

Islam and Interreligious Tolerance

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Abstract

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Islam, as a religion of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy to all creation), promotes the values of tolerance, peace, and respect for diversity, including in the context of interfaith relations. This study aims to examine the concept of tolerance from the Islamic perspective and its implementation within a pluralistic society. The study employed a qualitative approach using a literature review by analyzing primary and secondary sources, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and relevant scholarly publications. The findings indicate that Islam emphasizes the principles of religious freedom, mutual respect, and the prohibition of coercing others in matters of faith. These principles are reflected in various Qur'anic verses and in the practices of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), who consistently upheld tolerance and justice. Therefore, the implementation of moderate and inclusive Islamic teachings plays a crucial role in maintaining harmonious interfaith relations within the diversity of contemporary society.

Keywords: Islam; religious tolerance; interfaith relations; religious moderation; pluralism.

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is widely recognized as a multicultural nation characterized by remarkable diversity in terms of religion, ethnicity, culture, and language. Such diversity requires the cultivation of tolerance as a fundamental foundation for maintaining social integration, national unity, and peaceful coexistence. Nevertheless, the persistence of religion based conflicts and acts of intolerance indicates a disparity between the normative teachings of religion and their practical implementation in everyday social life (Azra, 2012, p. 45). Consequently, strengthening the values of interreligious tolerance has become an increasingly urgent priority in contemporary Indonesian society.

Within Islamic teachings, tolerance is referred to as *tasamuh*, which denotes an attitude of mutual respect, appreciation, and acceptance of differences without compromising the fundamental principles of Islamic faith. According to Shihab (2007, p. 321), the Qur'an explicitly recognizes diversity as *sunnatullah* a divine decree that constitutes an inseparable aspect of human existence. Consequently, individuals are encouraged to engage in *ta'aruf* (mutual understanding) while upholding universal humanitarian values. This principle is reflected in Surah Al-Kafirun verse 6, which emphasizes religious freedom, as well as Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13, which highlights the importance of harmonious social interaction within diverse communities.

The principles of tolerance advocated by Islam were exemplified by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the Charter of Medina, one of the earliest constitutional agreements governing a pluralistic society. According to Watt (1956, p. 227), the Charter recognized the rights of non Muslim communities and guaranteed their freedom to practice their respective religions while promoting justice and social harmony. This historical evidence demonstrates that tolerance has been deeply embedded within Islamic civilization and serves as a strong foundation for fostering inclusive and peaceful coexistence.

In contemporary society, however, the implementation of interreligious tolerance has become increasingly challenging. The rapid advancement of information technology and social media has transformed patterns of social interaction while simultaneously facilitating the spread of exclusive religious interpretations and intolerant ideologies. As argued by Azra (2012, p. 67), without a balanced and moderate understanding of religion, religious beliefs may become a source of social division and conflict rather than a means of promoting harmony. These circumstances highlight the strategic role of Islamic education in cultivating the values of *wasathiyah* (religious moderation), inclusivity and respect for religious diversity.

Although previous studies have examined Islamic tolerance from theological, historical, and educational perspectives, relatively limited attention has been devoted to integrating these perspectives into a comprehensive analysis that addresses the challenges of religious diversity in contemporary multicultural societies. Most existing studies focus on doctrinal interpretations or historical narratives without adequately discussing their relevance to present day social realities characterized by globalization, digital communication, and increasing religious pluralism. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge this gap by providing an integrative literature based analysis of the concept of tolerance in Islam and examining its relevance to promoting harmonious interreligious relations in contemporary society.

In light of the foregoing discussion, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the concept of tolerance from the Islamic perspective and examine its relevance to fostering harmonious interreligious relations in multicultural societies. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing discourse on religious moderation while providing a conceptual reference for developing more inclusive, contextual, and value oriented Islamic education capable of responding to the challenges of an increasingly diverse global society.

METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative library research design. This approach was selected because the focus of the study was to analyze the concept of tolerance from the Islamic perspective based on scholarly literature, including both religious texts and relevant academic publications. According to Sugiyono (2017) qualitative research aims to obtain an in depth understanding of a particular phenomenon through descriptive data analysis, making it an appropriate approach for examining normative values such as tolerance within Islamic teachings.

The data sources consisted of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained from the Qur'an and Hadith related to the concept of interfaith tolerance. Secondary data were collected from books, scholarly journals, and previous research relevant to the topic, including publications indexed in Google Scholar, GARUDA and the National Library of Indonesia. The literature analyzed included works by Azyumardi Azra (2012), M. Quraish Shihab (2007) and W. Montgomery Watt (1956) all of whom discuss tolerance from historical and contextual perspectives within Islamic teachings.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis, which involved identifying, classifying, interpreting, and synthesizing the relevant information to develop a comprehensive understanding of the concept of tolerance in Islam. The analysis focused on identifying the principles of tolerance presented in Islamic sources and examining their relevance to contemporary social life.

To ensure the credibility of the findings, the study employed source triangulation by comparing information obtained from various primary and secondary references. This procedure was intended to enhance the validity of the analysis and provide a comprehensive interpretation of the concept of tolerance from the perspective of Islamic teachings.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

The findings indicate that tolerance in Islam is known as *tasamuh*, which refers to an attitude of mutual respect, appreciation, and acceptance of differences, particularly in the context of religious beliefs. Tolerance is not interpreted as the assimilation or mixing of religious doctrines but rather as the recognition of every individual's right to practice his or her faith freely without coercion. This principle is consistent with the teachings of the Qur'an, which explicitly affirm that there is no compulsion in matters of religion.

Furthermore, the historical analysis reveals that the practice of tolerance has been embedded in Islamic social life since the early period of Islamic civilization. One of the most prominent examples is the Charter of Medina, which served as a constitutional framework governing a pluralistic society consisting of different religious and ethnic communities. The Charter guaranteed religious freedom and provided protection for minority groups, demonstrating Islam's commitment to justice and peaceful coexistence.

The findings also indicate that, within the context of contemporary society, the implementation of interfaith tolerance continues to face various challenges. These include the emergence of exclusive religious interpretations and the influence of social media in shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward religious diversity.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that tolerance in Islam is not merely a normative religious principle but also possesses a significant social dimension that contributes to harmonious coexistence within society. This finding is consistent with the perspective of M. Quraish Shihab (2007), who argues that Islamic teachings encourage Muslims to establish harmonious relationships with others regardless of religious differences.

Moreover, this study reinforces previous findings indicating that tolerance in Islam is supported by a strong historical foundation. The example set by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the Charter of Medina illustrates a social system that upheld justice, equality, and religious freedom. As explained by W. Montgomery Watt (1956), the society of Medina represents one of the earliest examples of a pluralistic community capable of maintaining peaceful coexistence among diverse religious groups. This historical evidence confirms that tolerance in Islam is not merely an ideal concept but has also been successfully implemented in practice.

The present findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing that Islamic teachings promote peaceful coexistence, justice, and mutual respect among diverse religious communities. However, this study extends the existing literature by providing an integrative analysis that connects theological foundations, historical evidence, and

educational perspectives to contemporary issues of religious diversity. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on doctrinal interpretations or historical narratives, this study highlights the continuing relevance of Islamic tolerance in addressing current challenges associated with digital communication, globalization, religious polarization, and multicultural social life. Consequently, this study contributes to the growing discourse on religious moderation by demonstrating that the principles of *tasamuh* remain highly relevant for strengthening social cohesion and fostering peaceful coexistence in increasingly diverse societies.

Nevertheless, the implementation of tolerance in contemporary society continues to encounter complex challenges. The findings reveal an increasing tendency toward religious exclusivism and intolerance, influenced by narrow interpretations of religious teachings and the widespread dissemination of unfiltered digital information. This observation is consistent with the view of Azyumardi Azra (2012), who argues that without the application of religious moderation, religion may become a source of social conflict. Therefore, strategic efforts are required to strengthen inclusive and moderate religious understanding within society.

The implications of these findings highlight the pivotal role of Islamic education in cultivating the values of tolerance. Educational approaches that focus solely on cognitive achievement are considered insufficient for fostering tolerant attitudes among learners. Instead, an integrative and contextual approach, as proposed by M. Amin Abdullah (2010), can help students develop a more open, critical, and constructive understanding of diversity. Accordingly, Islamic education should emphasize the principles of *wasathiyah* (religious moderation) while promoting inclusive character development and respect for pluralism. Such an approach is expected to equip learners with the knowledge, attitudes, and social competencies required to navigate religious diversity constructively in contemporary multicultural societies.

Although this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the concept of tolerance from an Islamic perspective, it has certain limitations, particularly because it relies on a literature review approach based exclusively on written sources. Consequently, the findings remain conceptual and have not been empirically validated in educational or community settings. Therefore, future research is recommended to employ qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches to investigate how the principles of Islamic tolerance are implemented across diverse educational institutions and multicultural communities. Such empirical investigations would provide a deeper understanding of the practical application of Islamic tolerance while enriching the theoretical discourse on religious moderation and interfaith relations.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes, based on a comprehensive review of Islamic literature, that tolerance constitutes one of the fundamental principles of Islamic teachings, emphasizing mutual respect, religious freedom, justice, and peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic society. The concept of *tasamuh* reflects Islam's recognition of diversity as part of God's divine will and encourages harmonious interaction without compromising the fundamental principles of faith. Historical evidence, particularly the Charter of Medina, demonstrates that Islam has long promoted inclusive and peaceful coexistence among diverse religious communities.

The findings also indicate that the implementation of interfaith tolerance in contemporary society faces significant challenges, including the rise of religious exclusivism, intolerance, and the widespread influence of unverified digital information.

These challenges underscore the importance of strengthening religious moderation and promoting inclusive religious understanding through educational institutions and community engagement.

Furthermore, this study highlights the strategic role of Islamic education in fostering tolerant attitudes and strengthening social cohesion. By adopting contextual, integrative, and value-based educational approaches, Islamic education can contribute significantly to developing individuals who are intellectually competent, spiritually grounded, and socially responsible. Future studies are encouraged to employ empirical research designs to examine how the principles of Islamic tolerance are implemented across different educational institutions and multicultural communities. Such investigations would provide richer empirical evidence while strengthening the theoretical and practical understanding of religious moderation in contemporary society.

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