

FOSTERING RELIGIOUS HARMONY: THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN PANCASILA VILLAGE, INDONESIA

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Abstract

Differences in beliefs in Indonesia often lead to social conflicts. This study aims to identify and analyze the role of religious figures in maintaining and fostering religious harmony in Banaran Village, which has been officially designated as Pancasila Village. The method used is qualitative with a descriptive-analytical approach, conducted in Pancasila Village, Banaran, Kandangan Subdistrict, Kediri Regency. The findings show that religious leaders have a significant influence on maintaining diversity harmony through inclusive approaches and interfaith dialogue. Religious leaders not only act as spiritual leaders but also as mediators and wise problem solvers amidst differences in beliefs and traditions. Through effective communication, tolerance, and inter-religious dialogue, they have successfully built and maintained social harmony in the village. However, they also face challenges, such as internal conflicts and disparities in resource access, requiring specific strategies to ensure a peaceful and harmonious community life.

Keywords: *Harmony, Religious Leaders, Dialogue, Pancasila Village*

Abstrak

Perbedaan keyakinan di Indonesia sering kali menyebabkan konflik sosial. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis peran tokoh agama dalam menjaga dan membina kerukunan umat beragama di Desa Banaran, yang telah diresmikan sebagai Kampung Pancasila. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif analitis, dilaksanakan di Kampung Pancasila, Desa Banaran, Kecamatan Kandangan, Kabupaten Kediri. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pemimpin agama memiliki pengaruh signifikan dalam menjaga keharmonisan keberagaman melalui pendekatan yang inklusif dan dialog antariman. Para pemimpin agama tidak hanya berperan sebagai pemimpin spiritual, tetapi juga sebagai mediator dan pemecah masalah yang bijaksana di tengah perbedaan keyakinan dan tradisi. Melalui komunikasi yang efektif, toleransi, dan dialog antaragama, mereka berhasil membangun dan menjaga keharmonisan sosial di desa tersebut. Namun, mereka juga menghadapi tantangan, seperti konflik internal dan ketimpangan akses sumber daya, yang memerlukan strategi khusus untuk memastikan kehidupan masyarakat yang damai dan harmonis.

Kata Kunci: *Kerukunan, Pemimpin Agama, Dialog, Kampung Pancasila*

A. Introduction

The diversity and differences in beliefs can lead to cases of radicalism, feuds, violence, separatism, and the loss of humanity, often resulting in conflicts within society (Yunus, 2014). Moreover, differences arising from various social indicators can cause individuals to desire different outcomes in the same situation. If these goals and interests are not aligned, conflicts are inevitable (Jamaludin, 2015). On another note, conflicts and disputes over religious beliefs are a complex factor in fostering religious harmony due to feelings of hostility, where defeating opponents becomes more crucial than achieving an ideal (Jamaludin, 2015).

To realize harmony as a national aspiration, encapsulated within the 1945 Constitution, Indonesia has made efforts to manage religious life as stipulated in Article 29 of the 1945 Constitution, which requires citizens to embrace one of the recognized religions (Pratama & Jatningsih, 2017). This necessitates an awareness that differences in belief should not hinder a society's ability to live in harmony and coexistence (Ali, 2017). Religious harmony is a desired condition among different religious communities, striving to live harmoniously, in sync, and with mutual respect. Achieving harmony among different beliefs can be accomplished without sacrificing the beliefs held by each individual (Husaini, 2015).

Indonesian society strives to build harmony amidst diversity and cultural or religious plurality. For instance, Clifford Geertz (1992) chose Indonesia for his research because it is considered a country rich in cultural freedom and diversity (Karomi et al., 2022). One example is Banaran Village, renowned for its harmonious community despite religious diversity, including Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. Officially declared a Pancasila Village on March 21, 2022, Banaran Village serves as a miniature model of Pancasila and a developmental initiative by the village government to gain wider recognition. Maintaining the values preserved in Banaran Village is a significant responsibility of religious leaders, who are considered knowledgeable about religion and a unifying force for interfaith communities (Sholeka, 2019). This is inseparable from the role of religion and its leaders as a foundation consistently advocating for a balanced and harmonious lifestyle, aiming for happiness through adherence to religious laws and national regulations (Rahmawanto, 2016).

Religious leaders are seen as possessing a higher status and greater knowledge compared to other community members. Therefore, they have the potential to serve as role models and exemplars in fostering religious diversity (Nasrulloh, 2022). With the uniqueness and diversity in the newly inaugurated Pancasila Village of Banaran, this study seeks to discuss how religious leaders play a role in nurturing religious diversity in Pancasila Village, Banaran Subdistrict, Kandang District, Kediri Regency, to prevent escalating conflicts arising from differences and diversity in traditions or beliefs held by the community.

This study aims to identify and analyze the role of religious leaders in maintaining and fostering religious harmony in Banaran Village, recently designated as Pancasila

Village. The research focuses on how religious leaders can facilitate interfaith dialogue, preserve harmony, and address differences and conflicts arising from the diversity of beliefs in the village. Additionally, this study explores the supporting and hindering factors that affect the role of religious leaders in achieving harmonious religious life. By delving deeper into the actions and roles of religious leaders, this study aims to provide insights into effective ways to promote harmony and togetherness amidst rich diversity, which is not only crucial for Banaran Village but also applicable in a broader Indonesian context.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive-analytical methods, conducted in Pancasila Village, Banaran, Kandangan Subdistrict, Kediri Regency. The field study aims to deepen the understanding of the role of religious leaders in promoting religious harmony and to explore the dynamics of social interaction within the context of religious diversity. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. Interviews were conducted with various religious leaders and community leaders, using an open-ended interview guide developed in line with the research objectives. Observations were carried out to gather information on religious practices and social interactions in the field. Secondary data were obtained from village archives, local publications, and other documentation sources relevant to religious harmony in Banaran Village.

The instrument used is an interview guide specifically designed for this study, which includes structured and semi-structured questions that allow for the in-depth data collection about the roles of religious leaders. Observation is complemented by detailed field notes to record interactions and religious activities. Data analysis was performed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which involves three main stages: (1) data display, to organize and arrange data so that it can be accessed and reviewed; (2) data reduction, a process of sorting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data from field notes; and (3) drawing conclusions/verification, interpreting the findings and drawing conclusions from the processed data.

C. Result and Discussion

1. Religious Leaders in Pancasila Village

Religious leaders are respected and revered individuals who are influential due to their expertise and advantages in the field of religion. They are often at the forefront of community life, significantly influencing the community by addressing legal issues and resolving various societal problems (Nurjanah, 2020). According to an interview with Mr. Catur Wasono, the Head of Banaran Village, the designation of this village as Pancasila Village was officially confirmed on March 21, 2022. Banaran Village is located on the western slopes of Mount Arjuna, featuring expansive rice fields and teak trees. The village comprises two hamlets, Puthuk and Banaran.

Banaran Village in Kandangan District is known for its religious diversity dating back before Indonesia's independence. The religious diversity in Banaran Village has enabled its residents to coexist harmoniously and respect one another. This harmony is generally evident from religious activities that not only involve adherents of each religion but also participants from other religions, ensuring the continuity of ongoing activities. The established religious practices in Banaran Village undoubtedly involve religious leaders who play a crucial role for their followers. These leaders act as mentors, role models, and guides, aiming to shape individuals who are devout and lead spiritually enriching lives. They possess deeper knowledge compared to ordinary followers and are often referred to by various titles such as kyai, romo, pastor, or pinandita (Saebani, 2007)

Within this village, religious leaders continually strive to preserve the diversity inherited from their predecessors. Various efforts and actions have been taken to convey meanings and teachings to each of their followers, making religious leaders not only trusted by the community but also a reference for religious and social discussions. Interviews with three religious leaders in Banaran Village provided insights into what these leaders represent in leading the community.

Mr. Citro, a Muslim religious leader, believes that despite its diversity, including in religion, Banaran Village always maintains unity in community building through its practices of diversity. This is evidenced by the community's resilience to the issues or conflicts that often arise in other diverse settings. According to Mr. Citro, a true religious leader always maintains the unity that has been established, ensuring that community life in Banaran Village remains blended without apparent differences among interacting individuals of different religions. Thus, it is crucial for religious leaders to address any emerging issues swiftly to prevent them from escalating and causing significant impact (Citro, interview, July 11, 2023).

Mr. Supriyono, a Hindu religious leader, views his role as part of a social vocation that does not expect rewards or compensation. He believes that religious leaders should be elders within a religious group who not only understand their religion but also possess good character and wisdom. A primary trait they must hold is to act without expecting anything in return, either from their own followers or others. Thus, actions taken by religious leaders are highly valued and respected by their adherents. Moreover, as a religious leader, maintaining good communication is essential to preserve harmony and embrace the village's diversity. For the Hindu community, it is crucial to understand how to live in harmony, as expressed in the Tri Kaya Parisudha, which outlines how to behave, think, and speak well in daily life (Supriyono, Interview, July 11, 2023).

The efforts of religious leaders to preserve diversity are supported not only by their personal traits but also by external factors such as unity and togetherness among their followers. Mr. Jhony, a pastor, has never experienced issues or conflicts in the village, attributing this to the role of religious leaders as mediators and decision-makers in their respective religions. Whether facing minor or major issues, religious leaders strive to find solutions before situations escalate, thus preserving the unity within the diverse

setting of Pancasila Village. This foundation of awareness in unity and togetherness among all leaders and followers is highly regarded (Jhony, Interview, July 11, 2023).

Therefore, religious leaders in Banaran Village are not only revered as knowledgeable individuals but also as leaders who embody a strong sense of unity and solidarity to maintain communal harmony, supported by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. This enables them to prevent and resolve common societal issues and to further develop the community and the village.

2. The Role of Religious Leaders in Pancasila Village

A religious leader, as a revered and trusted community figure due to their spiritual history and education, plays a pivotal role in influencing the community through emotional religious engagement. This influence is particularly critical in a diverse society, both in social and religious activities (Neliwati et al., 2022). A religious leader bears significant responsibility in conducting religious activities due to their high standing and deep understanding of their faith. In social settings, it is the religious leader who often mediates disputes during interactions among followers of different faiths.

The role of a religious leader is seen as a social duty that must be performed by individuals within their societal positions. Behavior associated with these roles is termed as such. These roles are interconnected and inseparable, describing the activities that occur within a given position or office. Therefore, when someone performs their duties according to their role, they are expressing their societal role (Zendrato, 2024).

Religious leaders act as stewards of religious diversity leadership. With social phenomena in play, they are capable of maintaining the diversity among religious communities. Various efforts and actions by religious leaders aim to preserve this diversity without compromising the established harmony. They serve as intermediaries, conveying religious teachings and meanings to their adherents. The involvement of religious leaders in the community is strategic in maintaining harmony within a diverse society. Every religious leader needs guidance, development, direction, and encouragement towards goodness for the community, particularly in fostering an understanding of religious diversity that can influence attitudes within the region.

Religious leaders with strength and charisma respected by the broader community can significantly influence societal diversity. In Pancasila Village, Banaran, with its religious diversity, each religious leader is fervent in conducting worship and other religious activities. Thus, each religious leader strives in various ways to continue their involvement in the community. This involves approaches tailored to each adherent, strategies or steps taken to be accepted by the community, and ways to reduce differences in Pancasila Village. The following outlines the roles that religious leaders play in sustaining life in a diverse community:

1) Building Interfaith Communication

Major changes initiated by religious leaders can shift community actions towards those desired by the leaders. The success of these changes is often due to

adherents' compliance, which stems from the leaders' ability to simplify complex issues. Thus, a religious leader's communicative ability is crucial in raising community awareness to align with religious commands (Nurul Aula, 2020). Each religion has its unique ways of fostering good communication among its followers and with those of other faiths. Good communication is rooted in the teachings of each religion. Mr. Supriyono emphasizes that to be successful in the role of a religious leader, one must have good communication skills and understand the importance of living harmoniously. This involves assisting adherents in difficulties and ensuring that actions are ethically sound. Maintaining unity is anchored in Hindu teachings, particularly the Tri Kaya Parisudha, which upholds moral values, particularly in education and ethics (Parmajaya, 2017).

2) *Maintaining Religious Harmony*

Tolerance is a key attitude in creating religious harmony. It must be a personal awareness consistently practiced in social interactions. Since tolerance is an absolute aspect of divine and earthly religions, it provides a solution to prevent divisions in practicing religious teachings (Zuhriah, 2020). The harmony that has existed since ancient times in the village is due to the tolerance inherited from ancestors. The cultural and behavioral norms within the community are legacies that must be perpetuated, allowing for the practice of diversity without barriers.

3) *Facilitating Interfaith Dialogue*

Interfaith dialogue is a tangible action that helps create a harmonious religious life and opens doors for respectful and understanding communication among different faith adherents. Participants from various beliefs can come together, talk, and listen to each other, fostering a deeper understanding of each other's beliefs and values. The goal of interfaith dialogue is to find common ground, appreciate differences, and form a collective awareness of diversity. It also organizes joint social activities, such as humanitarian campaigns or charity projects, which are positive steps forward. Such cooperation can reduce differences and barriers among adherents of different faiths (Zendrato, 2024).

In Pancasila Village, Banaran, active participation in religious practices does not hinder villagers from contributing to village development. Although not always in the form of sitting together and discussing religious issues, the routine respect for and understanding of different religious teachings among the villagers is evident. Major celebrations are held by each religion, with others participating to maintain order without coercion, thus demonstrating a collective care for living together in diversity.

3. Supporting and Hindering Factors in the Role of Religious Leaders in Fostering Religious Diversity

Religious leaders who have been conducting religious activities undoubtedly have strengths and weaknesses in fulfilling their roles, especially in fostering religious diversity in Banaran Village. This involves various factors that influence religious

activities, including both supporting and hindering factors. These can range from community support for the role of religious leaders to the availability of facilities and infrastructure for fostering diversity, or they may involve internal conflicts within each religion and unequal access to resources.

1) **Supporting Factors**

a. **Community Support for the Role of Religious Leaders**

Emile Durkheim viewed society as an objective reality, independent of the individuals who comprise it. Society, as a collective of humans living together for a substantial period and aware of their unity, forms a system together (Prasetyo & Irwansyah, 2020). As grouping humans influence community life, this influence in turn supports movements, including those led by religious leaders. Strong community support for religious leaders creates a comfortable and conducive working environment, enabling leaders to persist in spreading religious teachings (Neliwati et al., 2022).

In Banaran Village, significant community support is evident in the enthusiasm for social and religious activities. For example, during major celebrations like Eid, Christmas, or Nyepi, members from different religious communities voluntarily ensure security, maintaining the sacredness of these events without coercion (Citro, Interview, July 11, 2023).

Not only during religious celebrations, but Banaran Village also hosts regular community cleaning events that involve various social and religious groups. These activities generate support for religious leaders, fostering the identity of Banaran as a Pancasila Village, a microcosm of Indonesia's Pancasila philosophy. This diversity enables the village to conduct social activities peacefully and harmoniously, thus preserving a tradition that the village community cherishes (C. Wasono, Interview, March 11, 2023).

b. **Availability of Facilities and Infrastructure for Fostering Diversity**

A distinctive feature of Banaran Village as a Pancasila Village is not only its religious diversity but also its closely situated places of worship. These places, seen as sacred symbols of religion, significantly influence the community's tolerance, encouraging mutual respect among Banaran's diverse residents (C. Wasono, Interview, March 11, 2023). Additionally, the expanding influence of religious leaders is supported by advancements in technology that facilitate the spread of information. Activities are easily publicized through media, which serves as a platform for disseminating understanding and prompting desired actions (Aula, 2020).

Continuous projects are part of each religious leader's role. These projects are planned activities agreed upon to be executed over a specified period, providing a framework for organizations to achieve their goals (Article - Institute for the Study of the Application of Monotheism, n.d.). For instance, Hindu leaders are currently expanding the Pura Giri Nata temple to make it the largest in East Java. The expansion will cover up to 15 hectares toward the north, overseen by the central PHDI in Bali. Despite challenges such as irresponsible actions by some individuals and the COVID-19 pandemic, the local

community continues to raise funds to realize this vision (Supriyono, Interview, July 11, 2023).

Similarly, Christian leaders are endeavoring to expand their church by building a new structure behind the old one, measuring 8x20 meters. Once the new church is operational, the old church will still be used to support Christian worship. Funding for the construction has reached 500 million rupiah, with donations coming from individuals and various organizations, similar to the funding efforts for the temple expansion. Fundraising was also previously hindered by the COVID-19 pandemic (Jhony, Interview, July 11, 2023).

2) Hindering Factors

a. Internal Conflicts within Religious Communities

Societal life encompasses both positive and negative interactions, where positive interactions manifest as cooperation and negative ones as conflicts. Indonesian society, with its diversity of ethnicities, social strata, professions, and groups, is prone to potential conflicts, competition, and even open conflicts. Conflict is an unavoidable phenomenon in human life, emerging when there is an imbalance in social status, wealth, power, and access to resources (Amalia, 2015)

The emergence of these conflicts is a natural condition due to unavoidable differences in interests. Humans differ in gender, social and economic strata, legal systems, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, political affiliations, cultures, and life goals—especially in a diverse nation like Indonesia. Thus, conflict is an essential part of human life and development, characterized by diversity. As long as differences exist, conflicts are inevitable and will continuously occur, whether globally, within nations, organizations, companies, or even within the smallest social systems, such as families (Tjabolo, 2017).

Diverse communities are not immune to disputes, such as the irresponsible actions leading to the desecration of Pura Giri Nata. Similarly, the diminishing faith in Hinduism over time exemplifies internal conflict, where a holy person without wealth is overshadowed by someone with substantial financial resources. This conflict, which erupted in 1997 due to misunderstandings among religious followers, led to the destruction of a temple. To this day, there are frictions between Pura Giri Nata and Pura Calon Arang, with disputes over the latter's official recognition as a cultural heritage site. However, the Hindu community views this as a blessing, trusting that nature will act. Religious leaders are actively addressing these issues, and currently, plans are underway to expand the temple to become the largest in East Java (Supriyono, Interview, July 11, 2023).

For instance, in 2004, conflict arose from traditional practices under the umbrella of Nahdlatul Ulama, where certain groups within the community practiced rituals like slametan, tahlilan, and shalawatan. A group opposing these practices branded them as idolatrous. This dispute escalated until the death of a community leader, leaving the community directionless. A religious leader intervened to restore peace, culminating in

both groups compromising by constructing a mosque to mediate the issues (Citro, Interview, July 11, 2023). Despite these internal conflicts among the religions in Banaran Village, the community remains resilient, spurred to maintain interfaith harmony. This is achieved by developing various facilities and infrastructure as community resources.

b. Inequality in Access to Resources

Resources can be defined as sources of strength or energy that can be harnessed to drive mechanisms or activities, producing valuable outcomes. These resources, whether tangible or intangible, range from rivers used for irrigation and power generation to human skills and expertise. Humans, as biological and social beings, have limitless needs.

On the other hand, resources in the human environment are finite. Issues arise from the imbalance between the available resources and the ever-increasing human needs, whether these are natural or human resources. Inequality in accessing resources leads to disparities that relate to justice issues or social problems (Syawie, 2011). Access to resources entails having the opportunity to utilize essential resources, such as land, housing, fields, income, etc., where the practice does not necessarily involve authority over decision-making concerning the outcomes (Admin, 2011).

Inequality in resource access influences societal issues, including poverty, unemployment, climate change, refugee crises, gender inequality, domestic violence, animal welfare, and racial discrimination (Submitmele, 2023). However, in Banaran Village, an individual's human resources are not solely assessed through educational achievements. Even those working as farmers or laborers in fields who possess a deep understanding of religion can contribute significantly to maintaining harmony in Banaran Village. Thus, Hindu religious leaders place great hope in Sunday schools to educate children about etiquette and good moral character, complementing the teachings provided in regular schools (Supriyono, Interview, July 11, 2023)

D. Conclusion

This study on the role of religious leaders in fostering religious diversity in Pancasila Village, Banaran, Kandangan Subdistrict, Kediri, has yielded several significant findings. Firstly, the role of religious leaders is crucial, especially in a multicultural society diverse in religion, culture, and traditions. As respected and elder members of the community, religious leaders decisively resolve emerging issues among the diverse population, acting as wise leaders preventing problems from escalating. Their efforts have made Banaran Village a successful model of Pancasila, demonstrating that diversity within a single region can coexist peacefully, comfortably, and securely.

Religious leaders do not seek reciprocation for their role, as their leadership is a calling to uphold the values taught by each religion. This necessitates that they possess good character and wisdom. For instance, the proximity of Islamic, Hindu, and Christian places of worship without any conflict illustrates the effective communication between religious leaders and their followers, fostering mutual respect among different faiths.

Secondly, both supporting and hindering factors influence the execution of religious leaders' roles in Banaran Village. Supportive factors include community backing and the availability of facilities and infrastructure to nurture diversity. Meanwhile, hindrances stem from internal conflicts within religious communities and unequal access to resources. These elements compel religious leaders to devise appropriate work programs and interventions tailored to the community's conditions, thus ensuring the continued preservation of peaceful, safe, and harmonious community life and religious teachings.

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