

MOHAMMAD HATTA'S EMBODIMENT OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE THROUGH THE AGES

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Abstract: Mohammad Hatta is one of the founding fathers who declares Indonesian independence after Japan lost World War II in 1945. Well-known for being a nationalist, not many people know that Hatta came from a devoted Muslim family who upheld Islamic values to govern their way of life. His grandfather and uncle were respected Islamic scholars in West Sumatra who prepared Hatta to pursue higher religious education in Mecca and Cairo, although he ended up studying in The Netherlands for 11 years instead. This study aims to describe Hatta's embodiment of religious tolerance, which covered tolerant acts in diverse communities, through his interaction with people from different ethnicities and religions both when he was part of the Muslim minority in Europe and when he was part of the Muslim majority in Indonesia. This is a descriptive qualitative study. The data were obtained from three volumes of Hatta's memoir as the main data sources, which were then analyzed using Miles and Huberman's model data analysis tools. The result shows Hatta's encounters with people from different ethnicities and religions along with the religious tolerance he exemplified such as not forcing others to believe in Qur'anic teachings and appreciating different groups of people in his daily life. All of which were possible while remaining devoted to Islam. Observed from a historical perspective, religious tolerance had been personified by one of Indonesia's greatest Muslim statesmen and arguably became the glue that unified Indonesia as a nation.

Keywords: religious tolerance, history, Mohammad Hatta

1. Introduction

Mohammad Hatta is the prominent figure we would probably always associate with being a nationalist. When asked to name some of the Indonesian Muslim heroes, Haji Agus Salim, Hajjah Rasuna said, and K.H. Hasyim Asy'ari's names easily come up, but somehow not Hatta. Mohammad Hatta was also a scientist and a very prolific writer, with his work in various fields of study. His works discuss economic issues, cooperation, politics, law, philosophy, religion, and others (Maryono, 2015). A Muslim though he was, many people seem to know very little about

his religious background until they read what he revealed in three of his memoirs; Bukittinggi-Rotterdam Through Batavia, Resisting and Exiled, and Towards the Gates of Independence.

Hatta was only 8 years old when his father passed away. His father was the son of a highly respected Islamic scholar in West Sumatra. If the Dutch colonial government report is to be trusted, his great grandfather’s mosque in Batuhampar, near Payakumbuh, was one of the most prominent centers for Islamic Education in West Sumatra (then Minangkabau). Anyone who wanted to study Al Qur’an at the time would have to come to Batuhampar, where Hatta’s great grandfather taught (Hatta, 2011).

Therefore, it has been clearly established that Hatta came from a devoted Muslim family who upheld Islamic values to govern their way of life. His grandfather and uncle even prepared Hatta to pursue higher religious education in Mecca and Cairo by ensuring that he had access to the best Islamic education growing up, although he ended up studying in The Netherlands for 11 years instead. A turn of events his grandfather eventually accepted it as fate.

But nothing went to waste. Hatta’s understanding of Islam made him the great hero that he was. He remained a devoted practicing Muslim even during the eleven years of his time in Europe. Kept fasting during Ramadan month and maintained his *salat* (prayers). In Bukittinggi-Rotterdam through Batavia (Hatta, 2011), he wrote a situation when he hung out with a group of friends and they ordered alcohol but he just ordered water instead. The combination of his religious upbringing and his exposure to people from diverse religious backgrounds and ethnicities definitely influenced his tolerant actions, which became the subject of this study.

Indonesia is a multicultural country with a wide variety of cultures, customs, languages as well as religions. In terms of faith, for example, Indonesia has a lot of local believers. It includes several religions that were admitted by the State, such as Islam, Christian, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism. But there are also several other faiths and beliefs that developed and grew in this country (Abdillah & Kamaruddin, 2020). They existed long before those divine religions came. Therefore, Indonesia gains a predicate as The Meeting Place of World Religions (Muhammad, 2013).

The Qur’an explains that plurality is one of the objective realities of the human community (Madjid, 2005). Understanding Islam’s perspective on religious tolerance by referring to the

related verses in Al Qur’an is fundamental to discuss pluralism and tolerance. At the very least, in conceptual scope, the Qur’an has been giving essential guidance for people to solve the universal humanitarian problem (Abdillah & Kamaruddin, 2020). It is the reality of human beings’ plurality. It demands tolerance to the reality of peace in the world because Islam assesses that the requirement to make harmony is the recognition of the components that are naturally different (Maksum, 2015).

2. Literary Reviews

2.1 Religious Diversity in Indonesia

In 2018 Indonesian governmental statistics, 86.7% of Indonesians identified themselves as Muslim (with Sunnis about 99%, Shias about 1% and Ahmadis 0.2%), 7.6% Protestant Christian, 3.12% Catholic Christian, 1.74% Hindu, 0.77% Buddhist, 0.03% Confucian, and 0.05% others. This diversity posed a challenge from the time of our founding fathers until that of our current leaders sitting in the government. The big question is what will be the very act that can unite these differences, and the answer is tolerance.

Nearly all of Indonesia’s Muslims are Sunni although a very small but growing number are interested in Shi’ism. (Greg Fealy, Virgiana Hooker, and Sally White, 2006:39). In Indonesia, Sunnis was divided into several religious social organization like Nahdhatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, Perti, al-Washliyah, Jam’iat Khair, Nahdhatul Wathan (NW) and so on. (Abd. Moqsith Ghazali, 2009:2)

Archipelago Islam, or Islam Nusantara as it is known locally, was built over the centuries on Islam that arrived from several other parts of the world and was initially intertwined with Hinduism and ancient Javanese religions (Soekarba, 2018). Hefner argues that proponents of civil Islam, those who believe that Islam is compatible with democratic values, were a key part of the amplification of Muslim and Indonesian culture of tolerance, equality, and civility (2000).

2.2 Religious Tolerance

Ismail Acar (2018), in *Theological Foundations of Religious Tolerance in Islam*, discussed the Qur’anic verses related to religious tolerance in three subjects: salvation, religious diversity,

and fighting to see how the Qur’an treats these subjects and how scholars of the Qur’an understand them. The Qur’an asserts that diversity is part of the divine intent and purpose in creation “If God had willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but (He willed it otherwise) in order to test you” (5:48). This verse openly supports an ethnical diversity and tolerance among different communities.

Islam puts great value on freedom of religion and conscience. It runs counter to the very principle of freedom to compel non-Muslims to embrace Islam. The use of swords and force is strictly prohibited in matters of religion. Neither the prophet of Islam nor his four rightly guided caliphs resorted to power to enforce the religion of Islam on unwilling minds and hearts (Akhtar, et.al., 2016).

Al-Qur’an also advises its pious followers for peace: “For, [true] servants of the Most Gracious are [only] they who walk gently on the earth, and who, whenever the foolish address them reply with [words of] peace” (25:63). This verse implies active support of peace in a tolerant way. Instead of involving a struggle or clash, the Qur’an asks the pious Muslim to accept tolerance as a basic principle (Acar, 2008).

The word tolerance means “sincere (to like everyone, to let everyone give an opinion or have another argument, not to disturb one’s freedom of thought and faith)” (Poerwadarminta, 1996). Tolerance among persons of different faiths is the key to national integration and international peace and security to enhance development at all levels (Nandwa, 2016).

2.3 Mohammad Hatta

In a biography about Mohammad Hatta, Imran (1981) wrote that Hatta was born in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra, on 12 August 1902. In his book, *Reminiscing Hatta*, Widjaja (1988), who worked as Hatta's personal secretary, also wrote that Hatta was one of the prominent figures who drove the Indonesian independence movement.

When he was a toddler, Hatta only knew his extended family from his mother’s side. They were successful merchants. When he eventually knew his uncle from his father’s side of the family, who was descended from a long line of Islamic scholars, it was understandable that his uncle wanted him to continue the family traditions and legacy, for Hatta to be a Muslim scholar

too. Everyone in the family at that time agreed that Mecca and Cairo would be the final destination of Hatta’s education (Hatta, 2011).

But life showed Hatta a different path and with the blessings of his extended family, he took it. He first went to continue his education in Batavia (now Jakarta) before eventually pursuing higher education in the Netherlands. This is where his life story becomes very interesting. A western educated man with a deep Muslim root. Learning tolerance by following his examples is definitely a journey worth embarking on.

3. Research Method

To reach the objective of this study, which was to identify Hatta’s embodiment of religious tolerance, a qualitative study was conducted. This kind of research does not focus on numerals or statistics, but it gives more attention to the actions he exemplified. Thus, many stretches of words were employed in order to analyze, describe, interpret, and explain them. Qualitative data yields data in the forms of words, written, oral-not numbers, other than in comprehensive description (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

This method indeed enables a researcher to obtain the language and words of informants. Furthermore, it can be accessed at a time convenient to a researcher—an obtrusive source of information (Creswell, 1994). Here, most analyses were done with words to arrive at conclusion. With qualitative data, there would be a chronological flow, one could see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive a fruitful explanation (Miles & Huberman, & Saldana 2014).

There were two basic data involved in this study. The first source of data was a set of memoirs written by Mohammad Hatta himself entitled *For My Country*. This set consists of three books: *Bukittinggi-Rotterdam through Batavia*, *Resisting and Exiled*, and *Towards the Gate of Independence*. The second data was the list of *Tolerant Acts in Diverse Communities* from *The Theological Foundations of Religious Tolerance in Islam* by Ismail Acar derived from a book entitled *Religious Tolerance in World Religions*. The book was chosen as a data source because in this study the perspective of religious tolerance was based on the *Tolerant Acts in Diverse Communities* described in the book.

Data collection in this study was carried out by reading all three of Hatta’s memoirs in order to find his actions which represent tolerance acts through the ages. The data engaged in this study was primarily in the form of a stretch of words. A sort of constructed unit was carefully thought out in order to ease the analysis of his tolerant acts in diverse communities.

The subsequent steps are to facilitate the content analysis as adapted from Miles & Huberman which begins with data collection, then data reduction, data display, followed up with drawing conclusions and verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). After the identification process had been completed through a data reduction process, the results were later displayed in a sort of content-analytic summary description containing narrative reconstruction and description.

4. Mohammad Hatta’s Embodiment of Religious Tolerance

After reading all three volumes of Mohammad Hatta’s memoirs; Bukittinggi-Rotterdam through Batavia, Resisting and Exiled, and Towards the Gate of Independence, which become the subject of this study, the following four Tolerant Acts in Diverse Communities from The Theological Foundations of Religious Tolerance in Islam by Ismail Acar derived from a book entitled Religious Tolerance in World Religions is used to confirm Hatta’s embodiment of religious tolerance.

4.1 Accepts other religious groups as different entities of humanity

Although the Qur’an claims that Islam is the last version of monotheism, it accepts other religious groups as different entities of humanity (Acar, 2008). This is the context in which Hatta grew up, surrounded by diversity in terms of religions and races, he wrote:

“When I was little the population of Bukittinggi was only 2,500 people with 300 of them Dutch and around 600-650 of them were of Chinese descent.” (Hatta, Bukittinggi-Rotterdam through Batavia, 2011, p.3).

He further elaborated that he even went to school despite the snarky remarks of some native West Sumatrans who considered western education less (if at all) important than religious education. Most children his age would either help their parents in the field or play all day before getting informal education at the mosque in the evening. They also disliked the political reason behind why the Dutch started opening schools for Indonesian citizens at the time (Hatta, 2011).

This attitude brought him on a bright academic path. He continues to appreciate people from diverse entities of humanity well into adulthood. He went to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway to learn about Community Cooperation, hence his title as the Founding Father of Indonesian Community Cooperation (*Bapak Koperasi Indonesia*). He studied philosophy and actually wrote a book entitled Greek Realm of Thought which epitomizes how deep of a thinker he was. He carried out his mission to spread anti-colonialism propaganda, working together with youth from various Asian countries such as Jawaharlal Nehru from India, Hafiz Ramadhan Bey from Egypt, and Senghor who was the father of Senegal's president.

4.2 Does not force others to believe Qur’anic teachings

According to Al Qur’an, only the individual has a right to choose his path; nobody makes him believe or deny it. When Muhammad wished to convert somebody from the Meccan elites to Islam, for example, God revealed to him that “[v]erily, thou canst not guide aright everyone whom thou lowest: but it is God who guides him that wills [to be guided]” (28:56). Even Muhammad has no power to convert people to Islam. Therefore, Muslims should accept other faith members as they are (Acar, 2008). There were many occasions throughout his memoirs where Hatta embodied this teaching, but two events were exceptionally extraordinary.

The first event took place during the Japanese occupation of Indonesia. A Japanese officer named Miyoshi relayed a message if it was possible for Indonesian to do *seikere*, an act of saluting/worshiping Tenno Heika in Tokyo. Hatta firmly refused. It is up to the Japanese to practice their tradition of worship but he strictly prohibited that suggestion to be obliged to the Indonesian people. His response was:

“From what I have learned and based on my knowledge; Muslims are allowed to bow as a form of respect towards the people they meet, but *seikere* towards Tenno Heika who is far away in Tokyo and is not here is prohibited in Islam. Because that means positioning Tenno Heike in a higher place than Allah.” (Hatta, Towards the Gate of Independence, 2011, p. 27).

The second event occurred right after the declaration of Indonesian independence. The leaders of the revolution were drafting what would become the Indonesian constitution. The

opening stated that 'Indonesia is a theist country which obliges Muslims to practice Islamic law'. This information made it to the public and the representative of Christian and Catholic believers approached him regarding this issue. Hatta considered that phrasing the opening constitution like that is an act of discrimination against minorities. He took action exactly the next day:

"On 18 August 1945, before the Independence Committee assembly commenced, I asked Ki Bagus Hadikusumo, Wahid Hasyim, Mr. Kasman Singodimejo, and Mr. Teuku Hasan from Sumatra to discuss the matter. In order not to break our unity as a nation, we agreed to delete the part that hurt the feelings of our Christian brothers and sisters and replace it with the word 'monotheism' instead." (Hatta, *Towards the Gate of Independence*, 2011, p. 97).

And that version remains intact even to this day. It is the legacy Indonesians must forever protect.

4.3 Support ethnical diversity and tolerance among different communities

The Qur'an asserts that diversity is part of the divine intent and purpose in creation: "O men! Behold, we have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another" (49:13). This verse implies that God wished to create humanity in diverse communities (Acar, 2008). Hatta embraced this value by learning from the dominant male figure closest to him, his grandfather from his mother's side:

"Behind our house, we have a fish pond where we farm carp fish. The fish we harvested from the pond was one of the main reasons behind the fruitful relationship between my grandfather, Ilyas gelar Baginda Marah, and the Dutch people who held power in Bukittinggi. Sometimes, we sent them carp fish and on Eid Day they would return the kindness by gifting my grandfather their famous Dutch cigars." (Hatta, *Bukittinggi-Rotterdam through Batavia*, 2011, p. 9).

He learned from an early age that kindness goes beyond faith and ethnicity. When *Perhimpunan Indonesia*, an anti-colonial movement organization, was established in the Netherlands by Indonesian youth who were studying there, the colonial government started threatening parents whose children joined the movement in the Netherland. This resulted in parents stopping sending money to their children if they refuse to leave the movement. Hatta's response to this was to raise money among Indonesian communities, to help whoever, regardless of their religion. One of the members who was hit by this financial blow Arnold Mononutu. Hatta

made sure that his financial needs were covered so that he could continue his activities in the resistance movement (Hatta, 2011).

Later in his adult life, he magnified this lesson of tolerance towards different communities by implementing kindness beyond country borders. Hatta was studying in the Netherlands during the first World War and Germany was hit by extreme inflation. One day when he visited Germany, he ordered a suit from a German tailor which cost RM 37.000 or equal to *f* 33. When the suit was ready, the inflation went from worse to the worst that RM 5000 was only worth *f* 1. Because Hatta lived in The Netherlands and paid in Dutch Guilder, he actually only needed to pay less than *f* 8 for the suit. But he decided to pay *f* 20 instead. The tailor was thankful beyond measure for his generosity. The hyperinflation in Germany destroyed almost the entire middle-class economy at the time, so Hatta being the man that he was, also extended the same kindness to his host lady during his stay in Germany, by paying in the initial Dutch Guilder prize, regardless of Germany’s hyperinflation (Hatta, 2011).

4.4 Appreciative of different groups of people in their daily lives

Muslims are supposed to be appreciative of different groups of people in their daily lives. For their religious purposes, Muslims should follow the most tolerant way while they preach Islam. We see this obligation in the following verse, wherein God tells his messenger Muhammad, “Call thou [all mankind] unto thy Sustainer’s path with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them in the kindest manner” (16:125). (Acar, 2008). This is also another act of tolerance he embodied by observing the example his grandfather displayed:

“The way my grandfather run his business left a powerful impression on me. It may not mean much when I was little, but it definitely influenced me when I grew up. My grandfather treated all his subordinates equally, including his servants and horsemen. ‘We are all human,’ he then told us, his grandchildren. ‘Without them, I won’t be able to get all this work done’” (Hatta, Bukittinggi-Rotterdam through Batavia, 2011, p. 10).

In *Resisting and Exiled* (2011) he wrote about continuing his grandfather’s legacy by employing someone from native Kayakaya tribe when he was exiled in Digul. He would treat the person as his own. When Hatta was informed that his exile location was to be moved from Digul

to Banda Neira, he made a point of going to the market and hand-picked a gift to the native man who had been working for him and decided on a valuable axe as his gift of choice.

Hatta's acts of tolerance did not go in vain. His kindness and sincerity brought him help even in the most difficult times. In Bukittinggi-Rotterdam via Batavia (2011) he described that during the heat of *Perhimpunan Indonesia's* active anti-colonialism movement, he was captured by the Dutch police in the Netherland and then imprisoned. Two Dutch lawyers, Mr. Duys and Mr. Mobach, whom he did not know, offered to defend him. They confided that they were sympathetic towards him and were ashamed of the injustice the colonial government did to him. These two lawyers eventually managed to get Hatta out of prison.

5. Conclusion

As one of the proclaimers of Indonesian Independence and a Muslim, Hatta provided a historical perspective on the longstanding reputation of religious tolerance in Indonesia, which deserves scholarly study and discussion in and of itself. He gave us all empirical examples regarding the importance of considering every human being with honor, regardless of their beliefs, and to always bear in mind not to insult those who worship other gods.

Mohammad Hatta consistently exemplified religious tolerance both when he was only a Muslim minority during his 11 years in Europe and when he was part of the Muslim majority in Indonesia. He also firmly believed that Indonesia's unity should raise above all of our differences as a nation. That is the only direction we should move forward to pay tribute to his legacy.

Thus, his embodiment of religious tolerance is confirmed by Ismail Acar's list of Tolerant Acts in Diverse Communities from *The Theological Foundations of Religious Tolerance in Islam* from *Religious Tolerance in World Religions*. Hatta showed that he accepted other religious groups as different entities of humanity, did not force others to believe Qur'anic teachings, supported ethnical diversity and tolerance among different communities, and was appreciative of different groups of people in their daily lives.

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