

## RELIGIOSITY IN ACEH: THE DIVERSITY MEANING OF PARTICIPATION IN SALAT AL-JAMA'AH (CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER) FOR INSTITUTIONAL MUSLIM EMPLOYEES GOVERNMENT OF ACEH TAMIANG

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### Abstract

Congregational prayer for Acehnesse government employees has been regulated in qanun number 11 of 2002. In its implementation, this qanun receives a positive response in Aceh Tamiang regency, so that many employees implemented it. According to dramaturgy theory, this implementation could have various meanings. The objective of this study is to find out how Aceh Tamiang Muslim employees interpret their participation, either pray in a congregation at the office or individual prayer (*munfarid*). This study uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic type. The results of this study indicate that muslim employees have different interpretations of their participation in congregational prayers. Some of them feel calmer besides getting multiple rewards of praying in the congregation. Congregational prayer is also a gathering moment in which they can interact socially with fellow congregations so that associative meanings can appear which the results are cooperation, assimilation, and negotiation. However, some choose to perform individual prayer (*munfarid*) for certain reasons.

**Keywords:** religiosity, diversity meaning of participation, congregational prayer

## **Introduction**

Congregational prayers (*Salat Al-Jama'ah*) are prayers that are done together, with at least two people, one acting as the priest (*imam*) and the other as the congregation (*jama'ah*). The importance of congregational prayer is also stated in Qanun No. 11 of 2002, which requires every government employee to pray in the congregation during working hours. This is regulated in chapter IV concerning the experience of worship in article 9 paragraph 1, namely "Every government agency, educational institution and business entity is obliged to promote and provide facilities for congregational prayer." The implementation of Islamic law applies to all regions of Aceh, including the Aceh Tamiang regency. The implementation of this qanun is expected to make the people of Aceh more religious. In the preliminary observation data carried out by researchers on September 18, 2017, in Aceh Tamiang regency, when entering *Zuhr* and *Asr* time during working hours, the prayer congregation were employees. It can be seen from the clothes they wore. It can be concluded that the stipulation of qanuns regarding the obligation to pray in a congregation can be said to have been carried out well. For a muslim, the obligation to perform prayers can be done in two ways, namely the *munfarid* prayer (individual prayer) and the congregational prayer. So according to dramaturgy, a muslim can interpret their participation in the *munfarid* and the congregation. According to the researcher, it would be interesting to relate the analysis to the religious area of the Aceh Tamiang regency community. To see how the Aceh Tamiang muslim employees interpret congregational prayer during working hours, this study uses a qualitative approach with ethnographic type. The research aims to find out the forms, reasons, and impacts of the response of Aceh Tamiang government employees during working hours. The locations of this research are the Syuhada Mosque and Nurhasanah Mosque. Those mosques are chosen because their locations are in the work environment of the Aceh Tamiang employees. Observations were made of what they carried, what they wore, what they did before and after praying in congregation, and with whom they stood praying. It is aimed to identify what meaning they present when they perform congregational prayers in public spaces. In addition to observations, data were obtained from interviews with ten employees who pray in two mosques.

## **Research Method**

This study conducted qualitative approach with case study about the religiosity in Aceh. This study would explore about the religiosity in Aceh society.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **Dramaturgy and Congregational Prayer**

According to Goffman, various interaction behaviors that are carried out in the performances of our daily lives present ourselves in the same way an actor presents another person's character in a drama show. He based this on the show of sociology.

Dramaturgy studies the context of human behavior in achieving its goals. It does not study the results of that behavior. Role-playing is one of the tools that can lead

to achieving the agreement. In the Dramaturgy theory, it is explained that human identity is unstable and that each identity is an independent part of psychology. Human identity may change depending on interactions with other people. This is where the dramaturgy comes in, how we master these interactions.

. In this case, doers or actors who carry out social interactions with themselves, according to Mead, are done by taking the roles of others, and acting on those roles, then responding to those actions. The concept of personal interaction (self-interaction), in which the actors designate themselves, is based on Mead's scheme of social psychology. *The Self* here is active and creative, and there are no social, cultural, or psychological variables that can decide the actions of *The Self*.

Prayer is obligatory worship for every muslim which can be done individually and collectively. Prayers in a congregational manner are carried out together, consisting of the *imam* and the congregation. The *imam* is a leader who stands in front and the congregation follows what the *imam* does. The individual prayer (*munfarid*) is performed by a muslim by himself. Congregational prayer can be performed at home or in other places such as mosques, prayer rooms, and others. When it is performed in a public space, the meaning of the act will emerge. The congregational prayer is performed by a muslim which has an imaginary meaning. Such personality means being masked to survive in one group. It is related to Goffman's dramaturgic theory which believes that a human being living in this world is like playing a role because having an original role and a false role with the term Goffman front stage and back stage.

### **Congregational Prayers in Places besides the Mosque**

The employees of the Aceh Tamiang Office have different meanings and goals when they perform individual prayer and congregational prayer in mosques. The following data had been obtained from interviews with ten congregants for the *Zuhr* and *Asr* prayers at the Nurhasanah and Syuhada mosques. Here are the results of long observations and the analysis: Some of the Aceh Tamiang office employees get used to performing congregational prayer at home. They have their meaning in carrying out congregational prayers at home. In dramaturgy theory, It is called a backstage in which the cast can be more relaxed in doing anything following their original character, including establishing congregational prayers. They do not need to play any role to show themselves to someone he deems necessary to play the role. So many meanings emerge to an Aceh Tamiang muslim employee when he performs individual prayer or congregational prayer at home or in a mosque. First, when they perform congregational prayers at home, they can freely manage their time (not in a hurry). Moreover, they (male employees) become *imams* and other family members (wives and children) become a congregation. The congregational prayer that they do the most is *Maghrib* prayer because the implementation is at home and there are only a few congregations, so the time can be adjusted according to the wishes, or can even wait for each other as long as the prayer time does not pass. As explained by a respondent:

"I rarely pray in congregation at the mosque when I don't work. At most I invite my wife and children to perform *Maghrib* prayer. It is because I go home from work in the late afternoon so I don't want to rush to the mosque, so I prefer to perform congregational prayer at home, I can still get a reward too."

Second, there is also another muslim employee who interprets the implementation of congregational prayer at home. There is no demand to wear complete clothes or prayer clothes such as a *koko* shirt (a shirt that is often used for prayer). It is enough to just wear a sarong that is raised to the chest to cover the genitals (*aurat*) of a man which the *aurat* is only at the boundary between the navel and the knee. One respondent said:

"When the day is quite hot like this, when I pray at home, in which the congregation is with my wife and children, I rarely wear clothes, just a sarong. The important point here is, it is enough to cover my *aurat*, so the prayer is still valid, isn't it?"

Third, sometimes the selection of an *imam* who is still not following the requirements of being an *imam* in congregational prayer can be the reason for some muslims to be reluctant to pray in congregation at the mosque. Because one of the requirements to be an *imam* is having a fluent Koran recitation, it means that it is correct both in *tajwid* and *mahkraji*. One employee stated:

"It is a bit lazy to pray in the mosque because, sometimes, the recitation of the *imam* is not clear. It is understandable because it is in the village, but if at work, the *imam* is commonly good"

### **The Sensation of Individual prayer for Muslim Employees of Aceh Tamiang**

Prayer is also the second pillar of Islam which becomes the foundation of a muslim in increasing their faith and quality of life because as muslims, of course, they believe that the quality of their prayers is already following the *Shari'a* taught by the prophet Muhammad. Aceh Tamiang employees who are dominated by muslims, of course, pray without considering that it is a regulation from the government, but it is already on their self-awareness in implementing it. In the previous dramaturgy theory, it is mentioned that humans will try to maintain their social life by playing a role in front of the stage, but this cannot be separated from the backstage. For Aceh Tamiang Muslim employees, performing congregational prayers at home and performing individual prayers are their backstage. The following information is from the respondents regarding individual prayers. The first thing that they said was related to "*khusyu*" which means awareness, the consciousness of a muslim in performing prayers. Prayer is the servant's communication with the creator. Realizing this, some muslim employees in Tamiang think that they are more concentrated on performing individual prayers, aka at home. As the respondent stated,

"Sometimes, because of a lot of work, I feel lazy to go to the mosque. Moreover, my house is close to the office, so I can go home to perform individual prayer. I can manage the time and I feel more concentrated. But if I pray in the congregation, I feel unable to concentrate. Besides that, after praying at home, I can immediately have lunch and rest"

Furthermore, there are also Aceh Tamiang employees who interpret prayer as a memorizing medium to repeat memorization of the Koran. By performing individual prayer, they feel they can freely repeat their memorization.

### **The Reasons for Choosing Congregational Prayer**

In a hadith narrated by Abu Hurairah in the Sahih book hadith number 662 and Sahih Muslim hadith number 669, it is recommended to perform congregational prayers in mosques for men, because every step of the way a muslim performs congregational prayers in the mosque will earn a reward. Regarding this, there are many reasons for Aceh Tamiang Muslim employees to carry out congregational prayers at the mosque. This is as one of the respondents stated:

"I try my best to pray in congregation in the mosque. Besides getting a lot of rewards, every step of ours is counted as a reward. It is a huge loss if we don't perform congregational prayers at the mosque. If possible, I would prefer to walk to the mosque instead of taking a motorbike because the mosque is not that far from my workplace"

From the information above, it can be seen that those who have an understanding of the virtues of congregational prayer are those who never miss the worship. Several things build the implementation of the prayer namely when they interact with the Creator they think about their appearance before performing the prayer at the mosque. This can be seen from the statement of a muslim Tamiang employee: "We meet leaders or important people, we like to look good and attractive, that's why when we meet Allah we have to look much better."

Furthermore, there is an opinion regarding the implementation of prayers at the mosque, namely comfort, *khusyu'*. According to them, there is comfort when they pray in the mosque.

### **Congregational Prayers Performance of Aceh Muslim Employees at the Mosque**

When azan is announced and the time for prayer has come, many muslim employees from several institutions in a roll go to the nearest mosque from their office to carry out congregational prayers. Based on observations in the Nurhasanah and Syuhada mosque, many muslim employees from various institutions perform congregational prayers, so there are many kinds of people inside the mosque.

In social interaction, each individual will communicate with each other even though they do not use communication language such as speaking in a language, it could be gestures or others. So the first meaning that appears in congregational prayer is the associative meaning. This is because many associative forms appear such as cooperative action. Strong cooperation arises when the congregation will start the prayer. It starts when the *azan* is finished. It will automatically wait for a

moment for people to pray the *sunnah* before *Zuhr* for approximately 5 to 10 minutes, then someone behind the *imam* will rise to *iqamah* without any agreement or schedule on who does the *iqamah*, the *imam* only gives a little code to someone behind him. If there is no one is willing to do the *iqamah*, then the *imam* will take the initiative for *iqamah*, and at the time of *iqamah* in the sentence "*qad qamatish salah ...*" then immediately one by one the seated congregation will stand up even those who have just come will straight to go to the *shaf*. When the *imam* says "straighten the *shaf*", the congregation will move left and right to try to obey the *imam's* orders. *Shaf* will immediately be straight and neat without certain rules that bind the *imam* and congregation to carry out certain instructions well.

Another meaning that appears in associative is assimilation. Soekanto explained that assimilation can be characterized by efforts to reduce the differences that exist between individuals in human groups and also includes efforts to enhance the unity of actions, attitudes, and mental processes by paying attention to common interests and goals. Here, it can be seen that among one congregation and others with different backgrounds, either employee in the same institution or from a different institution, or office employees with residents who also perform congregational prayers at the Nurhasanah mosque, they do not differentiate between congregational prayers, for example, office employee must stand at a certain *shaf* with certain people. Or local officials and their equivalent must stand in the first *shaf*, but they stand based on who comes first and takes the *shaf*. Because they have the same goal, it is as if they already know each other so that the congregational prayers are carried out following the demands of the *Shari'a*. From several observations, it can be seen that the arrangement of congregational prayer *shaf* in both the Nurhasanah Mosque and the Syuhada Mosque is a mixture of office employees and other civilians. In this case, to strengthen the observation that occurred when congregational prayers were taking place, the researcher conducted interviews with certain congregations that the researchers had targeted first, including those who wore clothes that were not office clothes who standing next to the congregation of office employees. This was done by researchers to know the status of the congregation, whether civilians or office employees who may change their clothes before performing congregational prayer. Because based on interviews, some of them (employees) chose to change clothes before praying in the congregation for certain reasons.

Another meaning that emerges is the medium of negotiation which means that the congregational prayer stage is the right place to discuss a problem and find a solution. Observation data were gained on July 15, 2019, at the Nurhasanah mosque.

According to the Oxford dictionary, negotiation is a way of reaching an agreement through formal discussion. However, in this era, this has shifted in meaning not only informal but also in informal discussions. Because negotiation has become a form of social interaction, so the media must negotiate.

Some people think that places of worship such as mosques can be appropriate negotiation places. Negotiations were seen during congregational prayer at the Nurhasanah mosque. Data from observations show that several officials

including the regent and deputy regent of Aceh Tamiang prayed in the mosque, so many employees also chose this mosque as a place to perform congregational prayers. Besides, an interview with one of the congregation stated that it is easier to complain about problems at the mosque than in the office. Because here, the situation is non-formal so conveying something is more flexible, and even until the problem is resolved here. The observation data shows that many employees after praying in the congregation come to the deputy regent to shake hands. Then, some of them seemed to be discussing with the deputy regent to form a small *halaqah*. The deputy regent called one of the heads of offices from one of the Aceh Tamiang district institutions to join them. Although in a relatively short time, negotiations took place after the congregational prayers. Not only that, but it was also seen that another employee came to the deputy regent who was about to go to his car after prayer. Then he greeted and spoke to him for about five minutes, in the style of people negotiating something and closed again by shaking hands. Besides, they can also be categorized as looking for good images in congregational prayer, namely by showing that he is pious by praying two *rak'ahs* before and after the *fardhu zuhr* prayer and taking the front row even though it is too late to keep chasing the mainline. The dramaturgy theory introduced by Erving Goffman is a derivative of the symbolic interaction theory. According to Erving Goffman, each individual decides to present himself through the management and continues the performance to ensure that the image is formed. In interacting with other people, someone will give a judgment of a person based on various instructions that other people have given.

Based on that judgment, someone treats others and vice versa. Similar to a congregational prayer performed by a Muslim including office employees, they try to give a positive image to others or perhaps the wider community so that what they do (positive things) can be an example. So that the arena of life, according to Goffman, is like a theater. Following this theatrical analogy, Goffman spoke about the front stage and the backstage. The front stage refers to social events that allow individuals to style or perform formal roles. It was as if they were playing a role on a stage in front of the audience. Meanwhile, the backstage is likened to a dressing room where the actors relax and prepare themselves before playing on the front stage, which is usually more natural. Therefore, carrying out congregational prayers in a mosque can also be categorized as a staging arena that we can see from two sides, each of which has a character that demands a different role. We can call the congregational prayer in the mosque as the front stage, and the backstage when someone does congregational prayers in his house or does individual prayers.

## **Conclusion**

Muslim officials of Aceh Tamiang district government interpret individual prayer or congregational prayer at home based on the dramaturgy theory (backstage) with several meanings. When praying alone or in the congregation at home, they feel more comfortable because they can freely adjust their time with other family members who want to congregate. They are also free to wear household clothes or other clothes as long as the clothes are holy and cover their *aurat*. They can also

choose selected verses according to their wishes. Besides that, both individual prayers and congregational prayers at home, according to them, they can more focus or *kusyu'*, especially on individual prayers, they can repeat takbiratul ihram and even repeat prayers to get *kusyu'*. And for some of those who memorize the Koran, individual prayer can become a medium for them to repeat their memorization.

The muslim employees of the Aceh Tamiang district government interpret congregational prayer in a mosque based on the dramaturgy theory (front stage) with several meanings. They feel calmer when they are in the mosque and perform congregational prayer in it. In addition to the multiple rewards of praying in the congregation especially if it is performed in the mosque, they also get the reward for their steps to the mosque. For some Tamiang muslim employees, congregational prayer becomes a gathering place where they can interact socially, in which each individual will communicate with each other even though they do not use communication language such as speaking in a language, it could be gestures or something else. So the first meaning that emerges in congregational prayer is the associative meaning that results in cooperation, assimilation, and negotiation.

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