



# *Kanz Philosophia*

A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism

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**Philosophical Messages in Tuhan Maha Asyik Novel for Religious Inclusivity**  
*Ulya Ulya*

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The *Kanz Philosophia* is a journal published by Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Sadra and published twice a year in June and December. Contributors are invited to submit articles on relevant issues. It carries articles, book reviews, and viewpoints on Islamic philosophical and mystical issues as these raise out of classical and contemporary discussions from Eastern and Western traditions, and the goal is to promote advanced research and theoretical dialogue among scholars from the varied traditions.

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Volume 9, Number 1, June 2023

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**PHILOSOPHICAL MESSAGES IN TUHAN MAHA ASYIK NOVEL  
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## PHILOSOPHICAL MESSAGES IN *TUHAN MAHA ASYIK* NOVEL FOR RELIGIOUS INCLUSIVITY

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Article History:

Received:

5 April 2003

Revised:

14 May 2023

Accepted:

16 May 2023



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**Abstract:** *In Indonesia, there has been a religious trend that emphasizes formality and exclusivity. As a result, conflicts among religious communities or groups within a particular religion are often unavoidable. This case certainly requires solutions, including intellectual solutions. This article explores the philosophical messages of the novel, Tuhan Maha Asyik (God is Fun), written by Sujiwo Tejo and MN. Kamba: contribution to their thought is related to religious attitudes; to get the pre-structure that influences their thought. This article is literature-based research with a hermeneutic approach. The main data source is the novel above, while data collection is done through documentation. The data analysis used is the Verstehen technique. The result shows that according to the novel, worshipping God and practicing His teachings should be based on love, doing good to fellow human beings, and not acting in the name of God to judge others; the ideas contribute to educating the mind and attitude of readers to develop inclusivity in religious life; the ideas are built by authors' educational background, their life, and their religious tradition which ultimately influence their perspective and concept in understanding the issues of divinity and religiosity. This idea is one of the cultural capitals that needs to be internalized in Indonesian society, especially, to strengthen religious moderation and achieve harmonization in diverse lives.*

**Keywords:** *Inclusive, Love, Not Judging, Tuhan Maha Asyik 1-2.*

**Abstrak:** Di Indonesia telah terjadi tren keagamaan yang menekankan formalitas dan eksklusivitas. Akibatnya, konflik antar umat beragama atau antar kelompok dalam agama tertentu seringkali tidak bisa dihindari. Hal ini tentu membutuhkan solusi, diantaranya solusi intelektual. Artikel ini menelusuri pesan filosofis dari novel *Tuhan*

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*Maha Asyik* yang ditulis oleh Sujiwo Tejo dan MN. Kamba; kontribusi pemikiran mereka berkaitan dengan sikap beragama; mendapatkan prastruktur yang mempengaruhi pemikiran mereka. Artikel ini didasarkan pada penelitian kepustakaan dengan pendekatan hermeneutika. Sumber data utama adalah novel di atas. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui dokumentasi. Analisis data menggunakan teknik *verstehen*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa menurut novel, bertuhan, dan beragama seharusnya didasarkan pada sikap cinta dan berbuat baik kepada sesama dan tidak bertindak atas nama Tuhan untuk menghakimi orang lain; gagasan tersebut berkontribusi mendidik akal-budi dan sikap pembaca untuk mengembangkan sikap inklusif dalam kehidupan beragama; ide-ide tersebut dibentuk oleh latar belakang pendidikan, kehidupan, dan tradisi beragama pengarangnya yang pada akhirnya mempengaruhi sudut pandang dan konsep mereka dalam memahami masalah keilahian dan religiusitas. Gagasan ini menjadi salah satu modal budaya yang perlu diinternalisasikan di tengah masyarakat untuk penguatan moderasi beragama dan pencapaian harmonisasi dalam kehidupan yang beragam.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** *Cinta, Inklusif, Tidak Menghakimi, Tuhan Maha Asyik 1-2.*

## Introduction

Indonesia is known as a religious society. This can be seen in every religious holiday which is celebrated lively, many places of worship where many people worship, many people use accessories as religious symbols and use religious terminology in daily communication, and so on. However, at the same time, a series of violence and conflicts were recorded, both between religious communities and between sects, among others, the Situbondo conflict (1996), the Poso conflict (1998–2001); the Ambon conflict (1999); Singkil-Aceh conflict (2015); Tolikara conflict (2016); the expulsion of hundreds of Shiites in Sidoarjo (2020); burning of the Ahmadiyya Mosque in Sintang (2021); intimidation of the Ahmadiyya congregation in Garut (2021); there have also been tensions between puritan groups and groups that still carry out local traditions, such as the case of the forced disbandment by a number of Islamic groups of sea-flying ritual activities at Parangkusumo Beach, Yogyakarta (2018); the case of kicking offerings in the Mount Semeru, Lumajang (2022). In these incidents, of course, there was a lot of physical violence, violations of morality, desecration of human values, and even the use of religion and the name of God as a means of legitimacy for the acts of violence committed.

Such attitudes and behaviors of some religious people cause concern to many parties. Sujiwo Tejo and Buya Kamba responded to the cases in their novel, *Tuhan Maha Asyik*, a novel that is very unique and has character. The novel tells about God, how to believe in God, and practice His teachings. In the novel, the authors discuss interestingly and fun,

using analogies, it is based on stories of everyday life packaged in children's dialogues. In hermeneutics, a novel is not just a story. It is a text. According to Gracia, "A text is a group of entities, used as signs, which are selected, arranged, and intended by an author in a certain context to convey some specific meaning to an audience" (Gracia 1995, 4). Based on the statement, this article attempts to explore the authors' philosophical messages as conveyed in the novel regarding divinity and religious teaching, the contribution of their thought is related to religious attitudes; getting the pre-structure that influences their thought.

This article is written based on a literature study. The primary source used is a novel entitled *Tuhan Maha Asyik* 1–2 written by Sujiwo Tejo and MN. Kamba. The data collection used is documentation techniques with the stages of reading at the symbolic level, reading at the semantic level, recording on data cards, and coding (Kaelan 2005, 156–166). The analysis was carried out through the steps of data reduction, data display, and data interpretation through the *verstehen* technique, namely understanding the language symbols contained in the novel, then carefully exploring the meaning contained in it interpretatively (Kaelan 2005, 74–75), absolutely it is based on the hermeneutic theory used.

So far, there have been many articles using hermeneutics as an approach in novel studies (Dafid 2020, 1–17; Oktaviani, Suseno, and Nuryatin 2020, 78–84; Sumariyanto 2020, 84–17). Hermeneutics has several theories. Certain theories of hermeneutics have also been used many times to analyze novels. Several articles use Ricoeur's theory (Athaya and Soedarsono 2019, 23–29; Wahid and Ichsan 2020, 27–36); others use Gadamer's theory (Fajri and Noverino 2019, 113–126; Munandar and Sofa 2020, 146–158; Syafi'i 2018, 261–276); there is also who uses postcolonial hermeneutic theory (Connolly 2019, 1–21). Meanwhile, studies on Heidegger are discussed more in terms of the substance of his thought (Aziz 2013, 252–265; Muaz 2020, 142–152; Smythe and Spence 2020, 1–9). The study using Heidegger's hermeneutics theory as an approach is found in Escudero's article which uses it to analyze bodily phenomena (Escudero 2015, 16–25), not a novel. In this article, the writer uses hermeneutics and Heidegger's hermeneutics to analyze the novel *Tuhan Maha Asyik* 1–2.

The study of this novel is also not for the first time (Firdaus 2018, 104–124; Wahid and Ichsan 2020, 27–36; Riyadi 2021). Wahid studies it from the perspective of monotheistic education, while Firdaus focuses on theological issues, and Riyadi emphasizes on religious values. Wahid and Firdaus only used volume 1, while Riyadi only used volume 2 of the novel as a data source. In all of them, no effort was made to contextualize the discussion. Based on the background above, on the one hand, this



article is a continuation and refinement of previous studies in terms of data source and discussion; while on the other hand, this article takes a more specific perspective, both in theme and the hermeneutic approach used. This article is important because of the beneficial value that can be obtained, such as, proving that a novel does not only contain aesthetic but also philosophical values to increase the religious literacy of its readers.

## **Hermeneutics and Heidegger's Hermeneutics: A Theoretical Framework**

Generally, hermeneutics is the study of the interpretation or understanding of the text. The word hermeneutics comes from the Greek, *hermeneia* (n) means interpretation, or *hermeneutics* (v) means to interpret (Harvey 1986, 279). There are many definitions of hermeneutics, among others, stated by Palmer that "Hermeneutics is the process of bringing a thing or situation from intelligibility to understanding" (Palmer, 1969, 13). Relevant to Palmer's opinion, Bauman, as quoted by Komaruddin Hidayat, defines hermeneutics as an effort to explain and explore the message of a speech or writing that is unclear, vague, and abstract which frequently creates doubt and confusion for the reader (Hidayat 1996, 126). Meanwhile, according to Carl E. Braaten that "*Hermeneutics is a science that reflects on how a word or event in a past time and culture can be understood and becomes existentially meaningful in the present situation*" (Braaten n.d., 131). Based on the explanation above, hermeneutics is related to interpretive activities to explain something that is considered unclear or still unclear so that it becomes clear and concrete.

Heidegger is a philosopher from Germany. He lived for 87 years (born on 26 September 1889—died, on 26 May 1976). He was engaged in theology like his father (Bertens 1990, 155 dan 159). It was then that he became acquainted with hermeneutics as stated in Palmer's work, "The title 'hermeneutics' was familiar to me from my theological studies. At that time, I was especially taken with the question of the relation between the scriptural word and speculative theological thought" (Palmer 1969, 1953). He is a reformer of 20<sup>th</sup>-century hermeneutics. If previously the study of hermeneutics focused on methods and theories of interpretation, Heidegger shifted it to the study of the nature of interpretation. For him, hermeneutics as interpretation or understanding as quoted by Gadamer is a distinctive character of the existence of human life (Gadamer 1975, 230). This means that human existence cannot be separated from interpretation. Interpretation is not just the results of knowledge of things that are caught through the senses, but the statements of possibilities that

are schematized after activities based on the senses, for example, there is a dining table on which there are several apples. The first person saw the apples and counted them then he stated there were four apples on the table. The second person took an apple and ate some of it, then stated that the apple was sweet. The first case is not interpretation, while the second case is interpretation.

Heidegger, as stated by Hardiman, that whoever interprets in this way is always influenced by pre-understanding or pre-structure as the condition of possibility (Hardiman 1991, 9). The intended pre-understanding or pre-structure is formed from what was previously owned (*vorhabe*), such as social background, religion, and so on; what has been seen before (*vorsicht*), namely the point of view in seeing a certain reality. This point of view is formed by education or what had read; and what has been captured before (*vorgriff*), namely the concept of something that is already fused in the mind (Poespoprodjo 1987, 81; Sumaryono 1999, 83 dan 107).

Based on the explanation above, the understanding of the novel is carried out. The general hermeneutic theory is used as an approach to capture the message and contribution of the novel, while Heidegger's hermeneutics is used to find out the setting of the authors that caused them to have such thoughts.

### **Novel and Authors' Profile**

The novel entitled *Tuhan Maha Asyik* is an Indonesian-language novel written by Sujiwo Tejo and MN. Kamba. The novel consists of 2 volumes. The first volume was published in 2016 containing 28 titles and written 245 pages (Tejo and Kamba 2016), while the second volume was published in 2020 containing 25 titles and written 366 pages in total (Tejo and Kamba 2020). Both are published by Imania, Tangerang. The authors tell in their novel many things related to divinity, how to worship God, and practicing His teachings. In the novel, the authors often convey their anxiety about the phenomenon of the waning of the godly souls of most religious people. They actualize religious teachings formally. Religious formalism is actually more loved by the wider community. As a result, they tend to be exclusive. The exclusivity in the public sphere is susceptible to generating tension and conflict. Exposure to these serious issues is served by the authors using fun, interesting, and simple narration, often using analogies to avoid giving the impression of being lecturing.

The novel is written in the setting of children's lives when they are playing or studying at school and when they are casually chatting or

having serious discussions with their teachers. The children as the main characters of the novel are named Kapitayan, Buchori, Christine, Dharma, Pangestu, Parwati, and Samin. The names are given to the characters by the authors for some reasons. The naming reflects diversity. Kapitayan is the son of a puppeteer; Buchori is a Muslim and comes from a Muslim family; Christine is portrayed as a Christian and Chinese, from a rich and modern family; Parwati comes from a Javanese dancer family who really loves local culture; Pangestu symbolizes an adherent of local religion; Dharma from a Hindu family; and Samin, the son of a poor carpenter, comes from one of the indigenous groups in Central Java.

Before explaining the series of discussions as the subject matter of this article, the writer first describes the figures of the two novelists. The first is Sujiwo Tejo. His real name is Agus Hadi Sudjiwo. He was born in Jember, 31 August 1962, but grew up in Situbondo. He was born into a puppeteer family. Sujiwo Tejo started his basic education at SDN Mangaran (1974); he continued in junior high school in Asem Bagus (1977); After graduating from high school, he continued his study in ITB Bandung in the Mathematics Department (1980–1985) and the Civil Engineering Department (1981–1988) (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 235). He had a spiritual experience while studying at college. For him, learning mathematics is not just learning numbers and calculating skills, but fostering reflective abilities, that is, looking for patterns from something that previously appeared to be patternless. He connected this with rhythm and melody when reciting the Qur'an. Meanwhile, studying Civil Engineering led him to conclude that the smallest structure that is most stable in the universe is a triangle as the relationship between God, prophets, and mankind (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 236).

Sujiwo Tejo has dedicated most of his life to the world of art. He is a puppeteer who has inherited his family's tradition. He is a theater activist, film actor, director, musician, and even a painter. Because of his artistic blood, he likes to avoid formalities, including religious matters. In an interview, his answer when asked about religion:

Agamaku apa ? ini sulit kujawab kecuali yang nanya petugas KTP untuk formalitas. Bila kujawab "Islam" kok rasanya aku Ge Er banget. Bukanlah makna "Islam" antara lain "Berserah diri cuma ke Allah?". Nah, yang tahu ini kan cuma Allah. Bisa saja sejatinya aku masih berserah diri pada uang, dan lain-lain (What is my religion? This is difficult for me to answer except those who asked the KTP officer for formalities. When I answer "Islam" how come I feel too confident on it. Isn't the meaning of "Islam" among other things "surrendering oneself only to Allah?". So, only God knows this. It's possible that I actually still surrender to money, etc (Wijana and Maulina 2021).

He is also a journalist who has devoted himself to a National

Newspaper, Kompas, for approximately 8 (eight) years. He was active in writing and among his writings are: *Kelakar Madura buat Gus Dur* (Lotus, 2001), *Dalang Edan* (Aksara Karunia, 2002), *The Sax* (Eksotika Karmawibhanga Indonesia, 2003), *Ngawur Karena Benar* (Imania, 2012), *Jiwo Jancuk* (Gagas Media, 2012), *Lupa Endonesa* (Bentang, 2012), *Republik Jancukers* (Kompas, 2012), *Dalang Galau Ngetwit* (Imania, 2013), *Kang Mbok: Sketsa Kehidupan Sri Teddy Rusdy* (Komunitas Bambu, 2013), *Lupa Endonesa Deui* (Bentang Pustaka, 2014), *Rahvayana 'Aku Lala Padamu'* (Bentang Pustaka, 2014), *Rahvayana 'Ada yang Tiada'* (Bentang Pustaka, 2015), *Serat Tripama Gugur Cinta di Maespati* (Bentang Budaya, 2016), *Balada Gathak Gathuk* (Bentang Pustaka, 2016), *Lupa 3ndonesa* (Bentang Pustaka, 2016), dan *Tuhan Maha Asyik* (Imania, 2016), *Serat Tripama #2: Kumbakarna* (Bentang Pustaka, 2017), *Sabdo Cinta Angon Kasih* (Bentang Pustaka, 2018), *Talijiwo* (Bentang Pustaka, 2018), *Senandung Talijiwo* (Bentang Pustaka, 2019), *Tembang Talijiwo* (Diva Press, 2020), *Tuhan Maha Asyik 2* (Imania, 2020) (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 237).

Furthermore, the second author is MN. Kamba. Muhammad Nur Samad Kamba is his full name. He is an academic who pursues the field of Sufism, as well as a Sufi. He was born in Pinrang, South Sulawesi, 23 September 1958 and he passed away in Jakarta, 20 June 2020 (Tim detikcom 2020). Since childhood, he studied religion in the midst of his family. His formal education was from elementary to high school in Leppangang and Pare-Pare, South Sulawesi (1980) (Mustofa 2019, 167). After that, he continued his higher education in the Undergraduate (S1) to Doctoral (S3) Program at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. He studied at the Department of Theology and Philosophy at the Ushuluddin Faculty (1981–1994) (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 236). His dissertation is entitled *Nazāriyyah al-Ma'rifah 'inda al-Junayd al-Baghdādī* which examines *ma'rifah* according to Imām Junayd, one of the famous Sufi figures from Baghdad (Mustofa, 2019, 168). He has attended a postdoctoral program organized by CIDA/ Religious Ministry of the Republic of Indonesia at Mc. Gill University Montreal Canada (1996–1997) (Mustofa 2019, 167).

Kamba started his academic career as a lecturer in UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung in 1998 until his death. He teaches Sufism in the Department of Sufism and Psychotherapy at the Ushuluddin Faculty. He was also a guest lecturer at the postgraduate program of IAIN Sumatra Utara Medan (1998–2000) (Mustofa 2019, 169). Apart from being an academic, he is also a bureaucrat. He has held several important positions under the Ministry of Religion, as well as the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Tim detikcom 2020); Tejo and Kamba, 2016, 239). He is also a Sufi. Kamba's Sufism traces were traced when he met a Sufi teacher named

Muḥammad Diyā' al-Dīn al-Kurdī in Egypt. His meeting with the teacher caused a deep impression. His soul becomes peaceful and calm, even though the teacher never talks about Sufism in every meeting. It's just that his way of teaching always touches the spiritual side making Kamba's heart tremble (Mustofa 2019, 168). When he returned to Indonesia, he joined the Maiyah Community Forum initiated by Emha Ainun Nadjib, also known as Cak Nun. If Cak Nun is a reference who teaches Islamic practices, then Kamba is his scientific reference.

In the midst of his busyness, Kamba still found time to express his ideas in writing. Some of his writings, namely: *FatāwāMajlis al-'Ulamā' al Indūnīsīyy* (Indonesian-Arabic Translation) (CENSIS, 1996), *Universitas Al-Azhar: Problem Modernisasi Pendidikan Islam* (PERTA, 1997), *Al-Ṣirāṭal-Wasat* (CENSIS, 1997), *'Abd al-Karīm Amr al-Allāh wa Aṭhāruh fī al-Ḥarakah al-Tajdīdiyyah al-Islāmiyyah bī Minangkabaw* (CENSIS, 1999), *Al-Sirāh al Nabawiyyah* (Arabic-Indonesian translation) (Adigna Media Utama, 1999), *Shabakah al-'Ulamā'* (Indonesian-Arabic translation) (CENSIS, 1999), *Al-Muḥammadiyyah wa Nahḍah al-'Ulamā' fī Naḥr al-'Ulamā' bi al-Sharq al-Awsat* (Mimbar Studi, 1999), *Islam Sufistik* (Arabic-Indonesian translation) (Mizan, 2001), *Tuhan Maha Asyik 1* (Imania, 2016), *Kids Zaman Now Menemukan Kembali Islam* (Imania, 2018), *Mencintai Allah Secara Merdeka* (Imania, 2020), *Tuhan Maha Asyik 2* (Imania, 2020) (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 238).

### **About God, Worshipping Him, and Practicing His Teaching According to the Novel**

The novel *Tuhan Maha Asyik 1-2* discusses the deep thoughts of the authors about God and how to practice His teachings. After reading and understanding the novel, several important issues can be classified thematically, namely: 1). God's immanence, 2). Understanding *tawḥīd* or monotheism, 3). The path to God, 4). Not leaving God while practicing religious teaching, 5). Understanding the Qur'an and the formation of Muslim identity, 6). Human role in God's creation process. The explanation of each is described below.

The first theme is God's immanence. Analogous to the heavens that are earthly and the earth that is soaring, the authors of the novel explain the basis of God's creation in the world which is immanent. In Arabic, immanence is called *tajallī* which means visible or open (Munawir 1984, 206). Meanwhile, in the context of creation, it means that God is present in the universe, in every creation, and in every process of life. It was explained that originally He was the only Exist, Supreme Absolute, Supreme Everything, including the Supreme Creator. He manifests as

the Creator then all of His creation comes into existence potentially. He manifests as *Nūr Muḥammad* who illuminates all that exists potentially so that it becomes an actual being. He manifests as Condescending and Guide of all of His creation towards Himself (Tejo and Kamba 2020, 147). Likewise He manifests in human being so that there is no distance between human and Him. It is said in the novel that:

Di dalam diri manusia di situlah ada Dia. Karenanya manusia tak perlu mencariNya kemana-mana. Dia berada dalam setiap diri manusia (In human being there is Him. Therefore human does not need to look for Him anywhere. He is in every human being)(Tejo and Kamba 2020, 148).

The second theme is about *tawḥīd*. Etymologically, the word *tawḥīd* comes from Arabic, from the root word *wahḥada* (Munawir 1984, 1542). Definitively, *tawḥīd* is a study or teaching about the Oneness of God in the view of Islam, it is the most important characteristic among all the attributes of God (Nasution 1989, ix). *Tawḥīd* is the main concept that every Muslim must believe in. An important revelation that describes *tawḥīd* is QS. Al-Ikhlāṣ verses 1–4. Its translation as follows:

*Katakanlah: "Dialah Allah, Yang Maha Esa; Allah adalah Tuhan yang bergantung kepada-Nya segala sesuatu; Dia tiada beranak dan tidak pula diperanakkan; dan tidak ada seorangpun yang setara dengan Dia" (Say: "He, Allah, is One; Allah is He on whom all depends; He begets not, nor is He begotten; and none is like Him") (QS. Al-Ikhlāṣ [112]: 1 –4) (Departemen Agama RI 1993, 1118).*

*Tawḥīd* is explained in the novel not just as a theological concept, but also as a way of life that must be manifested in life. It is interpreted in the novel as the ability to unite, combine, and integrate. Humans as caliphs must have this ability. To attain this position, s/he must become *fanā'*, namely self-annihilation by emptying all desires and inclinations of the soul. In the end, there is only a sense of loving Him, reflecting His goodness and beauty in life (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 119). *Tawḥīd* as the ability to unite, combine, and integrate with love must be the spirit of every human activity in controlling and integrating the various realities in the world towards the harmonization of life (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 74–75, 77).

The third, the novel also explains the path to God. It is stated that there are many ways to know The One God that has been done by religious people. Some do it analogous to others, discussing, undergoing formal rituals, also *tawallī*. It is narrated in the novel that those who know God by analogy often compare God to the puppeteer in the puppet world. In this way, the authors believe that religious people like that will not know the real God because by comparing Him with the puppeteer, He is no longer the Most Absolute and Impersonal (Tejo and Kamba 2016,

186). Another religious people discuss Him. The authors believe that discussing God is the same as talking about something that is not known, so the results are only conjecture. This method also cannot convey them to God (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 163). Nowadays, many religious people approach God by getting closer to Him by carrying out formal rituals, such as: wearing robes for men or using the niqab for women, circling tasbih in their hands, giving alms by writing their names, and so on. Such religious formalities, according to the authors, are prone to give birth to arrogance and insincerity (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 141, 171). Another way to know God is through *tawallī*, namely people know and recognize God not independently but through God Himself. In the Sufistic tradition, *tawallīs* carried out through 3 (three) successive processes, namely: *takhallī*, *taḥallī*, and *tajallī*. *Takhallī* means cleansing oneself from the urges that destroy the soul. *Taḥallī* imitates the attributes of God by internalizing them within oneself. *Tajallī* is a spiritual state when a person feels the presence of God after her/his soul is clean. But sometimes there are also many people who are able to know God without going through any process known as *majdhūb*. At that time, God appoints His servants, and He has chosen among them without process (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 187).

According to the authors, the path to God which should be taken by religious people is not by comparing and debating Him, but through *tawallī*, a path of silence. To know God in silence is to seek oneness with Him. In this context uniting with Him is not as understood in Sufism, such as the concept of *waḥdah al-wujūd* by 'Ibn. 'Arabī, *ḥulūl* of *al-Ḥallāj*, *al-itihād* of Abū Yazīd al-Buṣṭāmī, *manunggaling kawula gusti* by Sheikh Siti Jenar. Uniting with Him means reflecting on His goodness in life (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 111, 119, 2020, 332). Love, helping, respecting others, compassion, forgiveness, sincerity, responsibility, and hard work are among the ways of life when religious people unite with Him.

The fourth theme, not leaving God while practicing religious teachings. People should not leave God in practicing religious teachings because God is the axis of religion. They who are religious but leave God are those who only discuss the concepts of faith, and rules of worship, busy in interpreting His words only. It is stated in a narrative novel that:

*Sangatlah penting bertuhan dalam beragama. Namun, terkadang orang tidak menyadari bahwa dalam kegiatan beragamanya ia bisa jadi malah tidak bertuhan. Itu terjadi saat mereka disibukkan oleh rumusan aturan-aturan keimanan dan peribadatan yang baku. Padahal, rumusan-rumusan tersebut boleh jadi tidak berasal dari Tuhan secara langsung, tetapi dari penafsiran atas firman-firman Tuhan. Dan di sinilah yang bisa menjadi pangkal permasalahan agama: ketika orang-orang beragama sibuk menafsirkan firman-firman dan lupa bertuhan (It is very important*

to have God in practicing religious teaching. However, sometimes people do not realize that in their religious activities, they may even be Godless. This happened when they were preoccupied with formulating rules of faith and worship. In fact, these formulations may not come from God directly, but from interpretations of God's words. And this is where religious problems can arise: when religious people are busy interpreting the words and forget to have God) (Tejo and Kamba 2020, 58–59)

The goal of religion according to the prophetic mission is social reform to realize universal human values (Tejo and Kamba 2020, 58). Therefore, religious people, in addition to fulfilling worship to God, must not ignore the interests of fellow human beings. Ignoring the interests of fellow human beings, especially with the reason of fulfilling worship to God actually plunges humans into egoism. Egoism can trap them into hidden shirk (Tejo and Kamba 2020, 61). Practicing religious teaching that does not leave God, namely carrying out social worship, working hard, realizing independence, upholding justice, spreading wisdom, and prioritizing honesty, on the basis of love for fellow human beings and all of His creation (Tejo and Kamba 2020, 63).

The fifth theme is understanding the Qur'an. The activity aims to form a Muslim identity, namely, to instill God's love and goodness for life and universal humanity. To achieve this goal, understanding the Qur'an is not synonymous with reading human texts that use a linguistic approach to determine meaning. Determining a meaning makes the meaning of the Qur'an limited while human problems develop throughout the ages. As a result, the judgment appears that the Qur'an impedes progress and the religious teaching does not relevance in life. Understanding the Qur'an with a language approach is also prone to reducing the word of God to the word of human because the interpreter often reduce His words in religious laws only, such as: must be done (*wājib*), must not be done (*ḥarām*), better done (*sunnah*), and so-on. Like that, these laws are not His word. They are human products resulting from interpretation activities. But in the end, religious people have often used these laws to judge the attitude and the behavior of others in the name of God (Tejo and Kamba 2020, 184–185). It is very dangerous. It is stated in the novel that:

Kitab suci tidak seharusnya diperlakukan sebagai kitab hukum. Tidak juga seharusnya dibaca sebagai teks biasa. Firman-firman Tuhan pada dasarnya mengajak manusia berdialog dengan dirinya sendiri (The holy book should not be treated as a book of law. Nor should it be read as human text. God's words essentially invite man to dialogue with himself) (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 193)

The statement above invites religious people to understand the Qur'an through dialogue. The meaning of the Qur'an obtained through dialogue produces love, kindness, and will not act in the name of oneself as God. The



whole content of the Qur'an is goodness (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 193). The authors of the novel exemplify the case of jihad. Through dialogue with oneself, the meaning of jihad is related to goodness, namely the spiritual strength in the personality of every human being to strive for success in any field of life, not the spirit of attacking others after judging others to be wrong, nor to provoke people to attack other groups. The meanings of jihad like this are internalized within oneself so that they become her/his personal characteristics. After the internalization process, it is followed by externalization efforts, namely showing goodness in her/his personal life. Furthermore, the process of socialization, namely reflecting goodness in her/his social interactions. This is the process of forming an identity based on the Qur'an (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 193). It is frequently referred to as the Qur'anic Society.

The last or sixth theme is the human role in God's creation process. In the novel, the authors emphasize that the real possessor of authority in the universe is God, not humans. However, s/he still has the will and choice in determining her/his life. The authors term that human being is God's co-workers (Tejo and Kamba 2020, 114). Human as God's co-worker means that God's creation is carried out through a process that involves humans. God's provisions for human runs according to the *Sunnah of Allah* (cause and effect). So, it is impossible for God to give wealth to people who are lazy to work, it is impossible for God to give passing exams to people who have never studied, and so on. This illustrates that both God and humans play an important role in creation, unlike Jabariyah's theological school which negates the role of humans (predestination), or Qadariyah which negates the role of God (free will and free action).

Because human has no real authority, meaning that human lives and process in the world through God's involvement. As a result/he has no right to position her/himself as God. In this context, the human does not have the right to negate others, patronize others; claim to be the most righteous; mislead other parties who disagree in the name of the divine mission; even judge and condemn other parties who have different beliefs, and so on (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 60–61, 106).

### **Resisting Exclusivity and Devoting to Inclusivity: Philosophical Message in the Novel**

Human beings living in the world cannot avoid plurality. They could not prevent contact with others of different religions, different religious schools of thought, different traditions, different opinions, and so on. According to Panikkar, a meeting between two different groups or more produces 4 (four) kinds of attitude classifications, namely: exclusive, in-

clusive, parallel, and interpenetration (Panikar 1999, 530–535). Exclusive is a closed attitude. Those who are exclusive believe that only their own religion or opinion is right and good, while those that differ from it are wrong and not good. If this attitude is implemented in a public where there are various religions, traditions, opinions, and so on, it will lead to destructive tendencies such as arrogance, unwillingness to be criticized, and truth claims, all of which have the potential to create intolerance, tension, and conflict. Furthermore, an inclusive attitude is an attitude that is more open and accepts differences. This attitude breaks the rigidity of exclusivism towards tolerance. Next, a parallel attitude that has seen the same truth and good in various religions and opinions. Diversity occurs due to differences in interpretation, perspective, and experience. Hick likened this case to a group of blind people describing an elephant. The results vary because it depends on what has been held by them. Hick stated this when explaining the differences of God as understood by religions, as written by Evans as follows:

Perhaps the apparently conflicting views the various religions have developed about God are like the apparently conflicting descriptions of elephant produced by a group of blind people. The various religions all present images of the divine, each expressing some aspect or range of aspects and yet none by itself fully and exhaustively corresponding to the infinite nature of the ultimate reality. The apparent differences are due to the differing interpretation humans have placed their experience of divine, which are due to the different cultural historical circumstances which have conditioned the experiences (Evans 1982, 181–182).

Parallel attitudes give birth to tolerance, and solidarity among people, respect each other, and appreciate differences sincerely. While the latter is interpenetration. Those who develop this attitude continue to try to understand the truth and goodness of religions, other religious schools, traditions, or other opinions by appreciating and studying the goodness in them to perfect themselves.

Based on the thematic explanation of God, how to worship Him, and practice His teachings in the novel that have been explained above, the authors show their disapproval of religious practices that emphasize formality and exclusivity. The authors expressed their anxiety in one of the parts of the novel that religion has taught inclusivism and tolerance, but in fact religious people have done the opposite.

Kala agama mengajarkan inklusivisme dan toleransi tinggi, rahmatan lil alamin sebagai kasih sayang bagi segenap alam semesta, umat beragama malah mempropagandakan eksklusivisme dan klaim kebenaran sepihak – sambil menegasikan golongan lain. Akibatnya, sungguh ironis, ceramah-ceramah agama saat mendengungkan pentingnya toleransi tetap membawa prinsip kebenaran sepihak: bahwa “Kebaikan hanya diakui atau legitimated jika dilakukan oleh kita, atau kelompok kita” (When religion teaches inclusivism and high tolerance, rah-

matan lil alamin as compassion for the whole universe, religious people instead propagate exclusivism and truth claim – while negating other groups. As a result, it is truly ironic, when religious lectures exalt the importance of tolerance, they still carry the principle of one-sided truth: that “Good is only recognized or legitimated if it is carried out by us, or our group.” (Tejo and Kamba 2020, 286–287).

Furthermore, there are statements in the novel that criticizes religious formalism. The authors’ response when they see religious people lately who prefer to show their religiosity by using religious symbols, that:

Mendekatkan diri kepadaNya hanya dengan melaksanakan ritual-ritual formal justru rentan melahirkan kesombongan, ketidaktulusan dan ketidakikhlasan (Getting closer to Him only by carrying out formal rituals is prone to giving birth to arrogance and insincerity) (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 141, 171).

The authors also expressly reject exclusivity in actualizing religious teachings based on at least 2 (two) arguments that are difficult to break. The first is that exclusivity is God’s right as the real possessor of authority, not human beings (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 106) and the second is that this exclusive attitude is prone to intolerance and conflict. It is contrary to the mission of religion which teaches compassion for all creatures and the universe (Tejo and Kamba 2020, 286).

The authors of the novel not only criticize and reject religious exclusivity but also spread messages and ethical values that should be developed by religious people. The intended messages and ethical values are several key statements that are already illustrated in the above description. They are the closer relationship between God and human beings; *Tawhīd* is not only a theological concept but the spirit to control and integrate the various realities in the world towards the harmonization of life; the goal of religion and prophetic mission is a social reform and realize universal human values, so religion is not just a matter of worshiping God, but realizing God’s command for the good of humanity; an explanation of the role of humans in the creation process that the real owner of the authority of this life is God, not a human being. Human is only the executor of God’s mandate in the world. Therefore, s/he must not act in violation of the mandate given (Rumadi 2012, 36), such as humans must not act in the name of God to judge other parties who are different. These attitudes encourage the birth of harmony, openness, and acceptance of other parties who are different.

From the above description that rejects exclusivism, criticizes formalism, spread messages and ethical values based on *tawhīd* and the prophetic mission, realizes God’s commands for the good of all human beings, not exceeding God’s mandate or in the name of God to judge others that have the different opinions, attitudes or behavior are philosophical messages that can be captured in the novel. These messages have a sig-

nificant contribution to paving the way for inclusive attitudes. Inclusivity is very necessary for human lives in the midst of diversity. This attitude is useful to avoid violence and conflict towards the realization of peace.

### The Authors' Pre-structure That Forms the Novel Message

The messages of the novel have an inseparable history from the background of its authors. This is what Heidegger calls pre-understanding or pre-structure. The pre-understanding or pre-structure is formed by *Vorhabe*, such as belief, and traditions; *Vorsicht* namely point of view or perspective, such as education; and *Vorgriff*, namely previous thought concepts that have been owned (Poespoprodjo 1987, 81; Sumaryono 1999, 83, 107). The awareness of this matter has been captured by the authors of the novel. In the novel, it is stated that a person's mindset on something influences opinion, attitude, and even behavior, as told by the authors when describing the attitudes of Pangestu, Buchori, and Kapitayan toward worms. They are from simple families but have different opinions and attitudes toward worms. Pengestu is not disgusted with worms because he likes fishing. Buchori is very disgusted. Kapitayan, at first was like Pangestu who had no disgust for worms. He often looked for worms for bait when helping his uncle fish. However, ever since he heard his parents say that worm is a disgusting animal while showing a face that cringes every time they saw a worm, Kapitayan turned disgusted (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 37–38, 40). Such awareness is also stated by the authors in another section in the novel more explicitly.

Makna dan pemahaman seseorang atas dunia bersifat relatif tergantung dari perspektif mana orang memandang (A person's meaning and understanding of the world is relative depending on which perspective one looks at) (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 50).

Actually, the description of how to worship God and practice religious teachings in the novel is conveyed by the authors in simple and polite language. They do not use a normative approach that judges right wrong or a *jadāl*-ist approach that invites other parties to debate. They use a conscience approach, trying to understand and empathize with other parties. This kind of approach has relevance to the *'irfānī* path used by Sufis (Jābirī 1993, 251–379). Sufi terminology also adorns the novel's narrative a lot, such as the concept of love, *tawallī*, *tajallī*, *fanā'*, criticizing religious debate, avoiding formality in religion, and so on. Surely this is due to the pre-understanding or pre-structure of the authors.

From *vorhabe*'s point of view, Sujiwo Tejo comes from an artist family. His father is a puppeteer (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 235). Since childhood, he has been involved by his father in this world. He grew into a multitalented

artist. He actively plays theatre, plays music, is involved in the film industry, both as an actor and director, likes to paint, is a journalist, and is a prolific writer. The soul of art has become a part of his personality which gave birth to his creativity, not being hard and rigid but adaptive, preferring to avoid formalistic things. In this novel, Sujiwo Tejo meets Kamba who is a Sufi. Unlike Sujiwo Tejo, since his birth, Kamba has been in a religious family. Since childhood, he studied religion with his parents before he deepened his knowledge at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt (1981–1994) (Tejo and Kamba 2016, 238). In Egypt, he met and studied with a Sufi teacher, Muḥammad Ḍiyā' al-Dīn al-Kurdī. The meeting with his teacher led him to become a Sufi academic and practitioner.

This educational background and religious pattern shape them in determining their point of view in understanding divinity and religious issues (*vorsicht*). Sujiwo Tejo has artistic blood and Kamba has Sufi blood. The two of them met and together looked at the issue of divinity and religiosity from an aesthetic point of view; emphasizing beauty, love, and goodness; based on Sufistic teaching emphasizing the esoteric side, not judging the other parties from the outward appearance. Apart from education, religious style, point of view, strengthened by the whole process and life experience and the challenges faced have fulfilled the reasoning of the two authors (*vorgriff*) to become a reference that strengthens their ideas like that. Such a religious basis encourages the birth of an attitude of inclusivity in practicing religious teachings and in social life in general.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the discussion above, several philosophical messages are found in the novel, which is related to the need for a close relationship between God and human; *tawḥīd* is a way of life that guides religious people to draw closer to Him by imagining Him in an attitude of love and doing good for universal humanity and the entire universe; reading the Qur'an is for the formation of true Muslim identity; a Muslim should actualize the religious teachings based on love, doing good to fellow human beings, and not acting in the name of God to judge others. The authors' ideas contribute to preventing exclusivity on the one hand and spreading inclusivity on the other. These thoughts, of course, were shaped by the educational and life experiences and religious traditions of the authors, namely Sujiwo Tejo who has a cultural background, and Kamba who has a background in academics and Sufis practitioners; These backgrounds form an initial point of view and concept in understanding divine and religious issues like that.

This kind of thinking is one of the cultural assets that need to be

disseminated in society to prevent intolerance and strengthen the tradition of religious moderation towards peaceful and harmonious religious communities in Indonesia. Actually, a study like this proved that a literary work does not only contain aesthetic values but also educational values to increase the religious literacy of its readers.

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