

SPACE FOR RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: MUSLIM AND HINDU RELATIONS IN TALANG BENUANG VILLAGE, INDONESIA

Rahmat Ramdhani^{*1}

¹Fatmawati Sukarno State Islamic University, Bengkulu.

Corresponding email: rahmatramdhani@mail.uinfasbengkulu.ac.id

Abstract: Harmonious relations between religious communities have become a best practice among Muslims and Hindus, contrasting with conflicts that have occurred in Indonesia. Amidst religious contestation, Muslims and Hindus in Talang Benuang Village allocate each other's space and are committed to fostering a peaceful environment within community development. This paper aims to demonstrate the existence of moderation spaces successfully built by these two religious groups and to explain how different religions can collaborate to build an empowered society. The results indicate that three types of spaces—doctrinaire, social, and cultural—form the foundation for harmony in community development. The doctrinaire space involves conceptual harmony between religions, the social space encourages interreligious interaction, and the cultural space, based on local traditions, facilitates peaceful coexistence. Culturally based moderation spaces hold significant potential for resolving interreligious conflicts in Indonesia's plural society. This paper suggests the need to develop a moderation model rooted in religious and cultural wisdom to enhance collective intelligence for a harmonious society.

Keywords: Religious Moderation, Community Development, Common Space, Social Harmony, Indonesia

1. Introduction

In Indonesia's plural society, marked by latent conflicts, there remains potential for moderation in interreligious relations. These relations are not always contentious; many examples demonstrate harmony among different religious groups. The coexistence of Muslims and Hindus in Talang Benuang, Indonesia, exemplifies the potential for interfaith harmony and best practices. In a rural community, Muslim and Hindu groups have successfully created a common space for peaceful living. However, as noted by Pamungkas (2014), Muslim-Hindu relations in Indonesia are not always smooth, with the majority-minority dynamic still prevalent in many areas. The issue of mutual respect between Muslims and Hindus is crucial for building harmony (Jannah, 2017). Studies examining Muslim-Hindu relationships in various social and cultural contexts are essential for understanding the dynamic interactions between these religions (Fathoni, 2017).

The study of interreligious relations has often been confined to structural explanations that frame interactions, such as those between Muslims and Hindus, within a rigid structure. First, many studies explore interfaith relations through a policy framework that dictates the interactions between religious groups (Wahid and Ghazal, 2010; Fitri, 2012; Ultimate, 2014; Rusydi and

Zolehah, 2018). Second, other studies focus on the foundations of harmony, particularly the harmonization that occurred with the introduction of Islam to Indonesia, which had to adapt to pre-existing Hinduism (Kholil, 2008; Hakiki, 2011; Daryanto, 2014; Aziz, 2015; Musthofa, 2015; Saputra, 2016). As Saputra (2016) noted, the spread of Islam in Indonesia involved adapting to local culture, which was still influenced by Hindu-Buddhist traditions. Religious differences have thus enriched the lives of the people. Third, some studies view interfaith relationships as inherently contentious, characterized by tension and conflict (Rozi, 2013; Sibarani, 2013; BM, 2014; St. Aisha, 2014; Alfath, 2015).

These three perspectives often overlook the interactive forces that create spaces for interreligious moderation, which can serve as a foundation for community empowerment. This paper aims to address the gaps in existing studies, which predominantly focus on the structural dimensions of interreligious relations, by emphasizing the cultural potential of two religious groups in creating common spaces within society. This study demonstrates that the relationship between Muslims and Hindus can foster both the concept and practice of harmony. It maps the forms of religious harmony in Talang Benuang Village and explains how a common space, as a model of moderation, can be established for local religious communities. This exploration includes a historical and theological analysis of the sources of harmony derived from religious beliefs and human life conceptions. Such an understanding of harmonious coexistence can serve as a reference for developing society and addressing issues of contestation, tension, and conflict in a pluralistic society.

This paper argues that inter-religious relations do not always involve tension, even in a contentious and conflict-ridden macro environment. Interfaith relations are shaped not only by differences but also by shared principles of goodness across religions. Fundamentally, religions share a common goal of promoting good for humanity. Harmony can be found among different religions, fostering religious moderation as a manifestation of a collective commitment to building a better life together. Therefore, interfaith relations framed within religious moderation can create an inclusive cultural space that allows for the sharing of narratives about life and common societal challenges. This shared space also serves as a source for distributing knowledge that forms a common understanding of peaceful coexistence among different groups. Such social capital is crucial for effective and cohesive community empowerment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Interfaith Relations

Interreligious relations refer to interactions or communications between or across different religions or beliefs. People of diverse religions or beliefs cooperate without religious bias, regardless of their backgrounds, to seek greater peace for humanity. Interreligious relations occur when followers of Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, and other religions live and

cooperate without conflict stemming from religious bias. According to Sek (2017), interfaith work encompasses peace and justice, community and friendship, conversation and action. The principle is that interreligious relations should not denigrate religious practices or suggest that all religions are equal (Kartupelis, 2017). Sinn (2019) affirmed that interreligious relations are spaces that point beyond themselves, towards the origin of all religions, which is referred to as God. Interreligious relations are also influenced by regional political processes, conflicts, and foreign policy guidelines. Consequently, interreligious relations, which evolve due to these influences, act as a driving force for multidimensional social transformation (Kartupelis, 2017).

Interfaith relations have become a significant concern in recent decades due to the emergence of various acts of violence in the name of religious interests. According to Jafar and Amrullah, such violence is partly triggered by a superficial understanding of religious texts. This superficial understanding arises from using approaches that fragment the reading of religious texts. An atomistic approach, which involves understanding verses by isolating parts without considering the overall meaning, leads to significant biases in interpreting religious texts (Jafar & Amrullah, 2019). In the Indonesian context, interfaith relations are particularly sensitive, especially within Muhammadiyah, known for its leadership in Islamic missionary activities (Burhani, 2011). Therefore, interreligious dialogue is essential for improving interreligious relations, preventing radicalization and terrorism, and avoiding excessive fanaticism within religious groups (Colwell, 2019).

Religious Moderation

The term harmony, when applied to a country, is defined as mutual understanding, unity, cooperation, peace, and friendship among its members, aimed at national and state purposes. Harmony also signifies a state of mutual agreement among members, leading to peace and concord (Soares & Sudarsana, 2018). According to Soares and Sudarsana (2018), religious harmony is not about merging religious teachings but fostering harmony between different religions. Religious harmony can be achieved through tolerance among people of different faiths. Tolerance involves self-control in one's attitude toward others, ensuring that no one feels aggrieved or threatened. This self-control must be practiced by every adherent of different religions (Soares & Sudarsana, 2018). Hussin (2018) states that religious harmony has a complex history, balancing the commitment to providing rights with the need for order. It is based on a careful balance between the state's requirements for order, the demands of religious communities for freedom of practice, and ensuring these practices do not overlap with the sensitivities of other religious communities (Hussin, 2018).

In a pluralistic society, accepting and accommodating religious and cultural diversity, including the religious rights, cultures, and norms of all communities and groups, is essential for maintaining religious pluralism, harmony, and communal peace (Yusoff & Sarjoon, 2017). To create a unified society from various ethnic groups, it is necessary to explore and disseminate local

cultural values to the general public, fostering recognition and appreciation of the cultural richness of different tribes (Bolotio, 2018). Facing both opportunities and challenges, governments, religious communities, and other relevant parties need to assume responsibility and advocate for religious harmony, resolve religious disputes and conflicts, promote social harmony, and uphold world peace (Zuo'an, 2013).

2.2. Common Space

Shared spaces are created by people in their efforts to build a world that accommodates, supports, and expresses the communities they participate in. Shared space should be distinguished from public and private space (Stavrides, 2015). Public spaces are mainly created by certain authorities (local, regional, or state) that control them and set the rules for their use. Personal space belongs to and is controlled by individuals or economic entities who establish the conditions under which others can use it. A common space can take the form of a meeting place, an area where various social circuits intersect (Stavrides, 2015). Shared space is relational and relative. It is not only a medium and a significant factor in social relations, like any type of space, but also part of a series of relationships that cease to function as a shared force when enclosed in a system of restricted positional relationships. For a shared space to remain effective, there needs to be a mechanism that continually processes the contributions of those invited to use it (Stavrides, 2016).

Common space appears as a threshold space, not bounded by perimeter boundaries, unlike public space, which is defined by marks of authority (Tsavdaroglou, 2018). A common space is shared by the people who use it. Public space, characterized by the presence of governing authorities, is allocated to people according to specific regulations. Common spaces are appropriated by the people who use them. The community of users develops by utilizing the space and transforming it into a potentially divisible area (Stavrides, 2016). It functions not only as a shared space but as a space where access cannot be easily denied, thus making it perceived as public by its users. A consensus to unify the trail system involves granting others the right to use private land, thereby creating a common space (Johnson & Glover, 2013). In a country's community, common space can be categorized in relation to economic activities, external relations, science, and education (Potemkina, 2010).

3. Method

This study was conducted in Talang Benuang Village, located in Seluma Regency, Bengkulu Province. Talang Benuang Village originated from a hamlet called Talang Benuang, situated in the Talang Giring Village area, and led by a Depati. The village was relocated due to a landslide that resulted in nine deaths, including the Depati and his family.

In 1975, Talang Benuang Village was moved to its current location through the Tanjung Bai Talang Benuang Resettlement program, later renamed Talang Benuang Resettlement by the government through the PMD project under the leadership of Mr. Sulaiman Canan. That year,

residential houses, yards, and agricultural land were established for 75 settlers, led by Depati Simanudin and subsequently by Depati Hasnul Basib. Talang Benuang Village includes migrant communities brought by the Social Service in three waves: 55 families in 1973, 100 families in 1975, and 155 families in 1977. Initially, in 1975, 11 people (5 heads of families) moved after hearing about vacant land in Talang Benuang Village and invited their Hindu relatives from Java and Bali (Samsudin, 2018).

The population of Talang Benuang Village is 1,640 people, with 727 men and 913 women (village data, 2021). The population is fairly balanced between Muslims (915 people) and Hindus (716 people), with a small Christian minority of 9. Most of the villagers work as farmers, while others are traders and laborers. The comparable composition of the Muslim and Hindu populations is why this area was chosen for research.

This qualitative research relies on observations and interviews conducted in Talang Benuang, Bengkulu. Data collection involved multiple visits to observe interfaith relations during various religious events and activities. These traditions provided opportunities to interview informants, ensuring comprehensive research data. Informants included village heads, religious leaders, traditional leaders, general followers of different religions, and youth. The data collected included abstract concepts such as values, outlooks on life, and the meaning of symbols, gathered through in-depth interviews. Additional data was obtained from supporting documents like village records and previous related research. The research data was analyzed through three processes: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

4. Results

4.1. Similarities in the Concepts of God and Humanity

Muslim and Hindu communities in Talang Benuang have remarkably similar concepts of belief in God. In Hindu society, the concept of Cadu Sakti comprises four elements: Wibdu Sakti, Prabhu Sakti, Jnana Sakti, and Kriya Sakti. These represent the understanding that God is omnipresent, the king of kings, omniscient, and continually active in creation, nurturing, dissolving, and protecting. Similarly, in Islam, it is believed that Allah is the Lord of all worlds (Surah Al-Fatihah, verse 2); the ruler of the entire universe (Surah Al-Fatihah, verse 4); omniscient of the unseen and visible (Surah Ar-Ra'd, verse 9); and the eternal living God who sustains His creation without slumber or sleep (Surah Al-Baqarah, verse 255).

Muslim and Hindu communities share the same concept and practice of building diversity in society, emphasizing the importance of cultivating religious harmony from childhood. This mutual respect for religious differences is ingrained in both communities and is supported by their religious teachings. In Hindu society, the term Catur Paramitha includes Upeksha, which means to respect others' opinions and show regard for them. Similarly, Islam teaches this principle through Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13, which states, "Verily, We created you from a man and a woman and made you into nations and tribes that you might know one another."

The concept of brotherhood is prevalent in both religions. Hinduism teaches Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, meaning "the world is one single family," promoting the idea that all human beings are equal and brothers. Additionally, the concept of tat twam asi emphasizes the divine aspect of the human soul (Radhakrisnan, 1953: 143). In Islam, the concept of Ukhuwah Islamiyah encompasses the brotherhood of believers (ukhuwah diniyyah), the brotherhood among humans (ukhuwah insaniyah), and the brotherhood among citizens (ukhuwah wathaniyah). This idea is reinforced by Surah Al-Hujurat verse 13, which mentions that Allah created males and females and made them into nations and tribes so they might know each other.

4.2. Inter-religious interaction

Social interaction between Muslims and Hindus in Talang Benuang is built on mutual help and respect. For example, when Muslims host a feast, they ensure that no beef or buffalo is served to Hindus, as these animals are considered sacred in Hinduism. Conversely, when Hindus hold a celebration, they appoint a special Muslim committee to prepare halal food. These practices are undertaken to ensure both communities feel comfortable and to prevent potential religious conflicts.

In religious interactions, harmony is built on mutual respect for each religion's beliefs. Muslims and Hindus can worship comfortably and securely without interference. This is evidenced by the presence of houses of worship, such as temples and mosques, built as religious symbols. Each religious community respects the other's sacred or forbidden animals; for example, Muslims recognize cows as sacred in Hinduism, while Hindus understand that dogs are considered unclean in Islam.

In institutional interactions, religious leaders play crucial roles in maintaining religious harmony. Religious figures from each community attend celebrations of the other faith. For example, Hindu leaders participate in tahlilah events held by Muslims and may even memorize some Quranic suras and verses frequently recited by Ustads during prayers. Although they pray in their own way during these events, their participation signifies respect and tolerance. Similarly, during the Galungan festival, the Imam of the mosque is a significant guest. While the Imam does not participate in Hindu ceremonies, his presence demonstrates religious tolerance.

4.3. The Opening of Common Spaces between Hinduism and Islam

Shared spaces between Hindu and Islamic communities are formed in religious, social, and political cultural areas. In Talang Benuang, religious cultural spaces are established through interfaith interactions. For instance, during Yasinan and Tahlilan activities, Muslims invite the Hindu community, who attend without participating in the readings. Conversely, during Galungan and brass activities, Muslims attend after the Hindu rituals at the temple. The Muslim community is welcomed with different food and drinks suitable for them. Additionally, Hindus attend tabligh events for mourning or visiting Muslims during bereavements. Another shared activity is the

presence of Hindus at Muslim marriage proposals. These interactions foster a sense of togetherness and mutual respect in the community.

The social space formed can be observed in the daily interactions of the Hindu and Islamic communities. For example, Hinduism allows interfaith marriages as long as the married individuals are daughters. There have been instances where Hindu women married Muslim men, and the women converted to Islam but were accepted by both families. However, there is room for negotiation under certain conditions. Family conflict arises if a Hindu man marries a Muslim woman and converts, as the son is considered the successor of Hinduism in their family. Additionally, youth organizations like Karang Taruna include young people from various religions who collaborate on village projects. During major national or regional events, the organizing committee comprises village community members, irrespective of their religion.

The formation of political spaces is evident in the election of traditional leaders and hamlet heads. There has been a democratic and fair distribution of power. In Kampung Tengah Hamlet, which has a nearly equal Muslim and Hindu population, the hamlet head election was won by a Hindu candidate directly elected by the community, even after receiving the 'blessing' of the village head. Furthermore, the justice in selecting hamlet heads is reflected in the practice of alternating the position according to religion. In the selection of traditional leaders, fairness is maintained by appointing a Muslim as the traditional leader and a Hindu as the deputy traditional leader, considering the Muslim majority in Talang Benuang Village.

5. Discussion

5.1. Similarities in Islamic and Hindu Religious Doctrines in the Concept of God and Goodness Leading to Harmony

The concept of harmony between Muslims and Hindus reveals significant similarities. These similarities influence attitudes toward relationships among people, even when these relationships are based on religious differences. Both religious traditions share a common understanding that God is omnipresent, omniscient, and the creator of all creatures, and that all humans are brothers and sisters. In Hindu society, these concepts are expressed through terms such as Cadu Sakti, Catur Paramitha, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, and Tat Twam Asi. In Islam, these concepts are articulated in Quranic verses such as Surah Al-Fatihah, verses 2 and 4, and Surah Al-Hujurat, verse 13.

The practical implications of these doctrines positively impact the formation of clean and healthy lifestyles, both ecologically and socially, promoting a spirit of forgiveness. In Islam, theological beliefs in God's omnipotence are reflected in a sense of complete surrender, manifested in religious rituals such as Yasinan, Tahlilan, and kendurian, which express gratitude to God and have a social dimension. Through these rituals, acculturation occurs, creating a culture of interfaith togetherness. This tangible manifestation of internalizing the values of belief in God has significant social implications.

The concept of religious harmony, based on mutual tolerance and respect, is derived from the universal teachings of both religions. Islam and Hinduism both adhere to universal values that promote goodness for humanity. Both religions emphasize that every human being is a brother to another, and they advocate for addressing differences in ethnicity and religion with a high level of tolerance. These values are passed down and practiced in daily life, fostering religious harmony. Developing awareness of religious understanding and harmony is crucial, as it involves the willingness and ability to respect other religions and actualize this respect in daily life by allowing each believer the freedom to practice their faith.

5.2. Intensity of Social Interaction between Religious Communities

The interaction within society can be observed through three main areas: social, religious, and institutional interactions. These elements are crucial for fostering harmony within the community. In Talang Benuang Village, local wisdom plays a significant role in maintaining community harmony by involving the entire community in social and religious activities. This harmony is fully supported by customary and religious institutions, ensuring no difference in treatment between Muslims and non-Muslims. This aligns with research conducted in places such as Enggano, Sorong, and Lampung. In Enggano, religious harmony exists because the local people are very open to new values, including religion, considering it a personal prerogative right that cannot be challenged by custom or family (Sari, 2018). In Sorong, social interaction is driven by tradition, kinship, and the influence of religious figures (Haris, 2013). In Lampung, social interaction is formed through relationships among youth organizations, religious organizations, religious youth organizations, and community organizations (Latief, 2012).

Well-established interaction between religious communities aims to create harmony in society. Humans, as social creatures, naturally build good relationships despite differing religious principles. Interaction can be based on factors such as religious figures, marriage, kinship, cooperation, and institutions. In Talang Benuang Village, religious leaders play a pivotal role, although the interaction is also rooted in the forms of tolerance present in each shared space. From childhood, children are introduced to values of cooperation, tolerance, and brotherhood, regardless of religious differences. This foundation enables the community to build harmonious relationships between people of different faiths.

5.3. The Formation of Shared Spaces

The concept of religious harmony in a shared space for community empowerment is realized by accepting each other, respecting each other's beliefs, and collaborating to achieve common goals. In Talang Benuang Village, public spaces are created within religious cultural spaces, social spaces, and political spaces. The presence of these shared spaces fosters harmony, allowing people of different religions to interact both physically and symbolically, even when some symbols might conflict with certain religious beliefs. This aligns with Nazmuddin's (2017) view that harmony and tolerance between religious groups can unify the nation. Effective

methods, such as inter-religious dialogue and good communication between believers, are essential for achieving this unity.

The concept of space in moderation helps religious believers find ways to avoid potential conflicts. This is facilitated through social spaces and religious traditions that promote respect and appreciation among different religious communities. Political spaces also embody justice for diverse groups. Recognizing and accepting religious differences are essential. Marital kinship is another factor that fosters unity between the two communities. The social spaces formed become new avenues for communication, enhancing mutual understanding. This communication space is crucial as a medium for maintaining relationships between religious communities.

6. Conclusion

This research found that harmony can be built through the interaction of two religious groups, arising from a mutual awareness to create a space for peaceful coexistence. Shared spaces are not solely established by external structural forces or the interests of authorities, as is often the case in response to contestative interreligious relations in Indonesia. Instead, cultural strength, in the form of shared cultural spaces, can naturally develop based on the lived experiences of two religious groups, thus creating best practices for community harmony. This cultural potential serves as a powerful bridge for overcoming differences.

The concept of moderation space provides a broader perspective on conflict and conformity issues in the relationships between different groups, emphasizing cultural dimensions. Shared spaces exist on multiple levels: at the conceptual level, where harmony aligns with the definition of goodness; at the institutional level, promoting integration; and within community traditions. These moderation spaces are not only physical and social arenas for interaction but also symbolic spaces imbued with meaning, enriching life. The interaction of two groups in shared spaces fosters shared values, which have a strong unifying effect.

However, this research is limited to the relationship between Muslims and Hindus in a single village, which limits its validity as a reference for understanding religious moderation phenomena in a broader, comparative, and comprehensive context. A more comparative and comprehensive understanding is essential not only to deeply understand the potential and mechanisms of moderation but also to develop a model of religious moderation applicable to various areas with potential conflicts. Therefore, future studies should explore the potential and mechanisms of moderation in diverse religious groups and different community types.

References

- Bolotio, R. (2018). Thanksgiving and Ketupat: Local Wisdom Dimensions and Ride of Religious Harmony in North Sulawesi. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/175/1/012134>

- Burhani, A. N. (2011). Lakum dīnukum wa-liya dīnī: The muhammadiyah's stance towards interfaith relations. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2011.586512>
- Colwell, P. (2019). Race, Power, and Privilege: Ecumenism and the Lost Narrative of Interfaith Relations in Post-Brexit Britain. *Ecumenical Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/erev.12469>
- Hussin, I. (2018). 'The New Global Politics of Religion': religious harmony, public order, and securitisation in the post-colony. *Journal of Religious and Political Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20566093.2017.1393173>
- Jafar, I., & Amrullah, M. N. (2019). DAKWAH RELASI AGAMA (STUDI PRELIMINARI BERBASIS Al-QUR'AN). *Jurnal Dakwah Tabligh*. <https://doi.org/10.24252/jdt.v20i1.9609>
- huss, A. J., & Glover, T. D. (2013). Understanding Urban Public Space in a Leisure Context. *Leisure Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2013.761922>
- Kartupelis, J. (2017). Spiritual awareness and interfaith relations. *Journal for the Study of Spirituality*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/20440243.2017.1290151>
- Potemkina, O. (2010). EU–Russia cooperation on the common space of freedom, security and justice – a challenge or an opportunity? *European Security*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2010.498009>
- Sek, V. P. (2016). *Buddhist Perspectives on Interfaith Relations*. 2013–2014.
- Sinn, S. (2019). Lutheran perspectives on interfaith relations: Theological trajectories of study processes in the lutheran communion. *Dialog*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12477>
- Soares, F., & Sudarsana, I. K. (2018). Religious Harmony Among Senior High School Students Multicultural Education Case Study in the Cova-Lima District of East Timor. *Vidyottama Sanatana: International Journal of Hindu Science and Religious Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.25078/ijhsrs.v2i1.522>
- Stavrides, S. (2015). Common space as threshold space: urban commoning in struggles to re-appropriate public space. *Footprint*. <https://doi.org/10.7480/footprint.9.1.896>
- Stavros Stavrides. (2016). Common Space: The City as Commons.
- Tsavdaroglou, C. (2018). The Newcomers' Right to the Common Space: The case of Athens during the refugee crisis. *ACME*.
- Yusoff, M. A., & Sarjoon, A. (2017). Anti-halal and anti-animal slaughtering campaigns and their impact in post-war Sri Lanka. *Religions*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8040046>
- Zuo'an, W. (2013). Religious Harmony: A Fresh Concept in the Age of Globalization. *Procedia* -

Social and Behavioral Sciences. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.03.080>