The Sunni-Shi'a Relation In East Lampung: From Resistance To Harmony

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Abstract:
The existence of Shi'a followers in Indonesia sometimes receives appalling responses, especially in rural areas. This research tries to portray the responses of Raman Aji villagers (who are Sunni followers) to those who are Shi'as. This field research used qualitative approach, with semi-structured interviews, documentation, and observation as data collection techniques. The results indicate that, first, community leaders in Raman Aji show strong resistance to the Shi'a followers; therefore, the resistance leads to tension in the community. Second, there have been efforts made to create mutual understanding to the Shi'a teaching, as well as its followers. The leaders understand that Shi'a followers will not give their teaching go, and vice versa. Third, the community leaders and prominent figures in Raman Aji village can finally accept the existence of Shi'a followers and allow them to carry out their activities.

Keywords: Diversity, Shi'a, Conflict, Harmony

INTRODUCTION

Muslims in the world are either Sunni or Shi'a believers. 10-15% of total Muslims are Shi'as, while the rests are Sunnis. Most of Shi'a communities live in Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen.[1] The relation of the two Islamic thoughts has been source of many studies, in local and global contexts. After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, there had been issues among Sunnis on the growing influence of Shi'a in the Middle East. The sentiment got stronger as Mahmud Ahmadinejad was sworn as the president of Iran in 2005 since the spread of Shi'a would get aggressive. In one side, there had been anti-Shi'a propaganda as a part of transnational movement in various Sunni media

platforms, including television and internet sites. They took historical experiences on Sunni-Shi'a rivalry in Islam's early years. One study which particularly shows the relation of these groups conducted by Sigrid Fahd in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Lebanon.[2]

In Indonesian context, the population of Shi'as is second to Sunnis. These groups grow and interact dynamically, as well as create a unique relation one to the other.[3] Another studies which examine the Sunni-Shi'a relation is *Relasi Persia dan Nusantara Pada Awal Islamisasi: Sebuah Kajian Awal Pengaruh Persia dalam Politik Aceh* (the Persian and Nusantara relation in the early years of Islamization: a study on Persian's influence to Aceh's politics) by Hilmy Bakar Almascaty.[4] Additionally, Zulkifli wrote a

dissertation in Leiden University and turned it into book in 2013 about a comprehensive history of Shi'a in Indonesia. He studied the main aspects of social and religious life in this minority Muslim group, including Shi'a denomination, main leaders, belief system and practices, teaching, education system, publication and organizational system, as well as reactions from Sunni community.[5]

Typically, Sunni-Shi'a relation is in disharmony. For fanatic Sunnis, Shi'a is considered a heterodox that has deviated from Islamic teachings. There are many Sunni followers who do not understand, wrongly comprehend, and even refuse to learn what and how Shi'a is. Their claims on Shi'a is a part of brainwashing in Sunni's political culture. It stands, theologically and politically, against Shi'a and is inherited from one generation to the other. Clash between these groups becomes a source of prolonged dialogue from time to time.[6] Therefore, a comprehensive study is required to explore the dialectic relation among Raman Aji villagers who are Sunni followers to those who are Shi'as. In addition, it is essential to conduct a study on efforts made to create and maintain harmony among these groups.[7]

METHODOLOGY

This is a field research with qualitative approach and studied both Sunni and Shi'a followers in Raman Aji village, East Lampung. The data were collected by direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and document study. The respondents were selected purposively to represent both Sunni and Shi'a communities in Raman Aji village. The data were analyzed with descriptive-qualitative method to achieve actual and essential information related to religious conflict between Sunni and Shi'a in this village.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The Existence of Shi'a in Indonesia

Shi'a comes from the word *sya'a* means follower or supporter. It applies to individual or group, both man and woman. Based on its terminology, Shi'a specifically refers to those who are loyal to Ali bin Abu Tholib and *Ahlulbait* (the family of Prophet Muhammad SAW). The plural form of *sya'a* is *asyya'* and *syiya'*.[8] Shi'a in its history experiences several changes. Afterwards, both Shi'a and Sunni undergo conflict.[9]

In the beginning, Shi'a was not a religious school. It emerged as a political power which considered Ali bin Abu Thalib's leadership was taken over by the other *khulafaur rashidin* (the Prophet's successors); Abu Bakr, Umar, and Ustman. Later, the group developed its own religious teaching, especially in *aqidah* (beliefs) and law. It then grew into a respected group with several factions.[10]

The history of Shi'a in Indonesia is considered vague. There are some historical claims referred to this group with interesting yet despairing facts. Some historians claim that Shi'a came to Indonesia in 12th century by Persian merchants. Others claim that it is brought by Arab traders. These claims actually return to a fact that Shi'a is brought by its original members, neither by Sufis nor traders. However, *taqiyya* literacy in Shi'a mentions that its teaching is brought by Syafii's scholars.[11]

Jalaludin Rakhmat, the founder of *Yayasan Muthahari Bandung* and the head of *syuro* board *Ikatan Jemaah Ahlul Bait Indonesia* (IJABI) mentions that Shi'a as a group starts its movement in Bandung.[12] He distinguishes Shi'a movement in Nusantara into several phases. He asserts that Islam firstly found in Aceh around 8th century or during Abbasid Dynasty. The Arabian *Hadramaut* came to Aceh for *da'wa* (spread the Islamic teachings); nevertheless, they never claimed themselves as Shi'a. They pretended (*taqiyya*) to be the members of Syafii schoo.[13] In Rakhmat's perspective, it is culturally accepted that Nahdlatul Ulama is Shi'a; however, there is no clear document regarding to this claim. Therefore, experts argue that Shi'a is still in its early phase of dissemination. It is in contrary

to another theory which mentions that Sunni came to Nusantara preceding Shi'a. Nevertheless, the last theory is still a subject of debate.[14]

In 1982, Shi'a started its second phase. It mainly caused by Islamic revolution in Iran, around 1979 – 1980s. It was marked by governmental shift from the autocratic regime of Mohammad Reza Pahlevi to the Islamic Republic era led by Ayatollah Rohullah Khomeini. Shi'a movement worldwide—including the one that developed in Indonesia—used this monumental occasion to declare its existence. Factions moved systematically in various organizations under Shi'a flagship. Nonetheless, the movements had not led into a particular genre or school as it officially started in 1979.[15] Revolution which Khomeini led attracted Indonesian students' attention and led to Islamic movements in Indonesia which mostly suffered lost in a number of political battles.[16]

The historical moment for Shi'a awakening in Indonesia was when Jalaludin Rakhmat, alongside Shi'a members in Bandung, declared *Ikatan Jemaah Ahlul Bait Indonesia* (IJABI) on 1st July 2000. The establishment of IJABI marks Shi'a members' belief in determining their existence. The members have calculated their loyal followers to sustain Shi'a movement and development in Indonesia. It is currently a running organization and annually holds *Silaturahmi Nasional Jamaah Syiah* (Shi'a Members Nasional Meeting) since 2006 which recommends the establishment of *Ahlul Bait Indonesia* (Shi'a community organization). It has proven that Shi'a grows steadily in Indonesia.[17]

Basically, IJABI is a religious movement which tries to interpret the reality of religious lives in Indonesia. Symbolically and substantially, *ahlul bait* belongs to the members of Imam Ali's family and followers, or *bani hasyim* and his followers. IJABI's establishment is mainly based on the development of Islamic teachings from the perspective of *ahlul bait*.[18]

1. Response and Dynamics in the Relation of Shi'a Members with the Community in Raman Aji

a. Initial Response on the Existence of Shi'a Members in Raman Aji

The first Shi'a member in Raman Aji came in 2007. A local villager, Amin, followed a session of religious gathering by Ustadz Khoiruddin-a Shi'a follower. The session was held in Fajar Isuk, Pringsewu. Amin was a graduate of Miftahul Ulum and Perguruan Islam Magelang boarding school. After joining the session, he started to read books that Uztadz Khoiruddin gave him.

Amin tried to ask his family members to join the religious gathering, especially Wakiran, his father. Wakiran is a healer and respected figure in both his community and surrounding areas of East Lampung. Wakiran was a Nahdlatul Ulama member in his village; he strongly opposed to the teaching that Amin brough to him in the beginning. Later, he could accept Shi'a teachings and practiced them.

After successfully brought his father into his circle, Amin became a *da'i* (preacher) of Shi'a teachings by encouraging his neighbors to join, especially in *Yasinan* (prayer group) that became a tradition in Raman Aji. He conducted weekly group meeting by inviting his teacher, Ustadz Khoiruddin. Some villagers later joined the group and officially became Shi'a followers.

By the time villagers' enthusiasm raised in discussing Shi'a teachings, none of Raman Aji's leaders/figures enrolled. Amin and his group's members, for instance, Wakiran, Syamsul, and Slamet, visited Raman Aji's leaders/figures in turn; they strongly encouraged them to take part in the group. The members believed that religious groups which learnt Islamic teachings other than Shi'a were misguided and would lead their members to hell. The members put blame on other villagers who did not join in the group meeting. Same attitude was shown in the *Yasinan* meeting which was widely and culturally accepted by the villagers of Raman Aji.

On the other hand, strong resistance showed by both of religious leaders and prominent figures of Raman Aji to the existence of Shi'a community,

which was mainly led by Ustadz Muhammad Amin and his followers. These group strongly held the principles taught by KH. Mahfud Tamimi from Miftahul Ulum Islamic boarding school. The resistance reached to its peak when the leaders "kicked out" Amin from *Yasinan* group and forbade him to give any lecture in Raman Aji.

Propaganda led by Shi'a followers and strong resistance from Raman Aji's leaders created restless and anxious condition in the village; moreover, it went for years. Nevertheless, less restless relationship was shown among Shi'a followers and Raman Aji villagers. *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* (MUI/Indonesian Ulema Council) of Raman Utara sub-district recognized this situation and formed a team to communicate with the Shi'a leaders in Raman Aji. The team asked them to stop the Shiite propaganda for sometimes because of the surfacing resistance.

Majelis Ulama Indonesia of East Lampung district had also called a meeting with the Shi'a leaders for further explanation on their running activities. When Ustadz Muhammad Amin answered the call, he explained that his teachings had no difference to the one that had long been believed by Raman Aji villagers. He brought *Fathul Qorib, Shohih Bukhari* and *Shohih Muslim* books with him to illustrate the *fiqh* teachings used by villagers.

His attempt was actually to mask his real intention, which in Shi'a, known as *taqiyya*. It is an attempt to hide a particular view or teaching, in a certain moment, to avoid resistance, anxiety, or even conflict. *Taqiyya* in Shi'a is part of its pillars of faith.[19]

The resistance was mainly sourced from stigma appeared among religious leaders and prominent figures in Raman Aji as they believed that Shi'a teachings were misguided. In Goffman's theory, a stigmatized group tends to adopt strategy which will infiltrate a social system of majority group. In this context, Sunni has been the norm of Muslim majority; on the other hand, Shiism is considered 'abnormal' which forces the followers to adopt a particular strategy in order to gain respect from

Sunnis.[20] Nonetheless, restlessness and conflict are inextricable from these groups' relationship.

The opposing condition is basically sourced from absolute truth claim—a claim on only one's rightful religious belief is accurate. By the beginning, the claim is aimed to recruit others to join a particular group; at least, to make other groups trust in one's belief.[21] Thus, absolute truth claim likely leads to agitation and conflict. Denny JA asserts that such condition will also cause a mob rule, where major group intimidates the minor ones.[22]

Maintaining harmony among different religions is a tough agenda, since it requires careful handling on emotional aspect than the rational ones. In addition, it highlights 'truth claiming' than 'truth seeking'.[23]

The Raman Aji case clearly illustrates that the early phase points out on each group's attempts to show existence by exposing its 'truth'. As well, both Sunni and Shi'a leaders employed absolute truth claims. Religious propaganda made by the Shi'a leaders demonstrates that they tried to provoke Raman Aji villagers to join their group. Spoken or written (via mass media) propaganda can easily lead to conflict in a particular religious group. Alas, when the propaganda is made to attack other religious groups.[24]

b. Efforts to Create Mutual Understanding

After years of disharmony, the opposing groups finally come to a mutual understanding on each role. The religious leaders and prominent figures in Raman Aji understand that the Shi'a leaders will not give their belief up, and vice versa. In the end, the Sunni-Shi'a leaders accept that they go separate ways. They believe that Allah, The Almighty, will determine the truth. This mutual understanding has created a better condition in the village, even though it is not as normal as the one before the tension occurred.

The condition naturally takes place over the years. It took five years in total to reach mutual understanding, after the villagers went through tensions, taciturn, and unpleasant relationship,

especially among the groups' leaders.[25] The understanding is considered a progress in the social relation of Raman Aji village. The villagers have moved on from hatred sourced from religious beliefs, as tensions among leading figures have dragged common villagers to psychological conflict and caused pointless suspicions and strains.

The mutual understanding also leads to a change. Shi'a's gathering which commonly took place in Wakiran's house had lesser followers. In addition, those who had confirmed as Shi'a believers returned to their prior beliefs.

In Islamic perspective, Sunni and Shi'a are seen as *ijtihad* (reasoning); therefore, conflicts raised can actually be prevented. In the history of Islam, mutual understanding between Sunni and Shi'a can be seen in the efforts made by the late Syaikh Mahmud Syaltut dan Ayatullah Bowjerdi Saleh who were great Shi'a leaders. Differences occurred between Sunni and Shi'a are *sunnatullah* (inevitable or likely to happen) as they are meant to enrich Muslims' knowledge and viewpoint. Additionally, these differences should be seen as blessing, instead of calamity. Muslims should comprehend that thought or interpretation may have fairly interpretative results; hence, there should not be any coercive or intimidating effort in sharing the thought or interpretation. Muslims should realize that absolute truth belongs only to The Almighty.

c. Acceptance

Failed attempts to influence one another has led to mutual understanding among the respected figures in Raman Aji. Sunni's leaders in the village finally understand that Shi'a followers need to conduct their religious activities. Furthermore, they willingly allow the Shi'a community to build their own mosque that is 250 meters away from the village's mosque.

With only 10 followers, the Shi'a mosque is filled with various religious activities. They perform principally similar activities to those who are Sunnis, for instance, calling for daily prayers, commanding *pujian*-pujian (reciting *shalawat* to

Prophet Muhammad PBUH), and *iqomah* (the second call for prayers). Therefore, both Sunni and Shi'a followers can conduct their religious activities in their own mosques.

The Shi'a followers conducts their activities in *al-Rasul al-Azham* mosque. The mosque is not only used for prayers, but also for *majelis taklim* (classes). After *magrib* prayer, they held *tadarrus al-Quran* (Quran recitation). Every Monday and Wednesday evening, there is religious gathering that invites Shi'a communities around Raman Utara sub-district. The mosque is also a headquarter for various *da'wa* activities, especially in Islamic holidays or other incidental agendas.

Sunni and Shi'a should be able to live side-by-side peacefully, since they are not enemies. Both are religious groups which learn Islamic teachings with their own approaches and methods. As Sunni and Shi'a use different *ijtihad*, the results may vary.[26] Therefore, highlight should not only be placed on how different these two groups is, but also similarities that Sunni and Shi'a may share as they come from the same root. In addition, Muslims need to avoid dispute based on one's belief, for instance, for believing in Sunni, Shi'a, or other schools. Differences can typically happen as these groups provide different interpretations on Islamic teachings.

From current cases which involve Sunni and Shi'a, there should be mutual understanding to highlight more on their strengths and weaknesses; hence, both groups can promote shared respect. Additionally, there are facts that Shi'a has better intellectual traditions, like, *ta'wil* (interpretation) and metaphorical reading to Islamic teachings, which can be seen in the works of Ali Syariati. Therefore, Shi'a followers are more theoretical and philosophical than Sunni ones. Additionally, at the time when philosophical thoughts declined among Sunni thinkers, it went contrarywise among Shi'a thinkers. This condition should be seen as an advantage that can improve not only the knowledge for Shi'a followers, but also for Sunni followers.

Sunni and Shi'a followers in Raman Aji has come to a mutual understanding that they need to maintain an intense communication and interaction. As a condition or a process of developing social interaction patterns, harmony is an essential element in strengthening and maintaining social structure in a society.[27] Harmony can function as safety valve to social disintegration. Harmony may reduce conflict; at the same time, it can functionally and structurally build social equilibrium. In this case, harmony can control, maintain, strengthen, and build 'social ties' in the structure of a society. Harmony maintains the ties and preserves shared integrity; consequently, a society can still survive and exist. Therefore, the meaning and function of harmony can be learnt in depth on various contexts of society's life.

CONCLUSION

The responses of religious leaders and prominent figures of Raman Aji village can be divided into three phases, namely strong resistance, building mutual understanding, and acceptance. First, the leaders and figures in Raman Aji show strong resistance to the Shi'a teachings. Second, there have been efforts made to create mutual understanding. After years of disharmony, the opposing groups finally come to a mutual understanding on each role. The leaders/figures understand that Shi'a followers will not give their belief up and vice versa. Third, the leaders and prominent figures in Raman Aji vilage try to accept the existence of Shiite teaching adopted by Shi'a followers. In the end, the Sunni-Shi'a leaders accept that they go separate ways; thus, it leads to acceptance among the opposing groups.

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