

# CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: REPRESENTATION OF RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL MORALITY IN THE NOVEL DALAM MIHROB CINTA BY HABIBURRAHMAN EL SHIRAZY

*Analisis Wacana Kritis: Representasi Ideologi Religius dan Moralitas Sosial Novel Dalam Mihrob Cinta Karya Habiburrahman El Shirazy*

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## Abstract

*This study aimed to reveal the representation of religious ideology and social morality in the novel Dalam Mihrob Cintaby Habiburrahman El Shirazy using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach of the Norman Fairclough model. This study used a descriptive qualitative method with a three-dimensional analysis framework: textual (linguistic), discourse practice (interpretation), and social practice (explanation). The findings revealed that the novel constructed a religious value hegemony through symbols, language patterns, and narrative structures emphasizing repentance, honesty, responsibility, and the roles of women and communities in character formation. Additionally, the Islamic boarding school setting and the author's identity as a da'i further reinforced the religious ideology embedded in the text. The study also found that the novel offered a critique of social inequality framed through religious morality, positioning literature as an effective medium for disseminating conservative values in modern society. These findings carried implications for character education, religious literature curricula, and the development of discourse-based critical literacy.*

**Keywords:** critical discourse analysis, religious ideology, social morality, Novel Dalam Mihrob Cinta

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap representasi ideologi religius dan moralitas sosial Novel *Dalam Mihrob Cinta* karya Habiburrahman El Shirazy dengan menggunakan pendekatan Analisis Wacana Kritis (AWK) model Norman Fairclough. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik analisis tiga dimensi, yaitu teks (linguistik), praktik wacana (interpretasi), serta praktik sosial (eksplanasi). Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa novel secara eksplisit membangun hegemoni nilai religius melalui simbol, struktur bahasa, dan konstruksi narasi yang menekankan pada tobat, kejujuran, tanggung jawab, serta peran perempuan, dan komunitas dalam pembentukan karakter. Selain itu, latar pesantren dan identitas pengarang sebagai da'i turut memperkuat ideologi religius yang diinternalisasi dalam teks. Penelitian ini juga menemukan bahwa novel ini mengkritik ketimpangan sosial dengan bingkai keadilan melalui moralitas religius, serta menjadikan sastra sebagai medium penyebaran nilai-nilai konservatif yang efektif dalam masyarakat modern. Temuan ini berimplikasi pada pengembangan pendidikan karakter, kurikulum sastra religius, dan literasi kritis berbasis wacana.

**Kata-kata kunci:** analisis wacana kritis, ideologi religius, moralitas sosial, Novel Dalam Mihrob Cinta

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## INTRODUCTION

The rise of popular Islamic literature in Indonesia reflects the growing complexity of ideological discourse, particularly in social morality and the representation of religious values. One of the prominent works in this stream is the Novel Dalam Mihrab Cinta by Habiburrahman El Shirazy. This work not only presents a spiritual story but also shapes the reader's understanding of religious values and social norms through the use of certain languages and narratives. Islamic narratives in literature in the context of a religious and multicultural Indonesian society become an arena for the contestation of meaning and ideology. Literature is not only a form of aesthetic expression, but also an instrument of production and reproduction of meaning that contributes to the formation of social structures (Van Dijk, 2015; Fairclough, 2013). Therefore, an analysis of the forms of language used in novels such as Dalam Mihrab Cinta is important to uncover the ideology hidden behind the text.

The development of the digital da'wah flow and the Islamization of public space, Islamic literature plays an important role in shaping public opinion about morality, religious law, and social relations. Narratives such as the Novel Dalam Mihrab Cinta are often used as moral references by young Muslims (Fealy, 2020; Heryanto, 2018). However, the dominance of certain values in these texts deserves to be critically examined within the framework of the relationship between language and power. This research is based on the understanding that language is never neutral. Language always contains ideological positions and becomes a tool in the practice of domination and resistance (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In the case of the Novel Dalam Mihrab Cinta, it is significant to see how moral and religious values are constructed and reproduced through linguistic structures such as choice of diction, metaphor, sentence structure, and narrative dialogue between characters.

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model is the main approach in this study, especially the three-dimensional model: text (linguistic), discourse practice (production and consumption of text), and social practice (ideological and institutional context). This approach allows researchers to reveal the relationship between language and power in the representation of religious ideology (Fairclough, 2015). Meanwhile, the historical-critical approach of Ruth Wodak and Meyer is used to enrich the context by tracing the social and political origins of religious values and morality promoted in the text. This approach is relevant to tracing the dominant ideology reproduced in the context of post-reformation socio-political change (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In this context, four important novelties are the contribution of this study. First, this study examines religious discourse not only as a narrative construction but as a strategy for representing moral power in society (Rahimi & Sahragard, 2018; Mertens & Fairclough, 2015). Second, the micro-linguistic approach is directly linked to the dynamics of contemporary Indonesian socio-religious studies (Syihabuddin, 2020). Third, this study reveals how popular texts are used as a means of internalizing values, not just spiritual entertainment (Fitria, 2021). Fourth, this study combines Fairclough's AWK model with the historical context of Wodak-Meyer's religious ideology, something that has not been widely done in studies of Indonesian popular literature.

Several studies have been conducted on Shirazy's novels. However, the majority are still thematic and do not emphasize linguistic and ideological aspects critically. A study by Mahsun (2018), for example, emphasizes the educational value of his novels. Meanwhile, studies that use a critical approach to religious narratives are still rarely carried out in depth using the AWK method. This shows a research gap that needs to be bridged. The study of Islamic discourse in popular media and literature is significant for understanding the direction of the transformation of society's ideology. Especially when society experiences a value transition from modernity to digital conservatism (Nisa, 2021). The novel In the Mihrab of Love is a literary representation of the spirit of Islamic conservatism that needs to be interpreted with an approach that is not only descriptive, but also analytical and critical.

The novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* also has a major influence in the context of education and social life that shapes the attitudes and moral views of its readers, especially the younger generation. The selection of the Novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* as an object of study is not only because of its popularity, but also because of its narrative content, which explicitly raises issues of social morality, forgiveness, repentance, and religious values that are full of ideological content. Therefore, it is important to understand how these values are constructed through language and how they impact the social consciousness of readers (Wardani, 2019). The study of this work has high relevance in the context of critical studies of the Indonesian language and literature.

This research also contributes to the development of critical literacy in society. Understanding the text is not only about understanding the content, but also understanding how the text shapes and is shaped by power, ideology, and prevailing social values (Tannen, Hamilton & Schiffrin, 2018; Machin & Mayr, 2015). The use of a critical discourse analysis approach in this study is expected to be able to show in detail certain linguistic signs (diction, sentence structure, metaphor) used to represent and disseminate moral and religious ideology in the novel. The impact of moral narratives in popular novels like this not only influences the way individuals think but can also influence social decisions, including in education, family relations, and gender roles. Therefore, critical analysis of narrative structures and language is an academic and social need (Lazar, 2019).

This study aims to describe linguistic signs and reveal religious ideology & social morality contained in the novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy through the Fairclough model Critical Discourse Analysis approach supported by Wodak & Meyer's historical aspects. Its usefulness not only adds to the treasury of linguistic and literary science but also provides practical insights in the fields of critical literacy education, ideology studies, and socio-religious communication in Indonesia. In addition, this study contributes a new understanding of popular literary works functioning as a tool for representing and producing religious ideology and social morality in the context of contemporary Indonesian culture.

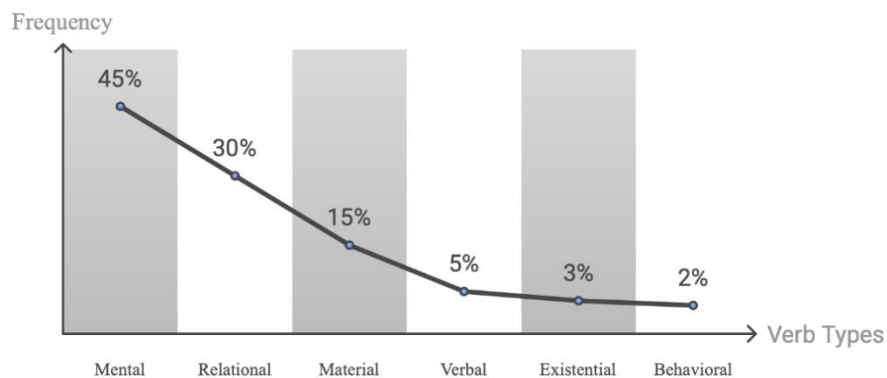
## METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method of Norman Fairclough's model, which consists of three dimensions: text (linguistic), discourse practice (production and consumption of text), and social practice (ideological and institutional context). This approach allows for analysis of the relationship between language, power, and ideology in literary texts (Fairclough, 2015; Hart, 2015). For linguistic analysis, the Systemic Functional Linguistics (LSF) theory developed by Halliday is used, especially the transitivity aspect, to identify processes, participants, and circumstances in clauses that represent ideological meaning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; O'Halloran et al., 2019). The object of this study is the novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy, which was chosen because it represents popular religious discourse practices in the context of Indonesian Muslim society. The main data are in the form of discourse units in the text that contain ideological values, both in narrative, dialogue, and character descriptions. Data were collected through intensive reading, identification of text segments containing ideological meaning, and classification of linguistic structures based on transitivity theory. Data analysis was conducted in three stages according to Fairclough's model: (1) linguistic description, namely the analysis of the internal structure of the text using the transitivity model, (2) interpretation, namely interpreting the text as a discourse practice through analysis of discourse production and consumption, and (3) explanation, namely linking the results of the interpretation to broader social practices. At this stage, the researcher traces how the text represents ideology and morality within a particular socio-historical framework, taking into account the religious context in contemporary Indonesian society.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Linguistic Description of Representation of Religious Ideology and Social Morality in the Novel Dalam Mihrob Cinta by Habiburrahman El Shirazy

The linguistic structure of the Novel Dalam Mihrob Cinta constructs a representation of religious ideology and social morality through the choice of process verbs, participants, and circumstances. The author uses certain sentence structures repeatedly to form the image of the main character as a religious, repentant, and highly moral figure, while placing other characters in positions that reflect the social construction of religion in society. This linguistic process becomes an explicit and implicit means to convey Islamic values such as repentance, charity, honesty, and the struggle to face social slander. The analysis of Halliday's transitivity model reveals that the linguistic structure of the Novel Dalam Mihrob Cinta systematically represents religious ideology and social morality. The use of various types of process verbs, namely mental, relational, material, verbal, existential, and behavioral, shows the thoughts, identities, actions, communication, existential, and behavior of the characters in forming a narrative that is full of religious and moral values. This is as shown in Figure 1, namely, the distribution of verb types below.



**Figure 1.**  
Distribution of Types of Process Verbs

Based on Figure 1, it shows that the transitivity analysis of the Novel Dalam Mihrob Cinta by Habiburrahman El Shirazy is more dominant in the use of process verbs, especially mental processes with a frequency of 45% and relational with a frequency of 30%. Both play a central role in representing religious ideology and social morality. This reflects the emphasis on the internal experiences of the characters and the relationship between their identities and values. Mental process verbs such as "reflect", "regret", and "pray" reflect the inner conflict and spiritual journey of the main character, Syamsul. Meanwhile, relational process verbs such as "adalah", "menjadi", and "merupakan" are used to describe the identity and transformation of characters in the context of Islamic values. The use of mental process verbs shows the psychological depth of the characters in the novel. For example, when Syamsul reflects on his mistakes and regrets his actions. This condition reflects a deep introspection process. This process is in line with the concept of repentance in Islam, where individuals are expected to reflect on their mistakes and try to improve themselves.

Relational process verbs are used to show changes in the identity and social status of the characters. For example, statements such as "Syamsul is a santri" or "Syamsul becomes more devout" describe the transformation of the main character from someone who is lost to a religious individual. Material process verbs, although not dominant, also play an important role in describing the real actions of the characters in practicing Islamic teachings. Actions such as "preaching", "helping", and "worshiping" show the implementation of religious values in everyday life. Verbal process verbs are used to describe communication between characters, especially in the context of conveying Islamic teachings. Dialogues between characters often contain advice, invitations to do good, and discussions about moral values. This is in line with the findings of Maulida & Yesicha

(2019), who highlighted the representation of preaching through verbal communication between characters in the novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta 2* and Sampoerno (2022) in the Novel *Api Tauhid* by the same author, Habiburrahman El Shirazy.

Existential process verbs such as "there is" and "there is" are used to emphasize the existence of religious values in the lives of the characters. For example, statements such as "there is hope for change" or "there is a path to goodness" indicate a belief in the possibility of self-improvement. This reflects the view that every individual has the potential to change for the better, in accordance with Islamic teachings. Behavioral process verbs such as "crying" and "smiling" are used to describe the character's emotional response to certain events. For example, Syamsul's crying when realizing his mistake shows deep regret, while his smile after helping others reflects happiness for doing good. These emotional expressions reinforce the moral message that the author wants to convey. The use of various types of process verbs shows that Habiburrahman El Shirazy consciously utilizes language structures to convey religious and moral messages. The depiction of mental, relational, material, verbal, existential, and behavioral processes created by the author has succeeded in creating a narrative that is rich in Islamic values and relevant to the lives of readers.

This analysis also shows that the language structure in the novel not only functions as a means of communication but also as a means to form and reflect ideology. As stated by Ningsih (2019), ideology in the novel can be realized through sentences and paragraphs that reflect the author's worldview. The use of process verbs is one way to represent religious ideology and social morality. Thus, the analysis of the process verbs of the Novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* provides deep insight into the language structure that can be used to convey religious and moral messages. This shows that literature can be an effective medium for character education and the dissemination of Islamic values in society.

### **Interpretation of the Representation of Religious Ideology and Social Morality in the Novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy**

#### ***Findings and Relevance to the Hypothesis***

The main findings of this study support the hypothesis that the Novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* represents a strong religious ideology and frames social morality within the framework of Islamic values. This representation is seen through the narrative of the main character, Syamsul Hadi, who undergoes a process of spiritual and social transformation. According to Shaumia (2020), this novel displays the values of faith, sharia, and morals that are reflected in the behavior of its characters. Sihwati and Marlina (2020) also emphasize that the values of moral education in this novel include morals towards Allah, oneself, and others. Munir and Khakim (2025) added that this novel presents a story that is full of religious and moral education values, making it a medium for moral education. Both studies confirm the initial hypothesis that this novel is not only about romance, but also about a religious and moral journey.

The spiritual and moral transformation of the main character, Syamsul Hadi in the Novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* is represented through a number of quotes that reflect the deep internalization of religious values. Quotes such as "I will not repeat the same mistakes. I want to be a good person, a person loved by Allah" (Shirazy, 2007) show the character's existential awareness of the meaning of life and the value of repentance in Islam. This is reinforced in his statement, "Life is a choice, and I have chosen the path of repentance" (Shirazy, 2007), which reflects individual actions as a constructive process towards social morality. Furthermore, in the quote "When humans judge you from the past, Allah judges you from your efforts to return to Him" (Shirazy, 2007), the reader is presented with a narrative that reconstructs the meaning of social acceptance based on Islamic ideology as the main legitimacy.

The critical discourse study frame in Syamsul's repentance narrative not only functions to complement the storyline but also as a representation of the hegemony of religious values that are formed discursively through the language and social experiences of the characters. Fairclough

(2015) states that discourse is not a neutral representation of reality, but rather a social practice that produces and reproduces dominant ideology. Islamic ideology is represented as the center of moral and symbolic power that shapes the actions and identities of characters. This view is in line with Wodak & Meyer (2016), who emphasize that discourse in literary texts can also be a means of resistance or confirmation of certain social structures. Thus, this novel consciously negotiates the relationship between individuals, society, and God through the mechanism of persuasive and hegemonic religious language.

### ***Consistency with Previous Research***

Consistency with previous research conducted by Isminatun (2018), who found that Habiburrahman El Shirazy's works often use religion as the main ideological framework. However, differences emerge in the emphasis on aspects of social morality that are more explicit in the Novel Dalam Mihrab Cinta. Purnamasari and Wulandari (2020) show that this novel contains moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and hard work. Grinitha (2015) also identified moral values in Habiburrahman El Shirazy's novels, including piety, honesty, and responsibility. This finding extends the results of previous studies by adding social nuances to the study of religiosity. The dimension of social morality in the Novel Dalam Mihrab Cinta is considered more explicit. This is reflected in the quote, "I work not only for myself, but also to prove that people like me can be trusted" (Shirazy, 2007), which emphasizes the importance of honesty and hard work as part of Syamsul's new social identity. In another part, the main character says, "A good person is not only obedient in worship, but must also be trustworthy and not betray trust" (Shirazy, 2007), which explicitly represents social morality as a continuation of spiritual transformation. Furthermore, "We must be responsible for our mistakes, not blame fate" (Shirazy, 2007), showing the character's awareness of the value of personal responsibility combined with piety.

The representation of the values contained in the three novel quotes does not stand alone, but is bound to the ideological construction that the author deliberately builds through the narratives of his characters. As explained by Fairclough (2003), discourse in literary texts has the power to produce and shape social understanding through the reproduction of certain values. In this case, social morality, such as honesty, responsibility, and hard work, is raised as a dominant discourse that is closely connected to the values of Islamic religiosity. The relevance of this view is also strengthened by van Dijk (2006), who emphasizes that the structure of the text plays a role in conveying symbolic power and framing the social reality desired by the producer of the discourse. Thus, the narrative of the novel In the Mihrab of Love not only conveys a story, but also reproduces a religious ideological structure that reshapes the position of the subject as a moral agent in society.

### ***Transformation of Characters as Representation of Ideology***

The transformation of the character Syamsul Hadi into the center of representation of religious ideology is manifested in a strong narrative of his inner journey. Initially, he is depicted as a santri child who falls into a theft case and finally repents through a spiritual path. One quote that describes the initial phase of repentance is "I realized that what I did before was stupidity. Allah still gives me a chance to change" (Shirazy, 2007). This awareness develops in his statement, "I am not a saint, but I want to live in the way of Allah" (Shirazy, 2007), which emphasizes Syamsul's determination to undergo the spiritual process with full sincerity. This religious journey reaches its peak when he says, "My prayer tonight is that I can be better and useful to others" (Shirazy, 2007), indicating that the transformation he experienced has expanded from the personal to the social realm. According to Shaumia (2020), the values of faith in this novel are reflected in the character's belief in Allah and His Messenger. Sihwati and Marlina (2020) emphasize that the process of repentance and sincerity is part of the moral education that is presented. Munir & Khakim (2025) also note that this novel presents moral education values that can be used as a learning

medium. This transformation is not only personal, but also a symbol of the struggle for ideology in the social system.

Syamsul's transformation in the framework of critical discourse studies cannot be understood only as an individual experience, but as an ideological construction designed by the author to instill dominant values in the social structure. Fairclough (2013), explains that discourse is not neutral, but works in the social system to reproduce power through language and narrative. Syamsul is positioned as a subject who goes through a process of re-ideologization, from a "social convict" to a representation of piety and this contains a moral message produced through the mechanism of discourse. Repentance and sincerity are not just themes, but tools to frame social reality within the framework of Islamic values. Wodak (2001), adds that a narrative of this kind of transformation is a discursive strategy that aligns the narrative structure with the dominant ideological structure in society. Thus, the character of Syamsul not only reflects the individual process, but also becomes a metaphor for the moral regeneration of an ideal Muslim society.

### ***Social Morality as a Critical Community***

The social morality raised in the novel emphasizes the importance of the role of the community in guiding individuals to the right path. Shaumia (2020) notes that sharia values such as prayer and reading the Qur'an are part of the characters' social lives. Sihwati & Marlina (2020) add that morals towards others, such as helping each other and keeping promises, are part of moral education in the novel. Munir & Khakim (2025) also highlight the importance of social values in shaping individual character. This shows that morality in the novel is not abstract, but contextual and applicable. The representation of these values is evident in Syamsul's quote, "I can't live alone. My friends in this mosque make me strong and feel accepted again" (Shirazy, 2007), which shows the importance of social support in restoring moral identity. In another part, Syamsul said, "The Ustaz at this Islamic boarding school always tells me to pray in congregation and read the Qur'an after Maghrib. I feel like my life is starting to be organized" (Shirazy, 2007), showing that social practices based on religious values become a tool for integrating individuals into the community. The value of mutual assistance is emphasized when Syamsul said, "I didn't expect people who used to be strangers to me, now help me selflessly" (Shirazy, 2007), the strengthening of social morality in the novel is shown through concrete interactions, not just normative advice.

Fairclough (2015), explains that social practices in the text can be interpreted as an ideological process that creates and strengthens certain social structures through language. Religious communities are framed as hegemonic moral development spaces where social norms are formed through the practice of worship and solidarity. Van Leeuwen (2008), adds that the representation of action in the text is never neutral. Actions such as congregational prayer and helping each other will be constructed as obligatory and meaningful forms of moral practice. In other words, this novel uses religious discourse as a tool to construct an ideal social reality and instill the value of collectivity in the structure of relations between individuals. This makes the narrative of the community in the novel not only literary, but also political in defining the form of an ideal society according to Islamic ideology.

### ***Contextual Factors: Socio-Cultural and Islamic Boarding Schools***

One of the contextual factors that influence the representation of religious ideology and social morality is the Islamic boarding school background and Javanese-Islamic cultural values. Shaumia (2020), shows that the Islamic boarding school background provides a strong religious nuance in the novel. Sihwati & Marlina (2020) note that the Islamic boarding school culture shapes the understanding of the values, ethics, and social structure of the characters in the novel. Munir & Khakim (2025) also emphasize that the Islamic boarding school culture is a background that influences the behavior of the characters. This representation shows that religious ideology does not stand alone, but interacts with the living cultural background. This is illustrated in the quote

when Syamsul reflects on his life in the Islamic boarding school, "The atmosphere of this Islamic boarding school taught me simplicity, togetherness, and discipline. This is where I learned about real life" (Shirazy, 2007). In addition, he also stated, "Our Kyai not only teaches the yellow book, but also how to behave, respect the elderly, and live politely" (Shirazy, 2007), which shows the internalization of the cultural values of the typical Javanese-Islamic pesantren. In a conversation with other students, Syamsul said, "In this place, the tradition of tahlilan, salawatan, and Friday night religious studies strengthen my soul" (Shirazy, 2007), showing the role of religious tradition as a shaper of spirituality and social character.

The representation of the setting in critical discourse studies contains an ideological dimension because place and culture are not only passive settings, but also discursive devices to instill certain values. According to Fairclough (2003), the social context in discourse is not just a setting, but an active field of meaning production, namely where social norms are constructed and reproduced. The pesantren setting in this novel not only strengthens the religious atmosphere but also becomes a hegemonic field where Islamic ideology is practiced, educated, and inherited. Van Dijk (2006), emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural and institutional context in analyzing the structure of discourse, because that is where ideology works implicitly. Thus, the pesantren in *In Mihrab Cinta* is not only a fictional space, but a socio-cultural representation that voices the integration between religion and local culture as the foundation for the formation of Islamic morality.

### ***Extrinsic Elements: Influence of the Author and Public Discourse***

Extrinsic factors such as the author's background as a Middle Eastern graduate and a preacher also influence the strong ideological content in this novel. Ningsih (2019) notes that Islamic and conservative ideologies are realized through sentences and paragraphs in Habiburrahman El Shirazy's novels. Shaumia (2020) also shows that the author places religion as the basis for all moral decisions of the characters. Sihwati & Marlina (2020) add that public discourse on the moral crisis of adolescents is also an important context in the novel. Thus, religious ideology becomes a response to contemporary social challenges. This is evident in Syamsul's statement, "I was once down, and no one helped me except Allah. From there I realized, only religion can raise my status again" (Shirazy, 2007), which shows the internalization of a religious worldview. In another part, he said, "My father always said, never make a decision without praying istikharah. That's what I always do now" (Shirazy, 2007), which strengthens Islamic values in every action of the character. In fact, when criticizing the behavior of other teenagers, Syamsul stated, "Many children today forget themselves, are too free, even though what they need is spiritual guidance" (Shirazy, 2007), which explicitly shows an ideological response to the moral crisis of teenagers and becomes an important theme in contemporary Islamic social discourse.

Fictional works in critical discourse studies function as a means of forming ideological awareness through language and narratives constructed by the author. According to Fairclough (2003), discourse in literary texts not only reflects reality but also forms social reality through the selection and construction of language that is full of values. The author's background as a preacher allows the formation of a hidden da'wah narrative in the story, making the novel a tool for spreading conservative Islamic values. As also explained by Wodak (2009), the production of texts cannot be separated from the social conditions and ideological identity of the author, so that the representation of characters and moral conflicts in this novel must be understood as a product of the author's religious subjectivity. Thus, the ideological power of this novel does not only come from the narrative, but also from the socio-writing context, which is strongly attached to the author's religious identity.



### ***Gender Construction in the Frame of Religiosity***

The representation of religious ideology is also seen in the construction of gender that idealizes women as guardians of morality and spirituality in society. The role of female characters, especially Zidna Ilma or Zizi, is shown significantly in the process of transformation of the main character. Quotes such as "Zizi always advises me patiently, she says life is not just about pleasure, but about blessings" (Shirazy, 2007), emphasize the role of women as holders of moral values. In another part, Syamsul expressed, "I felt ashamed when Zizi asked me to return to the right path. She is stronger than me in maintaining honor" (Shirazy, 2007), which strengthens the image of women as agents of moral guidance. In fact, when Syamsul began to firmly repent, he said, "Without Zizi's prayers and support, maybe I wouldn't be this strong in taking the path of hijrah" (Shirazy, 2007), indicating that women in this novel are not just companions, but active actors in the project of morality and morality towards others. Sihwati and Marlina (2020) noted that morality towards others, including in gender relations, is part of moral education in the novel. Shaumia (2020) added that the sharia values applied by female characters show their role as moral agents. Munir & Khakim (2025) also highlighted the role of women in guiding the main character towards repentance. This shows the internalization of religious values in social relations and gender roles in the novel.

Gender representation in critical discourse studies like this can be understood as an ideological construction that reflects a patriarchal social structure, which is wrapped in a religious narrative. As explained by Lazar (2005), gender discourse in the text is often used to normalize power relations through the symbolization of "ideal" gender roles. Female characters are positioned as moral subjects who guide men, but remain within the framework of Sharia norms that affirm feminine piety values. This shows that religious discourse not only shapes individual identity but also regulates and controls social roles based on gender. Fairclough (2003), also states that ideology in literary texts operates by cloaking power in positive values, namely piety & honor, which strengthens the normative role of women as guardians of morality without questioning their power relations. Thus, this representation is an example of a religious ideology that operates subtly and effectively in regulating gender relations.

### ***Symbolism and Religious Narrative as Ideological Instruments***

Religious symbols such as mosques, prayer mats, and the Qur'an are important tools in strengthening religious ideology. Shaumia (2020) notes that mosques and prayer mats are symbols of a place of surrender to God. Sihwati & Marlina (2020) add that the Qur'an is depicted as a lamp in the character's life. Munir & Khakim (2025) also show that these symbols instill ideology as an inseparable part of the character's life. This representation shows that religiosity in the novel is not passive, but active and intervenes in reality. The symbol is depicted explicitly, as in the quote, "I cry on this prayer mat, asking Allah to show my life the straight path" (Shirazy, 2007), which reflects the meaning of the prayer mat not just as an object, but a spiritual space of transformation. In another part, Syamsul recounts, "Every time I open the Qur'an, I feel the verses speak directly to me, as if guiding me" (Shirazy, 2007), which strengthens the position of the Qur'an as an ideological symbol and moral instrument. Even the mosque, which is the peak space of reflection and regret for the character, is mentioned: "This mosque is a silent witness to my tears every night, a place where I improve myself" (Shirazy, 2007). The three symbols are not only descriptive elements, but also contain deep ideological messages that influence the way the main character thinks and acts.

The use of religious symbols within the framework of critical discourse studies as a discursive strategy to build ideological hegemony that is not coercive, but persuasive through the character's personal experience. Fairclough (2003) states that symbols in texts can shape social practices and create ideological influence in a subtle way, because they work through emotional associations and values internalized by the reader. The mosque, prayer mat, and the Qur'an are not only

markers of objects in the story, but also represent the structure of moral power in the narrative. These symbols also function as intertextual devices that connect fictional reality with the dominant religious discourse in society. This is in line with Van Dijk's theory (2006), which emphasizes that the symbolic meaning of discourse cannot be separated from the structure of collective knowledge and the ideological context that surrounds it. Thus, the religious symbols of the Novel Dalam Mihrab Cinta not only bring the narrative to life but also reproduce conservative Islamic values systematically and structurally.

### ***Criticism of the Social System through Religious Morality***

Criticism of an unfair social system emerges from the framework of religious morality. Shaumia (2020) notes that society sometimes believes more in stigma than in truth. Sihwati & Marlina (2020) add that God's justice is fairer than human law. Munir & Khakim (2025) also show that religious ideology in the novel is a transformative force to improve social inequality. This criticism is evident in Syamsul's statement, "People never give space for those who fall to rise. Once labeled a thief, they are forever considered despicable" (Shirazy, 2007), which shows the social pressure caused by negative labels. In another scene, the father character says, "Don't be afraid of humans, be afraid of Allah who knows the hearts of His servants" (Shirazy, 2007), reinforcing the message that Divine justice transcends the human legal system. In fact, when Syamsul decided to migrate, he said, "I will no longer prove anything to humans, only God knows that I want to be better" (Shirazy, 2007), which signifies a shift from social to spiritual legitimacy as a moral basis.

The narrative reflects a literary text becoming an arena of resistance against social injustice practices that are legitimized by dominant social norms. Fairclough (2013), states that discourse in literary texts can dismantle power structures through symbolic confrontation between dominant values and alternative values offered by characters. Syamsul represents the voice of subordinates who are oppressed by the social system, but regain their autonomy through religious ideology. This is also in line with Van Leeuwen's thinking (2008), which explains that ideology can be manifested in the form of a narrative of liberation from inequality, using language that reconstructs power relations. Therefore, the social criticism of the Novel Dalam Mihrab Cinta does not stand neutrally, but is structured within the framework of a religious discourse that provides spiritual legitimacy to fight social stigma and affirm God's justice.

### ***Implications of Findings and Contribution of the Study***

Implications of findings for critical discourse studies in literature through the representation of ideology and morals brought by the author. The novel Dalam Mihrab Cinta has theoretically enriched the understanding of popular literature as a medium for the hegemony of religious values in modern society. These results encourage the practice of utilizing literature as a medium for moral and spiritual education. These findings are relevant to the policy of character education curriculum based on religious values. This study emphasizes the role of literature as a reflection and reconstruction of ideology in social life. Evidence from the novel can be seen in the statement of the character Syamsul, "I want my life to be useful. I want to be a person who brings goodness, not sadness, not hatred" (Shirazy, 2007). When Syamsul teaches children to recite the Koran, he says, "Let my past be dark, but their future must be brighter. I want to light the light in their hearts" (Shirazy, 2007). This quote emphasizes moral transformation as part of the character's life mission, which symbolically voices the author's vision of the importance of preaching and moral education through social roles. Syamsul also stated something at the end of the novel, "Islam teaches me to benefit, not curse the past" (Shirazy, 2007), which confirms the position of religious ideology as a source of reconstruction of social and personal life.

The discourse built through the characters in this novel reflects the hegemonic efforts in disseminating Islamic values through popular narratives. According to Fairclough (2013), literary

texts have the potential to form collective consciousness because they infiltrate through emotional, symbolic, and identitative language. The novel *In Mihrab Cinta* positions religious values as a dominant discourse that is not forced, but is voluntarily absorbed by the reader through the process of identifying with the main character. This confirms van Dijk's concept (2006), that the representation of ideology in the text infiltrates the reader's cognitive structure in the form of values, beliefs, and attitudes. The use of simple language, dramatic plots, and relatable characters are discursive strategy in strengthening the internalization of morals offered by the text. Therefore, the implications of these findings open up important space for the development of a literature education curriculum that is not only aesthetic, but also ideological and social.

### **Explanation of Religious Ideology Representation and Social Morality in the Novel *Mihrab Cinta* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy**

#### ***Transformation of the Character Syamsul Hadi as a Representation of Religious Ideology***

The character Syamsul Hadi undergoes a significant transformation from a santri who is slandered for stealing to a respected preacher. After being slandered by Burhan, Syamsul was expelled from the Islamic boarding school and was rejected by his family. However, through a spiritual journey and harsh life experiences, he rediscovers the path of faith and becomes a respected ustaz. This transformation reflects a religious ideology that emphasizes the importance of repentance and guidance in shaping individual identity. According to Fairclough (2015), discourse can shape and reflect ideology in society. Syamsul's journey represents a religious discourse that shapes the reader's understanding of the importance of faith and repentance in life. This argument is strengthened in the quote, "I will prove that I am not a thief, I will be a better person than all of you" (Shirazy, 2007), which emphasizes that the character's struggle is not only self-rehabilitation, but also resistance to social stigmatization through religious spirit. Syamsul's change is about the ideology of practice that is manifested in the daily actions that Syamsul makes, preaching a manifestation of his own change.

#### ***Gender Construction and the Role of Women as Guardians of Morality***

Women in this novel are depicted as guardians of morality and agents of change. Characters such as Zizi and Silvie play an important role in supporting and guiding Syamsul back to the right path. Zizi shows patience and steadfastness in accompanying Syamsul, while Silvie becomes a mirror for Syamsul to reflect on his mistakes. This construction shows that women in the novel are not only objects, but also active subjects in shaping social morality. According to Lazar (2005), critical feminist discourse highlights language strategies and representations that shape gender construction in the text. The novel depicts women as active subjects in shaping and maintaining the religious and moral values of society. This can be seen in the quote, "Perempuan itu hadir tidak untuk hakim, tapi untuk menunjukkan arah jalan kembali" (Shirazy, 2007), which reflects the moral leadership dimension of female characters. This role strengthens the argument that the discourse in the text is not neutral, but is laden with ideology that can strengthen or challenge dominant norms (Gee, 2011).

#### ***Social Morality and the Role of Community in Guiding Individuals***

Social morality and the role of the community have an impact on guiding individuals towards the right path. After leaving the Islamic boarding school and experiencing rejection from his family, Syamsul finds support in a new community that helps him return to the right path. For example, when Syamsul lives in a mosque and begins teaching the Koran, the community around him accepts and supports him. This shows that the community has an important role in shaping and restoring individual morality. According to Van Dijk (2015), discourse can reproduce social structures and power in society. The novel depicts that the community can be a positive agent of change in shaping social morality. The quote "No need to know your past, what we see is who you are

today" (Shirazy, 2007), emphasizes that social solidarity in a religious context becomes an element of moral recovery in social discourse. That symbolic solidarity through religious customs is a form of social capital used in identity restructuring.

### ***Pesantren Background and Javanese-Islamic Culture as Context of Religious Ideology***

The pesantren background and Javanese-Islamic culture provide a strong context for the representation of religious ideology in the novel. Pesantren is depicted as a place for the formation of character and morality, while Javanese-Islamic culture provides values such as patience, respect for parents, and mutual cooperation. For example, when Syamsul returns to the pesantren and is accepted back, it reflects the values of forgiveness and togetherness in the culture. According to Wodak & Meyer (2001), social and cultural contexts play an important role in critical discourse analysis. The pesantren background and Javanese-Islamic culture provide a framework for readers to understand and internalize the religious ideology conveyed in the novel. The quote "In this pesantren, we believe that every soul deserves a second chance" (Shirazy, 2007), emphasizes that the values of the pesantren are not just dogma, but living social practices. This supports Halliday's view (2014), that the social meaning of the text is shaped by the situational and cultural context in which the text operates.

### ***The Influence of the Author's Background on the Ideological Content of the Novel***

Habiburrahman El Shirazy's background as a Middle Eastern graduate and preacher influences the ideological content of this novel. His deep Islamic experience and knowledge are reflected in the narrative and characterization of the characters. For example, the use of Arabic terms and references to hadith and verses of the Qur'an shows the depth of the author's religious understanding. According to Fairclough (2003), the author's identity and social position can influence the production of discourse. The author's background provides authority and credibility in conveying religious ideology through his literary works. Expressions such as "Inna ma'al usri yusra" (Indeed, with hardship comes ease) become the spiritual foundation of the narrative and show a strong relationship between the author's preaching experience and the content of the story. That the author's social background and ideological beliefs become the field of meaning production in literary texts.

### ***Religious Symbols as Strengthening Ideology***

Religious symbols such as mosques, prayer mats, and the Qur'an are used in the novel to strengthen religious ideology. For example, when Syamsul lives in a mosque and begins to teach the Koran, the mosque becomes a symbol of a place of repentance and the formation of a new identity. The use of these symbols helps readers understand and feel the spiritual power that underlies the character's transformation. According to Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006), symbols and visual representations in texts can shape and strengthen ideology. Religious symbols in the novel function as tools to convey and strengthen religious messages to readers. This is emphasized in the quote "This mosque is my home, the prayer mat is my witness, and the Qur'an that I read is my reinforcement" (Shirazy, 2007), which displays the role of religious symbols as a narrative of the character's spiritual life. The symbolic use reflects myth as a communicative structure that articulates ideological meaning through culturally constructed signs.

### ***Criticism of the Social System through the Frame of Religious Morality***

Criticism of an unfair social system through the frame of religious morality. For example, when Syamsul was slandered and expelled from the Islamic boarding school without strong evidence, this reflects the injustice in the social system. However, through a spiritual journey and community support, Syamsul was able to prove the truth and regain his honor. According to Van Dijk (2015), discourse can be used to criticize and challenge unfair power structures in society. The novel uses a religious morality frame to criticize social injustice and encourage positive

change. This argument is strengthened in the quote "If humans can accuse, God knows better who is right" (Shirazy, 2007), which shows the superiority of Divine justice over a biased social system. The study shows that power and discourse shape each other in the process of control and resistance.

### ***Popular Literature as a Medium of Hegemony of Religious Values***

The novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* shows that popular literature can be a medium of hegemony of religious values in modern society. With an easy-to-understand language style and an interesting storyline, this novel is able to reach readers from various circles and convey religious messages effectively. For example, Syamsul's transformation from a pickpocket to a famous cleric shows that anyone can change for the better with religious guidance. Cultural hegemony occurs when certain values become dominant through institutions such as the media and education. This is what happened in Syamsul that in the media and religious education can become a vessel for change. The novel functions as a tool to spread and strengthen religious values in society. This is reinforced by the quote "Syamsul's sermon on TV reaches millions of restless hearts" (Shirazy, 2007), which shows the penetration of religious ideology through the mass media. In addition, it also shows the function of popular literature as a field of ideological struggle (Eagleton, 2002).

### ***Implications for Religious Value-Based Character Education***

The findings of this novel have important implications for religious value-based character education. The transformation of Syamsul's character shows that character education does not only occur in schools, but also through life experiences and community support. For example, the role of Zizi and the mosque community in guiding Syamsul shows the importance of the social environment in character formation. Effective character education involves family, school, and community in shaping individual moral values. The novel *In Mihrab Cinta* can be used as teaching material to teach religious and moral values to students. The quote "We are all teachers, every experience is a lesson, and every mistake is an opportunity to learn" (Shirazy, 2007), is a practical reflection of holistic character education. This novel provides an opportunity for a narrative-based educational approach in character formation.

### ***Contribution to the Development of Science and Practice in the Field of Critical Discourse Studies***

This study contributes to the development of science and practice in the field of critical discourse studies by showing that popular literature can reflect and shape ideology in society. Analysis of the Novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* reveals that religious discourse and social morality are represented and internalized by readers. This shows that critical discourse studies can be used to analyze literary texts and understand their role in shaping understanding and values in society. According to Fairclough (2015), critical discourse studies aim to reveal the relationship between language, power, and ideology in texts. This study contributes to understanding popular literature so that it can be used as a tool to strengthen and spread religious and moral ideologies in society. This relevance is strengthened by the multimodal analysis approach in critical discourse studies that not only focus on language, but also narratives, symbols, and the context of production and consumption of literary texts.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the Novel *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* consistently represents religious ideology and social morality through meaningful linguistic and narrative structures, depicting the transformation of the main character as a symbol of religious and moral ideologization. The findings of this study support the hypothesis that language in literature is not neutral but functions as a tool to construct and disseminate dominant ideology, in line with Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis framework. Theoretically, this study strengthens the understanding that popular Islamic

literature functions as a medium for religious hegemony and social reconstruction, while practically, it offers insights for developing religious-based character education and enhancing critical literacy among youth. Further research is recommended to expand the analysis by exploring inter-textual relationships or conducting sociolinguistic reception research to assess the broader social impact of religious discourse in contemporary literature.

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