

# Teaching Multiculturalism on the Grass Root Society: An Experience from Sunda Wiwitan Community in West Java, Indonesia

Rakhmat Hidayat, Eko Siswono, and M. Hasmi Yanuardi

**Abstract**—Sunda Wiwitan is one of the indigenous religions in Indonesia. As a minority religion in the society, they built the social interaction with another religion community such as Islam as the majority community in Indonesia and also the Christian community. They become a part of the diverse communities. However, as an indigenous community they always negotiate cultural diversities with the state and other societies. This paper aims to discuss how the teaching multiculturalism based on experience the Sunda Wiwitan community as an output of negotiation of cultural diversity and what the basic philosophy of multiculturalism from the Sunda Wiwitan community is? This study was conducted in Cigugur village (Kuningan Regency) and Susuru hamlet (Ciamis Regency). The research uses qualitative method. The data were gathered through in-depth interviews, observation and library research. The conclusion of research draws there are historical influences guiding their interaction as well as their behavior in society. Their ancestors teach the followers with the basic philosophy called *sawarga* which means family. The multiculturalism they have practiced since long ago integrates elements of the local beliefs inherited by their ancestors. Teaching diversity students in the school gave the insight and basic values regarding the social tolerance.

**Index Terms**—Multiculturalism, education, cultural diversity, indigenous, minority, Sunda Wiwitan.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The existence of Sunda Wiwitan religion in the middle of other religions such as Islam, Catholic and Protestant is an example of diversity in the social life of the Indonesian people. For a long time, they have had a harmonious relationship sustained by a real spirit of tolerance. Their social interaction promotes coexistence without seeing the diversities in terms of religion and belief. The communities respect each other's choices taken. The power of Sundanese civilization have made Sunda Wiwitan people respect each other's freedom in embracing the religion they believe. The followers of Islam, Catholic, Sunda Wiwitan, and Protestant respect each other in their daily lives. This paper describes concrete examples (best practice) of indigenous people of Sunda Wiwitan in Cigugur village (Kuningan Regency) and Susuru hamlet (Ciamis Regency). Sunda Wiwitan was born before Indonesian independence and was founded by Kyai Madrais in 1840. Sunda Wiwitan is a belief of Sundanese community who keeping maintaining a Sundanese ancestral system [1]. Sunda Wiwitan is categorized as an original

belief that keeps developing. Nevertheless, there is still discrimination against the followers of Sunda Wiwitan. Discrimination is inevitable from all elements including education. Education must be achieved by every community including Sunda Wiwitan community. The emergence of discrimination in terms of education led the community of Sunda Wiwitan to develop a special school for the followers of Sunda Wiwitan. This school was built to inherit the belief and culture of Sunda Wiwitan but it does not require its followers to study at the school.

## II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted by employing qualitative methods. The characteristics of qualitative research are: it is conducted in a natural setting; it rests on the basis that researchers are the main instruments of data collection; it is inductive; it is based on the participants' perspective; it often states; it often includes a theoretical perspective; and it is interpretive and holistic [2]. This study was conducted in Susuru hamlet (Ciamis Regency) and Cigugur village (Kuningan Regency). Both sites are located in West Java. This research describes the process of multiculturalism experience particularly in terms of formal education and social tolerance. The main informants in this study consisted of the elders and young people living in these sites of study. Supporting informants are indigenous people also living in the same sites. The data collection techniques used in this study was in-depth interview addressed to the all informants. The length of the interview varies depending on the situation and conditions during the interview.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Profile of Cigugur Village and Susuru Hamlet

Administratively, Cigugur village is located in Kuningan Regency, West Java, with an area of 3,369,576 H which is about 35 km to south Cirebon, or about 168 km from Bandung. In this location, it can be found an ancient building namely Paseban which was built in 1840 and renovated in 1971 and 2007 and then inaugurated by government at 14th of December, 1976 with Decree No. 3632/C.1/DSP/1976 as protected cultural heritage. This building is a center of activities of the Sunda Wiwitan community in Cigugur. The population in Cigugur Village, Kuningan is 7,084 people. Geographically, Susuru hamlet is located in Kertajaya Village, Pasawahan District, Ciamis Regency. Based on the data of population of Kertajaya Village in 2017, Susuru hamlet is a picture of a community

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The authors are with the State University of Jakarta, Jalan Rawamangun Muka, Jakarta Timur 13220, Indonesia (e-mail: hidayat@unj.ac.id, esiswono@unj.ac.id, mhasmiyanuardi@unj.ac.id).

with various diversities, especially in terms of religion. The relationship among the religion communities in Susuru hamlet is very harmonious. This hamlet is inhabited by Islam, Catholic, Protestant and Sunda Wiwitan community. The population consists of four different religions: Islam 719 people, Catholic 109 people, Sunda Wiwitan 62 people, and Protestant 8 people, with a total population of 888 people. Viewed from the four religions in Susuru hamlet, the majority religion is Islam; while, minority religion is Protestant.

### *B. Teaching Multiculturalism in the School*

The Sunda Wiwitan community have a junior high school, namely Tri Mulya. This school was established in 1959 under Tri Mulya Foundation. In the 1970s, this school experienced its glory because it had an extremely large number of students with various achievements. This school was established by Sunda Wiwitan indigenous community [3]. Junior High School Tri Mulya is located in Cigugur area, particularly in Paseban Tri Panca Tunggal area, the center of Sunda Wiwitan community. Initially, the school was built to accommodate the children of the Sunda Wiwitan family as an effort to maintain and inherit Sunda Wiwitan cultures and traditions. In the beginning, the school only accepted students from the Sunda Wiwitan family spreading from various regions in West Java. However, in its development, the school also has received students from non Sunda Wiwitan including Muslim and Catholic students. Until now, this school is still used as a place to inherit the values and culture of Sunda Wiwitan to the younger generation. Children from Sunda Wiwitan family usually finish their elementary school in their hometown then continue their study to Junior High School Tri Mulya while actively participating in Sunda Wiwitan activities in Paseban, Cigugur. The students of Junior High School Tri Mulya coming from outside the city usually rent a boarding house in Cigugur residents. They stay in the houses owned by Muslims, Sunda Wiwitan followers or Catholics. In their boarding houses, they learn to directly interact with various backgrounds of people. Although, this school built by Sunda Wiwitan community but now the students from any background religion such as Islam, Christian or Catholic. Their backgrounds made the learning process particularly different culture as well as religion integrated in the classroom. It can be understood as a cultural exercise for the students in diversity society. Yilmaz [4] explain this phenomena as a training for recognizing other cultures and reconstructing the educational system according to the cultural structure. In other hand, this process not only usefull for the students but also for the teacher. Both students and teachers in this research can involve the sharing of knowledge, experience and culture [5]. In addition, teaching multiculturalism in this research not specifically in one course subject but related with the diverse background of students.

Besides Junior High School Tri Mulya, there is also Junior High School Yos Sudarso established on July 15, 1982 by the Catholic community in Cigugur area. Junior High School Yos Sudarso under the Salib Suci Foundation. After Junior High School Yos Sudarso was established, it becomes one of the favorite schools in Kuningan regency

because of its excellent academic and non-academic achievements. The establishment of this school is also one of the factors of the fallen era of the glory of Junior High School Tri Mulya. Although Junior High School Yos Sudarso was founded by the Catholic community but it students come from both followers of Sunda Wiwitan and Islam. The existence of these two schools has been the place where the values of multiculturalism among the community of Sunda Wiwitan, Catholic and other communities have been inherited and raised. In practice, these schools can understood as the unit of change and making structural changes for the multicultural education [6],[7]. After completing junior high school in both schools, they usually continue to the Senior High School in the Kuningan area or they could also be back to their hometowns. Many students from the Sunda Wiwitan community studying at the two schools live around the Paseban Complex without renting rooms. In the Paseban TPT building complex, besides children attending Junior High School Tri Mulya, there are also the followers of Sunda Wiwitan teachings which consist of teenagers, adults and elderly. They are usually called as citizens or sawarga, which means family. This is an expression of understanding the teachings they believe in: every human being is a brother. Those living in Paseban become united in a family. Besides formal learning at school, these children are active and involved in various activities from the Sunda Wiwitan community which are centered in the Paseban complex. They learn Sundanese art and follow weekly or monthly routine activities to get involved in the Seren Taun ceremony as the main celebration of Sunda Wiwitan [8]. The Seren Taun program is held once a year to welcome the arrival of the Saka New Year of Javanese-Sundanese calendar. The event is conducted to be grateful for the blessings and gifts that God has given. In this event, some of the Cigugur and Sunda Wiwitan people from various regions work together to bring their works to be paraded in a lively parade or festival [9].

### *C. Foundation of Social Tolerance in the Community*

The diversity of people in the Sunda Wiwitan community is an example of grassroots communities that can coexist in a strong socio-cultural system. If it is seen further, even the diversity can also be seen from the phenomenon of a family with various religions and beliefs. It is common if in one house, there are family members who are Muslim, Catholic or Sunda Wiwitan. An example is the community in Cigugur and Susuru which is diverse in terms of religions. However, this phenomenon does not make them against each other. They live in harmony, peace and tolerance. They always keep mutual tolerance towards the followers of other religions to create peace among them living there. They feel the same sense of mutual respect among each other without discrimination. They believe that these differences and diversities lead the communities into a single entity. This diversity and unity has been taught by ancestors or elders of Sunda Wiwitan from the beginning. Prince Madrais is a pioneer of Sunda Wiwitan spreading this local belief in West Java. At present, the highest leader is Pangeran Djatikusumah living in the Paseban Complex, Cigugur (Kuningan). From the beginning, Prince Madrais has emphasized to his current successor namely Prince

Djatikusumah and to his followers that social or community life is not about religion and position as well as social class [10]. It is the customs that differ us.

In Susuru hamlet, the Sunda Wiwitan community live together with muslim, Catholic and Protestant. In this area, there is exist a catholic church, a mosque and Islamic school since long ago. However, they can built the social tolerance as well respect together [11],[12]). The symbol of tolerance to diversities is manifested in the form of daily experiences such as death and marriage. If there is a citizen of one of the religions who dies, other citizens will help one another without considering the background both religion and belief. They helped build tents for mourners. Ladies and gentlemen help prepare food and other needs. Moreover, they also help in the process of delivering the dead body, it is carried out jointly by all religions in the Sunda Wiwitan community. They also pray as a form of mutual respect among human beings. In addition, in the wedding ceremony, all citizens help each other. There are no striking differences due to different backgrounds. Death and marriage events are social spaces for how multiculturalism and tolerance are built and cared for in the lives of grassroots communities. They do it simply but it becomes an example that this tradition is currently threatened to disappear in the lives of Indonesian people amid the threat of intolerance and social discrimination. This tradition has taken place between generations. According to Malesevic [13] this phenomenon called as transgenerational cultural tradition. Indeed, religion or belief is not an obstacle for the Sunda Wiwitan community in West Java.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

There is a relation between social religion diverse and education in the society particularly in Sunda Wiwitan community. In the school, the social diverse as a significant part for the multiculturalism practical everyday. In other side, there is a pattern of relations among communities of religion in the family environment. Different beliefs do not always become a problem in a family. In Susuru hamlet, there is a family with each member embraces different religion. Although there are differences in embracing religion, the family still live in harmonious relationship with mutual respect and differences. Sometimes, the different religion occurs because of their own desires or as a result of interfaith marriages. In this case, it is common for the parents to give their children the freedom to choose the religion they will embrace based on their own choice. Although they embrace different religion, they can prove that the relationship with both parents remains harmonious. The reality of harmony is reflected in the social environment of the community. In everyday life, every citizen is involved in social activities and religious activities. In social activities, they are involved in the construction of places of worship, mutual cooperation to clean the environment, or help people celebrating weddings. In religious activities, they participate in celebrating the holidays of other communities of religion, pray if there are families from other religions die, and help them in the funeral process. The harmony that occurs in the Cigugur village and Susuru hamlet is not only identified from its religious and social activities, but also from the the

buildings of their places of worship which are contiguous. Based upon this, it can be seen that the people who are in the two sites of this study represent that the religion diversities do not trigger intolerance, it even becomes the energy that creates harmony among religion groups. The diversities in terms of ethnic, religion and culture, are not a barrier for people to be united and to live in harmony.

#### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

#### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization, RH.; Literature Review, RH., MHY., and ES.; Methodology, RH. and MHY.; Formal analysis, RH and MHY.; Investigation, RH. and MHY, Resources, RH. and ES.; Writing—original draft preparation, RH,MHY, and ES; writing—review and editing, RH,MHY and ES. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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**Rakhmat Hidayat** is a senior lecturer at Department of Sociology, State University of Jakarta. He was born on 13th April 1980 in Cirebon (Indonesia). His PhD from University Lyon 2 France. His research interest in indigenous people, social movement and sociology of education. Eko Siswono is a lecturer at Department of Social Studies, State University of Jakarta. He was born at Sidoarjo (Indonesia), 1959.

He got his PhD from Department of Anthropology, University of Indonesia. His research area on anthropology, social ecology, demography. M. Hasmi Yanuardi is a lecturer at Department Education History, State University of Jakarta. He was born at Jakarta on 1976. His master from Department Archeology, University of Indonesia. His field of research about European History, Cultural History, Intellectual History. Dr Rakhmat Hidayat was a member of Association of Sociological Research and Lecturer in Indonesia (AP3SI). Dr Eko Siswono, M.Si is a member of Association of Geography Indonesia (IGI). M Hasmi Yanuardi is a member of Association Historian Indonesia (ISI).