



THE MEANING OF UMMATAN WASATAN AND YOGA IN RELATION TO RELIGIOUS MODERATION; A Comparative Study of Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143 and Bhagavad Gita 6.17 Roland Barthes' Semiotic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Religious moderation is a solution step in the midst of differences that exist in a multicultural nation to anticipate disharmony in society. This article samples the concept of religious moderation offered by Islam as a Samawi religion in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143 which is represented in the word *ummatan wasatan* and the concept of religious moderation offered by Hinduism as an Ardi religion in Bhagavad Gita 6.17 which is represented in the word *yoga*. Although both were born from different wombs and different contexts, there must be similarities in certain respects. Therefore, to find the differences as well as the similarities, Roland Barthes' semiotics is used to explore the different aspects of language as well as their historical contexts. There are two important findings in this article first, the linguistic review shows that the word *ummatan wasatan* in Islam refers to a group that is moderate, just and becomes '*uswatun hasanah*'. While the word *yoga* in Hinduism is moderation, balance, and spiritual endeavour; secondly, the two scriptures have similarities and differences both based on origin and context, meaning, main focus, and practical application.

ABSTRAK

Moderasi beragama merupakan sebuah langkah solutif di tengah perbedaan yang ada dalam sebuah bangsa yang multikultural untuk mengantisipasi disharmonisasi dalam masyarakat. Artikel ini mengambil sampel konsep moderasi beragama yang ditawarkan oleh Islam sebagai agama Samawi dalam Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 143 yang terepresentasi dalam kata *ummatan wasatan* dan konsep moderasi beragama yang ditawarkan oleh agama Hindu sebagai agama Ardi dalam Bhagavad Gita 6.17 yang terepresentasi dalam kata *yoga*. Meskipun keduanya lahir dari rahim yang berbeda dan konteks yang berbeda, pasti terdapat kesamaan dalam beberapa hal tertentu. Maka untuk menemukan sisi perbedaan sekaligus persamaan keduanya, penggunaan semiotika Roland Barthes digunakan untuk menelusuri perbedaan aspek bahasa sekaligus konteks historis keduanya. Terdapat dua temuan penting dalam artikel ini pertama, tinjauan kebahasaan menunjukkan bahwa kata *ummatan wasatan* dalam Islam menunjuk pada kelompok yang moderat, adil dan menjadi '*uswatun hasanah*'. Sedangkan kata *yoga* dalam agama Hindu adalah moderasi, keseimbangan, dan usaha spiritual; kedua, kedua kitab suci tersebut memiliki persamaan dan perbedaan baik berdasarkan asal-usul dan konteks, pemaknaan, fokus utama, serta pengaplikasian secara praktis.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received August 27, 2024

Accepted December 05, 2024

KEYWORDS

Religious moderation, comparison, semiotics, Roland Barthes



Introduction

The diversity of religions, cultures, races, ethnicities, norms and customs in a country indicates the plurality of a nation. This diversity must have the potential to create differences that must be harmonised in order to avoid clashes between communities in a nation. A solution that can be offered to mediate the differences that exist in a country is a religious norm that can regulate the behaviour of its adherents in order to be moderate in religion (religious moderation), so that it will have implications for the response of religious believers in responding to existing differences so as to avoid conflicts that trigger tension in the life of the state. Although each religion has its own holy book, the spirit of religious moderation is something that is undoubtedly in the holy books of religions. So in this study, we want to review the concept of religious moderation in two major streams of religion, namely the heavenly religion (abrahamik) in this case making the holy book of Islam as the object of study and the darmic religion in this case making the Hindu religious scriptures as the object of study. The concept of religious moderation in the Qur'an (the holy book of Islam) is contained in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143, while in the Hindu holy book it is stated in Bhagavad Gita 6.17. In addition, the context surrounding the two scriptures is different so that although they are claimed to contain the spirit of religious moderation, of course there are different emphases that need to be examined more intensively.

The concept of religious moderation in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143 is represented by the term "*ummatan wasaṭan*", while in Bhagavad Gita 6.17 it is represented by the term *yuga*. The use of different terms to indicate the concept of religious moderation in the two books, indicates a different emphasis in the context of religious moderation on the one hand, but does not rule out the possibility of similar concepts offered on the other. It is an urgency to find out more about the meaning of the two terms, so this research uses Roland Barthes semiotics to examine more deeply the meaning contained in the two terms, so that it can be known what kind of religious moderation concept is offered. The selection of the two verses in each holy book as material objects is not without reason, the word *wasata* in the Qur'an is mentioned five times with four different derivations.¹ Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143 was chosen because of its position as a

¹ Muḥammad Fu'ad 'Abdul Bāqī, *Al-Mu'jam al-Mufaḥras li al-Fāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Kairo: Dār al-Ḥadīṣ, 1364), p. 750. Other verses that contain the word *wasata* are Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 238 (this verse calls for the maintenance of prayer, the use of the word *wuṣṭā* in this verse refers to the afternoon prayer); Q.S. al-Maidah [5]: 89 (this verse talks about the fine for breaking an oath by using the word *'awsaṭ* to refer to the "usual" food given to the family); Q.S. al-Qalam [68]: 28 (this verse uses the word *'awsaṭ* to refer to the wisest person); Q.S. al-'Ādiyāt [100]: 5 (the verse uses the word *wasat* to denote a war horse charging into the midst of a hostile assembly). See, 'Abū al-Qāsim al-



madaniah surah, one of whose characteristics is to discuss muamalah (social interaction) which is different from other madaniah surahs which also contain the word *wasata*, but only Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143 which represents the concept of religious moderation based on a syntagmatic review of the verse. While the selection of the word *yoga* in Bhagavad Gita 6.17 is the editorial in the verse explicitly how to be one with his god by balancing activities in daily life.

This research is expected to fill the void of previous research on religious moderation, at least in the last five years there have been several studies that discuss religious moderation based on the perspective of religious scriptures, among others. First, I Nyoman Surpa Adisastra and Ni Made Rai Kristina wrote an article that reviews the value of religious moderation in Hinduism based on theological perspectives²; *Second*, Fauziah Nurdin in his article reviews religious moderation based on the perspective of the Qur'an and hadith by using a thematic interpretation approach³; *Third*, Khairul Amri reviews religious moderation based on the perspective of religions in Indonesia as a response to the negative impact of extreme and intolerant content circulating on the internet⁴; *Fourth*, Muria Khusnun Nisa and friends wrote an article that is almost similar to the third article but provides differentiation by linking the impact of the digital disruption era on religious moderation⁵. In contrast to these studies, this research will review more deeply the implicit meaning of the concept of religious moderation represented in the symbols of "*ummatah wasatan*" (Q.S. al-baqarah [2]: 143) and "*yoga*" (Bhagavad Gita 6.17) using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach so that not only the literal meaning of the text can be revealed, but more than that it will reveal connotative meanings based on Barthes' language system and myth system.⁶ So that the differences and similarities of the concept of religious moderation in the two holy books can be identified.

Husayn ibn Muḥammad al-Ma'rūf bi al-Ragīb Al-Aṣfahānī, *Al-Mufradāt Fī Garīb Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Syāmiyah, 1991), p. 369-870.

² I Nyoman Surpa Adisastra and Ni Made Rai Kristina, "Nilai-Nilai Moderasi Beragama Dalam Hindu (Perspektif Teologi)", *Widya Katambung*, 13.2 (2022): 34-44 <<https://doi.org/10.33363/wk.v13i2.883>>.

³ Fauziah Nurdin, 'Moderasi Beragama Menurut Al-Qur'an Dan Hadist', *Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Mu'ashirah*, 18.1 (2021): 59 <<https://doi.org/10.22373/jim.v18i1.10525>>.

⁴ Khairul Amri, "Moderasi Beragama Perspektif Agama-Agama Di Indonesia", *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses*, 4.2 (2021) <<https://doi.org/10.14421/lijid.v4i2.2909>>.

⁵ Muria Khusnun Nisa dan kawan-kawan, 'Moderasi Beragama: Landasan Moderasi Dalam Tradisi Berbagai Agama Dan Implementasi Di Era Disrupsi Digital', *Jurnal Riset Agama*, 1.3 (2021): 79-96 <<https://doi.org/10.15575/jra.v1i3.15100>>.

⁶ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (New York: The Noonday Press, 1957), p. 110-119.



Departing from the above description, this study aims to answer two main questions, namely *first*, how the meaning of the concept of religious moderation in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143 and Bhagavad Gita 6.17 in terms of linguistics; *second*, what are the differences and similarities in the two holy books about the spirit of religious moderation. The initial assumption that builds the framework in this research is that although the two books both have a vision of religious moderation, but the two books were born from different wombs both in terms of historical, geographical, and different genealogies. So it is necessary to understand the meaning of the concept of religious moderation in the two holy books based on the context that surrounds it so that the similarities and differences can be understood. The difference in this case does not mean to find which one is better, but to always be open to differences in carrying out their respective beliefs.

This article is a type of library research related to documents. So that the primary references in this article are Arabic dictionaries, tafsir patterned '*adabi ijtima'i*' to review the impact of a verse on people's lives, and literature related to asbabun nuzul which is used to review the meaning of the word *ummatan wasaṭan* in the Qur'an. As for reviewing the meaning of the word yoga in the Bhagavad Gita, the primary sources used are Sanskrit dictionaries, books that provide interpretations of verses in the Bhagavad Gita, and literature that reviews the historical context of a verse in the Bhagavad Gita. Secondary references in this article are books and articles on religious moderation. The data is processed using Roland Barthes' semiotic approach to trace the deepest layers of meaning in a symbol (*ummatan wasaṭan* and *yoga*), so that the differences and similarities of the two terms can be known in the context of religious moderation.

Results and Discussion

Overview of Religious Moderation

Religious moderation is a sentence that has two different root words, namely moderation and religion. Moderation is an absorption word from Latin *moderātio* which means balance. While in English it is called *moderation* which means average, core, standard, and non-aligned, so it can be defined that moderation is a balanced attitude in terms of beliefs, morals, and good character in treating other individuals or dealing with state institutions.⁷ While in KBBI V moderation has two meanings, namely the reduction of violence and the avoidance of extremes. Meanwhile, the

⁷ *Moderasi Beragama* (Jakarta: Kementrian Agama RI, 2019), p. 15.



word beragama comes from the word religion which gets an affix in the form of the prefix "ber" so that when it is connected with religion it will become beragama so that it means adhering to or embracing a religion. Based on the definition of these two words, religious moderation can be defined as a balanced attitude or avoiding extreme attitudes in carrying out religious teachings. Religious moderation must be understood as a religious attitude that harmonises respect for the religious practices of others who have different beliefs (inclusive) with the practice of personal religion (exclusive). Religious moderation is the key to creating harmony, peace and tolerance, both at the local, national and global levels.⁸

All religions teach complete submission to the One True God. This devotion is reflected in obedience to His instructions in daily life. The principle of moderation is not exclusive to one religion, but is part of various religious traditions and civilisations in the world. Moderation in religion encourages people to avoid extreme and excessive attitudes in the face of diversity, including differences in religion and its interpretation. Instead, people are encouraged to always be fair and balanced, so that they can live together in harmony and agreement.⁹ Religious moderation does not mean obscuring the truth or losing one's identity. Moderation does not denigrate the truth, a person still has a firm view on a matter of truth and about the law of a case based on his beliefs. However, in religious moderation, it emphasises more openness to accept that beyond personal beliefs, while still paying attention to fellow countrymen who also have the same rights as part of a sovereign society within the framework of nationality.¹⁰

In addition, it is important to look at the perspectives of Islam and Hinduism with their respective holy books to understand the concept of religious moderation. The concept of religious moderation in Islam is often referred to as "Wasatīyah al-Islām", this term has only become widely known among Muslims in the modern era, popularised by thinkers from AL-Azhar University in Egypt such as Muhammad Rasyid Ridla (died 1935 AD) and Mahmud Syaltut (died 1963 AD). The word wasatīyah comes from the word wasat in the Qur'an, which means moderation. The next generation of Egyptian scholars such as Yusuf Al-Qaradhawi, Fahmi Huwaydi, and Muhammad Al-Ghazali, continued this tradition by introducing and promoting

⁸ Nisa and friends, "Moderasi Beragama...", p. 85.

⁹ Luh Riniti Rahayu and Putu Surya Wedra Lesmana, 'Potensi Peran Perempuan Dalam Mewujudkan Moderasi Beragama Di Indonesia', *Pustaka*, 20.1 (2020), p. 33.

¹⁰ Abdul Manap, 'Moderasi Beragama Keragaman Indonesia Dalam Bingkai Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia', *Widya Genitri: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan, Agama dan Kebudayaan Hindu*, 13.3 (2022): 236. <<https://doi.org/10.36417/widyagenitri.v13i3.503>>.



the term Wasathiyah in various religious discussions since the 1970s until now.¹¹ Some Muslim scholars give their views on religious moderation, including M. Quraish Shihab interpreting moderation (*wasathiyah*) as an attitude that is in the middle and does not take sides on one side and emphasises that this neutral attitude will shape humans into fair individuals so that they can be role models for all groups. Meanwhile, Hamka understands religious moderation as a middle attitude that is not only focused on the world or only on spiritual aspects, but a balanced position between the two. On the other hand, Yusuf Qardhawi explains that *wasathiyah* is an effort to maintain a balance between two conflicting sides, so that one of them does not dominate and override the other.¹²

While the concept of religious moderation in Hinduism assumes that the spirit of religious moderation has existed for thousands of years. This period includes four *Yugas* starting from *Satya Yuga*, *Treta Yuga*, *Dwapara Yuga*, to *Kali Yuga*. In each *Yuga*, Hindus adjusted their teachings as a form of moderation. One of the important teachings in Hinduism is the teaching of *Susila*, which teaches the importance of maintaining harmonious relationships between fellow humans, which is one of the three causes of well-being. Compassion is at the centre of this religious moderation.¹³ In Hinduism, religious moderation emphasises increasing individual awareness of religious principles. The implementation of Hinduism is often done collectively (communal), so one of the characteristics of this religion is its tolerance.¹⁴ In Hinduism, there is no specific term used to refer to religious moderation as *islām wasathiyah* in Islam.

The Application of Roland Barthes' Semiotics to Scripture

Semiotics is a discipline that studies signs in human life. This means that everything that is present in human life is a sign that requires meaning to the sign.¹⁵ The term semiotics is taken from the Greek *semeion* which means sign. There are two main figures in the discipline of semiotics, namely Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913 M) who developed his theory in Europe with a linguistic background and Charles Sander Peirce (1839-1914 M) who developed his theory

¹¹ Abdul Aziz dan A. Khoirul Anam, *Moderasi Beragama Berlandaskan Nilai-Nilai Islam* (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama RI, 2021), p. 16.

¹² Lukmanul Hakim, Aziza Meria, and Sartika Suryadinata, "Religious Moderation in Indonesia Context", *Al-Albab*, 12.1 (2023), p. 98.

¹³ Amri, "Moderasi Beragama...", p. 191.

¹⁴ Faisal Haitomi, Maula Sari, and Nor Farah Ain Binti Nor Isamuddin, 'Moderasi Beragama Dalam Perspektif Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia: Konsep Dan Implementasi', *Al-Wasathiyah: Journal of Religious Moderation*, 1.1 (2022): 75.

¹⁵ Benny H. Hoed, *Semiotika Dan Dinamika Sosial Budaya* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2014), p. 15.



in the United States with a philosophical background, so there is no doubt that the two did not know each other. In addition, both have different terms related to the science developed. Saussure termed the science he developed as semiology, while Pierce termed the science he developed as semiotics. The difference in the use of terms used by both is still oriented towards the science of signs without any significant differences in definition.¹⁶

Saussure's thinking about signs has a central role, he sorted it in the context of human communication into two, namely the signifier can be in the form of meaningful sounds or images (material aspects) and signified abstraction in the mind or concept (mental aspects) of a language, until in the end both are tied with one term called sign.¹⁷ Semiology is the science of signs introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure as the founder of modern linguistics in the 20th century although it was only an idea until around the 1960s. When anthropologists and literary critics were impressed by the science of linguistics, they tried to benefit from its methodological insights and developed Saussure's semiotics. Barthes was such an early proponent of semiology that when he was about to be appointed professor he said linguistics was his speciality. However, Barthes also said that his semiology was slightly different or even at odds with the wider development of the discipline of semiology at the time.¹⁸ Barthes defines a sign as the intersection of two sides (signifier and signified). The formation of a sign does not happen immediately, there is a process that binds the signifier and signified which is termed as signification. In addition, Barthes also asserts that a sign is not only formed through the union of signifier and signified, but can also gain value or meaning through the context or surrounding environment. Then the human mind in the semantic process tends to work by separating or parsing meaning, not just by uniting signifiers and signified¹⁹

Semiology as a model of the process of meaning production plays a significant role in Barthes' mythology. Semiology gives him a clear and coherent explanation of how myths work, in "Myth Today", Barthes reminds us that the sign is, in fact, involved in a three-part relationship. A sign,

¹⁶ Jafar Lantowa, Nila Mega Marahayu, and Muh. Khairussibyan, *Semiotika: Teori, Metode, Dan Penerapannya Dalam Penelitian Sastra* (Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2017), p. 1.

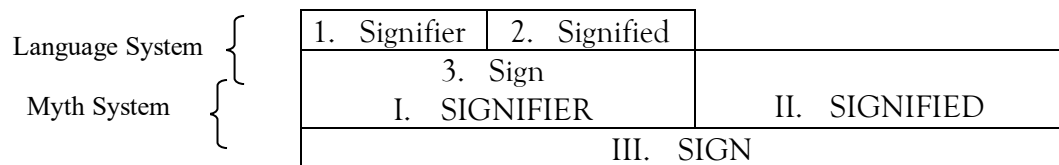
¹⁷ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course In General Linguistics*, trans. by Wade Baskin (Columbia University Press, 2011), p. 65-67.

¹⁸ Jonathan Culler, *Barthes: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 57.

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 48.



after all, is the relationship between signifier and signified.²⁰ Myth in Barthes' semiology builds on the previously existing semiological chain (the triadic pattern of signifier, signified and sign) which is nothing more than a signifier in the second system (*myth*). The whole thing happens as if the myth shifts the formal system of the first signification to the side. This lateral shift is quite essential in the analysis of myth, Barthes provides a description of the semiotic process as follows.²¹



Based on the above description, it can be seen that there are two semiological systems, one of which is connected to the other. The linguistic/language system is referred to by Barthes as the language-object used by the myth to build its own system, while the myth is referred to as the metalanguage. The first step that needs to be done in using Roland Barthes' semiotics is to sort out the symbols to be studied, in the context of this research on the concept of religious moderation as described earlier that the concept is represented in the sentence "*ummatan wasaṭan*" (Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143) in the holy book of Islam with the following editorial.

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا ۗ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعِ الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ ۗ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ ۗ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضِلَّ إِيْمَانَكُمْ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِالنَّاسِ لَرَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ١٤٣

“Likewise We have made you (Muslims) a middle nation so that you may bear witness to the people and so that the Messenger (Prophet Muhammad) may bear witness to you. We have not fixed the Qiblah (Baitulmaqdis) to which you used to turn, except that We may know (in reality) who follows the Messenger and who turns back. Verily, it is very hard, except for those to whom Allah has guided. Allah will not waste your faith. Verily, Allah is indeed merciful to mankind.”

Meanwhile, in the Hindu scriptures, it is represented in the rich "*yuga*" (Bhagavad Gita 6.17) with the following wording.

²⁰ Graham Allen, *Roland Barthes* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 47; Saussure, *Course In General...*, p. 65-67.

²¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 113.



yuktāhāravihārasya yuktaceṣṭasya karmasu, yuktasvapnāvabodhasya yogo bhavati duḥkhaḥā.
VI-17.

“For those whose meals and pleasures are proper, for those whose work activities are regular and whose sleep and waking are regular, there is a discipline (yoga) that eradicates all suffering.”

The two keywords will go through two systems as described above, to unravel their meaning and essence.

Language system

In this first system, the word will be analysed based on the literal meaning of the text to find out the denotative meaning of the text. The different languages (Arabic and Sanskrit) used in the two scriptural texts (the Qur'an and the Bhagavad Gita) necessitate different uses of a diction, even though both in the current context are considered to represent religious moderation. The methodical step that can be taken through this first system is to look for the meaning of both in their respective authoritative dictionaries and look at authoritative interpretations of the two scriptures.

Firstly, the word "*ummatan wasaṭan*" consists of two words: *ummatan* and *wasāṭan*. The meaning of *ummatan* in the dictionary *Mu'jam Matn al-Lughah* by 'Aḥmad Riḍā is a group or community to which Allah sent a messenger; and people from one *ummah* who have similar religious beliefs or practices. In Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī's *Kitāb al-'Ayn* (d. 170 H) the word *wasāṭan* has several meanings including "middle position" when read lightly as in "*zayd waṣṭ al-dār* (zayd was in the middle of the house)", and it can also mean "equality" as in "*al-waṣaṭu min al-nās wa kullu syai'in 'a'dalahu wa 'afḍalahu* (someone or something is the fairest and best, which is neither excessive nor deficient)."²² Ibn Manẓūr (630-711 H.) in his dictionary *Lisān al-'Arab* explains that the nature of the word *waṣṭ* is used to indicate the best or fairest part of something.²³ In certain contexts, "*wasāṭ*" can refer to something that is considered the best solution, a balance that avoids both advantages and disadvantages and is therefore considered a commendable attitude.²⁴ In addition,

²² 'Abū 'Abd al-Rahmān Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad Al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb Al-'Ayn* (Beirut: Dār wa Maktabah al-Hilāl, 1955), Vol. VII, p. 279.

²³ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab* (Kairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif), VII, p. 426-428.

²⁴ 'Abū al-Qāsim al-Husayn ibn Muḥammad al-Ma'rūf bi al-Ragīb Al-'Aṣfahānī, *Al-Mufradāt Fī Garīb Al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Syāmiyah, 1991), p. 369.



an ignorant poem by Lubayd ibn Rabī'ah also contains the word *wasāṭa* with the following wording.

مَخْفُوفَةٌ وَسَطُ الْبِرَاعِ يُظَلِّهَا # مِنْهُ مُصَرَّعٌ غَابِيَةٌ، وَقِيَامُهَا

“Surrounded amidst the reeds, she protected him from the tumbling forest, and his existence”

The explanation in the editorial shows that the word "*wasāṭa*" can have two meanings depending on how the letter "*sin*" is read. If the letter "*sin*" is read as *sukun* (dead), then it has a meaning as an adverb of place which means being in the middle position or between something. Whereas the letter "*sin*" with *fathah*, indicates a noun that means fair or moderate, not extreme to either side.²⁵ Based on this literal meaning, the word "*ummatan wasāṭan*" can be interpreted as a community or group that practices their religion in a balanced way, neither excessive nor deficient in their religious practices.

Meanwhile, the word "*yoga*" is a Sanskrit word that has three meanings: age, child, and meditation.²⁶ While in Arthur A. MacDonell's "A Sanskrit-English Dictionary" the word "*yoga*" has a variety of meanings that include physical, practical, and philosophical aspects. There are at least six meanings, namely unification (*yoga* means combining or uniting, either in a physical context or in a philosophical context such as uniting the soul and nature); application (*yoga* also means the implementation, use, or application of an activity or method); means (in the context of healing, *yoga* can mean a medicine or a way to achieve a goal or result); endeavour (*yoga* includes the notions of effort, endeavour, perseverance, and zeal in performing an activity); mental concentration and philosophical systems (*yoga* means mental concentration and also refers to philosophical systems related to meditation techniques and systematic abstraction); relationships and interrelationships (*yoga* means relationships, relations, or connections between various elements, both physically and conceptually).²⁷

Secondly, the interpretation of the verse containing the word *ummatan wasāṭan* (Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143) in several books of tafsir with '*adabi* *ijtimā'i*' style is as follows. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā in Tafsīr al-Manār defines the word *wasāṭa* literally with the meaning of middle or

²⁵ Muḥammad 'Alī Ṭaha Al-Darrāh, *Faṭḥ al-Kabīr al-Muta'āl T'rāb al-Mu'allaqāt al-'Asyr al-Ṭiwāl* (Beirut: Dār 'Thyā' al-Turās al-'Arabī, 2002), Vol. II, p. 55.

²⁶ Purwadi dan Eko Priyo Purnomo, *Kamus Sansekerta Indonesia* (Budayajawa, 2008), p. 167.

²⁷ Arthur A. MacDonell, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), p. 247.



middle, while in the context of the Qur'an, this word is often interpreted as justice and the best choice. While the contextual meaning of *ummatan wasaṭan* according to Riḍā is that to be a *wasata* people means to be a just and balanced people, neither excessive (*ifrāt*) nor deficient (*tafrīt*) in practising religious teachings. That is, being a *wasata* community means that they are in the middle between extreme materialism and extreme spiritualism. In the aspects of belief, morals, and deeds, the *wasata* people does not overdo religion to become extremists, nor does it underestimate religion to become secularists or hedonists. In addition to being *ummatan wasaṭan*, Allah also made them as "*shuhadā' 'alā al-nās*" who will witness and judge the state of both sides (extreme materialism and spiritualism) fairly. Muslims are expected to be fair witnesses to other human beings, showing how to live life with a balance between physical and spiritual rights.²⁸ On the other hand, M. Quraish Shihab in the interpretation of *Al-Mishbāh* interprets *ummatan wasaṭan* as a moderate people just like the ka'bah in the middle. The middle position helps people to remain neutral, not leaning to the left or right, so they can be fair. By being in the centre, one can be seen from various points of view and be a role model for everyone. Moreover, this position allows one to observe anyone anywhere.²⁹

While the word *yoga* has a different interpretation with *ummatan wasaṭan*. Sri Swami Satchidananda in "The Living Gita: The Complete Bhagavad Gita" interprets *yoga* in simpler language as the middle way (moderation in all things). Taking the middle path leads to peace of mind and peace, just as eating too much only satisfies the body and senses with the assumption that the self consists only of the physical body. On the other hand, not eating will satisfy the ego even if it does not satisfy physical needs. A *yogi* should have an orientation towards his every activity and action in order to enjoy the process and sustain his *yoga*. One is not required to achieve *yoga* because he is a *yogi*, so the solution offered is the middle way or moderation in everything. Because someone who loses his yogic balance will fall into *roga* (disease).³⁰ Also, in the book "The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita" there is an interesting explanation of Krishna's statement emphasising the importance of recreation. Krishna states that many spiritual seekers mistakenly consider any form of pleasure as harmful. In fact, without a healthy balance between

²⁸ Muḥammad Rasyīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr Al-Manāwī* (Al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyah al-'Āmah li al-Kitāb, 1990), Vol. II, p. 4-6.

²⁹ M. Quraish Shihab, *Tafsīr Al-Mishbāh* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2002), Vol. I, p. 347.

³⁰ Sri Swami Satchidananda, *The Living Gita: The Complete Bhagavad Gita* (New York: Owl Book, 1988), p. 90.



work and recreation, one can become monotonous and lose that all-important spontaneous creativity.³¹

Myth system

Myth in Barthes' semiotics is not the same as the myth commonly known as a story that comes from the folkloric tradition, but Barthes defines myth as a type of speech. Myth in Barthes' semiotics can only be obtained through the basis of history, because myth is a speech chosen by history.³² Based on this, the way that can be taken to identify meaning in the myth system is by looking at the historical aspects and context surrounding a scriptural text, especially for Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143 and Bhagavad Gita 6.17 as follows.

In Qur'anic studies, there is a discussion about the types of surahs, which are divided into two clusters: Makiah and Madaniah. Such a division is important to identify the general content or characteristics that describe the overall content of a surah. If traced based on *tartib nuzuli* as classified by 'Izzah Darwazah, then Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143 is a madaniah surah that was revealed in the 87th sequence.³³ While the madaniah surahs have the following characteristics including 1) The Qur'an comprehensively explores the provisions of ritual worship and muamalah (social interaction), including hudud (legal sanctions), kinship, inheritance, jihad (struggle to defend the truth), social relations, international relations both in peace and conflict conditions, legal rules, and principles of legislation; 2) The divine Word also addresses the People of the Book, i.e. the Jews and Christians, inviting them to embrace Islam, describing their deviation from the holy books revealed by Allah, their hostility towards the truth, and the divisions among them after the truth came due to envy among the followers of the heavenly religions; 3) The Quran reveals the character of the hypocrites, analyses their psychology and psychological characteristics, unmasks their pretence, and explains the great danger of hypocrisy to religion and spiritual life.³⁴ Points one and three relate to the matters contained in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143.

³¹ Paramahansa Yogananda and Swami Kriyananda, *The Essence of the Bhagavad Gita* (Nevada City: Crystal Clarity Publishers, 2006), p. 261.

³² Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 107-108.

³³ Muḥammad 'Izzah Darwazah, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Ḥadīṣ Tartīb Suwar Hasab an-Nuzūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Garab al-'Islāmī, 2000), p. 16.

³⁴ Manna Al-Qaththan, *Pengantar Studi Ilmu Al-Qur'an*, trans. by Anunur Rafiq El-Mazni (Jakarta: Pustaka al-Kautsar, 2005), p. 77.



The *asbabun nuzul* of the verse is in response to some of the Companions' concerns about their brothers who had died before Allah sent down the command to change the Qibla back to the Ka'bah. They were worried that the prayers performed by their brothers would not be accepted by Allah. Al-Barà' bin 'Àzib relates that the Messenger of Allah prayed facing Bait al-Maqdis for sixteen or seventeen months, although he was eager to pray facing the Kaaba. One day, when the change of Qibla took place, he was praying Asr with a number of companions. After the prayer, 'Abbàd bin Bisyr came out of the mosque and met a group of worshippers who were bowing facing the Ka'bah. He said, "I testify by Allah that I have just prayed with the Messenger of Allah facing Mecca." They then shifted the direction of prayer to the Ka'bah. As for those who died before the change of Qiblah, we do not know whether their prayers were accepted or rejected. So Allah revealed His words, "*wa mā kānallāhu liyuḍī'a 'īmānakum innallāha bi an-nāsi lara'ūfu ar-rahīm.*"³⁵

As in the Hindu scripture Bhagavad Gita, the historical context of the scripture can be traced in Rakesh Garia's "Perfection of Yoga" which provides an overview of the context of the chapter in the Bhagavad Gita. In Bhagavad-gita 6, Arjuna asks Krishna about the fate of a yogi who begins the process of yoga but fails to achieve it because he is distracted by worldly thoughts. Arjuna worries that unsuccessful spiritual endeavours will be in vain, like clouds that disperse and disappear without a trace. Krishna responded to Arjuna's concern by stating that there is no total failure for one who endeavours in spiritual activities, even a little effort in the spiritual path will not go in vain. Krishna states that one who is well-versed in yogic endeavours will not experience destruction either in this world or the next. The endeavour to attain yogic perfection is a very auspicious and rewarding endeavour.³⁶

Based on the identification of the language system and myth system above, the denotative meaning and connotative meaning of *ummatan wasaṭan* are as in the following table.

1. Signifier <i>Ummatan</i> <i>Wasaṭan</i>	2. Signified Communities/groups in the centre
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³⁵ *Asbabun Nuzul: Kronologi Dan Sebab Turun Wahyu Al-Qur'an*, ed. by Muchlis M. Hanafi (Jakarta: Lajnah Pentashihan Mushaf Al-Qur'an Balitbang dan Diklat Kementerian Agama RI, 2015), p. 101.

³⁶ Rakesh Garia, *Perfection of Yoga - A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada* (t.t: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1974), 28-p. 34.



<p>3. Sign I. SIGNIFIER <i>Ummatan Wasaṭan</i> is a community/group that is in the centre position.</p>	<p>II. SIGNIFIED A community that is moderate, balanced and fair in practising religious teachings.</p>
<p>III. SIGN <i>Ummatan Wasaṭan</i> is a community/group that is moderate, fair, and an example to others in living a balanced life between various aspects of life.</p>	

The word *yoga*, based on Barthes' semiotic system, has the following denotative and connotative meanings.

<p>1. Signifier <i>Yoga</i></p>	<p>2. Signified Concepts involving unification, application, means, effort, mental concentration, and relationships.</p>
<p>3. Sign I. SIGNIFIER <i>Yoga</i> is a concept that involves union, application, means, effort, mental concentration, and connection.</p>	<p>II. SIGNIFIED Practices that include moderation, balance, and spiritual endeavour.</p>
<p>III. SIGN The meaning of <i>yoga</i> is becoming more evolved to become more deeply about moderation, balance and spiritual endeavour. It encompasses the important aspect of living life in balance between the various physical and mental elements, as well as the ongoing endeavour to achieve spiritual perfection.</p>	

The results of the interpretation of the words *ummatan wasaṭan* and *yoga* above will be the basis for determining the different and similar aspects of the spirit of religious moderation echoed in the two holy books which will be described in the following sub-chapters.

Differences and Similarities in the Spirit of Religious Moderation

The differences and similarities that will be reviewed in this section take the data that has been processed previously using Barthes' semiotics as the basis of reference in its determination. In order not to make it complicated to understand, the differences and similarities will be described in the form of the following table.



Aspects	<i>Ummatan Wasaṭan</i>	<i>Yoga</i>	<i>Persamaan</i>
Origins and Context	Islam, Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143	Hindu, Bhagavad Gita 6.17	Emphasising moderation as the middle way in religion and life
Denotative Meaning	Groups that have similarities in religious beliefs or practices and a position of centre or equality (justice, the best part)	Age, child, meditation; Unification, application, means, effort, mental concentration, relationship	Moderation as a balancing act between different aspects of life without neglecting any of them.
Connotative Meaning	A community that practices religious teachings in a balanced, just, and non-extreme manner	Physical, mental, and spiritual balance, moderation in all things	Both avoid extremes, both spiritual and physical
Main Focus	Balance in carrying out religious teachings and behaving fairly in social life	Physical, mental and spiritual balance in daily activities	Balance in various aspects of life
Practical Applications	Applied in Islamic law, worship, and social relations	Physical exercise, meditation, healthy lifestyle	Moderation in daily actions and behaviour

The concept of moderation in *ummatan wasaṭan* and *yoga* shows how both traditions emphasise the importance of balance in living life. Despite coming from different cultural and religious backgrounds, both share the common goal of achieving harmonious balance, both in the context of religion and daily life. *Ummatan wasaṭan* emphasises moderation in the context of practising religious teachings and behaving justly in social life, while *yoga* emphasises moderation in physical, mental and spiritual aspects through daily practices. Both concepts, while differing in detail and application, offer guidance for a balanced life that avoids extremes and supports harmony and well-being of individuals and communities.



Conclusion

Based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of the concept of religious moderation in Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 143 and Bhagavad Gta 6.17, there are several important points that can be concluded that the meaning of *ummatan wasaṭan* (the middle people) in Islamic teachings is emphasised as a community that practices moderation in religion and behaves fairly in social life. This includes balance in spiritual, social, and moral aspects, and rejects all forms of extremism. Meanwhile, the meaning of *yoga* as a spiritual and physical practice originating from the Indian tradition, emphasises moderation in physical, mental and spiritual aspects. The practice of *yoga* aims to achieve balance and harmony through body exercises, breathing, and meditation. Moreover, both concepts, although coming from different traditions, emphasise the importance of moderation as a key principle. Moderation here serves as a balance between the various aspects of life, whether spiritual, social or physical. Religious moderation in both concepts avoids extremism and promotes harmony and well-being of individuals and communities. This confirms that both the concepts of *ummatan wasatan* and *yoga*, when viewed through the lens of Barthes' semiotics, provide guidance for a balanced and harmonious life, which is essential in achieving peace and justice in a diverse society. This research still leaves gaps such as not being comprehensive in reviewing every word about *yoga*, which seems to be found more with different concepts. In addition, the semiotic approach used is only limited to the linguistic and historical aspects of the text, so there is still potential to find other differences and similarities based on different approaches.

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