



P-ISSN 2355-2794
E-ISSN 2461-0275

Exploring Ethical Frontiers: Moral Dimensions in the Tapestry of Contemporary Indonesian Literature

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Abstract

Literary works have the potential to enhance a reader's internal reservoir of life values without being dismissive. Contemporary Indonesian literature specifically imparts moral messages to its readers. This study aims to explain the moral dimensions present in this literature, utilizing descriptive qualitative methods. Purposive sampling was employed for data collection, covering words, sentences, and discourse representing morals from contemporary Indonesian literary works. This research relies on a literature study for data collection, employing the dialectical method for analysis by oscillating between literary texts and social reality. The findings reveal diverse moral dimensions within contemporary Indonesian literature, each contributing significantly to enriching the reader's inner repertoire. These moral dimensions include (1) transcendental: aligning oneself to God, (2) struggle against evil (jihad fii sabiilillah), (3) nationalism, (4) getting closer to God (transcendental value), (5) gender equality as respect for women, (6) upholding the dignity of women, (7) remembering God (dhikr), (8) low morale leading to corruption, (9) upholding religion above worldliness, and (10) religious idea: life is a pseudo-game. The study's implications suggest that contemporary

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Citation in APA style: Al-Ma'ruf, A. I., Arifin, Z., & Nugrahani, F. (2024). Exploring ethical frontiers: Moral dimensions in the tapestry of contemporary Indonesian literature. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 11(1), 587-604.

Received March 2, 2023; Revised November 1, 2023; Accepted December 9, 2023; Published Online January 31, 2024

<https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v11i1.35142>

Indonesian literature serves as a significant source for fostering moral values, contributing to readers' inner development by highlighting themes such as spirituality, societal responsibility, and ethical conduct. This insight can inform educational and cultural initiatives to promote moral awareness and consciousness.

Keywords: Contemporary Indonesian literature, moral dimension, sociology of literature.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is a work of art about the imaginative existence of humanity using language as a medium. Reflections of socio-cultural realities depicted in literature, apart from being works of art, also influence inviting, prohibiting, and even influencing readers. From a humanitarian perspective, literary works contain various aspects of life such as social, moral, customary, and ethical (Carr, 2014).

Literature as a reading source for society has become one of the media that is transforming following the flow of globalization and current developments (Widiastuti et al., 2022). Literary genres, including poetry, fiction (short stories and novels), and drama, are children of the era that depict the patterns, ideals, aspirations, and behavior of society. In line with the views of Nasir and Ufairah (2023), that the essence and existence of literary works are interpretations of life. Literature is expressed by writers through poetry texts, prose fiction, and dramatic plays which utilize the aesthetics of language for a more dramatic effect.

As a work of art, literature, apart from entertaining, also teaches morals without having to preach through narratives in short stories or novels, lines and stanzas of poetry, and dialogue in drama plays. Encouraging moral values among learners can be achieved by utilizing literature (Husnaini & Parendi, 2022). It can make its readers more cultured, more sensitive, and more caring about their social environment, and have empathy for the poor and national problems in addition to their relationship with God.

If we look closely, it can be revealed that the decline in people's morals can be influenced by several issues, such as politics, the economy, society, dan technology (Latif et al., 2022). The 'two languages' that dominate Indonesian society are the political language which is winner-oriented, and the economic language which is profit-oriented. Therefore, the country may lose politicians or economists because they will be replaced by other statesmen. However, if the country has lost morals, the nation will become extinct or at least experience a decline.

Ironically, the phenomena of corruption, collusion, and nepotism—the main reasons for the reform movement that overthrew the new order (Saputra, 2018)—have recently become increasingly rampant. How many government bureaucrats such as ministers, governors, and mayors/regents (executive), law enforcement officers namely prosecutors, judges, and police (judicial), and people's representatives namely members of the People's Representative Council (legislature) are caught in corruption? Moral decadence, such as premarital relationships among teenagers, the habit of drinking alcohol, drugs, crime, and domestic violence, is increasingly widespread in society. Strictly speaking, currently, Indonesian society is experiencing an alarming

moral crisis (Davies, 2020). On the other hand, the 21st century confronts us with several national problems, including global competition which demands an increase in the quality of human resources. Human resources with competitive and comparative advantages, and moral integrity will be able to win the future (Hamadamin & Atan, 2019).

Along with the globalization of the world, we are now heading towards an unpredictable future. We must be able to face it without having to lose direction or become alienated from the values of local wisdom inherited from our ancestors, one of the sources of moral teachings that is often contained in literature. Theoretically, according to Setyaningsih (2017), local wisdom is a manifestation of the cultural teachings of a local community which are sometimes noble.

The contradiction is, that even though literature has the potential to become a source of moral education that can enrich the readers' inner repertoire, in reality, literature has not yet become interesting reading for society. An indicator of this is that the culture of reading literature in society is very minimal. The circulation of creative literary books such as poetry collections, short stories, novels, and drama texts in society is also minimal. The average number of literary books in school libraries is minimal.

Several studies are relevant to this research. Kosasih (2013) studies moral values in Malay classical Islamic literary works. Nurgoho and Suseno (2019), study the moral values in the short stories of the *Suara Merdeka* newspaper as an alternative literature teaching material in high schools. Akbar et al. (2021) analyze the moral message in an Acehese legend. Rachman and Susandi (2021) examine moral values from the perspective of literary sociology in the novel *Paradigma* [Paradigm] by Syahid Muhammad. Azkia et al. (2021) examine the violation of moral values in the novel *Aku Lupa sebagai Perempuan* [I Forgot that I'm a Woman] by Ihsan Abdul Quddus and its implications for learning in high schools. Nama and Sudewa (2022) examine moral values in the *Hikayat Maharaja Bikrama Sakti* (The Tale of Maharaja Bikrama Sakti). Burhanuddin and Mahsun (2023) investigate the moral values in the short story *Si Kakek dan Burung Merpati* [Grandfather and the Pigeon] by Muhammad Fudoli. The moral values found in these studies include self-confidence, submission, love, affection, and balance in life in this world and the hereafter, as well as the education of human personalities. Hence, the difference between this study and the previous studies mentioned earlier is that the latter only studied one or two literary works, including novels, short stories, and legends. Meanwhile, this present study examines several contemporary Indonesian literary works, both in poetry and prose fiction (short stories and novels).

Considering various limitations, the analysis of the moral dimension in contemporary Indonesian literary works is limited to literary works selected according to the research objectives (purposive sampling). This research aims to describe the moral dimension in contemporary Indonesian literature; thus, the research question is:

- How does the moral dimension manifest in contemporary Indonesian literature?

Uge et al. (2019) note a decline in the values of local wisdom, prompting this research to address the weakening understanding of cultural values in literary works. Data analysis reveals abundant moral ideas and messages in contemporary Indonesian literature, offering valuable insights into readers' inner enlightenment and emphasizing the didactic value of literature (Culler, 2002).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Contemporary Literature

According to [Ahyar \(2019\)](#), literature is a work of art that contains many elements of humanity and life, including thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. [Al-Ma'ruf and Nugrahani \(2019\)](#) state that literature is a work of art that expresses the existence of humanity with all its variations and twists and turns imaginatively and creatively using aesthetic language as the medium. [Al-Ma'ruf and Nugrahani \(2022\)](#) further specify that literary work is a medium for the expression of a writer in the form of imaginative fiction that contains the values and essence of life that are felt, thought, lived, and experienced by the writer. Literary works and real life, especially community or social life, are two interconnected things ([Setianingsih, 2019](#)).

Literature is a sign system ([Culler, 2003](#)). Many literary researchers are of the view that without including social aspects, that is, without viewing it as an act of communication, or as a sign, literature cannot be researched and understood scientifically. Hugh (1972, in [Aminuddin, 2015](#)) stated that literary works that have literary weight must meet two main criteria. The two criteria are (1) the relevance of the values of human existence which are described through art, imagination, and invention, all of which have a unified whole, are in harmony, and have coherence in achieving certain goals (integrity, harmony, and unity), and (2) power of expression, breadth, and charm presented through form (texture) as well as the arrangement of linguistic elements and verbal structure (consonant and clarity). [Inayyah and Simanjuntak's \(2022\)](#) statement is true, that novels as a literary genre can provide moral education to readers to avoid or oppose violence in their lives.

In line with that, contemporary literature is literary work that contains nationalist elements or a national spirit using Indonesian as the medium ([Rosidi, 2003](#)). Based on [Rosidi's \(2003\)](#) view, this means that contemporary literature began to emerge in 1921/1922, namely the Balai Pustaka Force with several phenomenal works at that time, such as the romance *Azab and Sengsara* [Doom and Misery] by Merari Siregar published in 1920, and *Sitti Nurbaya* by Merah Rusli published in 1922. Also, poems by Mohammad Yamin, Muhammad Hatta, Sanusi Pane, and others were published in Jong Sumatra magazine. The collection of poems *Homeland* by Muhammad Yamin reflects the spirit of nationalism and love for the country. In line with that, [Yudiono \(2010\)](#) explain that writing the history of Indonesian literature can be based on stylistic, thematic, character development, or social context, all of which are a means of placing literature in such a way that it has meaning for the people. In this way, contemporary Indonesian literature is literature that lives and develops in the new Indonesian society which expresses nationalism, and no longer regionalism. Contemporary literature appears in the form of poetry, short stories, serial stories, novels, and dramas.

2.2 Morals

The goal of society is to create a prosperous life by upholding morals because morality is a code of ethics that allows people to coexist peacefully in groups. For [Bertens \(2011\)](#), the term 'moral' is used to determine the boundaries of a person's character, temperament, will, opinion, or behavior that can be classified as right, wrong, good, or bad. In the context of moral and didactic aspects, the literature

contains educational value that can lead readers in a certain direction. Therefore, a valuable literary work is a literary work that contains didactic values. Understanding literary works is nothing more than an effort to give meaning to the literary work as a whole (Culler, 2002). Moral values in literary works are values conveyed by the author to educate humans in all aspects or issues of life and life so that humans can regulate their behavior to become good humans.

Morals (morality) is a term for referring to other humans in actions that have positive values. Nurgiyantoro (2015) coin morals as norms that are the ideas accepted by society about human behavior, and what is good and bad. Morals that are taught well will increase a person's ability to avoid despicable traits that can damage themselves and others (Elkabumaini & Ruhjana, 2016). Moreover, morals are (1) principles relating to right and wrong, good and bad, (2) the ability to understand the difference between right and wrong, and (3) teachings or descriptions of good behavior (Nata, 2013).

According to Kaur (2019), moral education is taught at home and school, such as loving fellow human beings, respecting elders, not making mistakes, never lying, loving one's country, not being jealous, etc. But nowadays crime thrives everywhere. Therefore, morals are closely related to issues of life and human life, including issues of human relationships with (1) themselves, (2) other humans in the social sphere, (3) the natural environment, and (4) God (Nurgiyantoro, 2015). The human relationship with oneself is something that involves the inner self and psyche of an individual which includes self-extension, self-esteem, self-confidence, fear, shame, longing, resentment, loneliness, etc. Human relations with other humans concern a person's relationship with other people personally, which includes love, affection, friendship, etc. The human relationship with nature can be defined as a form of human relationship with nature, including flora and fauna. Human relationship with God, namely love and devotion to Him, which includes belief, worship, surrender, and so on. Therefore, the moral values of injustice, for example, are a bad thing, and politeness and generosity are good things (Rodriguez-Soto et al., 2022).

Morals are formed by ethics. Morals talk about how things should be, while ethics talk about how good it is. Therefore, morals and ethics can be said to be morals. In fact, in Islam, morals are a barometer of the quality of a person's faith. This means that the perfection of a person's faith can be seen from the goodness and nobility of his morals. Rasulullah Saw. said: "The best believer is the one with the most noble morals" (H. R. Abu Dawud from Abu Hurairah). That is also why in Minang culture there is a very popular expression among the people there that tradition is based on *sharia*, and *sharia* is based on the book of Allah. This is embedded in the following expressions of the Minang people: *Adat basendi syarak* 'tradition based on Islamic religious law', *syarak basendi kitabullah* 'sharia based on al-Qur'an'. Sharia is the law derived from the scriptures of Islam, primarily the Quran and the Hadith, forming a fundamental aspect of Islamic teachings

As a literary work, the novel is a processing of social problems by Indonesian intellectuals, including writers, since the 1920s. In this case, writers are members of society who are bound by their social environment, so novels are created by writers to be enjoyed, understood, and utilized by society. Literature is also expected to be able to give a satisfying impression to its audience because the main aim of this literature is to provide satisfaction, aesthetic impressions, and values in a novel that can provide positive value to its audience (Afrila et al., 2021).

2.3 Sociology of Literature

Sociology, which rests firmly on a historical sensibility, questions the way we organize ourselves through numbers and alternative ways of measuring reality, ethnographically oriented works are interested in ways of inhabiting the world understood numerically (Camargo & Daniel, 2021). Sociology depends on the social conditions of community society which are reflected in literary works with imaginative polish. Literary works that attract people's attention, if they are read continuously, will be stored in them and will cause turmoil in their souls (Wasik & Liliani, 2019).

Sociological studies in literature aim to obtain a complete picture of the relationship between authors, literary works, and society. The sociological approach to literature is widely used today (Pradopo, 2021); its attention is on the documentary aspect of literature which is based on the idea that literature is a mirror of its time. Thus, literature is a direct reflection of various aspects of social structure, familial relationships, class conflicts, etc. The task of literary sociology is to connect the experiences of fictional characters and situations created by the author with the historical reality from which they originate.

Literary sociology is developed as an innovation from the structuralism approach which was considered to have ignored the relevance of society as the origin of literary works. Literary sociology assumes that literature must function the same as other aspects of culture (Ratna, 2003). So, in literary sociology, literary works are seen as socio-cultural documents that reveal the socio-cultural reality of a society at a certain time. Ratna (2003) explain the analysis model in literary sociology typically uses the dialectical method which includes three types of forms. First, analyze the social problems contained in literary works, then relate them to reality. Second, similar to the earlier analysis, but by finding the relationship between the elements. Third, analyzing literary works to obtain various information, which is carried out in certain disciplines.

3. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with content analysis or thematic techniques. Qualitative research is research aimed at describing and evaluating phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of people both individually and in groups (Bachri, 2010). Descriptive research is research that tells, examines, and interprets existing data to provide an overview of how contemporary problems are solved. In this research, researchers carried out data analysis using a descriptive qualitative approach.

The data used in this research is in the form of excerpts from literary texts that represent morals with data sources in the form of contemporary Indonesian literary works in the genres of poetry, prose fiction (short stories and novels), and drama. The selection of genres and/or works of contemporary Indonesian literature as data sources was carried out using purposive sampling techniques (Sugiyono, 2016). Moreover, the data collection techniques in this research are documentation and note-taking (Sugiyono, 2016). This means that researchers read documents in the form of literary works intensively and note important things. Data validity is carried out by triangulation of data sources and data-based. Triangulation was done by looking at data from various sources and then cross-checking them with each other.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis using Goldmann's (1980) dialectical method. This is in line with the literary sociology approach used in this research. Through the dialectical method, a dynamic relationship and continuous tension can be seen between the four components, namely text, author, reader, and reality or the universe (Abrams, 1998). Using the dialectical method, the literary sociology approach was seen as an attempt to describe elements that show the relationship between moral aspects as imaginative realities in literary texts with social realities in the real world (Ratna, 2003). In implementation, to reveal moral meaning in literature, researchers conducted a back-and-forth study between imaginative reality in literary texts and social reality in the real world and vice versa.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of the authors' creativity and reflection on life phenomena in their socio-cultural environment, literary works are rich in various life values that can enrich their inner treasures. Literature is always attached to and related to stylistics or beauty in its creation (Rajendra, 2020). Furthermore, it expresses moral messages in the form of humanitarian existence and innovative ideas (Wildan et al., 2023). Life values vary in literary works, including local wisdom values. Local wisdom refers to the knowledge, practices, and values associated with the unique culture of a particular region or community (Rubingah et al., 2023). The development of local wisdom can be carried out through communities in the surrounding environment (Sofyan et al., 2019). In contemporary Indonesian literary works, many moral messages found in this study expressed all aspects of life. These moral messages include (1) transcendental: aligning oneself to God, (2) struggle against evil (*jihad fii sabiilillah*), (3) nationalism, (4) getting closer to God (transcendental value), (5) gender equality as respect for women, (6) upholding the dignity of women, (7) remembering God (dhikr), (8) low morale leading to corruption, (9) upholding religion above worldliness, and (10) religious idea: life is a pseudo-game.

4.1 Transcendental: Aligning Oneself to God

A transcendent taste, surpassing all human aspirations, prompts individuals to bow down to the clear voice within the soul due to its greatness. Submissive in both ideals and behavior, as well as in intention and work. The novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk* [*Ronggeng* Dancer from Dukuh Paruk] by Ahmad Tohari in 1982, tells the story of Srintil, a girl who was eleven years old at that time. She was born and raised in Dukuh Paruk Village and was a village girl who was not beautiful, smelly, and was not liked by many people. However, after she succeeded in becoming a *ronggeng* (a type of Javanese dance in which couples exchange poetic verses as they dance to the music of a *rebab* or violin and a gong), people praised her.

- (1) *Dan kemudian Srintil dengan nilai-nilai kemanusiaannya sendiri merasa selera agung, meski tanpa sepatah kata jua, membuka pintunya bagi segala manusia dan kepada tiap-tiap jiwa untuk masuk dan menyelelarkan diri kepadanya.* [And then Srintil, with her own human values felt a great taste, even without a word, opened the door for all humans and for every soul to enter and align themselves with her.] (Tohari, 1982, 355)

Transcendental aspects that are essential for human life are also contained in literature. Through this novel, [Tohari \(1982\)](#) encourages readers to always follow the voice of their conscience in their actions and creations which whisper the truth. This is important so that people do not get trapped in the abyss of immorality which usually starts from following the whispers of lust ([Muzakkir, 2012](#)). For this reason, humans must try to align their behavior with God's teachings. This section reminds us of the words of Allah in the Al-Qur'an:

- (2) *Yaa ayyatuhan nafsul muthmainnah, irji'ii ilaa rabbiki radhiyatan mardhiyyah, fadhkuli fi 'ibaadii wadhkuli jannatii.* [O serene soul, return to your Lord to obtain His pleasure and enter the ranks of servants (who believe) and enter My heaven.] (Q.S. Al-Fajr: 27-30)

In this verse, Allah calls the death of calm and peaceful souls when they die, those who are pure because of their faith and the pious deeds they do, so that they obtain what Allah promised to them, that is heaven.

4.2 Struggle against Evil (*Jihad Fii Sabilillah*)

Through his poem, *Negeri Para Bedebah* [Land of the Bastards] in 2009, the poet, Adhie M. Massardi, not only conveys ideas about socio-political, national economic, and humanitarian problems but also a call to fight in the way of Allah against and eradicate crime. He read this poem in the KPK (*Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi* or Corruption Eradication Commission) office yard as part of an action of concern for the KPK on November 2, 2009. It was then published by Viva.co.id on November 7, an online newspaper, in the same year. His poem emphasizes that humans must do good and prevent evil, as shown in (3).

- | | |
|---|---|
| (3) <i>Tahukah kamu ciri-ciri negeri para bedebah?</i> | Do you know the characteristics of a land of bastards? |
| <i>Itulah negeri yang para pemimpinnya hidup mewah</i> | That's a country where the leaders live in luxury |
| <i>Tapi rakyatnya makan dari mengais sampah</i> | But the people eat by scavenging through rubbish |
| <i>Atau menjadi kuli di negeri orang</i> | Or working as laborers in other's lands |
| <i>Yang upahnya serapah dan bogem mentah.</i> | Whose wages are cursory and raw punches |
|
 | |
| <i>Di negeri para bedebah</i> | In the land of bastards |
| <i>Orang baik dan bersih dianggap salah</i> | Good and clean people are considered wrong |
| <i>Dipenjarakan hanya karena sering ketemu wartawan</i> | Imprisoned just because they often meet journalists |
| <i>Menipu rakyat dengan pemilu menjadi lumrah</i> | Cheating the people with elections has become commonplace |
| <i>Karena hanya penguasa yang boleh marah</i> | Because only the ruler can be angry |
| <i>Sedangkan rakyatnya hanya bisa pasrah.</i> | Meanwhile, the people can only surrender. |
|
 | |
| <i>Maka bila negerimu dikuasai para bedebah</i> | So if your country is ruled by bastards |
| <i>Jangan tergesa-gesa mengadu kepada Allah</i> | Don't be in a hurry to complain to Allah |
| <i>Karena Tuhan tak akan mengubah suatu kaum</i> | Because God will not change a race (a group of people) |
| <i>Kecuali kaum itu sendiri mengubahnya</i> | Unless they change it. |
|
 | |
| <i>Maka bila melihat negeri dikuasai para bedebah</i> | So if you see that the country is being ruled by bastards |

<i>Usirlah mereka dengan revolusi</i>	Drive them out with revolution
<i>Bila tak mampu dengan revolusi, dengan demonstrasi</i>	If you can't do it with revolution, with demonstrations
<i>Bila tak mampu dengan demonstrasi, dengan diskusi</i>	If you can't do it with demonstrations, with discussion
<i>Tapi itulah selemah-lemahnya iman perjuangan!</i>	But that's the weakest faith in the struggle!

Massardi (2009)

In the fourth stanza in (3), there is a very clear explicit invitation and appeal to the reader to fight back and even eradicate crimes committed by officials/high-ranking state officials who live luxuriously without caring about the people whose lives are miserable (Tube, 2020). If we look closely at the 4th stanza of the poem in, that is: //So if you see that the country is being ruled by bastards/Drive them out with revolution/If you can't do it with revolution, with demonstrations/If you can't do it with demonstrations, with discussions/But that's the weakest faith in struggle!//; it is an embodiment of the Qur'anic verse which reads:

(4) *Allazina amanu wahajaru wajahadu fisabilillah biamwa-lihim waanfusihiim a'damu darajatan indallahu waulaika humulfaizun.* [Those who believe and migrate and strive in the way of Allah with their possessions and themselves are of a higher rank.] (Q.S. At-Taubah: 20)

The verse means that those believers with strong faith, and willing to sacrifice their wealth, body, and soul, for the truth are of the higher rank in the eyes of Allah. The verse implies that these individuals, who exhibit such deep faith and readiness to make sacrifices, are considered to be of a higher rank or status in the eyes of Allah. This higher rank could be associated with increased spiritual closeness, favor, or reward from the divine.

4.3 Nationalism

Apart from socio-cultural and humanitarian issues, contemporary Indonesian literature also expresses the dimension of nationalism, namely nationalism and attitudes that reflect love for the nation and state. Tohari (1982) inserts elements of nationalism in his novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk*.

(5) “*Yang sampean maksud dengan kaum penindas?*” [What do you mean by oppressors?]
 “*Kaum imperialis, kapitalis, dan para kaki tangannya. Tak salah lagi!*” [The imperialists, capitalists, and their henchmen. There's no mistaking it!]
 (Tohari, 1982, p. 138)

Tohari (1982) considers the imperialists, capitalists, and their accomplices to be oppressors. Since Indonesia's independence, there are no longer colonialists who control the homeland. After the independence of the country's sovereignty, the influence of imperialism, capitalism, and liberalism in economics became a new reality that had never occurred in this country. It is currently battling the two major global ideologies that are sustaining its development in this period of globalization: socialism, which is supported by communist countries, and liberalism, which is supported by Western nations (Rogers et al., 2020). Because of this, imperialists, capitalists, and their accomplices are considered the oppressors of the people, as portrayed in (5).

4.4 Getting Closer to God (Transcendental Value)

As a writer and poet, Ebiet G. Ade's works are very familiar with religious or transcendental nuances, both divine and humanitarian. Almost all of his poems are full of elements of religiosity which tickle the reader's conscience to always be grateful to God for the gifts he has bestowed on humans. The infinite gift is 'time', as portrayed in his lyrical poem *Masih Ada Waktu* [There's Still Time], in his album *Sketsa Rembulan Emas* [Golden Moon Sketch], released in 1988.

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|--|--|
| (6) <i>Kita mesti bersyukur</i>
<i>Bahwa kita masih diberi waktu</i>
<i>Entah sampai kapan</i>
<i>Tak ada yang bakal dapat menghitung</i> | We must be grateful
We still have time
Do not know until when
No one will be able to count |
| <i>Hanya atas kasih-Nya</i>
<i>Hanya atas kehendak-Nya</i>
<i>Kita masih bertemu matahari</i> | Only by His love
Only by His will
We still meet the sun |
| <i>Sampai kapankah gerangan</i>
<i>Waktu yang masih tersisa</i>
<i>Semuanya menggeleng</i>
<i>Semuanya terdiam</i>
<i>Semuanya menjawab tak mengerti</i> | How long can it be?
Time that is still left
Everyone shakes their heads
Everyone is silent
Everyone answers they do not understand |
| <i>Yang terbaik hanyalah</i>
<i>Segeralah bersujud</i>
<i>Mumpung kita masih diberi waktu</i> | The best thing is
Prostrate yourself immediately
While we still have time |

Ade (1988)

Apart from reminding us of the importance of being grateful, Ade (1988) also invites readers to prostrate or worship Allah while we are still given a long life. A prostration is an act of submission and humility to Allah (Rahmadani & Thahir, 2022), as shown in //The best thing is/ Prostrate yourself immediately/While we still have time//.

4.5 Gender Equality as Respect for Women

Interestingly, Oka Rusmini in her novel *Tarian Bumi* [Earth Dance] published in 2007, expresses women's struggle in resisting male hegemony as can be seen in the following quote.

- (7) ...*Sejak kapan orang-orang di desa ini melarang gadis cantik sepertiku ikut menari?* [...Since when did people in this village forbid a beautiful girl like me from dancing?]. (Rusmini, 2007, pp. 20-21)
- (8) *Salahkah kalau sekarang aku ingin jadi penari yang dipuja-puja? Penari yang dapat menghidupkan sekeha joget desa ini! Begitu banyak sekeha joget yang muncul. Kudengar mereka semua memiliki pragina yang luar biasa. Di atas panggung tubuh pragina-pragina itu benar-benar jadi api yang membakar setiap nafas laki-laki. Luar biasa. Aku ingin melebihi pragina-pragina itu. Aku yakin Kenten, aku bisa melakukannya.* [Is it wrong that now I want to be a respected dancer? Dancers who can liven up this village dancing scene! So many dancing scenes appear. I hear they all have extraordinary praginas. On stage, the bodies of pragina women really

become a fire that burns every man's breath. Extraordinary. I want to go beyond those praginas. I'm sure Kenten, I can do it]. (Rusmini, 2007, pp. 20-21)

The novel emphasizes that women must emancipate themselves from the constraints imposed by traditional or societal norms that impede their freedom of movement and activities. Women should not be objectified by men. Hence, women must strive for dignity and self-respect to establish their presence and stand on equal footing with men. According to Nasution & Saad (2020), Q.S. Al-A'raf 7:172 informed that since from the womb, all humans acknowledged that Allah is the One God and the Creator, without distinction between men and women. In the initial stages of human creation, there was no discrimination based on gender.

4.6 Upholding the Dignity of Women

An interesting problem in Indonesian literary works is the problem of the message to uphold the dignity of women. Y. B. Mangunwijaya expressed this in the following novel *Burung-Burung Rantau* [Wandering Birds] in 1992.

- (9) *Memang aku perempuan! Puan dan empu, pembela kehidupan, penggendong si lemah! Ya, aku berkacak pinggang dan jari-jari mengepal! Jangan coba-coba main-main, kusepak anumu sampai kau menjerit-jerit kesakitan! Ya, aku punya harga, dan tinggi hargaku! Bukan kecantikan modalku! Itu yang kau mau. Tetapi aku bukan bahan gerabah yang dapat kau bentuk menurut kehendakmu! Ya, aku ada! Apa? Kausebut ini tidak pantas itu tidak menurut adat? Aku, ya akulah yang menentukan sendiri mana pantas, mana adat! Bukan kamu! Dan bukan ibuku sekalipun!* [Indeed I am a woman! Ladies and gentlemen, defenders of life, carriers of the weak! Yes, I put my hands on my hips and my fingers clenched into fists! Don't try to play around, I'll kick your genital until you scream in pain! Yes, I have a price and a high price! Not my capital beauty! That's what you want. But I am not a pottery material that you can shape according to your wishes! Yes, I am! What? Do you call this inappropriate or not according to custom? I, yes I am the one who decides for myself what is appropriate, what is customary! Not you! And not even my mother!] (Mangunwijaya, 1992, p. 254)

The quote in (9) from the novel shows that women deserve respect, with their dignity acknowledged and upheld. They possess equal potential and competencies as men, and are fully capable of becoming advocates for the vulnerable. In Islam, for example, this religion has organized the duties of men and women, by their respective natures, without the intention of lowering one's gender (Nasution & Saad, 2020).

4.7 Remembering (Dhikr) God

Ebiet G. Ade, through his many poems (which are then sung), is skilled at conveying moral messages about the importance of caring and maintaining good relationships with fellow humans. This is shown in one of his songs, *Berita kepada Kawan* [News to Friends] released in 1979, in his second album, *Camelia II*.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>(10) <i>Kawan coba dengar apa jawabnya</i>
 <i>Ketika kutanya mengapa</i>
 <i>Ayah ibunya telah lama mati</i>
 <i>Ditelan bencana tanah ini</i></p> | <p>Friends, try to hear what the answer is
 When I asked why
 His parents died long ago
 Swallowed by this land disaster</p> |
| <p><i>Sesampainya di laut</i>
 <i>Kutanyakan semuanya</i></p> | <p>Arriving at sea
 I asked everything</p> |

<i>Kepada karang kepada ombak kepada matahari</i>	To the coral, to the waves, to the sun
<i>Tetapi semua diam tetapi semua bisu</i>	But all is silent but all is mute
<i>Tinggal aku sendiri terpaku menatap langit</i>	I was left alone staring at the sky
<i>Barangkali di sana ada jawabnya</i>	Maybe there is an answer there
<i>Mengapa di tanahku terjadi bencana</i>	Why is there a disaster in my land?
<i>Atau Tuhan mulai bosan</i>	Or God is getting bored
<i>Melihat tingkah kita</i>	Look at our behavior
<i>Yang selalu salah dan bangga</i>	Who is always wrong and proud
<i>Dengan dosa-dosa</i>	With sins
<i>Atau alam mulai enggan</i>	Or nature starts to be reluctant
<i>Bersahabat dengan kita</i>	To be friendly with us
<i>Mari kita bertanya</i>	Let's ask
<i>pada rumput yang bergoyang</i>	On the swaying grass

Ade (1979)

Ade (1979) engages in a thoughtful and critical examination of the reasons for the occurrence of disasters on Earth. His perspective underscores the importance of introspection to comprehend the root causes of such events. The imperative is clear: the preservation of the natural environment is crucial. The correlation between human actions and the incidence of natural disasters is highlighted by Harun et al. (2023). They assert that the occurrence of these calamities is often intertwined with human activities that either inflict harm on nature or neglect the significance of environmental stewardship. This perspective suggests that human actions, marked by environmental disregard or damage, contribute to a state where nature reacts unfavorably, akin to expressing 'anger' or becoming 'unfriendly' towards humanity.

4.8 Low Morale Leading to Corruption

Corruption in the novel *Ladang Perminus* [Perminus Farm] published in 1990 by Ramadhan K. H., is described as not merely due to economic deficiencies or weaknesses, but rather as having become entrenched in government institutions. In conditions of dilapidated economic and bureaucratic governance, exacerbated by the immoral behavior of officials who do not care about the fate of the people, corruption has become a social phenomenon that spreads everywhere (Wibowo & Aqil, 2023). This can be seen in the following excerpt of the novel.

- (11) *Korupsi sekarang sudah menjadi wabah. Gentayangan di mana-mana, merasuk ke mana-mana. Kulihat, sekarang kita sudah sulit untuk memisahkan mana milik negara dan mana milik pribadi.* [Corruption has now become an epidemic. It is everywhere, it has penetrated everywhere. I see, now it is difficult for us to separate what is state property and what is private property.] (Ramadhan, 1990, p. 185)
- (12) *Sudah segala macam peraturan dan undang-undang dikeluarkan, tapi korupsi terus merajalela.* [All kinds of regulations and laws have been issued, but corruption continues to run rampant.] (Ramadhan, 1990, p. 186)

In (11) and (12), low moral values are shown through the characters of the novel, the Managing Director and Kahar, who are in control of the government and are

immoral officials. To fulfill their lust for a luxurious life, many government officials are involved in acts of corruption (Harun et al., 2023).

4.9 Upholding Religion above Worldliness

The novel *Kemarau* [Drought] by A. A. Navis in 1957, states the importance of humans to uphold religion above humanity. Whatever humanity is, no matter how heavy it is, it must still be placed in obedience to Allah (Rahmadani & Thahir, 2022). This is illustrated in (13).

- (13) *Walau apa katamu kepadaku, walau kauhina, kaukaci maki aku, kaukutuki aku, aku terima. Tapi untuk membiarkan Masri dan Arni hidup sebagai suami istri, padahal Tuhan telah melarangnya, ooo. Itu telah melanggar prinsip hidup setiap orang yang percaya pada-Nya. Kau memang telah berbuat sesuatu yang benar sebagai ibu yang mampu memelihara kebahagiaan anaknya. Tapi ada lagi kebenaran yang lebih mutlak yang tak bisa ditawar-tawar lagi, Iyah, yakni kebenaran yang dikatakan Tuhan dalam kitab-Nya. Prinsip hidup segala manusialah menjunjung kebenaran Tuhan. [No matter what you say to me, even though you insult me, you curse me, you curse me, I accept it. But to let Masri and Arni live as husband and wife, even though God has forbidden it so. It has violated the life principles of everyone who believes in Him. You have indeed done something right as a mother who is able to maintain her child's happiness. But there is another, more absolute truth that cannot be negotiated, yes, namely the truth that God says in His book. The principle of life for all humans is to uphold God's truth.] (Navis, 1957, p. 112)*

Navis (1957) conveys the moral message in this novel that when we are faced with problems in this life between the world and the hereafter or God's teachings, we must uphold God's teachings even though they are difficult. In (13), Navis' (1957) moral message is very clear "But there is another, more absolute truth that cannot be negotiated, yes, namely the truth that God says in His book. The principle of life for all humans is to uphold God's truth" (p. 112).

4.10 Religious Idea: Life is a Pseudo-Game

The religious dimension is revealed in *Dilarang Mencintai Bunga-Bunga: Kumpulan Cerpun* [It Is Forbidden to Love Flowers: A Collection of Short Stories] by Kuntowijoyo published in 1992. An excerpt from the short stories collection is shown in (14).

- (14) *Jangan sedih, Cucu. Hidup adalah permainan layang-layang. Setiap orang suka pada layang-layang. Setiap orang suka hidup. Tidak seorang pun lebih suka mati. Layang-layang dapat putus. Engkau dapat sedih. Engkau dapat sengsara. Tetapi engkau akan terus memainkan layang-layang. Tetapi engkau akan terus mengharapkan hidup. Katakanlah hidup itu permainan. Tersenyum, Cucu. [Don't be sad, Grandson. Life is a kite game. Everyone likes kites. Everyone likes to live. No one prefers to die. Kites can break. You can be sad. You can be miserable. But you will continue to fly the kite. But you will continue to hope for life. Let's say life is a game. Smile, Grandson.] (Kuntowijoyo, 1992, p. 4)*

Jewelry is a symbol of joy and fun. So, in life, the pleasure we experience is only superficial. The joy that humans experience sometimes turns into sadness. Just like in a game, in facing the bitter reality of life (grief, misery), humans do not need to be sad because grief does not last forever. The story highlights that sadness will be replaced by joy. Therefore, in facing any reality of life, whether it is joy or sorrow, humans do not need to dissolve and have patience in facing any obstacles (Fadlilah et al., 2022).

Based on Islam, this trust can be found as a hypogram in the Al-Qur'an in the last sentence of the verse shown in (15), "the life of this world is nothing but deceptive pleasure".

- (15) *Kullu nafsin zā'iqatul maūt, wa innamā tuwaffauna ujurakum yaumal-qiyāmah, fa man zuḥziḥa 'anin-nāri wa udkhilal-jannata fa qad fāz, wa mal-ḥayātud-dun-yā illā matā'ul-ghurūr.* [Every soul will taste death. And only on the Day of Resurrection shall you be paid your wages. Whoever is kept away from hell and put into heaven; then indeed has been lucky. The life of this world is nothing but deceptive pleasure.] (Q.S. Ali Imran: 185)

Moral messages in literature can be a medium for moral education for students. In line with the views of Prayitno et al. (2022), national education shapes morals civilizes the nation to have noble character, and develops the potential of students to believe in God.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion of the various literary works above, it can be concluded that contemporary Indonesian literary works contain many moral dimensions. Moral messages in literature can provide inner enlightenment for readers about the values of life. Appreciating the meaning of literature can refine readers' minds and hone their sensitivity towards fellow humans. These moral dimensions include (1) transcendental: aligning oneself to God, (2) struggle against evil (*jihad fii sabiilillah*), (3) nationalism, (4) getting closer to God (transcendental value), (5) gender equality as respect for women, (6) upholding the dignity of women, (7) remembering (dhikr) God, (8) low morale leading to corruption, (9) upholding religion above worldliness, and (10) religious idea: life is a pseudo-game. The study's implications suggest that contemporary Indonesian literature serves as a significant source for fostering moral values, contributing to readers' inner development by highlighting themes such as spirituality, societal responsibility, and ethical conduct. This insight can inform educational and cultural initiatives to promote moral awareness and consciousness

It is realized that research on the moral dimension in contemporary Indonesian literature is still limited to literary works that are popular among the literary community, both works and writers. Common limitations in this research include potential subjectivity in interpreting moral dimensions, the scope and representativeness of the sampled literary works, and the generalizability of findings beyond the specific context of contemporary Indonesian literature.

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