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Islamic Values: The Old and the Young Relationship in the Popular Malay Novels

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Abstract

This study focuses on identifying the Islamic values reflected in the relationships between the old and the young generation in Liza Nur's popular novel. Using textual analysis, this study has discovered that the relationships between the old and the young were fostered based on Islamic values where all actions by the main protagonists towards the elderlies in the stories were purely done out of their devotion to Allah s.w.t. Such great values found in the novels can impact readers positively and make popular novels worthy as educational reading materials.

Keywords: Islamic Values, Islamic Perspective, The Old and the Young Relationship, Popular Malay Novels, Liza Nur.

Introduction

Popular novel has been well-received among the readers especially the adolescents due to external factors which include publisher, promotion, author, and novel packages as well as internal factors for example their themes that are mainly romance involving family conflicts (Safei et. al., 2008). The author added that characters interestingly represented through their physical attributes, high educational background, and urban lifestyle has also made them popular. These novels also adopt the easy-to-follow plot that uses colloquial language in between Malay and English, suitable to the adolescents' life slogan of simple and pleasure. Holman and Harmon define popular novels as those favored most by the readers while Kamariah in her earlier studies discussed how popular novel preference seems to rely on commercial profit alone with their focus mainly on romance (Shaffine, 2017). Azman Husin believed that the message they brought to audiences are rather shallow and need not much thinking as it is mostly direct and simple (Shaffine, 2017). This led to the question of whether all popular novels are truly simple that they do not contain valuable knowledge that could shape better and more critical young minds. Even if so, their existence have been well received especially among the youths.

What one experiences in one's life including reading is an access to knowledge, and it influences one's belief, thoughts, and behaviours. As a matter of fact, it is a form of education. Popular novels have been studied from various angles including female empowerment (Che Baharudin & Hamzah, 2022) and their inherent knowledge values (Shaffine, 2017). However,

Kamaruddin (2015) strongly urges that all research on Malay novels should be done from Islamic perspective in the effort of reinforcing the Islamic values today especially in the context where both the writer and the readers are mostly Muslims. The author added that educational and Islamic values are highly related, and both should be the essence of writing so that they can be internalized and learnt by the community. Several interesting studies where popular Malay novels are now weighed from the Islamic perspectives have been published. Among them are those which focus on their Muslim characters and plot development (Ali & Abdullah, 2018; Arifin et. al., 2019). Ali and Abdullah (2018) found that the female Muslim character in their selected novel hold on tightly to the Oneness of Allah s.w.t, reflected in her actions and words while Arifin et. al (2019) believed that their choice of novel has highlighted the theme that is in line with those values in the Quran.

Today, we heard a lot of issues in the relationship between the older and the younger generation including the lack of respect among the younger generation towards the elderly. Even parents are abandoned and mistreated while in other cases the younger ones are abused and abandoned. The study which looks at this important aspect in Malay popular novels is rather scarce. It is thus crucial for the generation to be shown examples that are right according to the values of the faith. This study therefore aims to identify the old and the young relationships portrayed in Liza Nur popular novels through the characters as well as the plot of the story from the Islamic perspective.

Literature Review

Ethics, Moral Values, and Islamic Values

Before we proceed further, it is extremely vital to discuss what it means by Islamic values and to see how this is similar or different to the idea of ethics and moral values. In the Cambridge online dictionary (2022), ethics is defined as “a system of accepted beliefs that control behaviour, especially such a system based on morals” while moral is defined as “behaving in ways considered by most people to be correct and honest”. Ethics and moral values are interrelated that they are sometimes used interchangeably to mean a rule of behaviour that are based on what is morally right set by the society or community. So, if an action is ethical means, it is morally accepted by the society as good or right.

Unlike the understanding of moral values projected by the Western world, Islamic values is not based on societal judgements nor intellectual ideologies of what is considered as morally right and acceptable. Islam is the religion of submission, and all Muslims are the slave of Allah s.w.t and submit to Him totally (Haron et al., 2020). The authors added that Yusof al-Qardhawi, a famous Muslim scholar stated that a Muslim must behave in accordance with the Quran and Hadith as both divine sources have clearly distinguished between what is right and wrong. Thus, Islamic values are the spiritual behaviours that are in line with Allah’s commandments in Quran and Hadith.

Filial Piety and Islamic Perspective on The Young and The Old Relationships

The young and the old relationships can be seen from the distance of the relationships, either they exist in the family mainly based on blood-ties for example parent-child, aunt/uncle-niece/nephew, and grandparent-grandchild relationships or outside of the family, for example between the old and the young who are members of the society, colleagues, or strangers.

In many non-Muslim societies, the parent-child relationship is based on the concepts of filial piety and filial obligations which have been debated and argued upon. Different theories and models were developed (Stuifbergen & Delden, 2010) to explain the relationship yet, remain inconclusive. As mentioned earlier, Islam is the total surrender to Allah s.w.t, an obedience towards His commandment through Quran and Hadith. Thus, the ways the young and the old should behave are encapsulated in both Divine sources.

In terms of the relationship between the parents and the child, Quran clearly stated that raising and loving one's child and caring for one's parents are the obligations of a Muslim in hope to attain the blessing of Allah s.w.t. In Quran, there are so many verses on the children devotion towards their parents. In surah Al-Nisa verse 36, Allah s.w.t says, "Worship Allah and join none with Him in worship and do good to parents" and in surah Al-Israa, verse 23, "Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him and that you be kind to parents. Whether one or both attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of contempt, nor repel them, but address them in terms of honor" (Quran Reading, 2019).

Likewise, the children are the responsibilities of the parents, and they must be taken care of and molded to become a true Muslim. Allah s.w.t says, in Surah Al-Israa, verse 31, "And do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We provide for them and for you. Indeed, their killing is ever a great sin" and in Surah at-Tahrim, verse 6, "O you who believe! Ward off yourselves and your families against a Fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stones, over which are (appointed) angels stern (and) severe, who disobey not, (from executing) the Commands they receive from God but do that which they are commanded" (Stacey, 2017).

Asadollahi (2021) discusses other proofs regarding the constant respects and care that should be shown towards the elderly. The author believes that humility and reticence are the ways to cherish and respect the older adults when we are in their presence. This is reflected in the hadith recorded on (Islamonline, 2022). In a hadith, Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: "The young should greet the old, the passer-by should greet the one who is sitting, and the small group of people should greet the larger one". Here, the younger generation should be respecting the older ones. In another hadith by Ibnu Tirmidhi, Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "If a young man honors an elderly on account of his age, Allah appoints someone to honor him in his old age". Another famous hadith is the one recorded by at-Tirmidhi and Imam Ahmad where the Prophet s.a.w disavows those who are unkind to the elderly and the children when he says, "He is not one of us who does not show mercy to our young ones and esteem to our elderly".

Methodology

This study is a qualitative study using textual analysis. The two popular novels selected for this study are written by Liza Nur, who has published more than 20 novels throughout her career as a writer. She is an active writer with at least one new novel published annually under Karangraf. The two novels, *Bukan Salahku* (Nur, 2010) and *Bukan Gadis Biasa* (Nur, 2019) are selected in this study because they project clear relationships between the two generations, the young and the old. Despite the theme of romance that is a must-have in popular novels, the writer has managed to address current issues in her writing especially

those related to respect and care towards the elderly. The characters' behaviours, thoughts, words, and actions that influence the stories' plots which are related to the relationships between the older and the younger generation were analysed from the Islamic perspective and related Islamic values were then highlighted and discussed.

Findings and Discussion

Bukan Salahku (Not My Fault) is the story of a girl called Asyiqeen. She has had a complicated relationship with her grandmother. Ashiqeen has learnt to grow at a very young age, making her a wise and independent girl. After given birth to her little sister, Balqis, her mother fell sick and passed away. Both Ashiqeen and her sister were raised by the grandmother who, because of her grudge against her own daughter treated both grandchildren extremely badly. Asyiqeen was forced to do all the house chores including washing, drying, and folding the clothes and cleaning the dishes. The grandmother who is called Mak Tok sees them both as burden. Mak Tok has been very calculative. She browsed through her bank account book at that moment they were waiting for her daughter to deliver. She shows no kindness or care towards them at all. Mak Tok tried to give Ashiqeen's sister, Balqis away to her friend who refuse to take the baby after knowing her disability. She came back home in despair because she must raise them herself, Ashiqeen and Balqis, a disabled child with special needs.

There was once when Mak Tok instructed Ashiqeen to feed Balqis a banana as she has no money for her milk. Ashiqeen decided to secretly bring her sister to the grocery store to buy milk with the little money she saved from working. Uncle David who owns the grocery store gave her the milk powder for free out of pity. When she arrived home, Mak Tok beats her with the broom, accusing her of begging from others and tarnishing her good name. Mak Tok has always been abusive, she yells, beats, and curses her terribly even when Ashiqeen did not do anything wrong. Ashiqeen does not hate Mak Tok, but she cannot understand why Mak Tok hates them. There was one occasion however that deeply hurt Asyiqeen and forces her to distant herself from Mak Tok. Asyiqeen came back home with the chocolate she promised her sister. She saw her sister's weak body lying and her feet chained. She fell on her knees beside her. Her sister's feces dried all over the pants. Some were on her face as she sleeps with her dried tears. Her sister then becomes sick and passed away.

Ashiqeen was later adopted by her own teacher, raised, and supported. She finally managed to study and secure a job abroad. She is constantly reminded by her best friends, Aazad and Zahra of how her grandmother has grown old and probably needs her care. After she came back to Malaysia, she was forced to go back to her hometown. One day, Asyiqeen saw a woman, her Mak Tok running at the night market barefoot. When Asyiqeen saw Mak Tok, she is filled with tears. She tried to hold her, but she refused. Mak Tok denied her and continue walking. She holds her legs forcing her to stop. Mak Tok turned and yelled at her. She admitted having cursed, tied, and left Asyiqeen to the ants, dipped her in the pond, and questioned Ashiqeen's stupidity to come back and find her. There is an obvious disappointment in herself of what she has done to her granddaughter, but her ego refrains her from admitting that she needs her. Asyiqeen brought Mak Tok back to their old house. She cleaned her and tidied the house. Mak Tok was washed and cared for every day. Even her eyes were treated due to infection. Asyiqeen tried to feed her, but she refused and pushed the bowl. The food spilled on the floor and the bowl cracked. Asyiqeen stays patient and continue caring for her.

Ashiqeen performs her duty to her grandmother even after she was ill-treated by her. Her care was not to please her grandmother, but she performs her duty as that is what is asked by Allah s.w.t to the believers, as stated in the Quran. Her advice to Adib, her foster son proves her faith. She mentioned that when one sacrifices something, one should not hope for a return. The extremely worthy return a believer should sought after is the blessing from God. It is okay for her grandmother to hate her, but she will continue to love her grandmother and her adopted son until she dies. The character displays the Islamic values as we should care for one's elder family members not because they are good to us, but because it is the commandment of Allah s.w.t as mentioned in the Quran and Hadith. The respect and courtesy she showed to her is out of her devotion to Allah s.w.t. Asyiqeen also believe that without faith, it easy to get lost. Ashiqeen also left her career abroad and came back to take care of her best friend's son. Her best friend and her husband died in a car accident and left her son to Asyiqeen.

The second novel, *Bukan Gadis Biasa* (Not an Ordinary Girl) is about a boyish girl who had to go through a harsh life when she was young. While Johana was holding her daughter, walking while thinking of her life, she was shocked by an old woman who suddenly hugged her from behind, calling her Edora. She tried hard to let go of the woman's hands, but the woman refused. She wanted to yell at her but ended up not doing so because she is indeed an old woman. She pitied the old lady and brought her home with her. She empathized the woman. The old lady was so happy. Johana poured her some water, bathed her, shampooed, and combed her tangled hair and helped her change into a pair of batik sarong and baju Kedah. These clothes belong to Johana's late grandmother. She takes care of her for weeks, ignoring her friend's advice to report the old lady to the police station. She felt that a report is not necessary since no one is looking for her. One day, the old lady tripped in the house while walking, she put some oil on the lady's injured foot and massage it. She also helped wash her every time she went to the toilet. It was never a hassle for Johana as she had gone through so much in her life including caring for her bedridden grandmother before she passed away.

The old woman is Raja Aminah, known as Opah Aminah, a wealthy lady whose family is a chaos. Due to her mistake torturing a loyal daughter in law and her true grandson, Rayyan, she became depressed and senile. She can no longer care for herself. She is sought after by her sons and grandsons after leaving home and did not return. After they find her and brings her back to her home, she still longs for Edora, forcing Johana to keep seeing and caring for her every day till the day Opah Aminah died. Johana has high respects for the elderly. Although Opah Aminah is a stranger whom she should have ignored, she did not. She cares for her just like her own mother. She has also sacrificed her time, energy, and sleep just to make her comfortable.

Bruno Din, a man who has taken care of Johana and Aisha is also a very kind man. His words may be harsh due to his poor background, but he always respects and cares for others. For example, he helps Ah Boon, an old beggar who lives on the street near his shop by washing his body and giving him food to eat. The author likens his relationship with the old beggar to a son caring for his father. This is another great reflection of how respects should be given to the elderly regardless of who they are because Allah s.w.t commands all the believers to do good to the older people. Caring for them reflects our devotion to God.

Johana was born in a broken family. Her father is a criminal, has rarely been home. Her mother is a drug addict and prostitute. She sells her daughters, Johana and her sister to men to gain money to satisfy her addiction. Given such horrific experiences, it is almost impossible to forgive both of her parents. The author made Johana a strong, wise, and sensible character. She sends her mother to the drug addiction treatment center, and she visits her father regularly in jail. Her mother left her a letter before she passed away due to HIV. Her mother admitted all her faults and ask for Johana's forgiveness. Johana forgives them both. Johana realizes that grudge will only hurt the person bearing it while forgiveness gives both parties a chance to start a new life. Johana mentioned in the story, fate brings us to a place we may not expect to be or meet people we do not expect to encounter but as we move and learn to understand, we will be able see the true blessing behind whatever we fated to experience. Allah s.w.t decides everything as He is the Most Powerful and the Most Knowledgeable. We should always surrender our fate to Him and have faith in the choices made for us as His servants.

Conclusion

The relationships between the young and the old generations as reflected in Liza Nur's popular novels are reflective of Islamic values as these are the characters, behaviours and thoughts that should be understood and internalized by Muslim readers especially those young ones. Exposure to such stories will help youngsters become more conscious of what it means to understand, respect and care for others especially the elderly whether they are family members or strangers. When we do good to them, it is not because they do good to us that we are returning the favor. We act good because that what Allah s.w.t has commanded His servants to do. We seek not the blessing from human beings, but from God. It is apparent that not all popular novels are merely popular, they are also quality thoughts and values that make them worth reading.

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