

# Embracing Diversity Through The Values Of Multicultural Education In "Masjid Menara Kudus" (Menara Kudus Mosque)

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**Abstract---**"Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" is the official national motto of Indonesia, which means unity in diversity reflecting how the Indonesian people uphold the principle of tolerance. However, nowadays, the issue of intolerance is raised in the midst of Indonesian society. The facts are mainly triggered by political interests and due to the decline of multicultural awareness. This issue clearly contradicts to the diversity of Indonesian society which is multi-ethnic and multi-culture. If it is not managed properly, it consequently increases the potential to break the unity and integrity of the nation. Therefore, building the cultural awareness through the values of multicultural education plays a crucial role as an effort to encounter this problem. This study aims to analyze the values of multicultural education reflected in "Masjid Menara Kudus" and to examine how it plays a role in maintaining the unity of the nation. This research was carried out with a qualitative method approach. Research data were collected by observation, interview, and documentation techniques. Validation of data is done by data triangulation techniques. Data analysis was performed with interpretive descriptive techniques through the process of reduction, presentation, and verification. The findings indicated that the parts of "Masjid Menara Kudus" are the result of acculturation between Hindu-Buddhist, Muslim-Arabic, Chinese, and Javanese cultures. Moreover, cultural acculturation at the "Masjid Menara Kudus" which reflects the values of multicultural education can be a solution as an effort to increase awareness of diversity for the community, especially in the northern coastal areas of Java.

**Keywords:** Acculturation, Diversity, Masjid Menara Kudus, Multicultural education

## I. INTRODUCTION

"Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" is the official national motto of Indonesia, which means unity in diversity reflecting how the Indonesian people uphold the principle of tolerance. But today, the issue of intolerance is raised in the midst of Indonesian society. The emergence of this issue can be seen from the many facts that show attitudes and actions that mutually blaspheme, impose one's will, humiliate and act of violence among groups fellow the nation. These facts, in particular, are caused by political interests which are prone to causing disintegration both in the social and national life. Intolerance attitudes and actions are very dangerous because the diversity of Indonesian society which is multi-ethnic and multi-culture. If not managed properly, it has the potential to break the unity and integrity of the nation.

Beside of political interests, one of the reasons for the emergence of these attitudes and actions is due to the decline in cultural awareness to practice the values of multiculturalism. Today, the values of multiculturalism are urgent to be put forward in pluralistic Indonesian society. The attitude of mutual respect and respect for diversity, is very important for each individual to have in their social life.

One of the strategy to reducing intolerance attitudes can be carried out through multicultural education [11]; [8]). The application of multicultural education, is by exploring and re-studying local cultural wisdom, because in local cultural wisdom, especially in traditional arts, there are symbols that reflect the values of multiculturalism.

The value of multicultural education is the value of a thing, object or situation that is able to become a medium for fostering awareness of citizens of the nation to accept and appreciate cultural differences or diversity in pluralistic community life. Multicultural education emphasizes a philosophy of cultural pluralism into the education system which is based on the principles of equality ([8]). In line with the importance of multicultural education, it is necessary to explore the values of multiculturalism

from various sources as a medium of learning. One of the efforts in this direction that can be done is by learning from the local wisdom values of coastal art (Triyanto, 2018).

In the Javanese Pesisiran Culture, there are many legacies of traditional arts that reflect the symbolic expression of the multicultural education values. According to [10], coastal culture is a cultural area in which the socialization process of the people resides and lives along the northern coast of Java. One of the cities in the coastal cultural area is Kudus Regency. The history of Kudus regency cannot be separated from one of the Walisongo, namely Sunan Kudus. In teaching and spreading Islam, Sunan Kudus uses a fabian approach, using adapting, absorbing, and making partial compromises with a tolerant spirit towards the values of existing local cultures [6].

One of the artifacts from the history of Sunan Kudus when carrying out the Islamic teaching is the “Masjid Menara Kudus”. “Masjid Menara Kudus”, as a work of art building (architecture), although it is a holy building where Muslims worship, but it has unique manifestation not only expresses Islamic (Arabic) culture, but also accommodates or absorbs local cultural elements.

Related to what has been stated above, this study aims to analyze the values of multicultural education reflected in the “Masjid Menara Kudus” and to know how it plays a role in maintaining the unity in diversity of the nation.

## II. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach in an effort to provide inductive and in-depth understanding and explanation of the multicultural values in the visual manifestation of “Masjid Menara Kudus” and its role in maintaining the unity in diversity of the nation. This research was conducted with a case study design in the context of coastal community culture.

The data collection techniques used in this study were observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. According to qualitative research methods, this research data collection uses what is called a human instrument. The research team go to the research location to collect all the necessary data. To obtain data validity, using the principle of trustworthiness, the data validation technique was carried out through the triangulation process of data collection techniques, there are cross-checking between obtaining observational data, interviews, and collecting archived document data. Data analysis procedures were taken through an interactive cycle analysis model [12], through the process of data reduction, presentation, and verification.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### i. Kudus Society and Culture

According to Triyanto (2019) geographically, Kudus regency is divided into two areas, namely “Kudus Kulon” (West) and “Kudus Wetan” (East). The Kudus society are aware that their city is made up of these two regions. The “Kudus Kulon” area is located west of the Gelis river which flows through the city. In history, “Kudus Kulon” has been known as an old city which was colored by Islamic religious life and its strong and distinctive customs. In this area, the “Masjid Menara Kudus” stands as a legacy of Islamic cultural artifacts from Sunan Kudus. Meanwhile, “Kudus Wetan”, which is located east of the Gelis river, is a regional government center, transportation center, and trade center area [1]; [9]; [19].

The people of “Kudus Kulon” and the people of Kota Kudus in general are very proud of having the “Masjid Menara Kudus”. As a cultural asset that is very rare and unique, the community always maintains and preserves the “Masjid Menara Kudus”. The community always maintains their actions and attitudes when they are at the location, and never pollute or even say bad things in the surroundings of the mosque, tower, and cemetery of Sunan Kudus as a form of obedience to Sunan Kudus. The “Masjid Menara Kudus” building which resembles a Hindu temple always reminds the public of the teachings and commands that have been ingrained in the Kudus community to always maintain tolerance between religious communities, mutual respect between religious communities, but must adhere to and maintain the Islamic faith.



Picture 1. The location of Kudus regency

Administratively, the location of “Masjid Menara Kudus” located in Kota Kudus district, precisely in Kauman Village which is opposite Langgar Dalem Village. Culturally, this location, located in the “Kudus Kulon” area (Triyanto, 2019). Historically, the founder of Kudus regency was Ja'far Sodiq or Sunan Kudus [17]; [18]; [4]; [22]; [13]; [24]. The name “Kudus” comes from the word Al-Quds which means holy. During its development, Kudus was known as the city of the cigarette industry. Therefore, the economic life of the citizens of the community is characterized by activities in the cigarette industry (Triyanto, 2019).



Picture 2. The environment around the location of “Masjid Menara Kudus”



Picture 3. Masjid Menara Kudus

Kudus is included in the scope of the central coastal cultural area [10]. The people of these coastal areas generally embrace “puritan” Islam which of course affects their socio-cultural life. As a coastal area, Kudus with a puritanical Islamic community cannot be separated from the role of Sunan Kudus [15]. Kudus also known with the city of “santri” (student) or the city of Islam. Since its establishment, Kudus become a part of Islam spread in Java. Kudus developed into a center for knowledge and development of Islamic religion in Java, even in the archipelago. As a fanatical Muslim community, Kudus society tries to carry out all their religious orders and stay away from religious prohibitions. In practicing their religion, many people follow the teachings of Sunan Kudus (Pratiwinindya, 2017).

Sunan Kudus teaches the principle of tolerance in society. The principle of tolerance is used by Sunan Kudus in order to carry out his preaching in Kudus. Sunan Kudus uses a multicultural approach in its “da’wah” strategy, by acculturating Hindu culture that already exists in Kudus, with Islam. By using this strategy, Kudus society became adherents of Islam in a peaceful way without coercion. The contents of this acculturation are also expressed in the manifestation of their traditional culture. From this idea, it was then able to influence the Kudus community in particular, and people outside Kudus in general regarding the beautiful harmony of tolerance between religious communities.

ii. The Values of Multicultural Education in “Masjid Menara Kudus”

As a multicultural mosque, same with mosque buildings in general, “Masjid Menara Kudus” also consists of a main building consisting of a foyer room and an inner (main) room for prayer places. Meanwhile, the supporting buildings are in the form of a tower, a gate (gate), and a place for ablution. The location of five doors in the “Masjid Menara Kudus” is either on the right or on the left. There are four windows in this mosque building. In addition, there are also five large doors and four pillars “soko guru” (the main supporting pillars of the main building and four pillars of “soko rowo” (companion poles) in the interior of the mosque) which are made of eight teak wood (Triyanto, 2019)

The supporting building which is unique to the “Masjid Menara Kudus” is in the form of a gate (doorway). This form of the building visually adopts and resembles the Hinduistic style of Candi Bentar.



Picture 4. Gapura Candi Bentar Masjid Menara Kudus

The important supporting buildings that are famous because of their particularity in the “Masjid Menara Kudus” complex are the “Menara” (minaret) in the form of buildings in Hindu-Javanese East Java. The height of the “Menara” of this mosque is about eighteen meters. Meanwhile, the basic division of the building has a size of 10 x 10 m. Around the walls of the tower building, there are 32 ornamental plates covered with plates of 32 pieces. The decorative motifs in the plates, which are colored blue, represent several decorative motifs of flora and fauna. The remaining twelve red and white platters are filled with decorative motifs in the form of flower stylization (Triyanto, 2019).





Picture 5. Menara Kudus

In terms of archeology, Menara Kudus is a blend of Hindu and Islamic art, which can be seen from the carving art is the influence of Hindu art. Meanwhile, the levels on the body of the tower building indicate the influence of the old culture which usually consists of more than three or four levels which are interpreted in Javanese Sufism as “syariat, tarikat, ma’rifat and hakekat” [16].

Beside accommodating elements of Hindu-Buddhist and Javanese culture, “Masjid Menara Kudus” also influenced by Islamic-Arabic and Chinese culture especially on the ornaments in several parts of the building. In some parts of the mosque, you can find several ornaments or decorations that are meant to mark and decorate the mosque to make it look more beautiful. Some of the decorations found in the “Masjid Menara Kudus”, are seen on the facade (front wall of the face of the mosque building), the bottom of the dome, place of ablution, minaret, “paduraksa” door, ventilation over the door, the inside (main) room of the mosque (especially in the “mihrab” and “mimbar”). These ornaments or decorations can be grouped into several categories of motifs, namely calligraphy motifs, geometric motifs, flora motifs, fauna motifs, and arabesque motifs also Chinese porcelaine. The main ornaments found at the “Masjid Menara Kudus” presented as follows.

### 1. Calligraphy

First, the Khat ornament (Arabic calligraphy). The decoration on the facade wall, there are two decorations with Arabic calligraphy motifs and geometric motifs. The calligraphic motif is in the form of a calligraphic relief that functions like a mosque marker "signboard" with Arabic text which reads: "Masjid Al-Aqsho Manara Kudus" and stained glass decoration in the "window" area covered with glass. In the area of the "window" made of glass, there is a stained glass with the text that reads: "Lillahallahu Muhammadu rosulullah" (meaning: There is no God but Allah, Muhammad Rosul Allah)



Repetitive geometric motif

Tsulutsi style Arabic calligraphy reliefs with the text reading: Masjid al Aqsho Manara Kudus

Tsulutsi style stained glass calligraphy with the text reading: Laila hailallahu

Muhammadarosulullah

Picture 6. Arabic Calligraphy Ornaments

### 2. Arabesk

Second, the Arabesk motif decoration. This motif is one of the prominent decorative motifs and is often used to decorate mosques. In the “Masjid Menara Kudus”, the decoration of the Arabesk (Arabesque) motif is quite unique in its placement because it is placed on the wall of the “Paduraksa” building in Hinduistic style and at the bottom of the “Padasan” in the form of a braided motif (woven) of rope or knot that has no end and base.

This form of motif is often used because besides having aesthetic potential for decoration it is also one of the characteristics of Islamic ornament to avoid depicting figurative motifs or creatures.



Picture 7. Arabesk motif ornaments on the “Paduraksa” building

### 3. Geometric

The use of this type of motif is also possible to avoid making decorations depicting figurative shapes or creatures. It is not surprising that in various mosques you can find the use of this type of decorative motif, so that it is used as one of the characteristics of the form of decorative motifs that are considered Islamic. At the “Masjid Menara Kudus”, this type of decorative motif is located predominantly in the “mihrab” and “mimbar” of the mosque.



Picture 8. Knot ornament on the body of the "Lawang Kembar"

#### 4. Flora and Fauna

This ornament adorns quite a lot in several parts of the mosque building. The flora motif describes the stylized form (styling) of plant motifs such as "sultur - suluran" and flowers. Meanwhile, the fauna motif depicts the simplification of certain animal forms.



Picture 9. Flora and Fauna motif

#### 5. Chinese Porcelain

This ornament is a decoration in the form of a blue porcelain plate placed on the outer wall of the mosque tower. From the results of interviews and document studies, information was obtained that these decorations came from China, which has known ceramic civilization for a long time. All of these unique decorations total 32 pieces. 20 of them are blue and depict mosques, humans with camels and date palms. While the other 12 are red and white depicting flowers.



Picture 10. Chinese porcelain

#### iii. Masjid Menara Kudus: Embracing Diversity through Cultural Acculturation and Tolerance

The cultural artifacts of the historic "Masjid Menara Kudus" as a holy place of worship for muslims in Kudus, have the potential to be used as a source or media for multicultural education learning to embrace diversity. Because, the parts of building and ornament elements in "Masjid Menara Kudus" was built by utilizing a combination of elements from Hindu - Buddhist, Javanese, Islamic - Arabic, and Chinese cultures. This empirical facts, clearly shows that the value of intercultural tolerance shared by Sunan Kudus to the society. Even though they muslims, they exhibit appreciative, acculturative, accommodative attitudes and behaviors, and are open to elements of non-Islamic traditions.

These tolerant attitudes and behaviors, however, cannot be separated from the coastal lifestyle (culture) which is open, accommodative, acculturative, and appreciative of other cultural elements. From this, it can be learned that the teachings of the Islamic religion, which were spread by the "Wali", in this context Sunan Kudus, in Java applied the values of cultural tolerance that lived and developed in accordance with the socio-cultural conditions of the community at that time.

Sunan Kudus, even though he has the authority to carry out the mission of da'wah Islamiyah purely, but the cultural tolerance values, has become a spirit in implementing Islamic teachings humanistly by respecting the potential of local culture without reducing the value substance of Islamic teachings. Cultural differences are not a barrier to being united or integrated into one entity.

In other words, it can be emphasized that "Masjid Menara Kudus" reflects the value of intercultural tolerance in building a culture that respects one another even though it is different. The value of intercultural tolerance that is reflected in the "Masjid Menara Kudus" is actually the core of the goals of multicultural education in the midst of a plural society.

Building the cultural awareness through the values of multicultural education plays a crucial role as an effort to encounter the intolerance issues as early as possible. As said by experts, the core of multicultural education goals is basically the inclusion of cultural

tolerance values in students to respect each other and accept differences in diversity [11]; Bank and Bank, 2010, [2]; [5]; [8]).

To achieve this goal, the educators can take advantage of this local cultural artifacts from Islamic history, in this case the values of intercultural tolerance that are reflected in the “Masjid Menara Kudus”, as a source and instrument in teaching students towards the formation of cultural awareness in order to grow to appreciate and accept differences in cultural diversity. In the life of a community or nation that is pluralistic both ethnically and culturally [14].

Learning content that contains values of intercultural tolerance in multicultural education is an important material in building cultural awareness to respect and accept differences. In this context, the local traditional art of building the “Masjid Menara Kudus”, becomes relevant and significant to be presented as a medium. Through art education based on local cultural wisdom as a medium or source, students can understand the importance of cultural tolerance values as citizens of the nation. Relevant to this, [7] emphasizes that art does have the power to serve as a medium for multicultural education.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

“Masjid Menara Kudus” as a historical heritage of Sunan Kudus, has building elements consisting of the entrance gate, tower, foyer, main room, ablution place, and roof. In general, although the elements of the building are not different from the elements of a mosque, but visually, the manifestation of its shape has its own uniqueness which is different from the shape of mosques in Java.

The uniqueness that distinguishes the “Masjid Menara Kudus” from other mosques in Java lies in the accentuation of acculturative forms and ornaments, by utilizing, adopting, adapting, or accommodating elements of Hindu-Buddhist, Javanese, Islamic-Arabic and Chinese culture in one unit. Its is related with the cultural character traits of coastal communities that are open, tolerant, accommodative, and acculturative. So it makes overall shape of the building is unique and interesting.

The uniqueness of “Masjid Menara Kudus”, which is combination of several non-Islamic elements culture in one whole form of acculturative building, would not have been possible if Sunan Kudus did not have a tolerant attitude to respect, and use the local cultural elements of the local community at that time. Through the visual manifestation of “Masjid Menara Kudus”, it has cultural messages that people have to respect and accept differences. The differences over diversity of “Masjid

Menara Kudus” are not meant to be clashed but to be mixed and matched which can be accepted as a public property without losing the value of its identity as a sacred building a place of worship.

Therefore, at this point shows that “Masjid Menara Kudus” can be a learning content that contains values of intercultural tolerance in multicultural education. It is an important material to build cultural awareness to respect and accept differences. “Masjid Menara Kudus” becomes relevant and significant to be presented as a medium, through art education based on local cultural wisdom so people can understand the importance of cultural tolerance values as citizens of the nation. Through this actions, hopefully building the cultural awareness through the values of multicultural education can plays a crucial role as an effort to encounter the intolerance issues and plays a role in maintaining the unity of the nation.

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