

Religious Dynamics and Attitude of Religious Moderation in the *Carita Sejarah Lasem*

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Abstract: Moderate religious character in Indonesia is not just an academic concept that has developed in the contemporary era. Based on historical records such as ancient texts and manuscripts, Indonesian Muslims have applied and practiced the values of religious moderation for hundreds of years. One of the local scripts that record the dynamics of the plurality of local communities, especially in the coastal areas of Java, is the *Carita Sejarah Lasem* Text. This study aims to reveal the dynamics of religion and the attitude of religious moderation practiced by the coastal communities of Lasem, as stated in the *Carita Sejarah Lasem* Text. This research is a literature study using the content analysis method to analyze the data obtained. To explain the dynamics of religiosity and the practice of religious moderation, the researcher uses the perspective of religious moderation according to Prof. Quraish Shihab. The study concludes that there has been a dynamic spiritual practice in Lasem for hundreds of years. Although frictions between ethnic groups have occurred, the practice of community religiosity is relatively moderate. This religious life is manifested in an attitude of tolerance and egalitarianism between religious communities, accommodation of local culture, shared patriotism against colonialism, and balance in applying religious principles. Some attitudes of religious moderation cannot be separated from the competence of religious knowledge, emotional control, and prudence in the attitudes exemplified by several local religious leaders.

Keywords: *Carita Sejarah Lasem* Text, Lasem, religious dynamics, religious moderation.

Introduction

Religious moderation or *wasatiyyah* attitude in religion has become one of the most talked-about topics. Various groups ranging from academics, political figures to the public, in general, discussed further the definition of religious moderation and how to apply it. The discussion of this sensitive topic is certainly not without reason. Several negative phenomena related to the extreme religious life of the community are often found and are considered to threaten the joints of the life of the nation and state. Religious intolerance, which is often accompanied by vigilante actions or hate speech, is feared to create disintegration in Indonesian society, which is known to be religious. As a result, the idea of elevating the face of religion, exceptionally moderate and non-extreme Islam, has become one of the ways to reduce

people's religious attitudes that tend to be extreme. Religious moderation has now become one of the strategic programs of the Ministry of Religion. Even though religious moderation or *wasatiyyah* has become a concept or terminology discussed recently, this religious concept has become the essence of the teachings of Islam itself.

Indonesia is a country that is diverse in terms of religion, culture, and ethnicity. This diversity can be a potential for the nation's progress, and vice versa can also threaten the existence of the state (Busyro et al. 2019). Ethnic-religious conflicts that often occur in several regions exemplify the complexity of ethnic problems in Indonesia (Yuwono, 2017). Moreover, religion and religious activities have become one of the essential sub-importances of people's lives. Therefore, as a muslim, it is essential to understand the essence of religious moderation amid the reality of

Indonesian multiculturalism. Exemplary in religious moderation is also needed because it can inspire (best practice) for the community. One of the areas in Indonesia with multicultural society is Lasem. Currently, the city of Lasem is one of the sub-districts in Rembang Regency, Central Java. Even though it is a small town, Lasem has a long history of the religious traditions of the people of the Archipelago. Various ethnicities and religions hundreds of years ago have met in this city of Bandar and can live together. This collective memory of a harmonious and peaceful life amid multiculturalism is recorded in the text of *Carita Sejarah Lasem* (CSL). The memory of the meeting point can be an example for today's generation. As part of folklore, the CSL text contains much history, customs, views on life, politics, leadership, and ideals (desire) (Kuswara and Sumayana, 2021). In addition to the wealth of historical data, the CSL text is also full of religious values that can be explored and used as lessons. Exploring positive values based on local wisdom is in line with the vision of the Indonesian Ministry of Religion to develop religious moderation based on local wisdom.

The discourse of religious moderation is a strategic issue for strengthening religious harmony. This discourse is intended to counteract radicalism born from extreme religious understanding. Another effort in line with this is the strengthening of culture. This meeting point then prompted the need to develop a discourse on religious moderation through the promotion of culture, including by strengthening arts and culture, oral traditions, and preserving cultural heritage, especially religious texts (Hidayat, 2019). In this case, the existence of historical narratives in the CSL text can be a best practice in the experience of religious moderation in the Lasem community.

Previously, research on religious moderation values in historical texts or manuscripts had been carried out. Bisri Ruchani had previously researched the values of harmony in the *Serat Purwocampur*. In the text, there is a value of acculturation between Hindu teachings and Islamic teachings (Jawanization of Islam) peacefully (Ruchani, 2013). Another research conducted by Agus Iswanto and his friends is related to the

narrative in the *Serat Carub Kandha* Manuscript, which is historical evidence and collective memory of religious moderation in Indonesia's past the north coast of West Java (Iswanto et al. 2021). Norma Rizkiananingrum studied the text of *Carita Sejarah Lasem* itself in 2014. In her study, *Carita Sejarah Lasem* was analyzed structurally and the context of the story's content. The story in *Carita* (History) Lasem is quite challenging to understand because of the poet's language of delivery but because of the density and complexity of the story. Each episode contains a densely and intricately described story (Rizkiananingrum, 2014). Muh Khairul Umam Attamimi has previously investigated the research related to moderation in CSL in his thesis research. However, this research focuses on efforts to reveal the values of moderation in a more general context, namely the relationship between people and cultures of different ethnicities. Although Islam was mentioned in this study, the value of moderation in the context of the religious diversity of the Lasem Muslim community has not been analyzed (Attamimi, 2021). Different from previous studies, this study aims to reveal the dynamics of diversity and the attitudes of religious moderation practiced by the coastal community of Lasem, as stated in the *Carita Sejarah Lasem* text.

Materials and Methods

This research is library research, with a historical approach in Islamic studies. This integration-interconnection scientific paradigm is used to dissect the religious realities, especially those carried out and experienced by the Indonesian Muslim community in a certain period (historical-empirical). In this case, the historical approach, the use of the working method of thinking in the social sciences, is very prioritized in the scientific tradition of Islamic Studies (Abdullah, 2020). The empirical reality of Muslim religion is indeed one of the dimensions studied in Islamic studies (Abdurahman, 2011). The use of the historical approach is expected to provide a more comprehensive knowledge of the dynamics of the Indonesian Muslim community in understanding,

practicing, and expressing Islamic religious values in everyday life. The historical research went through five stages: topic selection, source collection, verification, interpretation (analysis and synthesis), and finally, writing (Kuntowijoyo, 2018).

The data obtained, then grouped and analyzed with content analysis as needed before being written down in discussions and conclusions. Content analysis can be interpreted as an effort to analyze documents or transcripts that have been written with recordings of verbal communication, such as newspapers, books, chapters in books, newspaper headlines, essays, interview results, articles, and historical documents, and the like. In a broad sense, content analysis is an analytical technique to make a conclusion or decision from various written or recorded documents by systematically and objectively identifying a message or information in its context. The advantages of using this analytical model are the availability of historical values or cultural understanding over time through text analysis, the availability of understanding towards complex human thinking models, and the use of language (Yusuf, 2014).

In this study, researchers used the perspective of religious moderation according to Prof. Quraish Shihab to analyze how the dynamics of diversity and the practice of religious moderation in *Carita Sejarah Lasem*. According to Prof. Quraish Shihab, Wasathiyyah or Moderation is a balance in all matters of worldly life and hereafter, which must always be accompanied by efforts to adapt to the situation based on religious instructions and the objective conditions being experienced. Thus, he does not just serve two poles and then chooses what is in the middle. *Wasathiyyah* is a balance accompanied by the principle of not lacking and not excessive. However, at the same time, it is not an attitude of avoiding difficult situations or running away from responsibilities (Shihab, 2020). Thus essentially, all Islamic teachings are moderate. Prof. Quraish Shihab himself did not formulate any indicators that someone can have moderate religion. However, through the definition above, he formulated the characteristics of religious moderation or *wasatiyyah*, namely

balance in practicing the three aspects of Islamic teachings, namely *Akidah*, *fiqh* (*Shari'a*), and morality or character. All three must be practiced in moderation whenever and wherever. The practice of religious moderation also requires the fulfillment of correct knowledge and understanding, balanced and controlled emotions, and continuous vigilance. Without these three, it is not easy to be moderate.

Results and Discussion

The Dynamics of Religious in a Multicultural Society

The various fragments presented in the CSL text tell several historical realities of the Lasem people, starting from the Hindu-Buddhist period, the Islamic period, to the period of penetration of VOC colonialism and the Dutch East Indies government. In this long period, the reality of the community's diversity is also recorded and becomes a collective memory that is deliberately maintained to be used as a lesson for the next generation. This message can be seen in the opening section of the CSL text, which Panji Karsono copied in 1920 (Kamzah & Karsono, 2012).

The presence of Islam in the Lasem area cannot be separated from the spice trade activities that led to the archipelago. The hectic trade in the spice route has encouraged the development of the socio-economic level of the coastal communities that it passes, including the Lasem coast. In the 13-14 century AD, the city of Lasem was transformed into a Port city (Bandar). As an important point of world trade, foreign traders from the Arab region, Central Asia, Champa, and China – most of whom are Muslim – then met each other, settled and formed a community in Bandar Lasem. During their stay, cultural contact between the foreign merchant community and the local population was unavoidable, and in the end, contributed to the introduction of Islam to the local community.

Islamization in the archipelago only accelerated between the 12th and 16th centuries AD after being introduced and taught by teachers or professional preachers and Sufis. These figures who spread the religion of Islam Besides having authoritative

religious competence, their presence from the beginning also specifically aimed to spread and teach Islam (WM et al., 2015). In the coastal area of Lasem, Sunan Ampel's pupil and son, namely Raden Makdum Ibrahim or Sunan Bonang, became a propagator of Islam in the area. Sunan Bonang's *da'wah* is also told in CSL. In the text, it is stated that Raden Makdum Ibrahim became the imam (*wali negara*) of the state for the regions of Tuban and Lasem. The *da'wah* movement was carried out with an educational approach, Sufism and a distinctive culture that made Islam widely accepted by the community. This *da'wah* model later helped shape the religious face of the moderate Lasem Muslim community, which was tolerant and appreciated the diversity that had previously been present in the Nusantara.

The CSL text mentions several traits/characters of the Islamic religion that make people enthusiastic about this new religion. On page 136, Islam is referred to as a religion: *ora kakehan sajensajen lan upacara-upacara seng pating clekunik; ora kakehan puja mantra sing ngantur dawwa; ora kakehan leladdi bekti marang dewa-dewa utawa makhluk makhluk maya; ora ana tata cara sing ngerakasakake raga; mbrastha kasta lan nyuwak panglengkara; dan sayuk rukun, ngulungguhi tata krama*. Islam is considered an easy religion, encourages the creation of harmony and order and encourages the creation of social justice. The friendly character of Islam meets the reality of the diversity that lives in the Lasem community. At that time, in Bandar Lasem, various ethnic groups met and socialized; there were Javanese, Malay, Champa, Arab, Persian, and Chinese. Religions also vary from Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism (worshipping gods, usually the sea god), and Islam. For hundreds of years, these different societies mingled, communicated and socialized with each other. Inter-ethnic marriages or amalgamations are common, as are encounters between different cultures. This diversity later helped shape the history and culture of Lasem.

For the record, not all historical narratives narrated in the CSL text are moderate religious realities. Friction or threats of disintegration between ethnic communities have occurred, especially after *Geger Pacinan* in the 1740s. Even

acts of intolerance that led to acts of radicalism have occurred. In 1745, the Regent of Suraadimenggolo III and the colonial government of the VOC ordered the massive destruction of temples and literary case books in Lasem (see CSL text: pages 77-78). This incident shows that the reality of religious practice in Lasem is very dynamic. However, widespread religious practice in Lasem is relatively more peaceful and harmonious. This dynamic can be seen from the many historical records that show the collective memory of the Lasem people who lived a harmonious and harmonious life between different communities. In Muslim and non-Muslim communities, rulers and ordinary people remain in harmony and establish mutually supportive relationships. Interestingly, relations between different religions and ethnic groups have existed since pre-Islamic times. Hindu-Shiva and Buddhists, the majority pre-15th century AD, can establish a harmonious relationship (see CSL text: page 7). Despite internal and external challenges, these harmonious social relations continued and were cared for during the Islamic era.

The Attitude of Religious Moderation in the *Carita Sejarah Lasem*

Attitudes or behaviours that show the values of religious moderation can be found in some episodes of CSL texts. Interestingly, the practice of religious moderation in the text is exemplified by the Muslim community and the Hindu-Buddhist Lasem community, from ordinary people to the rulers. In general, the attitude of religious moderation can be grouped into four forms as follows:

1. Tolerance and Egalitarianism Between Religious Communities

One of the attitudes of religious moderation described in the CSL text is the existence of tolerance which is manifested in the form of freedom to embrace religions and beliefs. This freedom takes place not only among the people of Lasem but also among the family of the Lasem palace. Although the Majapahit kingdom and its vassal kingdoms, including Lasem, were identified with the Hindu-Shiva religion as the kingdom's official religion, religious freedom had become

commonplace. Muslims, especially traders from China and the Middle East, were freely and freely involved in spice trading activities with the Majapahit kingdom and other archipelago kingdoms. The presence of sunans, guardians who are generally Sufi teachers, managed to enter the local kingdom and received the blessing of the relevant authorities to spread Islam in their area. This blessing can be found on page 9, CSL text. The text states that Adipati Wirabaja invited people to embrace the Apostle religion (Islam). The Lasem people who decide to embrace Islam are said to be people who, *lila lan eklas ninggalake agama Syiwa (Hindu) dan Budha*. In the palace family, Prince Wiranagara, since childhood, has been freed to embrace Islam. He even had the opportunity to study religion at the Sunan Ampel Islamic boarding school in Surabaya. In trading activities, for example, every community member is given the same rights. The Lasem people, both natives and foreign immigrants, can mingle and socialize without any barriers.

As a city, Lasem is open to all immigrants, regardless of religion and ethnicity. This openness was seen when the immigrants from Campa (now entering the southern part of Vietnam) were warmly welcomed by the ruler of Lasem, Prince Wijaya Badra (see CSL text: page 8). Besides China, the Champa ethnic group also plays a role in the spread of Islam through the process of inculturation the Champa Islamic tradition in the religious life of the northern coastal community of the Rembang-Lasem community, such as commemorating the day of death after someone's death, feasts, haul commemorations and so on (Sunyoto, 2016). Thus, the presence of foreign ethnic groups such as Champa and Chinese, Arabic, and Persian helped shape the face of the community's religious traditions. Their presence in Lasem was then followed by establishing several ethnic-religious-based villages, which were close to each other and remained in contact (see CSL text: page 51).

2. Accommodation of Local Culture

The attitude of the Lasem Muslim community that is willing to accommodate local culture can also be categorized as an attitude of religious moderation.

This attitude requires a big heart, broad understanding, and honest awareness of various forms of local culture that had developed before Islam came to Lasem. The Lasem Muslim community also does not simply accept all pre-Islamic culture because, in the process of accommodation of pre-Islamic culture, the values and principles of Islamic teachings become in every muslim's actions. If a tradition or culture does not conflict with Islamic teachings, that culture can be adopted. Vice versa, if it conflicts with Islamic teachings, the culture can be abandoned, or the model/form is accommodated. However, the substance and meaning of the tradition are changed to be in harmony with the values and spirit of Islam.

One of the local art forms mentioned in CSL is wayang. As is common knowledge, generally, leather puppets are made from animal skins such as cowhide. In Lasem, Adipati Lasem Tejokusumo IV in the 17th century AD encouraged the manufacture of wooden puppets. The appeal was made to respect the Lasem Hindu community, who consider cows sacred animals that should not be slaughtered, especially to make wayang (see CSL text: page 41). This appeal is interesting considering that in the 17th century AD, the number of Muslims in Lasem should have been much more than at the beginning of the 15th century AD. However, the Lasem people still respect the existence of non-Muslim communities by making necessary cultural adjustments solely to maintain religious harmony. Not only wayang, but Adipati Lasem also invites the community to develop other local traditions and cultures, such as karawitan (see CSL text: page 51).

In addition to physical culture such as wayang art, another form of culture that is also protected and preserved is the literary case culture left by the ancestors of Lasem, namely the script of the Badra Santi Word Book. This manuscript is the main book of which the CSL text is a part (see CSL text: pages 39-40). This preservation also shows an appreciation for the history and progress of the Lasem ancestors. This form of respect for ancestors is also shown through the dedication of Sunan Bonang, who took care of the burial complex of

Putri Cempo and the Lasem duchy family (the ancestors of Lasem rulers) in Binangun.

3. *Shared Patriotism Against Colonialism*

For hundreds of years, the Lasem people have always maintained a sense of togetherness. Whatever their religion and ethnicity, all of them can live side by side and help each other. During the reign of Hindu rulers, the Muslim community of Lasem could freely practice their religion and life. Likewise, when a Muslim holds several Adipati Lasem, the state's rights and religion of non-Muslim communities are maintained and respected. As a result, when Java, especially the Lasem area, began to face the threat of western colonialism, all elements of society fought together to repel the invaders.

In 1740 the *Geger Pacinan* broke out in Batavia. The incident was a rebellion of the Chinese ethnic community over the colonial government's discriminatory attitude towards them. The chaos that occurred in Batavia then sparked resistance in several areas, including in Lasem. At the same time, the VOC colonial government had built a fort on the coast of Rembang (the City of Rembang, today). Seeing the threat in front of their eyes, the Lasem people, which consisted of various ethnicities and religions, joined forces to expel the invaders from the land of Rembang. This resistance was led by Tumenggung Widyaningrat, a Chinese Muslim with Panji Margana (a Javanese from the duchy family, who was close to the Chinese community). The santri (pesantren) were also involved. Through the force mobilized by KH Baidhowi I, after one Friday, the Lasem community consisting of ethnic Chinese and Javanese invaded Fort Rembang (see CSL text, pages 53-55; 83). The war in 1741 was known as the yellow war (Sabil war). Even though the resistance failed, history has proven a willingness to help each other, fight threats for the sake of creating the common good. This character is in line with the character of Islam Nusantara, as described in the CSL text, as a religion that encourages harmony in society, applies good manners, and upholds social justice (see CSL text, page 136).

4. *Balance in Applying Religious Principles*

This moderate attitude was exemplified by Sunan Bonang when he was careful (not rash) in responding to the attitude of his older sister, who had left religious teachings. In one episode, due to the influence of his brothers-in-law, Nyai Ageng Maloka is influenced by kejawen teachings and rarely prays (see CSL text: page 14). Sunan Bonang did not rashly accuse his brother of being infidel or heretical. On the other hand, Sunan Bonang patiently gave advice. When this subtle effort has not been achieved, Sunan Bonang deliberately takes distance (away) from his brother and lives in Tuban. Sunan Bonang's efforts were a subtle form of reprimand to his brother. In the end (although the CSL text does not specify the story), Nyai Ageng Maloka later repented, and Sunan Bonang was pleased to return to Lasem. Although it looks simple, this incident shows the moderate attitude of Sunan Bonang, who carefully applies religious law. Carrying out religious orders is an obligation, and Sunan Bonang firmly holds it. It is just that how the teachings are delivered must pay attention to the context and object of the *da'wah* so that the message can be conveyed properly without any coercion.

Caution in a wider context is also seen in the reasons behind the creation of wooden puppets. As mentioned in the previous explanation, the creation of the puppet is a form of caution by Islamic leaders in religion. On the one hand, wayang is a medium of Islamic *da'wah* that is commonly used, and on the other hand, making wayang from cowhide is a natural thing. However, to respect and protect the feelings of the Lasem Hindus, Lasem Islamic leaders have creatively made puppets made of wood. Whereas legally, slaughtering cows and using their skins is not prohibited by religion. Therefore, once again, the application of religious law is important to always look at the context and conditions of the surrounding community solely to achieve the goals of Islamic *da'wah* itself.

Good Example from Local Leaders

Although religious moderation or the principle of moderation is one of the essences of Islam itself, its application in religious activities is not something

easy. Especially in a multicultural life, multicultural understanding and awareness are needed that respects differences, pluralism, and the willingness to interact with anyone fairly. On the other hand, the role of the government, community leaders, and religious counselors is also needed to socialize and develop religious moderation in the community to realize harmony and peace (Akhmadi, 2019).

Several attitudes of religious moderation in the CSL text cannot be separated from the role of historical figures. Muslim figures such as Prince Wiranegara and Nyai Ageng Maloka, Kangjeng Sunan Bonang, Adipati P. Tejokusumo I, Adipati P. Tejokusumo IV, Mbah KH. Baidlowi I, and Temanggung Widyaningrat became role models in applying moderate attitudes in religion in the context of the Lasem community. Religious scholars such as Sunan Bonang and KH. Baidhowi can synergize with local rulers. The synergy between the two has encouraged forming a harmonious and respectful religious culture in the Lasem area. This synergy is inseparable from the kinship and scientific relationship between the Lasem rulers and the clergy. An example is Prince Wiranegara, Prince Lasem, whom Sunan Ampel directly trained. The process of cultural contact and cultural change in a community group will, however, also be determined by the attitude of the ruling class (Sen, 2018).

Several religious moderation attitudes exemplified by the Lasem figures cannot be separated from the factors of religious knowledge competence, emotional control, and caution in acting, as exemplified by some local religious leaders. These three things are a condition for a person to be moderate, especially in religion. As a result, several political figures and religious propagators were able to present and spread the friendly face of Islam Nusantara, which brought mercy to nature. The missionary mission of the wali, Sunan, and local muslim rulers made the process of Islamization acceptable to the wider community. In the CSL text, Islam is referred to not only as an easy religion (and not difficult) for its adherents but also a pleasant religion, brings happiness (*kemulyaan*), social justice, and guarantees (encourages) the creation of peace and

order in society. So do not be surprised if this new religion is easily accepted by the community and gets the blessing (permission to spread) from local authorities.

Discussion

Local historical documents such as CSL texts are important to be treated and studied because their information is very helpful in the local historiography process. The CSL text, which is based on the collective memory of the Lasem people, can fill the narrative space of the people's daily history, in this case, the reality of religion. This kind of local historiography can be an alternative amid national historical narratives, which are often dominated by the influence of big kingdoms such as the Majapahit Kingdom and the Demak Bintoro Sultanate.

For the current generation, CSL texts can also be a source of value education, especially the values of religious moderation. Various historical events in the text can be projections and examples for the present and the future. The religious dynamics narrated in the text do not always run well. The potential for disintegration in a multicultural society such as the Lasem community is very large. In several moments, tensions between ethnic-religious religions in Lasem even occurred. However, the reality of religion that is the memory of the Lasem people is precisely the memory of a harmonious and tolerant society. This historical reality cannot be separated from the role of the CSL text figures, including religious leaders, community leaders, and merchant figures. These figures can wisely and wisely be moderate in the context of religious life. Several examples of the moderate religious life of the Lasem people, such as tolerance and discussion between religious communities, and shared patriotism against colonialism, were encouraged and exemplified directly by these figures. Three important components are competence in religious knowledge, emotional control, and prudence in behavior. A person can be moderate, all three of which can be found in figures such as Sunan Bonang, Adipati Wiranegara, and other figures.

In the end, the CSL text can be a historical narrative offering that can be used as an example

of best practice and religious moderation in the past. *Wasathiyah* or religious moderation is not a recipe for which details are available. Religious moderation is a continuous effort to find it, including digging it from the treasures of local wisdom, the collective memory of the long history of diversity in the people of the Nusantara, which we can later emulate and apply in our lives.

Conclusions

As a historical document, the text of *Carita Sejarah Lasem* is an embodiment of the community's collective memory of Lasem's history from time to time. In this text, we can find out how the religious practice of the muslim community amid a very multicultural environment and society. From this historical document, the researcher concludes that there has been a dynamic religious practice in Lasem for hundreds of years. Although frictions between ethnic groups have occurred, the practice of community religiosity is relatively moderate. This religious life is manifested in an attitude of tolerance and egalitarianism between religious communities, accommodation of local culture, shared patriotism against colonialism, and balance in applying religious principles. Some attitudes of religious moderation cannot be separated from the competence of religious knowledge, emotional control, and prudence in the attitudes exemplified by several local religious leaders.

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