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# ISLAM IN INDONESIA

## Preface

In discussing Islam in Indonesia I will treat the salient points of the following topics:

- a) Islamization of Indonesia.
- b) Main characteristics of Indonesian Moslems.
- c) Islam in Indonesian Politics
- d) Islam and other religions in Indonesia.
- e) Islam in Indonesia today.

## Islamization of Indonesia.

Indonesia is a country consisting of a string of islands 5,150 km long and 1,930 km wide. Between the islands are big areas of ocean.

The most important islands are: Sumatra, Java, Celebes, Borneo, Bali, Lombok, Sumbawa, Flores, Timor, Maluku, and Irian (New Guinea).

Before the arrival of Western Europeans, the territories of these islands were divided into many small tribes' territories governed by a tribal chief or king. Most of the inhabitants adhered to animistic beliefs. However already in the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. there were signs that parts of Java, Sumatra, Borneo, and even Celebes were governed by Hindu or Buddhistic kings.

Until the 15th century Hinduism and Buddhism were dominant in Java and Sumatra, and from there Hinduism and Buddhism influenced many parts of the present Indonesia.

In the meantime Islam had spread from the Arab countries to parts of Europe and also of Asia.

In the 16th century there was a mighty Islamic Kingdom in India, the Magul (Moghul) Kingdom, with the important trade port of Gurajat.

From there Moslem traders sailed to Malakka, Sumatra, and Java. In the 16th century there was already a strong Moslem kingdom in the northern part of Sumatra, the well known Acch Territory.

By establishing coastal trade-towns Moslems have established Moslem kingdoms dominating many trade ports of many islands in Indonesia.

From this fact Islam became the religion adopted by the majority of the people of the present Indonesia.

Dutch people are not very militant religious people, so that despite Dutch domination in trade, and later the in political field, they did not bring about complete conversion of the Indonesian people to Christianity. The islands of Timor and Flores became islands with a Catholic population, because Spanish and Portuguese forces dominated those islands for a long time, so that when the Dutch forces defeated the Spanish and Portuguese they found those islands were already Catholic Islands. The same happened with regard to the Protestant Church in the Molukken (Maluku) Islands.

The presence of Dutch forces caused frequent revolts by Moslem kings in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Christianity established itself slowly in Indonesia through education and medical services given by religious priests, brothers and sisters, who came to Indonesia motivated by missionary spirit of the 19th century.

### **Characteristics of Indonesian Moslems**

As mentioned above Islam came into Indonesia through traders. There was no military expedition trying to convert indigenous people who were Hindus, Buddhists or people with animistic belief.

Conversion followed the pattern of *cuius regio, eius religio*, the people followed the religion of the king. When the king of a trade port or capital city was converted to Islam by traders, his people also adopted Islam as their religion. Conversion also happened when a Muslim preacher managed to defeat in religious debate the teacher of a Hindu or Buddhist community. When the teacher was converted, then the pupils followed him.

The people were easily converted because the Indonesian mentality is basically syncretistic. They accepted other beliefs easily, as long as they were able to accommodate the new belief to their old conviction.

From the facts above mentioned, we can state these main characteristics of Indonesian Moslems: 1) They are mostly quite moderate, syncretistic, quite willing to accommodate other beliefs.

2) Their idea of Islam is colored by their local world view and practices.

3) Their religious belief consists of mainly knowing the Qur'an by heart and following the precepts in a legalistic way, and quite prepared to interpret the precepts in the most broad in the broadest way, depending on the situations most beneficial to them.

4) They have a strong communitarian spirit, ready to defend their community and their religion against the slightest offense from outside.

5) Fundamentalism and religious terrorism is basically foreign to the spirit of Indonesian Moslems.

### **Islam and Politics in Indonesia.**

I have mentioned above that the Indonesian Moslems are not militants. However, from the 18th century until the 20th century there were many revolts in Indonesia against Dutch Christian people, led by Moslem leaders.

We have to regard those revolts not as a fight against another (Christian) religion, but as a political warfare to maintain or to gain power, which also means to gain territory, properties and possession of economical resources.

Entering the 20th century the situation of the Indonesian Moslem people was identical with the situation of many colonized people all over the world.

Indonesian Islam consisted, at that time, of feudal lords and poor uneducated peasants. The former Moslem business people of the 17th century were replaced by Chinese traders, as a strategy of the Dutch colonial government to keep control over the Indonesian people.

However, at the end of the 19th century the Dutch government opened up the possibility of Indonesian nobles getting education. (Again as a political strategy to get political support from the indigenous nobilities, who still had power over their people). In the first half of the 20th century there were already groups of educated young Moslem Indonesians in the Netherlands and in Indonesia.

Through those young Moslems the desire for independence was aroused.

Although they were all Moslems however, true to the characteristics of Indonesian Moslems mentioned above, some of them emphasized the socialistic or communistic way of an independent Indonesia; another group envisaged an independent Indonesia as a Moslem theocratic state.

The first Islamic movement was actually an attempt to improve the situation of Islamic traders against the Dutch monopolized Chinese and foreign traders.

On a more religious level came the Muhammadiyah, which had as its aim to promote the welfare of poor Moslems through education and social service, and through more adequate religious instruction. In this regard Muhammadiyah wanted to get back to an Islam without the practices taken over from the local customs. (Muhammadiyah was inspired by the idea of Panislamism and the Islamic reformation of Wahabbiyah in Saudi Arabia).

This movement was opposed by a group of Moslem religious leaders (Ulama), who in their turn established their own organization called the Nahdhalatul Ulama. Another group of young Indonesian Moslems established a purely nationalistic organization called the National Party of Indonesia.

All these groups aroused the spirit of independence, which led to revolts against the Dutch government. All the revolts were suppressed, and many of the Moslem leaders were arrested and put into jail, or banished to a remote part of the present Indonesia (the former Dutch East Indies).

When Indonesia proclaimed its independence on 17 August 1945, the Moslems, who formed the majority of the Indonesian people, supported the proclamation and all fought for Indonesia against the Dutch and allied forces who came back to reestablish Dutch control over the former Dutch East Indies, after the surrender of the Japanese.

In the debate over the form of the State of Indonesia there were three basic tendencies. The tendency to form a state following the Western pattern, that is a parliamentary democracy or a communist totalitarian state; also there was the tendency to form a state on the Indonesian pattern, a unitary state based on the idea of a family, with strong government as father, and loyal citizens as children of a family; and thirdly there was the tendency to form an Islamic State of Indonesia. These three tendencies are called: Western secular state tendency, nationalistic integralistic tendency, and Islam state tendency.

In the first Constitution of 1945, the integralistic nationalistic tendency got the upper hand. The state ideology was formulated on the basis of belief in God, the unity of Indonesia, a spirit of humanism, social justice, and government by mutual consent in a people's representative assembly (The Pancasila)

Revolts from the side of the communist party and from the militant Moslems, who wanted a communist state and an Islamic state, arose, but the Indonesian government managed to suppress them.

After the general election of 1955 a constituent was set up to formulate a constitution to replace the constitution of 1945.

However the three tendencies mentioned above came up again in the debate for the new constitution, so that the constituent were unable to formulate a new constitution. The main issue is between the tendency to make Indonesia an Islamic state or to take other forms of state.

In 1959 President Sukarno decreed to return to the constitution of 1945.

Again the integralistic nationalistic tendency prevailed.

However, Sukarno leaned towards the communist party, which ended up in the attempted coup by the communists on 30 September 1965.

This communist movement was suppressed by General Suharto, and Sukarno gave over the command of the state to Suharto, and Indonesia began the so called "New Order". In the beginning it seemed that the New Order would take the form of a western secular parliamentary

pattern. The state economy surely was patterned into a liberalistic capitalistic free market economy, and Indonesia actually has managed to develop economically. However in the government the integralistic tendency gained power over the western parliamentary tendency. The state became more and more paternalistic.

After the failure of the communists in 1965 the Indonesian Moslems who aspired to an Islamic Indonesian State, encouraged by the success of the Arabs' oil policy against the western powers, came to the surface.

There was, and still is, a strong Islamic survival in Indonesia. In the early years of the New Order there were attempts by Moslem terrorists. However, they did not succeed in making an Islamic revolution.

Then the Moslems changed tactics. They accepted Indonesia as a nationalistic state, they stopped aspiring to a formal Islamic Indonesian Republic, but they tried to gain more say in the government and among the people by the so called "cultural strategy". The Moslems began to stress the outward Islamic appearance. Many mosques were built, the Islamic prayers were broadcast through loud speakers on the mosques, girls were dressed with the Moslem Jilbab covering their whole bodies, Islamic greetings were in all public speech.

Television stories were full of Islamic teachers and heroes performing good wonderful deeds.

Very subtly the Christian minority were pushed aside, and kept away from important position.

This strategy was successful. After the election of 1992, in the new cabinet many Christian/Catholic ministers were pushed aside, and almost all ministers were taken from the members of the militant ICMI (Association of Moslem Scholars) who aspired to have an Islamic government in Indonesia, although not calling Indonesia an Islamic State.

### **Islam in Indonesia and other religions**

As mentioned above, the Indonesian mentality is basically sincretistic, so there was always tolerance toward other religions by the Indonesian Moslems.

Many Moslems are just Moslems by name, not convinced Moslems. But among the convinced Moslems there is great tolerance.

They become militant only when they feel offended in their belief.

However, their militancy is usually aroused intentionally by political leaders for political purposes.

So the relation between Islam and other religions should be assessed in a political context, not in a religious one. There has never been a religious war in Indonesia.

In the political context: The government adopted tolerance as state policy.

All religions are formally given freedom in Indonesia. Intentional attempts to arouse hatred toward other religions is formally forbidden.

In general there is still great tolerance and peaceful co-existence between Moslems and members of other religions.

### **Islam in Indonesia today.**

Today in Indonesia there are 170 million Moslems, the biggest Moslem population in one state. That is why Indonesia forms the focus of attention for other Moslem countries. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia try to get Indonesia into their political side.

There is a great Islamic revival in Indonesia.

Islam begin to appear as a way of life. In these last years President Suharto (maybe for political reasons) shows his leaning towards the Moslems. (In the early years of the New Order he leaned more to the rationalistic and secularly oriented nationalists, and to the more educated Catholics and Christians).

Suharto's leaning toward the Moslems gives more boost to the Islamic revival. The Islamic revival opens opportunities to Moslem militants (although they are only a small group) for power-hungry Moslems to seize more power in the Government.

That is why there is some fear among the Christians that in the future there will be an Islamic State, and persecution of the Christians.

On the other hand, from among the Moslems themselves have come forward scholars with a very modern, moderate attitude.

Also the nationalists themselves still do not want an Islamic state.

So the Christian conception of a state of justice still has influence amongst the Moslems themselves.

The struggle of Indonesian Moslems is the struggle between "moderate non exclusive" Islam, and the "narrow-exclusive fundamentalistic Islam".

At present I think the Christians have to put up with some harassment from Moslem fundamentalists here and there. The Christians have to put up with the outward appearance of Moslem dominance.

However the basic attitude is still a general spirit of tolerance, and seeing the basic mentality of Indonesians the moderate Moslems and the Christians can still work together to avoid a fundamentalist Islamic State.

The challenge for the Christians is to keep calm, to work steadily to become good citizens, to teach the people the way of good conduct, to keep away from corruption, to give example of discipline and dedication in the professions.

By doing so, they will still get sympathy from the Moslems who also aspire toward "amar ma'ruf nahy munkar" doing the good deeds

and avoiding bad deeds. Islam in Indonesia is not a threat, but a challenge, to the Church.

Malang 29 March 1995