

REFRAMING SUFISM AS A FRAMEWORK FOR RELIGIOUS MODERATION: Negotiating Islamic Authority and Social Cohesion in the Indonesian *Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid Tasawuf (MPTT-I)*

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Abstract: While religious moderation has become a central discourse in Indonesia's pluralistic society, existing studies have largely examined it through legal-political and institutional frameworks, leaving its spiritual-ethical dimension, particularly the role of Sufism (tasawuf), insufficiently explored. This study addresses this gap by examining how Sufi traditions serve as a conceptual and practical resource for constructing religious moderation at the grassroots level. Using a qualitative case study of the *Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid Tasawuf Indonesia (MPTT-I)* congregation in Aceh, this research employed purposive and snowball sampling to gather data from key informants, including Abuya Amran Wali Al-Khalidi, district leaders (*wali nanggroe*), and MPTT-I members. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, consisting of data collection, condensation, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that MPTT-I integrates three major Sufi traditions, namely falsafi, sunni, and akhlaqi, into its spiritual teachings. These traditions form a moral-spiritual framework that nurtures religious moderation through values such as balance (*tawâzun*), acceptance of diversity, self-restraint, tolerance, compassion, and communal harmony. This study contributes by proposing a Sufism-based model of religious moderation, showing that moderation emerges not only from policy or doctrine but also from embodied spiritual practice.

Keywords: *Tasawuf*, Religious Moderation, MPTT-I Congregation, Aceh.

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Introduction

The diversity of Indonesia is one of the most striking characteristics of this nation, reflected through aspects of ethnicity, language, geography, and religion.¹ In terms of religion, there are six officially recognized religions in Indonesia.² Interfaith dynamics often serve as a source of social strength, although they can also trigger challenges and conflicts.³ The religious diversity in Indonesia is a blessing that enriches the nation's culture and identity. With more than 600 ethnic groups and various religions practiced, Indonesia offers extraordinary diversity.⁴ This diversity creates opportunities to learn from each other and understand different values, strengthening the sense of tolerance and harmony among religious communities.

However, the potential for religious conflict remains, especially when there are sensitive issues related to beliefs. Misunderstanding or misinterpretation of certain religious practices can cause tension. In some cases, provocation from certain groups or careless statements can trigger excessive reactions, creating an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. Such conflicts can widen the divide between groups, create discrimination, and damage the harmony that has been established. The potential for conflict can be seen in various incidents that have occurred in Indonesia, such as the riots in Ambon between the Muslim and Christian communities in the late 1990s, which resulted in thousands of casualties and refugees. The conflict in Poso, which lasted from 1998 to 2002, also demonstrates how inter-religious tensions can escalate into large-scale violence, resulting in attacks and killings that leave deep trauma. Additionally, the incident in Sampang in 2012 reflected tensions between Sunni and Shia groups, which resulted in the expulsion of the Shia community and violence. In Aceh Singkil, the closure of several churches in 2015 by authorities and local communities highlighted the challenges of implementing the principle of tolerance in areas with a Muslim majority. The case of the burning of a mosque in Tolikara, Papua by certain members of the community while Muslims were performing the Eid al-Fitr prayer in 2015.⁵

No	Year	Location	Parties involved	Brief Description
1	1999-2000	Ambon	Moslem and Christian Community	Armed conflict between two communities that resulted in thousands of deaths and mass displacement.
2	1998-2002	Poso	Moslem and Christian Community	Prolonged clashes, with many casualties and damage to infrastructure.
3	2012	Sampang	Sunni and Syiah Community	Violent incident that led to the expulsion of the Shia community from Sampang.

4	2015	Aceh Singkil	Moslem and Christian Community	The closure of several churches by authorities caused protests and social tensions.
5	2015	Tolikara, Papua	Local People and Moslem Community	Violence against Muslims who were performing Eid prayers by members of the public.
6	2016	Jakarta	Supporters and Opponents of Ahok	Controversy related to Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok)'s statement which sparked massive demonstrations.

Table 1. Religious Conflict in Indonesia

These cases illustrate the importance of preventive measures and constructive conflict resolution. Therefore, all elements of society, including the government and religious leaders, need to continue educating and campaigning for the values of tolerance and interfaith dialogue. In addition to the data presented above, there is also data from the past year related to KBB (Freedom of Religion and Belief) released by Setera Institute as follows:⁶

Category	Data
Total Events	27 Events
Total Action	329 Actions
State Actors (Actions)	114 Actions
Local Government	40 Actions
Police	24 Actions
Civil Service Police	10 Actions
Army	8 Actions
Regional Leadership Communication Forum	6 Actions
Educational Institutions	4 Actions
Non-State Actors (Actions)	215 Actions
Civilians	78 Actions
Individual	19 Actions

Individual	19 Actions
MUI	17 Actions
Religious Organizations	8 Actions
Foreign Citizens	5 Actions
Disruption of Places of Worship	65 Disturbance
Church	40 Disturbance
Mosque	17 Disturbance
Temple	5 Disturbance
Vihara	3 Disturbance

Table 2. KBB Violations Throughout 2023

The above patterns of religious conflict and freedom-of-religion violations are not merely empirical phenomena, they reflect a deeper structural-theoretical problem in how religious moderation is currently conceptualized in Indonesia. Existing studies on religious moderation has predominantly focused on state-driven approaches, including policy frameworks, regulatory instruments, and institutional mainstreaming through bodies such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs.⁷ While important, such top-down models often fail to capture the lived spirituality through which moderation is actually internalized at the grassroots level. International scholarship on religion and peacebuilding has increasingly emphasized the role of embodied religious practice and spiritual traditions as alternative pathways to fostering moderation.⁸ Within Islamic studies specifically, recent works have demonstrated that Sufi orders in Indonesia have served as institutions that promote tolerance, anti-radicalism, and peaceful coexistence through doctrines of love and moderation.⁹ Yet, despite this potential, the theoretical link between Sufism and religious moderation remains underdeveloped, particularly in empirical case studies that demonstrate how Sufi practices translate into moderate dispositions in pluralistic settings.¹⁰ This study addresses this lacuna by positioning the MPTT-I congregation as a productive site for examining how Sufism operates as a bottom-up framework for religious moderation.

In facing the challenge of potential religious conflict, the concept of religious moderation can be an effective alternative solution.¹¹ Religious moderation emphasizes the values of tolerance, openness, and interfaith dialogue. In fact, the government has issued Presidential Regulation Number 58 of 2023 on Strengthening Religious Moderation on September 25, 2023. This regulation is an effort to mainstream the religious moderation program within the Ministry of Religious Affairs and other related institutions.

One of the religious institutions that plays a significant role in instilling the values of religious moderation in Aceh is the Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid Tasawuf Indonesia (MPTT-I). This council is an institution rooted in the practice of the Naqshbandi Al-Khalidiyah order. This assembly was founded by Abuya Syekh Amran Wali, the son of the charismatic Acehnese scholar, Abuya Muhammad Wali Al-Khalidi, who was also the founder and caretaker of Dayah Darussalam Labuhan Haji in South Aceh.

Although considered controversial by some circles, MPTT-I actually has a noble goal focused on creating harmony and unity in society. Abuya Amran Wali, as the founder of this assembly, strives to instill values of love and mutual respect through a Sufi approach. The Sufi approach implemented by MPTT-I emphasizes a deep spiritual aspect, inviting its followers to reflect on the meaning of life and their relationship with God. In this way, Abuya Amran Wali hopes to reduce conflicts and tensions that often arise due to differences in religious understanding.

The internalization of Sufism teachings essentially has a strong intersection with the concept of religious moderation, which consists of four main pillars: National Commitment, Tolerance, Anti-Violence, and Accommodation to local cultural values. These pillars complement each other and provide a framework for the development of moderate attitudes in religious practice. The commitment to nationalism emphasizes the importance of loving the homeland and maintaining unity amidst diversity.¹² The teachings of Sufism, which encourage its followers to see the commonalities among humanity, align with this pillar, as they emphasize that all individuals have equal value and rights. Tolerance is the next pillar integrated into the teachings of Sufism. The concept of accepting differences and respecting others' views is very relevant to spiritual teachings that invite us to humble ourselves and show mutual respect. In the context of MPTT-I, this approach encourages society to understand that differences in religious understanding are not obstacles, but rather opportunities for mutual learning. Anti-Violence becomes another important pillar, where the teachings of Sufism promote love and peace. Abuya Amran Wali strives to convey that violence, whether verbal or physical, is not in line with the true teachings of Islam.

Religious moderation as a concept has been theorized in multiple traditions and remains a multidimensional construct that integrates socio-religious, cultural, and implementation dimensions.¹³ Within the Indonesian context, religious moderation has been institutionalized through Presidential Regulation No. 58 of 2023, articulating four pillars: national commitment, tolerance, anti-violence, and accommodation to local culture. However, scholarly engagement with these pillars has remained largely policy-oriented and normative, with limited attention to the spiritual mechanisms through which moderation is cultivated. Recent studies have begun to explore how moderation is received and internalized at the grassroots level, particularly through religious texts and educational practices, suggesting that moderation is best understood as a grounded

construct rather than merely a top-down policy. Models of moderation centered on intellectual humility and youth engagement have also been proposed, yet these primarily address pedagogical rather than spiritual dimensions.

Tasawuf (Sufism) is conventionally understood as the inner, mystical dimension of Islam, encompassing three interrelated traditions: falsafi (philosophical Sufism, associated with Ibn Arabi), sunni (orthodox Sufism, associated with al-Ghazali), and akhlaqi (ethical Sufism, focused on character formation). Recent scholarship has begun to examine Sufism's social function beyond personal piety, particularly its role in promoting peace, tolerance, and intercommunal harmony. Studies on Sufi orders in Indonesia, such as the Tarekat Qadiriyyah wa Naqshabandiyah (TQN), have shown that doctrines of love (*maḥabbah*), mutual respect, and tolerance serve as primary instruments in countering religious radicalism.¹⁴ Comparable studies have demonstrated that the *waḥdat al-adyân* reasoning of Ibn Arabi provides a Sufistic foundation for religious harmonization in Indonesia, suggesting that philosophical Sufism is intrinsically compatible with the values of religious moderation.¹⁵ Theosophical Sufism, particularly as elaborated in the Al-Hikam tradition, has likewise been shown to cultivate ma'rifah (gnostic awareness) that transcends sectarian rigidity and fosters spiritual openness.¹⁶ Yet, these studies tend to remain at the level of theological exposition or historical narrative, rarely offering empirical case studies that demonstrate how Sufi traditions concretely translate into moderate religious dispositions in contemporary pluralistic societies.

Several previous studies have examined MPTT-I in Aceh. One of them is the research conducted by Abdul Manan titled "The Role of Tauhid Tasawuf Study Council in Preaching the Tauhîd and Tasawuf in Aceh, Indonesia."¹⁷ The results of this study show that the MPTT-I Aceh study group plays an important role in the development of worship rituals and the moral values of the Acehnese community. In addition, research by Safrilsyah et al titled "The Effectiveness of *dzikr* on Anxiety in Facing the Covid-19 Pandemic among the Congregation of the Indonesian Sufism and Theology Study Council (MPTT-I & *Dzikh Rateb Seuribei*)" shows that the practice of *Dzikh Rateb Seuribei* conducted by MPTT-I Aceh is capable of reducing anxiety levels in facing the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁸ Rani et. al further situates MPTT within the broader typology of tarekat adaptation and transformation in contemporary Acehnese society, noting that MPTT under Abuya Amran Wali tends to reinterpret classical Sufi doctrines deemed incompatible with Sharia.¹⁹ More recently, Wirianto traced the spiritual genealogy of the Naqshbandiyah order in Aceh through the figure of Sheikh Muhammad Waly Al-Khalidi, the father of the MPTT-I founder, providing a historical-spiritual context for understanding the doctrinal foundation of MPTT-I. Studies of Naqshbandiyya al-Waliyya in other Acehnese dayah have also identified its role in cultivating religious moderation among disciples.

However, none of these studies have theorized the relationship between Sufi practices and the framework of religious moderation as articulated in contemporary Indonesian

and global discourse. This represents a clear theoretical gap, while the empirical existence of moderate Sufi communities is well-documented, the conceptual mechanism through which Sufism produces moderation remains underexplored. To bridge this gap, this study focuses on examining the role of MPTT-I in supporting the mainstreaming of religious moderation by analyzing the concepts and values that intersect with the pillars of religious moderation within the MPTT-I community in Aceh. The researcher argues that the practical application of Tasawuf teachings has indirectly contributed to instilling values of religious moderation, leading to harmony among religious communities in Aceh, both within and between religious groups. Drawing on insights from intercultural and interfaith sensitivity studies in Indonesia,^{2v} this research further proposes that Sufism functions as a multi-layered moral-spiritual architecture that integrates falsafi, sunni, and akhlaqi dimensions, which systematically generates moderate religious attitudes. By analyzing the MPTT-I congregation as a paradigmatic case, this research contributes both empirically (a grounded case study) and theoretically (a conceptual model linking Sufism and moderation).

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the synergy between Sufism (tasawuf) and religious moderation within the Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid dan Tasawuf Indonesia (MPTT-I) congregation in Aceh. A qualitative method was chosen because the research seeks to understand religious experiences, teachings, and social practices from the perspectives of the participants. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of how the teachings of Tauhid and Tasawuf are interpreted and practiced by members of the MPTT-I community in shaping attitudes of religious moderation. The study adopts a case study design, focusing on the MPTT-I congregation as a specific case of a Sufi-based religious community in Aceh. The case study approach was selected to allow a comprehensive examination of the teachings, practices, and social dynamics within the community, particularly regarding the integration of spiritual teachings and moderate religious values.

The selection of a single-case embedded design is theoretically motivated. MPTT-I represents what may be characterized as a revelatory case, namely an organization whose internal dynamics offer rare empirical access to the under-theorized intersection between Sufi spirituality and religious moderation. Three considerations justify its theoretical significance: first, MPTT-I is one of the largest Sufi-based congregations in Aceh, a province often characterized by religious conservatism, making it a critical site for observing how moderation emerges from within traditional religious structures; second, MPTT-I integrates three Sufi traditions (*falsafi*, *sunni*, *akhlaqi*) within a single doctrinal framework, providing a unique opportunity to examine how diverse Sufi orientations converge in shaping moderate dispositions; and third, MPTT-I operates at the grassroots level, allowing

examination of moderation as lived practice rather than institutional discourse. This positioning aligns with broader scholarly observations that Sufi orders in Indonesia have historically functioned as carriers of moderate, tolerant, and pluralistic Islamic traditions.

The research was conducted in Aceh Province, with the primary locus at the central post of the MPTT-I congregation and several congregation communities. The research sites cover three main regions in Aceh: the West-South Coast, the East-North Coast, and the Central Aceh region. These locations were selected because they represent areas where the MPTT-I congregation is actively established and where its teachings are regularly practiced and disseminated. Data collection was carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Participatory observation was conducted by directly engaging with the activities of MPTT-I administrators and congregation members to understand their religious practices, gatherings, and interactions within the community. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including the main leader of MPTT-I, Abuya Amran Wali Al-Khalidi, district-level leaders known as wali nanggroe, as well as the members and the sympathizers. These informants were selected because of their active roles and deep knowledge of the organization's teachings and practices. Documentation was also collected from internal organizational records, teaching materials, and relevant publications related to the MPTT-I activities. The selection of informants was conducted using purposive sampling to identify individuals who possess relevant knowledge about the teachings and activities of MPTT-I. In addition, snowball sampling was applied to expand the range of informants based on recommendations from initial participants, allowing the researcher to reach other key members within the congregation.

The researcher acknowledges his positionality as a Muslim scholar of Acehese background with prior familiarity with Sufi traditions in the region. This positionality afforded insider access to the congregation and facilitated trust-building with informants. To mitigate potential bias arising from this proximity, the researcher employed reflexive journaling throughout the fieldwork, regularly documenting personal assumptions and their potential influence on data interpretation. Peer debriefing with academic colleagues outside the Sufi tradition was also conducted to ensure analytical distance and interpretive rigor.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed three strategies of triangulation: first, source triangulation, by interviewing informants across different organizational levels (central leadership, district leaders, and ordinary members) and geographic regions (West-South, East-North, and Central Aceh); second, method triangulation, by combining participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis; and third, theory triangulation, by interpreting findings through multiple theoretical lenses (Sufi theology, sociology of religion, and the religious moderation framework). Member-checking was conducted by returning preliminary findings to selected informants for verification, ensuring that the interpretations resonated with the lived experience of the participants.

The research adhered to standard ethical protocols for social science research involving human subjects. Prior to data collection, informants were provided with detailed information regarding the research objectives, their right to withdraw at any stage, and the confidentiality of their participation. Informed consent was obtained verbally and documented. For sensitive theological discussions, pseudonyms have been used in this article where requested by informants, while public figures (such as Abuya Amran Wali Al-Khalidi) appear with their real names with explicit permission.

After the data were collected, they were analyzed using the interactive analysis model, which includes data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing.²⁰ This analytical process was carried out continuously throughout the research to identify patterns, themes, and relationships between the teachings of Tasawuf and the values of religious moderation practiced within MPTT-I.

Results and Discussion

The Concept of the *Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid dan Tasawuf Indonesia* (MPTT-I) Teachings in Aceh

The interview results revealed that MPTT-I focuses on developing teachings that align with moderate and grounded Islamic principles, aiming to deepen the spiritual understanding of the Acehnese community. Through teachings that emphasize the purification of the heart, strengthening of faith, and the application of Sufism in daily life, MPTT-I strives to bring the Acehnese community closer to Allah and enhance their spiritual quality. This is in line with what was conveyed by the informant as follows:²¹

“The main objective of MPTT-I in Aceh is to study and develop the teachings of monotheism and Sufism that align with moderate and grounded Islamic teachings in Aceh. We aim to provide a correct understanding of profound spiritual concepts, particularly in how to draw closer to Allah through the purification of the heart, strengthening of faith, and the application of Sufism in daily life. Thus, the people of Aceh can deepen their understanding of God and enhance their spiritual quality.”

This concept aligns with the understanding of moderate Islam, which emphasizes the balance between worldly and spiritual needs.²² Moderate Islam in the context of MPTT-I aims to avoid extremism and provide teachings that are acceptable in the daily lives of the Acehnese people. Moreover, moderate Islam emphasizes the balance between worldly and spiritual needs, and avoids extremism in the understanding and practice of religion.²³ This makes the teachings of MPTT-I highly relevant for the Acehnese community who wish to lead a religious life without falling into extremism.

Furthermore, the teachings conveyed by MPTT-I focus on a deep understanding of monotheism and Sufism, with an emphasis on the purification of the soul, strengthening of faith, and the formation of morals in accordance with moderate Islamic teachings.

MPTT-I strives to guide the Acehese community in following the correct spiritual path through an approach based on Sufi practices, such as *dzikir*, prayer, and *mujâhadah*, with the aim of deepening the individual's relationship with Allah. In addition, this teaching also emphasizes the importance of awareness of the true self and inner peace as part of the journey towards spiritual perfection. This is as conveyed by the following informant:²⁴

“The main teachings that we emphasize include the strengthening of tauhid or belief in the One God. We teach that every aspect of life must be based on the correct creed. Additionally, the teachings of tasawuf are an integral part, where we teach the concept of purifying the soul, cultivating patience, humility, and sincerity in deeds. We also encourage understanding the essence of oneself, as well as ways to achieve closeness to Allah through *dzikir*, prayer, and *mujâhadah* (spiritual struggle).”

The strengthening of tauhid or belief in the One Almighty God becomes the main foundation in the spiritual life of the community. The strengthening of monotheism is expected to guide each individual to place the correct belief as the main foundation in all aspects of life, both in worship and social interactions. The tauhid, as the main foundation in Islamic teachings, becomes a source of strength for the community to navigate a life full of challenges.²⁵ This belief strengthens the inner bond between the servant and God, thereby creating peace and direction in life.

In the formulation of the tasawuf teachings concept, MPTT-I refers to several classical texts that possess spiritual depth. These sources provide the theoretical and practical foundation that enables MPTT-I to convey tasawuf teachings that are moderate, grounded, and relevant to the context of Acehese society. This is as conveyed by the following informant:²⁶

“In MPTT-I, we use various classical books and contemporary writings as the foundation of tasawuf teachings. Some of the main sources we refer to include: the Book of Al-Hikam by Ibn Ata'illah As-Sakandari: This book teaches a lot about the concept of ma'rifah and how to control oneself to achieve closeness to Allah. Next, the Book of Manazil As-Sa'irin by Imam Al-Harawi: This book is an important guide for the salik (spiritual path travelers), outlining the stages of the spiritual journey towards Allah. Next, the book *Insan Kamil* by Abdul Karim Al-Jili: This book discusses the concept of *insan kamil* (the perfect human), which is one of the foundations in Sufism.”

The reference book used by MPTT-I in the teaching of Tasawuf is known as a reference in deep spiritual teachings about the journey towards inner perfection and closeness to Allah. In Al-Hikam, for example, Ibn Ata'illah teaches the importance of surrendering to Allah's decree and understanding the profound meaning in every life trial, which is an essential part of the spiritual development of a Sufi disciple.²⁷ These teachings form an important foundation for MPTT-I in guiding the Acehese community to understand Sufi concepts that are more relevant to their spiritual needs.

In addition, the works of Abuya Amran Wali, such as *Risalah Tauhid Tasawuf*, *Ajaran Tasawuf dan Keshufian*, and practical guides on *tawajjuh* and *suluk* in the Naqsyabandiyah Khalidiyah order, also serve as important references in the teachings of tasawuf at MPTT-I. These guides provide a practical approach to performing deeper worship, including techniques of *dzikr* and *mujâhadah* that enable a disciple to attain closeness to Allah. Furthermore, Sufism is not just about theory, but also about spiritual practices that must be applied in daily life to achieve the purity of the soul.²⁸ MPTT-I uses these works as references to teach Sufism that is not only theoretical but also practical and applicable in the context of Acehnese society.

In general, the concept of tasawuf teachings in MPTT-I is based on three important interrelated concepts. Abuya Amran Wali, as a mursyid, strives to integrate the concept of philosophical tasawuf with the concept of Sunni tasawuf and the concept of ethical tasawuf as a unity. Regarding the concept of philosophical Sufism, the informant stated the following:²⁹

“Philosophical Sufism in MPTT-I we consider as the foundation of profound knowledge regarding irfani monotheism, an understanding of God that is very deep and inner. This concept teaches us to see God not only in the visible aspects but also in the hidden essence behind all of His creations. In this teaching, we learn how to purify the heart through a profound understanding of God’s unity with the universe. Thus, every action and thought of ours should culminate in a continuous awareness of God.”

In MPTT-I, philosophical Sufism is made the main foundation in the deep spiritual understanding of irfani monotheism, which is an extremely profound inner understanding of God. This concept teaches that God can not only be understood in the outwardly visible aspects but also in the hidden essence behind all His creations. This approach aligns with the thoughts of Ibn Arabi, a key figure in philosophical Sufism, known for his views on *Wahdat al-Wujûd* or “unity of existence.” According to Ibn Arabi, God is the only existing reality, while the universe and all its contents are merely manifestations of His existence that are not directly visible.³⁰ Ibn Arabi argued that the understanding of God must transcend external appearances and involve deep contemplation of God’s essence in all creation.³¹ This understanding leads to the awareness that everything in this world, although appearing different, has a direct connection with God, who is the center of all existence. The teachings of MPTT-I, which encourage seeing God through this deeper dimension, are very relevant to Ibn Arabi’s teachings on the unity of God with the universe. Notably, the *wahdat al-adyan* reasoning derived from Ibn Arabi’s philosophical Sufism has been identified as a foundation for religious harmonization, as it dissolves the perceived ontological superiority of one’s own group and provides an epistemic grounding for accepting religious diversity. Philosophical Sufism as a foundation in its implementation needs to be supported by the practical application of Sufism, which is then referred to as the concept of Sunni Sufism. This is as stated by the informant as follows:³²

“The Tasawuf Sunni (Sunni Sufism) in MPTT-I is very focused on practices that are in accordance with Sharia. In this regard, we integrate the teachings of Rateb Seuribei, which is a practice of *dzikr* passed down by Sunni scholars. Rateb Seuribei involves reciting the phrase “*lâ ilâha illâ Allâh*” as much as possible, followed by a series of prayers recited to attain closeness to God through practices in accordance with the Sunnah. So, in the context of MPTT-I, Sunni Sufism strengthens our spiritual structure by following the authentic traditions of the *Salaf*.”

In MPTT-I, the Tasawuf Sunni (Sunni Sufism) focuses on spiritual practices that align with Islamic law, emphasizing actions that conform to the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). One form of Sunni Sufi practice taught is The Rateb Seuribei, a form of *dzikr* passed down by Sunni scholars. The Rateb Seuribei involves reciting the phrase “*lâ ilâha illâ Allâh*” repeatedly, followed by a series of prayers as a means to draw closer to Allah. This practice is rooted in Sunni Sufism teachings that always prioritize harmony between spiritual practices and authentic Sharia teachings. This is in line with Al-Ghazali’s thoughts in *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, which state that Sufism must align with Sharia, because Sufism that is not based on Sharia will fall into innovation.³³

By following authentic practices in accordance with the Sunnah, Sufism in MPTT-I aims to strengthen a true and pure spiritual foundation. The Rateb Seuribei itself plays an important role in bringing a servant closer to God through practices aimed at purifying the soul and strengthening faith. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya in his work *Madârij al-Sâlikin* teaches that continuous practice of *wirid* and *dzikr* can awaken spiritual awareness and strengthen the bond between the servant and God.³⁴ In this context, the practice of The Rateb Seuribei is not merely a verbal ritual, but also part of a deeper spiritual journey, aimed at purifying the heart from spiritual ailments and drawing closer to Allah. By following these teachings, Sunni Sufi practitioners in MPTT-I strive to enhance their spiritual quality by adhering to the methods accepted by the *Salaf*, the first generation of Muslims who were closer to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). As a system that binds one another, the concept of tasawuf in MPTT-I culminates in the emergence of commendable traits as the outcome of understanding the philosophical concept of tasawuf actualized in Sunni tasawuf practices. This is as conveyed by the informant as follows:³⁵

“Moral Sufism is one of the most important aspects of MPTT-I. After we gain a deep understanding of God and practice actions in accordance with the Sharia, the most evident impact is our morals. Moral Sufism teaches us to develop commendable traits such as patience, humility, and compassion. The impact of these teachings is good morals, which are reflected in our behavior towards fellow humans and other creatures.”

The Tasawuf Akhlaqi (Ethical Sufism) is a very important aspect because it is directly related to the transformation of individual behavior and morals. The teachings of tasawuf teach that after someone gains a deep understanding of God and performs actions in accordance with the Sharia, the most noticeable impact is the transformation of character.

Akhlaqi Sufism focuses on the development of commendable traits reflected in daily behavior, such as patience, humility, and compassion. Ibn al-Qayyim in *Madârij al-Sâlikin* emphasizes that true spiritual change must be reflected in good behavior, and that the teachings of tasawuf are not limited to ritual practices, but also to moral improvement that has a positive impact on interactions with others.³⁶ This concept aligns with the teachings of Sufism, which emphasize that true spirituality must result in noble character. Akhlaqi Sufism in MPTT-I teaches that good character is a reflection of an individual's spiritual depth. After someone understands irfani monotheism and acts according to the Sharia, commendable traits such as patience in facing trials, humility in interacting with others, and compassion towards fellow beings become very important aspects to pay attention to. Al-Ghazali in *Ihya Ulum al-Din* teaches that the ultimate goal of tasawuf is to perfect one's character, as good character is the result of closeness to Allah.³⁷ Furthermore, individuals who engage in strong spiritual practices, such as Sufism, tend to show an improvement in moral and social quality, reflected in better behavior towards others and the surrounding environment.³⁸ Overall, the concept of Sufism teachings in MPTT-I taught by Abuya Amran Wali is manifested in the concept of the triad that binds and supports each other. This can be seen in the illustration of the chart below:

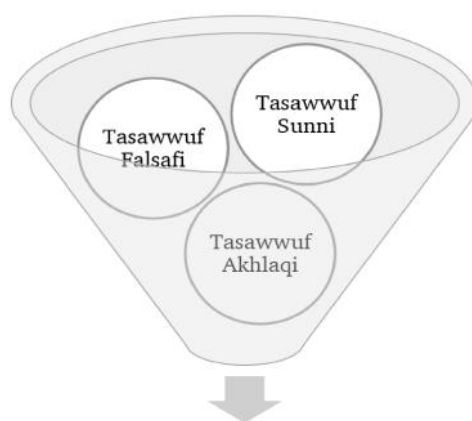


Figure 1. MPTT-I Tasawuf Teaching Concept

The Values of Religious Moderation Contained in the Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid dan Tasawuf Indonesia (MPTT-I) Congregation in Aceh

The results of this research reveal that the teachings of Tauhid and Tasawuf conveyed by the Jama'ah MPTT-I (Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid dan Tasawuf Indonesia) in Aceh contain several values of religious moderation that are highly relevant in the context of the social and religious life of the Acehnese community. Among these values are:

Balance in Religion

This is as conveyed by one of the MPTT-I congregation members as follows:³⁹

“After practicing the teachings of Tasawuf, I feel I can maintain a better balance in my

religious life. Tasawuf teaches me not only to focus on ritual worship but also to purify the heart and control oneself. In that way, I can live more simply and with more compassion towards others. This teaching makes me more humble and not excessive in everything, both in worldly life and the hereafter. I also became more tolerant of differences in religious and cultural views, and more at peace in my daily life.”

This finding is in line with the theory of religious moderation, which emphasizes the balance between spiritual and social aspects in religious practices. According to Quraish Shihab in his book *Moderasi Beragama: Solusi Islam untuk Masyarakat Multikultural*, religious moderation is an attitude that does not excessively interpret religious teachings and is able to place religion in a context that is appropriate for the times.⁴⁰ The teachings of Tasawuf, with a focus on purifying the heart and self-control, facilitate its followers to live life more wisely, calmly, and not get caught up in extremism. This is reflected in the informant’s statement emphasizing the importance of living simply and with compassion towards others, which is the essence of Tasawuf teachings that encourage its followers to achieve inner balance and harmonious relationships with God and fellow beings.

Furthermore, this value is relevant to the concept of *wasatiyyah* taught in Islam, which refers to the middle path that distances itself from two extreme poles. According to Muhammad al-Ghazali in his works, Sufism provides its followers with the space to draw closer to God through self-control and the attainment of inner peace, which culminates in a moderate attitude in interacting with society.⁴¹ This teaching creates an awareness of the importance of tolerance, simplicity, and avoidance of behaviors that can lead to conflict or division. These findings, therefore, indicate that Sufism teachings within the context of MPTT-I have made significant contributions to shaping moderate individuals, in line with the relevant values of religious moderation in the life of Acehese society.

Acceptance of Differences

This is as conveyed by one of the MPTT-I congregation members as follows:⁴²

“After attending the study at MPTT-I, I have learned to accept differences with an open heart. In the teachings of Tasawuf, we are taught to see everyone as equal creatures of God, with no one being higher or lower. Everyone has their own path and way of getting closer to God. I have become more tolerant of differences in religious views, culture, and ways of life. Because this teaching encourages us not to judge others, but to focus more on improving ourselves and maintaining peace in our relationships with others.”

These findings reflect the application of the principle of religious moderation, which teaches acceptance of differences within the context of social and religious life. In line with the concept of tolerance which emphasizes the importance of appreciating differences, Sufism teaches that every individual has the right to pursue their own spiritual

journey without feeling superior to others.⁴³ Sufism instructs its followers to view diversity as part of God's destiny and to focus on self-improvement, which is reflected in the increasingly open-minded attitude of the MPTT-I congregation towards differences. This makes differences an opportunity to enrich spiritual experiences and strengthen interpersonal relationships, rather than a source of conflict.

This finding also reflects the application of the principle of inclusivity as reflected in the teachings of religious moderation, which acknowledges and appreciates differences in religious interpretation as part of the diversity created by God. According to Hassan Hanafi in *Islamic Thought: A Contemporary Approach*, inclusivity in religion encourages followers to embrace differences as opportunities for mutual understanding, not to build divides.⁴⁴ This teaching aligns with the concept of religious pluralism, which holds that although there are many paths to God, each path remains valuable and has a place within a broader religious framework. By adopting an inclusive attitude, the MPTT-I congregation demonstrates a moderate stance that avoids the exclusivity often a source of division, and promotes harmony in diversity. This finding is consistent with broader research on interfaith dialogue in Indonesia, which has demonstrated that grassroots religious communities can constitute meaningful spaces for cultivating religious moderation through inclusive engagement with religious others.

Self-Control

This is as conveyed by one of the MPTT-I congregation members as follows:⁴⁵

“After attending the MPTT-I study session, I increasingly understand the importance of self-control in daily life. The teachings of Tasawuf teach us not to be carried away by emotions or excessive worldly desires. I learned to be more patient, calm, and to control my desires, both in worship and in interacting with others. By practicing these teachings, I feel more able to maintain my attitude and behavior, not easily angered or provoked, and more focused on things that bring me closer to God. This self-control also makes me better in maintaining relationships with family and society, as I can better understand and appreciate the feelings of others.”

This finding aligns with the concept of self-control in Sufism, which emphasizes the importance of *tazkiyah* or purification of the soul, aimed at controlling desires and emotions so that they do not dominate a person's actions. According to al-Ghazali in *Ihyâ' Ulûm al-Dîn*, self-control is the main key to achieving inner peace and piety, because by restraining oneself from desires, a person can focus more on their spiritual goals and maintain harmony in social life.⁴⁶ The teachings of Sufism, which emphasize self-control, are also related to the concepts of patience and trust in God, which help individuals remain calm in facing life's trials, not easily provoked, and more sensitive to the needs and feelings of others. This reflects the practice of religious moderation that encourages its followers to live more wisely and harmoniously, both in personal and social relationships.

Tolerance and Affection

This is as conveyed by one of the MPTT-I congregation members as follows:⁴⁷

“After joining MPTT-I, I have become increasingly aware of the importance of tolerance and compassion in daily life. The teachings of Tasawuf teach us to always look at others with love, regardless of their background or religious views. I learned to be more patient and understand the situation of others, even when there are differences in opinion or actions that do not align with my expectations. Love is not only limited to family or close friends, but also to fellow humans, even to those with differing views. This teaching makes me appreciate every individual more and maintain a respectful attitude in every interaction.”

This finding reflects the fundamental principles of Sufism teachings that emphasize the importance of compassion and tolerance in human relationships, in line with Muhammad al-Ghazali's thoughts in *Ihyâ' Ulûm al-Dîn*, which state that love and mutual respect are the essence of good morals. Al-Ghazali teaches that a Muslim should love fellow humans as a manifestation of love for God, because everything in this world is His creation. This teaching is also related to the concept of rahmah or compassion in Islam, which encourages the faithful to be gentle, loving, and tolerant towards differences. By applying these values, the MPTT-I congregation demonstrates the practice of religious moderation that creates peace in society and avoids conflicts that often arise from an inability to accept differences. This is consistent with cross-comparative findings indicating that Sufi doctrines of love (*mahabbah*) and mutual respect have been internalized in various tarekat communities across Indonesia as principal instruments against radicalism and as foundations for moderate religious life.

Simplicity and Community Living

This is as conveyed by one of the MPTT-I congregation members as follows:⁴⁸

“At MPTT-I, I learned to live simply and focus more on the essential things in life. The teachings of Tasawuf teach us not to get caught up in excessive worldly luxuries and to appreciate what we have more. I feel that life is more peaceful when I am not burdened by excessive desires. In addition, I was also taught to be more active in the community, to help others selflessly, and to maintain harmony in the surrounding environment. Love and togetherness are more important than wealth or social status. Through this study, I have become more sensitive to the needs of others and feel more connected to the community.”

This finding aligns with the principle of *zuhd* (simplicity) emphasized in Sufi teachings, which instruct Muslims not to get entangled in the material world and to prioritize spiritual values. According to al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, simplicity is one way to cleanse the heart from the love of the world that can obstruct the relationship with God.⁴⁹ This simplicity also reflects Islamic teachings about the importance of living with what one has and not

being excessive, which is closely related to the concept of mutual aid or helping each other in society. In this context, the MPTT-I congregation demonstrates the application of religious moderation by leading a simpler life and being more sensitive to the social needs around them, in accordance with Islamic social values that prioritize togetherness, mutual assistance, and maintaining harmony among individuals in society.

The application of Sufism teachings in MPTT-I in Aceh has produced values of religious moderation, including balance in religious practice, acceptance of differences, self-control, tolerance, compassion, simplicity, and concern for community life. The implementation of these values shows that through the practice of Sufism, MPTT-I congregants can build a harmonious, peaceful, and respectful way of life, which not only strengthens their spiritual relationship with God but also strengthens social bonds within the Acehese community. This can be seen in the chart below:

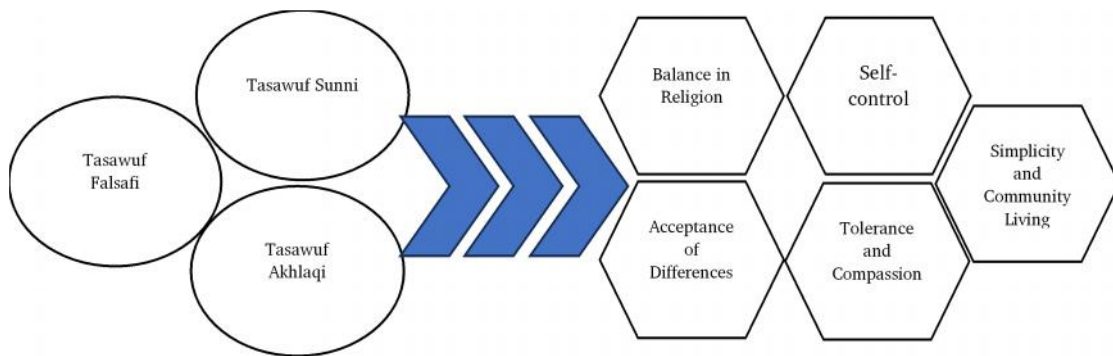


Figure. 2 The Model of Tasawuf Integration and Religious Moderation

From the findings and discussions of this research, it can be concluded that the integration of Sufism teachings in the Majelis Pengkajian Tauhid dan Tasawuf Indonesia (MPTT-I) in Aceh carries three main concepts, namely philosophical Sufism, Sunni Sufism, and moral Sufism. These three concepts, although having different approaches, complement each other and support the application of noble values in religious life. The concept of philosophical Sufism teaches the depth of spiritual understanding, Sunni Sufism emphasizes loyalty to authentic Islamic teachings, while moral Sufism encourages the practice of noble character in daily life. The implementation of these teachings in the practices of the MPTT-I congregation has proven to create a moderate and harmonious atmosphere.

The noble values derived from these three concepts of Sufism directly intersect with the four pillars of religious moderation, namely tolerance, inclusivism, social justice, and interfaith dialogue. In the context of diverse Aceh, the application of these values has greatly contributed to the creation of harmony in community life. By prioritizing a peaceful attitude, mutual respect, and appreciation of differences, MPTT-I has successfully instilled a moderate attitude that strengthens the unity and cohesion of the community, especially in Aceh.

Theoretical Contribution: A Sufism-Based Model of Religious Moderation

The findings of this study allow for the formulation of a conceptual model linking Sufi traditions and religious moderation, which the writer terms as the Sufi Tripartite Model of Religious Moderation (STM-RM). This model posits that religious moderation, when emerging from Sufi traditions, is not a single doctrinal stance but the product of three interlocking spiritual mechanisms that operate in a vertically integrated manner.

First, the Cognitive-Metaphysical Layer (*Tashauwuf Falsafî*). At this layer, moderation begins with a metaphysical reorientation: the recognition that all of creation reflects divine unity (*wahdat al-wujûd*). This worldview philosophically dissolves the perceived ontological superiority of one's own group, providing the epistemic foundation for accepting diversity. Moderation here is not merely a social attitude but a metaphysical commitment grounded in the Sufistic reasoning that has historically informed religious harmonization in Indonesia and beyond.⁵⁰ This finding aligns with broader theosophical readings of Sufism that highlight the formative role of *ma'rifah* in shaping a non-exclusivist religious consciousness.

Second, the Ritual-Practical Layer (*Tashauwuf Sunnî*). At this layer, moderation is anchored in disciplined religious practice consistent with shari'ah, particularly through communal *dzikr* such as *Rateb Seuribei*. These rituals function as ethical infrastructure, embedding moderation in routine bodily practice rather than abstract reasoning. Moderation here becomes habituated, that is, a dispositional virtue that is reinforced through repetition and communal participation. Comparable cases of Naqshbandiyya orders in Aceh have demonstrated that disciplined Sufi ritual practice cultivates moderate religious attitudes among disciples in dayah-based settings.⁵¹

Third, the Ethical-Behavioral Layer (*Tashauwuf Akhlâqî*). At this layer, moderation manifests as observable conduct: patience, humility, compassion, and self-restraint. This is the public-facing dimension of moderation, where the inner transformations of the previous two layers become socially legible. Empirical observations on Sufi orders in Indonesia demonstrate that the ethical-behavioral outcomes of Sufi practice constitute the most visible counter-narrative to religious radicalism, as they translate doctrinal love and spiritual purification into everyday moral conduct.

The theoretical novelty of this model lies in its assertion that religious moderation, in Sufi-grounded communities, is not externally imposed but internally generated through a vertically integrated spiritual architecture. This challenges the dominant policy-driven conceptualization of moderation in Indonesia, which tends to treat moderation as a top-down value to be socialized through institutional mainstreaming. STM-RM demonstrates that moderation can be intrinsically cultivated through religious tradition itself, offering an alternative, and arguably more sustainable, pathway to pluralistic coexistence. This insight is particularly relevant in the Indonesian context, where existing youth moderation models have largely focused on intellectual humility and pedagogical intervention, but

have not sufficiently engaged with the spiritual-mystical traditions that animate much of grassroots religious life.

The implications of this model are threefold. Theoretically, it bridges the gap between sociological studies of religious moderation and Islamic spiritual studies, two fields that have largely operated in parallel. Methodologically, it offers a layered analytical framework that future studies can apply to other Sufi orders or even to non-Islamic mystical traditions. Practically, it suggests that government policies on religious moderation could benefit from engaging with existing spiritual infrastructures rather than treating moderation as a value to be introduced from outside. In the specific case of Aceh, which is a region with a strong tradition of *dayah* and *tarekat*, STM-RM provides a culturally grounded alternative to externally imposed moderation campaigns.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the integration of Sufism within the MPTT-I congregation represents a significant framework for cultivating religious moderation in Aceh. The teachings of Tasawuf manifested through philosophical, practical, and moral dimensions form a complementary spiritual foundation that shapes ethical behavior and moderate religious attitudes among its members. The interaction between these Sufi teachings and the principles of religious moderation strengthens key values such as tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and respect for diversity. As a result, the spiritual practices and teachings within the congregation contribute to maintaining social harmony in a pluralistic society. These findings suggest that Sufism can function as an important cultural and spiritual resource in promoting religious moderation at the community level. By emphasizing inner spirituality, moral discipline, and social responsibility, Sufi teachings provide a constructive pathway for reducing religious tensions and fostering mutual understanding. Theoretically, this study contributes by proposing the Sufi Tripartite Model of Religious Moderation (STM-RM), which articulates the cognitive-metaphysical, ritual-practical, and ethical-behavioral mechanisms through which Sufism produces moderate religious dispositions. Future studies are encouraged to further examine the broader role of Sufism in shaping social and policy frameworks related to religious moderation, as well as its influence on younger generations in responding to contemporary challenges such as globalization and social change. Comparative studies involving other religious organizations in Indonesia may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of various models for implementing religious moderation in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

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