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Research Article

Mahabbah Teaching And The Problem Of Religious Moderation

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Ajaran Mahabbah Dan Problem Moderasi Beragama

Abstrak. Radikalisme beragama berkaitan dengan kesalahpahaman dalam memahami makna esensial teks suci sehingga agama tampak berkontradiksi dengan esensi ajaran yang dibawanya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelaraskan nilai-nilai moderasi dalam konsep *mahabbah* sebagai inti ajaran tasawuf ke dalam praktik beragama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ajaran *mahabbah* menawarkan gagasan moderat, humanis, dan universal. Dalam konteks relasi agama, ajaran *mahabbah* mengikis egoisme, merekatkan harmoni, melepaskan ikatan formal, serta melahirkan sikap terbuka dengan perbedaan. Melalui ajaran *mahabbah*, agama menemukan kembali fungsi esensialnya dan menjadi solusi bagi problem radikalisme beragama.

Kata Kunci: *mahabbah*, moderasi beragama tasawuf, radikalisme beragama

Abstract. Religious radicalism is related to misunderstandings in understanding the essential meaning of sacred texts so that religion appears to contradict the essence of the teachings it carries. This study aims to harmonize the values of moderation in the concept of *mahabbah* as the core of Sufism teachings

into religious practice. The results of the study show that the *mahabbah* teachings offer moderate, humanist, and universal ideas. In the context of religious relations, the teachings of *mahabbah* erode egoism, strengthen harmony, release formal ties, and give birth to an open attitude to differences. Through the teachings of *mahabbah*, religion rediscovers its essential function and becomes a solution to the problem of religious radicalism.

Keywords: *mahabbah*, religious moderation, religious radicalism

INTRODUCTION

The principle of religious moderation is not synonymous with religious moderation. In practice, relations between religious communities are not always well established. The spirit of religious moderation is contaminated by the fanatical and exclusive ways of religious people that often trigger conflicts (Brubaker, 2015; Deitch, 2020; Ifezue, 2021; Lindgren & Sonnenschein, 2021; Study & Study, 2016). Religion is the reason for legalizing radicalism, whether in actions, attitudes, words, or writings (Karell & Freedman, 2019). It is because the focus on religion has shifted towards formalism and a pattern of scriptural understanding (Dogan, 2011; Haleem, 2010; Rouf, 2020) towards several religious teachings which should be interpreted in an essential and profound manner. In the sufistic interpretation, the values of moderation are reflected, such as maintaining brotherly relations, respecting differences in people, showing tolerance and rejecting fanaticism, and thinking ahead (Sharif, 2021). Sufism emphasizes the spiritual, esoteric, and humanist dimensions that are needed as a basis for upholding the construction of religious moderation (Gani, 2019; Syarif, 2021). Moderation in Islam is in accordance with the *tasawuf* approach (Gani, 2019). Therefore, the values of Sufism need to be explored to become the basis for the practice of religious moderation. The research aims to combine the values of religious moderation in the concept of *mahabbah* in *tasawuf* into religious practice as a solution to the problem of religious radicalism. This research is important because religious fanaticism and exclusivism can reduce the spirit of religion and the universal human values it promotes so that religion and the face of humanity become distorted. Islam as a religion that carries universal moderation values, such as justice, equality, and mercy (Helmy et al., 2021; RI, 2019), can be realized by actualizing the values of Sufism in the religious practices of its adherents.

Research on the relationship between sufism and religious moderation seems to have not been done much. Heck (2006) found that sufism played a role in shaping the morals of muslim society. The universal character of sufism, which is rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, gives birth to a living ethic and has the potential to see and embrace all beings through a single ethical vision, regardless of religion or other affiliation. This facet of Islam offers important insights into understanding the nature of muslim societies. The study confirms that sufism offers important material for positioning Islam as part of the international order with principles and standards that are following the moral vision of Islam itself.

Another study analyzes the relationship between sufism and religious moderation in the case of Indonesia by exploring the contribution of sufism to the development of moderate Islam in the format of Archipelago Islam. The study

concluded that the development of moderate Islam in Indonesia cannot be separated from the contributions of sufism over a century, which has created a fundamental structure for the harmonization of religious life in Indonesia (Anshori et al., 2021).

Syarif (2021) examines the implications of the teachings of religious moderation on student competence from a sufism perspective. This study found that there are moderation values in sufistic interpretation. In the realm of education, this model of sufistic interpretation encourages students to improve the quality of Qur'an interpretation. Students can develop their reasoning, understanding, and professional skills as superior muslim scholars who are professional and qualified to respond to the challenges of the times.

Unlike previous research, this study focuses on examining the relationship between the value of moderation contained in the concept of *mahabbah* and the potential for realization of a moderate attitude in religion. This finding expected to strengthen the moderate way of religion which is shown by strengthening tolerance and respect for religious differences.

CLAIM

Humans have an instinct to love His creation, both fellow humans and other living things (As-Sulami, 1999). Love is a universal human expression and is the spirit of all beliefs. The language of love can express esoteric truths without contradicting dogmatic theology (Burckhardt, 2008). In Buddhism there is the teaching of *Saraniyadhamma* or *compassion* (Kolis, 2017), Hinduism has the concept of *bhakti*, Christianity has the concept of divine love, and Islam has the concept of *mahabbah* (Burckhardt, 2008).

Love is human nature. God places love in the human heart. The heart is the "home" of God. In a hadith qudsi, it is stated that God said to the Prophet David to empty his heart only for Him. Emptying the heart is eliminating the inclination of the heart towards the material world. An empty heart is the beginning of the heart to be able to accommodate all goodness and become *makrifat* (Ar-Raniri, 2009).

In sufism, *hubb* or love is the main foundation of his teachings (Faruq Thohir, 2021). *Mahabbah* or *hubb al-ilahi* is the tendency of the soul towards everything related to God. The implication of *mahabbah* is *uns*, namely the peak of joy in the soul when *taqarrub* is the touch of all feelings and submission of conscience to Him (Al-Ghazali, 1996). The sufis make Allah the center for the goal of love, even Allah himself is love. God as love can be seen from the expressions of Turkish and Iranian Sufis who repeat the words There is no god but love (Lumbard, 2007). The focus of *tasawuf* on love began in the second Hijri century, which previously focused on fear (*khauf*) of love. This shift points to Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah as the first Sufi to popularize the teachings of *mahabbah*.

The Qur'an, which is the inspiration for the discipline of Sufism, mentions *hubb* in basic words and its derivatives 83 times in 49 situations (Al-Baqi, 1987; Scattolin, 1997). In it, God's love is explained in its attachment to and limited by the principle of justice: God loves what is good and hates that which is superfluous. Through love, a servant will try to do what God likes, and vice versa will stay away from things that God doesn't like. On the other hand, Allah requires obedience to the prophet as a

reflection of love for Him (3, 31). In history, the Prophet is described as a figure full of love for mankind. Loving God, thus, is imitating the Prophet in terms of spreading love to fellow human beings, because one of the reflections of love is *shagf* (12, 30), namely the emergence of mutual affection and love for fellow creatures.

Mahabbah teachings can be an entry point for moderate ideas in religious attitudes. A moderate attitude in religion is marked by *tawassuth* (taking the middle way), *tawazun* (balanced), *i'tidal* (straight and firm), *tasamuh* (tolerance), *musawah* (egalitarian), *shura* (deliberation), *ishlah* (reform), *aulawiyah* (prioritizing priority), and *tathawwur wa ibtikar* (dynamic and innovative) (Nur & Mukhlis, 2015). Such a way of religion is very likely to be born by people who can make *mahabbah* the spirit of their actions. Love accepts differences and knows no violence. In religion, the teaching of love can be an alternative approach to understanding religion so that religion is not always seen from its formal legal dimension but also an ethical-moral perspective. Religious ethics can be reflected through the religious behavior of its followers who are tolerant, humane, love peace, and accept plurality.

ARGUMENT

Love is a natural human expression. This expression, as described in the text of the Qur'an, took place in the life of the material world at first (2, 216; 38, 32; 75, 20; 76, 27), property (2, 177; 3, 92; 3, 152; 9, 24; 89, 20), women, sons, and wealth (3, 14; 12, 30), or food (76, 8), and then leads to spiritual things, namely loving faith (*faith*), God (God) (3, 31; 5, 54; 2, 165), forgiveness (24, 22), victory (61, 13), or self-purity (9, 108). In early Sufi literature and at the spiritual level of love, God is declared to be the only one worthy of love.

Based on the differences between the two types of love orientation, it is necessary to identify true love with only metaphorical love. Therefore, in Sufism, love (*mahabbah*) is always related to knowledge (*ma'rifah*) or recognition. The hallmark of Sufism is that its expressions often maintain a balance between love and knowledge (Burckhardt, 2008). Sufis are always in the perspective of *ma'rifah* (knowing) and *mahabbah* (loving). It is impossible for a person to love God without knowing Him. To love God, a servant must know Him.

Love is a feeling that cannot be described in words. Love is marked by the loss of self-identity as reflected in the expression of Rabi'ah al-Adawiyah:

*It's hard to explain what the essence of love is
It is the longing of the feeling image
Only people who feel and know
How can you possibly describe
something that you yourself seem to have lost from His sight,
even though your form is still there because your heart is happy
that numbs your tongue.*
(Isnai, 2003)

The self-disappearance of the lover becomes the basis for the disclosure of the nature of the beloved. The self is not found in the soul of lovers because it becomes a symbol for egoism. If someone is still who he or she is, he or she will never know God, because the biggest curtain that blocks him or her from God is himself or herself

(Faruq Thohir, 2021). Through love, things that were previously hidden become apparent. At the stage of knowing the loved one, one is no longer concerned with himself or herself, but with the one he or she loves.

For lovers, there is only the beloved. The lover is more loved than himself (Burckhardt, 2008). Love for God is characterized by obedience, surrender, and emptying of everything other than God (Nasution, 2006). The Qur'an explain the things that God likes and dislikes. In the context of religious moderation, God loves those who do good (*muhsinun*) (2, 195; 3, 134; 3, 148; 5, 13; 5, 93) and act fairly (*muqsitun*) (5, 42; 49, 9; 60, 8). On the other hand, God does not like those who transgress (*muta'addun*) (2, 190; 5, 87; 7, 55), mischief-makers (*mufsidun*) (2, 205; 5, 64; 28, 77), are unjust (*unjust*) (3, 57; 3, 140; 42, 40), arrogant (*fakhr*) (4, 36; 31, 18; 57, 23), arrogant (*mustakbirun*) (16, 23), excessive (*musrifun*) (6, 141; 7, 31), who are proud (*farihun*) (28, 76) and spread slander (4, 148). In other words, God likes moderation and does not like its opposite, namely being extreme, radical, or exclusive. Doing what God loves is a reflection of a servant's love. At this stage, there is a reciprocal relationship between the lover and the beloved or the servant and God.

The statement of Qur'an (5, 54) which states "He loves them, and they love Him" shows the existence of a dialectical love relationship. The statement "He loved them" means that God is a lover, and man is the loved. On the other hand, the statement "They loved Him" means that man is a lover, and God is the loved. So God and man are both lover and loved, and that every lover is also loved. Loving God is a reflection of true love and love for other than Him is only a metaphorical love. By loving God, man becomes a true lover. God is eternal, so when He says "He loved them," he is referring to a the beyond the category of time of love (Chittick, 2011).

Because *mahabbah* is related to *ma'rifah*, then the way to love someone towards God has a solid foundation. *Ma'rifah* means being present with Him and *praying* to Him. *Ma'rifah* produces *al-uns*, and *al-uns* gives birth to *sakinah* (Al-Ghazali, 1996). Thus, *mahabbah teachings* can direct a person to spread love to fellow creatures, create a harmonious life, and stay away from conflict. Actions that are defined as radical actions, such as exploitation in the name of religion, discrimination, exclusivity, discrimination, and so on, cannot grow in an atmosphere of peace and love.

PROOF

When juxtaposed with religion, the term radicalism creates contradictions. Religion carries a mission of peace. As a behavior, radicalism is also contrary to human nature. This contradiction identifies several accidental problems, including the textual interpretation problem in understanding the sacred texts should be understood substantively, not formally. The product of sufism interpretation can be a solution to this problem, from which the concept of *mahabbah* as the core of his teachings is born.

Religious radicalism is not only an Islamic phenomenon but a religious phenomenon in general (Zulkarnain & Purnama, 2016). Specifically, in the case of Islam, there is a stigma for religious radicalism that takes the case of Islam which has become a global discourse. These stigmas include "militant Islam" (Rashid, 2000) "Islamic terrorism" (Venkatraman, 2007), "Radical Islam" (Brown & Saeed, 2015;

Ibrahim et al., 2019; Karagiannis & McCauley, 2006) "revivalism " (Tazmini, 2001), "Islamic fundamentalists" (Bahramitash, 2003; Indonesia, 2002; Rashid, 2000), and others. This was caused by the outbreak of cases of radical movements from certain organizations acting in the name of Islam. The transnational movement ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Jama'ah Islamiyah, or Ikhwan al-Muslimin, as an example of an Islamist movement that often takes extreme, militant, and fanatical ways, exists on a global scale so that the international media carries out a massive campaign against the movement. This radical stigma is of course detrimental to Muslims because it determines how the face of Islam is presented.

Methodologically, there is a relationship between the textual interpretation model and the interpreter's actions. Actions are reflections of thoughts. Religious radicalism is related to the epistemological character of its adherents. The views that underlie radical movements are partly due to the way of their scriptural understanding of the Qur'an which results in misinterpretation and impacts on the religious way that are militant, radical, exclusive, and conservative. Through this way of comprehension, generally, all these movements have the same vision, specifically to make Islamic teachings a positive law. They adhere to the ideology of "radical Salafism," which aims to re-create a salaf society (the generation of the Prophet's companions). They aim to make fundamental changes (Beck, 2015; Karell & Freedman, 2019). However, they realized this in harsh and radical ways.

In religious texts, sometimes some teachings seem contradictory or show religious exclusivity. The style of textual interpretation can give rise to misunderstandings in interpreting the fundamental meaning of religious teaching so that it becomes the inspiration for radical groups to legalize their radical actions. For example, there are texts of the Qur'an or lafadz hadith which, when interpreted textually, are perceived as orders to kill or fight unbelievers. In the hadith texts, there are orders to fight humans until they say the shahada, declaring that Jews and Christians will go to hell or a ban on greeting Jews and Christians when meeting them on the street. Some hadiths state the opposite, namely the prohibition to repay a bad prayer with another bad prayer, the obligation to respect the Jewish body, and that the Prophet permitted a Christian Imam to pray at the Prophet's mosque (Helmy et al., 2021).

To anticipate this, there are several methods for understanding hadith texts that seem contradictory or contain contradictory propositions (*ta'arud al-adillah*). Scholars of the Shafi'i, Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Zahiri schools, in a different order, offer four methods, namely favoring arguments that come later chronologically (*nasakh*), corroborating one of the hadiths based on the quality of the narrator, fairness, and understanding (*tarjih*), gathering contradictory arguments and then compromising them (*al-jam'u wa al-taufiq*), or aborting the two contradictory arguments (*tasaqut al-dalilain*) then looking for other arguments of lower quality (Afrohah, 2021; Atabik, 2015). Al-Subky offers four methods, namely choosing one of the contradictory propositions (*al-takhyir*), leaving both of them (*al-tasaquth*), suspending their practice (*al-tawaqquf*), and using both in different contexts (*al-takhyir wa al-tasaquth*) (Afrohah, 2021; Al-Subky, 2003). Thus, if there is a holy text that seems contradictory, on the one hand, it teaches peace but on the other it

commands war, there is a method to understand it. Understanding the meaning of the text, of course, requires in-depth knowledge and understanding so that it is not sufficiently understood based on the textual meaning.

An understanding of something written is not a reproduction of something past, but a sharing of present meaning (Gani, 2019). For this reason, careful and in-depth interpretation of the Qur'an is needed to get its implied meaning, and if not, this understanding can mislead the reader and be used to mislead others (Anshori et al., 2021). The impact of this process is proven by the discovery of potential tendencies for the growth and development of radicalism in religious tertiary institutions, in Islam, Catholicism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism (Khozin, 2013). This phenomenon has begun to spread to mosques, state institutions, and BUMN institutions as institutions identified as being exposed to radicalism (Yani et al., 2020).

To understand the contents of a verse in the Qur'an, it is not enough to just grasp its contextual meaning there must be a deeper understanding of its implicit meaning by applying a Sufistic approach (Asfar, 2020). In this context, religious people can adopt the values of Sufism which teach religious moderation. The values of religious moderation emphasize the aspects of morality and spirituality of religion so as to give birth to radical understanding and attitudes in religion (Ali, 2018). Sufism values need to be revived in response to differences in religious interpretation. *Mahabbah* teachings can give birth to a religious attitude that is open, balanced, and tolerant of differences.

DISCUSSION

Religious moderation is realized through a balanced attitude (*tawazun*) and fairness (*i'tidal*), tolerance (*tasamuh*), egalitarianism (*musawah*), deliberation (*shura*), as well as dynamism and innovation (*tathawwur wa ibtikar*) (Fahri & Zainuri, 2019). Moderation reflects attitudes and views that are not excessive, extreme, or radical (*tatharurruf*), thereby offering synergy for justice and goodness. Following a religion means spreading peace and love to all people at all times. Religious moderation refers to the strength in holding a moderate attitude and perspective so that religious teachings are not practiced in an extreme way. In other words, religious moderation is needed to prevent interpretation from going beyond acceptable limits (Mahrus et al., 2020). This study argues that the principles of Islamic moderation are justice, balance, tolerance, diversity, and exemplary, and the discourse of religious moderation is an important part of creating religious cohesion (Kawangung, 2019) and fighting extremism, violence, and radicalism (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Mandaville & Nozell, 2017). Religious moderation is an idea that is built from the essential character of religion itself which is moderate.

But in reality, the relationship between religious communities is not always well established. Religion is often used as a medium to incite other religious communities, resulting in conflict (Deitch, 2020; Mandaville & Nozell, 2017; Yunus, 2014) which conceptually has an ideological charge (Lindgren & Sonnenschein, 2021) so that it becomes a prolonged conflict. Cases of the domination of religion over the religion adhered to by others shift the human spirit promoted by the religion it adheres to into fanaticism and exclusivism, so it is not uncommon for violence to

occur in the name of defending religion. The results of such interpretation of the text of the scriptures are used as a basis for determining the truth of the belief version. Religious teachings are closed because the space for dialogue is not open. Religion then becomes a vehicle for a few people to reach heaven which is also exclusive. In this way, truth becomes the absolute right of religion and also the dominant figures within it. Even though the religious conflict has a positive side if handled properly (Ifezue, 2021), the ideological narrative of religion is still very strong so the issue of defending God and religion is still an effective issue to prolong the conflict.

If action is a reflection of understanding, then the exclusivism of one's religious way is linear with the exclusivism of that person's religious understanding. Exclusive understanding is marked using textual interpretation. In the Al-Qur'an there are verses that if understood textually have the potential to give rise to exclusive understanding, for example, the interpretation of jihad (Haleem, 2010; Rouf, 2020). This misunderstanding gave rise to arguments for the legality of radical actions and religious ways that are exclusive, fanatical, subjective, one-sided, and anti-plural. ISIS, for example, often displays violence in the name of religion against those who disagree with their ideology and claim to be infidels (Zulkarnain & Purnama, 2016).

Theoretically, religious differences should form awareness to respect each difference. The process of forming this awareness will involve many parties. Academically, in Islamic tertiary institutions, the teaching of religious moderation must accord with the teachings of the Holy Quran, whose contents have been applied throughout the ages (Abdullah & Nento, 2021). The Quran requires careful and deep interpretation, however, in order to glean the meaning implied in its holy verses, and without a proper understanding, it can be misleading for the reader and used to misguide others (Anshori et al., 2021). According to several studies, the emergence of radical movements can be minimized by teaching religious moderation (Arifianto, 2019; Arifinsyah et al., 2020; Ishaq, 2021; Syatar et al., 2020) On the other hand, preachers need to revitalize the values of religious moderation in understanding and practice of Muslim community life which includes the values of *tawasuth*- moderate, *tawazun* - equality, *tasamuh* - tolerance, and *i'tidal*, especially in conflict-prone areas (Ibrahim et al., 2019). *Mahabbah* teachings are the spirit for this effort.

Love is characterized by the loss of the lover's self-identity so that there is only the loved one. From this, it is known that love will make selfish nature disappear from a person. True love is the disappearance of the ego. To love Allah is to know all the attributes of His perfection and to immerse oneself in Him. Losing his human identity means that a person is capable of becoming a divine mirror capable of displaying all of His attributes. At this stage, all words, deeds, and even gestures are all a reflection of God's will. In everyday life, this character gives birth to a divine attitude, giving birth to a person who spreads love for fellow human beings. Therefore, the teaching of *mahabbah* is expected to unite all people of different religions and spread peace on earth.

Mahabbah places love for God as a means to spread affection for fellow human beings and at the same time erode the potential for the growth and development of radicalism understandings and movements. Love for Allah makes humans create a harmonious life as a reflection of humanity and proof of love for Him, stay away from

conflict, and see differences based on ethical and aesthetic perspectives. Love, thus, is the key to deradicalization efforts. The concept of *mahabbah* teaches compassion as the core of religious teachings. In the context of *mahabbah* teachings, radical movements contradict the substance of religion and are a reflection of the nature of the soul which is empty of love so that it experiences a crisis of spirituality. *Mahabbah* teachings teach humans to spread love to fellow human beings and all creatures. Thus, Sufi teachings are a solution to the rise of radical religious behavior (Abshor, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Epistemologically, radicalism, which is characterized by an exclusive-particularistic attitude, is related to the scriptural way of interpreting a religious text, causing misunderstandings in understanding the essential teachings of their religion. To anticipate this, we need a method of understanding that is oriented to the essence, not to existence. The Sufism method is a solution to this problem and the teachings of *mahabbah* can be used as an alternative solution to the problem of radicalism which takes a religious background. *Mahabbah* which is the core of the teachings of Sufism needs to be revitalized to respond to the problem of religious radicalism.

Mahabbah teachings offer a moderate, humanist, and universal idea in the context of religious-religious relations, containing moral messages that are directly related to the harmony of social-religious life. The concept of *mahabbah* is built on universal human values. A person who lives on the path of love can spread his love to others to erode egoism, enmity, hatred, or revenge between people even though they have differences in religious beliefs. Because the heart is filled with love, selfishness will not exist in him. Love becomes a medium to glue harmonious relationships between human beings.

True love in the concept of *mahabbah* which only makes God the center of love by releasing all attachments to others than Him, including to heaven or hell, teaches that love can let go of all forms of symbols or formalities so that it only focuses on nature. Thus, differences in beliefs between people are not a reason for the growth of hatred which has the potential to give birth to radical actions. His love for fellow human beings is proof of his love for God. Love in a person will be seen in the way he treats others. Thus, radical actions cannot possibly be born from someone who lives on the path of love. Lovers do not see differences as a threat because all come from and will return to the same source, to God, the Most Love.

Love is a feeling, not logic, so love is not trapped in a debate that has the potential to give rise to strife. Thus, the teachings of love can be a medium for strengthening religious patterns that are moderate, inclusive, tolerant, as well as harmonious, and peaceful among religious communities. The teachings of love can transform formal teachings into perennial ones and from division into a brotherhood.

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