THE MODERATION IN ACTUALIZING THE RELIGIOUS HARMONY AND ISLAMIC CULTURE IN SOUTH WEST COAST OF ACEH – INDONESIA

Abdul Manan, Rahmad Syah Putra & Saprijal

Abstract

Aceh is a province where Islamic sharia law is applied, owning to diverse understanding towards religious and Islamic cultural practices. One of areas in Aceh, where Islamic values are highly precedent is in the south west coast, the districts of Southwest Aceh and South Aceh. The aim of this study is to find out the attitude of moderation in forming the harmony into culture and religion. The research instruments are observation, interview and documentation. The data analysis is conducted through data reduction, data display and data verification/conclusion. The result of the study indicates that someone that is considerably moderated can be reflected to the attitude of taking the neutral and be considerate towards compromise in reconciliating problems both in religious affair and cultural practices which can encourage society to live together harmoniously. Religious and cultural harmony is a manifestation that is constructed together based on the awareness of individual and group of people to respect each other, maintain the cultural values as heritage, participate in major Islamic days, such as maulid Nabi SAW, samadiyah, grave pilgrimage, tulak bala and kanduri jeurat.

Keywords: moderation, harmonious, religion, culture and *Acehnese south west coast*

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is recognised as country which has multi diverse ethnicity, tribes, cultures, languages and religions. The most dominant religion in Indonesia is Islam.[1] Yet, religions embodied by people certainly result to the issues happened in humans' daily life, either as challenge or obstacles in forming the harmonious society. Uniting the diversity amongst religions is not an easy work, even one minor discrepancy can potentially lead to the disintegration and long-drawn conflict in society.[2] The current condition of Islamic society is facing flaming taken place in internal and external facet. Internally, the people of Islam are experiencing the drawbacks of understanding the religious knowledge, culture, education, economy and politics. The people of Islam nowadays are categorised into some factions which have different perspective towards religious understanding, tend to have extreme attitude and be recognised to be strict in teaching the Islamic teachings.[3] This phenomenon is happening in entire Indonesia done by major Islamic society, and one of them is Aceh which is familiarly recognised of its nuance of Islamic sharia and has culturally formed rituals that are still existed today.[4]

The early Islamic civilization in Aceh, the people used to maintain the harmonious relationship amongst each other in performing religious and cultural practices that direct to the Islamic values approach. However, such condition is no longer preserved, due to the presence of diverse perceptions in understanding the Islamic law. The diversity and differentness are common to happen in society, especially in interpreting the verses of Qur'an and hadiths that might potentially cause issue in terms of the performance of *ibadah.* Today, religious and cultural activities performed by people are getting stronger supported by the existence of institutions and organisations which can direct to the religious and cultural practices in the form of rituals, hence may lead to the contradiction

amongst society that have different believe and understanding about religion towards religious and cultural practices that are commonly done by some Acehnese.[5] That phenomenon is susceptible in the midst of society today, even there are some accusation or allegation indicating the digression, *bid'ah* and labelling each other as unbeliever (*kafir*). In understanding Islamic law, sometimes it cannot be simply done by reviewing all *mazhab* or point of view of previous *ulama.* Thus, it causes troubles and lead to the disintegrated path in the life of Acehnese society. Therefore, in order to prevent such conflict in religious and cultural life, it is necessary to find the solution, a path called as "moderation" to live side by side, accept, appreciate and respect each other, to become wise and harmonious, despite the diverse religious perspective. The concept of moderation has been clearly reviewed many times in Qur'an and hadiths. Moderation is the core value in Islamic teaching, even can be reference and guidance to solve today's societal problems in terms of radicalism, blind fanatic, and the matter of *khilafiyah.* The attitude of being moderate is sourced from wise and fair habits as solution in facing issues and obstacles in the midst of Acehnese society. However, Islamic moderation is often debated and complained by a few of people. For them, Islam is just Islam and there is no moderation in Islam, or there is no Islamic moderate.

The diversity of religious and cultural comprehension in society is necessarily expected to produce solution that can create harmony and peace in carrying out the Islamic teaching by proposing the attitude of religious moderation, so that it cannot be trapped into extreme actions, intolerant and violence amongst people.[6] Understanding Islamic teaching should be holistic, so that the differentness in doing *ibadah* and *amal* can be respected by each other. But, in reality, plenty people learn the teaching from only one perspective (*mazhab*) and refer to only few *mazhab* delivered by few *ulama.* There is limited consideration and awareness to study other perspectives by considering the similarities and differences of them. Consequently, it may trigger the ego and leads to the conflict and discordance amongst people. This kind of situation took place in Aceh, few years ago. The hatred and conflict took place not only in social media, but directly in mosque and *mushalla*, during the religious speech. For instance, there was one *ustadz* invited from outside Aceh to deliver speech (*ceramah*) in one of the mosques located in Banda Aceh municipal. It was indicated that the content of his speech tends to condemn and state the obvious disagreement towards the religious practices done by some group of people in Aceh.[7] Such issue was mainly caused by the limited research and study of religious scope comprehensively, hence it caused the attitude of being ignorant and oppositely against the Islamic teaching by labelling certain people as unbeliever (*kafir*), *bid'ah,* and claiming aggressively that his group as the most relevant and righteous in doing the practice of *ibadah* and *amal.* Meanwhile, that kind of attitude should not be done, because it contains the disparity from the way of performing the Islamic teaching well, textual and contextual.

The condition described above needs to be handled in order to prevent the disintegration amongst locals in Aceh, especially for *jamaah* who actively join the study and recitation about Islam. By seeing that condition, it demands a concept and the attitude of becoming moderate to stabilise the conflicted condition and to create the religious and cultural harmony in daily life. The act of moderation offers the neutral path and also becomes a media to create a harmony. Gaining understanding towards moderation also produces the behaviour of respecting and appreciating each other, being open-minded and tolerant in dealing with the religious issues in the society. The attitude of being moderate is believed to the most relevant way to overcome the people who are lack of understanding of Islamic teaching that are reluctant to accept the differentness, in terms of *ibadah* and other religious practices that contain Islamic values, such as *samadiyah,*

death ceremony, *kanduri jeurat, kanduri maulid,* grave pilgrimage and so on. In this study, the scope only covers some parts or locations in south eastern coast of Aceh, those are Southwest Aceh and South Aceh as the focus of the study. The reason the researcher chooses those two regions because the religious and cultural practices are still strongly adhered. However, only few people lived in south southwestern area do not practice it because the source of law related to the religious and cultural practices is not highly convinced and strong, besides the cultural practice only relies on the former Acehnese's tradition passed to the next generations. There will be interesting points found in this article, thus it is necessary to be reviewed and described as the consideration to see how far the society accept and run the attitude of moderation in religious and cultural aspects in South West Aceh and South Aceh

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is categorised as qualitative research combining the library and field research, through descriptive analytic approaches. All the data are collected through participant observation, in-depth interview and documents review based on the focus of the study. Additionally, the data analysis uses theory developed by Miles and Huberman and all collected data are later analysed through several procedures, namely data reduction (data selection, simplification and classification) and data display (organizing and visualizing data). From data categorization that have been reduced, displayed, then the conclusion is drawn.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Moderation

The word "moderation" is derived from Latin word, "moderation" which means "being moderate". It also means "neither too much/exaggerated nor too little" or it is also defined as self-control from excessive or exaggerated attitude. Moreover, according to *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia,* there are two meanings derived from word "moderation" which are the reduction of violated actions and prevention over the extremism. Therefore, someone that is moderate means he or she acts reasonably, modest, temperate and not extreme.[8] In *surah Al-Baqarah,* verse 143, the term "*wasathiyyah*" is etymologically used. The term "*wasathiyyah*" is constructed from three syllables, namely *wawu, siin,* and *tho'.* In *mufradat* (Arabic vocabulary), those words contain some meanings, which are fairness, *khiyar* (the best choice) and moderate or in average. Meanwhile, in Indonesian translation, it consists of two meanings, that is avoiding the extreme attitude and saying and tends to dimensional direction or middle way.[9]

Islamic Moderation in Arabic is called as *Al-Wasathiyah al-Islamiyyah* as Al-Qardhawi mentioned some words that have similar meaning to *tawadzun, I'tidal, ta'adul* and *istiqamah.* Islamic moderation is a view or attitude which always leads to the middle way from two opposite sides, so one of the two sides will not dominate in someone's mind and attitude.[10] In one book entitled "*Strategi Al-Wasathiyyah*" published by Kuwait Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Religious Affairs and cited by Mukhlis Hanafi, the word *wasathiyyah* is defined as one thinking method, interacting and behaving based on the attitude of *tawâzun* (balanced) in dealing to state of actions that is possible to be analysed and compared, so that it can find one attitude that is relevant with the condition and is not contradicted with the principles of religious teachings and Islamic cultural practices. That definition of the attitude will protect someone from the tendency of being fallen into excessive or exaggerated attitude towards fellow Muslims.[11]

In moderation, Yusuf Al-Qardhawi explained that *wasathiyyah* can also be called as *at-tawâzun* which means the effort of keeping the stability between two sides, the edge and the side that is opposite, just like spiritualism, materialism, individualism, socialism, realistic, idealistic and many more. Being balanced in dealing by treating it fairly for both sides or other parties without excessively, much or less.[12] Meanwhile, *wasathiyyah,* according to Islamic terminology, can also be defined from detailed sources. First, based on *surah Al-Fâtihah,* verse 6 which means the base of kindness (*dalîl alkhairiyyah*) and the appearance of virtue and singularity in material matters (*almâdiyyât*), meaningfulness (*al-ma'nawiyyât*) and the safe place from disunity.[13] Moderation, according to M. Quraish Shihab is an attitude that is firm over the neutral one and passive, even it is not just the matter of individual, but for the matter of group of people and country. Moreover, Nasaruddin Umar defined moderation as a form of attitude that leads to communicating life pattern for religion and country. Next, according to Ali Muhammad Ash-Shallabi, moderation is relationship that is adhered between "*khairiyah*" and "*baniyah*" that is *indrawi* (sensory) or *maknawi* (meaningfulness).[14] In *Tafsir Al-Mishbah,* Quraish Shihab also interpreted *surah Al-Baqarah,* verse 143, that Muslims are destined to be the middle/medieval people that are moderate, the role model and be exemplified, so it can be said that the existence of Muslims is in the middle. That kind of position reflects that human should not take a side that can be obviously seen by anyone in every difference. This directs human to become fair and can be imitated nicely for all mankind, especially for those who still lack of knowledge of Islam. Furthermore, it was also mentioned that Muslims will be the witness of their acts where the say "*litakûnu*" using *fi'il mudhâri'* (future verb/tense), that it indicates that there will be a fight of perspective and the dispute of many "-isms". However, at the end, "*ummatan wasathan*" will become the reference and witness about the truth and the confusion of perspective.[15]

The most basic understanding of moderation taught in Islam is reflected from the explanation contained in the Qur'anic verses. In general, Al-Qur'an uses the term of "*Al-Wasathiyyah*" to reveal the meaning of moderation in Islam. Therefore, this basic concept can be used as root in understanding the moderation in Islam as life guidance over the diversity. Simply, the definition of *wasathiyyah* terminologically is derived from etymologic meanings which means noble characteristic that keeps someone's tendency of becoming extreme.[16] The word "*al-wasth*" which means *baina* (in between), whereas the word "*al-wasathu*" contains four definitions, in which first, the noun (*ism*) which means middle position between two opposite positions. Secondly, as an adjective which means choices (*khiyâr*), main (*afdhal*) and prime (*ajwad*). Thirdly, it also means *'adl* (fair) and lastly, it contains something that is between good side and the bad side or neutral.[17] Meanwhile, in its development, the word *wasathiyyah* is often defined as moderate which etymologically means the attitude of moderate, not excessively to behave, while the word "moderator" refers to someone that is middleman or mediator in solving problems.[18] Based on explanations above, moderation is a guide or path to create harmony for every individual or group of people in doing the Islamic teachings based on each other's understanding and Islamic and cultural practices in the form of rituals and others.

3.2 Harmony in Religion and Islamic Culture

The attitude of moderation should be understood and developed as mutual commitment to preserve the balance in carrying out the Islamic teaching. In order to create the attitude of moderation, the inclusivity should be avoided. According to Shihab, the concept of inclusive Islam is not only simply the recognition of the diverse society, but also it should be actualized in the form of direct involvement amongst society.[19] This statement was also supported by Saiful Azmi, as the instructor of Islamic teaching, that kind of attitude (moderation) would give space for religious freedom, culture and for

Islamic perceptions owned by each individual and society.[20] Based on the attitude of moderation that has been used as reference in forming the religious and cultural harmony in Islamic context, especially in Southwest Aceh and South Aceh, it certainly requires the socialization to the society; hence every action that tends to bring the violence and unwanted actions can be prevented.

According to Jalaluddin, a traditional figure from Southwest Aceh mentioned that Acehnese people are religious and pious and own the culture and custom that is identic with Islamic values, so that religion and culture become inseparable. He added that it has taken root and one thing for sure, those practices have been long practiced in daily life.[21] As the result, if there are few of people that have same perception or disagree with certain religious and cultural practice done commonly by few people can be accepted and appreciated. However, in fact, the sense of appreciation and respect each other is rarely seen in the midst of people living in Southwest Aceh and Aceh South Aceh from then until today. Though, there was a record of conflict between group of people happened in the religious department, *Majelis Pengajian Tauhid Tasawuf MPTT* in Southwest Aceh in early 2021. That conflict, fortunately, still could be solved with *musyawarah* and taking the middle way to gain peace by putting forward the values of *ukhuwah Islamiyah* in guaranteeing the freedom for everyone that want to do *amal,* based on Islamic knowledge they have.

Furthermore, explained by Abdul Gani, as Islamic figure from South Aceh that the issue of differentness in religion and culture seems to be fine, but it needs more enlightenment for followers of certain religious institution/organization about effective interaction for groups that have different perspective in carrying out the Islamic teachings. He added that it was hard to unite group of people who have different religious understanding, nonetheless there is moderation as solution as the middle way to maintain the disunity and do good to Allah SWT.[22] According to Ahmad Khusairi as *ustadz/*preacher, mentioned that moderate attitude that is based on the wisdom has been adhered by people of Southwest Aceh and South Aceh by respecting and appreciating each other. For instance, in performing Shalat Tarawih, there some *jamaah* did 11 *rakaat* and some of them did the 23 *rakaat.* This once again becomes the choice, because each number has legal basis in Islam.[23] Therefore, to create harmony is not enough by simply knowing the Islamic law, people need to know about the differences in doing *amal* should be used as brace in living in harmony, side by side, by putting forward the characteristics offered in religious moderation.

Meanwhile, in the context of cultural practices like celebrating major Islamic day, like *maulid* of the prophet, all people participate and honour its every moment, although there are few people disagree with the procession. Hasbi, as traditional figure, argued that the celebration of *maulid* is one of major and memorable events for people to celebrate every year, but people might see it differently, in terms of procession. Some said that the procession should take place in the yard of mosque or *mushalla* by inviting people from another village, and some people do the procession at home by inviting orphans and the poor. Both ways have equal value in practices of Islamic culture, it is just different in the process. Similar statement was also mentioned by Mahmuddin, as cultural figure, the effort in creating harmony in religious and cultural lives, people need a moderate and non-excessive behaviour in doing one particular cultural practice. For example, in south-southwestern area, the rituals are still strongly associated to the myth, such as *tulak bala,* visiting sacred tombs of previous *ulama* and so on. Such practice is viewed differently by society, as long as it is not categorised as *syirik.* That kind of phenomena are

understandable by few other people that do not follow them and never claim that their people and teaching as the most correct, neither say them wrong nor do the violence.[24] It means, people are understanding each other that the diversity in habitual actions has become the cultural heritage of previous people, but the Islamic values also should be carefully maintained so as not to be contradicted to the religion.

In cultural practice, so far it is actively done each year and has not caused to the things that lead to the violence amongst people, because people from south-southwestern area basically have various rituals done from then until today. Like what has been said by M. Yunan as public figure, that maintaining the values of unity is better than fighting for something that is not necessarily *haram.*[25] Then, it is necessary to see wisely, even though in Islamic teaching, every cultural practice in the form of ritual was never taught. Nevertheless, the relationship between religion and culture is strongly close, so in order to keep creating harmony in the society, it needs a noble attitude and not arrogant to other group of people that have commonly practices some certain cultural events continuously. Therefore, in executing those both aspects, it needs vast understanding about Islam and wise attitude in religion in order to create harmony in society. There are some people who adjust the religious practice with existed culture and custom. This can be seen in most Acehnese socio cultural lives. Islam and culture can be united and difficult to break. So, in here, the principle of Islamic teaching has been already part of custom or has been "customed" and custom itself is part of Islam that should be kept the relation between them both. In Southwest Aceh and South Aceh society, there is one provision that there are two provisions decided by Allah that cannot be changed of all time; those are cultural and ritual practices that meet the Islamic values. Therefore, to do the Islamic teaching well, it needs wisdom, so harmony in doing *amal* and Islamic cultural practices can be well maintained generally in entire Aceh, especially in Southwest Aceh and South Aceh.

4. CONCLUSION

The attitude of moderation is an action or perspective of someone or certain group of people in society that put forward the wisdom in every problem and takes the middle way between opposite groups, either it is the diversity of religious understanding or cultural practice. Then, it encourages the attitude and habit of society in creating the life harmoniously. Harmony in religion and culture is a phenomenon that is happening in the middle of society of Southwest Aceh and South Aceh in doing the daily life for both *ibadah* and Islamic cultural practices. The shape of harmony is built by people by putting forward the mutual awareness, appreciating each other for every different perception, honouring the cultural values as legacy of former people, participating in the celebration of major Islamic days such as *maulid* of the prophet, *samadiyah,* grave pilgrimage, *tulak bala, kanduri jeurat,* and many more.

Proceedings of International Conference on Islamic Studies
"Islam & Sustainable Development"

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