



The Buddhist Community's Efforts to Maintain Interfaith Harmony in Bandar Bireuen Village

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Abstract

Religious life is a form of belief in supernatural powers believed to influence the lives of individuals and communities. Bandar Bireuen Village is a village in Bireuen Regency where the majority of the population is Muslim, but it also contains a minority community of Buddhists. The existence of the Buddhist community in the village reflects a harmonious, mutually supportive society despite differences in beliefs. The Buddhist community does not isolate itself and builds social relations in forums with the surrounding community, regardless of religious differences. This study aims to determine how the Buddhist community strives to maintain interfaith harmony in a Muslim-majority society. In analyzing the data, the researcher used Robert David Putnam's Social Capital theory, which emphasizes the importance of trust, norms, and social networks in creating societal harmony. This study used a qualitative, descriptive method. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation. The results show that the Buddhist community actively maintains harmony through social adaptation, interfaith communication, and involvement in various social activities. This community upholds prevailing cultural and religious norms and maintains close social relations with the Muslim community. Despite facing obstacles such as stereotypes, limited worship spaces, and challenges in passing on religious values to the younger generation, the Buddhist community remains consistent in maintaining peace. It is an important part of strengthening social harmony in Bandar Bireuen Village.

Keywords: Bandar Bireuen Village, Buddhist Community Efforts, Interfaith Harmony.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Religious life is a fundamental aspect of human life because religion is not only understood as a belief system in magical or supernatural powers but also as a moral and social guide that regulates individual behavior in society. Belief in God influences how a person views themselves, others, and their surroundings. In a social context, religion serves as a source of values that shape norms, ethics, and interaction patterns among individuals and groups. Therefore, the existence of religious communities is not only important for the development of religious teachings, but also has a major impact on the social relations in a pluralistic society. Harmonious inter-religious relations need to be built on tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect, and the equal application of each religion's teachings. These principles are the main foundation in creating strong, peaceful and sustainable religious harmony (Afrianja, 2022).



One aspect of pluralism in Indonesia is religious pluralism. There are six officially recognized religions: Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. In Indonesia, we always guarantee the freedom of religious communities to embrace and practice their religious teachings in accordance with their beliefs and convictions. Therefore, the state has a strategic role in guaranteeing religious freedom while maintaining social stability (Prakosa, 2022). This also applies to Aceh Province, which is specifically mandated to implement Islamic Sharia. This specificity gives the community's social and religious dynamics their own color. Religious harmony in Aceh is conceptually formulated in Aceh Qanun Number 4 of 2016 concerning Guidelines for Maintaining Religious Harmony and Establishing Places of Worship. This Qanun aims to maintain harmonious relations among religious communities and to prevent social conflicts rooted in religious backgrounds.

Article 127, Paragraph (2) of the Aceh Government Law Number 11 of 2006 states that the Aceh Government and the Regency/City Government are responsible for implementing Islamic Sharia. However, the Government also has an obligation to guarantee religious freedom, foster harmony between religious communities, respect the religious values held by the community, and provide protection so that every religious adherent can practice worship according to their respective beliefs (Aceh, 2016). Thus, the implementation of Islamic Sharia does not eliminate the rights of minority groups, but rather continues to provide a safe and protected living space for all religious adherents.

Concrete efforts to maintain harmony are reflected in various interfaith dialogue activities held in Aceh. On December 13, 2020, a dialogue activity on interfony was held at the Grand Nanggroe Hotel, Banda Aceh. During the event, the Head of the Regional Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Aceh Province stated that harmonious relations between religious communities in Aceh remain well-maintained without significant disruption. Even during times of conflict, tolerance between religious adherents remains positive and harmonious (Humas, n.d.). This statement demonstrates the Acehnese people's collective awareness of the need to maintain social stability and harmony amidst diversity.

One region in Aceh that exemplifies interfaith harmony is Bireuen Regency. While the regency is predominantly Muslim, it also boasts minority religious communities, such as Buddhists in Bandar Bireuen Village. This village serves as a prime example of a pluralistic society in which Muslims and Buddhists coexist peacefully. According to 2024 population data, the village has a Muslim population of 3,111, while Buddhists number 255 (SIGAP, 2024). This significant difference in population does not necessarily lead to social tensions; instead, it demonstrates harmonious patterns of interaction.



The dynamics of the Buddhist community in Bandar Bireuen Village demonstrate a positive social relationship with the Muslim community. They live in a sense of security and peace and assist each other in various social activities. One tangible evidence of this harmony is the presence of the Bireuen Buddhist Temple, located opposite the Muslim community's house of worship. When Buddhists celebrate Vesak Day, Muslims participate in maintaining security around the temple as a form of solidarity and respect for the religious activities of their brothers and sisters of different faiths (P. Bireuen, 2024). Furthermore, during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, Buddhists in Bireuen also demonstrated social concern by raising funds to distribute basic food aid to communities affected by the outbreak, including Muslims (Suesilo, 2020). These actions demonstrate that humanitarian values and social solidarity can transcend religious boundaries. The social interactions established are not merely symbolic but are also manifested in concrete actions that strengthen social cohesion at the local level.

Efforts to maintain interfaith harmony in Bandar Bireuen Village were further strengthened by its achievement of the "Harmony-Aware Village" designation from the Aceh Provincial Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2021 (Suesilo, 2022). This designation demonstrates a shared commitment among the village, religious leaders, and the community to fostering a harmonious, tolerant atmosphere. Furthermore, the Bireuen Regency Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) serves as a platform for communication, dialogue, and collaboration among religious communities. Through various religious moderation activities and interfaith dialogue, the FKUB facilitates cooperation and establishes mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution (Farizal, 2022).

In the context of the social life of the Bandar Bireuen Village community, Robert D. Putnam's social capital theory provides an important lens for understanding how the Buddhist community, as a minority group, maintains harmonious relations with the majority Muslim community. Putnam divides social capital into two main forms: bonding and bridging. This shows that bonding social capital is a strong foundation for the Buddhist community in maintaining its identity, culture, and solidarity in a majority environment. The presence of the Religious Harmony Forum (FKUB) also helps strengthen bridging social capital by involving the Buddhist community in interfaith dialogue and religious moderation activities. Social capital theory also holds that it consists of three main components: trust, norms, and social networks. Trust is a form of mutually supportive interaction between two groups to achieve mutual benefits.

Norms serve as guidelines expected to be respected by both groups, enabling cooperation in accordance with the agreed provisions. Meanwhile, the network plays an important role in creating coordination among the Buddhist community in Bandar Bireuen Village. These three components play an important role in strengthening



relations among religious communities and in realizing a peaceful, tolerant life together (Mamahit, Youdi . et al., 2016).

Previous research conducted by Wijayanti (2017) entitled "The Social Role of the Prabha Buddha Temple in Maintaining Religious Harmony in Yogyakarta" focused on the role of the Young Generation of Cetiya Buddha Prabha (GMCBP) organization in maintaining harmony through various social activities such as blood donation, distribution of necessities, scholarships, meditation, and other social activities organized by the temple. Furthermore, previous research was also conducted by Megianto et al. (2025), entitled "Strengthening Religious Attitudes among Maitreya Buddhists in Penyengat Village, Siak Regency, Riau Province", which focused on strengthening the religious attitudes of Maitreya Buddhists through religious activities, spiritual guidance, increasing understanding of Buddhist teachings, and participation in temple activities. The main focus of this research is on increasing Buddhists' internal religiosity.

Based on previous research, the study's focus differs from the author's research. Sekar Wijayanti's (2017) study focused on the role of the Buddhist temple's youth organization in maintaining harmony through various social activities organized by the Prabha Buddhist Temple in Yogyakarta. Meanwhile, Megianto et al.'s (2025) study focused on strengthening the religious attitudes of Maitreya Buddhists in Penyengat Village, Siak Regency. Unlike these two studies, this study examines the efforts of the Buddhist community, as a minority group, to maintain interfaith harmony in Bandar Bireuen Village, Aceh, where the majority of the population is Muslim.

This study also has novelty because it uses Robert Putnam's Social Capital theory to analyze the roles of trust, norms, and social networks in fostering harmonious relations between the Buddhist and Muslim communities. Thus, this study makes a new contribution to the study of interfaith harmony in the context of the Buddhist minority community in the Aceh region, which implements Islamic Sharia. Therefore, the author is interested in raising the title "Efforts of the Buddhist Community in Maintaining Interfaith Harmony in Bandar Bireuen Village" as an academic contribution to understanding the practice of harmony in a pluralistic society.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative, descriptive approach. Qualitative research seeks to describe and interpret objects as they are, then collect field data and analyze and draw conclusions from it (Arikunto, 2016). The descriptive approach provides an in-depth picture of the conditions, efforts and obstacles faced by the Buddhist community in maintaining inter-religious harmony. This research was conducted in April 2025 in Bandar Bireuen Village, Bireuen Regency, known as "Santri City," emphasizing a strong

religious identity in society. There. There is a Buddhist temple, namely the Bireuen Buddha Vihara. Data collection techniques included observing interactions between the Buddhist community and the people of Bandar Bireuen Village, conducting direct interviews with 8 informants, and documenting population data, village activities, conversation archives, and daily blogs.

Informants were selected using a purposive sampling technique: Buddhist and Muslim communities living in Bandar Bireuen Village for more than 10 years who were involved in or were aware of Buddhism, both through religious practices and the challenges they faced. Data sources include primary data (interview results) and secondary data (literature, journals, theses, and village daily blogs). The data analysis technique refers to the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction to filter important information, presenting data in tables from interview results, and drawing conclusions based on systematically analyzed findings.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Geographical Location of Bandar Bireuen Village

Bandar Bireuen Village is one of 23 villages in Kota Juang District, Bireuen Regency, Aceh Province. This village, located in an urban environment, covers 54 Ha, has a population of approximately 3,589 people, and 799 families. Bandar Bireuen Village was originally a Village called Kelurahan Kota Bireuen, led by a Village Head with Civil Servant (PNS) status, appointed by the district Government. In 2009, the status of Kelurahan Kota Bireuen changed to Bandar Bireuen Village (B. P. S. K. Bireuen, 2016).



Figure 1. Map of Bandar Bireuen Village

Table 1. Population of Bandar Bireuen Village

No.	Religion	Population
1.	Islam	3.111
2.	Catholicism	6
3.	Protestantism	0
4.	Hinduism	6
5.	Buddhism	255
6.	Confucianism	0

Data Source: Bandar Bireuen Village Information System, 2024

Religious population size in a village is a crucial factor in understanding interfaith harmony. In Bandar Bireuen Village, the heterogeneous population contributes to religious diversity, even though the majority adheres to Islam. Population size by religion can help us understand the extent of each religious group's involvement in social life and how interfaith relationships are fostered through mutual respect and harmony.

Characteristics of the Bandar Bireuen Village Community

Bandar Bireuen Village has a diverse population, with people from different religions, cultures, and socioeconomic backgrounds. According to data obtained from the village website, the majority of the population of Bandar Bireuen Village is Muslim, while the minority consists of Buddhists. The Buddhist community numbers approximately 255 people, including 20-30 families, most of whom live near the Muslim community, making it easier for them to maintain solidarity and cultural identity. According to an interview with Mr. T. Asrinaldi, the Secretary of Bandar Bireuen Village, there have been no problems with interactions related to religion or belief. Furthermore, regardless of the Buddhist faith, there have been no disturbances in Bandar Bireuen Village. Due to this harmonious relationship, Bandar Bireuen Village received the 2021 Harmony Awareness Village award (interview, April 10, 2025).



Figure 2. Harmony-Aware Village Award



The statement above demonstrates that interfaith relations in Bandar Bireuen Village are well-established, maintaining solidarity and cultural identity. The award as a Harmony-Aware Village demonstrates the community's ability to uphold the values of tolerance and mutual respect. This achievement not only reflects a stable social climate but also demonstrates the community's commitment to maintaining peaceful interfaith harmony.

In general, the people of Bandar Bireuen Village have diverse livelihoods. Many Muslims work as civil servants, traders, and farmers. Meanwhile, the Buddhist community is predominantly employed in the trade sector, such as electronics stores, grocery stores, and food businesses. This creates a reciprocal economic interdependence among villagers. This is supported by a statement from Mr. T. Asrinaldi, the Secretary of Bandar Bireuen Village, who said that people from various religions gather at the coffee shop to discuss business and social issues, as the Chinese people in this village are similar to the Acehnese. This could happen because they have lived in this village since birth, were raised with different religions, but their characters are the same (interview, April 10, 2025). In terms of education, some children from the Buddhist community attend public schools, namely Bireuen State Elementary School 21, Bireuen State Elementary School 4, and Bireuen State Junior High School 1, alongside children from the Muslim community, demonstrating social integration in the educational sphere. The language used daily is Indonesian, though in informal contexts, the Muslim community uses Acehnese, and the Buddhist community uses Chinese within its own communities. However, the use of Indonesian in daily interactions between groups remains dominant, facilitating communication among residents.

The History of Buddhism's Arrival in Bandar Bireuen Village

Buddhism began to enter Bandar Bireuen Village following the transmigration program in the 1980s. Interviews with traditional leaders revealed that most Buddhists in the village are descendants of North Sumatrans. Buddhists came to Bandar Bireuen Village seeking a better life. After adjusting to the new settlement, the Buddhists formed small communities while maintaining the culture and teachings of Theravada Buddhism, or the teachings of the elders (B. Bireuen, 2024). This aligns with Mrs. Isnawati's explanation, a Buddhist religious leader, who stated that although Buddhists are a minority, we have always respected one another. Therefore, Muslims have adapted to the presence of Buddhists in Bandar Bireuen Village. In the Bireuen area, Buddhists are tolerant, harmonious, and have no problems, and they care for one another (interview, April 17, 2025).

The presence of the Buddhist community initially created distance from residents due to cultural and religious differences. However, over time, as the need for interaction in daily life increased, they were accepted by the Muslim community in this village. This

was possible because both religions were open to each other and respected differences. The Buddhist community then built a simple monastery as a place of worship, the Bireuen Buddhist Temple, which is directly opposite the Muslim place of worship in Bandar Bireuen Village, namely Meunasah Kota. According to Mrs. Isnawati, a Buddhist religious figure, the Bireuen Buddhist Temple was relocated in 1992. There was also an incident in 2004 after the tsunami, where the statue inside the Bireuen Buddhist Temple appeared to be crying. From this incident, Buddhists became more convinced that differences in belief are not a barrier to caring for each other (interview, April 17, 2025).



Figure 3. Bireuen Buddhist Monastery

As the informant explained, an incident occurred that shocked the community: the statue in the monastery appeared to be shedding tears. This incident stirred emotions and trust among Buddhists and is considered to have special meaning, believed to be a form of spiritual communication conveying messages of sadness, suffering, and hope for peace. This further strengthens Buddhist faith in religious teachings and strengthens solidarity in the midst of the post-tsunami grief. Apart from that, the monastery is also a symbol of the existence and identity of Buddhists, demonstrating the values of tolerance and mutual respect in a predominantly Muslim society.

Social and Religious Conditions of Bandar Bireuen Village

Based on observations and interviews with several informants, the social situation in Bandar Bireuen Village is quite harmonious. Relations in both Muslim and Buddhist societies are characterized by mutual respect and tolerance. There has never been any conflict, inequality or unfair treatment towards the Buddhist community in practicing their beliefs. This is in accordance with what Mrs. Teo Siau Peing, a Buddhist traditional leader, conveyed: the Buddhist community, as a minor community originating from the Chinese tribe, only wants to do good and get along with all people without making any distinctions. So we consider all religions to be of equal status, and in the past, the majority of people have always accepted the existence of Buddhists. Buddhist and Muslim

communities love and do not harm one another, so harmonious relationships are maintained (interview, 14 April 2025).

Interviews show that as a minority community, Buddhists are not isolated and build harmonious social relations with the surrounding community, regardless of religious differences. Social activities such as cooperation, village meetings, visits between residents, and commemorations of religious holidays are carried out together. Buddhists participate in social activities; although they may sometimes be unable to attend, they still provide moral and logistical support. This strengthens social solidarity among residents. The social situation in Bandar Bireuen Village is similar to that expressed by Mr. Yuliansyah Abadi, who stated that one of his personal values is helping others in the community. When the husband of a shop owner died, Mr. Yuliansyah Abadi was asked to help with the funeral and attended the funeral for approximately three days, including helping to escort the body to the cemetery (interview, April 30, 2025). The interview revealed that social relations in Bandar Bireuen Village are built on mutual respect and togetherness. In both good and bad times, the community supports one another, regardless of differences in faith. These norms serve as behavioral guidelines that govern daily life and strengthen a sense of togetherness, preventing the Buddhist community from feeling isolated.



Figure 4. Religious Practices at the Bireuen Buddhist Vihara (Instagram account @viharabuddhabireuen)

In the religious sphere, each adherent freely practices worship. Muslims have a mosque as a place of worship, while Buddhists have a monastery for private use. There was no rejection or protest from the majority community regarding the existence of this place of worship. In accordance with Mrs. Riawarni's statement, as a Buddhist community, they can freely carry out worship; Muslims are used to it because each of them performs worship. After all, the purpose of worship is to calm the heart, for goodness and benevolence. Hence, Muslims believe that they both worship in their

respective houses of worship, so there are no problems, and everything is very peaceful (interview, 18 April 2025).

Religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Vesak Day are crucial for fostering social cohesion. As Ms. Isnawati, a Buddhist religious figure, stated, when approximately 100 devotees attended the Vesak celebration in Bandar Bireuen Village, police officers were present to maintain security around the temple as a form of tolerance. Typically, officers from the police station, precinct, or sub-district police come to the temple to help clean the area from the third floor down to the first floor (interview, April 17, 2025).



Figure 5. Security for the Tri Suci Vesak Day Celebration (Bireuen Police Website, 2024)

Religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Vesak are important opportunities to strengthen social relations between religious communities in Bandar Bireuen Village. This celebration is not only a religious activity but also an opportunity to strengthen ties and show mutual respect. Mrs. Isnawati, one of the village's Buddhist religious figures, explained that during the Vesak celebration, around 100 Buddhists gathered at the monastery. Interestingly, police officers from the police and sub-district levels were also present, not only to maintain security, but also to help clean the monastery from the third floor to the first floor. The presence and involvement of these officers reflect genuine tolerance and cooperation among community groups with different beliefs.

The Buddhist community does not hold large activities during Ramadan or Eid al-Fitr as a form of empathy towards Muslims. On the other hand, during Vesak Day, the Muslim community also respects the traditions of the Buddhist community, such as providing support by helping maintain security around the monastery so that Buddhist worship can continue solemnly. This shows that tolerance values have grown naturally and are strongly upheld by the people of Bandar Bireuen Village. Similar to what was conveyed by Mr. Asrul Muhammad as an Islamic religious figure, he said that one of the important values implemented by the people of Bandar Bireuen Village is *hablumminannas* (human relationships) and *hablumminallah* (relationship with Allah)



in accordance with their respective beliefs as in the last verse of Surah Al-Kafirun which reads For you, your religion and for me, my religion (interview, 27 April 2025).

Buddhist Community Efforts to Maintain Inter-Religious Harmony in Bandar Bireuen Village

Inter-religious harmony in Bireuen Regency, especially in Bandar Bireuen Village, demonstrates harmony between the Muslim majority and the Buddhist minority. The results of this research show that the Buddhist community in this village has made various efforts to maintain trust and build harmonious relations with the Muslim community. The efforts made by the Buddhist community to maintain inter-religious harmony are as follows:

a. Respect the Norms and Customs of Muslim Society

Adaptation is the process of adjusting one's behavior to the surrounding environment. Meanwhile, social adaptation is a person's ability to respond appropriately to social situations and conditions, as well as build positive social relationships. This is important because humans are basically social creatures who need each other to survive (Andriani & Jatningsih, 2015). Buddhist communities adapt socially to establish good relations with a social environment dominated by Muslims. The forms of social adaptation carried out include the Buddhist community in Bandar Bireuen Village, which really appreciates the culture and habits of Muslim communities. For example, they do not carry out activities that are considered contrary to Islamic norms, such as setting off firecrackers when Muslims are performing their prayers or holding parties during the month of Ramadan. This is similar to what was conveyed by one of the informants, namely Riawarni, who, as a Buddhist community, said that all this time he had lived side by side with Muslim communities in a harmonious atmosphere, without ever experiencing conflict or disruption in social relations. Because the relationships that exist are naturally good, according to him, there is no need for special social rules to maintain harmony. As a form of tolerance, he shows concern for his Muslim employees, including by closing his shop during Eid al-Fitr and giving them around 5 days off so they can celebrate Eid with their families (interview, 18 April 2025).

b. Participating in Social Activities of the Bandar Bireuen Village Community

The Buddhist community participates in various social activities organized by the village community. One form of this participation is seen in their involvement in routine cooperation activities, such as cleaning the environment. Also, during the holy month of Ramadan, they participate in a cooperative effort to clean the Muslim place of worship, the mosque. This is in accordance with what Mr. T. Asrinaldi, the Secretary of Bandar Bireuen Village, conveyed: when there is village cooperation, the Buddhist community

also attends. However, with limitations, for example, they are reluctant to enter the Muslim house of worship, so they only clean the meunasah terrace. Some also support drinking water consumption because they are unable to participate in the cooperation activities (interview, April 10, 2025).



Figure 6. Mutual Cooperation Activities to Welcome the Holy Month of Ramadan (Kabar Bireuen Website)

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c. Adjusting Clothing and Lifestyle

The Buddhist community in Bandar Bireuen Village certainly has traditions and cultures different from the majority Muslim community. However, they still demonstrate a high level of awareness in adapting to the prevailing social norms in their environment. One of the most visible forms of adaptation is in clothing. As Mrs. Riawarni, a Buddhist, stated, the Buddhist community in Bandar Bireuen Village adapts to the village's values of modesty. For example, women typically wear long-sleeved tops and skirts or trousers in public and avoid overly flashy or revealing clothing (interview, April 18, 2025). In this regard, it confirms that the Buddhist community in Bandar Bireuen Village has a high level of adaptability to cultural and decency values. Women, in particular, demonstrate

respect for dress codes consistent with the community's values of decency. This lifestyle adjustment is an effort to maintain balance and coexistence amidst diversity.



Figure 7. How Buddhists in Bireuen Dress
(Instagram account @viharabuddhabireuen)

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d. Establishing Good Relations with Religious Leaders and Muslim Community Leaders

Harmonious relationships are also demonstrated through active communication with religious and traditional leaders. When Buddhists celebrate religious events, they politely notify village officials or Muslim community leaders in advance, as a sign of respect and to avoid misunderstandings. An interview with Mr. Adnan Adam revealed that harmony between the Muslim and Buddhist communities in Bandar Bireuen Village is fostered through open communication and mutual respect between religious and traditional leaders. For every Buddhist religious celebration, they always provide prior notification to village officials or Muslim community leaders as a form of respect and to prevent misunderstandings. This attitude reflects the strong value of tolerance in

community life. Mr. Adnan Adam, the village head and Muslim traditional leader, explained that during his leadership, he was known for his close relationship with the Buddhist community, earning him the nickname "Chinese head." He also entrusted the Buddhist community with roles as tuha peut (leader). Through his involvement in the Bireuen Regency Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), Mr. Adnan continues to encourage a dialogical approach and collaborative problem-solving. He believes that the key to harmony is encouraging community cooperation. In fact, during Buddhist religious events, village youth participate by helping ensure the smooth running of these activities. In addition to the Interfaith Harmony Forum activities, several Buddhist and Muslim communities in Bandar Bireuen Village are members of the Indonesian Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation in Aceh. This form of cooperation is an important moment that strengthens social ties and fosters a sense of togetherness.



Figure 8. FKUB Activities of Bireuen Regency
(Bireuen Police Website, 2024)

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Figure 9. Social Service Distribution of Basic Food in Bireuen.

The Indonesian Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation has been spreading the values of compassion in Indonesia since 1993. This institution is a representative of the Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation based in Hualien, Taiwan. Since its founding by Master Cheng Yen in 1966, Tzu Chi has grown and now has branches in 67 countries worldwide. As a humanitarian organization that is interfaith, ethnic, racial, and national, Tzu Chi carries out its activities based on the principle of universal compassion. Tzu Chi is a social humanitarian institution that is interfaith, religious, racial, and national, which bases its activities on the principle of universal compassion. Tzu Chi's activities include charitable missions, health care, education, and humanist culture.

Tzu Chi's charitable mission is carried out without regard to religious, ethnic, or racial background because Tzu Chi's basic principle is universal love. In Aceh, the implementation of this charitable mission has had a positive impact on the surrounding community, as further conveyed by Mrs. Teo Siau Peing, who said that as an active member of the Tzu Chi Buddhist Foundation in Aceh, in carrying out humanitarian missions and charitable activities, she was directly involved in the distribution of basic food packages to the underprivileged. According to her, the majority of aid recipients in Aceh are Muslims, considering that Muslims dominate the population composition at 99%. For Mrs. Teo Siau Peing, helping others regardless of religion is a real form of caring.

She believes that by being kind to others, we will be seen as brothers or friends, regardless of differences in beliefs (interview, April 14, 2025). The interview results emphasized the importance of kindness in building social relationships. Mrs. Teo Siau Peing said that when someone is kind to others, they will see them as brothers or friends, not as strangers. This view reinforces the essence of Tzu Chi's charitable mission: building bridges of humanity through concrete actions grounded in sincerity and empathy.

e. Obstacles Faced by the Buddhist Community in Bandar Bireuen Village

Despite various positive efforts to maintain interfaith harmony, the Buddhist community continues to face several obstacles in Bandar Bireuen Village, including limited religious space. Limited worship space is one of the challenges faced by Buddhists in Bandar Bireuen Village. Without a large temple, they rely on simple places of worship managed independently by the Buddhist community. This situation makes it somewhat difficult to hold communal worship services, particularly during major religious holidays, which require more adequate space and facilities.



Figure 10. Buddhist Worship Practice Room.

Social Capital Theory as a Strengtheners of Social Harmony in the Buddhist Community in Bandar Bireuen Village

Social capital is the potential in a community that can be used to build relationships, strengthen cooperation, and support other assets owned. In short, social capital shows citizens' ability to work together to solve common problems. In maintaining harmonious inter-relational harmony amidst the dominance of the Muslim community in Bireuen Regency, the Buddhist community draws on strong social capital (Saheb et al., 2018).



Putnam's social capital theory can be applied to understand the Buddhist community's efforts to maintain inter-religious harmony in Bandar Bireuen Village. Social capital theory holds that it consists of three main components: trust, norms, and social networks. Trust is a form of mutually supportive interaction between two groups to achieve mutual benefits. The security measures, as guided, are expected to be adhered to by both groups so that cooperation can take place in accordance with the agreed provisions. Meanwhile, the network plays an important role in creating coordination among the Buddhist community in Bandar Bireuen Village. These three components play an important role in strengthening relations between religious communities and in realizing a peaceful, tolerant life together (Mamahit, Youdi, et al., 2016).

In the context of the social life of the Bandar Bireuen Village community, Robert D. Putnam's theory of social capital offers an important lens for understanding how the Buddhist community, as a minority group, maintains harmonious relations with the Muslim majority. Putnam divides social capital into two main forms: bonding social capital and bridging social capital.

a. Bonding Social Capital

Bonding social capital refers to the close relationships within an internal community, in this case, among members of the Buddhist community in Bandar Bireuen Village. Interviews indicate that the Buddhist community maintains strong internal solidarity through regular worship services at the Bireuen Buddhist Monastery, celebrations of important holidays such as Vesak, and social activities, including cooperation among the monastery's members. Ms. Isnawati, a Buddhist religious figure, stated that "Buddhists in this village maintain strong relationships with each other, help each other, and adhere to the values of love and kindness." This demonstrates how bonding social capital serves as a strong foundation for the Buddhist community in maintaining its identity, culture, and solidarity within a predominantly Buddhist environment.

b. Bridging Social Capital

Unlike bonding social capital, bridging social capital refers to the interconnectedness among different groups. In this study, bridging social capital was evident in interactions between the Buddhist and Muslim communities. An interview with Mr. T. Asrinaldi, the Village Secretary, revealed that the Buddhist community not only participates in village cooperation activities but also actively provides logistical support and maintains environmental cleanliness, including the meunasah area during Ramadan. Furthermore, Mrs. Riawarni, a Buddhist resident, revealed that she routinely provides hampers and gifts to Muslim employees during Eid al-Fitr as a form of tolerance and appreciation. Meanwhile, Muslims also help maintain the security of the Buddhist temple during Vesak celebrations.



The presence of the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB) also helps strengthen bridging social capital by involving the Buddhist community in interfaith dialogue and religious moderation activities. As conveyed by Mr. Asrul Muhammad, an Islamic religious figure, the community in this village adheres to the principle "For you your religion, for me my religion," emphasizing the importance of *hablumminannas* in maintaining interpersonal relationships. Thus, the combination of bonding and bridging social capital within the Buddhist community not only strengthens internal cohesion but also builds effective social bridges with the majority group. This is key to the Buddhist community's success in maintaining interfaith harmony and forming strong social harmony amidst the diversity of Bandar Bireuen Village.

In the Bandar Bireuen Village community, social capital is a crucial foundation for maintaining social harmony between Buddhist and Muslim communities. Using Putnam's theoretical approach, encompassing trust, norms, and social networks, we see how the Buddhist community builds harmonious relationships with the Muslim majority. Trust is manifested through daily interactions, such as participation in village activities and mutual support during religious holidays. Social norms are reflected in the culture of cooperation and village deliberations, which all residents attend in a spirit of togetherness. Meanwhile, social networks, including the FKUB (Community Forum for Religious Development), the Tzu Chi Foundation, and friendships, serve as a platform for interfaith collaboration. These three components strengthen each other and form comprehensive social bonds, ensuring the continued existence of the Buddhist community.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings on "The Buddhist Community's Efforts to Maintain Interfaith Harmony in Bandar Bireuen Village," it can be concluded that the Buddhist community in Bandar Bireuen Village maintains interfaith harmony in a predominantly Muslim environment through various forms of social adaptation and active participation in community life. This community upholds the values of tolerance, mutual respect, and the prevailing norms and culture of the surrounding community. The Buddhist community's efforts to maintain interfaith harmony are identified through Robert Putnam's Social Capital Theory, which holds that bonding social capital is built through internal activities such as temple worship, Vesak celebrations, and community solidarity. Meanwhile, bridging social capital is reflected in interfaith cooperation through the Interfaith Harmony Forum (FKUB), participation in social activities, and mutually supportive relationships with Muslims. Trust, norms, and social networks serve as the foundation for fostering harmony in this village's multicultural life. Although the Buddhist community faces some obstacles, such as limited worship facilities, their collective efforts have succeeded in creating an inclusive, safe, and peaceful social



environment. This success is concrete evidence that social capital can be an effective instrument in building tolerance and harmony between religious communities in a pluralistic society.

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