

The Da'wah Thought of Dr. Zakir Naik on Religious Tolerance in the Context of Interfaith Dialogue

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Abstract. This study examines the da'wah thought of Dr. Zakir Naik on religious tolerance within the context of interfaith dialogue. The research is motivated by the reality of increasingly plural modern societies and the growing intensity of interreligious interactions, which require a da'wah approach that is dialogical, rational, and respectful of religious differences. In this context, Islamic da'wah is not merely understood as a means of conveying religious teachings, but also as a medium of communication that contributes to fostering tolerance and social harmony. The objectives of this study are to analyze the concept of religious tolerance according to Dr. Zakir Naik, to examine his da'wah thought related to the issue of religious tolerance, and to explore the relevance of his ideas within the context of da'wah practices in Indonesia. This research employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive-analytical method. It is classified as library research, with primary data sources consisting of Dr. Zakir Naik's sermons, public dialogues, question-and-answer sessions, and da'wah documentation, as well as secondary data derived from relevant books and scholarly works. Data analysis is conducted through content analysis. The findings indicate that Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah thought emphasizes the importance of interreligious dialogue based on rational argumentation, respectful delivery, and recognition of freedom of belief. Religious tolerance is understood not as an effort to equate all religions, but as an attitude of respecting religious differences without compromising fundamental doctrinal principles. These ideas are considered relevant to the Indonesian context, particularly in promoting dialogical da'wah communication and strengthening interreligious harmony within a multicultural society.

Keywords: *Religious Tolerance, Interfaith Dialogue, Dr. Zakir Naik.*

A. Introduction

The Religious diversity has become an inseparable characteristic of contemporary global society. The processes of globalization have been advances particularly in information and communication technology, and the rapid expansion of digital media have significantly increased interactions among individuals from different religious backgrounds. These developments have enabled people to access religious information and engage in interfaith encounters more easily than ever before. While such interactions offer opportunities for mutual understanding and cooperation, they also present serious challenges when differences are not managed through constructive and ethical communication (Bungin, 2020).

In many cases, the religious differences are vulnerable to misinterpretation, prejudice, and exclusivism, which may lead to tension and conflict. Religious intolerance often emerges not only from theological disagreement, but also from limited knowledge, lack of dialogue, and ineffective modes of religious communication. When religious teachings are delivered in rigid or confrontational ways, differences are frequently perceived as threats rather than as social realities that require mutual respect and understanding. Consequently, the strengthening dialogical communication in religious discourse becomes increasingly important in plural societies (Mahfud, 2020).

Islam emphasizes the importance of peaceful coexistence and respect for religious diversity. The Qur'an explicitly states that there is no compulsion in religion, highlighting the principle of freedom of belief as a fundamental aspect of religious life. This principle provides a normative foundation for the concept of religious tolerance within Islamic teachings and underscores the importance of ethical engagement with individuals of different faiths.

As stated in the Qur'an, "There is no compulsion in religion" (Qur'an, Al-Baqarah [2]: 256).

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۚ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ ۚ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ
الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ لَهَا ۗ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

"There is no compulsion in religion. The right path has become clearly distinct from the wrong one. Whoever rejects false deities and believes in Allah has truly grasped a firm handhold that will never break. And Allah is All-Hearing and All-Knowing". This verse reflects the Islamic view that faith should be based on personal conviction rather than coercion. In the context of plural societies, this principle serves as a moral guideline for promoting tolerance, dialogue, and peaceful coexistence among followers of different religions.

Indonesia represents a distinctive context in discussions of religious tolerance and interfaith relations. As a nation characterized by ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, Indonesia constitutionally guarantees freedom of religion and belief. However, despite these legal protections, empirical data indicate that challenges related to religious intolerance persist. Reports on freedom of religion and belief reveal ongoing cases of discrimination, restrictions on religious practices, and interreligious tensions in various regions of Indonesia (Setara Institute, 2024). These conditions demonstrate that religious harmony cannot be achieved solely through legal frameworks, but requires continuous social, educational, and communicative efforts.

Within this context, religion plays a crucial role in shaping individual attitudes and collective behavior. One of the most influential forms of religious expression in Muslim societies is da'wah. Traditionally understood as the dissemination of Islamic teachings, da'wah in contemporary society is increasingly viewed as a form of religious communication that interacts with diverse audiences. Scholars emphasize that da'wah in plural and multicultural societies should adopt dialogical, persuasive, and ethical approaches, prioritizing wisdom and rational engagement rather than coercion or hostility (Huda, 2024).

Contemporary da'wah is therefore expected to function not only as a means of transmitting doctrinal messages, but also as a medium for fostering social harmony and interreligious understanding. Dialogical da'wah encourages openness, mutual respect, and intellectual engagement with people of different beliefs. Such an approach aligns with broader discussions on intercultural and interfaith communication, which highlight dialogue as a key instrument for reducing prejudice and promoting peaceful coexistence (Muhyiddin, 2023).

In the context of religious communication, the way religious messages are delivered plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of religious diversity. Ineffective communication strategies, particularly those that emphasize exclusivism or hostility, may intensify misunderstanding and reinforce negative stereotypes toward other religious groups. Conversely, dialogical and inclusive communication approaches have the potential to transform religious differences into opportunities for mutual learning and cooperation. Therefore, the study of da'wah as a form of religious communication becomes increasingly relevant in addressing contemporary challenges related to religious tolerance (Bungin, 2020).

Furthermore, the discourse on religious tolerance cannot be separated from broader discussions on multiculturalism and social cohesion. In multicultural societies, tolerance functions as a social mechanism that enables diverse communities to coexist peacefully while maintaining their respective identities. Scholars argue that tolerance must be actively cultivated through education, dialogue, and ethical communication practices rather than assumed as an automatic outcome of diversity itself (Mahfud, 2020). This perspective underscores the importance of examining religious discourse and da'wah practices that actively promote dialogical engagement and mutual respect.

One prominent figure in contemporary Islamic da'wah whose activities frequently intersect with issues of interfaith dialogue is Dr. Zakir Naik. He is internationally recognized for his engagement in comparative religion and interfaith discussions through public lectures, debates, and question-and-answer sessions. His da'wah approach is characterized by rational argumentation and frequent references to religious scriptures, including the Qur'an and texts from other religious traditions, to address theological questions and religious differences (Naik, 2022).

Central to Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah thought is his interpretation of religious tolerance. He consistently argues that tolerance should not be understood as equating all religions or compromising fundamental theological principles. Instead, tolerance is framed as respecting religious differences while firmly maintaining one's own beliefs. This perspective positions tolerance as a social ethic rather than a theological compromise, emphasizing coexistence without diluting religious identity (R. Mustapha & Razak, 2022).

From an Islamic theological perspective, the principle of religious tolerance is closely related to the concept of freedom of belief and ethical dialogue. Islamic teachings emphasize that religious messages should be conveyed through wisdom, good counsel, and respectful communication. Scholars argue that these principles provide a strong foundation for dialogical da'wah, particularly in engaging with individuals of different faiths in multicultural societies (Ismail, 2023).

Despite the extensive public attention given to Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah activities, academic studies that specifically analyze his views on religious tolerance within the framework of interfaith dialogue remain relatively limited, especially in relation to the Indonesian socio-religious context. Most existing studies focus on his debating style or comparative religious arguments, while fewer studies examine the implications of his da'wah thought for promoting tolerance and interreligious harmony in plural societies.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the concept of religious tolerance according to Dr. Zakir Naik, examine his da'wah thought in the context of interfaith dialogue, and explore the relevance of his ideas for da'wah practices in Indonesia. By employing a qualitative library research approach, this study seeks to contribute to academic discussions on contemporary Islamic da'wah and to provide insights into the role of dialogical communication in fostering religious tolerance and social harmony within multicultural societies.

In addition, the discourse on religious tolerance is closely related to the ethical dimension of religious communication. In plural societies, the effectiveness of da'wah is not solely determined by the content of religious messages, but also by the manner in which these messages are conveyed. Communication that ignores social context and audience diversity may unintentionally reinforce exclusivism and resistance. Therefore, da'wah in multicultural settings requires approaches that emphasize dialogue, rational explanation, and respect for religious differences.

Religious tolerance, in this sense, functions not only as an individual attitude but also as a collective social value that must be continuously cultivated. Dialogue becomes a strategic medium through which religious communities can clarify misunderstandings, reduce prejudice, and build mutual trust. Without dialogical engagement, religious diversity risks becoming a source of tension rather than a foundation for cooperation. This condition highlights the importance of examining

da'wah thought that explicitly engages with interfaith dialogue and ethical communication as a response to contemporary challenges of religious pluralism.

B. Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a descriptive-analytical method. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because this research aims to explore meanings, concepts, and interpretations related to da'wah thought rather than to measure variables numerically. The descriptive-analytical method is applied to systematically describe and analyze Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah thought on religious tolerance within the context of interfaith dialogue.

This research is categorized as library research, focusing on the examination of written and documented sources relevant to the research topic. Library research enables the researcher to explore theoretical frameworks, conceptual discussions, and scholarly interpretations related to Islamic da'wah, religious tolerance, and interfaith dialogue by relying on credible academic sources.

The primary data sources of this study consist of Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah materials, including sermons, public lectures, interfaith dialogues, and question-and-answer sessions. These materials were obtained from books authored by Dr. Zakir Naik, recorded lectures, video documentation, and official digital platforms that publish his da'wah activities. Primary data were selected based on their relevance to the discussion of religious tolerance, freedom of belief, and dialogical engagement among different religious communities.

Secondary data sources were collected from various academic references, including scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, research reports, and previous studies that discuss Islamic da'wah, religious tolerance, interfaith dialogue, and communication in multicultural societies. These secondary sources were used to support the analysis, provide theoretical perspectives, and strengthen the interpretation of the primary data.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic documentation technique. The researcher identified relevant sources, categorized them according to their thematic relevance, and reviewed the selected materials carefully to ensure that the collected data were comprehensive and directly related to the objectives of the study.

The data analysis technique applied in this research is content analysis. Content analysis involves examining texts to identify key themes, concepts, patterns, and arguments related to the research focus. In this study, content analysis was used to analyze Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah discourse by identifying his views on religious tolerance, freedom of belief, and interfaith dialogue. The analysis was carried out by interpreting the content of the data, comparing it with relevant theoretical perspectives, and contextualizing the findings within the socio-religious conditions of Indonesian society.

To strengthen the analytical framework, this study also refers to the communication theory of Jalaluddin Rakhmat (Rakhmat, 2018) particularly his views on ethical communication and persuasive religious discourse. According to Jalaluddin Rakhmat, effective religious communication should emphasize empathy, rational persuasion, and respect for the audience's psychological and social background. This theoretical perspective is relevant to the present study, as it provides a conceptual basis for analyzing Dr. Zakir Naik's dialogical da'wah approach, which prioritizes rational argumentation, respectful dialogue, and intellectual engagement in interfaith contexts. (Azra, 2019)

The integration of Jalaluddin Rakhmat's communication theory with the analysis of Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah thought allows this study to examine how dialogical and ethical communication contributes to the promotion of religious tolerance. This approach is consistent with the focus of the author's thesis, which analyzes da'wah thought on religious tolerance within the framework of interfaith dialogue. By combining content analysis with communication theory, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how da'wah discourse can function as a medium for fostering interreligious harmony in a multicultural society.

To ensure the validity of the analysis, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information from multiple sources. This process helped to minimize bias and enhance the credibility of the research findings. The results of the analysis are presented descriptively to provide a clear and systematic understanding of Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah thought and its relevance to contemporary interfaith relations, particularly in the Indonesian context.

C. Result and Discussion

Profile of Dr. Zakir Naik as the Object of Study

Zakir Naik is a contemporary Islamic preacher whose da'wah activities are widely recognized in the context of comparative religion and interfaith dialogue. His prominence is not merely based on popularity, but on the distinctive characteristics of his da'wah approach, which emphasizes rational argumentation, textual evidence, and direct engagement with audiences from different religious backgrounds. This orientation positions Dr. Zakir Naik as a relevant figure for academic analysis, particularly in studies examining religious tolerance and interreligious communication.

In his da'wah discourse, Dr. Zakir Naik frequently employs a comparative approach by referring to the Qur'an alongside scriptures from other religious traditions. This method is used to explain Islamic teachings and to respond to theological questions raised in interfaith settings. Such an approach reflects his belief that religious dialogue should be grounded in knowledge, logic, and clear theological positioning rather than emotional persuasion. As a result, his da'wah activities often take the form of open lectures and question-and-answer sessions that directly involve participants of different faiths (Naik, 2022).

The relevance of Dr. Zakir Naik to this study lies in the consistency of his engagement with interfaith audiences and the explicit articulation of his views on religious tolerance. He consistently distinguishes between social tolerance and theological commitment. Social tolerance, in his view, involves respecting the rights of individuals to practice their religion freely and to coexist peacefully within society. At the same time, he maintains that theological principles should remain uncompromised. This distinction forms a central theme in his da'wah thought on religious tolerance and becomes a key focus of analysis in this research. (Rakhmat, 2018).

Previous academic studies have noted that Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah style represents a form of dialogical da'wah that relies heavily on rational explanation and scriptural reasoning. While his approach has generated diverse responses, including both support and criticism, scholars acknowledge that his consistent engagement with interfaith dialogue provides valuable material for examining how religious tolerance is negotiated in plural contexts (R. Mustapha & Razak, 2022).

Therefore, Dr. Zakir Naik is selected as the object of this study not only because of his international visibility, but also because his da'wah discourse explicitly addresses issues of belief, difference, and coexistence. His da'wah activities offer a concrete example of how religious tolerance is articulated within interfaith dialogue, making his thought particularly relevant to the objectives of this research and consistent with the focus of the author's thesis.

In addition, the discourse on religious tolerance is closely related to the ethical dimension of religious communication. In plural societies, the effectiveness of da'wah is not solely determined by the content of religious messages, but also by the manner in which these messages are conveyed. Communication that ignores social context and audience diversity may unintentionally reinforce exclusivism and resistance. Therefore, da'wah in multicultural settings requires approaches that emphasize dialogue, rational explanation, and respect for religious differences.

Religious tolerance, in this sense, functions not only as an individual attitude but also as a collective social value that must be continuously cultivated. Dialogue becomes a strategic medium through which religious communities can clarify misunderstandings, reduce prejudice, and build mutual trust. Without dialogical engagement, religious diversity risks becoming a source of tension rather than a foundation for cooperation. This condition highlights the importance of examining da'wah thought that explicitly engages with interfaith dialogue and ethical communication as a response to contemporary challenges of religious pluralism.

Concept of Religious Tolerance in Dr. Zakir Naik's Da'wah Thought

The results of this study indicate that Dr. Zakir Naik conceptualizes religious tolerance as an attitude of respecting religious differences without compromising fundamental theological principles. In his da'wah discourse, tolerance is not interpreted as the equalization of all religions or the acceptance of theological relativism. Instead, it is understood as recognizing the right of individuals to adhere to their own beliefs while maintaining peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic society (R. Mustapha & Razak, 2022).

Dr. Zakir Naik consistently emphasizes that faith is a matter of personal conviction and rational acceptance rather than coercion. He frequently highlights the principle of freedom of belief,

arguing that religious truth should be conveyed through intellectual explanation and dialogue. This perspective aligns with Islamic teachings that emphasize persuasion through wisdom and respectful communication. In this sense, tolerance functions as a social ethic that governs interaction among people of different faiths, rather than as a theological compromise (Ismail, 2023).

This finding supports scholarly views that define religious tolerance as a balance between maintaining religious identity and fostering harmonious social relations. Tolerance does not require abandoning one's beliefs, but rather encourages mutual respect and peaceful coexistence in diverse societies. Such an understanding is particularly relevant in multicultural contexts where religious diversity is an unavoidable social reality (Mahfud, 2020).

Interfaith Dialogue as a Central Da'wah Strategy

Another significant finding of this study is Dr. Zakir Naik's emphasis on interfaith dialogue as a central strategy in his da'wah activities. Interfaith dialogue, in his approach, is understood as an open forum for exchanging ideas, clarifying misconceptions, and discussing theological differences through rational argumentation. This dialogical method is evident in his public lectures, debates, and question-and-answer sessions, which often involve participants from diverse religious backgrounds (R. Mustapha & Razak, 2022).

Rather than avoiding sensitive theological issues, Dr. Zakir Naik addresses them directly using logical reasoning and scriptural references. His approach reflects a form of dialogical da'wah that prioritizes clarity, rationality, and intellectual engagement. Such a method aligns with contemporary theories of da'wah communication, which emphasize persuasion through reasoned discourse rather than emotional confrontation or hostility (Huda, 2024).

However, the findings also indicate that Dr. Zakir Naik's dialogical approach has generated diverse responses. While many audiences perceive his method as intellectually stimulating and informative, others criticize his debating style as confrontational. Despite these differing perceptions, this study finds that his da'wah approach remains grounded in the principle of intellectual engagement, positioning dialogue as a tool for reducing misunderstanding and fostering awareness among religious communities.(Naik, 2008).

Religious Tolerance and Ethical Communication in Da'wah

The findings further reveal that ethical communication plays a crucial role in Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah thought on religious tolerance. Ethical communication, in this context, refers to the use of respectful language, logical argumentation, and openness to discussion. Dr. Zakir Naik emphasizes that da'wah should be conducted with wisdom and good counsel, especially when addressing individuals of different religious backgrounds.

This approach corresponds with broader discussions on religious communication in plural societies, which argue that ineffective or confrontational communication can exacerbate prejudice and interreligious tension. Conversely, dialogical and ethical communication can contribute to mutual understanding and social harmony (Bungin, 2020). Therefore, da'wah that prioritizes ethical communication is more likely to promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

The emphasis on ethical communication also highlights the transformative potential of da'wah in shaping social attitudes. By encouraging rational dialogue and respectful interaction, da'wah can function as a medium for reducing stereotypes and fostering positive interreligious relations. This finding reinforces the view that da'wah is not merely a religious obligation, but also a form of social communication with broader societal implications.

Relevance of Dr. Zakir Naik's Da'wah Thought to the Indonesian Context

The final finding of this study concerns the relevance of Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah thought to the Indonesian context. Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious society faces ongoing challenges related to religious intolerance, discrimination, and miscommunication. Empirical data indicate that misunderstandings and lack of interfaith dialogue often contribute to social tension (Institute, 2024).

In this context, Dr. Zakir Naik's emphasis on dialogical da'wah and rational persuasion offers valuable insights for addressing interreligious challenges. His approach highlights the importance of dialogue, intellectual engagement, and ethical communication in fostering tolerance. However, this

study also finds that the application of his da'wah thought in Indonesia requires contextual adaptation.

Cultural sensitivity, local wisdom, and the principles of religious moderation that characterize Indonesian society must be considered to ensure that dialogical da'wah contributes positively to social harmony. Without such adaptation, da'wah practices may risk misunderstanding or resistance. Therefore, Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah thought should be interpreted critically and selectively, integrating its dialogical principles with the socio-cultural realities of Indonesian society (Shihab, 2011).

D. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah thought on religious tolerance emphasizes respect for religious differences without compromising fundamental theological principles. Religious tolerance, in this context, is not understood as equating all religions or accepting theological relativism, but rather as recognizing the freedom of belief and the right of individuals to adhere to their respective religious convictions while maintaining peaceful coexistence within a pluralistic society. (Krippendorff, 2018).

This study also finds that interfaith dialogue constitutes a central element of Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah approach. Through dialogical communication grounded in rational argumentation and supported by scriptural references, interfaith dialogue is positioned as an effective medium for clarifying misconceptions, addressing theological differences, and fostering intellectual engagement among followers of different religions. Such an approach highlights the importance of dialogue as a constructive alternative to confrontational or coercive forms of religious communication. (Amin, 2021)

Furthermore, the findings indicate that ethical communication plays a significant role in promoting religious tolerance through da'wah. Dr. Zakir Naik's emphasis on logical reasoning, respectful discourse, and openness to discussion reflects the broader principles of ethical da'wah communication. By prioritizing wisdom and rational persuasion, da'wah can function not only as a means of transmitting religious teachings, but also as a social instrument for reducing prejudice, minimizing interreligious tension, and strengthening mutual understanding. (M. Mustapha et al., 2019).

In relation to the Indonesian context, this study demonstrates that Dr. Zakir Naik's da'wah thought holds considerable relevance for addressing contemporary challenges related to religious diversity and interfaith relations. Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious society requires da'wah models that promote tolerance, dialogue, and social harmony. However, the application of Dr. Zakir Naik's dialogical da'wah approach must be accompanied by contextual adaptation that takes into account local cultural values, socio-religious dynamics, and the principles of moderation that characterize Indonesian Islam.

Therefore, this study suggests that dialogical and rational da'wah approaches can contribute positively to the promotion of religious tolerance and interreligious harmony in plural societies, provided that they are implemented with cultural sensitivity and ethical awareness. The integration of dialogical da'wah with local wisdom and inclusive communication strategies is essential to ensure that da'wah serves as a unifying force rather than a source of division.

The findings of this study also indicate that dialogical da'wah has broader social implications beyond theological discourse. When da'wah is practiced as ethical communication, it contributes to shaping attitudes of openness, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence. In this regard, religious tolerance is not merely an abstract concept, but a practical outcome of communicative interaction among diverse religious communities.

Finally, this study has several limitations, particularly in its reliance on library research and textual analysis. Future research is encouraged to explore empirical and comparative studies on da'wah practices in interfaith contexts, including field-based research that examines audience reception and the practical impact of dialogical da'wah approaches. Such studies would provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of da'wah communication models in fostering religious tolerance and social cohesion in diverse societies. (Institute, 2024).

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