INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION IN PRESERVING LOCAL TRADITIONS AS A STRATEGY FOR STRENGTHENING RELIGIOUS MODERATION (A CASE STUDY IN YOSOMULYO VILLAGE, GAMBIRAN DISTRICT)

Agus Baihaqi[1], Agung Obianto[2], Afif Mahmudi[3]

[1,2,3] Universitas KH Mukhtar Syafaat Blokagung, Banyuwangi

Email: [1]*agus.baihaqi@iaida.ac.id*, [2]*agungoby@uimsya.ac.id*, [3]*mahmudiafif@iaida.ac.id*

Abstract

Indonesian society is characterized by a high degree of religious, ethnic, and cultural plurality. While this diversity constitutes an important asset for development, it also carries a considerable potential for conflict. Religious moderation is therefore an essential prerequisite for fostering social harmony in a plural society. Yosomulyo Village, Gambiran District, is known for its religious and cultural diversity, whose communities coexist in relative harmony. Residents cultivate trust-based communication and regard religion as a private matter, while communal solidarity is maintained as part of preserving local traditions. They acknowledge the plurality of their community and, through their religious understanding, embody multiculturalism in everyday social life. This article aims to analyze the role of inclusive communication in preserving local traditions as a strategy for strengthening religious moderation in Yosomulyo Village. The study employed a qualitative case-study approach. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. The findings show that local traditions sustained through inclusive communication function as a medium for interfaith social dialogue, strengthen tolerance, and prevent the polarization of religious identities. These findings affirm that communication rooted in local wisdom plays a significant role in fostering contextual and sustainable religious moderation.

Keywords: inclusive communication, local traditions, religious moderation, Yosomulyo Village.

INTRODUCTION

Plurality is an unavoidable social reality in human life. Differences in religion, ethnicity, language, and culture are historical realities that have shaped the development of world civilizations. Yet plurality does not always produce harmonious relations. In many cases, identity differences can become sources of conflict when they are not managed through constructive communication and dialogue. In the global context, Hans

Küng emphasized that there can be no peace among nations without peace among religions, and no peace among religions without broader and more effective dialogue among them (Küng, 1991). This proposition underscores the central position of religion in the dynamics of both global peace and conflict.

Across different parts of the world, religiously framed conflicts are often triggered by theological exclusivism, the politicization of identity, and the lack of equitable spaces for dialogue. Religion, which fundamentally teaches compassion and justice, can be transformed into a source of legitimation for conflict when interpreted narrowly and textually without sufficient attention to social context. This phenomenon suggests that the principal problem lies not in religious teachings themselves, but in how religion is understood and communicated in the public sphere.

Indonesia, as a country characterized by exceptionally high levels of diversity, faces similar challenges. With more than 17,000 islands, hundreds of ethnic groups and languages, and six officially recognized religions, Indonesia represents a microcosm of global plurality. This diversity constitutes extraordinary socio-cultural capital. At the same time, however, plurality also contains the potential for conflict when it is not managed wisely. Indonesian history records a number of social conflicts involving religious and identity dimensions at both local and national levels. Such tensions are frequently fueled by prejudice, stereotypes, and exclusive religious narratives that provide insufficient space for dialogue.

It is within this context that religious moderation has become a strategic national agenda. Religious moderation is not intended to relativize religious teachings; rather, it seeks to affirm ways of practicing religion that are just, balanced, and respectful of differences. It offers a paradigm that positions religion as a source of solutions rather than a source of conflict. Intolerance and violence committed in the name of religion are often rooted in shallow and incomplete religious understandings. The more superficial a person’s understanding of religion, the greater the potential for exclusive and even radical attitudes to emerge. Strengthening religious moderation is therefore an urgent necessity for safeguarding social harmony and national cohesion.

Nevertheless, strengthening religious moderation cannot rely solely on normative-theological approaches or structural policies. Such approaches are important as conceptual frameworks, but they may be ineffective if they fail to engage with the everyday practices of community life. Religious moderation requires socio-cultural strategies rooted in local realities. In rural communities, local traditions constitute a strategic medium for creating spaces of encounter across different identities.

Local traditions embody values of togetherness, mutual cooperation, solidarity, and deliberation that are transmitted across generations. Tradition is not merely a cultural ritual; it is also a space of social interaction in which shared meanings are constructed. From the perspective of cultural anthropology, tradition functions as a symbolic system through which social values are produced and reproduced within community life. When local traditions involve interreligious participation, they have the potential to become

spaces of inclusive communication that bring differences together within an egalitarian setting.

Inclusive communication refers to a mode of communication that recognizes diverse identities and opens space for dialogue on an equal basis. It is oriented not toward domination or conversion, but toward mutual understanding and respect. In plural societies, inclusive communication is a prerequisite for the development of social cohesion. Without inclusive communication, differences can easily turn into social distance and become sources of conflict.

Yosomulyo Village, Gambiran District, Banyuwangi Regency, provides a concrete example of how plurality can be managed harmoniously through local traditions and inclusive communication. The village is inhabited by communities with diverse religious backgrounds, including Islam, Buddhism, Protestant Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, local belief traditions, and Confucianism. Despite the presence of majority and minority groups, social relations in the village remain relatively harmonious. In 2025, Yosomulyo Village was ranked eighth in a national religious moderation competition.

This achievement is closely related to the continuity of local traditions that involve interreligious participation. Practices such as mutual cooperation (gotong royong), village cleansing rituals (bersih desa), communal thanksgiving ceremonies (selamatan kampung), and reciprocal assistance in socio-religious activities create spaces of encounter that strengthen social solidarity. In practice, residents do not emphasize religious identity as a boundary to interaction; instead, they regard difference as part of a social reality that must be respected.

The Yosomulyo case is particularly important because it demonstrates that religious moderation can develop from the bottom up through everyday social practices rather than solely through formal programs. Local traditions function as media of symbolic communication that bring residents together through collective experience. Within these spaces, tolerance and mutual respect are not taught doctrinally but practiced concretely in everyday life.

This article proceeds from the assumption that inclusive communication embedded in the preservation of local traditions functions as a social mechanism for strengthening religious moderation. Inclusive communication enables non-confrontational dialogue, fosters social empathy, and reduces the potential for identity-based conflict. Accordingly, this study focuses on how inclusive communication practices within local traditions in Yosomulyo Village contribute to strengthening religious moderation.

Academically, this study contributes to the development of scholarship on interreligious communication and locally grounded religious moderation. Much of the existing literature on religious moderation continues to focus on normative approaches and public policy, while social praxis at the village level has received comparatively limited in-depth attention. By positioning local traditions as spaces of inclusive communication, this article offers the perspective that social harmony can be built through culturally embedded social mechanisms.

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to provide a model or point of reference for other villages seeking to manage plurality constructively. In the context of national development, community-based religious moderation constitutes an important foundation for building a peaceful, just, and prosperous society.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach within a constructivist paradigm. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to develop an in-depth understanding of the meanings, practices, and processes of inclusive communication that emerge within the local traditions of a plural community. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore subjective experiences, values, and social constructions embedded in community life (Creswell, 2016).

The constructivist paradigm views social reality not as singular and objective, but as collectively constructed through social interaction and symbolic communication (Berger & Luckmann, 1990). In this study, religious moderation is understood as a social reality constructed through everyday communication practices, interreligious participation in local traditions, and social relations that are continuously reproduced in the life of the Yosomulyo Village community.

Research Site and Participants

The study was conducted in Yosomulyo Village, Gambiran District, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java. The site was selected because the village is characterized by a high degree of religious plurality and has a documented record of achievement in the practice of religious moderation at the national level.

Research informants were selected using purposive sampling, namely the deliberate selection of participants according to specific criteria relevant to the research focus (Sugiyono, 2017). The informant criteria included:

1. Village officials involved in the management of social activities and local traditions.
2. Religious leaders from different faith communities who are actively involved in interfaith activities.
3. Community leaders or village elders with knowledge of the village's social history and the dynamics of interreligious relations.

This technique was employed to ensure that the data were obtained from social actors with direct experience of inclusive communication practices.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using three main techniques:

First, in-depth interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to provide sufficient space for exploring informants' experiences, perspectives, and reflections concerning religious moderation and local traditions. In-depth interviews enabled the

researchers to examine meanings underlying social actions that may not be immediately observable (Kvale, 2009).

Second, participant observation was undertaken through the researchers' direct involvement in several social activities and local traditions, including mutual cooperation, village communal ceremonies (selametan desa), and religious activities involving interfaith participation. Participant observation enabled the researchers to understand the dynamics of social interaction in their natural and contextual settings (Spradley, 1980).

Third, documentation was collected from village archives, population data from the Village Administration System (Simada), activity photographs, and official documents related to local traditions and interreligious activities. These documents served as supporting data and as triangulation materials to enhance the validity of the study.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously following the analytical model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which consists of three stages:

1. Data reduction, namely the process of selecting, simplifying, and categorizing data according to the research themes, including forms of inclusive communication, patterns of interreligious participation, barriers to dialogue, and strategies for maintaining social harmony.
2. Data display, namely the organization of data into descriptive narratives, thematic matrices, and diagrams showing relationships among concepts in order to facilitate interpretation.
3. Conclusion drawing and verification, namely the process of formulating the main findings and examining data consistency through source and methodological triangulation.

Data trustworthiness was maintained through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and follow-up confirmation with informants (member checking) to ensure that the researchers' interpretations corresponded to the social realities intended by the research participants.

Results and Discussion

1. Portrait of Religious Plurality in Yosomulyo Village

   Yosomulyo Village is one of the villages in Gambiran District, Banyuwangi Regency, characterized by a high degree of religious plurality within a rural context. According to Village Administration System (Simada) data as of October 2025, the village had a population of 13,482 residents adhering to seven religions and belief traditions.

   The population composition by religion is as follows:

   - Islam: 11,487 people (88%)
   - Buddhism: 1,034 people (7.6%)
   - Protestant Christianity: 505 people (3.7%)
   - Catholicism: 67 people (0.5%)

- Hinduism: 16 people (0.11%)
- Local Belief Traditions: 9 people (0.06%)
- Confucianism: 4 people (0.03%)

Adherents of these religions and belief traditions are distributed across five hamlets: Krajan, Sidomukti, Sidorejo Kulon, Sidorejo Wetan, and Sidotentrem. Buddhist residents are relatively concentrated in Sidomukti and Sidorejo Wetan. Historically, the village was formerly known as Karangasem and was officially renamed Yosomulyo in 1953 by the Besuki Resident. The renaming was intended to establish a more positive image for the village. Initially, the religions and belief traditions practiced by residents included Islam, Hinduism, and local belief traditions. Buddhism and Christianity began to develop around 1967, with some Buddhist adherents originating from communities practicing local belief traditions. Plurality in the village is not merely administrative but also genealogical and cultural. Most residents maintain strong kinship ties. Interreligious marriage is relatively common, and members of a single family may therefore adhere to different religions, including differences between parents and children. From a constructivist perspective, this condition contributes to an inclusive social reality because religious identity does not exist separately from kinship identity.

2. Local Traditions as Spaces of Inclusive Communication

Most residents of Yosomulyo Village work as farmers and agricultural laborers. The communal character of rural social structures strengthens the culture of mutual cooperation and social solidarity. Local traditions provide regular and recurring spaces for interreligious encounters.

Several forms of inclusive communication identified in the study include:

a. Interreligious mutual cooperation, both in the construction of public facilities and in village social activities.
b. Village communal ceremonies (selametan desa), attended by residents regardless of religious background.
c. Interreligious participation in major religious celebrations, including mutual assistance during Eid al-Fitr, Vesak, and Christmas.
d. Solidarity in times of bereavement, whereby Buddhist residents attend yasinan and tahlilan gatherings in Muslim households, while Muslim residents also attend seven-day memorial prayers held by bereaved Buddhist families.

These practices demonstrate that inclusive communication is not confined to discourse but is implemented through concrete social action. Local traditions function as media of symbolic communication that bring different identities together within equal social spaces. Within the framework of religious moderation, these practices reflect four principal indicators: national commitment, tolerance, non-violence, and accommodation of local culture (Kementerian Agama RI, 2019). Local traditions are not positioned as threats to religious teachings, but as bridges that strengthen social cohesion.

3. Religious Moderation as a Social Construction

The findings indicate that religious moderation in Yosomulyo Village does not arise solely from formal programs, but is the outcome of a long-term process of social construction. Kinship relations, economic interaction, and communal traditions have formed an inclusive social habitus.

Inclusive communication is developed through:

- Natural everyday dialogue
- Interaction in economic activities
- Joint participation in village traditions
- Collective awareness of the need to maintain harmony

Thus, religious moderation in Yosomulyo Village is not merely a normative slogan, but a living social practice that has become institutionalized within the community's local traditions.

DISCUSSION

1. Local Traditions as Spaces of Inclusive Communication in Yosomulyo Village

Local traditions in Yosomulyo Village are not merely routine cultural activities; they function as social spaces that bring residents of different religions together in meaningful collective experiences. Activities such as mutual cooperation, village cleansing rituals, communal thanksgiving ceremonies, and local cultural celebrations constitute arenas of social interaction that transcend formal religious identity boundaries. In practice, residents participate not as representatives of particular religions, but as members of a social community with a shared responsibility for sustaining village life.

Interreligious participation in local traditions demonstrates a collective awareness that social togetherness takes precedence over differences in theological identity. These traditions function as unifying media of symbolic communication. From Clifford Geertz's perspective, traditions and rituals constitute systems of symbols that carry social meanings and shape the ways in which communities understand reality (Geertz, 1973). In Yosomulyo, traditional symbols such as tumpeng, communal prayers, community service, and collective gatherings become a social language understood by all residents regardless of their religious backgrounds.

Local traditions also create fluid spaces for informal dialogue. Dialogue does not necessarily take the form of theological discussion; rather, it emerges through familiar everyday interactions. During mutual cooperation activities, for example, communication develops through working together, joking, and sharing tasks. Such communication patterns build emotional bonding that strengthens social cohesion. Emile Durkheim described this phenomenon as mechanical solidarity, namely solidarity that arises from shared collective experiences (Durkheim, 1912).

Significantly, local traditions in Yosomulyo do not erase religious identities; instead, they situate those identities within a framework of social togetherness. Religious identities remain recognized and respected but are not used as

instruments of exclusivism. Local traditions therefore function as social mechanisms that mitigate the potential for conflict. When residents are accustomed to interacting within shared communal settings, interreligious prejudice and stereotypes can be minimized.

From a communication perspective, local traditions function as spaces of communicative action, as conceptualized by Jürgen Habermas: communication oriented toward mutual understanding and consensus (Habermas, 1984). Social consensus in Yosomulyo is not produced through structural coercion, but through a shared awareness that emerges from collective experiences within village traditions. This process makes local traditions an effective foundation for inclusive communication.

In addition, local traditions embody forms of local wisdom that strengthen solidarity, including mutual cooperation, deliberation, and respect for ancestors. These values become collectively accepted social norms. When consistently practiced across religious communities, such norms foster a natural and sustainable culture of dialogue.

Thus, local traditions in Yosomulyo Village are not merely forms of cultural heritage, but strategic social instruments for building inclusive communication. They provide spaces of encounter in which differences are brought together in an egalitarian and mutually respectful environment.

2. Inclusive Communication in Socio-Religious Practices

Within religiously diverse settings, inclusive communication is a fundamental prerequisite for the development of moderate attitudes. Inclusive communication opens spaces for interfaith dialogue and promotes social empathy. In Yosomulyo Village, inclusive communication is characterized by three main features: openness, the use of egalitarian local language, and mutual respect for each community's beliefs.

First, openness is reflected in residents' willingness to attend the socio-religious activities of other faith communities. Such participation is not intended to blur doctrinal boundaries, but rather to express social solidarity. For example, Buddhist residents attend tahlilan gatherings held by Muslim families as an expression of social empathy, while Muslim residents assist with seven-day memorial prayer rituals organized by Buddhist families. This pattern demonstrates a clear distinction between social participation and theological commitment.

Second, the use of egalitarian local language strengthens inclusive communication. Language serves as a medium that places residents on an equal social footing. No form of language is used to dominate or demean others. Communication takes place in a relaxed and familiar atmosphere. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, language is an important instrument in the construction of social meaning (Blumer, 1969). In Yosomulyo, local language functions as a social bond that reinforces a sense of togetherness.

Third, religious leaders play a significant role in sustaining moderate religious narratives. Religious leaders in the village do not use religious platforms to disseminate exclusivist messages; instead, they emphasize the importance of harmonious coexistence. Inclusive religious narratives reduce the likelihood of hate speech and sectarian provocation. This role is consistent with the concept of moral authority within communities, whereby religious leaders act as guardians of social harmony.

Inclusive communication in Yosomulyo also takes the form of symbolic communication. The presence of residents from different religions during Eid al-Fitr, Christmas, or Vesak celebrations symbolizes recognition of the existence of other religious communities. Such symbols reinforce the message that difference is not a threat, but part of a social reality that must be respected.

Within the framework of communicative action theory, communication among Yosomulyo residents is oriented toward mutual understanding. The purpose of communication is not to prevail in theological argument, but to build social understanding. Inclusive communication therefore functions as a mechanism of social learning through which moderate attitudes develop organically.

3. Strengthening Religious Moderation through Local Traditions

Religious moderation in Yosomulyo Village does not emerge as a normative concept imposed from outside, but grows out of everyday social experience. Local traditions provide a practical foundation for the formation of a moderate religious habitus. Pierre Bourdieu defines habitus as a system of dispositions formed through repeated social experiences (Bourdieu, 1990). In the Yosomulyo context, experiences of mutual cooperation and interreligious interaction contribute to the development of tolerant social dispositions.

The strengthening of religious moderation is reflected in several aspects. First, residents help one another regardless of religious affiliation. Second, they respect the religious celebrations of each community. Third, they reject hate speech and sectarian provocation. When sensitive religious issues arise, community and religious leaders promptly provide clarification and initiate dialogue to prevent such issues from escalating into conflict.

These findings indicate that religious moderation is more effectively cultivated through socio-cultural approaches than through normative-theological approaches alone. Normative approaches remain important as doctrinal foundations; however, without concrete social experience, religious moderation is unlikely to become deeply rooted.

The Yosomulyo model demonstrates that local traditions can serve as strategic instruments for social development at the village level. Togetherness expressed through mutual cooperation, village communal ceremonies, and socio-religious rituals helps shape an approach to religious life that is just, balanced, and respectful

of differences. Religious moderation is understood not as a compromise of faith, but as an ethical orientation in social life.

Accordingly, strengthening religious moderation requires cultural communication strategies that are integrated into the everyday practices of community life. Local traditions provide effective spaces of praxis for grounding the values of tolerance and harmony. This model can be replicated in other areas with appropriate adaptation to each locality's specific forms of local wisdom.

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