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## Women in the Perspective of *Mahabbah* through a Selection of Mawar Safei's Latest Short Stories

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### Abstract

This article discusses the inclination in Mawar Safei's latest short stories to promote Islamic spirituality through her female characters. This inclination was confirmed and recommended to obtain new insight in female character-building by a female writer. The female characters in her works opened the door for a wider discussion for scholars of Malay Literature. On average, studies on this topic generally address the same problem: the need to elevate the role of female characters within an Islamic context. There are three dominant polemical strands within the effort to dignify female characters within the Islamic context. Firstly, with reference to research findings that acknowledges significant Malay-Muslim female characters within a Western intellectual model. Secondly, the opposition to and rejection of Western framework by local scholars in their study of Malay-Muslim female characters. Thirdly, the injustice in providing justification for the aspirations of female characters within the works of female writers themselves. Following these polemical strands, this study opts to discuss female characters through an Islamic-based analytical framework, the Mahabbah (Love of Allah) to strengthen the Islamic identity within Malay Literature studies. The discussion on female characters through the Mahabbah concept then focuses on the works of female writers, with the selection of Mawar Safei as one of the more prolific female writers, active in her promotion of Islamic and tasawwuf values in her works. The Mahabbah concept as applied in this study is taken from the Mahabbah concept by Jalaluddin Rumi that offered concepts of Mahabatullah (Love of Allah). This concept is then applied to the four latest short stories of Mawar Safei: (Cinta, 2020; Pencinta, 2020; Ibrahim, 2020; Ephesus, 2021). The analysis and findings of this study conclude that the female characters in Mawar Safie's works reflect the female character par excellence in their expression of the love of the Divine. The Islamic spiritual education reflected in Mawar Safie's short stories further also contributes to efforts in helping the community and youth, especially women, to build a high personality and spirituality. The reflection of the superiority of women's personalities sketched by Mawar Safei's in turn can form a circle of civilized and prudent society.

**Keywords:** Female Characters, Mahabbah, Short Stories, Mawar Safei

## Introduction

Discussions on the role of female characters generally offers continuity and a variety of room for discussion within Malay Literature. An examination of this new marking process of female characters within these works can be traced to three dominant polemical strands. The first focuses on the refutation of a reductionist paradigm, or a neglect of the Malay-Muslims philosophy and worldview by local scholars that study female characters. This occurs when local scholars are inclined to opt for Western theory as their platform of discussion. The inclination to apply Western theory and approach meant a confusion in the reading of female identity in Malay Literature works. This is because the feminist ideology itself is not partial to the Malay-Muslim female identity. Zalila (2004) states that the feminist idea champions the equality of rights between men and women, in clear opposition to the Malay female identity. The selection of this theory as a method to study female character can be linked to the evolutionist philosophy among earlier modern literature scholar. As stated by Rahimin (2012), the evolutionist philosophy is absolute in its idea that Western civilisation is higher and more advanced than the Eastern societies. This is supported with a quote by (Noraini, 1986);

*Malay women are confined by strict cultural and religious rules. Culture and religion emphasize the 'natural' role of women in terms of reproductive and household production.*

Noraini's opinion proves that the feminist idea sets the female characters in Malay literature work in total opposition to the culture and religion around her. As she states, the foundation of Malay culture and Islam is a demand that should be disputed. Following this ideology, there emerges an idea to revolutionise the study of female characters within Modern Literature. This ideology then motivates the selection of the feminist theory as a framework for previous works. Therefore, the element of freedom from the shackles of culture and religion for female characters is encouraged by scholars of this feminist strand of thought. As argued by Shanon (1981), the symbolic honour of Malay females within creative works have been 'prostituted' with new meanings: female emancipation, women's total rights, and equal standing. According to Rahimin (2008), this refers to the inclination of opting for Western theory without consideration of the religion, philosophy, and worldview of the Malay and Muslim. This situation was also discussed by earlier critics, such as (Hashim, 1984) that argue these studies undertook these Western theories *in toto* without the necessary evaluation, the result being a confusing application. Such studies also create a sense of estrangement within the Malay literary tradition, blurring the image of the Muslim woman in Malay literature works. According to Hajar (2006), the inclination in this polemical strand is also marred by the monotonous nature of earlier works, leading to the aping of research patterns and even stereotypes.

The inclination of earlier studies to practise this reductionist approach then leads to the second polemical strand in the study of female characters. This strand occurs as an active rejection and dispute by local critics of the application of feminist theory as a framework in studying Malay Literature. This rejection and dispute are generally based on the argument that the feminist framework stands in opposition to Malay culture and Islamic principles as the basis of values. Affandi (2012) is among the clear opponents of the so-called feminist values:

... which becomes the priority [in the theory of feminism] is the evilness characteristic of a woman, so it is a claim in feminism that the female author, if she wants to succeed as defined by feminism, must recount the evilness of a woman, a rebel (quietly or out loud), a person who wants full freedom and who dares to present herself as a determinant of the values of ordinary life according to her desires.

Affandi's criticism is identified as one of the efforts to shine a light on the confusion in portraying Malay female identity through the lens of feminist theory. Affandi (2012) also urges scholars to understand Islam before applying Western theory wholesale as the guiding ideology of research. Therefore, Islam should be forwarded as the research method for Malay Literature:

... Feminism is not needed as an analytical tool in our study of the questions that facing Muslim women, although it should be known as a women's movement in the West. Feminism can still be introduced in universities so that our students are exposed to some of the rather shocking developments of the Western academic world; but the introduction must be followed by an in-depth and complete description of its position according to the Islamic view, so that students do not drift into the unfounded belief that feminism fits the Islamic view.

(Affandi, 2012)

Affandi (2012) proposal is in line with al-Attas's (1972) view that the nature and reality of Malay civilisation and culture is an Islamic one. The two aspects could not be separated within a pure intellectual conceptualisation. The introduction to the comprehensiveness Malay language and literature should not be separated from an introduction to Islam. Next, this refutation and rejection is also identified in the writings of (Maimunah, 2019) that clearly posits that studies based on Western theory, framework, and ideas are awkward and fully incompatible. As mentioned by Maimunah (2012), the context of studies based on Western theories are very different from local considerations, either in religion, culture, values, and outlooks on life. Ungku Maimunah's criticism then turns to two academic papers by Siti Hajar Che Man as the object of her criticism. In her critique, Maimunah (2012) strongly asserts that the feminist theory is irrelevant as a research tool for Malay Literature, and according to her;

The above analysis [a study based on Siti Hajar Che Man's paper] shows the application of feminist theory to the matter of exposition of the *HSM* [*Harga Sebuah Maruah*] is clearly no longer needed. It turns out that the findings obtained through the application of feminist theory can easily be achieved through ordinary reading at the literal or *harfiah* level only, thus making the use of feminist theory irrelevant.

(Maimunah, 2012)

In addition, the application of Western framework will never be fair to the mostly Malay and Muslim indigenous works (Maimunah, 2012). Ungku Maimunah's assertion is then referred to as we transit to the third polemical strand as stated in the earlier part of this paper. This polemical strand refers to the injustice that provides justification to the aspiration of female characters in the works of female writers themselves. This can be seen in the presence of themes in the works of recent writers that engage in the principles of knowledge and *hikmah* as intertextual elements within their narratives.

This is also identified in the works of Mawar Safie, a writer said to have a strong influence in conveying this knowledge and creativity (Ruzy, 2020). Mawar Safie, as seen in her works, is highly inclined towards themes of Islamic spirituality. This is supported by Hashim (2020), in which Mawar's idealism of womanhood is strengthened by the divine. Hashim also agrees that there is an element of the love of the divine as will be discussed in this article, as stated in the following quote;

Mawar's work not only has the pure values of da'wah, but Mawar is a female author who dares to apply the *Sufi* elements (*tasawuf*), talking about the question of love (*Mahabbah*) to the Creator. There is an association with Jalaluddin Rumi who also admires love. This is highlighted in the latest works of Mawar Safie. Cultivating the journeys of *Sufi* and dares to explore the world of *Sufi* of Jalaluddin Rumi. Mawar is able to relate it to God's love.

(Hashim, 2020)

This study also highlights Mawar's stance on Islam as her narrative foundation, proven by her own words when she received the S.E.A. Write Award;

The creation of this creative work that I lived in for more than 20 years actually fostered my confidence upon my etymology. It nurtured me so much to always humbly acknowledge that there is no power to us as human beings other than Him. It invited my heart and mind to always acknowledge the greatness of God. So with that call, I also admit every weakness in my work even though it is better to try to put together usefully between the lines for those who have time to read.

(Safie, 2020)

Mawar's stand can be referred to as a prevalence in the journey of the soul within literature works, stated by Salleh (2002) as the Occidental Exile towards the East (towards original enlightenment). Therefore, it is demanded of scholars of Malay Literature to provide accurate justification in marking the female characters within a work. By working on *Sufi* love poems, Mawar Safie's short stories emerge as unconventional prose. Therefore, this study aims to



provide an accurate justification of Mawar's vision to awaken female spirit and development holistically, in line with her own spiritual journey as writer. The element of Divine love that is radiated in Mawar Safei's short story is further targeted to benefit the community and youth, especially women in an effort to strengthen the Islamic personality in contributing to the formation of a harmonious society. To advance the findings of this study, the *Mahabbah* concept of Jalaluddin Rumi is used to provide justification of Mawar's aspiration towards female characters within the idea of Islamic spirituality.

### **Problem Statement**

The jumping point of problem statement comes from the confusion of female character identity in works of Malay Literature. Such confusion occurs due to the emergence of a reductionist paradigm that rejects Malay-Muslim religion, philosophy, and worldview in earlier studies. As stated by Rahimin and Faizuri (2008), discussion on the identity of the Malay-Muslim woman is done in a miniscule and non-holistic scale. Furthermore, this polemic also created an estrangement within the tradition of Malay letters, and the blurring of the Muslim woman image in Malay literary works. Therefore, the reductionist paradigm is linked to the conformity and attachment to the evolutionist philosophy within the context of modern literature. According to Rahimin (2012), the evolutionist philosophy absolutely sets Western civilisation as higher and greater than Eastern societies. This ideology encourages the selection of the Western framework as evolution within the context of Malay Literature studies. In addition, the inclination in this polemical strand is also marred by the monotonous nature of earlier works, leading to the aping of research patterns and even stereotypes. The studies produced is more geared towards questions that are bland and undemanding to the female mind, such as looking from the perspectives of theme and question, historical research, socio-cultural development and growth, creativity, activity, and frailty of women in producing writings. Research aspects such as these clearly showed a more single-track line of thinking by the researcher, and more geared towards themes and contemporary issues. Therefore, as mentioned by Hajar (2007), studies among female literature and participation is seen to overlap and the essences of discussion have much in common.

The second refers to the rejection and dispute of earlier findings more inclined to Western thought when discussing female characters in Malay Literature studies. This rejection and dispute are based on the argument that the feminist framework stands in opposition to Malay culture and Islamic principles as the foundational values. Maimunah (2019) is among the loudest critics, proclaiming studies based on Western theories, frameworks, and ideas as awkward and totally incompatible. The emphasis of this argument in the fact that research contexts based on Western theories are very different from the local context, either in religion, culture, values, or outlooks on life. This is also mentioned by (Noraini, 1986);

*Malay women are confined by strict cultural and religious rules. Culture and religion emphasize the 'natural' role of women in terms of reproductive and household production.*

In a nutshell, the above quotation explains elements of rejection of Malay culture and Islam. Malay women are said to be straight jacketed by restrictive religious and cultural rules and regulations. Culture and religion are said to only emphasise on the natural role of the woman in domestic affairs. Such a view, of course, can be disputed as Islam has no restriction on

women's freedoms, and women are free to participate in other fields in life within the boundaries of religion and culture. According to Masnah (1999) the traditions (*Hadith*) of Rasulullah P.B.U.H. outlines the rights of women in Islam, such as right to religion, individual rights, right to seek knowledge, and to own property.

The final problem, referred to as the third polemical strand, discusses injustice in providing justification to aspirations of female characters by women writers themselves. The application of the Western framework according to Maimunah (2019) will never be fair to the mostly Malay and Muslim indigenous works. As mentioned by Harun (2004), works that incorporate Islamic values within new situations and descriptions should be accepted and evaluated accordingly. It is incumbent upon Malay Literature researchers to provide accurate justification while marking women characters within any given work.

### Limitation of Studies

As already stated in the research problem, one of the goals to be achieved in this study is to offer a study on the *Mahabbah* of the female character in the latest short story chosen of Mawar Safie. In this context, the author is a woman in expressing her position and views on women through her "voice" to the reader. Therefore, this study will outline two characteristics of the selection of study materials. First, the latest short stories of Mawar Safie and second, the works of Mawar Safie which are endorsed and manifest the dominant theme of Islamic spirituality. Based on these two considerations, a total of four short stories published by Mawar Safie in 2020 and 2021 were selected as study materials. The short stories are (*Cinta*, 2020; *Pencinta*, 2020; *Ibrahim*, 2020; *Ephesus*, 2021). This number is considered sufficient especially in offering a comprehensive observation of its nature as a new introduction of the study in the context of *Mahabbah*.

### Methodology

This study uses the Textual Analysis Approach, a research approach that utilises written texts as study materials. The approach is commonly used in the study of literature which revolves around literary texts such as short stories, novels, dramas and poems. In utilising the approach, an analytical framework is needed to function as a "reading framework" in order to read and analyse the studied literary texts. To this end, this study chooses to apply the concept of *Mahabbah* as an analytical framework to read and analyse Mawar Safie's short stories entitled (*Cinta*, 2020; *Pencinta*, 2020; *Ibrahim*, 2020; *Ephesus*, 2021). The concept of *Mahabbah* is coined by Jalaluddin Rumi (henceforth Rumi) a famous Persian sufis who lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. For the purpose of this study, the understanding of Rumi's concept of *Mahabbah* is based the discussion in a book entitled *Fihi* by Rumi (2019) a translated edition published by Penerbit Zaman.

By and large, Rumi defines *Mahabbah* as Divine love rationally. Based on the Quran, *Mahabbah* comes from the word *hubb* or *habb*, meaning seed or core (Rakhmat, 2008). In the Quran, the term *habba* was mentioned seven times, in Surah *al-An'am* (verses 95 and 99), Surah *Yasin* (verse 33), Surah *al-Naba'* (verse 15), and Surah *Abasa* (verse 27). In these seven verses, Allah reminds mankind that the variety of crops that grow upon the earth was made for the benefit of man. Refer to the translation of Surah *Al-An'am* verse 95;

Surely, it is Allah Who causes the seed and the fruit-stone  
to split and sprout. He brings forth the living from the dead

and the dead from the living. It is Allah, Who does all this,  
then why are you being misled?

(Translation of *surah Al-An'am*: verse 95)

Therefore, all of creation is shown as a sign to mankind on the manifestation of His Divine glory and power. As stated in *Kamus Al-Quran* (2011) with this reminder, man is made aware of His love and power, and is full of thankfulness. The love and power of Allah (SWT) can also be identified in at least three verses, selected using the connotation of *habbah* with the same meaning: *Surah al-Baqarah* verse 261, *Surah al-An'am* verse 6, and *Surah al-Anbiya'* verse 47. *Habbah* in *surah al-Baqarah* verse 261 refers to the rewards promised to those that do good deeds.

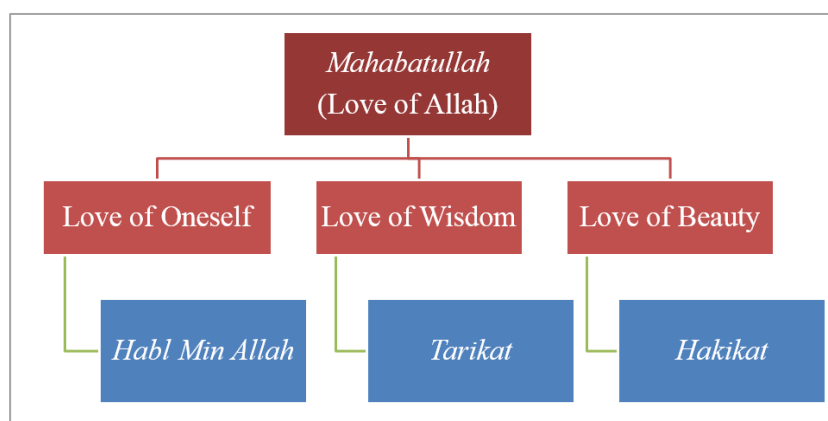
Next, *Mahabbah* is also seen from a terminological perspective by three thinkers: Imam al-Ghazali, Harun Nasution, and Abu Nashr as-Sarraj. Based on observation, there is a conceptual alignment that could be classified as a dominant meaning for the term *Mahabbah* from these selected thinkers. Firstly, the term *Mahabbah* according to Al-Ghazali (2018), refers to all things related to the *dzat* or Essence of Allah. *Mahabbah* has no other meaning aside from inclination towards favoured pleasures. Linguistically, *Mahabbah* means "love", and *Mahabbatullah* means "love of Allah." As mentioned by Abdul Majid et al (2009), this connotation according to Imam al-Ghazali, reflects the attitude of the soul that beckons to self-devotion, the "sacrifice of the self" and "Love of the Divine".

Secondly, the term *Mahabbah* according to Nasution (2010) refers to the Divine Love that could be described in three stages of the soul. First, a resolute love of Allah and hatred of acts contrary to His commands. Second, total submission of one's heart and soul to the Beloved (Allah SWT). Finally, emptying the self from all but the love towards the Divine. Thirdly, the meaning of *Mahabbah* from Abu Nashr as-Sarraj who also outlines three stages of the Divine Love. First, the love of the commons, a love that refers to the goodness and love of Allah SWT to all mankind. This could be obtained from all acts of worship, such as *zikir* that praises God. Second, the love of the *siddiq*, a love that exists in the heart when witnessing the glory and greatness of Allah, covering all His beauty and wisdom. Third, the love of the *'arif*, the love that emerges from diligence of observing and knowing the eternal Divine Love with all his heart (Nasution, 1973).

As mentioned above, Rumi explains the *Mahabbah* as the rational Love of the Divine. As mentioned by Atmonandi (2018), this rationality is contrasted with the *Mahabbah* as forwarded by previous thinkers as the total love of the slave to his Lord and Creator. However, according to Marsudi (2017), the Divine Love concept *à la* Rumi is seen as more rational and universal, as it involves all elements in all of creation. The expression of love for Rumi is the expression of the words *Bismillah* and *Al-Fatihah* that represents the process of creation of the worlds and the seven planes of existences of all His creations. To Rumi, the first thing created by Allah SWT was love (*Bismillah*). According to Marsudi (2017), in Rumi's *Mahabbah* concept, he aims his concept of love to two bases: the intellect, and the strength of love. In his book titled *Fihi Ma Fihi* (2019), the concept of the intellect was much discussed by Rumi, as evident in discourses 9, 12 38, 48, and 71.



## Jalaluddin Rumi's Concept of *Mahabbah*



For further discussion in this article, Rumi's concept of Mahabbah used to highlight the element of Divine Love in Mawar's works is Mahabatullah. This discussion is based on the three types of love: love of the self (*Habl Min Allah*), love of wisdom (*Tarikat*), and love of beauty (*Hakikat*). Al-Ghazali's (2018) mentioned that's Mahabatullah refers to love of Allah that reflects the attitude of the soul that beckons to self-devotion, the sacrifice of the self, and Love of the Divine. In his *Fihi Ma Fihi* (2019, discourse 23), Rumi explains that man inwardly loves Allah SWT, seeks for Allah, and worships Allah. All of man's hopes are aimed towards Him, and acknowledges Him as All-Powerful.

### Love of Oneself (*Habl Min Allah*)

Among the attitudes and acts that leads to Mahabatullah is the love of oneself. The love of oneself could be linked to the practice of worship one does that points to Allah SWT. One's submission and obedience in the act of worship is not merely a manifestation of the love of oneself, but a reflection of his love towards the Divine. This is mentioned in the Qur'an in Surah Ali Imran verse 31;

"Say (O Muhammad), "If you sincerely love Allah then follow me that Allah may love you, and forgive your faults. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful."

(Translation of Surah *Ali-Imran*: verse 31)

Man inwardly loves Allah SWT, seeks for Him and worships Him. All of man's hopes are aimed towards Him, and acknowledges Him as All-Powerful (Rumi, 2009). As such, in Mawar's short story titled *Sulapan Tujuh Pencinta*, the woman marked by Mawar as the "I" character clearly reflects Mahabatullah through her spiritual journey. This short story is Mawar's voice as a woman carrying the message of love of oneself in obeying the Divine command. This short story is set in a world in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, driving the "I" character to a higher spiritual plane to know the Divine Love.

When I was in the realm of disengagement, I saw how much Allah is the true Ruler. Allah is the Owner of all that power. This disengagement is a room of submission. That is where the point of *Rahmah* has been, in which all of this time I have only dared to mention without understanding

the whole thing. Then what does this stand for when I'm next to the seven lovers awaiting for me in Rumi's room? O Allah, as a beggar, I come before You only to ask a supplication, It is more than what a king asks for. If each only asks what they need, I come to You only for one. Ask for Yourself alone. True Brother, those words conjure me up!

[Saat di wilayah penyendirian, saya melihat betapa Allah itu adalah Penguasa sebenar. Allah Pemilik segala kekuatan yang ada. Penyendirian ini adalah rung penyerahan. Di situlah letak titik Rahmah yang selama ini hanya saya berani sebutkan tanpa mengerti segenapnya. Lalu apa maknanya penyendirian ini apabila saya menyampingi ketujuh-tujuh pencinta yang menunggu saya di ruangan Rumi. Wahai Tuhan, sebagai pengemis saya datang di hadapan-Mu hanya untuk mengajukan sebuah permohonan, Ia lebih daripada apa yang dipinta seorang raja. Jika masing-masing hanya meminta apa yang diperlukan mereka, saya datang kepada-Mu hanya untuk satu. Meminta Diri-Mu semata. Benar Saudara, kata-kata itu menyulap saya!]

*Sulapan Tujuh Pencinta (2020)*

Based on the extract, it is observed that Mawar's actions to grasp the divine message through the "I" character, playing the role of a woman that places her hopes in Allah SWT. Mawar uses the name of one of the *Ashabul Kahfi* (the Companions of the Cave), Tamlikha as a miracle (spell) that spiritually carries off the "I" character to Konya, a place rich with Rumi's manifestation of love. In her solitude brought about by a pandemic-ridden world, the "I" character realises the reality of submission, knowing the greatness of Allah, reflecting on the limitations of man. In this state of submission, the "I" character knows the meaning of *Rahmah* as a manifestation of God's love in the tale of the *Ashabul Kahfi*. This is outlined in the following extract;

This disengagement leads to the path of knowing the greatness of Allah, realizing the meaning of creation and human limitations. When I was in the realm of disengagement, I saw how much Allah is the true Ruler. Allah is the Owner of all that power. This disengagement is a room of submission. That is where the point of *Rahmah* has been, in which all of this time I have only dared to mention without understanding the whole thing.

[Penyendirian ini menuju jalan mengenal kebesaran Allah, menginsafi makna penciptaan dan keterbatasan manusia. Saat di wilayah penyendirian, saya melihat betapa Allah itu adalah Penguasa sebenar. Allah Pemilik segala kekuatan

yang ada. Penyendirian ini adalah ruang penyerahan. Di situlah letak titik Rahmah yang selama ini hanya saya berani sebutkan tanpa mengerti segenapnya.]

*Sulapan Tujuh Pencinta (2020)*

The extract highlights that Mawar proclaims worship as not only leading to the path of goodness and His pleasure, but also guides the intellect to interpret all of the manifestations of Allah SWT through the “I” character. In addition, the “I” character’s realisation of the Divine Love is also known through Mawar’s vision in the creation of Muslim female characters *par excellence* in her works. The “I” character in this short story is her female voice on the importance of being the best of women, as recommended in Islamic teachings. This situation is in line with the *Mahabbah* element which, according to Rumi (2019), is the trembling of human love referring to the need to seek God.

Next, the *Mahabatullah* element is also mentioned in the short story *Mencari Ibrahim* published in August, 2020. This short story is also strongly influenced by the story of Rumi’s search of his friend, Syam Al-Tabriz. Mawar’s influence in using Rumi’s story in the narrative of the “I” character that represents the female voice in her works is unmistakable, especially when looking at her two works, *Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta* and *Mencari Ibrahim*, their similarities identified. Mawar’s ability to analyse and translate Rumi’s poem along with the idealism of the Divine Love is a new aspect, to be examined in the light of delivery of *da’wah* in these works. In *Mencari Ibrahim*, the reflection of the Divine Love is also presented by Mawar through the journey of her “I” character in search of her friend, Ibrahim. The “I” character’s journey is not only partnered with stories that highlight the character of the Muslim woman, but also guides the soul to know of God’s power through the *asmaul husna* (Divine Names). This is stated in the following extract;

“Ya Khalik, ya Muhaimin, ya Jabbar, ya Musawwir.”

That gentleness was a straight path that turned out to be a lot of *marhalah* for me to traverse in finding him.

[“Ya Khalik, ya Muhaimin, ya Jabbar, ya Musawwir.”

Kelunakan itu adalah jalan lurus yang rupa-rupanya menjadi marhalah yang banyak untuk saya tempuhi dalam mencari dia.]

*Mencari Ibrahim (2020)*

In the narrative of the “me” character, Mawar compiles her stories in knowing the attributes of Allah SWT as manifesting man’s search for his Creator (*Khaliq*). The Names of the Divine strengthens her soul as a pious woman, certain in His glory. This is mentioned in the following extract;

Ya Jabbar, I am asked repeatedly to believe that He is enough and there is no God except Him. Ya Allah. "Where are you, Ibrahim?"

...

Ibrahim left me. In the meantime, I am constantly looking for him with many paths and questions. Why I met Ibrahim

in the first place? Why with him I know the destiny sheet about the Qur'an. Why should I know that he is an abandoned child?

[Ya Jabbar, saya diminta-minta untuk mengimani bahawa cukuplah Dia dan tiada Tuhan selain Dia. Ya Allah. "Di mana kau, Ibrahim?"

...

Ibrahim meninggalkan saya. Sedang saya terus dan terus mencarinya dengan banyak jalan dan pertanyaan. Mengapa saya bertemu dengan Ibrahim awalnya. Mengapa dengannya saya mengenal lembar takdir tentang al-Quran. Mengapa saya harus tahu bahawa dia adalah anak yang ditinggalkan.]

*Mencari Ibrahim (2020)*

At the end of the story, Mawar is seen to project the authority of her female character in proclaiming the Divine Love by referring to the tale of Siti Hajar within the "I" character's narrative. The end is effective in guiding the reader to the connotation of Divine Love when the "I" character acquiesce to the fact that the only eternal love is love of Allah SWT. This is quoted in the following extract of the short story;

This heartbroken, I persuaded for a long time with Ibrahim's gentleness. I am like Hajar, ultimately in accordance to the names of God.

*Ya Khalik.*

*Ya Muhaimin.*

*Ya Jabbar.*

*Ya Musawwir.*

I hear and I obey, if this is true of His command. Then, do I need to ask again "where are you, Ibrahim?"

[Hati rajuk, saya pujuk lama dengan kelunakan Ibrahim.

Saya seperti Hajar, akhirnya menurut nama-nama Tuhan.

Ya Khalik.

Ya Muhaimin.

Ya Jabbar.

Ya Musawwir.

Saya dengar dan saya taat, jika ini benar perintah-Nya. Lalu, perlukah saya bertanya lagi "di manakah kau, Ibrahim?"]

*Mencari Ibrahim (2020)*

The above extract clearly exhibits Mawar's intensity and creativity as a writer in voicing out *Mahabbah* elements in line with the need to shape the personality of a Muslim female character *par excellence*. This excellence is identified when Mawar carefully recruits the "I" character to communicate the message of Divine Love as enjoined in Islam. The mobilisation of female characters within the context of Divine Love is also consistent with the role of the writer, to use their gift with the pen to lead man on the road to Allah SWT. In addition, the

extract also proves that Mawar exhibits a strong influence of Rumi's *Mahabbah* in her writing style. This is based on the description of the "I" character in knowing *Rahmah* (God's love) with the manifestation of Rumi's *Mahabbah*, based on *Ar-Rahman* and *Ar-Rahim*. This is also acknowledged by Hashim (2020), and Mawar is able to translate and recruit Rumi's text with the Divine Love through the characters in her works.

This observation then turns to the short story *Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta*, also published in the same year. Again, the "I" character is seen to represent the author in conveying the *Mahabbah* of a woman influence by Rumi's tale. This is also acknowledged by Mawar in her article "Narasi Saya tentang Rumi dan Cinta," published in *Dewan Sastra* No. 3, 2020. Mawar wrote this article to elaborate on influence towards the creative process of the short story *Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta*. In this article, Mawar admits to Rumi's influence in the production of the short story. The essence of Rumi's poems inspired her to construct the narrative of *Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta*. Mawar also included Rumi's love poems from the *Mathnawi*, the *Diwan Syamsi Tabriz*, and the *Rubayat*, and this is seen as the strength of attachment of Muslim female identity in her short stories. This is seen in the following extract;

We're in a circular of love. The *Buraq* brings the poetry of love. Apparently every beautifully bewitched line and stanza is a gift from Rumi! For example, this one is from *Diwan Shamsi Tabriz*,

The world is like *Thursina*.  
And we are Moses the seeker of light.  
Every lead comes from there.  
And the top of this mountain is in pieces.

[Kami dalam bundaran cinta. *Buraq* membawa datang tembang cinta. Rupa-rupanya setiap baris dan rangkap yang disihir indah ialah hadiah daripada Rumi! Misalnya yang ini dari *Diwan Syamsi Tabriz*,

Dunia ini bagai *Thursina*  
dan kami ialah Musa pencari sinar  
setiap petunjuk datang dari sana  
dan puncak gunung ini berkeping-keping pecahnya.]

*Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta* (2020)

This creative process was also strengthened by the writer's jottings as she visited Turkey, and exposed to the *Buraq* and the *Sama*. Mawar also utilised the seven advices of Rumi in the dialogues of her female characters in her short stories, referring to devotion, love, shame, anger, moderation, openness, and being true to oneself. The use of Rumi's poems not only offered new knowledge on the glory of his poems, but also *Mahabbah* within women, as represented through Mawar's "I" character. This is highlighted in the following extract;



In the *Sama'* presentation room, I found chants of love that were still lamenting the loss. Maybe between the pause of disappearance and the persuasion, this is the line it reads,  
 I choose to love you in silence, because  
     in silence I get no rejection.  
 I choose to love you in peace, because  
     in peace no one has you but me.  
 I choose to admire you from afar, because the distance  
     will protect me from wound,  
 I choose to kiss you in the wind, because  
     the wind is softer than my lips.  
 I choose to hug you in a dream, because  
     in dreams you will never end.  
 My eyes are still familiar with *ney* in the hands of the *Buraq*. This time I came again to Konya. I actually miss Rumi!

[Di ruang persembahan Sama' saya temukan lantunan cinta yang masih meratap kehilangan. Mungkin antara jeda kelenyapan dengan bujukan tersebut, begini baris bunyinya,  
 Aku memilih mencintaimu dalam diam, kerana dalam diam aku tidak mendapatkan penolakan.  
 Aku memilih mencintaimu dalam sepi, kerana dalam sepi tidak ada yang memilikimu selain aku.  
 Aku memilih mengagumimu dari jauh, kerana jarak akan melindungiku daripada luka,  
 Aku memilih menciummu dalam angin, kerana angin lembut ketimbang bibirku.  
 Aku memilih memelukmu dalam mimpi, kerana dalam mimpi kau tidak akan pernah berakhir.  
 Mata **saya** masih mengakrabi *ney* di tangan *Buraq*. Kali ini saya datang lagi ke Konya. Saya ternyata merindui Rumi!]

*Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta (March, 2020)*

The stirring of man's love within the *Mahabatullah* through the short story *Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta (2020)* is also shown through the "I" character, working to be close to Allah SWT;

I also want to cleanse my heart, *Buraq*. I also turned out to be wounded. I also want to be guided on the path of healing. I need health. I need love. And, the *Buraq* recited its poem again,  
     Everything that hurts is a message  
     Hear it should.  
 and you know, that on the rupture of the wound  
 is the torched path of entering:

light column.

[Saya juga mahu membersihkan hati, Buraq. Saya juga ternyata sedang terluka. Saya turut mahu dituntun di jalan penyembuhan. Saya perlu keafiatan. Saya perlukan cinta. Dan, Buraq menyitir lagi tembang puisinya,  
Setiap yang pedih itu ialah perutusan  
Dengari ia seharusnya.  
dan kautahu, bahawa pada pecah luka itu  
tempat tersuluhnya jalan masuk:  
lajur cahaya.]

*Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta (2020)*

Based on the above extract, Mawat used the connotation of 'love' as symbolic of the search for Divine Love through her chosen character. This description clearly shows the strength of Mawar's characters, who turn to the spiritual plane as the foundation of internal strength. The "I" character in this short story is aligned with elements of truth (al-Haqq), goodness (al-Khayr), and beauty (al-Jamal), which uplifts the character of the Muslimah. In this context, the voice of a female writer is evidently needed to deliver the message of a noble female character for enlightenment of the reader.

In addition, tawakal (reliance) is also seen as one element of Mahabatullah reflecting man's love for his God. As stated by Saodah A, R. (2007), tawakal is one of the ways man interact with Allah SWT. Those that rely on the Divine focuses their attention to Allah SWT, even as they feel either gladness or sadness. In Mahabbah, Rumi also states that tawakal is one way for man to commune with the Divine, as stated in the following quote;

Turn your face to Allah, who is the source of fear. Be assured that Allah will save you from this evil fear. Don't give up hope in Him. You have seen that your obedience comes from yourself until you fall into this immorality. Now, in your immorality, do not despair from Allah. Lower yourself before Him.

(Rumi, 2012)

This is also mentioned in the Qur'an in Surah Yusuf verse 87;

Truly no one despairs of Allah's soothing Mercy, except those who have no faith.

(Translation of Surah *Yusuf*: verse 87)

The above translation of the verse means that those that rely on the submit to Allah SWT with meet with goodness and bliss. Mawar utilises this concept via her "I" character, representing the aspirations of her female characters across the four short stories analysed. This is shown in the following example;

My dear God, as a beggar, I come before You only to ask a supplication. It is more than what a king asks for. If each only asks what they need, I come to You only for one. Ask for Yourself alone. True Brother, those words conjure me up!

[Wahai Tuhan, sebagai pengemis saya datang di hadapan-Mu hanya untuk mengajukan sebuah permohonan. Ia lebih daripada apa yang dipinta seorang raja. Jika masing-masing hanya meminta apa yang diperlukan mereka, saya datang kepada-Mu hanya untuk satu. Meminta Diri-Mu semata. Benar Saudara, kata-kata itu menyulap saya!]

*Sulapan Tujuh Pencinta (2020)*

In the quotation above, Mawar's message is clear: the necessity for women specially to rely on Allah SWT. This message reflects the writer's thoughts in describing the personality of the Muslim woman, consistent with Rumi's *Mahabatullah*. The communication and submission of the "I" character with her Lord proves that a Muslim woman should eschew traits such as arrogance and conceit in their lives. Mawar's "I" character is also described as a woman that needs to strengthen her relationship with Allah SWT as the foundation of life to ensure her well-being here and in the hereafter.

In the work *Fihi Ma Fihi* (2019, discourse 23), Rumi explains that man inwardly loves Allah SWT, searches for Him and worships Him. All of man's hopes are focused to Him, and he admits Allah SWT as All-Powerful. However, the road to Him is only revealed through self-devotion. This is stated in the following quote;

Let it be known that approaching Allah will not be easy  
except by enslaving oneself.

(Rumi, 2019)

Therefore, as mentioned by Al-Ghazali (2018), *Mahabatullah* is referred to as loving Allah that leads to an attitude within the soul that beckons to self-devotion, self-sacrifice, and Love of the Divine. Abd. Kadir (2016), explained that within this philosophy of Divine Love, love is considered the spark of creation, and love also causes goodness to return to Allah SWT.

### **Love of Wisdom (*Tarikat*)**

Literally, *tarikat* means way, journey, convention, custom, situation, school of thought, system, tradition, and so on. However, according to Sidek (1997), the most dominant definition of *tarikat* is 'way'. This is further explained in the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, taken from the book *Empat Puluh Hadis Kelebihan Ulama* (2004) with its translation, "If anyone travels on a road in search of knowledge, Allah will cause him to travel on one of the roads of Paradise." (Riwayat Abu Daud, Tirmizi, and Ibnu Majah). Based on the *hadith*, *tarikat* here means man's way to seek knowledge. In this context, Rumi also states the Qur'an as God's storehouse of wisdom, and it is by reading with knowledge that one can get its true meaning, and guide man on the road to the Divine. This is stated in the following quote;

God's treasure store is a great deal. Allah's knowledge is a great deal. If someone reads the Qur'an with knowledge, why should he reject Qur'an words?

(Rumi, 2019)

Therefore, as mentioned by Al-Hashimi (1999), to achieve a higher stage, a Muslim must place himself within the protection of the Qur'an as often as possible, act in humility and with desire to understand it. Thus, through the benefits of the Qur'an, one that could read, learn, or teach it will receive merit and blessings manifold from Allah SWT, as He says in Surah al-Isra verse 9;

Indeed, this Quran guides to that which is most suitable and gives good tidings to the believers who do righteous deeds that they will have a great rewards.

(Translation of Surah *al-Isra*: verse 9)

Based on the above verse, the Qur'an is the guide of man on the road towards the Divine. Therefore, the love of the Qur'an is also delivered through the female characters in Mawar's four short stories. Mawar's inclination to lift stories from the Qur'an and place them within the narrative of her "I" characters is evident in the four short stories. This is seen in an extract of *Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta*;

"Treat your grief with love. You know, when Usaid Ibn Hudhair quoted the words of the Prophet Muhammad, that the Angel was very happy to hear the recitation of your Qur'an. He will approach. Embrace tighter as the reading continued. Close and do not want any distance to fill between them. The Qur'an is love."

["Rawat dukamu dengan cinta. Kautahu, saat Usaid Ibn Hudhair menyitir akan sabda Rasulullah, bahawa Sang Malaikat senang sekali mendengar bacaan al-Quranmu. Dia akan mendekat. Kian mendakap ketika bacaan dilanjutkan. Dekat dan tidak mahu ada jarak yang mengisi antara mereka. Al-Quran itu cinta."]

*Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta* (2020)

The above quotation clearly showed the authority of Mawar's female character, teaching her readers to love the Qur'an as one way leading man to Divine Love. On this topic, Al-Hashimi (2010) also emphasises that Muslimah must work to increase her obedience, faith, and reliance through the Qur'an. Mawar as the author presents the distinction of the Qur'an, by including the tale of Usaid Ibn Hudhair, serving Mawar's voice and objectives to strengthen her female characters. This is consistent with Rumi's *Mahabbah* that frames around the short stories in this study. This was also acknowledged by Fariza (2020), that Mawar's method of lifting stories from the Qur'an was proper, and these stories could serve as lessons and guidance for the readers.

The love of the Qur'an is also identified through the narrative of the "I" character in the short story *Sayap Langit Ephesus*. This short story is set during the Covid-19 pandemic, going through the spiritual journey of the "I" character, recruited by Mawar to know the meaning and message of the Qur'an. Following Mawar's aspirations to shape her female characters in line with her spiritual journey in Islam, the "I" character was also entrusted to convey the message of the meaning of Surah *Al-Kahf*, as in the other short story *Sulapan Tujuh Pencinta*. However, the story-telling based on Surah *Al-Kahf* in *Sayap Langit Ephesus* is more inclined towards a different style. This is mentioned by Mawar in the following extract;

I seemed to also be putting up wings, joining the seven Young Men of Cave Sleepers in the Ephesus Hill. I slept for 300 years plus nine. It was a strange sleep. Awaken in sleeping. Sleep in awakening. Between sleeping and awakening, I saw the seven Cave Youths lying down, occasionally moving around left and right. Then I heard the hum and echo on the cave wall being the last reading that was so pointed at his advice towards me,  
Whoever believes and hopes for an encounter with his God, let him do righteousness, and do not associate anyone in worshiping his God.

[Saya sepertinya turut memasang sayap, bergabung dengan tujuh Pemuda Gua di Perbukitan Ephesus. Saya tidur selama 300 tahun ditambah sembilan. Tidur yang aneh. Jaga dalam tidur. Tidur dalam jaga. Antara tidur dengan jaga itu, saya melihat ketujuh-tujuh Pemuda Gua sedang berbaringan, sesekali berpindah mengiring kiri dan kanan. Lalu saya mendengar dengung dan talun di dinding gua menjadi bacaan terakhir yang begitu menuding-nuding anjurannya menuju saya,  
Sesiapa yang percaya dan berharap akan pertemuan dengan Tuhannya, hendaklah dia mengerjakan amal soleh, dan janganlah mempersekutukan sesiapaapun dalam ibadah kepada Tuhannya.]

*Sayap Langit Ephesus* (2021)

The above extract further strengthens *Mahabatullah* through the characters recruited by Mawar, reflecting the Muslim female character *par excellence* in delivering their message of the Divine to the reader. In addition, the "I" character also fulfils the characteristics of Muslim womanhood, upholding the *Mahabbah* principle by projecting her love to all things loved by Allah SWT. In this regard, the "I" character in *Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta* was in admiration of the personality of the Rasulullah PBUH, and raised him as the *qudwah hasanah* (best example). The following extract states;

Once I feel the shade of Prophet Muhammad's heart in *Isra'* tracking to *Al-Aqsa* with the *Buraq*, a mount from the heaven at the speed of light... I also want to cleanse my



heart, Buraq. I also turned out to be hurt. I also want to be led to the path of healing.

[Begitu saya rasakan teduhnya hati Rasulullah dalam Isra'q menjejaki Al-Aqsa bersama-sama Si Buraq, kenderaan dari syurga dalam kelajuan cahaya...Saya juga mahu membersihkan hati, Buraq. Saya juga ternyata sedang terluka. Saya juga mahu dituntun ke jalan penyembuhan.]

*Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta (2020)*

Based on the above extract, the love of the "I" character towards the nobility of the heart of Rasulullah PBUH also drove her to become a better person. This drive is identified in the phrase, "I too would like to clean my heart" following the example set by Rasulullah PBUH in the Isra' and Mi'raj Night Journeys. Another element that guides man's relations with his Creator is also shown in the short story *Mencari Ibrahim*. The female voice, described by Mawar as "I", is a woman that works to know her responsibility as servant in her journey to seek her friend, Ibrahim. This is mentioned in the following extract;

Entering the museum's gallery room, I was greeted by *al Hasyr's* chant of the names of God. O, Ibrahim must be here. Isn't he a lover of 99 names? It took me all the way to the corner that found me with softness. True, my soul is supple. I could feel like Ibrahim with manners and patience came to me to return to the path of obedience. He doesn't take sides in anything that's at odds. I thumbed through the number of *mashaf* pages, and each of them I was invited to keep looking. *Ya Muhaimin*, then I can feel he wants me to preserve my self-respect while looking for him.

[Memasuki ruang galeri muzium, saya disambut lantunan *al Hasyr* tentang nama-nama Tuhan. O, Ibrahim pasti ada di sini. Bukankah dia pencinta 99 nama. Ia membawa saya jauh ke penjuru yang menemukan saya dengan kelunakan. Benar, jiwa saya dilentur. Saya dapat rasakan seperti Ibrahim dengan santun dan sabar mendatangi saya untuk kembali ke jalan taat. Dia tidak memihak pada apa-apa yang berselisih. Saya menyelak banyaknya halaman *mashaf*, dan setiap itu saya diajak untuk terus mencari. *Ya Muhaimin*, kemudian saya dapat merasakan dia mahu saya memelihara kehormatan diri saat mencarinya.]

*Ibrahim (2020)*

The above extract displays the *Mahabbah* element which Mawar displays through the love of the 99 Names of Allah SWT. Through the "I" character's love of the Names of Allah and Ibrahim's noble personality, her soul is guided to becoming a Muslimah that maintains her honour. This manifestation of love is also mentioned by Rumi (2019), who stresses that those under the tutelage of a lover of Allah SWT will also have a pure and clean heart. Allah SWT

also sends His prophets and *wali* (saints) as exemplars so man's soul can be free of imperfections.

In *Fihi Ma Fihi* (2019, discourse 47), Rumi explains that Allah SWT loves gratitude, obedience, a righteous servant, and dislikes ugliness. As a clear example of this love, the character of Rasulullah PBUH is cited as the best example. A Messenger of God (*Rasul*) only called for his followers to do what is loved by God and eschews that which He hates. In addition, a Messenger of God was undeniably faithful in doing acts beloved by Allah SWT. Ramli (2010) explained that mankind at this stage is one that reflects the character of Rasulullah PBUH: obeying His commands, call to do good, avoid evil, and struggle in His way This is commanded in the Qur'an through Surah *At-Taubah* verse 24;

Say (O Muhammad): "If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your relatives, wealth which you have obtained, commerce wherein your fear decline, and dwellings with which you are pleased are more beloved to you than Allah and His Messenger and jihad in his cause, then wait until Allah executes His command. And Allah does not guide the defiantly disobedient people."

(Translation of Surah *At-Taubah*: verse 24)

### **Love of Beauty (*Hakikat*)**

One love that describes the love of all things beloved by Allah SWT is the love of beauty (*hakikat*). According to Al-Ghazali (2007), the love of beauty refers to one's love of another's nature. This refers to the three beautiful natures of those on the straight and narrow (*shiddiq*): first, their knowledge of God (Allah), the Angels (*malaikat*), the Qur'an, the Messengers (*Rasul*), and the Law (*syariat*). Second, their ability to improve themselves and others with wisdom and sagacity. Third, the purity of their selves from base natures and desires that lead them to evil. This love of beauty also dominates the narratives of the female characters in Mawar's four short stories. The first beauty is the desire to know Allah SWT, the Angels, the Qur'an, the Messengers, and the Law. This is proclaimed by the "I" character in *Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta*;

Isn't the angel also a good friend? He has every submissive soul. He does not want to disobey. Buraq, I always wanted to be close to him. In the line of Ghafir, the angel prays forgiveness for human beings who return to the path of repentance. So I am also happy and grateful for the Qur'an. That's among the aisles for me to cross to meet him.

[Bukankah sang malaikat itu juga sahabat yang baik. Dia punya setiap jiwa ketundukan. Dia tidak mahu ingkar. Buraq, saya selalu mahu dekat dengannya. Dalam baris Ghafir, malaikat itu mendoakan keampunan untuk manusia yang kembali mengikuti jalan pertaubatan. Maka saya juga senang dan bersyukur dengan al-Quran. Itulah antara lorong untuk saya menuju lintas bertemu dia.]

*Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta* (2020)

The second nature in love of beauty is their ability to improve themselves and others with wisdom and sagacity. This nature is also identified in the description of female characters in *Sulapan Tujuh Pencinta* through the "I" character;

So throughout this quiet season, I learned the meaning of prayer. In a season of catastrophe, what else do you want other than protection and hope that it will all end soon. Catastrophes are frequently accepted as disasters and should be avoided. But is that true?

[Maka sepanjang musim sunyi ini, saya belajar erti berdoa. Dalam musim petaka, apa yang Saudara mahukan selain daripada perlindungan dan mengharapkan agar semuanya segera berakhir. Petaka tidak jarang diterima sebagai bencana dan harus di jauhi. Tapi benarkah begitu, Saudara?]

*Sulapan Tujuh Pencinta (2020)*

The extract above clearly shows that Mawar elevates the importance of the search for knowledge in enriching the "I" character by underlining the wisdom and sagacity of her narrative. In the four short stories, knowledge and good deeds are two components Mawar use to guide her readers along her experience of *da'wah*. The role of the knowledgeable female characters and lovers of knowledge is strongly dominant, and this is one way to qualify the "I" character to broadcast her message of Divine Love. This element is shown in the following extract;

"You see two divisions of hands as he spins. His right hand is pointing towards the sky, while his left hand is pointing towards the earth. The mission is a resemblance of being grateful to be given back of every gift of Allah to all beings through love. So, we must also learn to be like the earth in terms of moderation. Never be bumptious with anything in hand. Instead, continue with humility. Let's abandon pride. We put on humble clothes. We turn towards Him. We are turning towards love!"

["Kaulihat dua belahan tangan saat dia berputar. Tangan kanannya mengarah ke langit, sementara tangan kirinya menuju bumi. Misi itu ialah tamsilan bahawa setiap kurniaan Allah harus disyukuri untuk diberikan semula kepada sekalian makhluk melalui cinta. Maka, kita juga harus belajar menjadi seperti bumi dalam perihal kesederhanaan. Tidak pernah pongah dengan apa-apa yang ada di tangan. Sebaliknya meneruskan kehidupan dengan kerendahan hati. Ayuh kita tinggalkan kebanggaan. Kita kenakan baju kerendahan hati. Kita berputar menuju Dia. Kita berputar menuju cinta!"]

*Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta (2020)*

The above extract shows Mawar's "I" character as one wise to the deeper meaning of the *Sama* dance, inspired by Rumi as surrender and unity of love. This also elevates Mawar's female characters as the ideal woman within the context of improving the self and others through wisdom and sagacity. Asiah (1993) explained that the strength and weakness of a woman's *iman* (faith) is based on the quality of her appreciation of Islam. In this regard, Zarina and Borhan (2006) mentioned that it is incumbent upon the Muslim woman, as a Muslim and believing individual, to prepare herself with knowledge of Islamic creed and faith, so her belief is firm and deeply embedded in her soul, and manifested through her daily acts of worship, behaviour, interaction, and so on.

Next, according to Al-Ghazali (2007) the characteristics of a man that loves beauty is their purity of imperfection and desires that lead to evil. This characteristic is also identified in the inserted narratives of female characters, who Mawar marks as "I" across her four short stories. In *Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta*, the "I" character is depicted as a female character with great expectations heading towards Divine Love by referring to Rumi's tales. The subject of Rumi in the "I" character's narrative is very significant in transmitting this *Mahabbah* element, as shown in the following extract;

True, the evil within and the evil I face. Everything is united in a circular of love, which thins the circular of lies, *sum'ah* and pretense.

"Come on, later after the snowfall, be the sun in terms of love." I know that is the Buraq's persuasion. I want to follow the sun! I want to warm up unconditionally. I want to be befriended like Rumi and Shams al Tabriz. Befriended Rumi with Shalahudin Zarkub. Befriended Rumi with Hasamuddin who brought *Mathnawi* with a collection of love songs. God, I'm like entering many paths in the sky.

[Benar, kejahatan dalam diri dan kejahatan yang saya depuni. Semuanya sudah bersatu dalam bundaran cinta, yang menipis lingkaran dusta, *sum'ah* dan pura-pura.

"Ayuh, nanti usai luruh salji, jadilah matahari dalam perihal berkasih sayang."

Saya tahu itu bujukan Buraq. Saya mahu ikut jadi matahari! Saya mahu menghangat tanpa syarat. Saya mahu bersahabat seperti Rumi dan Shams al Tabriz. Bersahabat Rumi dengan Shalahudin Zarkub. Bersahabat Rumi dengan Hasamuddin yang membawa *Mathnawi* dengan himpunan lagu cinta. Tuhan, saya seperti memasuki banyak jalan di langit.]

*Seribu Pohon Sukma dan Satu Jalan Menuju Cinta (2020)*

The above extract displays the “I” character’s authority in representing the writer in projecting her female characters in line with the command to love beauty and be pure of base natures and desires. This is described by Mawar in her phrase ‘*kejahatan dalam diri dan kejahatan yang saya depati*’ (the evil within and the evil without). According to Rumi, each process in life is based in love. As stated, man inwardly loves Allah SWT, longs for Him and worships Him (Rumi, 2019). All of mankind’s hopes are geared towards Him and acknowledges Him as All-Powerful. This is also stated in the Qur’an in Surah Ali Imran verse 31;

“Say (O Muhammad), “If you sincerely love Allah then follow me that Allah may love you, and forgive your faults. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.”

(Translation of Surah *Ali-Imran*: verse 31)

The expression of love for Rumi is the expression of the phrases *Bismillah* and *al-Fatihah*, representing the creation of the worlds and the seven planes of existence of all His creations. To Rumi, the first thing created by Allah SWT is love (*Bismillah*). Therefore, the main foundation of life is love that brings creation into reality. In this context, Atmonadi (2018) mentioned that Rumi sees *Mahabbah* as an abundance of universal grace, as all that exists in the heavens and the earth are dependent on *Ar-Rahman* dan *Ar-Rahim*. Therefore, the manifestation of *Mahabbah* is identified as the basis of *da’wah* as presented by Mawar to understand the meaning of the Qur’an, and then to the representation of Rumi’s tales and poems. Perceiving the discussed *Mahabatullah* concept can clearly be organised into three stages: love of self (*Habl min Allah*), love of wisdom (*Tarikat*), and love of beauty (*Hakikat*).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers findings that provide new markings in the role of female students within an Islamic framework, thus unravelling the ongoing polemical strands in the study of female characters in Malay Literature. The basis of study framework that incorporates Jalaluddin Rumi’s *Mahabbah* proves that female characters in works of women writers have the capability to discuss Islamic spirituality. This ability is measured through the female characters paraded by Mawar Safei in her four latest short stories in 2020 and 2021. Through understanding the *Mahabbah* by focusing on *Mahabatullah* (Love of Allah), the women characters in Mawar Safei’s works are in consort with *Mahabbah* by outlining the principles of Divine Love with the three stages of love: love of the self (*Habl min Allah*), love of wisdom (*Tarikat*), and love of beauty (*Hakikat*). Such findings are seen as significant as Mawar Safei’s creative journey is consistent with her own spiritual journey to know the Truth (*Hakiki*). This also provides justice to the aspirations of female characters by a woman writer herself. From analysing this study, Mawar’s works is not only based on Islamic spirituality, but also opens up various questions to other more serious and deeper aspects. Other commentators and critics also recommend that Mawar Safie’s work be given the proper treatment to understand the meanings hidden deep. The discussion based on the concept used also highlights the credibility of women authors in their efforts to develop the community and youth, especially women in building personality and spirituality. Furthermore, the findings of this study are also targeted to be a source of knowledge about the superiority of women from an Islamic perspective in leading their role in the formation of *ummah*.



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