

## Women's Contribution to Religious Moderation in a Multicultural Society: a Study in Balun Village, Lamongan

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**Abstract:** Indonesia's multicultural society, characterized by ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, is vulnerable to intergroup friction, especially given the strong religious convictions of its people. Building multicultural awareness through moderate religious practices is therefore crucial. Balun Village, recognized as the "village of Pancasila" for its strong pluralism, exemplifies this effort. This research investigates the role of women in fostering religious moderation and explores the social construction of women's involvement in Balun Village. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were gathered through observation, interviews with religious, community, and women leaders of various backgrounds, and documentation from village authorities and related organizations. Data analysis followed the Miles & Huberman technique, encompassing data reduction, display, verification, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that women play a strategic role in promoting religious moderation across multiple domains. Within families, women serve as educators of tolerance, instilling diversity values in children from an early age. Socially, they participate in inclusive religious and community activities and act as mediators in interfaith groups to maintain harmony. Additionally, women help preserve local culture as a unifying force amid pluralism. Their influence is evident in interfaith economic initiatives, the internalization of moderation values in family education, and their leadership in religion-neutral social activities. Through active engagement, women in Balun Village significantly contribute to creating a harmonious and moderate society.

**Keywords:** Women, Religious Moderation, Pluralism.

**Abstrak:** Masyarakat multikultural Indonesia, yang ditandai oleh keragaman etnis, budaya, dan agama, rentan terhadap gesekan antar kelompok, terutama mengingat keyakinan agama yang kuat di kalangan penduduknya. Membangun kesadaran multikultural melalui praktik agama yang moderat oleh karena itu sangat penting. Desa Balun, yang dikenal sebagai "desa Pancasila" karena pluralismenya yang kuat, menjadi contoh upaya ini. Penelitian ini menyelidiki peran perempuan dalam mendorong moderasi agama dan mengeksplorasi konstruksi sosial keterlibatan perempuan di Desa Balun. Menggunakan pendekatan fenomenologis kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara dengan pemimpin agama, komunitas, dan perempuan dari berbagai latar belakang, serta dokumentasi dari otoritas desa dan organisasi terkait. Analisis data mengikuti teknik Miles & Huberman, mencakup reduksi data, penyajian,

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*verifikasi, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa perempuan memainkan peran strategis dalam mempromosikan moderasi agama di berbagai bidang. Di dalam keluarga, perempuan berperan sebagai pendidik toleransi, menanamkan nilai-nilai keragaman pada anak-anak sejak usia dini. Secara sosial, mereka berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan keagamaan dan komunitas yang inklusif serta bertindak sebagai mediator dalam kelompok antaragama untuk menjaga harmoni. Selain itu, perempuan membantu melestarikan budaya lokal sebagai kekuatan pemersatu di tengah pluralisme. Pengaruh mereka terlihat dalam inisiatif ekonomi antaragama, internalisasi nilai-nilai moderasi dalam pendidikan keluarga, dan kepemimpinan mereka dalam kegiatan sosial yang netral secara agama. Melalui keterlibatan aktif, perempuan di Desa Balun secara signifikan berkontribusi dalam menciptakan masyarakat yang harmonis dan moderat.*

**Kata Kunci:** Perempuan, Moderasi Agama, Pluralisme.

## Introduction

Religious moderation in Indonesia still faces various challenges, especially due to the persistence of religious fanaticism that can trigger radicalism and extremism. Pluralism in Indonesia is a gift to be grateful for, but in reality there are still many people who have exclusive thoughts towards certain religions. Based on a survey conducted by Alvira Research, nearly 30 million Indonesians are exposed to radicalism, showing that multicultural awareness and moderate attitudes in religion still need to be strengthened. Therefore, building religious moderation is an urgent matter in order to create a harmonious and peaceful social life.

In building religious moderation, women have an important role as agents of social change. Apart from being a pillar in the family, women also have great potential in creating a more tolerant and harmonious society. Yenny Wahid stated that women are not only key elements in economic success, but also have strong social capital in building tolerance and togetherness in society. Women's involvement in various social and religious activities makes them the main actors in instilling moderation values from the family level to the wider community.

One concrete example of the success of religious moderation in Indonesia can be found in Balun Village, Lamongan Regency, which is known as 'Pancasila Village'. This village has a high tolerance index and is a symbol of harmonisation of social life in the midst of religious diversity. The people of Balun Village are able to express the

values of peace, manage differences without conflict, and control their religious ego for the sake of unity. This success is certainly inseparable from the contribution of various elements of society, including women who play a role in maintaining social balance and building moderate attitudes in religion.

However, although Balun Village is often used as an example of harmonious diversity, studies that specifically highlight the role of women in building religious moderation in this village are still limited. In fact, women's involvement in building moderate attitudes in a plural society is an important aspect in the sustainability of the tolerance that has been formed. Therefore, this study aims to examine more deeply how women in Balun Village contribute to strengthening religious moderation, as well as the strategies they use in facing the challenges of diversity. Thus, this research is expected to provide new insights into the role of women in building a harmonious religious life in the midst of community pluralism.

## **Research Methods**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, an approach that focuses on an in-depth understanding of the phenomena that occur in society as well as individual experiences in a particular situation (Lexy J. Moleong, 2007). This research falls into the category of field research, which directly observes and explores the dynamics of religious moderation in Balun Village. The object of this research is Balun Village, which consists of two hamlets, namely Balun Hamlet and Ngangkrik Hamlet.

The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling, where informants are selected based on certain criteria relevant to the focus of the research, such as women leaders who are active in interfaith communities, religious leaders, and people involved in social religious activities. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with key informants, documentation in the form of archives and records of community activities, and focus group discussions (FGDs) to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of women in building religious moderation.

Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman framework, which consists of three main stages: data reduction (sorting and simplifying the data obtained), data display (presenting data in the form of a matrix or narrative that facilitates interpretation), and verification and conclusion drawing (exploring patterns and relationships between findings to obtain research conclusions). In addition, analysis was also conducted using thematic analysis to identify the main themes that emerged from the data collected (Saleh, 2017).

To ensure data validity, this study applied source triangulation, which compares information obtained from various informants to ensure data consistency and veracity. In addition, member checking was also conducted, where the interview results and research findings were confirmed back to the informants to ensure accuracy and representation in accordance with their experiences. With this approach, this research is expected to provide a more accurate and in-depth picture of the contribution of women in building religious moderation in Balun Village.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Religious Moderation**

Religious moderation is a noble character of Islam that invites Islamic preaching to be open, tolerant and reject all radical thoughts and opponents of extremism (Mukhlis, 2015). In language moderation means something that is in the middle, or that has two ends that are comparable in size. As for the term moderation is Islamic values built on the basis of a straight and middle mindset, not excessive in certain matters (Ashur, 1984) According to Darlis, religious moderation from an Islamic perspective is to uphold tolerance in the midst of differences, be inclusivism, both in madzhab and in religious practice. Differences do not become obstacles to mutual cooperation, on the basis of human values (Darlis, 2007).

According to the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, what is meant by religious moderation in the context of a diverse Indonesia is (Kemenag RI, 2019):

- a. Religious moderation is part of the nation's strategy in maintaining Indonesia. As a very diverse nation, from the beginning the founding fathers have succeeded in

bequeathing a form of agreement in the nation and state, namely the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, which has clearly succeeded in uniting all religious, ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups. Indonesia is agreed not to be a religious state, but also not to separate religion from the daily lives of its citizens. Religious values are preserved, combined with local wisdom and customs. Some religious laws are also institutionalised by the state, religious and cultural rituals are intertwined in harmony and peace. That is the true identity of Indonesia, a very religious country, with characters that are polite, tolerant, and able to dialogue with diversity. Religious moderation must be part of the cultural strategy to maintain our identity.

- b. The establishment of religious moderation needs to be guarded together, both by individuals and institutions, both society and the state. Moderate religious groups must speak out loudly and no longer choose to be the silent majority. In fact, the involvement of women will also be very important in efforts to strengthen religious moderation, considering that violence in the name of religion can be committed, both by men and women. Every component of the nation must believe that Indonesia has the social capital to strengthen religious moderation.
- c. The social capital is in the form of local cultural values, the rich diversity of customs, the tradition of deliberation, and the culture of mutual cooperation inherited by the Indonesian people for generations. We must nurture this social capital to create a harmonious life in cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. If shouldered together, Indonesia can be an inspiration to the world in practising religious moderation. In order to create a society that is moderate in religion, the state needs to be present to facilitate the creation of public space to create religious interaction. The state should not create regulations with certain religious sentiments that are discriminatory, and are generally applied in public spaces. The presence of the state must facilitate, not discriminate.

As an effort to strengthen religious moderation in public life, the Ministry of Religious Affairs has formulated 9 values of religious moderation that are expected to be embedded into a lifestyle for people at all age levels.

9 the value of religious moderation that is worthy of being used by educators to

teach about moderate attitudes to students (Anam, 2021):

- 1) *Tawassuth* (middle) is choosing the middle way, meaning not being extreme in spreading religion, and not easily disbelieving others because of differences in understanding, people who have *At-tawassuth* attitudes always hold the principle of brotherhood.
- 2) *I'tidal* is defined as putting things in their place and exercising rights and fulfilling obligations proportionally.
- 3) *Tasamuh* (tolerance) is an attitude of openness of a person in accepting various differences in views and stances, people have this attitude will always appreciate the stance, views and habits that are different from themselves.
- 4) *Syura* (Deliberation) is defined as making decisions based on dialogue, communication and mutual expression.
- 5) *Ishlah* (Innovative creative) which means accepting all changes and progress of the times based on the benefit of the people.
- 6) *Qudwah* (example) means to initiate goodness for the good of human life.
- 7) *Muwathanah* (Love of Country) means accepting the state of the nation and state so as to bring about an attitude of love for the country.
- 8) *Al-La'Unf* (anti-violence) is an attitude that rejects all forms of extremism that invite destruction and violence both against themselves and against the social order.
- 9) *Al-I'tiraf al-Urf* (Culture Friendly), which is able to accommodate the practice of local traditions and culture, has an understanding of culture that is not rigid (Anam, 2021).

### **Pluralism**

In language, pluralism can be said to be an understanding or teaching that refers to the existence of reality or reality that is more than one substance (Lestari, 2019). In terms of pluralism, it is an awareness to be open and respectful of differences, including in the context of religion, where each belief is respected without eliminating the distinctive identity of each. Alwii Sihab revealed that pluralism involves positive interaction amidst diversity. Nurcholish Madjid adds that pluralism is part of the human condition, a necessity that ensures the creation of social harmony and safety.

Pluralism is not just diversity or plurality, nor is it just tolerance and relativism



but more than that. Pluralism is an attitude of mutual respect between existing differences and is accompanied by an active effort to understand others and respect their existence. Pluralism is the coexistence of groups, streams of beliefs and beliefs while maintaining the differences and characteristics and uniqueness of each (Ramadhan, 2023).

## **1. Women in Building Religious Moderation in Balun Village**

Balun Village is one of the villages in Lamongan Regency that has a multicultural population, with Muslims, Christians and Hindus living in the village. The people of this village always live side by side in harmony and peace, because the extraordinary tolerance between religious adherents makes this village get an award as a Pancasila village. All people in this village work together to build harmony and tolerance, including women. Women are an important pillar in building and maintaining inter-religious relations, women also have the potential to build religious moderation through their active role in various fields, namely:

### **First, as educators of tolerance in the family**

Whether as housewives, teachers, or community members, women have an important role in instilling the values of religious moderation in children. This education is provided through daily activities that demonstrate an attitude of tolerance and mutual respect between religious communities. As mothers and the main educators of the family, women have great potential to instil the values of tolerance from an early age. They can teach children to be open and appreciative of religious diversity, get them used to interacting with friends from different backgrounds, and teach them to respect the religious differences that exist in their environment. This potential contributes to the formation of a calm and tolerant younger generation.

Women in Balun Village through their role as mothers always instil tolerance in their children from an early age, and they always try to teach them how to be moderate amidst the diversity that exists in this village. The role of women in this village is to be the first teacher for children. Balun village women build religious moderation by teaching tolerance to children from an early age,

and they are able to produce a generation that is calm and able to socialise well with their friends of different religions. Women in Balun Village, through an individualised approach that focuses on the family environment, can instil the values of multiculturalism, so that their children grow up to be individuals who are open to cultural, ethnic and religious diversity.

### **Second, involvement in moderate religious and social organisations**

Organisations in Balun Village are one of the platforms for women to be active in social life. Many Balun Village women are active in moderate social and religious organisations. The role of women in both social and religious organisations strongly supports religious moderation in Balun Village. In this village, women actively contribute to religious and social activities such as Muslimat NU, Fatayat NU, Christian Women's Prayer Group and similar organisations in Christian and Hindu religious communities. These organisations encourage women to conduct interfaith dialogue, joint social activities and build solidarity between different religious groups.

Women in Balun Village have programmes to increase understanding and respect for other faiths. In the church, for example, women hold roles in the Congregation Council as well as in general and specialised worship such as children's and women's worship. This allows them to convey messages of tolerance through sermons, role modelling, and various other social activities. Apart from religious organisations, women also play an active role in social organisations such as Dharma Wanita and PKK, which provide a platform for interfaith interaction. These social organisations often involve women from different religious backgrounds, providing a space to strengthen interfaith relations and build mutual understanding.

In moderate religious and social organisations, women can involve themselves in activities that promote tolerance, such as social service programmes, monthly meetings, or recitation activities that involve different religious groups. These activities strengthen mutual respect among different communities Women's participation in these organisations.



The involvement of Balun Village women in religious and social organisations, which helps religious moderation and social harmony. They are the prime movers in maintaining harmony amidst pluralism by supporting activities that encourage the value of tolerance. Balun Village is an example of a village of tolerance in Indonesia because the actions of these women show that moderation is not only spoken but also practised in everyday life.

### **Third, Interfaith Women's Community Leaders**

Women in Balun Village have the potential to become leaders in interfaith social groups such as the arisan mothers' community. They can strengthen interfaith social relations and create a harmonious dialogue space by leading and initiating joint interfaith activities. As leaders, they can also direct community activities to foster mutual understanding and support in the midst of diversity.

Women in this village play an important role in promoting religious moderation through their active involvement in social, cultural and religious activities. Through these roles, women demonstrate community leadership that promotes tolerance and harmony in a plural society. Women play a role through their roles as mothers, PKK organisers, village officials, teachers, cadres, and youth organisers. Although their efforts have not been coordinated on a massive scale, women are actively contributing to maintaining peace. This shows that women can be informal leaders who instil the value of moderation in their daily interactions.

### ***Fourth, Preservation of Local Culture***

Indonesia is famous for its many cultures, traditions and religious rituals that are preserved throughout Indonesia. Local culture is also owned by Balun Village in Lamongan Regency. This village has traditions such as Wedding Celebrations (Kenduri), Death Celebrations, Community Service, Art Performances, Nyadran and Tunduan Rituals, mutual cooperation in worship rituals and religious holidays and others.

Women play an important role in preserving inclusive local traditions, such

as the tradition of gotong-royong, traditional ceremonies, and other community activities. In Balun Village, women participate in organising events that invite all villagers regardless of religion, such as village events or joint celebrations at certain moments. Women's participation in these activities shows that religious moderation can be fostered through culture and customs that embrace all levels of society.

Preserving local culture is a form of local wisdom. Local wisdom is a variety of cultural wealth that grows and develops in a society that is known, believed and recognised as important elements that can strengthen social cohesion in the community.

By maintaining and preserving this local wisdom, the Balun Village community not only strengthens local cultural identity but also helps foster moderate attitudes and respect for differences. Ultimately, this reduces the likelihood of social conflict and strengthens unity amidst diversity.

## 2. **Social Construction of Women in Building Religious Moderation in Balun Village**

The social construction of women in Balun Village reflects how women are involved and play a role in various social, cultural, economic and religious activities. The form of social construction of women in Balun Village in building religious moderation amid pluralism, among others:

### **First, initiating an interfaith mutual cooperation-based economy**

Women in Balun village are often involved in economic activities, such as through cooperative activities with interfaith women. This economic activity not only provides an opportunity for women to contribute to the welfare of the family but also strengthens relations between religious communities. Because in this activity, Balun village women mingle together without distinguishing their respective beliefs. Through women's activities in the economic field, there are several positive contributions, including improving family economic welfare, strengthening interfaith social interactions, building interfaith trust and

encouraging participation in development.

Joint economic activities in Balun Village serve as a platform that not only supports economic prosperity but also builds and strengthens social harmony. This interfaith participation is an effective means to overcome prejudice and create an inclusive and peaceful village environment. In Balun Village, the village supports economic enterprise groups involving interfaith women, creating a space for collaboration that promotes the value of gotong royong and religious moderation.

### *Second, internalisation of moderation values in family education*

Women in Balun Village have the responsibility to teach their children how to interact with people of different faiths. Therefore, mothers instil religious moderation through the internalisation of moderation values in family education to form a tolerant attitude in children from an early age.

Women shape moderation through family education, which children will use to adapt to a society of different faiths. Women in Balun Village play an important role in teaching their families the values of religious moderation. As the primary educators, mothers teach their children how to respect religious differences and live in unity with people of different faiths. The internalisation of religious moderation values in the family aims to educate children to be tolerant and moderate. The norm in this village confirms that women function as the primary educators in the family, the first place where the values of religious moderation and tolerance are taught. Mothers endeavour to instil human values and respect for differences through a loving and friendly approach. As a result, children grow up to be peace-loving individuals who respect diversity.

### *Third, Interfaith Social Activists*

Women have an important role in building and maintaining the various forms of tolerance needed in Indonesia. As mothers, women often interact with their children and accompany them in various activities. This helps women develop attitudes of sacrifice, patience, motherhood, and willingness to sacrifice.

These traits enable them to adapt, explore new alternatives and possibilities, and understand the differences around them.

Women in Balun Village often initiate social activities that are not related to a particular religion, such as community service to clean the village environment or fundraising for residents in need. These activities show that women are the main drivers in maintaining harmony and harmony between residents, regardless of religious differences. In this way, the social construction of women in Balun Village is formed through norms and roles that prioritise harmony, tolerance, and respect for others, as well as important values in religious moderation. Women in Balun Village act as religiously neutral drivers of social activities, emphasising the spirit of togetherness and unity of villagers amidst diversity, so they often organise activities such as community service and fundraising that reflect tolerance and solidarity.

In Balun Village, women play an important role as prime movers in various religiously neutral social activities, including community service, PKK, posyandu and national holiday celebrations. With a high sense of care and diligence, women are often the driving force in organising activities that strengthen togetherness and care in the community. In a diverse environment like Balun Village, the role of women in social activities is very important, as they are able to bridge religious and cultural differences with a flexible and inclusive attitude. Activities such as community service, national holiday celebrations, and social services are often initiated by women who inspire other residents to participate. Through this role, women reflect religious moderation by creating a space for togetherness that is open to all, prioritising human values, and the spirit of gotong royong regardless of faith.

The results show that women in Balun Village have a significant role in building religious moderation through various social and religious activities. They are active in interfaith forums, inclusive recitations, and social activities involving various religious groups. This finding is in line with Nurcholish Madjid's theory that religious moderation must involve all elements of society, including women, in building social harmony (Majid, 1998).

According to Parsons' social role theory, women in Balun Village play a role as agents of socialisation of moderation values through family and community education. They educate their children with the principles of tolerance and openness to differences, reflecting an approach to religious moderation in daily life (Wahid, 2006).

## Conclusion

Women in Balun Village have a significant role in building religious moderation in a multicultural society through various aspects of life. As educators in the family, they instil the value of tolerance to children from an early age, forming a generation that is open to diversity. Their involvement in religious and social organisations, such as Muslimat NU, Fatayat NU, and Christian and Hindu prayer groups, strengthens interfaith solidarity through dialogue and joint social activities. In addition, women also act as leaders of interfaith communities, such as in arisan and village activities that create spaces for harmonious dialogue. They are active in preserving local culture such as kenduri, nyadran, and community service, which provide a forum for inclusive interaction for the entire community. In the economic aspect, women also initiate interfaith mutual cooperation-based activities, such as women's cooperatives, which not only improve family welfare but also strengthen social relations. With active involvement in various fields, women in Balun Village prove that religious moderation can be realised through education, community leadership, cultural preservation and economic collaboration, making this village an example of harmony in diversity.

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