

NAHDLATUL ULAMA: A PILLAR OF MODERATE ISLAM IN SOCIAL LIFE AND ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

Erma Athiyatur Rofi'ah, Siti Masrurohtul Jannah
Email: ermaathiyah@gmail.com sitimasrurohtuljannah@gmail.com
(STAI Ihyaul Ulum Gresik)

Abstark

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia that plays a strategic role in religious, social, and educational life. Since its establishment in 1926, NU has been committed to upholding the teachings of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Islam, which is moderate, tolerant, and rooted in the Islamic traditions of the archipelago. This article aims to examine the background of NU's establishment, NU's role in the social reality and Islamic education in Indonesia, as well as the challenges faced by NU in the modern era. The research method used is a literature study by analyzing various relevant literature sources. The results of the study show that NU plays an important role in maintaining social harmony, developing Islamic education based on Islamic boarding schools and formal institutions, and shaping the character of a nation with noble morals. Amidst the challenges of globalization and technological advances, NU continues to adapt through digital da'wah, strengthening digital literacy, and improving the quality of education without abandoning the values of Islam Nusantara. Thus, NU remains relevant as a major pillar of moderate Islam and nationalism in Indonesia.

Keywords; Nahdlatul Ulama, *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Islam*, Islamic Education, Moderate Islam, Islam Nusantara

INTRODUCTION

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is the largest Islamic social organization in Indonesia, with extensive influence in religious, social, educational, and national life. Founded in 1926 by KH. Hasyim Asy'ari together with Islamic boarding school scholars, NU emerged as a response to various challenges faced by Indonesian Muslims, both during the colonial period and in the dynamics of the times. NU is based on the teachings of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Islam, which emphasizes moderation, tolerance, balance, and fairness in religion.

In the context of Indonesia's diverse society, NU plays an important role in maintaining social harmony and national unity. Through polite preaching and a cultural approach that respects the Islamic traditions of the archipelago, NU strives to instill peaceful Islamic values and noble character. In addition, NU is also active in various social and humanitarian activities as a tangible manifestation of its concern for the welfare of society.

However, in the era of globalization and advances in information technology, NU is faced with various challenges.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a library research approach. Data was obtained from various written sources, such as books, scientific journals, official Nahdlatul Ulama documents, and scientific works relevant to the topic of discussion. Data collection techniques were carried out through examination and recording of these sources. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive-analytical methods by examining, understanding, and interpreting the data to obtain a complete picture of Nahdlatul Ulama's role in the social reality and Islamic education in Indonesia, as well as the challenges it faces in the modern era.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Background to the Establishment of Nahdlatul Ulama

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was founded in response to the conditions faced by Indonesian Muslims in the early 20th century, who were confronted with serious challenges in religious, social, and political aspects. At that time, Indonesia was still under Dutch colonial rule, which had a significant impact on the lives of Muslims, including pressure on religious practices and the weakening of the role of Islamic scholars in society.¹

In addition to colonialism, there were also religious ideologies that tended to be harsh and extreme, especially those that rejected local Islamic traditions such as tahlilan, maulidan, and grave pilgrimage. These ideologies were considered by Islamic boarding school scholars as a threat to the teachings of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Islam, which had been embraced by the majority of Muslims in the archipelago for centuries.²

In this situation, the pesantren scholars felt the need to form an organization that was capable of preserving the purity of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Islamic teachings while also maintaining the Islamic traditions of the archipelago. Therefore, on January 31, 1926, KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, together with the pesantren scholars, founded Nahdlatul Ulama in Surabaya.³

¹ Choirul Anam, *Pertumbuhan dan Perkembangan Nahdlatul Ulama*, (Surabaya: PT Duta Aksara Mulia, 2010), hlm. 15.

² Greg Fealy, *Ijtihad Politik Ulama: (Sejarah NU 1952-1967*, Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2003), hlm. 5.

³ M. Ali Haidar, *Nahdlatul Ulama dan Islam di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1998), hlm. 34.

The main objective of establishing NU was to serve as a forum for scholars to defend moderate, balanced, and tolerant Islamic teachings, as well as to protect Muslims from the influence of colonialism and deviant thinking. NU also sought to strengthen the role of scholars and Islamic boarding schools in guiding the community to remain steadfast.

Furthermore, the establishment of NU was closely related to international developments in the Islamic world, particularly the rise of reformist movements in the Middle East that influenced religious discourse in Indonesia. Through NU, traditional scholars were able to organize themselves institutionally, unify their voices, and actively participate in shaping religious, educational, and socio-political life. Over time, NU grew into one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, playing a crucial role not only in safeguarding religious traditions but also in contributing to national independence and the development of Indonesian society.

2. The Role of Nahdlatul Ulama in Social Reality

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) plays a very important role in maintaining harmony in Indonesian society. As the largest Islamic organization, NU promotes the teachings of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Islam, which is moderate (tawassuth), tolerant (tasamuh), balanced (tawazun), and fair (i'tidal). These values form the basis of NU's efforts to foster a society that avoids extremism, radicalism, and violence in the name of religion. Through polite and soothing preaching, NU strives to instill an understanding of Islam that loves peace and respects differences. NU's preaching is not coercive, but emphasizes a cultural and dialogical approach that is in line with the character of Indonesia's diverse society. This approach has proven effective in maintaining interfaith harmony and strengthening social unity.⁴

In addition, NU plays an active role in preserving and sustaining local religious traditions such as tahlilan, maulidan, istighotsah, and grave pilgrimages. These traditions not only have religious value, but also serve as a means of strengthening social relations among citizens. Through joint religious activities, the community can build solidarity, togetherness, and a sense of mutual care. NU views the Islamic traditions of the archipelago as part of a cultural wealth that does not conflict with Islamic teachings.

In the social and humanitarian fields, NU is actively present through various institutions and autonomous bodies that focus on education, health, disaster relief, economic empowerment, and community development. Through pesantren networks,

⁴ Ahmad Zahro, *Tradisi Intelektual NU*, (Yogyakarta: LKiS, 2004), hlm. 45.

social service institutions, and community-based programs, NU contributes significantly to improving the welfare and resilience of society.⁵

Furthermore, NU also plays a strategic role in national life by consistently supporting unity, democracy, and the integrity of the Republic of Indonesia. NU encourages its members to participate actively in civic life while upholding ethical and moral values rooted in Islamic teachings. By integrating religious principles with social responsibility, NU continues to serve as a moral force that guides society toward peaceful coexistence, social justice, and sustainable national development.

3. The Role of Nahdlatul Ulama in Islamic Education

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) has made a significant contribution to the development of Islamic education in Indonesia. Since its inception, NU has viewed education as the primary means of producing a generation of Muslims who are knowledgeable, moral, and capable of playing an active role in society. Therefore, NU education is not only oriented towards the mastery of knowledge, but also towards shaping the character and personality of students.⁶

Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are the main basis of NU education. Through the pesantren system, NU shapes students who have a deep understanding of Islam, especially in the fields of fiqh, aqidah, tafsir, and akhlak. In addition, NU pesantren instill the values of independence, discipline, simplicity, and social awareness. The educational process in pesantren does not only take place in classrooms, but also through the example set by the kiai and daily life in the pesantren environment. Thus, pesantren function as educational institutions as well as centers for character building for santri.

In addition to pesantren, NU also manages thousands of formal educational institutions throughout Indonesia, ranging from Early Childhood Education (PAUD), madrasahs, public schools, to universities. The management of these educational institutions is under the coordination of the NU Ma'arif Education Institution (LP Ma'arif NU). Through this institution, NU strives to improve the quality of education so that it can compete and remain relevant to developments.⁷

4. The Challenges Facing Nahdlatul Ulama in the Modern Era

⁵ Abdul Mun'im DZ, *Islam Nusantara: Dari Ushul Fiqh hingga Paham Kebangsaan*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Compass, 2015), hlm. 78.

⁶ KH. Hasyim Asy'ari, *Qanun Asasi dan I'tiqad Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah*, (Jombang: Maktabah Turats Islami), hlm. 12

⁷ Abdurrahman Wahid, *Islamku, Islam Anda, Islam Kita, Jakarta:*(The Wahid Institute, 2006), hlm. 45.

The development of globalization and advances in information technology have brought about major changes in people's lives, including in the religious, social, and educational spheres. Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), as an Islamic organization with strong roots in the Islamic traditions of the archipelago, faces various challenges that require it to adapt without losing its identity and core values.⁸

One of the main challenges faced by NU is the influx of foreign cultural influences that are not always in line with Islamic values and local culture. Globalization brings with it cultural trends that tend to be individualistic, materialistic, and permissive, thereby potentially weakening the religious and social values that NU has long upheld. If not addressed wisely, these influences could erode the moderate and moral identity of Islam in the archipelago.⁹

In addition, advances in information technology and digital media also pose a serious challenge for NU. On the one hand, technology makes it easier to disseminate information and preach, but on the other hand, it opens up opportunities for technology abuse. The spread of hoaxes, hate speech, and extreme and radical religious ideas through social media is a real threat, especially for the younger generation who are still in the process of finding their identity.

The next challenge is the moral degradation of the younger generation. Changes in lifestyle, weak social control, and a lack of religious guidance can cause m.¹⁰

CONCLUSION

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) was founded in response to the condition of Indonesian Muslims during the colonial period and the emergence of extreme religious ideologies. Based on the teachings of Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah Islam, NU plays an important role in preserving the Islamic traditions of the archipelago and guiding the people towards a moderate, tolerant, and balanced understanding of Islam.

In social reality, NU has contributed greatly to maintaining social harmony through peaceful preaching, preservation of local religious traditions, social and humanitarian activities, and a strong commitment to national values such as the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, Pancasila, and the 1945 Constitution. In the field of Islamic

⁸ M. Ali Haidar, *Nahdlatul Ulama dan Islam di Indonesia*, (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1998), hlm. 132.

⁹ Tim PBNU, *Dakwah Digital Nahdlatul Ulama*, (Jakarta: PBNU, 2020), hlm. 21

¹⁰ Lembaga Pendidikan Ma'arif NU, *Strategi Pengembangan Pendidikan NU di Era Global*, (Jakarta: LP Ma'arif PBNU, 2019), hlm. 39.

education, NU plays a strategic role through Islamic boarding schools and formal educational institutions that emphasize the integration of religious knowledge and general knowledge as well as the formation of good character.

In the modern era, NU faces the challenges of globalization, technological advances, and the moral degradation of the younger generation. However, through the use of digital technology, the strengthening of digital literacy, and improvements in the quality of education, NU continues to adapt without abandoning its Islamic Nusantara identity. Therefore, NU remains a major pillar in building an Indonesian society that is religious, tolerant, virtuous, and patriotic.

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