CONTEXTUALIZING MUHAMMAD ABDUH’S THOUGHT ON RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN INDONESIA

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Abstract
Indonesia, characterized by its rich religious diversity, inevitably experiences variations in religious principles. Engaging in religious practices can sometimes lead to excessive fanaticism, resulting in conflicts and divisions within religious communities. To mitigate such challenges, fostering religious tolerance becomes crucial for promoting harmony. This qualitative research employs a library research method, analyzing secondary data sources to explore the concept of tolerance as interpreted by Muhammad Abduh, an Islamic theologian and reformist, in his work “Tafsir al-Manar.” Abduh’s interpretation aligns with Surah Al-Baqarah verse 256 from the Qur’an, emphasizing the importance of mutual respect and the freedom of belief without coercion. Given Indonesia’s context, where Islam is known for its openness, inclusivity, and problem-solving capabilities, studying and embracing the concept of tolerance from “Tafsir al-Manar” is highly relevant. The study concludes that Abduh’s perspectives on religious tolerance can significantly contribute to national harmony and the advancement of humanitarian values in Indonesia.

Keywords: Muhammad Abduh, Tolerance, Harmony.

Abstrak

Kata Kunci: Muhammad Abduh, Toleransi, Harmoni.
A. Introduction

Indonesia is rich in ethnic, cultural, belief, and religious diversity. In addition to the six major religions practiced by its inhabitants, Indonesia is also home to numerous ethnic groups, regional languages, and indigenous religions from various regions. This diversity results in a wide range of beliefs, views, and needs of all citizens, especially in religious matters. Article 29, Paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia clearly states that the status of religion and belief is a form of ritual worship trusted by citizens as the truth of religious teachings (Jufri & Mukhlish, 2019). There are 187 registered religious beliefs at the Ministry of Education and Culture in Indonesia. Following a Constitutional Court decision, the Ministry of Home Affairs must revise the State Administration Law to include these 187 religious beliefs in the population system and modify the e-KTP form to record one's religion or belief (Anggini et al., 2023). Indonesia's advantage lies in having one official language, Bahasa Indonesia, which facilitates communication and mutual understanding among its citizens despite diverse beliefs.

This diversity inevitably leads to differences in religious practices. The practice of religious activities can drive adherents towards fanaticism in their beliefs. Excessive fanaticism can cause conflict and division among religious communities. To prevent and reduce conflicts between religious adherents, religious tolerance becomes the best solution for creating harmony among religious communities. Tolerance is an attitude of respecting and valuing followers of other religions. Etymologically, tolerance comes from the English word “toleration,” which means tolerance. According to Umar Hasyim, tolerance is giving individuals the freedom to pursue their beliefs and manage their own lives, as long as the actions and attitudes taken do not violate or contradict the necessary conditions for creating order and peace in the social structure (Fauzi, 2020).

In Arabic, the term for tolerance is “tasamuh,” which means mutual respect. The Qur'an does not directly use the word “tasamuh” or tolerance with all its limitations. Thus, verses describing tolerance can serve as guidelines in daily life. In the context of religious life, tolerance is an essential requirement for individuals who desire a peaceful and respectful life (Zuhriah, 2020). According to Muhammad Abduh, tolerance is an attitude of respect and appreciation for an inevitability, especially in the context of Indonesia. Tolerance is believed to contribute positively to the constellation of life. Tolerance means
providing individuals the opportunity to believe in their faith without coercion from others.

The contextualization of religious tolerance can be applied in various aspects. Currently, we are experiencing the digital era, where human activities are closely related to digital media. With the advancement of digital media, people can quickly absorb information. With a single touch, one can access information worldwide. At this point, digitalization is used by some groups to spread religious ideas, thoughts, and symbols to the wider community. Muhammad Abduh's thoughts are relevant to Indonesia due to its religious and cultural diversity, which is essential in addressing radicalism and extremism, providing religious education and understanding, and achieving peace among Indonesians. This study aims to describe or analyze the concept of religious tolerance from Muhammad Abduh's perspective and its contextualization in Indonesia.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing the library research method. According to Sugiyono (in Sari & Wisroni, 2020), library research involves the examination of theories, references, and other scientific literature relevant to cultural, value, and normative aspects arising in the social situation under study. The researcher chose the library research method because Muhammad Abduh's works are particularly interesting to study.

The data collection technique employed in this research involves documentary studies as the primary data source and secondary data from previous researchers (interpretations). The data analysis techniques used include data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is the process of simplifying, summarizing, and transforming complex data into more understandable abstracts and processing raw information recorded from field observations. This process is continuous throughout the research, beginning from the initial stages like the conceptual framework and problem formulation to data collection (Ahmad & Muslimah, 2021). Data display is done using narrative text. Data presentation starts with explaining the research findings involving data collected by the researcher after validation and data simplification processes. After these processes, the data is then analyzed in the discussion (Napsawati, 2020). Conclusion drawing should present solutions to the research problems posed before the study. This
stage also reveals new findings that have not been previously identified. These findings can be descriptions or representations of the research object analyzed empirically, requiring further research to confirm their validity (Anggini et al., 2023).

C. Result and Discussion

1. Muhammad Abduh's Thoughts on the Meaning of Tolerance

Muhammad Abduh, also known as ‘Abduh (1849 - July 11, 1905), was an Islamic religious scholar, an Islamic law jurist in Egypt, a reformer with liberal views, the initiator of the Islamic modernism movement, and a significant figure in the development of theology and philosophy that shaped modern Islamic thought. Abduh was born in 1849 in Mahallat al-Nasr, a region in the al-Bukhariyya Province, Egypt. His father, Hasan Khairullah, was of Turkish descent, while his mother, Junainah, was of Arab descent with a lineage traceable to the same tribe as Umar bin Khattab. His birth occurred amidst political turmoil in Egypt under the rule of Muhammad Ali, who imposed heavy taxes on villagers, especially farmers. This condition forced many residents to relocate frequently to avoid heavy tax burdens. Abduh's parents experienced similar circumstances, often moving before finally settling in Mahallat al-Nasr, where they bought land and settled (Siregar, 2020).

Abduh was born and raised in the countryside under the care of his parents, who were not formally educated but had strong religious convictions. He learned to read and write at home and was later entrusted to a teacher to memorize the Qur'an. Due to his diligence, he completed it in two years (at the age of 12). At 13, Abduh was sent to Tanta to study at the Ahmadi Mosque, where he spent two years (1862-1864). However, the traditional teaching methods did not satisfy him, leading him to escape and hide at his uncle's house in 1865. After three months, his brother asked him to return to Tanta, but Abduh believed that studying there would not yield the desired results. Therefore, he returned to his hometown with the intention of becoming a farmer. At 16, Abduh got married, but 40 days later, his parents urged him to continue his studies in Tanta. Though he left his hometown, he went to his uncle's house instead. There, Abduh met Sheikh Darwisy Khadr, his father's uncle, who reignited his interest in knowledge. Eventually, Abduh returned to Tanta in October 1865 to continue his education at the Ahmadi Mosque. After completing his studies there in 1866, he continued his education at Al-
Azhar. While at Al-Azhar, he met Jamaluddin al-Afghani, whose profound thoughts and extraordinary intelligence greatly impressed him, especially regarding the spirit of struggle. Under al-Afghani's guidance, Abduh began studying philosophy and writing articles for the newly established al-Ahram newspaper. In 1877, he completed his education at Al-Azhar and was appointed as a lecturer there. In 1878, at the initiative of Prime Minister Riyadl Pasha, Abduh was appointed as a lecturer at the newly established Dar al-Ulum University (Muliati et al., 2020).

Tolerance derives from the Latin word “tolerar,” meaning to restrain oneself, be patient, appreciate others' views, maintain an open attitude, and respect differences in beliefs or religions. In the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), tolerance is defined as an attitude that shows appreciation for freedom and understanding towards differing or opposing stances. In Arabic, tolerance is known as “tasamuh,” referring to a kind-hearted attitude of mutual permission and assistance. According to Umar Hasyim, tolerance is described as granting individuals or all community members the freedom to practice their beliefs or life principles as long as such actions do not violate fundamental principles necessary to maintain order and peace in society (Yasir, 2014).

From the explanations above, it can be concluded that religious tolerance is an attitude of patience and self-control to avoid interfering with or demeaning the religion, belief system, and worship practices of others. In interacting with various religions, one should maintain a strong commitment to their own religion. A person of faith will exhibit consistency between their attitudes and actions, including being tolerant. Faith reflects consistency between beliefs and behavior. Tolerance should be implemented in all aspects of life, including spiritual, moral, ideological, and political domains. Islamic tradition is rich in perspectives on tolerance. For example, the ethics of disagreement in Islam states that no form of coercion is permissible on others. Furthermore, tolerance fosters the ability to empathize and build broader humanitarian awareness. The growth of tolerance can break the chains of ignorance and poverty (Atmaja & Hanafi, 2017).

One of Muhammad Abduh's works explaining tolerance is the book “Tafsir al-Manar.” The Al-Manar magazine was first published on 22 Shawwal 1315 H / March 17, 1898 M. This weekly magazine initially had eight pages. The writings created by Rashid Ridha were submitted to Muhammad Abduh for review. After obtaining approval, these writings were published in Al-Manar magazine, giving rise to what later became known
as Tafsir Al-Manar. Tafsir Al-Manar, also known as Tafsir Al-Qur’an Al-Hakim, is a commentary that adopts a modern era thought approach. This interpretation includes authentic narratives and logical opinions that explain the wisdom of Sharia law and Allah's Sunnah for humans. This book illustrates the role of the Qur'an as a guide for everyone. It is written in simple language, avoiding foreign terms to ensure it is easily understood by ordinary people. The interpretation style of Al-Manar is literary-social (adaby ijtima’iy), oriented towards literature, culture, and social society. It is easy to understand and touches upon real-life aspects in the community. The method known is a comparative global thematic analysis (Wahyuni, 2022).

Muhammad Abduh defined the meaning of tolerance based on the interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah verse 256. Islam is a religion that teaches values of peace, brotherhood, and equality. In Islamic teachings, there is no room for coercing a group to follow a particular belief because Allah SWT desires peace without pressure or coercion. Abduh began his discussion by stating that tolerance is a mutual respect and appreciation of beliefs, especially in the context of Indonesia. He believed tolerance could positively contribute to the diversity of life. Tolerance is also interpreted as giving individuals the opportunity to embrace their faith without pressure from others, as elaborated in QS Al-Baqarah verse 256:

وَتِ وَيُؤْمِنْْۢ بِاللُِّٰ فُرْ بِالطَّاغ ِْ ۚ فَمَنْ يَّكَ غَي ْ ْۢ قَدْ تَّبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ ال *العُرْوَة*ِۗوَاللُّٰ سَمِيْعٌ عَلِيْمٌ

There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So, whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing."

This verse firmly states that there should be no pressure in adopting a religion, especially in a diverse society like Indonesia. Awareness and belief in the truth of Islam should not be realized through violence or coercion but through understanding and evidence that demonstrates this truth. Human nature serves as a guide given by Allah, as long as it is not hindered by negative behaviors that will reinforce acknowledgment and faith through revelation guidance. More importantly than asserting human responsibility to obey the command of guidance is the ability to choose freely, which will guide nature in the right direction in a strong state (Khusnah et al., 2022).
In Tafsir Al-Manar, the interpretation of QS. Al-Baqarah verse 256 explains the principal tenet in Islam and its grand policy that Islam does not compel anyone to embrace it. Instead, the religion emphasizes inviting others to the path of God with wisdom, good preaching, and debating in a better way, aiming to show guidance from misguidance with clear evidence. This is the straight path to faith.

The background of this verse is related by Masruq. An Anshar man named Hushain had two Christian sons while he himself was a Muslim. He complained to the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), saying, “Shouldn't I force my two sons? They were raised in a Christian environment.” Allah’s response is explained with the verse لا كراة فِى الْدِين لاكراة في الدين “there is no compulsion in religion,” meaning there is no need to force someone to embrace Islam because the verses of the Qur’an are clear in not compelling someone to adopt Islam. Therefore, there is no need to use force to impose religion on someone. Those not guided by Allah, whose hearing and sight have been sealed, will not benefit from being forced into Islam.

Scholars state that the background of this verse pertains to the Anshar people. One narration mentions that before the advent of Islam, a woman always experienced sorrow due to the death of her child. She vowed that if a child survived, she would follow the Jewish religion. When Islam arrived and the Jews of Banu Nadhir were expelled from Medina for their treachery, the child, along with some others, had become part of the Anshar family. The Anshar said, “Do not let our children be with them.” In another narration, it is said that the revelation of this verse was related to Hushain, an Anshar who had two Christian children while he himself was a Muslim.

2. Contextualization in Indonesia

Concerning national interests and nation-building, harmony among religious communities is a crucial element of national unity. Religious harmony encompasses relationships based on tolerance, mutual understanding, respect for each other, appreciation of equality in religious beliefs, and cooperation in communal life within society, nation, and state, in accordance with the principles of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Thus, interfaith harmony is an essential precondition for development in Indonesia.

The importance of harmony in interfaith life is highly emphasized in the efforts of nation-building. The application of interfaith harmonization is imperative for religious
communities to unite and instill a sense of brotherhood and kinship, despite differences in beliefs, ethnicities, and races. To create a harmonious attitude among religious communities, it is essential to instill a sense of love and tolerance among people. This is because those involved in planning, implementing, and enjoying the results of the development process are also part of this effort. Therefore, every religious community in Indonesia is expected to contribute significantly to national progress. Religious values should become a source of positive motivation and a clear direction in every step of development undertaken in Indonesia (Khoiruzzadi & Dwi Tresnani, 2022).

The importance of unity and cooperation among various religious communities cannot be denied, but interfaith relationships are sensitive issues. Incidents can lead to conflicts and national losses due to issues related to interfaith relations, as well as factors often referred to as SARA (ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup). Although fundamentally, every belief teaches peace and harmony among humans and between religious communities.

It cannot be denied that every religion provides good advice to its followers, and every religion certainly teaches respect and tolerance among religions. However, if there are problems related to religion, it indicates the existence of individuals who deliberately use the name of a religion to damage another religion. Therefore, considering the numerous cases of this kind, the government should immediately impose strict sanctions on individuals causing unrest or disharmony.

They commit to not repeating the same actions. Harmony between religious communities and the government is essential to maintaining national stability in nation-building efforts. This harmony must be supported by interfaith harmony and internal harmony among religious communities. The desired harmony is not just the absence of internal conflicts among religious communities, interfaith conflicts, or conflicts between religious communities and the government. The desired harmony is a state where there is a harmonious relationship and real collaboration while respecting interfaith diversity and the right to worship without interfering with others' religious freedom (Nazmudin, 2018).

Laws governing interfaith harmony and tolerance include:

1) The principles of interfaith harmony can be found in the interpretation and implementation of Pancasila as stated in the MPR Decree No. II/MPR/1978 (MUI 1988-33). It can also be observed in the values of the first principle of Pancasila.
2) The principles of interfaith harmony and tolerance are regulated in Article 29, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the 1945 Constitution.

3) The concepts of interfaith harmony and tolerance in the Broad Guidelines of State Policy (GBHN) are detailed in MPR Decree No. II/MPR/1988, Part IV, Section D, Points 1, Subpoints b and f.

4) Laws related to interfaith harmony are Law No. 1/PNPS/1965 issued on January 15, 1965, concerning the prevention of misuse or defamation of religion (Vinkasari et al., 2020).

It is known that Indonesia has a pluralistic society. This diversity is a distinctive feature of our society and nation. The plurality of society is evident in various aspects such as diversity in religion and belief in Almighty God, differences in languages and cultures in regions, and the diversity of ethnic groups with various customs. In terms of embracing religion, we must also internalize the belief in Almighty God. Although there are such differences, they should not be overly emphasized because religion and belief are matters of faith that should not be imposed on others. Therefore, we need to have a tolerant attitude towards these differences. The availability of religious tolerance does not imply the merging of religious doctrines. We must maintain the purity of our religious teachings even while living in a pluralistic society.

It is crucial to cultivate and enhance the attitude of tolerance within every individual in society. With tolerance, we can become harmonious citizens. The desired unity and cohesion can be achieved if there is mutual acceptance among individuals. Tolerance among individuals can help prevent issues that may disrupt unity. As members of society and citizens of Indonesia, we must respect the diversity in this country. Harmonious life due to existing differences can make us more aware of Indonesia's diversity in terms of religion, culture, regional languages, customs, and ethnic groups, making Indonesia a country with a unique identity. With this diversity, Indonesia can be known as a multicultural country that is harmonious despite the various differences within it (Kholisah et al., 2021).

The implementation of humanity in Islam is reflected in Islam's universal vision of humanity. This vision is evident from the purpose of Prophet Muhammad's (SAW) command, as stated in Surah Al-Anbiya, verse 21, which declares that the Prophet Muhammad was sent as a mercy to the entire universe (wa ma arsalnâka illa rahmatan lil
‘ālamin). The humanity emphasized in Islamic teachings applies not only to Muslims but to all inhabitants of the universe. Islam contains high moral teachings from the transcendental to guide human behavior. Religious teachings direct human life within the framework of humanity, placing significant value on humans as the central focus. Therefore, ontologically, Islam teaches the importance of humanity, bringing mercy to the entire universe. Islamic teachings come with a clear humanitarian purpose. Its principles emphasize equality in human dignity as an effort to fight against oppression and violations of human values. In the pre-Islamic era, individuals from lower social groups were often treated inhumanely. They were considered of very low value, sometimes valued only slightly higher than animals, and often traded by their owners.

Indonesian society in the past also experienced the loss of human dignity under colonial rule. Today, as the majority population in the archipelago, Muslims should no longer engage in debates about the separation between Islam, Indonesianness, and humanity. These three concepts should be united in one framework, making Islam in Indonesia a friendly, open, and accepting religion capable of providing solutions to the challenges faced by the government. Dynamic Islam should be able to provide justice and protection to all individuals in this country without discrimination, regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof. Conversely, the image of Islam will appear frightening if presented with a harsh appearance by a group of people using hate rhetoric and speaking in the name of God.

The implementation of al-wasathiyyah (moderation). Intolerant attitudes and behaviors are closely related to a person's way of thinking. If we observe some acts of anarchy and terrorism in Indonesia, we will see that they have almost the same pattern, originating from radical ideologies. Radicalism, anarchy, and terrorism are interconnected phenomena and sources of intolerance. Therefore, to prevent the spread of such views, it is essential to continue promoting the importance of moderate Islam. The radical religious ideology is currently experiencing its peak after being suppressed for a long time during the New Order era. With the development of a more open political atmosphere, they are also striving to grow with full potential. Their presence is inevitable for anyone. By merging with society, they can infiltrate religious, social, and political institutions (Rosyidi, 2019).
In UUD No. 2 of 2011, it is explained that “a political party is a national organization formed voluntarily by a group of Indonesian citizens based on shared will and ideals to fight for and defend the political interests of its members, society, nation, and state while maintaining the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia” (IBAD, 2018). Therefore, political parties influence the implementation of religious tolerance. The application of tolerance in politics is a crucial obligation for every individual and society to maintain unity and cohesion in communal life. Political tolerance is an attitude that respects others' political opinions and honors others' political rights. With political tolerance, every individual is expected to respect and appreciate one another, create harmony among adherents of various religions, strengthen family bonds, reinforce the spirit of patriotism, and nurture unity within society. Political tolerance is also part of Pancasila, which serves as the legal and ideological foundation of Indonesia. Pancasila consists of five principles: divinity, social justice, social justice, unity through sincerity, and struggle. Political tolerance refers to unity and cohesion, one of the five principles of Pancasila.

To develop political tolerance, one step that can be taken is to promote inclusive understanding and attitudes towards diversity through religious moderation programs. This aims to reduce existing differences. Tolerant attitudes are essential in preventing issues from escalating into more serious problems (Abqa, 2020). In Indonesia, Muhammad Abduh's thoughts on tolerance have significantly contributed to the development of inclusive and harmonious religious discourse. The principles of tolerance he espoused, such as respecting differences, mutual understanding, not forcing groups to adopt a particular religion, and fostering interfaith cooperation while avoiding discriminatory attitudes, have become the foundation for many interfaith movements and dialogue initiatives in Indonesia (Nasution et al., 2023).

D. Conclusion

Muhammad Abduh was a significant Muslim theologian and reformer, born in Egypt in 1849. At the age of 13, he began his studies at the Ahmadi Mosque in Tanta, and after completing his education at Al-Azhar, he became a lecturer there and at Dar al-Ulum College. Abduh's works, including his seminal “Tafsir al-Manar,” first published on
March 17, 1898, provide crucial insights into the concept of tolerance. “Tafsir al-Manar” adopts a literary-social approach (adaby ijtima’iy), focusing on literature, culture, and social issues, making it accessible and relevant to everyday life.

Tolerance in Arabic (tasamuh) involves granting individuals or communities the freedom to practice their beliefs or life principles, provided these do not violate the fundamental principles necessary to maintain societal order and peace. Religious tolerance, as described by Abduh, is the behavior of patience and self-control, avoiding the denigration of others' beliefs and worship practices. This principle is vital in Indonesia, a nation characterized by its rich diversity in ethnicity, culture, and religion.

The implementation of Islamic humanitarian principles in Indonesia underscores the importance of interfaith harmony for national unity. Relationships built on tolerance, mutual understanding, respect for different beliefs, and cooperative living are consistent with the principles of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. These values are essential for the nation's development, ensuring that Islam in Indonesia remains a friendly, open, and inclusive religion capable of addressing national challenges.

Abduh’s perspective on tolerance significantly contributes to fostering inclusive and harmonious religious discourse in Indonesia. His principles of respecting differences, mutual understanding, and cooperation among different faiths without coercion have become foundational for many interfaith movements and dialogues. Therefore, religious harmony and tolerance are integral to Indonesian society, and it is crucial to continuously strengthen and promote these values in all aspects of communal life.

References


