



# ***Santri's Concern for Ethics and Morals in Indonesian Pesantren Novel: El Shirazy's Kembara Rindu***

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**Abstract.** As one of *pesantren* novelists, Habiburrahman El Shirazy consistently conveys *pesantren* tradition in his novels, including in his new novel, *Kembara Rindu*. Through the main character, he specifically shows the *santri* (*pesantren* student)'s concern for ethics and morals implemented in their life. This article exposes the influence of *pesantren* to the main character's concern of ethics and morals portrayed in the way he manages his life and solves his problems. Using ethical criticism, the analysis focuses on every aspect concerning ethics and morals performed in the whole novel related to the main character and uses Islamic teaching of ethics and morals as the basis. The analysis shows that the main character as a *santri* always holds the principles of Islamic ethics and morals in his life. He is trustworthy in doing his duties and keeping message and advice, helpful to others, submissive and faithful to the *Kyai*, responsible and reliable for his family, persistent, and having integrity. All the values are from what he learns in *pesantren*.

**Keywords:** Pesantren · pesantren novel · santri · ethics · morals

## **1 Introduction**

This article is about the characters' concern for ethics and morals in their lives as the result of their *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) educational background described in the first book of a duology novel *Kembara Rindu* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy. The thesis to be discussed is how far *pesantren* builds the *santri* (students of *pesantren*)'s concern for ethics and morals to manage their life and solve problems in their life. As educational institutions that have more concern in the improvement ethics and morals, do they actually give inspiration to the *santris* to always be concerned with ethics and morals in their life? The novel is expected to represent the real *pesantren* to see the role of *pesantren* in teaching ethics and morals to *santris* or young generation. The first possibly visible fact that can be identified is that the author of the novel is really the alumnus of *pesantren*. Considering that the author is close to *pesantren* life and that he describes more or less about the real *pesantren*, we can rely on the validity of the novel in describing *pesantren*.

The aim of this article is to give description and argument that *pesantren* novels tend to describe educational aspect of *pesantren* or specifically the role of *pesantren* in

improving ethics and morals of the people, especially the santri or young generation. It is Habiburrahman El Shirazy's specific area. He is one of the Indonesian best selling novelists and as a *pesantren* novelist he has a specific intention in writing novels, that is, to serve God and for the propagation of Islam [1]. Writing novels for him is his way to preach Islam [2]. The target readers of his novels are generally the young people. It is in line with the current development of Islamic movement that the young people take their important role as the agent of change. Islamic revival has been initiated by university students, influenced by the global resurgence of Islam [3]. Considering the great potential of the young people, proselytizing movements in various activities have been carried out in various media to counteract the influence of other media [4]. *Pesantren* novels as one of the media emerge due to, among other things, the influence of the rise of global Muslim religious spirit [5]. And, studies on novels by *pesantren* writers are mostly related to popular culture [6] that is related to young people. El Shirazy takes his part through his novels.

Islamic teaching of ethics and will become the basis of analysis, meaning that the ethics and morals in this discussion is not concerned with the idea of ethics and morals of any other perspective other than Islam. *Pesantren* novel as the medium for the author to improve people's morals and ethics may be seen in this article as well as *pesantren* novel's concern with the educative aspect literary works may take as their main role.

Ethical criticism is applied to achieve the aim of this article. Ethical criticism is a significant literary theory that potentially becomes one of important literary theories in the twenty first century. The main ideas of ethical criticism is that literary study aims to help readers to see, understand and appreciate literary works. It can inspire them to feel, think, and evaluate; and to see the influence of literary works to the readers' to their feeling and mind. Thus, they understand how to respond their real life as they respond the stories in literary works [7]. Therefore, literary critics work by analysing the moral effect of literary works and value how the effect works in the readers' mind; and the focus of ethical critics in on the implied meaning the author expresses and the forms of literary effects [8]. Specifically, Young states that literary criticism and concern of values cannot be separated and using religious perspectives in analysing literary works is the same as using other theories' perspectives, such as Freud and Nietzsche. Literary values and spiritual; values should be well hand in hand and should be able to reveal the critics' honesty about values in their studies [9]. In this article ethical criticism will be matched with Islamic ethics that can be used as ethical criticism in the basis of Islamic ethics. Islam offers concepts of ethics as the pillars of good society. It is important to illuminate the individuals and society with Islamic ethics to build good characters as the requirement of a good society. Islamic ethics should be generated among Muslim society to establish Muslim characters and it should be implemented in Muslim's daily life.

Ethics and morals are in Islamic teaching generally related the term character or *akhlak*. *Pesantren* as Islamic educational institution is related closely to the efforts of building students' good character or good *akhlak*. Two integrated systems, that is, a formal educational system and a boarding school system (*pesantren* system), enable students to learn and improve their character on the basis of daily life education. Both systems are synergetic and complementary to each other. The formal education is in

accordance with the national educational systems, in this case applied in Indonesia, and the *pesantren* system implements traditional teaching method that Islamic values and teachings are taught directly by religious leaders or *Kyais*. The integration of both systems gives students both general science and religious knowledge, good discipline, and adoption of Muslim character (*akhlak al karimah*). Together with the efforts to deepen the students' religious and general knowledge, character building becomes the priority in *Pesantren*. In accordance with Islamic teaching, developing human character is the most important teaching that the prophet Muhammad brings to human beings. His most important mission is to remedy and purify human character or *akhlak* to become *akhlak al karimah* or good character. Character is an essential aspect of whole human existence that will influence all other aspects. The goodness or badness of human character will give influential impact to human life as a whole. Human character is considered the basic element of human soul. There are three main aspects in human self, that is, the heart, the body and the thought. From the three aspects, the heart is the most important aspect that can drive the other aspects. The condition of other aspects depend much on the condition of the heart. The good heart will bring the good body and good thought, or *visa versa* the bad heart will give bad influence to the body and the thought. Based on this teaching, character building becomes the priority in Islamic education.

Character (*akhlak*) is the internal state of the soul that leads to perform the actions without thought and deliberation. It covers two kinds of state. The first is natural and develops in the temperament and the second is that acquired by habit and self-training. Character may begin in deliberation and thought, but through the practice it becomes an aptitude and a trait of character [10]. The second kind of character underlies *pesantren's* endeavour to give character education to the students. The character education can be developed in stages, that is, on the basis of knowledge of what is right and wrong and the responsibility as individual and as a member of society. It also includes identification of correct action and perceived truth behind action, identification of knowledge and understandings of our actions and sustainability of our practice, and the last the application in our behaviour.

In *pesantren* students are trained to be individuals with good character by improving their knowledge, promoting the conditional state, and implementing the practices. Improving the knowledge is included in the formal subjects or curriculum and speeches from the *Kyai* and teachers. The conditional state is shown through modelling, building the *pesantren* culture, and imposing rules and regulations. Practices are conducted through the religious rituals, extracurricular activities, organization, *pesantren* lifestyles, daily routine, and social activities [11].

The novel shows how *pesantren* conducts character building. Through the main character, Ridho, the novel shows how *pesantren* succeeds to educate *santris* to be good people in all aspects. The novel describes *pesantren* life and how the main character learns ethics and morals from the *Kyai* (a central figure of *pesantren* as a great teacher), process of teaching-learning, activities, all people around there. The novel describes two steps of life Ridho experiences, in the *pesantren* and outside the *pesantren*, where in both he learns and practices the teachings all at once that finally he becomes a figure of good concern of ethics and morals.

Improving the students' knowledge about good character through the implementation in curriculum, *pesantren* conduct specific methods and materials to make the students easily understand the teachings of *akhlak* (character) and impose their memories to remember the teaching perpetually. The teachers (*ustadz*) always try to perform different way in delivering the teachings of good character to the students. Beside each teacher has their own ways, they also apply different ways for different materials. The different way is to avoid boredom among the students so that they can grasp the essence of the materials and implement the teachings involuntarily. *Pesantren* as a close community likely have advantage in building close relationship through close communication and interaction. It links all the individuals living there from those in high rank such as the *Kyai* (expert in religious teachings and the owners or leaders of *pesantren*) to those in lower rank such as the students or all people working there in various positions. The closeness among all the elements in *pesantren* also plays a part in the success of teaching-learning process.

*Pesantren* culture is created through arranged daily activities and mental enforcement. Character building they enforce to the students is integrated with all activities, including curricular, extra curricular, and other daily activities. The integrated activities give inclusive and comprehensive understanding and discernment. All activities are arranged in accordance with the goal to create perfect individuals (*insan al kamil*) that one of the indicators is good character. *Pesantren* is 24-h full day educational system. Its educational goal is to create independent, self-contained and tough individuals in order to be blessing for the world with the provision of both general science and religious knowledge. Character building is conducted through integrated systems that the final goal is to educate students not only about knowledge but also ethics and morals. All activities are arranged to give students life experience that explore all of their capacities to complete and perfect human beings in all aspects of their humanity or the person who has reached the perfection (*al-insan al-kamil*). The students' activities from getting up in the morning to the time they go to bed is in order of an overall education to build good character.

With great missions, that is, blessing to all mankind (*rahmatan lil alamin*) as the main life mission and seeking knowledge as a big mission in life, *pesantren* create individuals who love seeking knowledge and have ideals to be useful for society. Studying is a part of life struggle and more important it is a part of obedience, submission and devotion to Allah (God). With this belief, the students have a spirit that studying is not only for the sake of the worldly need and ambition but also for their preparation of the next life, that is, hereafter. The goal of seeing knowledge is to make a better life in all aspects, worldly and religiously. The ones who seek knowledge have high position in Islam. They are the ones who have responsibilities for the betterment of this world and all people. Betterment of the world and people is related much to the improvement of human character quality as the basic goal of Islam. The students are called as knowledge seeker, a title that gives very position to them. The respect and honour gives the students self-esteem and self-confidence as human being. In spite of very young age, the students get so high appreciation that makes them feel like a perfect human being. Such feeling gives them big responsibility to realize the hope of *pesantren*, people, and society.

Finally, all activities in *pesantren* are arranged to give students valuable experiences to build their good character. There is a synergy among all components in *pesantren*,

from *kyais* to students, to make the arrangement successfully done. It is not only based on the worldly interest but also more important is to get God's blessing. Doing goodness in the world is only to get a better place in the hereafter. The spirit of goodness in the world and hereafter motivates students more to be people with good character.

## 2 Santri's Concern for Ethics and Morals

The main character of *Kembara Rindu* is Ridho, an orphan young man who spent his youth time in *pesantren*. Through his character, concern for ethics and morals is demonstrated. Ridho is trustworthy. In any situation he always holds messages given to him and his promises. He does it voluntarily, even it is actually hard for him and determines the step of his life. When he goes to *pesantren*, his grandfather tells him not to go back home until his *Kyai* asks him so. He holds this message even when his family has a big problem that needs his presence, that is, his grandfather suffers stroke and no adult people who can replace the responsibility for the economic needs of the family. His family has no courage to tell him the real condition because they know Ridho will keep his promise in any condition. "... *lelaki itu telah dipesan oleh Kakek Jirun agar tidak pulang sebelum disuruh Kyainya pulang. Dan ia tahu persis, Udo Ridho adalah anak yang sangat patuh pada pesan Kakek Jirun, juga sangat patuh pada guru-gurunya*" [12]. Trustworthiness is one of ethics and morals and morals that people have to hold as standard of goodness. It is significant because no one can value it other than the oneself. Ridho is the one who hold this consistently and voluntarily as well. His *Kyai*, *Kyai Nawir*, notices well this character of his *santri* so Ridho becomes his most reliable *santri*. He trusts Ridho to manage his fish pool, not only the maintenance but also the business matters. *Kyai Nawir* also trusts Ridho look after his daughter, not only official business but also private. Ridho does his duty responsibly. Although she is the *Kyai's* daughter, when she does something wrong, Ridho will remind her. To avoid problems, he can obey all what the daughter asks him to do because *Kyai Nawir* is not there. But Ridho always holds the ethics and morals when he is trusted he will keep the trust in any condition.

Unconditional loyalty to the *Kyai* is also the ethics and morals that Ridho always holds. *Kyai* is the figure who has high religious knowledge and always keeps the way to the truth. In *pesantren* *Kyai* is not only a teacher but also a father. To the *Kyai*, Ridho and all *santris* give their respect and loyalty; even they give their soul and life for the *Kyai*. Ridho learns 'silat' (a martial arts) in order to be able to guard his *Kyai*. One moment it happen when some thugs challenge the *Kyai* when he delivers a sermon, no one is brave to save the *Kyai*, but Ridho without considering his own safety he puts up a fight against the thugs. He wants to keep the dignity of *ulama* (Muslim religious leaders).

Helpful is another character that can be identified in Ridho's character. He is always ready to help anyone who needs his help, especially the weak ones, not only the ones he knows but even also the strangers, from a easy one to a difficult one, and something in high risk, endangering his life. It happens when he saves a girl from rape in the middle of a coffee plantation. The rapists bring knives and Ridho should fight against him. "*Penjahat itu mengeluarkan pisau dan menyerang Ridho. Tapi Ridho adalah santri pendekar. Ia menghindar dan sekaligus menyerang balik.*" [12]. Ridho does not care about his own safety, so he is not selfish and coward, but heroic. He sacrifices himself

to help other people. For him, the rights must be fought for and the wrongs must be banished.

Ridho is a responsible person. He is the only adult young man in his family who should take the responsibility for the family. He is still quite young but he knows that he is the only one who should take the responsibility. Economy of the family is in insecurity. His grandfather who takes the responsibility to fulfil the needs of the family is now sick and have stroke attack, the young Ridho is determined to replace the position of his grandfather after his *Kyai* asks him to go home. He tries many works to earn money. It is a hard situation for him actually but he neve gives up. The ethics and morals he holds is that he has to be responsible to his family. He loves them very much. In the meantime, he treats his grandfather and tries to get the best treatment for his grandfather. There are five persons in the family in his responsibility, his grandfather, his grandmother, the sister of his grandmother, and his two second cousins. It is not easy but Ridho is a hard worker and he is sincere to undergo all the hard times. It is also the key ethics and morals that he holds. He is sincere because he believes God determines human's journey in this world. He has to accept it as the way to get god's blessing.

Ridho is obedient and submissive or *ta'dhim* to his *Kyai*. He will follow all the words from his *Kyai*. It is why his *Kyai* loves him and always monitors his condition. When he faces difficulties his *Kyai* tries to help although from the other person's hands. Obedience and submission or *ta'dhim* is the ethics and morals that the students have to hold for his *Kyai*. Ridho holds all the teachings from his *Kyai*. The utmost is that he has to hold the truth as the principle to overcome all problems in his life and he has to fight for it. He is still young but he is brave to uphold the truth although he has to deal with the adults. It is concerned with the inheritance that his cousins should get from their late father that now is still in the hand of their father's first wife. The first wife does not acknowledge the marriage of his husband with his second wife while they actually are officially married and she actually gives her consent to the marriage unintentionally. Because of her hatred for the second wife or the mother of Ridho's cousins, she refuses the marriage and refuses to give the right for the inheritance to them. Ridho's cousins and the family actually do not care about it and they actually have been resigned not to have the inheritance. But, Ridho, holding the ethics and morals to uphold the truth, he supports his cousins to get their right. He goes with his cousins to meet their father's first wife. It is not easy. The first wife refuses them but Ridho with his braveness explains the status of their parents' marriage with all the proof, that is, the marriage certificate and letters written by the father. The first wife still refuses all the facts. It is no problem for Ridho. The important thing is that he has done what he has to do, that is, upholding and saying the truth.

Ridho finally succeeds to build his business and he becomes one of the successful young entrepreneurs in his area. To reach the success he holds the ethics and morals and the key to be successful in business, that is, honest, trustful, professional, and having good integrity, and his model is the Prophet Muhammad. "*Ia menjelaskan tiga akhlak penting yang ada dalam diri Rasulullah saw. Yang harus diteladani oleh seluruh umatnya, terutama para pebisnis. Tiga akhlak penting itu adalah jujur, amanah, dan professional.*" "*Salah satu hal penting untuk sukses dalam apa saja, termasuk bisnis, adalah menjaga integritas. Integritas adalah sikap moral dalam diri yang terjaga lahir batin.*" [12].

In short, in his life Ridho always holds ethics and morals as the principle to undergo his life and solve all the problems in his life.

### 3 The Influence of Pesantren to the Santri's Concern for Ethics and Morals

*Pesantren* has significant influence to build the *santri's* concern for ethics and morals. From *pesantren santris* learns knowledge about ethics and morals and how to apply it in their life. The *Kyai* is the most important figure that becomes a model for the *santris* concerning ethics and morals.

The *Kyai* gives the *santri* lesson or model how to hold the trust from other people. The *pesantren* fish pool is built in land that is trusted to the *Kyai* with a message that it should be used to fulfil the needs of the orphans. Holding the trust, the *Kyai* the profit of the fish pool only the orphan *santris* even the person who gives the land has been dead. This gives valuable lesson for Ridho to do so. "*Meskipun wakaf untuk pesantren, tapi Mbah Kasan memberi syarat bahwa wakafnya itu khusus untuk anak yatim dan dhuafa.*" [12].

*Pesantren* gives Ridho many lessons for his life guidelines. The *Kyai* always gives the *santris* advices through his lessons as their daily activities. In the process of teaching learning that proceed everyday in twenty four hours because the *santris* live in the *pesantren*, the *Kyai* transfers knowledge more effectively, because it is not only in official class but also in private activities. This way makes the *santris* can absorb the knowledge deeply and involuntarily.

The way *pesantren* gives lesson to the *santris* is also through giving tasks. *Pesantren* gives Ridho a responsibility to manage the *pesantren* fish pool. Through this task, Ridho learns how to hold the trust from the *Kyai*. He handles the pool as well as he can and learns how to treat the fish and how to manage the business to get more profit for the *pesantren*. In the future it becomes important lessons for him to build his own business.

Another task specific in *pesantren* is being a *Khadim*, the assistant of the *Kyai*. The duty is to help the *Kyai* in handle his daily activities, usually concerning private activities, such as, household works and help the members of the *Kyai's* family with various activities. Being a *Khadim* is a special trust from the *Kyai* and Ridho becomes more special because the *Kyai* not only trusts but also loves him. It is because the high loyalty Ridho gives to him. Being a *Khadim* gives Ridho many lessons, and in *pesantren* being able to be close with the *Kyai* is a blessing because they will get the lessons in direct experience with the *Kyai*.

### 4 Conclusion

Ridho as the main character in the novel shows that education in *pesantren* gives him much concerns for ethics and morals. The principles are consistently and involuntarily applied in his daily life. He becomes a person who automatically does what he should do based on the principles. He is trustworthy in doing his duties and keeping message and advice, helpful to others, submissive and faithful to the *Kyai*, responsible and reliable for his family, persistent, and having integrity. *Pesantren* and the *Kyai* give lesson, experience, and example for him to be a guideline in applying the principles in his life.

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