

The role of religious leaders on the development of village communities: The case of Teluk Awur Village Jepara, Indonesia

*Mudjahirin Thohir*¹

¹Department of Indonesian Literature, Faculty Humanities, Diponegoro University, Semarang – Indonesia

Abstract. This research focuses on the role played by religious leaders in the community towards the implementation of existing community religious communal rituals; Is the involvement of community members in ritual activities used by religious leaders to make them aware of the need to improve the quality of life by increasing the people's economy. The data collection method was carried out by interviews and focus group discussions. The analysis used is based on the actors (leaders) based model theory.

1 Introduction

Teluk Awur is one of the villages in the Tahunan district of Jepara, with a population of around 1882 people, the majority of whom are Muslim, and the general occupation of the community is self-employed, such as carving, trade, farming and casual labor (see Jepara Statistical Data, 2020). In this village, there is also the Diponegoro University II campus which has a very large area, so it is reasonable that the village community needs attention.

In the majority of the population who are Muslim, the role of religious leaders becomes important. The question as the focus of this study is who is categorized as a religious figure, what role is played, is it related to the world of work? If "yes" in what perspective? If "no", then how do they play a role and are played by the community?

To answer this question, data collection was carried out directly in the field through purposive interviews with informants, both those who were called religious leaders, as well as members of the general public. After obtaining the initial data, then a cross-check was carried out through a focus group discussion. It means that data were obtained by interviewing informants in the purposive category of religious leaders. Information gathered from subsequent interviews was developed and cross-checked by means of focus group discussions as suggested in the qualitative study (see Cresswell, 2014).

2 Result and Discussion

The majority (98%) of the people of Teluk Awur Jepara are Muslim, making religious leaders have an important role, not only because they teach religious moral issues but also together with other community leaders, build the construction of social harmony.

Those who are called religious figures are the heads of management of social-religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama, have the capacity of religious knowledge, are leaders of religious rituals, are khotib (speakers) in Friday prayers and generally teach religious schools. In particular, they have a role of giving advice in marriage rituals and communal rituals such as village alms rituals.

Their position and role are increasingly important if they are economically affluent and have popularity. From field studies, the role of religious leaders is not directly related to issues of empowerment in the economic sector. They specifically focus on the development of religious morality in the context of realizing harmony in the family and social environment. However, it is interesting to note, because in their view, living in harmony is the main basis for success in life, including in economic activities.

What is the strategy of religious leaders to be heard and respected? From the field study, it was found that the approach strategy they chose was to combine religious and cultural understandings, not separate them. Religion is not interpreted dogmatically (legal dogma) but is understood through the example of the behavior of the Prophet (Muhammad), including his sayings (hadith) and the behavior of admired village ancestors, to serve as role models for successful life as a religious human being as well as a human being with a social life. Such an approach is characteristic of the actor based model approach.

From the results of the interviews and focus group discussions, it appears that these religious leaders put more emphasis on the importance of maintaining social morals and ethics as the entry point for success in economic activity (maesah). Their suggestions are general, namely first, responsibility and motivation, starting from oneself at the personal (individual) level, then to family level, and the last is social level. They exemplify the prophet Muhammad as an honest, intelligent, and communicative trader. Second, thrifty attitude, not consumptive. Third, dare to start, but with knowledge and hard work. If you fail in the middle of the road, take the positive side, namely gaining experience. An experience that doesn't need to be repeated. That's intelligence. If it still fails, another job alternative is needed according to space and opportunity.

They say that every human being has the same time, namely 24 hours in a day. The question is, how many hours of time are provided to pursue this business activity with strong responsibility and motivation?

Next, at the household (family) level. Isn't marriage a pledge to achieve a common goal? Commitment to one goal of living life together, the prayer said by the marriage counselor: "*Allahumma allif baina huma*".

The shared goal of the husband and wife [household], according to local terms, is known as the concept of "gotong gawe" [bebrayan; work together]. It is with this commitment that rizki is sought together. The end result, not the main wealth as a measure, but happiness.

To emphasize the importance of such a construction of conjugal fidelity, it is very interesting when religious figures remind their citizens repeatedly about an ancestral legend called "Roro Kemuning (compare Pudentia, 2015)". Who is Roro Kemuning? She is a very beautiful woman, the wife of a religious figure named Syeh Jundan. One day, a king was tempted by her beauty and forced her to marry him, but Roro Kemuning made conditions that were impossible to fulfill. She remains faithful to her husband. Through this legend, the wives of Teluk Awur residents take an example. This is the first provision in family life: a wife is loyal to her husband.

Another important message from religious leaders, presented through rhetorical questions: Why are people successful? Then they gave the answer: because of knowledge, according to the argument: "*man aroda*

dunya fa alaihi bil ilmi, wa man aroda al Akhirata, faalihi bil ilmi. Wa man aroda huma, fa alaihi bil ilmi. The meaning in short: to be successful in this world and in the hereafter, the provision is knowledge.

In order to convey moral messages to residents, religious leaders in this village also take advantage of space and opportunities in communal rituals. Events commemorating the month of Muharram (Hijriyah year), commemorating the independence of the Republic of Indonesia every night on August 17, as well as commemorating (Haaul) village ancestors, exhortations to the importance of cooperation and tolerance are often conveyed. Such socio-religious movements are intended to create social cohesion among citizens themselves.

Such socio-religious movements are intended to create social cohesion among citizens themselves. In a symbolic sense, the need for social cohesion is manifested by the way each member of the community brings food and fruit, then collects and distributes it again. The symbolic message, "what you feel, we feel too". This is harmony living together

3 Conclusion

Is the role of religious leaders as described above, are the residents obeyed? The answer is up to each individual. For residents, religious figures who are often called kiai or ulema are still considered important as a direction for the formation of social-religious morals, but when it comes to economic activities, in general, residents have preferences according to their social network.

In the past, around 50 years ago, those who were called kiai or ulema, were the people's references for any matters. But nowadays, religious figures called kiai are seen in a special role, namely in religious activities, and giving advice related to religious ethics and morality. Beyond that, as in relation to economic activities and even in politics, the clergy are no longer a figure that is asked for primary consideration.

Reference

1. Berger, Peter L & Thomas Luckman. 1991. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Penguin Books.
2. Creswell, John W. 2014. *Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. SAGE. Publication.
3. Pudentia, 2015. *Oral Tradition Study Methodology*. Jakarta: Torch Sujatmiko, Edy 2022 *Overview and Socio-Cultural Conditions of Jepara Regency* (paper). Not published.
4. Thohir, Mujahirin. 2006. *Coastal Javanese Muslims*. Semarang: Fasindo