

LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING AS THE REFLECTION OF RELIGIOUS MODERATION IN THE NOVEL LOVE FROM A TO Z BY S.K. ALI (2019)

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Abstract

This study explores Love and Understanding as the reflection of religious moderation in the novel Love from A to Z by S.K. Ali and focuses on how the values of love and understanding influence the characters' response to prejudice and diversity. This study uses a Qualitative method and applies the theory of Genetic Structuralism by Lucien Goldmann to examine how the author's socio-historical structure as a Muslim woman in the West shapes these values. The findings reveal that Love from A to Z depicts key aspects of religious moderation, including tolerance, anti-violence, acceptance of tradition, and national commitment through the acts of the characters. The study also finds that the author's identity as a South Asian Canadian Muslim and her experiences in a post 9/11 Western strongly shaped the novel. Muslim authors like S.K. Ali have emerged to promote and convey to the world the true essence of Islam, especially in response to the widespread misunderstandings and misconceptions in the media about Muslims themselves. By examining how moderation is conveyed through narrative, this research highlights the role of literature in promoting understanding across religious and cultural differences.

Keywords: Love, Understanding, Religious Moderation, Diversity, Genetic Structuralism

INTRODUCTION

The world is colored by the diversity of conflicting ideologies, including differences in beliefs and cultures, so the need for a moderate attitude becomes very important. Moderation is needed to ensure harmonious coexistence in a diverse society. Religious moderation emphasizes balance, tolerance, and mutual understanding. Moderation is also present to prevent extremism. Religious Moderation is defined as a perspective, attitude, and behavior that consistently takes a middle-ground position, acts fairly, and avoids extremism in practicing religion (The Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019). This concept emphasizes the importance of maintaining harmony, tolerance, and openness in faith, fostering both personal peace and social harmony in diverse communities. With religious moderation, people are expected to demonstrate balance and avoid extremes in

thought and action.

A moderate attitude includes refraining from imposing one's beliefs on others, especially those with different religions. A moderate individual understands that differences in belief are part of diversity and chooses to respect others' beliefs without provoking conflict. By adopting a moderate behavior, individuals can balance their religious obligations with tolerance towards others. For this reason, religious moderation serves as a foundation for creating a more peaceful and harmonious life.

However, there are still people who have no respect for those with different backgrounds, including religious differences. For instance, in the West, Muslims are a minority population and are often discriminated against. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the unfair portrayal of Islam in the Western media. There are less than 1% of Muslims in the US and the media constantly negatively presents Muslims and Islam (Sutkutè, 2019). Analysis of the headlines and a careful examination of the lexical and structural choices from certain media revealed that Islam and Muslims were misrepresented (Poorebrahim & Reza Zarei, 2016). Chris Allen in Abdillah 2022 reveals that at the same time the media is considered one of the most virulent producers of stereotypical misconceptions of Muslims and Islam that allegedly support the discourse and understanding of Islamophobia (Abdillah & Putri, 2022). To combat this, Muslims make several efforts. These efforts are made to show the world what Islam is really about. One of the main objective of Islam is to establish a united, inclusive, integrated, and consolidated Muslim community, that is, a community in which people of different races and ethnicities live in mutual tolerance because of common beliefs and rituals (Sulaiman, 2021). Efforts are made in various ways. One of them is through literary media because the phenomenon of Islamophobia is not only able to be seen in real life but is also depicted in any social media, movies, or literary works (Shoumi & Koiri, 2021). To address these negative perceptions, Muslim community has consistently worked to convey the true principles of Islam to a global audience. A key component of this effort involves utilizing various media channels, such as articles, the film industry, and literary works.

This study investigates Love and Understanding as the reflection of Religious

Moderation because it is an essential concept that must be understood, especially in a society with diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Love from A to Z is the object of this research because it portrays how the character navigate discrimination and highlighting the challenges of Muslim in non-Muslim-majority environments.

LITERARY REVIEWS

This section presents the theories that support the research process and serve as reliable sources for the study.

1. Previous studies

Several researches have examined religious moderation. Jamilatun Nafi'ah in her research Religious Moderation Representation in The Movie My Name Is Khan (2022). The study used a descriptive qualitative method with a focus on content analysis. The research shows how the film's main character, Rizwan Khan, models the practice of religious moderation through acts of love, tolerance, and rejection of Islamophobia. The film successfully portrays the important message that Islam is not a religion that promotes violence, but teaches peace and diversity. Meanwhile, another study by Nahdia Ilma Nafisah entitled "Religious Moderation Represented Through Rumi's Thought in The Masnavi Book: A Critical Discourse Analysis" examines the representation of religious moderation in Rumi's poetry through the Discourse Historical Approach. The research shows how moderation values such as tolerance and harmony are expressed in poetry to honour religious differences. Nonetheless, this research is limited to poetry and uses the CDA framework. In another study, Religious Moderation in the Framework of Life by Choiriyah et.al (2022) explores the values of religious moderation such as justice, balance and tolerance in social life. The study highlights the importance of moderation in preventing extremism and promoting social harmony however, this study does not discuss how religious moderation is represented in literary works, particularly novels.

Previous studies focused on how religious moderation is represented in movie, poetry, and social life while this study particularly focus on novel. This study also discusses about the reflection of love and understanding that center on the Muslim as the

main character, and have employed a methodology that utilizes Genetic Structuralism to link literary works with the social context of the author.

2. Love and Understanding

Building love amidst diversity is a noble act. Through love and understanding, the diversity present in social life can be embraced with an open heart, fostering harmonious relationships between individuals and among different religions. As narrated by Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (may Allah's peace and blessings be upon him) said: "By the One in Whose Hand is my soul! You will not enter Paradise until you believe, and you will not believe until you love one another. Shall I inform you about a matter which if you do it, then you will love one another? Spread the Salam among each other." Jami' at-Tirmidhi 2688 (Al-Tirmidhi, n.d.). That indicates that Love is the foundation of faith and the cornerstone of harmonious relationships and mutual understanding among individuals. Islam emphasizes kindness and mutual respect as a form of devotion to Allah. It emphasizes that mutual respect and kindness are essential practices of devotion to Allah, fostering unity even in the face of differences. In the context of religious moderation, this principle encourages the acceptance of diversity and the rejection of intolerance, illustrating how Islam values peace and mutual understanding. Such values resonate with the broader themes of Love from A to Z, where characters navigate their identities and beliefs through acts of empathy and love, reflecting the universal human need for acceptance and coexistence.

3. Religious Moderation

Religious moderation generally refers to an approach that emphasizes reducing violence and avoiding extremism in religious practices. Etymologically, Religious Moderation, or *al-washatiyyah*, comes from the word *wasath*, which means middle, balanced, and just. Based on the Indonesian Dictionary, "moderate" refers to consistently avoiding extreme behavior or expressions and tending toward a balanced or middle path. According to the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, religious moderation refers to the attitude of reducing violence or avoiding extremism in religious practice (Ministry of Religion Affairs, 2019). It refers to the idea that when religion is practised in an extreme or fanatical manner, it can cause tension and conflict among

groups in society. By promoting moderation in religious practice, the aim is to avoid clashes and ensure that different faiths can coexist peacefully in society. According to the Religious Moderation Handbook, the key to moderation is avoiding excessiveness, especially in religion. A moderate individual must take a middle ground, standing between two extremes. They neither practice religion excessively nor dismiss its importance lightly (The Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2019). Religious moderation is our perspective on moderately practicing religion, meaning understanding and applying religious teachings without being extreme, whether on the far right or left. Religious moderation encourages individuals to take a balanced and thoughtful approach in applying religious teachings to everyday life (Riyadi, Dedi Slamet Syafaat, 2019). According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, there are four measures, boundaries, or indicators used to determine whether a particular religious perspective, attitude, and behavior can be considered moderate or otherwise, namely:

a. National Commitment:

National commitment is an important indicator of religious moderation, as it reflects how a person's religious views, attitudes, and practices align with the fundamental values of the nation. This includes accepting Pancasila as the state ideology, loyalty to the 1945 Constitution, and a positive attitude toward nationalism and existing laws. From this perspective, practicing religious teachings is considered in harmony with fulfilling one's duties as a citizen, and likewise, fulfilling civic responsibilities is seen as part of living out one's religious beliefs.

b. Tolerance:

Tolerance is the attitude of respecting and giving space for others to hold their beliefs, express their opinions, and practice their religion, even if they differ from our own. It reflects openness, patience, and acceptance of differences with respect and a positive mindset. Tolerance is a key foundation of democracy, as it allows people to listen to and appreciate differing views. In the context of religious moderation, tolerance includes both interfaith and intra-faith relations, such as the willingness to engage in dialogue, cooperate, support the establishment of places of worship, and respect minority groups within a religion.

c. Anti-violence

Anti-violence is a key indicator of religious moderation, emphasizing the rejection of any form of aggression and radicalism in expressing or defending one's faith. Radicalism, in the context of religious moderation, refers to an ideology or belief system that seeks to drastically and rapidly change social or political systems through violence in the name of religion whether verbal, physical, or ideological. At its core, radicalism involves individuals or groups using violent means to push for change. Although often linked to specific religions, radicalism can actually arise in any religious context. It is often triggered by a sense of injustice or threat—social, economic, or political. When these feelings are shaped ideologically and directed toward hatred of certain groups, they can lead to support for radical actions or even terrorism.

d. Acceptance of tradition

A moderate religious attitude is characterized by openness to accepting local culture and traditions, as long as they do not contradict the core principles of religious teachings. Moderates are usually more friendly and flexible in their religious practices, focusing not only on normative rules but also on the values of goodness. However, some groups reject local traditions because they view them as tainting the purity of religion. Nevertheless, openness to local culture does not necessarily indicate a moderate stance, and the correlation between the two still needs further exploration.

4. Synopsis of the Novel

Love from A to Z is a novel written by S.K. Ali. This novel tells the journey of the main characters, Zayneb Malik and Adam Chen, who meet in Doha, Qatar. Zayneb is a Muslim teenager struggling against discrimination and Islamophobia in her surroundings. This reflects the reality faced by many Muslims, especially after the 9/11 tragedy. Zayneb often experiences Islamophobic treatment from her professor, Fencer. She is frequently treated unfairly, with her beliefs and identity as a Muslim being criticized and mocked. Despite this, Zayneb has a supportive friend named Ayan who stands by her side. Ayan is Zayneb's close friend who deeply cares about her. Ayan

consistently offers a different perspective and helps Zayneb view situations from a broader angle. There is also Kavi, who always supports and assists Zayneb in facing the challenges and discrimination she encounters. During her journey, Zayneb visits her aunt in Doha, where she meets Adam, who shares her passion for the journal *Marvel and Oddities*. Even in her aunt's apartment complex, Zayneb continues to face racist behavior. This becomes a pivotal moment to observe how Zayneb, as a Muslim, responds to such treatment. Adam, who had been struggling with his illness, finds solace and support in Zayneb, who inspires him to persevere and face his difficult days. The two characters ultimately realize that love and understanding are the keys to overcoming any obstacle.

By the end of the story, their relationship evolves into a symbol of the beauty of moderation and acceptance, showing that even in a world often filled with uncertainty and prejudice, true love and friendship can prevail. After enduring numerous personal and societal challenges, they finally discover peace and happiness in their relationship. Zayneb, having overcome various forms of discrimination and internal conflicts about her identity and beliefs, begins to feel empowered and confident in her strength. The novel concludes with an inspiring message about the importance of staying true to human values and prioritizing love, tolerance, and mutual understanding. Zayneb and Adam, who have learned so much about themselves and each other, demonstrate that, ultimately, humans have the ability to create positive change in their lives and the world around them.

5. Biography of S.K. Ali

Sajidah Khan, popularly known as S.K. Ali, is an Indian-Canadian author. She was born in South India and grew up in Canada. She is best known for her adult books, including *Love from A to Z*, which explores themes of Muslim identity, love, and the struggle against discrimination. Ali grew up in a religious cultural environment, which has shaped her writing. She earned a degree in Creative Writing in 1990. Ali worked as a second-grade teacher while gradually completing a manuscript, and in 2019, she resigned from teaching to pursue writing full-time. (The Author Village, n.d.). She is happily married and resides in Toronto, where she is employed as a teacher. She is quite famous for her portrayal of Muslim life and culture in her writings. Ali belongs to a family

full of Muslim scholars. The members of her family are consistently featured in the list of the World's top 500 Most Influential Muslims (BookSeriesInOrder.com., 2023). S.K. Ali began writing at a young age, with her first story written when she was in seventh grade. She was inspired by the tales and legends from South India that her mother used to tell her. These experiences nurtured her love for storytelling and writing.

Ali began her writing career in 2017, and two years later, her novel *Love from A to Z* was released. Her debut novel received numerous accolades, and the release of her subsequent works further solidified her position as an important voice in contemporary literature, particularly in representing the Muslim experience. In her interviews, S.K. Ali often discusses the importance of authentic representation in literature, especially for the Muslim community, which is often stereotyped. She believes that writing is a way to create space for the complex and diverse stories within the Muslim community. In an interview on the channel *Let the Quran Speak*, she shared, "I was like querying agents like the publishing industry aware of this conversation and seeing that when a narrative comes from a person from within that community it might look different or it might not be what you think, the way it should be so I felt confident that my story will be received." (Let the Quran Speak, 2018). This means that when a narrative comes from a writer who is truly part of that community, the story may differ from what outsiders assume it should look like. Ali felt confident that her story would be accepted because she brought an authentic perspective from her community. In other words, she wanted to show that narratives rooted in someone's real experiences could be more authentic and may offer a new or different perspective from common expectations. Therefore, it can be concluded that the story presented in Ali's novel reflects a real-life experience.

Ali offers a perspective on Muslims because the world often misunderstands and stereotypes them in a negative light. Through the characters in her works, she portrays the struggle of practicing one's faith while facing external challenges such as discrimination and prejudice. In the novel *Love from A to Z*, she emphasizes tolerance, empathy, and respect for diversity.

6. Genetic Structuralism by Lucien Goldman

Genetic Structuralism can be identified as a non-pure method, as it stands in opposition to focusing solely on the intrinsic elements of literary works. This method goes further by examining the social structure and historical background surrounding the creation of the literary work (Helaluddin, 2018). Goldmann developed a literary analysis method called Genetic Structuralism from the earlier structuralist approach, expanding the focus beyond intrinsic elements to include the social and historical structures reflected in a literary work. This approach emphasizes the collective consciousness of the social group to which the author belongs. Goldmann's theory of Genetic Structuralism establishes a connection between literary structure and societal structure through the worldview or ideology it expresses. Therefore, literary works (as well as all other cultural activities) cannot be fully understood if the totality of the society that produced them is ignored (Taum, 1997).

This method comes from the word Genetic and Structuralism. Structuralism is the method that focuses on the autonomy of literary works (Muniroch, 2007). Such as character, plot, and setting, while the genetic approach, according to David Daiches, considers literary works in terms of their origins, whether social, individual, or a combination of both (Sutejo & Kasnadi, 2016). With this methodology, literary works are believed to be closely linked to the society that created them.

Literature is depicted as a reflection of the worldview, ideology, and social values that were prevalent in society at that time. Literary works not only reflect the views of their creators but also serve as expressions of a broader social reality. We must accept the existence of a reality that goes beyond the individual and finds its expression in their work. (Picken et al., 1967).

The idea of Lucien Goldmann's Genetic Structuralism emphasizes that cultural products, including literary works, are a reflection of human relations within a specific social and historical context. Therefore, understanding a literary work requires examining the socio- historical conditions that shaped the relationships and values of the individuals or groups who produced it, showcasing the interplay between structure and society because What had been produced by men is the production of men's relations in the society (Kobis, 2019). The genetic structuralism approach by Lucien Goldmann has

concepts that construct the theory. Included:

a. World View (Vision du Monde)

Lucien Goldmann, in his book *Essays on Method in the Sociology of Literature*, states that by worldview, we mean a coherent and unified perspective regarding human relationships with others and with the universe. Since individual thoughts are rarely coherent and unified, a worldview seldom corresponds to the actual thinking of a single individual. Thus, a world view is not a given empirical reality, but a conceptual instrument for doing research; an extrapolation constructed by the historian which, however, is not arbitrary, since it is founded on the structure of the real thought of individuals (Goldmann, 1980). In the context of literary analysis through Genetic Structuralism, the concept of worldview serves as a bridge that connects the structure of a literary work with its socio-historical background. It reflects the collective consciousness or ideology of a particular group and offers insights into how the work effectively conveys social issues in an organized and meaningful way.

b. Textual Structure

Lucien Goldmann, in his book, states that "As in the study of prose works (and social facts in general), here, too, one would first have to isolate a significant global structure on which partial or more strictly formal structures are founded, and on the basis of which one should study them;" (Goldmann, 1980). This explains that in analyzing a literary work, the first step is to identify the important structure, which is the overall pattern or main theme that forms the foundation of other elements in the work. This allows for an understanding of smaller structures or other formal elements, such as plot, characters, or style, to be comprehended. By understanding this structure, we can see how the smaller parts of the work are interconnected and support the overall meaning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative methods are particularly oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic (Patton, 1987). This research method helped the researcher collect data by analyzing the object in depth where the data revealed the findings and not stick to a limited hypothesis.

In qualitative research methods, there are various data collection techniques. This study used the technique of document analysis, with the novel *Love from A to Z* as the primary data and biography documents as secondary data. According to Bogdan in Sugiono 2013, in most tradition of qualitative research, the phrase personal document is used broadly to refer to any first person narrative produced by an individual which describes his or her own actions, experience, and belief (Sugiyono, 2013).

The data were primarily collected from the narration in the *Love from A to Z* novel which contains love and understanding as the reflection of religious moderation aspects due to it being the focus of the research aim. The researcher read the novel *Love from A to Z* in depth, noting relevant sections related to the pillars of religious moderation, as well as the themes of love and understanding. Then, the researcher collected relevant literature on religious moderation, literature, and themes in the novel. This includes books, journal articles, and reports from the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, and Collected biographical information about S.K. Ali including social media, book reviews, articles or interview documentation from the internet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis of the novel, it is found that Love and Understanding reflect in the indicators of Religious Moderation and the influence of the author's background

1. Love and Understanding reflects in the Religious Moderation indicators

a. Tolerance

Tolerance becomes one of the most prominent themes throughout the novel. Zayneb's interactions with her non-Muslim portray strong examples of interfaith empathy. Despite their different religious backgrounds, her friends offer sincere condolences when her grandmother passes away, showing emotional support and respect. Zayneb, in return, appreciates their acceptance and openness. These moments depict how love and understanding are key elements of tolerance, where differences in belief do not become barriers to care and human connection. Kavi's awareness of Zayneb's need to

wear the hijab is another powerful scene that reflects religious tolerance, as she shows sensitivity to a practice that is not her own.

b. Anti-Violence

The characters in the novel choose non-violent responses when facing discrimination and misunderstanding. Instead of reacting with hostility, they reflect, understand, and respond with wisdom. Adam's peaceful personality and Zayneb's internal shift from anger to thoughtful restraint show that moderation is not about suppressing one's voice, but about choosing responses that are constructive rather than destructive. This aligns with the anti-violence principle, which promotes dialogue, understanding, and self-restraint over confrontation. Even Zayneb, who initially reacts strongly to injustice, learns to temper her emotions and act with maturity, reflecting a balance between firmness and empathy.

c. Acceptance of Tradition

The novel is set in an international and multicultural environment, and it still presents the acceptance of tradition in the form of respecting religious. Zayneb and Adam both embrace their Muslim identity in their own ways. Adam with quiet reverence, and Zayneb with vocal resistance against misrepresentation. The fact that Zayneb continues to wear her hijab and defend her beliefs, even when misunderstood, reflects not just personal conviction but also pride in her cultural-religious tradition. Meanwhile, her non-Muslim peers who respect her practices without forcing assimilation embody a healthy model of mutual acceptance and intercultural respect.

d. National Commitment

The national commitment reflected in this novel is shown when the characters Zayneb and Adam acknowledge their nationality. Adam said I'm Canadian. But his father's family is originally from China, and his mother is from Finland. Zayneb said her father's family is from Pakistan, which was part of the Indian subcontinent, and her mother is from the Caribbean.

These findings demonstrate how acts of love and understanding are the medium through which Religious Moderation is realized in the character's action.

2. Depiction of religious moderation influenced by the author's social and historical structure

This section discusses the findings by exploring the author's worldview. A worldview is shaped through interactions with the environment and social groups (Muniroch, 2007). Therefore, the analysis examines the author's environmental and social structure and connects it with the real-world social structure reflected in the novel.

Love from A to Z novel was published on April 30, 2019, eighteen years after the 9/11 tragedy, one of the events that became one of the catalysts for the rise of Islamophobia and the discrimination faced by Muslims in the West. The novel touches on the impact of this event through the experiences of Zayneb, a Muslim girl who wears hijab and is subjected to unfair treatment. The story reflects the post 9/11 era in which Muslims are often unjustly associated with violence or extremism. In Love from A to Z, Ali portrays the everyday realities and challenges of Islamophobia experienced by Muslim youth. "What riles me is that people think Islamophobia is these little or big acts of violence. Someone getting their hijab ripped off, someone's business getting vandalized, someone getting hurt or, yes, even killed."

As a Muslim author, S.K. Ali uses this novel to raise her voice and offer an authentic perspective on what Islam truly represents. It is deeply shaped by her personal experience of being a Muslim woman in a post 9/11 Western society, where muslims are often portrayed through a lens of fear and suspicion.

In an interview, S.K. Ali shares that her inspiration for the novel came from her visit to the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, Qatar. One of the settings of the novel is also in that Museum.

So, Ali is writing based on her experience. Ali also expresses her disappointment with the misportrayal of Muslims in Western media. The media occasionally presents information inaccurately, which can shape and even distort public perceptions of particular subjects or communities. Shaping public opinion, distorting information, manipulating news, and influencing individual thinking are all manufactured

traits of today's media (Rezaei et al., 2019). This experience shows the gap between the real history and contributions of Muslims and the negative images often shown. This moment of realization became the foundation for the novel's themes, as Ali ought to tell a story that reflected the reality of Muslim life.

Ali does not intentionally set out to deliver moral or political messages, but instead writes from her own lived experiences. This indicates that the stories in her novels are authentic representations of narratives written by a Muslim author whose messages may differ from the commonly circulated portrayals of Muslims and Islam often produced by outsiders (non- Muslims). It emphasizes that mainstream representations are frequently biased or inaccurate, as they do not originate from within the Muslim community itself.

Muslim writers have emerged to correct the misrepresentations and stereotypes often portrayed by the media. Ali states "promote books written in our own voices." It means expressing through the voices and perspective of Muslims themselves. Based on the study by Raihanah et. Al, they stated that Muslim fiction writers problematize the issue of identity of Muslims in the world today, given their heterogeneous landscapes and social/cultural contestations (Raihanah et al., 2014). Muslim writers have come forward to set straight the stereotyped identities. They portray diverse Muslim identities that reflect the social and cultural realities they experience, and one of them is S.K. Ali. Literary works such as poetry, drama, and novels are considered to reflect real life through language and are kinds of communication between writers and readers (Hasni et al., 2023). This novel serves as a medium for the writer to communicate and convey messages.

Ali created Zayneb as a strong and outspoken Muslim girl who dares to speak out against injustice. Zayneb challenges the stereotype that Muslim women must be quiet and submissive to be accepted. But at the same time, Ali reminds readers that speaking up should also be done wisely and respectfully. Nevertheless, Zayneb expresses her anger toward injustice through morally grounded arguments. She does not use direct insults, instead emphasizing empathy and a sense of shared humanity, as stated by Ali in the interview.

One of the key narratives in the novel is reflected in the line: "The best way to

challenge these Islamophobes is by succeeding in society. Getting suspended is not succeeding! Don't you want to join your sister and brother at university?" This is a statement made by Zayneb's father in response to her #EatThemAlive protest, which she directed at her Islamophobic teacher. Her father believes that confronting such people directly will only get Zayneb into trouble. Instead of fighting back openly, he sees success in education, career, or social contribution as a more effective way to challenge harmful stereotypes.

However, Zayneb's character, as developed by S.K. Ali, takes a different path. She is someone who chooses to express her anger openly and refuses to stay silent in the face of injustice. "what's wrong with being angry? What's wrong with caring about your world and being outraged by injustice? Why do young women have to make themselves smaller or quieter to fit a mold of what society expects of them?" It is shown in the novel "I get angry for the right reasons. So I embraced my anger. I was the angry one."

Zayneb's character demonstrates that being faithful and critical of injustice are not contradictory. On the contrary, her moral courage illustrates the essence of religious moderation. She does not resort to verbal attacks or violence when confronting Islamophobia, whether it comes from her teacher, during her interrogation at the airport, or in relation to her swimsuit. Instead, she chooses to respond with dignity, informed arguments, and an unwavering belief in justice. In this way, Zayneb becomes a model of how religious identity and social activism can coexist harmoniously. She speaks up not to divide, but to awaken empathy and awareness, aligning with the moderate path of upholding justice while maintaining peace and respect in society.

When we look at the author's social and historical background, it's clear that S.K. Ali has been actively using her voice to advocate for representation. In January 2017, she launched the #MuslimShelfSpace movement to spotlight books written by Muslim authors featuring Muslim characters (Cat on the Bookshelf, 2019). Ali aimed to create a platform that amplifies Muslim voices and narratives, countering the often negative or stereotypical portrayals found in mainstream media. Through #MuslimShelfSpace, both Ali and the literary community advocate for greater visibility and recognition of Muslim identities in literature. The movement seeks to

provide space for Muslim writers to share authentic and diverse stories about their experiences, cultures, and values, not just the one-dimensional or negative images frequently shown in the media. As a result, readers around the world are offered a broader and more accurate understanding of what it means to be Muslim. Ultimately, #MuslimShelfSpace is not only a celebration of diversity and humanity in Muslim-authored literature but also a form of resistance against harmful stereotypes. It invites everyone to support and uplift underrepresented voices in the literary world.

Ali states, "I try to write as real and honestly as possible, the journey of the character often includes issues and topics that young people actually go through and especially things that our society is grappling with". By portraying challenges that are familiar to many Muslim youth, such as discrimination, identity struggles, and the pressure to conform, Ali creates a narrative that speaks directly to the lived realities of her readers. Ali also states in an interview that her book is a compilation of true events and imagined scenes, and what she knows to be true about life and the world. S.K. Ali was born in South India and immigrated to Canada when she was three.

S.K. Ali is known for her works that portray the Muslim experience in an authentic and meaningful way. Ali is also recognized for her courage in addressing complex social issues in her work, such as sexual assault, Islamophobia, and anti-Black racism, while weaving in positive elements like love and hope. Her works include *Saints and Misfits* (2017), which tells the story of the inspiring multicultural coming-of-age novel that features relatable teenage characters as it tackles important themes such as faith, identity, and sexual assault (Common Sense Media, n.d.); *Love from A to Z* (2019), which follows two Muslim teens who meet in Doha, Qatar, and face issues such as Islamophobia and chronic illness; and *The Proudest Blue* (2019), a picture book co-authored with Ibtihaaj Muhammad, which explores themes of hijab and identity, representation of family relationships against the world's difficulties is memorable and inspiring (Kirkus Reviews, 2019). Through these works, Ali has established herself as a writer who is deeply committed to highlighting issues faced by Muslims in her surroundings. Ali also portrays characters who demonstrate resilience in difficult situations and appear as courageous and outspoken women. Reflecting her own educational background, in an interview with Geeks OUT Media, she shared that she

became a mom while still in college, and went on to finish her degree while taking that baby to class sometimes (Kirichanskaya, 2022).

Ali's background deeply influences her story. Growing up as a Muslim immigrant in Canada, she experienced firsthand the complexities of navigating multiple cultural identities. This perspective allows her to write with authenticity and empathy, capturing the nuanced experiences of Muslim youth who often feel caught between different worlds. Through her work, Ali raises awareness about the challenges faced by Muslim communities and also provides representation and hope, encouraging young readers to embrace their identities confidently.

CONCLUSIONS

The researcher finds that novel *Love from A to Z* reveals four main indicators of religious moderation identified as tolerance, anti-violence, acceptance of tradition and national commitment. These aspects are portrayed not in abstract terms but are woven into the everyday lives of the characters, particularly through the lens of love and understanding. Among all the indicators, tolerance emerges as the most dominant value. Zayneb's ability to confront Islamophobia while maintaining her dignity, her decision to understand rather than retaliate, and her willingness to coexist with those who are different from her are clear reflections of tolerance. Similarly, Adam's quiet spiritual presence, grounded in peace and empathy, illustrates the anti-violence value of Islam, while both characters' openness to multicultural environments demonstrates the acceptance of tradition in new and diverse contexts.

From the perspective of Lucien Goldmann's genetic structuralism, the text of *Love from A to Z* reflects a deep connection between the individual consciousness of the author and the larger socio-historical structure in which she exists. Goldmann asserts that a literary work is a reflection of the collective consciousness of a social group, and in this case, S.K. Ali represents the voice of Muslim individuals navigating life in a post-9/11 Western society. Her lived experiences as a South Asian Canadian Muslim woman inform the characters she creates, especially Zayneb, who embodies the struggles, resilience, and values of that community. The novel becomes not just a story, but a cultural expression of a marginalized group asserting their presence with dignity. By

embedding indicators of religious moderation throughout the narrative, Ali not only constructs relatable characters but also bridges the gap between faith and modern multicultural society, thus illustrating Goldmann's idea that literature can function as a medium of ideological expression shaped by both individual and collective experience.

In conclusion, the findings in *Love from A to Z* reveal that religious moderation is not merely a concept but a lived value reflected through narrative and character. Through figures who embody tolerance, nonviolence, and openness to tradition and diversity, S.K. Ali delivers a powerful message that love and understanding are essential in navigating differences. By portraying the social realities and Muslim identity in the modern world, the novel serves as a strong representation of how love and understanding depicted in religious moderation can be practiced and promoted in everyday life.

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