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# SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN THE SUROAN TRADITION: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION AMONG JAVANESE MUSLIMS IN KEDIRI

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Abstract: This article aims to understand and analyse how the Suroan tradition functions within the context of religious moderation and the social dynamics of the Islamic Javanese community in Kediri. The Suroan tradition is a significant ritual among the Muslim community in Java, carrying profound social and spiritual meaning. Using an anthropological approach, this study examines the social elements influencing the Suroan ritual, including the values embedded within its practices. The findings indicate that Suroan serves not only as an expression of gratitude to God but also as a medium for strengthening solidarity among community members, building cultural identity, and fostering interreligious tolerance. This tradition reflects the community's ability to adapt and uphold the values of moderation in the face of social change. This research aims to offer new insights into the interaction between local traditions and religious moderation within the Islamic community in Java.

**Keywords:** Religious Moderation, *Suroan*, Tradition.

#### A. Introduction

Local culture refers to the cultural heritage possessed by a particular community or region. The relationship between local culture and religion or belief is often closely intertwined, as local culture can reflect the values, norms, and beliefs upheld by the local community. A study (Romansyah, 2022) demonstrates how local culture and religion interact harmoniously in Indonesia through the adaptation of local values in religious life. The

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interaction between Islam and local culture is manifested in various aspects of daily life, including religious rituals, social structures, value systems, and behavioural patterns. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of this interaction is essential to gaining deeper insight into the diversity within Muslim societies. In the Indonesian context, numerous studies have explored the interconnection between local culture and religion or belief (Zainuddin et al., 2024).

Case studies on the social dynamics within Muslim communities enable us to comprehend how Islam adapts to diverse cultural contexts. Such research also seeks to identify conflicts or harmony between religious teachings and local cultural practices. Furthermore, in the context of globalisation and modernisation, Muslim communities often experience significant changes in their mindset, lifestyle, and adopted values. This raises questions about how religion and local culture influence each other and evolve amidst rapid social change. Awareness of cultural heritage among future generations in preserving, safeguarding, and deepening the meaning of ancestral traditions is a key component of national consciousness. Such awareness must be balanced with an understanding of cultural significance to ensure that cultural messages can be passed on to present and future life. This understanding of cultural meaning must be realised by implementing and explaining its substance to the public through various techniques. However, this cultural understanding is shaped by the interests of future generations, making education crucial in instilling cultural meaning from an early age (Rosvid, 2020).

Traditions serve to maintain environmental balance through the preservation of biodiversity (sarebu rupa), sustainability (babasan sarereaeun), simplicity and frugality (path goah), orderliness (dawegan dipares/tataliparanti), and the protection of native plants (Julaeha et al., 2019). The Javanese ethnic group exhibits a rich cultural diversity stemming from differences in social and cultural conditions across various groups. Culture can be understood as a way of thinking and expressing oneself across different aspects of group life, forming a social unity within specific contexts of space and time. In traditional societies, especially among the Javanese, certain patterns of action and thought relate to beliefs in ancestral heritage, passed down through generations to preserve traditions. One such tradition is Suroan, deeply rooted in its specific rites and practices. The Suroan tradition is observed by the Javanese community to welcome the new year according to the Javanese calendar. Originally flourishing in royal circles, the tradition has since spread to the wider community in various forms of activities and spiritual practices. Suroan is regarded as a sacred



tradition, with many people hoping to receive blessings on this holy day (Yulian & Lubis, 2022).

The Suroan tradition in Kediri is unique compared to celebrations in other regions. A distinctive feature of Suroan in Kediri lies in the preservation of customs and culture that have become long-standing traditions. One of the rituals still practised in the village is the welcoming of the month of Suro, observed by the Javanese community during the month of Muharram or Suro in the Javanese calendar. This ritual symbolises cleansing the village, praying for safety, and seeking protection from misfortune. The Suroan tradition in Kediri is held annually in the month of Suro, specifically on the 1st of Suro (Muharram). The ritual is led by the customary leader and participated in by the entire community of Kediri, where collective prayers are held and food is shared. The local wisdom values embedded in the Suroan tradition include religious, aesthetic, cooperation, moral, and tolerance values. This local wisdom, as a cultural product inherited from our ancestors, deserves renewed study to grasp its meaning comprehensively.

An anthropological approach to the *Suroan* tradition offers deeper insight into how the people of Kediri perceive their religion and identity. The anthropology of religion focuses on how religious beliefs and practices function in shaping the social identity of a community. In this context, the *Suroan* tradition represents a distinctive Javanese-Islamic identity, in which Islamic teachings are integrated into the local cultural framework that has existed for centuries. This study provides a broader perspective on the social dynamics that emerge through religious practices within the community.

Religious moderation within the context of *Suroan* is evident in how the community maintains a balance between normative Islamic teachings and local customs. The tradition reflects a high degree of flexibility and adaptation, with cultural elements such as offerings, rituals to ward off misfortune, and pilgrimages to ancestral graves being preserved but given more Islamic meanings. In this way, religious moderation is observed not only in theological aspects but also in the community's ability to manage differences, both within the Muslim community itself and with those of other faiths.

Furthermore, the social dynamics within the *Suroan* tradition demonstrate the presence of strong social cohesion among the people of Kediri. Collective rituals, such as feasts (*kenduri*) and communal prayers, serve as gatherings that strengthen social solidarity. These activities are not only attended by Muslims but often involve people from different religious backgrounds, reflecting tolerance and mutual respect. The tradition serves

as an essential medium for strengthening social bonds among residents, whether within families, neighbourhoods, or the broader community.

In conclusion, this study aims to contribute to the discourse on religious moderation in Indonesia, particularly within the context of the Javanese Muslim community, which is rich in tradition. Religious moderation, as reflected in the *Suroan* tradition, demonstrates that religion and culture can coexist harmoniously. An anthropological approach to understanding this tradition is crucial for uncovering how local communities interpret and practise Islam contextually and moderately, which can serve as a model for other communities in maintaining harmony and peace.

### B. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative method with an anthropological approach to explore the social dynamics within the Suroan tradition among the Javanese Muslim community in Kediri. This approach is designed to understand the cultural context and social interactions that shape the community's religious practices. The ethnographic design serves as the primary framework, enabling direct engagement with the daily lives of the community members.

Research participants will be purposively selected, including religious figures, community leaders, and active participants in the Suroan tradition. Through interviews, the researchers will explore their perspectives and experiences to understand how this tradition influences their daily lives and social relationships. Data triangulation will be conducted to ensure the validity of the findings by comparing information from multiple sources.

This approach aims to provide in-depth insights into the Suroan tradition and its contribution to religious moderation within the Javanese Muslim community in Kediri. The study is expected to reveal the relationship between cultural practices and religious values, as well as their impact on the community's social life.

#### C. Results and Discussion

# 1. The Meaning of the Suroan Tradition

A tradition consists of practices, beliefs, and norms that are passed down over time within a group or society. Traditions encompass various aspects of life, including religion, culture, social activities, and rituals. They often involve specific ways of conducting ceremonies, celebrations, or rituals that carry significant meaning within a cultural or community context. The *Suroan* tradition is widely



known in Java, particularly in Central and East Java. This tradition is associated with the month of Muharram, the first month in the Hijri calendar, and is often linked to the celebration of the Islamic New Year (Sikumbang et al., 2023).

The Suroan tradition involves various cultural and ritual elements, engaging the participation of the local community. People gather at specific locations, such as villages or places of worship, to conduct ritual ceremonies. During these ceremonies, they perform actions and prayers believed to bring blessings and safety. Some individuals also observe a one-day fast on the 1st of Muharram or a particular day during the month of Suro as a form of reverence and worship. Religious scholars, in guiding the community's beliefs, do not prohibit or eliminate such traditions. The Sharh of Sahih Muslim by Imam Nawawi mentions that Muharram, or Suro, is the second most meritorious month for fasting after Ramadan, as stated in a hadith narrated by Muslims. According to Islamic teachings, Muharram is regarded as a month of multiplied rewards, meaning that all virtuous deeds performed during this month will receive greater rewards. Therefore, the key practice during Muharram or Suro is to avoid wrongdoing and strive towards piety (Surah al-Taubah[9]: 36) (Safera & Huda, 2020).

The *Suroan* tradition serves as both a spiritual and social moment, during which the Javanese people hold rituals to seek safety and blessings at the beginning of the Hijri New Year. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen social bonds among community members (Prabowo, 2022). The tradition is often tied to the commemoration of the Islamic New Year, which becomes a time for reflection and spiritual renewal. People celebrate the start of the new year with hopes for fortune and divine grace (Noorhidayati, 2017). Through this tradition, values such as cooperation (*gotong royong*), tolerance, and gratitude are instilled in the younger generation. It is also a moment for sharing stories and experiences and fostering social connections. The *Suroan* tradition reinforces the values of solidarity and togetherness while also serving as an effort to preserve local culture amidst the forces of modernisation (Wahyu, 2021).

The *Suroan* tradition among Javanese society, especially in Central and East Java, holds deep social, cultural, and spiritual significance. As a celebration coinciding with Muharram, it is not merely a way to welcome the Islamic New Year but also a moment for reflection, the strengthening of social relationships, and cultural preservation. The rituals performed during this tradition reflect the

community's hopes for safety, blessings, and prosperity in daily life. Additionally, *Survan* functions as an educational tool for the younger generation, teaching them about noble values and the importance of maintaining traditions.

Thus, the *Suroan* tradition not only forms part of the identity of Javanese society but also plays a crucial role in fostering social solidarity and preserving cultural heritage in the face of modernisation. By gaining a deeper understanding of this tradition, we can appreciate the richness of cultural heritage and use it as a foundation for building a better future.

#### 2. The Suroan Tradition and Patterns of Social Interaction

The *Suroan* tradition within Javanese society reflects rich and diverse patterns of social interaction. This research highlights that social interaction within this tradition is deeply influenced by local cultural values. During ritual ceremonies, people gather at specific places, creating strong bonds between individuals and the community. Activities such as communal prayers and shared meals not only symbolise togetherness but also strengthen solidarity among residents. In a spiritual context, participation in the *Suroan* tradition is believed to bring blessings and safety (Nurshodiq, 2020). This belief fosters mutual trust and commitment among community members, which in turn supports the formation of a shared identity. Through these rituals, people engage not only socially but also experience a spiritual depth that binds them to one another.

Informal education occurring within the *Suroan* tradition also plays a crucial role in transmitting cultural values to younger generations. By participating in the ceremonies, children learn the meanings and values of these traditions. This helps them understand their role within the community and the importance of preserving cultural heritage. However, it is undeniable that interactions within this tradition can also lead to conflict, especially regarding differences in ritual interpretation. Nonetheless, the *Suroan* tradition often serves as a mechanism for conflict resolution, where people engage in discussions to resolve differing views collectively (Mutualli, 2018).

With advancements in technology, social media has begun to influence the patterns of interaction within the *Suroan* tradition. Many residents share their experiences and document the ceremonies through digital platforms, broadening participation and connecting a wider community. However, this also has the potential to alter the way people understand and practise the tradition. The *Suroan* tradition



reflects profound cultural meaning, where social interaction involves not only togetherness but also respect for ancestors and religious values. Awareness of this meaning encourages the community to preserve the tradition and integrate it into daily life.

In this context, the *Suroan* tradition becomes an essential event for Javanese Muslim society to strengthen social bonds. One of the prominent social interaction patterns within this tradition is *gotong royong*, a form of cooperation that embodies the spirit of communal togetherness. *Gotong royong* during the *Suroan* tradition usually involves preparing feasts, cleaning sacred places such as ancestral graves, and performing various religious rituals. Through cooperation, community members strengthen their relationships, help one another selflessly, and foster a strong sense of unity. This demonstrates that the *Suroan* tradition not only carries spiritual meaning but also serves as a means of reinforcing social solidarity.

Furthermore, the *Suroan* tradition reflects religious moderation in the social interaction patterns of Javanese Muslim society. On the one hand, people adhere to Islamic teachings by engaging in prayers and Qur'anic recitation, while on the other hand, they preserve syncretic Javanese cultural elements, such as pilgrimages to ancestral graves and the use of offerings. This illustrates the capacity of Javanese Muslim society to blend religious and local cultural elements without creating conflict. Such religious moderation allows the community to live harmoniously amidst diversity, with the *Suroan* tradition serving as a space for interaction among individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, the social interactions during the *Suroan* celebration reflect hierarchical relationships inherent in Javanese culture, particularly between the general public and spiritual or traditional leaders. Religious scholars (*kyai*), elders, or community leaders often lead key rituals, such as communal prayers and processions. The interaction between community members and their leaders reflects a patron-client relationship, where people show respect to leaders who are regarded as possessing spiritual knowledge and the ability to pray for the community's safety.

Additionally, social interaction within the *Suroan* tradition accommodates participation from various age groups, genders, and social statuses. Women, for instance, play a significant role in preparing food for feasts and managing household rituals, while men often participate in more public activities such as pilgrimages or communal work at sacred sites. Children are also involved, either by assisting their

parents or observing the processions, as part of the intergenerational transmission of traditions. By engaging various elements of society, the *Suroan* tradition serves as a social platform that brings together different groups, providing space for interaction and shared experiences.

Finally, the *Suroan* tradition also serves as a medium for fostering peaceful interfaith relations within Javanese society. In some cases, non-Muslim communities participate in the tradition, demonstrating tolerance and inclusion in religious practices. Certain activities, such as environmental clean-ups or visits to cultural sites, often involve people from diverse religious backgrounds. This highlights that the *Suroan* tradition is not merely a religious ritual but also a social mechanism for maintaining harmony among members of a pluralistic community.

In conclusion, the patterns of social interaction within the *Suroan* tradition demonstrate how culture, spirituality, and communal values contribute to the formation of strong social relationships. The rituals performed within this tradition not only strengthen social bonds but also provide space for dialogue and conflict resolution. Efforts to preserve and understand the meaning of the *Suroan* tradition are essential for sustaining social interactions within Javanese society.

## 3. Suroan Tradition from the Perspective of Religious Moderation

The term "religious moderation" derives from the Latin root "moderation", which means "middle ground" or "balance." However, the concept is more appropriately interpreted through the lens of Arabic since the root of "moderation" aligns with Arabic principles. In Arabic, moderation is known as wasath or wasathiyah, which signifies being at the centre (tawasut), embodying justice ('adl), impartiality, and balanced conduct (tawazun). This concept later evolved into Islamic moderation, or wasathiyah Islamiyah, which refers to self-control, given the power and potential weaknesses associated with it. Islamic moderation integrates several key elements: divinity (uluhiyah), humanity (basyariyah), and a combination of material aspects (madiyah) with immaterial dimensions (ruhiyah). It balances public welfare with personal interests and worldly matters with the afterlife and rejects both extremism and excessive leniency. These principles reflect the values of Islamic moderation, as taught by the Prophet Muhammad (Dodi, 2022).

Religious moderation is defined as a form of moderation that emphasises unity, tolerance, and harmony across all segments of society (Akhmadi, 2019). This is manifested in daily social interactions



(Bachrong & Ansar, 2021), where moderation promotes openness, balance, and tolerance. Religious moderation is also understood as a "middle path," navigating between opposing extremes to negotiate religious understandings and find solutions to various issues. As such, religious moderation requires a significant departure from radicalism (Drolet et al., 2021). Implementing religious moderation is crucial for fostering national harmony (Fahruddin et al., 2021), as it holds the potential to minimise conflicts between religious communities. At the policy level, moderation offers strategic means to prevent the spread of radicalism (Hidayat et al., 2020). It serves as a paradigm, attitude, and practice aimed at ensuring collective well-being (Sulaiman et al., 2022). This concept is reflected in various religious activities, where it promotes non-violent and peaceful strategies to resolve conflicts through compromise rather than confrontation (Brocker & Künkler, 2013), moderatism refers to the deliberate choice to use peaceful and non-confrontational strategies to find compromise and resolve conflicts instead of violent, provocative and confrontational means.

In the context of Islam, religious moderation aligns closely with the concept of wasathiyah, an essential discourse aimed at balancing the actions of those who misinterpret the essence of Islam (Arif, 2020). It counters misdirected interpretations that often blame others. Wasathiyah offers a moderate understanding of Islam, rejecting violence, standing up for the oppressed, opposing fanaticism, condemning extremism, rejecting intimidation, and opposing terrorism. In Islam, moderation is equated with wasathiyah, emphasising the importance of balance, justice, and well-being as a foundation for openness, humanity, and tolerance. These concepts have become widely accepted in everyday usage (Niam, 2019). In the Middle East, for example, intellectuals have proposed ummatan wasathan (the balanced nation) and Islam wasathiyah as frameworks for challenging emerging religious extremism (Diyani, 2019). Thus, the concept of Islamic moderatism (wasathiyatul Islam) emerged as a response to the friction between two opposing movements that claim to represent Islam. The first is the hardline and literalist approach to Islam, which views the religion as something constant and unchanging, with little room for change - especially in terms of creed, worship, law, and muamalat (transactions). Such movements are seen as creating the perception that Islam is a violent, intolerant and radical religion. The second is the liberal movement that promotes rationalist thinking and narratives, arguing that Islam must adapt to the times, including in terms of creed, worship, law and muamalat. This kind of movement is



inclusive and tolerant, positioning Islam as a religion that continues to respond to all external changes.

Religious moderation plays a vital role in maintaining social harmony within diverse communities. One example of this is the *Suroan* tradition in Java. Every year, particularly in Kediri, Javanese communities celebrate the month of Muharram with a series of rituals rich in spiritual and social significance. The *Suroan* tradition brings people together in specific locations, such as villages or mosques, where they perform various ceremonies and prayers believed to bring blessings and safety. On the first day of Muharram, many people fast as a form of reverence, demonstrating mutual respect among community members. The tradition is not only an act of worship but also a means of strengthening social bonds (Nurshodiq, 2020).

The ritual activities of *Suroan* serve as informal education for younger generations, teaching children the values of tolerance, harmony, and empathy (Ahmad, 2021). These values form a crucial foundation for deepening their understanding of religious moderation. Although the tradition generally promotes moderation, conflicts may arise due to differences in ritual interpretations. However, the community typically resolves such differences through open dialogue, which strengthens relationships among residents (Noorhidayati, 2022). With the help of technology and social media, the *Suroan* tradition has gained wider recognition, creating opportunities for sharing experiences and understanding their meaning.

In summary, the *Suroan* tradition is not merely a religious celebration but also a medium for teaching and internalising the values of religious moderation. Through the preservation of this tradition, Javanese communities celebrate diversity while maintaining harmony in everyday life.

#### 4. Local Wisdom Values in the *Suroan* Tradition

The Suroan tradition within Javanese society, particularly in Kediri, reflects various elements of local wisdom that are vital to both social and spiritual life. The tradition involves deeply religious rituals, with community members gathering for communal prayers. This serves to strengthen spirituality and express gratitude to God for the blessings they have received. The practice of fasting on the 1st of Muharram as a form of reverence demonstrates the community's dedication to their religious beliefs (Nurshodiq, 2020).

In carrying out the Suroan tradition, the community collaborates to organise activities, from preparations to the execution of rituals.



This spirit of cooperation (*gotong royong*) reflects strong solidarity and a sense of togetherness among residents, reinforcing social bonds within the community (Noorhidayati, 2021).

The Suroan rituals are often enriched with aesthetic elements, such as dance, music, and decorative arrangements. The beauty present in these practices enhances their meaning, creating a sacred atmosphere and paying homage to traditions that have endured for generations (Ismail, 2022).

The Suroan tradition also emphasises moral values, including mutual respect, the maintenance of harmony, and conflict avoidance. Through the teaching of these values, the community is encouraged to live peacefully and appreciate differences.

By involving various elements of society, the Suroan tradition fosters tolerance. It teaches people to accept differences in perspectives and religious practices. Dialogue and interactions between residents during the celebration strengthen mutual understanding (Usatenko, 2021).

The Suroan tradition serves as a form of informal education for younger generations. Through participation in the rituals, children learn about religious values, traditions, and the importance of maintaining harmonious social relationships. This helps them develop an understanding of their cultural identity (Yaqub, 2022).

Furthermore, the Suroan tradition plays a crucial role in preserving cultural heritage. By maintaining and passing down this tradition from one generation to the next, the community not only preserves rituals but also reminds itself of the importance of its history and culture.

Many of the rituals in the Suroan tradition are also connected to respect for the environment and nature. The community is taught to care for nature as part of sustainable living, educating them on the importance of maintaining a clean and sustainable environment.

The values of local wisdom embedded in the Suroan tradition not only strengthen the identity of the Javanese people but also provide a foundation for building a moderate and harmonious society. Through the practice of these values, the community not only preserves tradition but also builds a better future for the next generation.



#### D. Conclusion

The Suroan tradition holds a highly significant role within the Islamic Javanese community in Kediri, functioning not only as a spiritual ritual but also as a profound social practice. This study emphasises that Suroan serves both as an expression of gratitude to God and a medium for strengthening solidarity among community members. Through these rituals, the community can build and reinforce its cultural identity, which is increasingly crucial in globalisation and rapid social change.

The findings reveal that Suroan goes beyond religious dimensions, contributing to the development of interfaith tolerance by creating spaces for dialogue and interaction between different communities. The social elements that influence the practice of *Suroan*, such as traditional values, social norms, and interactions among members, offer insights into how this tradition can adapt to contemporary challenges.

This research provides a broader understanding of how local traditions like Suroan function in promoting religious moderation. It highlights the community's ability to maintain moderation values amidst shifting social dynamics while fostering harmonious interactions across various religious groups. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on the relationship between local traditions and religious moderation within the context of Islamic society in Java.

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