

Tracing the Roots of Moderate Religiosity in Classical Islamic Theology: A Study of the Murji'ah Sect

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Abstract

The concepts and practices of moderate Islam are not a manifestation of new Islamic teachings, but can be traced back to the characteristics of Islamic religious movements in the past. The purpose of this study is to describe the theology of the Murji'ah school of thought and its relevance to the formation of a moderate Islamic character. This qualitative study, conducted as a literature review, employs descriptive analysis and content analysis. The research findings indicate that the Murji'ah holds Islamic theological principles that form the basis of a tolerant religious character toward the diversity of Islamic beliefs and attitudes outside their community, such as the principle of *Irja'* (postponement), which defers the judgment of one's faith status due to major sins to God (Allah) as His exclusive prerogative, thereby avoiding the practice of arbitrary *Takfir* (declaration of unbelief). Furthermore, the Murji'ah's principle of neutrality in political and theological conflicts can be viewed as a foundation for integrative values within the plurality of social life. This study's contribution underscores that the roots of moderate Islamic religious practices can be found within the diversity of classical Islamic theological schools that *are inclusive and tolerant*.

Keywords: Islamic Theology, Murji'ah, Moderate Islam

Abstrak

Paham maupun praktik keberagamaan Islam moderat bukanlah manifestasi ajaran Islam baru, melainkan dapat ditelusuri pada corak aliran keberagamaan Islam di masa lampau. Tujuan penelitian ini untuk mendeskripsikan teologi Islam aliran Murji'ah dan relevansinya terhadap pembentukan karakter keberagamaan Islam moderat. Penelitian kualitatif dalam bentuk kajian pustaka ini menggunakan pendekatan analisa deskriptif dan analisa isi. Hasil penenelitian menunjukkan Murji'ah memiliki prinsip teologi Islam yang menjadi basis corak keberagamaan toleran terhadap kemajemukan paham maupun sikap keberagamaan Islam di luar komunitasnya, seperti prinsip Irja' (penundaan) yang menyerahkan penilaian status keimanan karena dosa besar sebagai hak prerogatif Tuhan (Allah), sehingga tidak terjebak dalam praktik takfir (pengkafiran) yang sembarangan. Kemudian, prinsip netral Murji'ah dalam konflik politik dan teologis dapat dipandang sebagai basis nilai integratif dalam pluralitas kehidupan sosial. Kontribusi penelitian ini menegaskan akar corak keberagamaan Islam moderat dapat ditemukan dalam diversitas aliran teologi Islam klasik yang inklusif dan toleran.

Kata Kunci: Teologi Islam, Murji'ah, Islam Moderat

INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of Islamic theology, Murji'ah played an important role as one of the main centers of study in the second century of the Hijri calendar. Together with the Khawarij on one side and the Mu'tazilah in the middle, Murji'ah formed a triangle of thought that enriched the discourse on the nature of faith, the status of those who commit major sins, and the relationship between human will and divine decree.

The dedication of the Murji'ah system lies in its emphasis on the aspect of *ma'rifah* (knowledge) as the core of faith, as well as its rejection of the practice of *takfir* (excommunication) with an attitude that will become the foundation for Islamic religious behavior. In this context, moderate Murji'ah serves as a corrective mechanism against the excessive actions of the Khawarij, who not only declared Ali and Muawiyah to be infidels, but also took the lives of fellow Muslims whom they considered sinful (Zuhri & Muhibin, 2022). Not only that, by rejecting the equal division between the Islam of perfect believers and eternal unbelievers, Murji'ah opens up more space for a more comprehensive understanding of a more human faith. The influence of Murji'ah thought in modern Islamic teachings is particularly prominent amid the current rise of takfirism, which revives the spirit of the Khawarij in a new form (Nur Fauji et al., 2026).

The focus of this study is to describe the theological thinking of the Murji'ah school of Islam and its relevance to the formation of moderate Islamic character. This study is categorized as qualitative research in the form of a literature review. The research approach uses descriptive analysis and content analysis.

Previous studies conducted by Sofiani, Triana, Rita Rahmawati, and Shinta Dewi Rismawati, among others, have confirmed that the *irja'* (postponement of judgment) attitude promoted by the Murjiah in the early days of Islam served as a political strategy to reduce horizontal conflict between the supporters of Ali bin Abi Talib and Muawiyah bin Abu Sufyan, thereby creating social stability through neutrality. Finally, regarding contemporary relevance, it can be concluded that the Murjiah principle of theological tolerance has a positive correlation with the concept of religious moderation (*wasathiyah*) in the modern era, where an emphasis on the essence of heartfelt belief can reduce the potential for radicalism, which is often triggered by excessive judgment of the outward forms of worship or differences in *furu'iyah* (Sofiani et al., 2014).

This research is expected to serve as material for study or reflection for the development of knowledge of kalam in Islamic teachings. In practical terms, this research is expected to contribute useful insights for students, the wider community, and relevant institutions in the context of exploring accurate and objective information about the knowledge of Murji'ah's thinking in the body of modern Islamic teachings, whose knowledge must develop in a society with an understanding of teachings that does not exceed limits, which can then be followed up by all elements, both vertical and horizontal.

RESEARCH METHODS

The main subject of this study is to describe Murji'ah Islamic theology and its relevance to the formation of moderate Islamic diversity. To answer the main research question, this

study uses a qualitative research method in the form of a literature review. This study uses a descriptive analysis and content analysis approach.

The research data sources used various scientific literature that explain the concept of Murji'ah Islamic theology and explanations of the concept of moderate Islam. Furthermore, the research data was obtained through documentation techniques. Then, data analysis in this study used three stages, including reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Moderate Islam

Moderate Islam, often referred to as Islam *Wasathiyah*, is not a new sect or school of thought that has emerged amid the dynamics of the Muslim community, but rather the basic essence of Islamic teachings themselves, which emphasize balance and justice. Etymologically, the word moderate comes from the Latin word *moderatus*, which means moderate or not excessive, which in Islamic terminology is translated as *wasath*. This concept places its adherents in the middle ground, avoiding the extreme right, which tends to be radical and intolerant, and the extreme left, which is too liberal to the point of neglecting Sharia law.

In the context of diversity, Moderate Islam promotes the principle of *tasamuh* or tolerance, whereby truth is not monopolized by any one group. Religious moderation is key to creating social harmony in a diverse society. Thus, being a moderate Muslim means committing to understanding religion comprehensively, not partially, and always prioritizing the welfare of humanity at large. This understanding is crucial to clarify amid the proliferation of one-sided claims of truth that often trigger horizontal conflicts. Therefore, Moderate Islam serves as an ideological defense to protect the purity of religion from abuse in the name of God for the purpose of violence. Its implementation requires maturity in thinking and acting, where each individual is able to distinguish between basic principles that remain constant and branches of law that can change according to the context of the times.

The theological foundation of Moderate Islam is very solid because it comes directly from the Qur'an and Hadith, particularly Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143, which refers to Muslims as 'Ummatan Wasatan' or the middle nation. This verse is the main argument that Allah SWT wants Muslims to be witnesses to the truth in a fair and balanced manner, not leaning towards either extreme (Hidayat & Nur, 2020).

The concept of *wasathiyah* in this verse encompasses the meanings of justice, the best choice, and objective testimony before other humans. This understanding rejects all forms of *ghuluw* or excessiveness in religion, such as declaring fellow Muslims as infidels simply because of differences in political views or *fiqh* that are *furu'iyah* in nature. Conversely, Moderate Islam also rejects *ifrat* or completely disregarding sharia on the grounds of excessive modernization. This balance requires Muslims to harmoniously combine the texts of revelation with the context of social reality. Without a strong theological foundation, the moderation movement will only be seen as a political project, when in fact it is a divine command. Therefore, strengthening religious narratives based on valid *naqli* arguments is

very important to counter radical narratives that also often use religious arguments but with narrow interpretations that are taken out of context. A correct understanding of verses promoting moderation will give rise to a calm attitude towards religion that is not easily provoked by divisive issues. In the realm of faith or belief, Moderate Islam teaches its followers to uphold the principle of tawhid without falling into blind fanaticism that closes the door to dialogue. Moderation in faith means believing in the truth of Islam with certainty, while still respecting the rights of others to believe in their respective religions without coercion (Aziz, 2019).

Setiawan in a journal on religious sociology explains that moderate religiosity in terms of faith is characterized by an open attitude towards different religious interpretations as long as they remain within the basic principles of Islam. This is important to prevent the emergence of takfiri attitudes, which is the tendency to easily accuse others of being infidels, a characteristic of extremist groups. Moderate Islam encourages its followers to use common sense in understanding the verses about the nature of Allah, not to get caught up in anthropomorphism that equates God with creatures, but also not to completely deny His attributes like liberals do. This balance between naqli and aqli creates inner peace in one's beliefs. In addition, moderation in faith also means avoiding mixing Islamic teachings with mystical practices that cannot be justified in terms of sharia or superstition. With a moderate creed, a Muslim will have strong spirituality while remaining rational, so that their faith is not easily shaken by misleading contemporary issues. This is the main foundation before moving on to other aspects of worship and muamalah in the structure of a Muslim's comprehensive and complete religiosity. The next scope is in the field of worship, where Moderate Islam emphasizes a balance between vertical rituals to Allah and horizontal rituals to fellow human beings. Worship in the moderate view is not limited to the formalistic practice of prayer, fasting, or hajj, but also pays attention to the substance and social impact of such worship (Setiawan, 2021).

Moderation in worship rejects attitudes that are too lax to the point of abandoning sharia obligations, but also rejects attitudes that are too rigid to the point of causing difficulties for oneself and others. For example, in performing prayer, Moderate Islam teaches to be solemn but still pay attention to the surrounding conditions so as not to disturb public comfort. The principle of ease or taysir in Islamic law is highly valued in this concept, given that Islam is a religion that is natural and in accordance with human capabilities. Therefore, the understanding of fiqh that is applied must be contextual and prioritize the welfare of the ummah. Worship should not be a tool of exclusivity that separates Muslims from their social reality. Thus, moderation in worship will produce individuals who are ritually pious and socially pious, whose presence always brings peace to their surroundings. The aspect of muamalah or social interaction is the most visible scope of the application of Moderate Islam in everyday life, especially in countries with high diversity such as Indonesia. In this realm, Moderate Islam promotes the principles of human equality, justice, and cooperation in goodness regardless of ethnic, racial, or religious background (Rahman, 2022).

Moderation in *muamalah* (social interaction) also includes a critical stance toward social injustice and government, but it is conveyed in a polite and constitutional manner, not through anarchy. Moderate Islam in Indonesia does not separate Islamic identity from Indonesian identity, but rather harmoniously combines them within the framework of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). This is in line with the findings of various studies which show that moderate Muslim groups are at the forefront in rejecting movements that seek to replace the foundations of the state on religious grounds. Religious moderation here is interpreted as a commitment to maintaining the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia while continuing to practice Islamic law personally and communally. The government, through the Ministry of Religious Affairs, has also made strengthening religious moderation a priority policy to counter radicalism that threatens the stability of the state. Therefore, the scope of Moderate Islam in national politics is to support the existing democratic system, respect positive law, and actively participate in national development. This attitude proves that being a devout Muslim is not incompatible with being a good citizen who loves the country. Without this moderation, the potential for conflict between religion and the state will continue to loom and threaten the future of Indonesian civilization in the eyes of the international community.

Finally, the challenges and future of Moderate Islam have become a crucial topic of discussion in this fast-paced digital age filled with disinformation. Amidst the onslaught of social media, narratives of hatred and radicalism can spread massively, targeting young people who are searching for their religious identity. Therefore, strengthening Moderate Islam cannot only be done through conventional approaches in mosques or schools, but must also extend to the digital space with creative and enlightening content. Collaboration between the government, Islamic community organizations, and academics is needed to produce moderate religious literacy that is easily accessible to the public (Fauzi, 2023).

Murji'ah Islamic Theology and Characteristics of Its Teachings

Kalam is a branch of knowledge that studies the teachings that form the beliefs of the Islamic community. It explores information related to the power of Murji'ah thought in modern Islamic teachings, which is an important aspect that students and the wider community should be aware of. Data visualization helps us understand the information obtained, information about beliefs and knowledge in depth because it instills many of the values found in the Qur'an, such as the belief that words and deeds are not part of the essence of faith, but merely complements or fruits of faith.

In the perspective of Islamic Theology (*'Ilm Kalam*) studied in higher education, understanding of old schools of thought such as Murji'ah is not only viewed as historical, but also as a foundation of thought that still has methodological relevance. The following are the theoretical foundations commonly understood by students in studying the Murji'ah school of thought:

Etymologically, Murji'ah comes from the word *arja'a*, which means "to delay" or "to postpone." in theological terminology, Murji'ah is a group that defers the legal decision on perpetrators of major sins (apostates or infidels) to Allah SWT on the Day of Judgment. For

students, this is understood as an attitude of *tawakkal* (trust in God) in theological judgment, in contrast to the Khawarij who are quick to declare someone an infidel (*takfir*).

In the literature *Milal wa Nihal* (History of Islamic Sects), there are several important points in the teachings of Murji'ah that are the subject of study. First, Faith is Confirmation of the Heart: Faith is *tasdiq bi al-qalb* (confirmation in the heart). Verbal statements and physical actions are not part of the essence of faith, but merely complements or fruits of faith. Second, Sin Does Not Nullify Faith: A Muslim who commits a major sin is still considered a believer, not an infidel. Their status is left to Allah (*irja'*). Third, Separation between Faith and Deeds: Good deeds do not significantly or fundamentally increase or decrease the quality of faith.

In modern Islamic studies, Murji'ah is often associated with the seeds of liberal or comprehensive thinking. This theory is used to analyze how Islam responds to diversity. For students, studying Murji'ah is not about accepting all of its teachings without careful consideration, but rather about learning lessons about tolerance and the dangers of going too far. One of the biggest problems in modern Islam is the rise of terrorism and coercion based on the easy practice of excommunicating fellow Muslims (*takfir*). Radical groups often use Khawarij logic (viewing major sins as apostasy). Murji'ah thinking offers a powerful way to safeguard against this phenomenon. With the principle of "delaying judgment," Murji'ah teaches that humans do not have absolute power to determine who will enter heaven or hell based on worldly sins.

The Dimensions of Moderate Islamic Religious Teachings in the Murjiah Theology

The Murji'ah school of thought emerged in the history of Islamic thought during the Umayyad Dynasty, precisely in the midst of political turmoil and sharp horizontal conflicts between the groups of Ali bin Abi Talib and Muawiyah bin Abu Sufyan. Etymologically, the word Murji'ah comes from the word *arja'a*, which means to delay or postpone, reflecting their theological stance of postponing judgment on the status of a person's faith who has committed a major sin until the Day of Judgment, when only Allah has the right to determine. In this bloody historical context, the Murji'ah emerged as a balancing force that rejected the extremism of the Khawarij, who were quick to declare fellow Muslims as infidels. The relevance of this thinking to moderate Islam today is very strong, because the essence of the moderate movement is to create social stability amid differences in political and religious views. As discussed in the *Journal of Theology*, which examines the history of the Kalam school of thought, this attitude of postponing judgment does not mean ignoring sin, but rather a theological strategy to prevent wider divisions among the people. By placing absolute judicial authority in the hands of God, Murji'ah indirectly builds a barrier for humans to punish each other in this world, which is a basic principle of religious harmony in a pluralistic society such as Indonesia.

The concept of faith in Murji'ah theology is one of the main pillars supporting the narrative of moderate Islam, in which they define faith as justification in the heart (*tasdiq bi al-qalb*) and verbal expression, without requiring good deeds as an integral part of the definition of faith itself. Although this view is often criticized by *Ahlussunnah wal Jamaah*

circles, who include deeds as a condition for the perfection of faith, in a sociological context, this separation provides broad tolerance for individuals who may be weak in practicing Sharia but still have basic beliefs. In the Journal of Qur'anic and Hadith Studies, it is explained that the flexibility of this definition of faith prevents rigid religious exclusivism, whereby a person is not automatically considered to have left Islam simply because of negligence in mahdhah worship. Moderate Islam adopts this spirit by emphasizing that social piety and good intentions in the heart are as important as formal rituals. Thus, Murji'ah theology provides a philosophical basis that religiosity should not be measured in black and white based on outward appearances alone, but rather it is necessary to look at the substance of beliefs that encourage peace, not hostility between fellow Muslims who differ in their levels of obedience. One of the greatest contributions of Murji'ah theology to moderate Islamic discourse is the principle of anti-*takfir*, or rejecting the easy labeling of fellow Muslims as infidels, which has become a crucial issue in the contemporary era of rampant radicalism. Radicals often use textual arguments to declare other groups as infidels or apostates simply because of differences in political choices or legal interpretations, which has the potential to trigger violence.

The *irja'* or postponement of judgment advocated by Murji'ah serves as a theological defense mechanism to protect the lives and honor of Muslims from reckless accusations of heresy. References from Al-Tahrir: Journal of Islamic Thought highlight that the danger of takfir is a real threat to national unity, and a more inclusive theological approach is urgently needed. Murji'ah teaches that as long as a person still professes the shahada, then their blood and property are inviolable, regardless of the sins they may have committed. This principle is in line with the spirit of Islam *wasathiyah* (moderation) that is promoted in Indonesia, which prioritizes brotherhood (*ukhuwah islamiyah*) over differences in *furu'iyah* (branches of religion).

By internalizing the Murji'ah attitude in this aspect, Muslims can build a healthy culture of dialogue without fear of being labeled as enemies of religion simply because of differences in opinion. From the perspective of political and state stability, Murji'ah theology offers an approach that supports obedience to legitimate government in order to avoid chaos or *fawdha*, as long as the government does not openly command immorality. In the early days of Islam, this stance helped quell armed rebellions that used religion as a pretext to overthrow rulers, which often only resulted in unnecessary casualties without any clear solution. In the context of modern nation states such as Indonesia, this principle can be interpreted as support for national consensus and applicable laws as a means of maintaining the public interest (*maslahah ammah*). The Journal of Islam Nusantara, in its study of the relationship between religion and the state, states that political stability is a prerequisite for the establishment of Islamic law in its entirety, because without security, worship cannot be carried out peacefully. Moderate Islam does not teach anarchy or bloody revolution, but rather change through constitutional means and persuasive preaching. Therefore, the Murji'ah school of thought's legacy regarding the priority of public order and the postponement of political judgment against rulers is an important foundation for Muslims

to become good citizens who are both religiously devout and patriotic, without getting caught up in narratives of hijrah that disrupt the social order.

The connection between Murji'ah theology and moderate Islam is also clearly seen in the concept of *wasathiyah*, which emphasizes balance between revelatory texts and the context of social reality. Murji'ah, in its more rational form, attempts to bridge the gap between high religious idealism and the reality of human beings, who are full of limitations and sins. Moderate Islam takes this spirit by not burdening the *ummah* with inhuman demands for perfection, which can actually cause people to stray from religion because they feel pressured. Instead, the moderate approach provides space for a gradual process of learning and self-improvement. As described in the International Journal of Islamic Civilization, the balance between hope (*raja'*) and fear (*khauf*) is the key to the spiritual health of the people. Murji'ah leans too much towards hope for God's forgiveness, which, if taken positively, can foster optimism in religion. Moderate Islam adopts this optimism to construct a narrative of Islam that is friendly, soothing, and liberating, rather than frightening and threatening. Thus, Murji'ah theology provides a conceptual framework for understanding religion as a blessing for the universe, where human errors are treated with compassion and education, rather than with social punishment that leads to exclusion.

Tolerance and pluralism are core values of moderate Islam, which find their historical roots in the Murji'ah theological attitude towards internal diversity within the Muslim community. When the Murji'ah stated that differences on the issue of major sins did not negate a person's status as a Muslim, they implicitly acknowledged the diversity of levels of obedience within a single community of faith. This is highly relevant to Indonesia's diverse society, where there are various expressions of religiosity, from the highly textual to the highly contextual. The Murji'ah approach teaches not to impose uniformity in religious practice as long as the basic creed is maintained. In the Journal of Islamic Education, it is discussed that moderate religious education must instill an attitude of respecting differences as *sunnatullah*. Murji'ah theology supports this by emphasizing that matters of the heart and the hereafter are the domain of Allah, so that humans do not need to spy on each other's mistakes. This approach reduces the potential for horizontal conflict, which is often triggered by unilateral truth claims. By making this principle a foundation, moderate Islam can develop into a unifying force capable of embracing various groups without losing its Islamic identity, creating harmony within a framework of diversity that is recognized theologically. However, in adopting Murji'ah theology as the foundation of moderate Islam, a critical and selective attitude is needed to avoid misunderstandings that could lead to permissiveness towards sin.

The main criticism of classical Murji'ah is the potential misuse of the *irja'* doctrine to justify negligence in worship on the grounds that faith is only in the heart. True moderate Islam does not teach laziness in worship, but rather balances internal faith and external deeds. Therefore, the synthesis that is built must take the Murji'ah principle of tolerance in judging others, while maintaining high ethical and sharia standards for oneself. References from various contemporary studies emphasize that moderation does not mean compromising religious truth, but rather the manner of delivery and attitude toward

differences. Muslims must continue to practice their religion earnestly, but without using that earnestness as a tool to judge others. With this filter, Murji'ah theology can be purified of its negative elements and distilled into its essence, which is open-mindedness, compassion, and a focus on the substance of faith rather than divisive formalities, resulting in Muslims who are devout yet humanistic.

In conclusion, Murji'ah Islamic theology offers a strong philosophical foundation for the development of moderate Islam in the contemporary era, particularly in terms of tolerance, anti-radicalism, and social stability. The principle of postponing judgment (*irja'*), the inclusive definition of faith, and the rejection of takfir are golden values that are urgently needed to address the current challenges of polarization within the Muslim community. Despite historical criticism of this school of thought, the universal values it embodies align with the spirit of moderation championed by the majority of Indonesian Muslims. The integration of Murji'ah theological insights and moderate religious practices can create a healthy Islamic ecosystem, where differences are treated as assets rather than threats. Referring to various academic studies in theology and Islamic studies journals, it is clear that revisiting classical schools of thought such as Murji'ah can provide solutions to contemporary problems. Ultimately, moderate Islam based on these noble theological values is expected to realize Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, bringing peace to all of humanity, maintaining national unity, and strengthening national resilience amid the challenges of globalization.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Murji'ah school of thought has Islamic theological principles that form the basis of its religious character, which is tolerant of diversity in Islamic beliefs and attitudes that differ from those of the Murji'ah. This conclusion can be seen from several of its teachings, including the principle of *Irja'* (postponement), which leaves the assessment of the status of faith due to major sins as the prerogative of Allah in the hereafter. Its rejection of the practice of *takfir* (excommunication) without due cause forms the foundation of moderate and inclusive Islamic religious behavior in responding to the diversity of Islamic religious life. In addition, the Murji'ah's principle of neutrality in political and theological conflicts can be seen as the basis for a tolerant attitude in maintaining religious integration.

This study confirms that moderate Islamic values have historical foundations and roots in the Murji'ah school of Islamic theology, which is inclusive of diversity. However, this study has not identified the various factors that led to the disappearance of the Murji'ah community. Therefore, this issue warrants further research.

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