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**RELIGION AND CULTURE: MAINTAINING THE EXISTENCE OF  
THE BUFFALO SACRIFICE TRADITION IN THE COMMUNITY OF  
KUDUS CITY**

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**Abstract**

*Combining culture and religion is a distinctive characteristic of many preachers in conveying religious messages to diverse communities. One prominent example is Sunan Kudus, a revered Islamic figure in Indonesia, who skillfully integrated spiritual and cultural approaches in his da'wah. A notable case of this synthesis is his instruction to refrain from slaughtering cows during Eid al-Adha, reflecting a deep sensitivity to the cultural values of the local Hindu-influenced community. This article seeks to explore the dynamics of cultural and religious acculturation in the context of the Qurban (sacrificial) tradition and to analyze how such blended practices can be sustained over time. Employing a qualitative library research method, the study gathers and examines relevant literature on religious acculturation and cultural preservation. The findings reveal that Sunan Kudus's prohibition was not merely a religious directive but a strategic act of social harmony and cultural diplomacy. The enduring relevance of this tradition is maintained through the transmission of cultural experience and knowledge across generations. Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity in religious practice and highlights how harmonious coexistence can be achieved through thoughtful adaptation of religious rituals within specific cultural contexts.*

**Keywords:** Religion, Culture, Existence, Sunan Kudus.

**INTRODUCTION**

Reviving and preserving ancestral cultural heritage is a step in how traditions survive and is an important part of society. There is no doubt that traditions are able to survive amidst modernity which increasingly distracts existing culture.

In this case, culture becomes an overall part of the results of human life in society. The results of actions carried out by fellow human members as members of society are a manifestation of intelligence, belief, art, morals, laws, and customs that have been in force for a long time. One of them also covers social functions as well. Whereas humans live in a social environment and are bound by a certain culture, the development of a person's character can only be carried out in the relevant social and cultural environment. This means that the development of national culture and character can only be carried out in a process that cannot be separated from the social and cultural functions that have existed for a long time in people's lives.

Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) as quoted by Akhmad Sahal with the idea of "Indigenization of Islam" stated that: Indigenization of Islam is "not changing the religion of Islam, but only changing the manifestation of Islamic religious life itself". Apart from that, "Indigenization of Islam" does not necessarily place Islam subordinate to culture and tradition, nor does it carry out "Jawanization" or syncretism (Wahid, 2007). The goal is how Islam is "understood by taking into account contextual factors, including legal awareness and a sense of justice," and how local needs are taken into account in formulating religious law, without changing the law itself. Based on the statement above, it can be seen how cultural factors play a role in shaping Islam in Indonesia, however, Gus Dur's statement above emphasizes that culture and traditions should not be arbitrary towards Islam.

When community traditions are not built and preserved, indirectly those traditions begin to erode. Among the traditions whose existence is starting to be eroded is the Javanese language in wedding traditions (Prabandari, 2021). Many people do not understand the language used by MCs in guiding traditional Javanese wedding ceremonies. This makes the Fine Javanese/Kromo Inggil language less familiar to today's children. Young people now prefer to use Indonesian or popular languages, such as South Jakarta, when communicating. Moreover, if you look at the South Jakarta language, currently this language has become a new culture of communication.

In this case, globalization has a big influence on changing people's views on culture. When a tradition is then eroded until it is lost, this will have the impact of losing the identity of a particular group. One of the traditions that survives to this day is sacrificing using buffalo. This Islamic ritual activity is carried out by people from middle to upper economic levels who want to make sacrifices, namely on Eid al-Adha. Usually, people make sacrifices using goats or cows, but in practice slaughtering cows is prohibited if you want to carry out animal sacrifices.

Sacrifice using buffalo has been carried out by the community for more than a century, so the culture carried out by the community is believed to be a ritual that must be carried out. Even people do not dare to replace their sacrificial animals with cows. Seeing the phenomenon that

occurs in society and has been able to survive for more than a century, the author is interested in knowing how society can maintain the existence of this culture.

## METHOD

In accordance with the research objectives, this study employs the library research method, which involves the collection of data and information from written sources such as scientific journals, books, encyclopedias, and other reliable documents, both printed and digital, that are directly relevant to the topic under investigation. The library research method entails a series of activities, including identifying, reading, taking notes, and analyzing relevant literature to develop the study's theoretical framework (Mestika, 2008). This approach serves as the foundation for constructing conceptual models, formulating research assumptions, and gathering secondary data.

The study relies solely on documented sources, both published and unpublished, such as journal articles, books, research reports, and academic papers. The literature review also plays a crucial role in helping researchers organize, classify, and integrate relevant sources that contribute to the depth and credibility of the research. As emphasized by Sugiyono (2012), literature is the essence of all recorded human thought, which includes writing, drawings, or monumental works. In the context of this research, such literature provides essential insights and supports the development of the study's analytical framework.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Cultural and religious acculturation**

Culture is the result of creativity, intention, and feeling. In this case, society cannot be separated from culture, because culture is a way of knowing the identity of a society. Without culture, society will lose identity and even idealism. Koentjaraningrat explained that the emergence of a culture must fulfill the elements that are the core of all cultures, namely religious systems and religious ceremonies, social systems and organizations, knowledge systems, language, arts, livelihood systems, and technological and equipment systems (Juhanda, 2019). By looking at these seven elements, what Walisongo, especially Ja'far Sadiq, and Sunan Kudus, did, really understand the cultural conditions of society at that time. The humanist preaching carried out by Sunan Kudus could truly be understood and accepted by society so that the spread of Islam could be well received.

In line with Woodward's statement that everyone believes in their religion always with the right attitude. Therefore, to understand a belief, one thing that must be done seriously is to explore the basic assumptions, logic used, and claims made to the social world which is connected and

related to various religious activities that motivate its adherents (Berger, 1990). As Azyumardi Azra quoted from Nottingham, religious movements in ancient times were very strong and influenced by the personality of the founder and leader. Therefore, understanding the various actors who play a role in the process of Islamization of the Nusantara can alleviate antipathy towards the clear manifestation of the emergence of Islam which has been influenced by cultural patterns in the Nusantara (Andini, 2005).

The success of the da'wah carried out by the propagators of Islam in the Nusantara cannot be separated from the combination of Islam and local culture. This is what the Walisongo did in spreading the religion of Islam. The Walisongo with their intellectual abilities are able to understand the conditions of society quickly and precisely so that they can transform their knowledge into that culture. No wonder the spread of Islam was so rapid and to make Islam accepted by society.

This combination of religion and culture is one of the traditions that has survived since Islam spread in the Nusantara. Combining religion and culture has become one of the role models for the way of preaching carried out by preachers to this day. Through local cultural wisdom, Islamic values can be used as a medium to spread messages of goodness that are more easily understood and accepted by society (Hendra & Hartati, 2019).

Apart from that, according to Mubasyaroh, there are da'wah strategies that can be carried out by da'i by following the principles of persuasive da'wah communication which have been explained in the Qur'an, such as sayings of lines, sayings of sadness, sayings of maysuran, sayings of maturity, sayings of marufa, and sayings of Karima (Mubasyaroh, 2017). If you look more closely at the principle of persuasive da'wah communication, the da'wah pattern carried out by the Walisongo, especially Sunan Kudus, in spreading the religion of Islam really prioritizes the teachings that Rahmatan lil 'alamin.

One of the practices carried out by Sunan Kudus in spreading Islam was replacing the sacrificial animal with a buffalo. Sunan Kudus's process of replacing the sacrificial animal with a buffalo certainly prioritizes the social aspects of society, especially those who have different beliefs. This is because during the time Sunan Kudus lived there were many Hindus in Kudus. As a form of respect for Hinduism, Sunan Kudus finally replaced the sacrificial animal with a buffalo. Cows are believed by Hinduism to be one of the sacred and respected animals.

If you look at it from a religious perspective, the practice carried out by Sunan Kudus of changing cows into buffaloes does not violate existing sharia rules. In Islamic law, it is not implicitly explained that there is a requirement to make sacrifices using cows. Adjusting fiqhiyah issues in

sacrificing is not a heresy that violates religious rules, in fact, replacing the sacrificial animal is highly recommended considering the existing conditions of society (Zamani, 2024).

If we examine further the sacrificial traditions in Saudi Arabia, they do not have a large population of cows or buffalo to serve as sacrificial animals, in fact, the largest livestock there are camels. The hot and deserted environmental conditions in Saudi Arabia mean that livestock other than camels cannot survive for long. Only camels have a strong immune system and are able to walk in the desert.

The form of cultural acculturation carried out by Sunan Kudus is in accordance with Surah al-Hujurat verse 13. This verse explains that there are basic principles of human relations. This basic principle of human relations does not differentiate between men and women, because in the opening of the verse, it says "O humans". Moreover, this verse recommends getting to know other nations and tribes (Nurazizah, 2023).

The verse also recommends building values *hablum minannass*, human relations. Even though there are differences in beliefs, it does not mean that these differences become an arena for conflict between fellow humans. On the contrary, the existence of differences must lead to cooperation that can benefit all parties (Shihab, 2001). Looking at this verse, what Sunan Kudus practiced did not change the order of society. It only shifts the paradigm held by society a little without destroying the religious beliefs of the surrounding community.

Even though the tradition of prohibiting the slaughter of cows on Eid al-Adha is an oral tradition that has been believed by the Kudus people for generations and is considered *pamali*, it does not require the possibility of slaughter by some people who carry out sacrifices using cows. It is known that the people who slaughtered the cows were not native to Kudus, but rather immigrants who lived in Kudus. According to Moh Rosyid, they think that Islam has become the majority religion and only 12 families are Hindu so the practice of slaughtering cows is legal (Rosyid, 2016).

Understanding this tradition that has been carried out from generation to generation requires preservation. Even though the Kudus community as a whole believes in the practice of slaughtering cows on Eid al-Adha, there needs to be a narrative that is reconstructed so that there is no conflict that could damage this tradition.

### **Maintaining Cultural Existence**

There will be the existence of local culture in the people of Kudus district who have long not used cows as sacrificial animals or for slaughter in their area. The arrival of Sunan Kudus in the Kudus community caused a new culture, namely the Islamic religion, to enter politely without any resistance because it was very polite and without harming the culture that had been present

for a long time before. The culture of prohibiting the slaughter of cattle has been passed down from generation to generation until now and will probably continue to apply in more complex social life in the future.

Muslims in Indonesia have long been known to have been successful in spreading their religion throughout the Nusantara. This evidence can be seen in the current dominance of Muslims. This success is inseparable from traders, preachers, kiai, and even Walisongo figures who succeeded in introducing Islamic teachings in cities to remote areas. The Kudus Community has long been formed by many people who adhere to different religions. This condition correlated positively with the general condition of Javanese society at that time who knew religions before Islam, namely Hinduism and Buddhism. These conditions did not become an obstacle for the early spread of Islamic teachings in the Kudus area. As explained by Geertz, most of the people on the island of Java are divided into three groups, namely abangan, santri and priyayi. Geertz stated that this group was strongly influenced by the Hindu-Buddhist religion which has incorporated caste into its teachings (Lutan, 2001).

With the mapping explained by Geertz regarding cultures influenced by other religions, of course, they always experience changes from time to time. This change occurs because it is in line with societal factors that want change to occur. This cultural change occurred very rapidly because one of the factors was the inclusion of elements of globalization into culture. The element of globalization itself actually falls into the realm of culture whose uncontrolled nature pervades the national culture (Tobroni, 2012). Currently, the Indonesian government needs to be more aggressive in promoting Indonesian culture in the international arena, the proof is that foreign people are more familiar with Indonesian culture than Indonesian people. However, this is still within the scope of material culture but is still a bit like tradition and culture which tends to be unique and has not yet spread to society as a whole.

The lifestyle of today's society and the past is very different, this cannot be separated from the flow of globalization so it needs better handling. If not handled well, the most feared effect will occur, namely that it can damage the mentality and morals of the younger generation. Many local cultures are starting to fade due to the lack of generations who have an interest in learning and inheriting them. According to Malinowski, a higher and active culture will certainly influence a lower and passive culture through cultural contact (Koendjaraningrat, 2015). Two categories of forces cause social change, heels, forces from within society itself (internal factor), such as the change of generations and various local discoveries and modifications. Second, forces from outside society (external factor), such as the influence of good intercultural contact directly or indirectly through the spread of cultural elements and environmental changes which in turn can spur the

social and cultural development of communities that must reorganize their own lives (Sendjaja, 1994).

In fact, through cultural learning, we can find out the importance of local culture in building national culture and how to adapt local culture amidst current developments (Sedyawati, 2006). Preservation is an activity carried out continuously, directed, and integrated to realize certain goals that try to reflect the existence of an identity. Cultural preservation efforts need to be made to maintain cultural arts and traditional values by developing manifestations that are dynamic, flexible, and selective, as well as adapting to situations and conditions that are always changing and developing over time. Various efforts can be made to preserve local culture, including:

- a. Raising awareness about the importance of culture as a national identity.
- b. Contribute to preserving culture by participating in its preservation and implementation.
- c. Study it and participate in socializing it or advertising it to other people so that they are interested in taking part in protecting or preserving it and even maintaining it.

As a nation that has a very rich and diverse local culture, as the next generation we are obliged to protect it because the existence and resilience of local culture is in the hands of the younger generation. This is related to the characteristics of regional culture, not all nations have very diverse identities like Indonesia. Apart from the things mentioned above, there are still other ways to maintain the existence and preserve local culture in Indonesia, including as stated by Yunus (Yunus, 2014), namely:

- a. Improving the quality of human resources in advancing local culture;
- b. Encouraging local communities to maximize the potential of local culture along with its empowerment and preservation;
- c. Striving to revive the spirit of tolerance, kinship, hospitality, and high solidarity; And
- d. Always maintain Indonesian culture so that it does not become extinct due to the erosion of time.
- e. As well as ensuring that the community is able to manage local cultural diversity well.

Therefore, the government needs to pay special attention and maintain Indonesian social culture as a national identity. Don't just focus on economic development, but building a cultural image as a strong identity needs to be implemented. By filtering, collecting cultural data, and preserving culture from various regions, this identity will become stronger. Moreover, people can develop traditional art into a part of modern life, of course by modifying past art forms to transform modern society. This will certainly be very interesting by highlighting regional culture as a priceless wealth of the Indonesian nation that is not owned by foreign nations. As the next

generation who are the heirs of the nation's culture, maintaining arts and culture is a very expensive value. With globalization making life easier for people, the existence of regional culture must continue and be preserved.

In this regard, every society certainly does not want to lose its identity from the cultural roots it has had for a long time. From this case example, we can see that a major change has occurred at the structural level. The structural changes referred to in this case are most influenced by communication media, which previously had to be done directly, but now broadcasts or short message broadcasts are considered sufficient. For most people, internet and smartphone technology has a multitude of benefits because it makes it easier for them to communicate. As previously stated by Parsons in Ritzer, we can say that the new structure in the form of the use of communication technology in the social system has been able to establish a functional structure, therefore this structure will last a long time and will go hand in hand with the existing culture of society. existed before (Ritzer, 2012).

## CONCLUSION

The relationship between science and religion is not contradictory; instead, they can complement each other in addressing both existential and empirical human questions. In a multi-structured society, harmonizing science and religion is essential for fostering tolerance and social cohesion.

Although they operate in different domains—science through empirical inquiry and religion through transcendental insight—both contribute to a holistic understanding of human life. Challenges such as identity conflicts, discrimination, and intolerance may be mitigated by integrating religious, national, and scientific values into education and broader social systems.

Strategies such as implementing an integrative curriculum, offering religious moderation courses, utilizing technology-based learning for students, and conducting teacher training programs represent concrete steps toward building a peaceful, adaptive, and open-minded society. Such harmonization fosters constructive dialogue and encourages collaboration across diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, thereby contributing to the development of a more enlightened and inclusive civilization.

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