
Gus Baha's Perspective on Religious Tolerance and How the Public Respond

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Abstract

Tolerance in religion practices among different groups or different religious communities is always important in plural societies like Indonesia. However, the fact shows that many intolerance cases still occur in the country. This study is an endeavour to explore the tolerance teaching brought by Gus Baha in his traditional Islamic lectures. In addition, the reaction of the public to the teaching was also examined. It adopted a digital ethnography approach employing virtual data as the main sources, including YouTube Video, and the comments of netizen following them. The ideas of tolerance were analyzed thematically, and the comments were classified, following the Appraisal theory (Martin & Rose, 2005). Based on the analysis, it reveals that Gus Baha makes use of old stories involving prophets, the Prophet and his companion as they implemented tolerant practices of daily business and religious matters. The stories there proved upscaled tolerance exemplified by the best models for Moslem communities. The public (netizen) have shown positive responses toward the ideas, as it is proved from their positive emotion (80%), and judgment (74%), meaning they like the idea and agree that they are right. In turn, it is expected that they would practice the models of tolerance in their own daily lives.

Keywords: Religious Tolerance, Teaching, Appraisal, Public Response



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1. Introduction

The ability to tolerate and appreciate other people's religious practices and beliefs, regardless of how they differ from one's own, is known as religious tolerance. It entails honoring and accepting the customs and doctrines of different religions. This requires accepting other people's legitimate religious practices and beliefs, even if they differ from one's own (Hambali, 2023; UUA, n.d.). Tolerance necessitates compassion and an appreciation of others' differences. It needs avoiding bias, appreciating

and respecting diversity, and having a positive outlook on other people (Hambali, 2023; Al Fariz & Saloom, 2021).

Tolerance, seen from a different angle, is about embracing diversity and being free from prejudice. It requires an individual to be accommodating and engaging in day-to-day interactions rather than forcing one's own understandings and views on others (Al Fariz & Saloom, 2021). Such positive behavior can be demonstrated by constructive interactions amongst individuals of diverse religious beliefs. They are involved in interfaith dialogue, offering cooperation in certain aspects of life (excluding faith-related matters), and competing in virtues to build the nation (Hambali, 2023).

Over time, the idea of religious tolerance has changed. Early Western edicts, such as the Edict of Milan (313 CE), gave Christians and non-Christians the freedom to assemble and practice, although these edicts were frequently motivated by ulterior objectives and were not always truly tolerant[4]. Religious tolerance has been a contentious issue in the public sphere, raising issues with acceptance in both society and religious traditions. Communities have grappled with the issue of permitting differences in beliefs and practices, which has resulted in historical instances where leaders and governments have debated these issues (UUA, n.d.).

In Indonesian context, although it may not be very apparent recently, cases of intolerance still persist. In December 2022, several Christmas events in various regions were disrupted by groups opposing the celebrations, indicating a rise in intolerance towards the Christian community (Setara Institute, 2022). In August 2023, a Christian church in East Java was attacked by individuals who opposed its existence, drawing attention from numerous human rights organizations (Komnas HAM, 2023).

In Bali, reports indicate that Hindu followers often face discrimination, such as being prevented from building new places of worship, which contradicts the values of tolerance that should be upheld (National Network Report, 2023). Additionally, in areas like Sampang in Madura, frequent conflicts between Sunni and Shia groups have led to violence and the expulsion of the Shia community (Komnas HAM, 2023).

Respect, admiration, and acceptance of the existence of different religious adherents and beliefs are examples of religious tolerance in Indonesia. Instead of being actively aware, it is frequently used as a cover for indifference to the opinions and differences of others (Hambali, 2023). Therefore, acceptance, respect, empathy, and constructive involvement are all necessary components of the complicated idea of religious tolerance. It is necessary to promote inclusive living and to create religious peace in a pluralistic community. The goal of continuous efforts to measure and validate tolerance scales is to increase understanding and foster better acceptance of diverse religious beliefs, even though practical implementation and historical evolution have presented difficulties.

Only few studies on tolerance in Indonesia have been conducted recently. A study was undertaken to measure the tolerance scale among the people. It is found out that the scale had good psychometric properties but required further testing with a more diverse sample. The scale was unidimensional with three aspects: fairness, empathy, and reasonableness. However, one item in the fairness dimension was not valid (Budiman et al., 2021). With a different approach, Idris et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative study to understand the role of Islamic teaching to grow the tolerance among the communities. Through an in-depth interview, they explore how the influence of education can profoundly affect a positive angle in seeing the differences. Their findings highlighted the importance of Islamic teachings in fostering tolerance. Despite challenges like the politicization of religion and extremist ideologies, the study emphasized individual and community efforts to promote interfaith understanding through dialogue and education[2]. A similar study on high school students was examined in West Kalimantan to discover the impact of multicultural education to their tolerance over diversity (Fernando et al., 2024). They underscored the role of multicultural education in promoting diversity awareness among the younger generation. The study found that multicultural education was crucial for minimizing ethnic conflicts and fostering social capital in post-conflict regions like West Kalimantan.

This study explored tolerance by making use of digital data. The video of Gus Baha religious lectures addressing tolerance were collected to see his ideas, and the comments following them as the impact were classified to reveal their responses on the tolerance ideas. As known recently, social media has become a major information source for the public. The case is much more extensive among Indonesian, where moslem is the largest part (Israel & Wilson, 2006; Fernando et al., 2024). It is said that "the (YouTube) platform is ...home to significant amount of religious content", and also other materials like scholarly articles, documentaries, and educational videos (Library, n.d.). With the huge audiency, it is expected that the tolerance teaching through the platform can influence a good religious mindset for the viewers as part of Indonesian public.

2. Method

This is a qualitative study, utilizing a digital ethnography design to analyze social media data and understand public perceptions on specific issues (see Tornberg & Tornberg, 2016; Fangena & Holter, 2020). The focus is on the themes of moderation in the sermons of Gus Baha (GB) broadcasted on YouTube. It also examines viewer perceptions of these sermons. Data sources comprise videos and comments related to tolerance, collected from various channels featuring Gus Baha's content, including shorter videos. Comments were gathered from a single video with the highest views and engagement. The video taken include 1) *Dengarkan ini ! Batasan toleransi beragama !! Gus Baha*, kanal **NU Channel**, 2) *Toleransi Antara Islam dan Nasrani - Gus Baha Bahasa Indonesia*, Kanal **Suara Literasi** 18 Juni 2021. Sedangkan data komentar diambil dari video *Gus Baha: Beginilah, Batasan Interaksi Muslim dan Non Muslim* dari kanal **Bijahil Habib Official**. The lectures in the video were analyzed using content analysis, by identifying their themes of tolerance strategies used by the Gus Baha. Meanwhile the comments were analyzed by applying Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005).

3. Findings and Discussions

Tolerance is a critical component of social cohesion, enabling individuals to interact with people who hold different beliefs and practices. Tolerance encompasses attitudes ranging from acceptance to respect. Understanding these aspects is essential to fostering tolerance in diverse societies. Tolerance is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses attitudes of acceptance, respect, and appreciation for differences in beliefs, practices, and lifestyles. This tolerance is essential for the peaceful functioning of diverse societies, such as Indonesia.

The main aspects of tolerance are acceptance and respect. As part of a pluralistic society, we must recognize and respect the rights of individuals to live their lives as they wish, even if what they live is different or even contrary to our beliefs (Hjerm et al. (2020); Klein and Zick (2013). Tolerance can take various ways of behaving (multidimensional) such as passive acceptance, aesthetic acceptance, acceptance, and appreciation (Hjerm et al.: 2020).

Gus Baha discusses this issue of tolerance by proposing the premise, "*Al'ilmu yaritsul ahwal*" ("*ilmu melahirkan sikap*", "knowledge/understandin leads the attitudes"). If we have sufficient references about tolerance, then it will be the guide in our action. "By adhering to the reference of the exemplary attitude of the Apostle, then wherever and whatever we face, the attitude of tolerance will become an inherent lens. The Apostle has given an example of an attitude of forgiveness and tolerance towards people or groups that are different or even hostile to him.

Ketika nabi mau dibunuh oleh orang namanya Da'sur. Ketika beliau sedang bersantai di suatu tempat. Tiba-tiba ada orang yang mengambil pedangnya. Sekarang kamu dan saya hanya berdua, siapa yang bisa menghalangi kamu? Nabi dengan rileks *ngendikan*, "Allah." Lalu si Da'sur gemetar, pedang jatuh diambil nabi. Rasul: "Sekarang Da'sur...siapa yang bisa menghalangi kamu siapa?" "*La ahada*, tidak siapa pun." Nabi dengan gampangnya memaafkan. Padahal ini jenis harbi, karena niat membunuh. (*Dengarkan Ini ! Batasan Toleransi Beragama !! Gus Baha*, kanal NU Channel 8 Juni 2023)

The Prophet was about to be killed by a man named Da'sur. As he was relaxing in a certain place, Suddenly, Da'sur took out his sword and said, "Now it's just you and me, who can help you?" The Prophet calmly replied, "Allah." Da'sur trembled, and his sword fell, which the Prophet then picked up. The Prophet asked, "Now Da'sur... who can help you?" Da'sur answered, "No one." The Prophet easily forgave him, even though this was an act of aggression, as he had the intention to kill.

GB presents the story of tolerance practiced by the Apostle, as the highest exemplary figure in the reference of the attitude of Islamic society, with a very extreme attitude of tolerance. The Prophet could forgive someone who clearly intended and was about to kill him. Despite the threat, the Prophet would have found it very easy to take revenge. On the contrary, the Prophet forgave and released his would-be killer. This story is clearly an attitude of the highest tolerance because it deals with the lives of Muslims, even the soul of an Apostle. The highest threat is apparently exemplified by the fact that tolerance (forgiveness, understanding) can still be given without any conditions.

The Prophet Muhammad SAW showed an extraordinary attitude of tolerance when facing Da'sur who wanted to kill him. With a relaxed and forgiving answer, the Prophet showed that he was not affected by the bad intentions of others. This attitude shows that the Prophet not only respects the freedom of individuals to embrace any religion, but also respects the courage of others to express their intentions, even if it means endangering themselves.

This example can be reflected in the context of Indonesian Islam by respecting and appreciating the differences in religions that exist in Indonesia. In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, tolerance is very important to maintain harmony and harmony between each other. The tolerant attitude of the Prophet Muhammad SAW can be an example for Muslims in Indonesia to deal with differences that exist in society. By forgiving and respecting differences, Muslims can create a more peaceful and harmonious environment.

GB, on another occasion also shared historical stories that contain teachings of tolerance related to respecting religious practices carried out by other religions.

Dulu nabi itu nggak puasa Asyura. Tapi ketika datang ke Madinah, beliau melihat orang-orang Yahudi melaksanakan puasa itu. Coba kamu tanyakan kenapa mereka puasa tanggal 10? Mereka menjawab: "itu hari yang Allah menyelamatkan nabi Musa. Terus "Amaro bishiyam". Nabi menyuruh sahabat berpuasa. Artinya dulu itu segampang itu hidup. Untuk sesuatu yang baik. Memberi percontohan kita... (Dengarkan Ini ! Batasan Toleransi Beragama !! Gus Baha, kanal NU Channel 8 Juni 2023)

The Prophet didn't use to do fasting on Ashura. But when he arrived in Medina, he saw the Jews observing that fast. When he asked them why they fasted on the 10th Ashura, they replied, "It's the day God saved Prophet Moses." Then he said to his companions, "You should fast too." It used to be that simple in life—doing something good and setting an example for us.

The Prophet Muhammad SAW did not force his religious beliefs on the Jews in Medina. Instead, he respected and acknowledged the Ashura fast carried out by the Jews. This shows that the Prophet had a tolerant attitude towards religious and cultural differences. As stated in one study that "During the preaching of the Prophet Muhammad SAW there was never any news that the Prophet Muhammad SAW forced others to convert to Islam and ever did bad things to others" (Ritajuddiroyah, 2020; Fitriani, 2020).

When he saw the Jews fasting on Ashura, he decided to adopt it. However, the Prophet did not just follow the tradition directly. He changed it to fasting on the 10th and 11th of Ashura. This shows that the Prophet not only respected differences, but was also able to integrate new traditions into the lives of his community. "The Prophet ordered his companions to fast. It means that life was that easy. For something good, the Prophet adopted it, even though the Prophet changed it to fasting on the 10th and 11th of Ashura". By adopting and changing the tradition of fasting on Ashura, the Prophet

Muhammad SAW created a more harmonious and tolerant environment. This historical fact shows that tolerance is not only about respecting differences, but also about integrating differences into the lives of society, whenever possible and without crossing the boundaries of sharia rules. This is in line with the meaning of tolerance expressed by Shihab (2022) as "the courage to respect and appreciate the differences between us, so that life remains harmonious and peaceful" (Shihab, 2022).

In the religious context in Indonesia, the example of the tolerance of the Prophet Muhammad SAW in dealing with religious differences in Medina can be an inspiration for Muslims in Indonesia to respect and appreciate the religious differences that exist in society. KBBI defines tolerance as "behaving in a way that tolerates (respects, allows, permits) positions (opinions, views, beliefs, habits and behavior) that are different or contrary to one's own positions" (Ritajuddiroyah, 2020; Fitriani, 2020).

In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, the example of the tolerance of the Prophet Muhammad SAW can be used as an inspiration to integrate differences into people's lives. By respecting and integrating differences, society can create a more harmonious and peaceful environment. Yasir (2014) views tolerance as "an open attitude when facing differences, which contains an attitude of mutual respect and appreciation for the existence of differences between each party" (Yasir, 2014).

The story told by Gus Baha shows how the Prophet Muhammad SAW faced religious and cultural differences in Medina by respecting and integrating differences into community life. This example can be an inspiration for Muslims in Indonesia to respect and appreciate religious differences in society, and to create a more harmonious and peaceful environment, of course within the scope of Islamic law.

Saya hanya mengambil kisah dari kitab *Ar-Risalah al-Qusyairiyah*... Suatu saat di antara tamu Ibrahim a.s. itu ada yang berakidah Majusi... terus Nabi Ibrahim nggak mau. Saya mau ngasih makan, syaratnya Anda harus Islam. Akhirnya orang ini putus asa kemudian meninggalkan Nabi Ibrahim. Saat orang itu meninggalkan Nabi Ibrahim Allah memberi wahyu ke Nabi, "Ibrahim orang itu umurnya 50 tahun dan dia hidup karena tak kasih makan," kata Allah. "Ngasih makan dia 50 tahun tanpa syarat dia harus Islam. Kamu baru dimintai makan sehari mensyaratkan Islam. Alhasil terus Nabi Ibrahim ngejar orang majusi itu. Terus "Monggo Monggo makan di rumah saya." Singkat cerita terus orang Majusi itu tanya, "Kenapa Anda berubah pikiran?" Nabi Ibrahim cerita bahwa dia ditegur Allah. (Dengarkan Ini ! Batasan Toleransi Beragama !! Gus Baha, kanal NU Channel 8 Juni 2023) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMdEi2BpCos>)

I'm just sharing a story from the book *Ar-Risalah al-Qushyairiyah*... One time, among Abraham's guests, there was someone with a Zoroastrian belief, and Abraham didn't want to host him. He said, "I want to feed you, unless you convert to be Muslim." Eventually, this person became hopeless and left. Soon after it, God revealed to Abraham, "That man is 50 years old, and he has lived because I feed him," said God. "You refused to feed him for just one day unless he converted to Islam, while I have fed him for 50 years without any conditions." So, Abraham ran after the Zoroastrian and said, "Please come back, and have a meal at my house." Having wondered about Abraham's attitude, he asked, "Why did you change your mind?" Abraham explained that he just received a reprimand from God.

Tolerance in the text shows how the Prophet Ibrahim faced religious differences in a wise and tolerant manner. The following is a detailed analysis and explanation of tolerance in this context, integrating scientific references. He did not force his religious beliefs on the Magians. Instead, he respected and recognized their freedom to embrace their own religion. This shows that the Prophet had a tolerant attitude towards religious differences. "*Islam mengajarkan toleransi dan penghormatan terhadap keyakinan lain. Nabi Ibrahim SAW tidak memaksakan keyakinannya kepada orang-orang Majusi*" (Islam teaches tolerance and respect for other beliefs. Prophet Ibrahim SAW did not force his religious beliefs on the Magians) (Ghazaly, 2020).

When Allah revealed to Prophet Ibrahim that the Magians lived because they were not fed, Prophet Ibrahim SAW changed his mind and respected their freedom of religion. This shows that the Prophet respects Allah's command and respects freedom of religion. "Allah revealed to Prophet Ibrahim that the Magians lived because they were not fed. Prophet Ibrahim SAW changed his mind and respected their freedom of religion" (Ghazaly, 2020). In a pluralistic society like Indonesia, the example of tolerance of Prophet Ibrahim SAW can be used as an inspiration to integrate differences into people's lives. By respecting and integrating differences, society can create a more harmonious and peaceful environment. *"Toleransi merupakan sikap terbuka ketika menghadapi perbedaan, didalamnya mengandung sikap saling menghargai dan menghormati eksistensi perbedaan masing-masing pihak"* ("Tolerance is an open attitude when facing differences, in which there is an attitude of mutual respect and appreciation for the existence of differences in each party) (Yasir, 2014).

The tolerance in the story shows how the Prophet Ibrahim SAW faced religious differences in a wise and tolerant manner. This example can be an inspiration for Muslims in Indonesia to respect and appreciate the religious differences that exist in society, and to create a more harmonious and peaceful environment. In presenting references to tolerance from the stories of the prophets, GB believes that an individual will grow into a tolerant person, based on true knowledge about tolerance. Gus Baha stated firmly that tolerance is nothing other than part of Islamic teachings, such as the title of the book that is the reference for his lecture, *Ar-Risalah al-Qusyairiyah* written by Sayid Bakar Sato.

Social context of GB's tolerance teaching

The social context of Gus Baha's teaching of tolerance is the occurrence of conflict in society triggered by an intolerant attitude towards religious practices from other Islamic religions/communities. These incidents include the following:

1. Destruction of Worship House

Cases of destruction and throwing of places of worship have occurred in several regions in Indonesia. One example is the destruction of the HKBP house of worship in Cilegon (Ilmi & Sa'adah, 2023). In addition, there was also rejection of residences that were converted into places of worship, such as the rejection of the construction of places of worship by village government officials (Ilmi & Sa'adah, 2023).

2. Physical Violence and Discriminatory Treatment

Physical violence and discriminatory treatment against certain religious groups are also forms of intolerance. A recorded example is physical violence and discriminatory treatment against minorities (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

These incidents of intolerance are indicated to be caused by the following factors: 1) narrow understanding of religious texts, 2) double standards in implementing tolerance, 3) exclusive education, and 4) radicalism activities. These four things are the root of religious conflicts in Indonesia from various cases.

Literal understanding of the text of the verses of the holy books of each religion can trigger cases of religious intolerance. Intolerant groups often hold onto such verses without looking at their context in the past or the context of life today and the increasingly diverse future (Simarmata, 2023). In Islam, Gus Baha also said that *"Agama itu mengikuti riwayat, bukan sekedar berdasarkan teks."* (Religion follows history, not only based on text). Religious understanding cannot rely on the text of the book, just reading. True understanding can be achieved through history.

Some religious groups have double standards in respecting the behavior of others. They apply the ethical principle of reciprocity only to those who are in the same group, sect, or denomination, but not to people from other sects or denominations or broader than other religions (Simarmata, 2023). Education that is less inclusive and does not strengthen the values of tolerance can trigger intolerant attitudes. Education that emphasizes the violent teachings of religion can trigger radicalization and intolerance (Setara Institute, 2023). Radical-terrorist activities involving young people can trigger cases

of religious intolerance. This example can be seen in several cases at the Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta and the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (Purba, 2024). Cases of religious intolerance in Indonesia show that there are still many challenges to be faced in maintaining harmony and tolerance between each other. Therefore, it is important to improve religious understanding, avoid literal understanding of the verses of the holy book, and adopt the principle of an inclusive and tolerant reciprocity ethic.

The Public Response

Here public responses were assessed through appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2006). It argues three elements of evaluation: attitude, graduation, and source. The essential element is the first, while the others are the properties of it. Attitude consists of affect, judgment, and appreciation. The comments collected are 49, but not all of them are relevant for the discussion. Based on the classification, there is no comment included in appreciation type. They are only affect, showing emotion of the text producer, and judgment, representing the character evaluation from them. Here, the object of their appraisal is Gus Baha.

Table 1. Public Appraisal on Gus Baha

	Affect		Judgement		Tot
	n	%	n	%	
Pos	9	80	14	74	23
Neg	2	20	5	26	7

Generally, the public, represented by commenters, have positive perception on Gus Baha and his teaching on tolerance. This is evidenced from their emotive reaction in which most of them (80%) respond positively. The majority of comments expressing positive affect indicate that the audience generally feels happy, satisfied, or enthusiastic about Gus Baha's content. This positive sentiment can be attributed to the engaging nature of his videos, which often convey uplifting messages or entertaining content. The emphasis on positive affect aligns with the appraisal framework's focus on how speakers/writers express emotions and attitudes (Martin & White, 2005). Positive affect in this context suggests that Gus Baha's content resonates well with his audience, fostering a positive emotional response.

The minority of negative comments indicate that some viewers might have experienced dissatisfaction with certain aspects of Gus Baha's content. These negative sentiments could arise from various factors such as differing opinions on specific topics or personal preferences. The presence of negative affect underscores the complexity of audience reactions and the importance of considering both positive and negative evaluations in appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005). This diversity in reactions highlights the nuanced nature of audience engagement.

4. Conclusions

Based on the analysis, it is concluded that the tolerance in Gus Baha's sermons (lectures) are based on valid stories taken from old reliable manuscripts and other eligible references in Islam tradition. One of them is *Ar-Risalah al-Qusyairiyah* written by Sayid Bakar Sato. From the book, he reads and retells the stories reflecting how tolerance was practiced by prophet Abraham, the Prophet, and his Companion. They implemented tolerance in daily business, and also in religious practices. These examples of tolerance are used to provide the moslem society with reliable references on the issue in the midst of rampant cases of intolerance between people from different religion—particularly the dominant group to minorities. Toward the notions of tolerance in Gus Baha's lectures, most of the people perceive positively and they tend to agree with the ideas, as proved from the positive values in their

emotive reaction (80%) and judgment (74%). Thus, it is expected that their positive responses will be manifested in the real practices as they engage with others having various background.

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