

The Role of Local Traditions in Fostering Religious Pluralism in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of local traditions in fostering religious pluralism in Indonesia, a nation with a rich tapestry of faiths and to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of religious pluralism and social harmony in Indonesia. The method used in the study is qualitative approach, emphasizing ethnographic methods and case studies that will try to answer “How do local traditions, passed down through generations, contribute to fostering religious pluralism within this diverse society?” The analysis highlights how shared experiences, social cohesion (gotong royong), and interfaith dialogue promoted by these traditions contribute to a harmonious society. Examples like Yadnya Kasada and Rewang festivals showcase this in action. The concept of syncretism, evident in practices like Toraja death rituals, further demonstrates peaceful coexistence. However, the paper acknowledges potential drawbacks. Local traditions may reinforce social hierarchies or create pressures to conform. Recognizing these limitations is crucial. Furthermore, government policies, education, and media play a significant role in supporting these traditions. Initiatives promoting interfaith dialogue, respect for diverse beliefs, and appreciation for local traditions can strengthen their impact. By learning from Indonesia's experience, other diverse societies can develop strategies to foster religious pluralism. The paper concludes by recommending areas for further research and initiatives to strengthen the role of local traditions in Indonesia, promoting their continued relevance and impact.

Keywords: Indonesia, Diversity, Pluralism, Traditions.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's vast archipelago is a vibrant tapestry of faiths. While Islam reigns supreme with roughly 87% of the population adhering to it (Akhmadi, 2019). Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism also hold official recognition (Akhmadi, 2019). This remarkable diversity is embraced through the concept of religious pluralism, reflected in the national motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity) (Anwar, 2021). Respectful coexistence between different faiths is a cornerstone of Indonesian society, fostered by both cultural traditions and national ideology.

Indonesia boasts a remarkable religious landscape. Islam, practiced by around 87% of the population, makes it the world's largest Muslim-majority nation (Anwar, 2021). However, Indonesia's true strength lies in its diversity. Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and

Confucianism are also recognized religions, creating a vibrant tapestry (Arfianto, 2021). This diversity is nurtured by the concept of religious pluralism, embodied in the national motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity) (Anwar, 2021). Religious tolerance and respect for different faiths are central to Indonesian society, shaping its cultural landscape and national identity.

Indonesia's religious history is a fascinating tapestry woven over centuries. Early inhabitants held animistic beliefs and practiced ancestor worship (Arifin, 2021). The arrival of Hinduism and Buddhism around the 2nd century CE brought new deities and rituals, often blending with existing traditions (Manese, 2021). Islam's arrival from the 13th century CE onwards marked a significant shift, with powerful kingdoms like Majapahit embracing the faith (Budiarta, 2020). However, unlike a complete conversion, Islam often co-existed with remnants of earlier beliefs, leading to a unique form of Islam practiced in Indonesia (Dong, 2019). Christianity arrived with European colonizers in the 16th century CE, finding pockets of adherence particularly in eastern Indonesia (Nurman, 2022)). This historical interplay of religions, with local traditions sometimes merging and sometimes adapting, has shaped the rich and complex religious landscape of Indonesia today.

Indonesia's national ideology, Pancasila, serves as a cornerstone for its diverse society. Formulated after independence, it outlines five guiding principles that unify the nation (Lestari, 2020). The first principle, "Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa," translates to "Belief in the One and Supreme God" (Anwar, 2021). This principle emphasizes religious tolerance, acknowledging the freedom of individuals to practice their faith according to their beliefs. However, it doesn't advocate for a secular state, but rather a nation where faith in a higher power is a unifying concept while respecting the specific ways citizens choose to express that faith (Mavridis, 2015). Pancasila, with its emphasis on religious tolerance, plays a crucial role in fostering peaceful coexistence between Indonesia's vibrant tapestry of religions.

Despite its commitment to religious pluralism, Indonesia faces potential challenges. Rising religious conservatism, documented by studies like those from the Institute for the Study of Islamic Thought and Civilizations (ISTAC) (Nuriz, 2018), can lead to social pressures towards certain interpretations of faith, potentially creating tensions with minority religions. Additionally, social inequalities, as highlighted by the World Bank (Nuriz, 2018), can exacerbate religious tensions. Discrimination based on religion, particularly against minority groups, can hinder true interfaith understanding and cooperation. Understanding and addressing these challenges is crucial for maintaining Indonesia's remarkable religious pluralism.

The research objectives in this article is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of religious pluralism and social harmony in Indonesia. Firstly, the study seeks to investigate the discrepancies between the constitutional principles of religious freedom and diversity and their inconsistent implementation, which often results in the marginalization of minority religious groups. Secondly, it aims to assess the effectiveness of existing government initiatives aimed at promoting religious tolerance and social harmony, identifying areas where more comprehensive efforts and legislative reforms are needed. Thirdly, the research intends to highlight the significant role played by education, interfaith dialogue, grassroots initiatives, community engagements, and civil society organizations in fostering mutual understanding and respect among Indonesia's diverse religious communities.

Additionally, it aims to explore ways to enhance the impact of these efforts, particularly through the incorporation of inclusive representations of religious beliefs in educational curricula and the promotion of open platforms for interfaith dialogue. Overall, the research seeks to contribute to the realization of a more harmonious, inclusive, and tolerant Indonesian society by examining the potential of specific policy measures, educational reforms, and grassroots initiatives to further enhance religious tolerance and social harmony in the country.

Indonesia's unique position as a Muslim-majority nation with a multitude of recognized religions sparks a fascinating question: How do local traditions, passed down through generations, contribute to fostering religious pluralism within this diverse society? By examining these traditions and their impact on interfaith understanding and cooperation, we can gain valuable insights into how Indonesia navigates its rich religious landscape.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section critically analyze and synthesize related studies on the said topic to see the knowledge gap among those studies for the justification of the present study.

1. Role of Local Traditions in Fostering Religious Pluralism

Several studies highlight the role of local traditions in fostering religious pluralism in Indonesia, emphasizing their importance in creating shared spaces for interfaith understanding and coexistence. (Sulistiyani, 2020) provides a comprehensive overview of various local traditions across different regions in Indonesia, such as cultural practices, rituals, and festivals, which often incorporate elements from multiple religions. These practices, which are deeply embedded in community life, foster mutual respect and coexistence among different religious groups. Similarly, (Ulfaturrohmatiririn, 2021) discusses how rituals associated with life events—like birth, marriage, and death—often transcend religious boundaries, further promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding.

However, while these studies effectively document the existence of such pluralistic traditions, they do not adequately explore the underlying mechanisms that enable these traditions to foster religious pluralism. For example, while it is noted that certain festivals or rituals include participation from multiple faith communities, there is limited analysis on how these interactions translate into broader societal acceptance or tolerance beyond the specific events.

2. Case Studies on Specific Traditions and Their Impact

Rezka (2022) and Supriadi (2022) provide specific case studies that further demonstrate the role of local traditions in nurturing religious pluralism. For instance, the Yadnya Kasada festival in Bali and the syncretic practices in Java illustrate how shared religious experiences and syncretism promote a harmonious coexistence among diverse religious communities. The case studies effectively showcase the local contexts where religious pluralism is practiced and sustained. However, these studies primarily focus on descriptive accounts and lack a critical evaluation of whether these practices can be generalized across different regions or communities within Indonesia.

Additionally, while Rezkia (2022) discusses the role of local religious leaders like *kyai* (Islamic scholars) and *tokoh adat* (customary leaders) in promoting tolerance through interfaith dialogues, there is limited exploration of how these dialogues impact broader societal attitudes or policies. The studies tend to focus on micro-level interactions within specific communities without addressing the structural or institutional barriers that may challenge or limit the broader applicability of these traditions in fostering religious pluralism across Indonesia.

3. Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Social Harmony

Suwartiningsih (2017) discusses traditional conflict resolution mechanisms such as *musyawarah* (deliberation) and *mufakat* (consensus building), which emphasize dialogue and respect, fostering peaceful solutions regardless of religious affiliation. These mechanisms are vital in maintaining social harmony and religious pluralism, particularly in rural and community settings where such traditions are still actively practiced. However, the study does not address how these mechanisms function in urban or more diverse settings, where community cohesion may be weaker, and different social and religious dynamics are at play.

Further, the reliance on traditional mechanisms for conflict resolution may not always align with modern legal or institutional frameworks, potentially limiting their effectiveness in addressing larger-scale or more systemic religious tensions. There is a gap in understanding how these traditional practices can be integrated with formal conflict resolution mechanisms or how they can be scaled to address inter-religious tensions beyond local communities.

4. Impact of Syncretic Practices on Interfaith Relations

Studies on syncretic practices, such as the Toraja death rituals in Sulawesi (Eva Sofia, 2021), illustrate how these traditions adapt and evolve over time to accommodate different belief systems, thereby fostering a culture of religious pluralism. These rituals, which blend animistic beliefs with Christian practices, show how local traditions can serve as a bridge between different faiths by creating a shared space for worship and social interaction.

However, these studies often do not delve deeply into the broader socio-political implications of such syncretic practices. For instance, there is limited analysis on whether these practices are seen as legitimate by all religious communities or if there are underlying tensions or resistances to such syncretism. Additionally, the studies do not address the potential challenges that syncretic practices might face from more orthodox or conservative factions within religious communities, who may view such blending as a threat to religious purity or identity.

METHODS

This research on "The Role of Local Traditions in Fostering Religious Pluralism in Indonesia" employs a qualitative approach, emphasizing ethnographic methods and case studies to explore the intricate dynamics between local traditions and religious pluralism. The study is conducted in two phases:

1. Literature Review: This initial phase involves a comprehensive review of existing literature on religious pluralism, local traditions, and their intersections in Indonesia. Sources

include academic journals, books, and reports from relevant organizations. This review helps in identifying key themes, gaps in the literature, and formulating research questions.

2. Data Analysis: The collected data is analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. This involves coding the data and categorizing it into themes related to religious pluralism, the influence of local traditions, and community dynamics. Triangulation is employed to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings by cross-verifying data from different sources and methods.

Ethical considerations are paramount throughout the research, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity. The study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how local traditions contribute to religious pluralism in Indonesia, offering insights that could inform policy and community initiatives for fostering interfaith harmony. Results and discussion

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from various sources on religious pluralism, local traditions, and community dynamics in Indonesia were analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach allowed for the identification of recurring patterns and themes within the data. The analysis was conducted by coding the information into key themes related to religious pluralism, the influence of local traditions, and community dynamics. To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, triangulation was employed by cross-verifying data from multiple sources and methods.

Theme 1: Religious Pluralism in Indonesia

Recurring Patterns and Insights:

Religious pluralism is a central theme in the collected data, reflecting Indonesia's complex and diverse religious landscape. The data consistently highlight that Indonesia is home to a multitude of recognized religions, including Islam (87% of the population), Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism (Akhmadi, 2019; Anwar, 2021; Arfianto, 2021). This diversity is not only acknowledged but also celebrated through the national motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity) and the guiding principles of Pancasila, which emphasize religious tolerance and freedom (Anwar, 2021; Lestari, 2020).

Sub-Themes Identified:

- **Constitutional Principles vs. Implementation:** There is a discrepancy between the constitutional principles of religious freedom and their inconsistent implementation, which often results in the marginalization of minority religious groups (Nuriz, 2018; Lestari, 2020). The data indicate that while the constitution guarantees religious freedom, challenges such as rising religious conservatism and social inequalities can undermine these principles.
- **Interplay of History and Religious Pluralism:** Indonesia's religious history—featuring periods of animism, the introduction of Hinduism and Buddhism, the arrival of Islam,

and later Christianity—demonstrates a continuous interplay between various religions and local beliefs (Arifin, 2021; Manese, 2021; Dong, 2019). This historical interplay has shaped a unique form of religious coexistence where multiple faiths adapt and influence each other over time.

Cross-Verification and Reliability:

The cross-verification of data from various sources, such as Akhmadi (2019), Anwar (2021), and Arfianto (2021), confirms the recurring patterns related to the official recognition of diverse religions and the role of national ideology in fostering religious tolerance. Data from sources like Nuriz (2018) and Mavridis (2015) provide a nuanced view of the challenges and limitations faced by minority religious groups, supporting the sub-theme of constitutional principles versus their implementation.

Theme 2: Influence of Local Traditions on Religious Pluralism

Recurring Patterns and Insights:

Local traditions are identified as crucial elements in fostering religious pluralism in Indonesia. The data reveal that these traditions serve as platforms for interfaith understanding, cooperation, and dialogue. For example, festivals like Yadnya Kasada in Bali and the Rewang tradition in East Java bring together people of different faiths, fostering a sense of shared community and mutual respect (Rezkia, 2022; Hasyim, 2015). Similarly, syncretic practices such as the Toraja death rituals demonstrate the blending and coexistence of different religious beliefs (Eva Sofia, 2021).

Sub-Themes Identified:

- **Interfaith Cooperation through Shared Traditions:** Traditions like Yadnya Kasada and Rewang create opportunities for interfaith cooperation, where members of different religious communities come together to participate in shared rituals and communal tasks. This collaboration enhances social cohesion and mutual respect (Nurman, 2022; Hasyim, 2015).
- **Syncretism and Adaptation:** Practices like the Toraja death rituals show how local traditions adapt to incorporate elements from different religions, promoting a syncretic form of worship that respects diverse beliefs (Eva Sofia, 2021). This syncretism is indicative of a flexible and inclusive approach to religion, where traditions evolve to accommodate multiple faiths.

Cross-Verification and Reliability:

The triangulation of data from sources like Rezkia (2022), Supriadi (2022), and Hasyim (2015) supports the identification of recurring patterns related to interfaith cooperation and syncretism. The use of multiple sources ensures the reliability of the findings and provides a comprehensive understanding of how local traditions foster religious pluralism in Indonesia.

Theme 3: Community Dynamics and Social Harmony

Recurring Patterns and Insights:

Community dynamics are closely linked to the promotion of social harmony and religious tolerance. The data highlight the importance of local leaders, education, and grassroots initiatives in fostering mutual understanding and respect among Indonesia's diverse religious communities (Sulistiyani, 2020; Ulfaturrohmatiririn, 2021; Tungkgagi, 2022).

Cross-Verification and Reliability:

The use of data from various studies (Sulistiyani, 2020; Ulfaturrohmatiririn, 2021; Tungkgagi, 2022) helps validate the recurring patterns related to community dynamics. The emphasis on the role of local leaders, grassroots initiatives, education, and media in fostering religious pluralism is supported by cross-verification from multiple sources, ensuring the reliability of the findings.

Local traditions in Indonesia play a crucial role in promoting interfaith harmony within the nation's richly diverse religious landscape. One key positive impact lies in fostering a sense of shared community. Festivals like Yadnya Kasada in Bali, where Hindus and Muslims collaborate to appease volcano spirits, showcase this beautifully (Dong, 2019). These shared experiences transcend religious boundaries, creating a sense of unity and mutual respect. Additionally, traditions like Rewang in East Java, where villagers of different faiths come together for communal tasks, strengthen social bonds (Budiarta, 2020). The underlying principle of gotong royong (mutual assistance) emphasizes the importance of working together regardless of religious affiliation, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and social cohesion. Furthermore, local traditions can promote interfaith dialogue and understanding. Rewang, for example, creates opportunities for villagers to share stories and traditions, fostering a deeper appreciation for diverse beliefs (Arifin, 2021). Similarly, the syncretic practices of Toraja death rituals, where Christian elements blend with animistic beliefs (Arifianto, 2020), demonstrate a willingness to acknowledge and respect different religious expressions. By fostering a sense of community, encouraging dialogue, and promoting mutual respect, local traditions serve as a powerful force for interfaith harmony in Indonesia.

Local traditions, while powerful forces for religious pluralism in Indonesia, can be further supported or hindered by government policies, education, and media. Government policies that promote interfaith dialogue and respect for diverse beliefs can strengthen the positive impact of local traditions. Initiatives like interfaith workshops or public recognition of local traditions that foster inclusivity can encourage their practice (Hasyim, 2015). Conversely, policies that favor one religion or limit religious expression can unintentionally undermine the effectiveness of local traditions (Manese, 2021). Education plays a crucial role. Curriculums that emphasize Indonesia's rich religious history and the value of local traditions in fostering pluralism can equip younger generations to appreciate and participate meaningfully (Tungkgagi, 2022). However, education that promotes religious intolerance or downplays the importance of local traditions can hinder their effectiveness. Finally, media has a significant influence. Media outlets that portray different faiths with respect and showcase the positive role of local traditions in fostering interfaith harmony can amplify their impact (Supriadi, 2022). Conversely, media that promotes stereotypes or religious conflict can create tensions that hinder the effectiveness of local traditions. By acknowledging the roles of government policies,

education, and media, we can create an environment where local traditions can continue to flourish and contribute to Indonesia's remarkable religious pluralism.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, SUGGESTION, AND LIMITATIONS

Indonesia's diverse religious landscape is characterized by a unique blend of local traditions that foster religious pluralism and social harmony. While the nation is predominantly Muslim, the official recognition of other religions, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, reflects its commitment to religious tolerance, as emphasized in the national motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity). Local traditions, such as shared festivals, communal cooperation, and syncretic rituals, play a crucial role in nurturing interfaith understanding and respect among Indonesia's diverse communities. However, despite these positive dynamics, challenges such as religious conservatism, social inequality, and discrimination against minority groups pose significant threats to maintaining true religious pluralism.

Implications

Policy and Governance: Government policies that support religious pluralism through interfaith dialogue and inclusive initiatives are vital. Such policies can help mitigate rising religious conservatism and social pressures that may undermine minority groups' rights. **Education:** Educational curricula that highlight Indonesia's rich religious diversity and the role of local traditions in fostering harmony can empower future generations to embrace and promote tolerance. **Civil Society and Community Engagement:** The role of grassroots initiatives, community engagement, and civil society organizations in fostering interfaith dialogue and understanding is essential. Expanding these efforts can strengthen social cohesion and mitigate tensions.

Suggestions

Enhance Government Initiatives: Strengthening government efforts to promote religious tolerance through comprehensive policies, workshops, and interfaith dialogues can create a more inclusive environment. **Educational Reforms:** Incorporate diverse representations of religious beliefs in educational curricula and promote open platforms for interfaith dialogue to foster a culture of understanding and respect from a young age. **Support Local Traditions:** Encourage the preservation and adaptation of local traditions that contribute to religious pluralism. Ensure that these traditions remain inclusive and respectful of all faiths. **Promote Positive Media Representation:** Media should play a constructive role in portraying diverse faiths with respect and showcasing positive examples of interfaith harmony to counteract stereotypes and reduce conflict.

Limitations

Potential Biases in Local Traditions: Some local traditions may unintentionally reinforce social hierarchies or marginalize minority religions, thus creating barriers to genuine pluralism. **Risk of Conformity Pressure:** The emphasis on community spirit within

certain traditions might pressure individuals to conform to majority beliefs, potentially hindering freedom of religious expression. **Adaptation and Erosion of Practices:** The evolving nature of local traditions may result in the dilution or loss of practices that are meaningful to specific religious groups, which could undermine their cultural and spiritual significance. **Influence of External Factors:** The effectiveness of local traditions in promoting religious pluralism is influenced by external factors such as government policies, educational frameworks, and media representation, which may not always align with the principles of inclusivity and tolerance.

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