

## INTERRELIGIOUS PEACEBUILDING AND MINORITY PROBLEMS IN ISLAMIC MYSTICAL TEACHINGS



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### Article History:

Submission: March 27, 2023  
Revised: May 24, 2023  
Accepted: June 19, 2023  
Published: June 30, 2023

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**Keyword:** Peacebuilding,  
Mystical Teaching, Religious  
Minority, Tolerance, Harmony

**Kata Kunci:** Binadamai,  
Ajaran Mistik, Minoritas  
Agama, Toleransi, Harmoni

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### Abstract

Differences are a necessity that humans cannot deny, including differences in matters of belief and religion. Humans living side by side in a community should be able to create a harmonious, safe and peaceful life. However, harmonious relations between religious adherents are often disrupted for various reasons. Religious people, who should respect and care for one another, are often provoked so that differences, which should be understood as a necessity and a gift, sometimes fuel divisions. By using Library Studies, this study explores sources that can be used as arguments for religious people to respect each other and create peace, especially in Islamic mystical teachings. It can be concluded that peace and harmony are the hope of everyone, including those living in a country. Differences should not be used as an excuse to criticize each other and eradicate the existence of different groups; this research found that people must complement each other and realize the importance of maintaining unity, maintaining relationships in interacting and living together among religious communities.

### Abstrak

Perbedaan merupakan keniscayaan yang tidak dapat dipungkiri oleh manusia, termasuk perbedaan dalam persoalan keyakinan dan agama. Manusia yang hidup berdampingan dalam sebuah komunitas, seharusnya mampu menciptakan kehidupan yang harmonis, aman, dan damai. Akan tetapi, hubungan harmonis antarumat beragama kerap kali terganggu dengan berbagai alasan. Umat beragama yang seharusnya saling menghargai dan menjaga satu sama lain, kerap diprovokasi sehingga perbedaan yang seharusnya dipahami sebagai keniscayaan dan anugerah, kadang kala menjadi penyulut api perpecahan. Dengan menggunakan studi Pustaka, kajian ini bertujuan untuk menggali sumber-sumber yang dapat dijadikan sebagai dalil bagi umat beragama untuk saling menghargai dan menciptakan kedamaian satu sama lain, terutama dalam ajaran-ajaran mistik Islam. Dapat disimpulkan jika kedamaian dan keharmonisan adalah harapan semua orang, termasuk masyarakat yang hidup dalam sebuah negara. Perbedaan bukanlah sesuatu yang harus dijadikan alasan untuk saling mencaci dan menihilkan keberadaan kelompok yang berbeda, melalui penelitian ini didapatkan jika masyarakat harus saling melengkapi dan menyadari pentingnya untuk menjaga persatuan, menjaga hubungan dalam berinteraksi dan hidup bersama antar umat beragama.

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## INTRODUCTION

Peace is one of the basic needs of human life, where the good and evil in society will be directly related to peace. Peace or reconciliation means mutual compromise, understanding, and setting aside disputes and hostility. This concept is built on material, spiritual, and understanding and acceptance of each other's rights and position following religious rules and human values. Peace is one of the basic needs and prerequisites for achieving a life of value and usefulness at the individual, family, social and global levels (Mamdani, 2002).



Peace and wanting peace is one of the natural human needs of religious teachings. Peace has a high position in all religions and schools of thought and is an essential foundation in human social life. It is inconceivable how human social life would be without peace and tranquility among them. Regardless of religious tendencies and religious sects, human coexistence on the axis of peace and tranquility is necessary to maintain the stability and perfection of social life. Peace and peaceful coexistence between adherents of different religions in society will open space for the growth and development of society (Sayed, 2018; Taufik, 2020).

The diversity that exists in the reality of society is a definite *sunatullah*. A concrete form of diversity in society can be seen in various religions, ethnicities, races, and cultures. Humans are created diverse with different backgrounds to get to know each other, as mentioned in Surat al – Hujurat [49]: 13. Even though *Allah* wants to create human beings in one group Allah Himself emphasizes the creation of various human beings and wants differences in humans, including differences in religion, as stated in Surat al – Ma'idah [5]: 48; Letter Hüd [11]: 118; Surat an – Nahl [16]: 93; and Surah Ash – Shura [42]: 8.

Unfortunately, differences and diversity, which are gifts and definite provisions (*sunatullah*), are often used as legitimacy to impose will on other people—insulting, demeaning, and persecuting, thus legitimizing acts of discrimination against other people or groups who are different. Outrageous acts of religious fanaticism that quickly label different people as 'infidels' or others exacerbate the social situation in the context of diversity and community life. Moreover, if, in the end, this fanaticism develops in the form of radicalism through violence in the name of religion (Fitriani, 2020).

Peace and harmonious relations between religious adherents and discriminatory actions and policies by adherents of religions (Dikarma, 2022) and public figures are threatened by excessive fear of other groups, such as Islamophobia (Deslandes, 2017; Suryodarsono, 2022). By using the literature study method and reviewing the literature directly correlated with wetting in this study, the researcher outlines the importance of maintaining peace, the attitudes that religious people need to take, and the steps that need to be taken to create interreligious peace.

## PEACE PERSPECTIVES ON 'IRFANI

In mysticism, yearning for peace and concern for peace are held in high esteem. This high position led to pacifism being considered one of the main characteristics of the mystic (Taufik, 2019; Waston, 2018). In terms of mysticism, peace is divided into two types (Alliez & Negri, 2003):

1. Internal peace or peace within the human itself. It is the main factor for the peace of a mystic and is the starting point of peace and friendship with others;
2. External peace. It is peace and reconciliation between one human being and another human being in various of social life matters.

One of the prominent factors in pacifism among mystics is the "unity of being." This belief considers all humans to have the same substance and essence and believes that the Divine Spirit resides in His creation. Humans must not rise and have a confrontation with humans who all have the Divine Spirit. One of the most popular mystic stories in this regard is a saying by Shaykh Abul Hasan Khaqani (5th Century mystic), which he inscribed on his doorstep: "Whoever comes to this house, give him bread and don't ask his faith. People who are worth their lives before the door of the Almighty, of course worth bread for Abul Hasan."

The second factor of pacifism among mystics is their concern for religion's esoteric, divine, and moral aspects. The mystics try to introduce their religion with ethics, not with bigotry. However, that doesn't mean ignoring the religious aspect. The great mystics consider it obligatory and avoid God's prohibitions, like a rope that can lead us to perfection and ideal happiness. Seeking peace and believing in the existential unity of humanity and the moral nature of religion have led mystics to friendly dialogue between different religions and beliefs. Athar narrated in *Tadhkirah Awliya'* that a Christian once visited Shaykh Abul 'Abbas Nahavandi for four months. Because the Christian was affected by the Shaykh's ethics and kindness, the Christian embraced Islam and became the Shaykh's great student. Even after the teacher died, the Christian replaced him (Basri et al., 2022).

Another thing we can learn from pacifism among mystics is the "*khalwat*" or seclusion method of the mystics. Mystics have used this method as an alternative tactic to wage war and conflict with others. It is also stated in history that the more the government put pressure on its people, the preference towards mysticism and seclusion increased. Ibn' Arabi, known as the father of Theoretical Mysticism, said,

"I withdraw from the gathering of people, not to be safe from them, but I withdraw so that they are safe from me. Seclusion is a way of escaping conflict and strife, encouraging the mystic to look more within himself." (Ibn Arabi, n.d.)

Love and compassion are also important in Islamic mysticism and are considered effective in mystic pacifism. In particular, love for all beings create self – peace and peace in society. In Islamic mysticism, one must have high spiritual power to love all of God's creatures. The mystics even assume that God's love for humans is the cause of the creation of this world.

In Rumi's mystical thought, when a person achieves awareness and self – knowledge, he will realize that the philosophy of human creation is love. This awareness and knowledge will allow a person to see everything, including God, with love. According to him, every view has this nature and deserves respect. Every human being is part of the Ummah, and every beauty manifests God's beauty. So that in the view of mystics, God is the Highest and can reach the whole world. Within every human being, there is a sign of God's truth. Therefore, to achieve universal truth, a human must be at peace and be friendly with the world. The keys are knowledge and wisdom. The mystics, especially Rumi, have the view that to reach the stage of "Mystical Unity" (*wahdah 'irfaniyyah*) or (*fana' fi Allah wa bawa bi Allah*), which is the final stage of mysticism, is to eliminate and put aside differences, disputes, and conflicts (Kolis, 2017).

Following what the al – Qur'an emphasizes, Rumi condemns racism and ethnocentrism. He considered these ideas to result from human feelings and emotional tendencies, not knowledge and awareness. He says emotional behavior occurs because of attachment to appearance and "color." Still, conversely, if people are knowledgeable, they will be able to reach the essence and meaning, not the differences. Rumi pays more attention to empathy than to common language in his poetry. He considers empathy as a point of connection and integration between people. For Rumi, the Turks, Persians, Hindus, Arabs and so on are not superior to one another; even racism cannot unite people of a certain race. Because misunderstandings are very likely to occur; for example, fellow Turks who, although they speak the same language, can feel foreign because of misunderstandings between them. According to Rumi, fanaticism means immaturity or not reaching the stage of maturity (Bahri, 2010).

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PEACE IN SOCIAL COMMUNITIES

Among Muslim thinkers and scholars, peace and harmony have a special position. Maḥmūd Shaltūt wrote, "Islamic guidance invites us to peace and friendship as long as it is not considered a conflict against the true religion and a cause of hostility and aggression." (Shaltūt, 1399, p. 3). The principle of relations between Islamic countries and other countries is peace. If there is hostility towards the cities or against religious missionaries and preachers of Islam, war is necessary to defend life, property, and faith (Zuhailī, 1203, p. 120). Rashīd Riḍa', in one of his works, explains that peace and international relations are the main things that must be obeyed, which is why God commands us to choose peace over war (Riḍa', 1208, p. 312).

Ṭabaṭab'ī also holds that all beings in this world are towards perfection, and human perfection is formed at the heart of the community. For this reason, humans are inherently social (Shīrazī, 1349, p. 124). According to Plato, someone has limitations in meeting their needs no matter how hard they try unless they are in the midst of society (Aflāṭūn, 1340, p. 115). Therefore, if people act individually, they will perish, or their humanity will not grow. Ibnu Sīna also considers that human life is impossible to form except in social relationships, where there is a spirit of *gotong-royong*/mutualism and cooperation under legal norms. Therefore, human social life must be realized in a proper system that gives order and harmony to every relationship. At the same time, human society is a legal society that contains general rules with a specific and unassailable purpose; any systems or conditions that regulate social and cultural relations to be maintained.

There is a belief that society's problems can be solved without chaos. In this view, "peace" means silence, peace and agreement in the family and society for the ultimate goal of humanity. Therefore, providing and guaranteeing is the main obligation of every government and every person living in a society under any conditions. Peace is freedom from a state of conflict and exploitation. Stability, unity, peace, and empathy will result from coordination, understanding, and harmony with one another. Peace is formed not because of force but because of real agreement and understanding (Przentaznik, 1997, p. 6). If necessary, there must be noble principles that can prevent profiteering and pessimism.

Therefore, the norms of social order are a necessary prerequisite for all social relations, consolidation of bonds, stability, security and collective peace. In other words, human beings are subject to the law in creating social order, regulating social relations, and inviting others to comply with social norms; anyone who violates the convenience of public order is subject to punishment. Life's problems can be overcome when the idea of security and peace becomes essential for society.

## RELIGIOUS COEXISTENCE AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE

"Religious coexistence" is authentic Islamic thought outlined in various verses of the al-Qur'an with various forms of emphasis and clarity. The Prophet Muhammad invited humankind to practice it fourteen centuries ago when religious coexistence was completely unknown. We are prohibited from holding grudges, enmity, and insulting followers of other religions, which are not taught in Islam. As the first source of validity in Islam, al-Qur'an explains ways to live with adherents of other religions. There are three categories of verses to find out how Muslims behave or how to interact with adherents of other religions.

First, as stated in al-Baqarah [2]:256, there is no compulsion to change the aqida. This value is one of the most basic elements to achieve peaceful coexistence. The al-Qur'an states below:

Let there be no compulsion in religion, for the truth stands out clearly from falsehood. So whoever renounces false gods and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the firmest, unflinching hand – hold. And Allah is All – Hearing, All – Knowing.

Second, love and affection for non – Muslims. Love and affection for non – Muslims is one of the duties of Muslims in an Islamic society. Several verses of the al – Qur'an explain how Muslims should relate and behave with followers of other religions. Muslims are not allowed to look at non – Muslims with hostility, but they must be treated with love and compassion, as Allah says in al – Mumtaḥanah [60]: 8 – 9 as follows:

Allah does not forbid you from dealing kindly and fairly with those who have neither fought nor driven you out of your homes. Surely Allah loves those who are fair. Allah only forbids you from befriending those who have fought you for 'your' faith, driven you out of your homes, or supported 'others' in doing so. And whoever takes them as friends, then it is they who are the 'true' wrongdoers.

Third, the emphasis on coexistence with followers of other religions. Other verses in the al – Qur'an mention the method of discussion and debate with the *Ahl al-kitab*. These verses provide beautiful and accurate examples for discussing with the *Ahl al-kitab*, who accept the rational and logical method. Allah teaches us through the al – Qur'an that the purpose of human beings must awaken and convince the conscience. Of course, to achieve this goal, we must use the best and most effective means without violence and hostility based on bigotry. In al – 'Ankabūt [29]: 46, it is explained:

Do not argue with the People of the Book unless gracefully, except with those of them who act wrongfully. And say, "We believe in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to you. Our God and your God is 'only' One. And to Him we 'fully' submit.

## MINORITY RIGHTS AND THE ETERNAL PEACE IN ISLAM

Minorities are one of the most important elements of the *Ummah*. In Islamic countries, no pressure is exerted applied on religious minorities to give up their faith or their culture. One of the common debates in Islamic societies is the issue of minority rights and how to interact with them. This topic, which can apply to religious and non – religious minorities, has multiple dimensions. One of the important duties of the government and its institutions is to recognize, organize, and implement the rights of minority people (Kaye, 2022; Mandaville, 2001). Prophet Muhammad practiced this method by making peaceful agreements and compromises with the *Ahl al-kitab* from the beginning of the rise of Islam and the emergence of Islamic society. Communities and groups of different faiths lived with Muslims in Islamic lands without abandoning their religions and beliefs. They preferred to live with Muslims rather than migrate or become Muslims. Muslims must use special strategies to deal with these religious sects and groups. Among these sects, followers of other celestial religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and the Magi do not want to convert to Islam, but they do not intend to fight and want to live in peace with Muslims. By formalizing minorities and recognizing their reality, the al – Qur'an automatically recognizes their rights. With its spirituality, Islam considers that its relationship with the reality of religious diversity is inseparable QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 285.

With such an approach, the claim of seeking justice and Islamic pacifism can be proven by complying with the rights of minorities in Islamic societies. Thus, it goes without saying

that in the Indonesian state, the existence of a progressive and comprehensive principle called "Pancasila" with the motto of "*bhineka tunggal ika*" (unity amid plurality) is the most important model of statehood in the Islamic world, which is based on the teachings of the al-Qur'an and authentic Islam (Miichi & Kayane, 2020).

When referring to the verses of the al-Qur'an, we will find Islam's policies in interacting with minorities. As I said earlier, the verse in al-Mumtahanah [60]: 8-9 is one example of how to build interactions with minorities:

Allah does not forbid you from dealing kindly and fairly with those who have neither fought nor driven you out of your homes. Surely Allah loves those who are fair. Allah only forbids you from befriending those who have fought you for 'your' faith, driven you out of your homes, or supported 'others' in doing so. And whoever takes them as friends, then it is they who are the 'true' wrongdoers.

The above verse explains the general principle on which Muslims relate to non-Muslims and applies not only to the time when the verse was revealed but to this day and beyond. Muslims are responsible for every group of people. If the state is hostile and against Islam, or aids the enemies of Islam, then Muslims should take a firm stance and sever ties of love and friendship with them. But if the state is neutral towards Islam, Muslims can establish friendly relations with them. However, the relationship is not as deep as that with one's Muslim brothers and sisters and not as profound as incorporating their influence among Muslims (Shīrazī, 1349, p. 22).

According to Ṭabaṭaba'ī, Allah hints through the verse not to make enemies of Allah and our enemies as friends. Allah does not intend to prohibit us from doing good and being just with those who do not fight us in matters of religion and do not expel them from our lands. For kindness is justice itself, and Allah loves those who do justice (Ṭabaṭaba'ī, 1374, p. 400).

Based on the above two verses regarding Islam's general policy towards minorities and opponents of Islam, we can conclude that as long as minorities do not violate the rights of the majority and do not conspire against Islam and Muslims, they can live free in an Islamic state. Every Muslim should treat them with justice and kindness. However, suppose they have ties with other countries against Islam and Muslims, every Muslim should prevent their activities and never consider them friends or comrades (Subḥanī, 1370, p. 527). Interaction between religious communities can be peaceful and harmonious if they can work together to coexist, take care of each other, and also respect each other's rights. However, the challenge is to instill awareness in the community, especially in a country where the population has many differences.

Differences or diversity can trigger conflicts if one another cannot understand the conditions that occur. However, if religious diversity is understood as a necessity and people can accept each other's reality, then religious diversity will not be a problem or conflict. The differences and diversity that exist in the world should be understood as a provision of God for humankind. If, in reality, there are differences, then as thinking beings, humans should be able to find various ways to find common ground so that differences and diversity do not prevent them from uniting and living together in peace (Mawardi & Ruslan, 2019; Meran, 2019).

For harmonious relations between religious communities to last, respecting and recognizing each other's differences is important. Even in the context of communication, religious people no longer need to insult or demean each other. Maintaining each other's

feelings is a way to create peace. The role of religious leaders in maintaining the climate or cycle of harmony and peace between religious communities can be done by continuing to convey messages of peace, accepting the reality of differences, and no longer insulting, or demeaning each other, let alone inciting people to demonize other religions (Baihaki, 2020).

In addition, there must be massive efforts by both the government and other elements to continue to develop multicultural awareness so that people can be awakened and willing to accept the fact that there are differences that they must maintain and respect together. People can live side by side, respect each other, look after each other, and help each other to worship safely and comfortably (Umihani, 2019).

Another effort must be made to reorganize and improve education, especially from an early age. Education in all lines, including religious education, is expected to raise awareness to students to understand diversity so that they can sympathize, empathize, and accept differences (Masyhuri et al., 2019). Education as an effort to create a society that accepts differences is not only in the educational environment but must also be carried out in the child's family environment from an early age (Widiatmaka & Hakim, 2021).

## **FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND THE CHALLENGE OF EXTREMISM**

Islam, through the verses of the al-Qur'an, recognizes the diversity of heavenly religions and their prophets and respects their laws as one of the tenets of its faith. According to the Dhimma Agreement, minorities can participate in religious events freely and safely without any interference to uphold their religion (Rabbanī, 1366). In the Islamic Republic of Iran, according to Article 13 of the Constitution, "Iranian Zoroastrians, Kilimians, and Christians are recognized as religious minorities who are free to conduct their religious events within the limits of the law and act following their religion." (Hashimī, 1388).

Some al-Qur'anic verses indicate the freedom of belief of *Ahl al-kitab* as mentioned in al-Ma'idah [5]: 99 and Al-Ghashiyah [88]: 21–22. These verses discuss the method of da'wah that is not by force but rather a kind gesture with appeal. Historical evidence shows that the Prophet did not force the followers of *Ahl al-kitab* or polytheists to accept Islam. The infallible Imams expressed a way of life that showed they did not believe in coercion in preaching Islam. In a letter to the Bishops of Najran, the Prophet said, "No bishop will be removed from his position, no monk will be dehumanized, and no priest will be deposed." (Sa'ad, 1405, p. 266).

Freedom of speech is recognized in Quranic verses, one of which is in an-Nahl [16]: 125. The prophet's task of da'wah is with wisdom and good delivery, debate in a good way, not with coercion. As we know, the meaning of freedom of speech indirectly lies in debating in the best way. One of the principles and conditions of good dialogue is freedom of speech. This issue is not only present in the al-Qur'an but also in the practical life of the Islamic community leaders. In Nahj al-Balaghah, it is mentioned that a Jew said to Ali a.s.: "You are already disputing when you have not finished burying your prophet". 'Ali replied: We dispute what reached us from him, not because of him (Nahj al-Balaghah/308). The People of the Book have the right to write the Torah, Gospel, and other books." Therefore, the issue of freedom of speech for *Ahl al-kitab* is undeniable. However, if the opposite were the case, they would never be allowed to express their opinions verbally or in writing.

Allah, in An – Nis' [4]: 58, commands to uphold justice unconditionally and under any circumstances. Ali a.s. in his letter to Malik Al – Ashtar, said: "Establish justice to the Dhimmah, give justice to the oppressed and be firm with the oppressors," (Nahjul Balaghah/53). The verses and narrations mentioned above teach that the word "*al-Nas*" means that Allah has commanded to uphold justice among people, and there is no provision for adherence to a particular religion. Correspondingly, Article 14 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran also affirms that they have the right to sue, arbitrate, and obtain judicial protection (Hashimī, 1388, p. 180).

In discussing ethnicity, we must pay attention to the importance of considering the diversity of ethnic groups in Indonesia as an opportunity. With empathy and cooperation, this opportunity can be used as a strength for the country. The rise of anarchism is a manifestation of the desire to be recognized. So that excessive attitudes ultimately provide opportunities for individuals to demonize and not recognize the existence of different groups. Of course, there needs to be a policy that regulates so that every society with diverse cultural backgrounds can continue to exist and recognize the existence of other groups without nullifying or dwarfing different groups (Banks, 2013).

Extremist currents, especially in the Islamic world and Indonesia, threaten peace and the developing economy in Southeast Asia. Undoubtedly, the lack of common policy organization for ethnic groups, the lack of a unified national identity to control tensions, and ethnic – religious discrimination in society may create uncontrollable challenges for Islam in Southeast Asia. Suppose a system of interaction between Muslims and minorities and the gradual formation of large unions and associations do not emerge. In that case, the Islamic fundamentalist organizations in the Southeast Asian region will become more intense. It will create a politico – religious and security environment that is inflamed and insecure, and there are political – economic costs that the region's residents will have to pay.

If violence is in the name of religion, it is unacceptable and illogical if religion is used as its basis or legitimacy. Religions that teach good values are ultimately accused and labelled terrible just because a few people act in the name of religion. The damage and violence committed by religious people seem to make religion participate in the vortex of the actions they are carrying out (Dachrud & Mantu, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the history of Islam, the only element that threatened the existence of Islam among nations was the lack of stability and peace in society. The great Islamic society needs a situation free from violence and extremism to carry out God's commands and teachings. One of the vital elements in maintaining the authority of Islamic society is organizing peace and tranquillity among religious believers and all sects, as well as respecting the rights of minorities in a society rooted in the teachings of revelation. Movements and organizations based on the Qur'an can eliminate the opportunity for extremist currents to emerge while fostering and advancing a society based on the two essential elements of revelation and reason.



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