

“For *jannah*, she created *jahanam*”: female piety and the gothic grammar of religious violence in *Malam Seribu Jahanam*

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ABSTRACT

Purpose

This article examines how *Malam Seribu Jahanam* (2023) transforms female piety and purity politics into a symbolic grammar of religious violence. This study focuses on Annisa, a pious daughter, bride, and suicide bomber, to show how *Jannah*, shame, bodily purity, and feminine virtue are narratively reorganized into a gothic structure of sacred harm.

Design/methodology/approach

This research employs qualitative literary analysis through close reading. This analysis is guided by three interrelated concepts: gendered pious femininity, aestheticized purity/purity politics, and eschatological religious violence. Primary data are drawn from novel's key narrative nodes, including Annisa's bombing, Hajjah Victoria's prophecy, bridal imagery, *wudu*, *Ramadan*, whiteness, jasmine, fragrance, and *Jannah/Jahanam* reversal. Secondary sources include studies on women and terrorism, Indonesian Muslim piety, gendered agency, and contemporary Indonesian gothic fiction.

Findings

This article finds that Annisa's “soleha” femininity functions as moral legibility: it makes her body trusted before it becomes violent. Purity signs such as *wudu*, whiteness, jasmine, and heavenly fragrance aestheticize religious virtue, yet novel contaminates them with blood, burial, shame, and ruin. *Jannah* becomes a compensatory horizon that legitimizes destruction, while *Jahanam* names social catastrophe left for the living.

Originality/value

This article contributes to Indonesian literary studies by linking gendered piety, purity politics, and women's religious violence within a single gothic reading. It argues that Intan Paramaditha's novel does not merely represent terrorism; it exposes how sacred beauty can become ethically dangerous when severed from accountability to embodied others.

Introduction

Malam Seribu Jahanam (2023) raises a crucial problem in contemporary Indonesian fiction: how religious violence survives not only as doctrine or ideology, but also as memory, shame, family wound, and gothic terror. In Muslim middle-class world imagined by the novel, paradise, purity, female virtue, and moral respectability do not stand apart

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from violence; they can reinforce one another until harm appears sacred. Indonesian terrorism studies show that women can no longer be understood only as victims or passive appendages. They may act as supporters, ideological mediators, wives, recruiters, online activists, or perpetrators, while still inhabiting normative roles as daughters, mothers, and brides (Macfarlane, 2024; Veronika, 2025). Southeast Asian cases of family bombing further show that radicalization cannot be explained only through individual choice, because gendered subjectivity is embedded in kinship, communal morality, and domestic authority (Resnyansky et al., 2024). Intan Paramaditha's novel (2023) matters because it turns this social anxiety into gothic form. Its world is filled with blessed signs that no longer bless: *Jannah* becomes a lure, feminine purity becomes a mask of credibility, and violence returns through shame, haunting, ruined kinship, and the house that refuses to keep its secrets buried.

Studies of terrorism, gender, and religious violence in Indonesian cultural texts have opened a necessary conversation, but they have not yet fully addressed how sacred signs themselves become unstable in fiction. Indonesian novels and films are often read through deradicalization, misinterpreted jihad, brainwashing, Islamophobia, family resistance, or counter-narrative. Aziz (2019), for example, examines *Demi Allah, Aku Jadi Teroris* (2009) through psychosocial crisis, misread jihad, and Islamophobia. Rahayu (2020) reads *Mata Tertutup* (2011) through NII recruitment, youth radicalization, and family intervention. Schmidt (2021) turns to *Islam Nusantara* media as a counter-terror aesthetic shaped by religious authority. These studies are important, yet they leave another question less explored: what happens when signs of piety, purity, and salvation no longer secure moral order, but begin to carry violence? Studies on Paramaditha's fiction have also moved close to this problem. Azhahra and Septiyani (2024) foreground magical realism and social criticism, while Mayada and Sulton (2024) read Annisa through gothic feminism and family inequality. Still, the specific relation between *Jannah*, *wudu*, *Ramadan*, bridal whiteness, jasmine, shame, and the "soleha" girl remains underexamined. These signs do more than mark religiosity. They organize feeling, trust, beauty, and dread. This article therefore reads them as part of a gothic grammar of religious violence, where female piety becomes socially credible, purity becomes sensuous, and salvation becomes ethically dangerous. Culture, genre, and moral judgment are not separate here. They work through one another.

In *Malam Seribu Jahanam* (2023), female piety and purity become a language through which violence gains sacred force. Annisa stands at the center of narrative: a beloved daughter, promised bride, disciplined body, and "soleha" girl whose femininity is already read as moral trust. This reading matters because studies of Muslim women's piety in Indonesia show how modesty, bodily discipline, domestic virtue, and public respectability often make female morality visible before it is questioned (Rinaldo, 2014; Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024). This article then follows signs that intensify that trust: *wudu*, *Ramadan*, whiteness, jasmine, fragrance, *Jannah*, and *Jahanam*. These signs do not simply express faith. They make purity sensuous, beautiful, and persuasive, while also bringing it close to blood, shame, burial, and ruin. Finally, this analysis turns to the novel's central reversal: *Jannah* pursued as salvation, *Jahanam* produced as social catastrophe. In this reversal, transcendence loses its ethical force when purity and feminine virtue are used to authorize harm. This novel is therefore read not as evidence of extremism, but as a literary account of how sacred language, family shame, gendered trust, and gothic haunting can make violence appear devotional. This approach also responds to terrorism studies that warns against reducing women perpetrators to victims, dupes, or anomalies, since women

may inhabit domestic, ideological, and violent roles at once (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Macfarlane, 2024; Margolin & Cook, 2024; Veronika, 2025).

Malam Seribu Jahanam (2023) is not concerned with religion as an object of rejection. It stages a more specific danger: lived faith remade as purity. In this shift, Annisa's "soleha" femininity gives violence a body already trusted by family and community. Bridal whiteness, jasmine, and heavenly fragrance soften that body with beauty. *Jannah* supplies the promise through which destruction can appear as salvation. Yet the narrative keeps breaking purity it displays. Wudu stands beside blood that cannot be washed away. Fragrance hovers between paradise and grave. The bride becomes the bomber. Heaven, pursued as reward, leaves *Jahanam* as a social fact. This reversal matters because it refuses two familiar simplifications: religious violence as irrational fanaticism, and female perpetrators as merely manipulated, immature, or brainwashed (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Nacos, 2005; Veronika, 2025). It also speaks to studies of Muslim women's piety in Indonesia, where modesty, bodily discipline, and public respectability often make female virtue socially visible before it is questioned (Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024; Rinaldo, 2014). By moving purity from ritual cleanliness into beauty, affect, and afterlife desire, this novel shows how moral beauty can turn dangerous when it loses responsibility to living bodies. Indonesian gothic fiction exposes that danger by making innocence itself haunted.

The "soleha" girl: pious femininity as moral legibility

Gendered pious femininity refers to the way feminine virtue becomes socially legible through religious discipline, bodily comportment, affective restraint, and kinship roles, not only privately believed. In Indonesia, piety often appears through modest clothing, disciplined emotion, domestic responsibility, bodily restraint, and moral respectability. Through these signs, women are made visible as ethical figures for family and community (Rinaldo, 2014; Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024). Yet this visibility is not innocent. Terrorism studies complicates this picture by demonstrating that women involved in violent extremism may continue to inhabit normative identities as daughters, wives, and mothers even while engaging ideological, logistical, or violent roles (Macfarlane, 2024; Veronika, 2025). *Malam Seribu Jahanam* (2023) turns this tension into gothic form. Annisa's "soleha" status does not come mainly from doctrinal argument. It comes from how others read her: beloved daughter, cherished younger sister, promised bride, disciplined body, innocent girl. Her piety works because it is already trusted. Precisely there, the danger begins. A femininity coded as gentle and pure can be redirected toward death, shame, and ruin. What should guarantee moral clarity instead makes violence intimate and believable. This novel therefore treats pious femininity not as moral essence, but as a fragile social script. Annisa is made readable first, then sacred, then vulnerable to capture. Through her, this novel shows how religious violence can borrow the emotional authority of feminine virtue.

In this novel, gendered pious femininity can be traced through four indicators. First is daughterhood: Annisa is valued through filial intimacy and through family's dependence on her moral sweetness, a pattern that reflects how women's piety is often tied to kinship, domestic virtue, and public respectability (Rinaldo, 2014; Jati et al., 2024). Second is bridal destiny: prophecy, marriageability, and bridal imagery place her within an ideal script of feminine futurity, where pious womanhood becomes visible through modest beauty, bodily discipline, and social expectation (Husein & Slama, 2018; Sunesti, 2019). Third is bodily respectability: modest comportment, aesthetic innocence, and disciplined embodiment make her appear ethically transparent, as if a controlled feminine body could guarantee moral truth (Avishai, 2008; Rinaldo, 2014). Fourth is moral legibility: label

“soleha” condenses piety into an immediately recognizable social code, one that makes female virtue readable before it is questioned (Jati et al., 2024; Veronika, 2025). Read together, these signs show that Annisa is not simply religious; she is rendered readable as religion in feminine form. This novel uses that readability to expose a paradox: the more socially credible Annisa’s pious femininity becomes, the more available it is for ideological and catastrophic refunctioning (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Macfarlane, 2024; Margolin & Cook, 2024; Veronika, 2025).

Aestheticized purity and the fragility of sacred signs

Aestheticized purity (or purity politics) refers to the process by which moral innocence is made visible, desirable, and emotionally persuasive through sensory, chromatic, and affective signs (Duschinsky, 2013; Papastergiadis, 2014). In broader studies, purity is commonly discussed as boundary making: a distinction between clean and unclean, sacred and profane, proper and dangerous (Douglas, 1966; Duschinsky, 2013). Studies of contemporary Muslim femininity extend this insight by showing that piety often circulates through visual regimes of modest beauty, bodily discipline, and respectable appearance, especially in Indonesia’s mediated public sphere (Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024; Rinaldo, 2014; Sunesti, 2019). In fiction, however, purity can do more than regulate social boundaries; it can organize atmosphere, pacing, expectation, and dread for readers and characters (Duncan, 2026; Krupa, 2024; Papastergiadis, 2014). In *Malam Seribu Jahanam* (2023), aestheticized purity is not reducible to doctrinal correctness, ritual cleanliness, or moral sincerity. It is produced through whiteness, jasmine, fragrance, bridal fabric, *Ramadan* temporality, and the promise of *Jannah*, all of which make sanctity sensuous before it becomes ethical. Novel thereby shifts the concept from sociological visibility to gothic instability. Purity does not remain a stable sign of goodness. It flickers between innocence and danger, paradise and burial, blessing and contamination. This difference matters because this novel shows that purity politics works not only by excluding impurity, but also by beautifying violence in advance. The sacred surface attracts trust; the sensory atmosphere lowers resistance; the sign of heaven begins to conceal the nearness of *Jahanam*.

In this novel, aestheticized purity can be operationalized through five interrelated indicators. First, chromatic purity appears in white cloth, bridal dress, and visual brightness, where color and clothing become visible signs of moral readability (Bouvier, 2016; Sunesti, 2019). Second, floral and olfactory purity appears in jasmine and fragrance, which make innocence sensuous and memorable, turning purity into affective atmosphere rather than abstract doctrine (Duncan, 2026; Papastergiadis, 2014). Third, ritual purity appears in ablution and *Ramadan*, signs that ordinarily promise cleansing, discipline, and sacred time (Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024). Fourth, eschatological purity appears in *Jannah* as a horizon of reward and incorruptibility, where sacred promise begins to shape moral perception and action (Krupa, 2024; Veronika, 2025). Fifth, destabilization appears when these same signs are contaminated by blood, bodily debris, burial imagery, and dread, exposing purity as a fragile boundary rather than a stable guarantee of goodness (Douglas, 1966; Duschinsky, 2013). Taken together, these signs show that purity in this novel is never merely seen. It is smelled, touched, anticipated, and then broken. Sacred signs do not disappear after violence enters the scene. They remain, but in a disturbed form. Purity still organizes feeling, memory, and moral expectation, even when blood, bodily ruin, and burial imagery have already exposed its fragility. This persistence is what makes purity so dangerous in this novel: it continues to attract trust after its promise of innocence has collapsed.

Eschatological violence and the collapse of transcendent promise

Eschatological religious violence refers to violence that derives legitimacy from an imagined afterlife, where harm in present is reframed as sacrifice, purification, redemption, or access to transcendent reward (Buc, 2021; Hu, 2025; Jackson, 2025; Jonkers, 2017). Studies of women and terrorism warn against two familiar reductions: female perpetrators as irrational fanatics, or as passive victims of male control (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Nacos, 2005; Phelan, 2023). Work on Indonesia and Southeast Asia also shows that women's violent participation often takes shape within dense moral worlds of kinship, communal duty, and religious aspiration, not simply individual grievance (Macfarlane, 2024; Resnyansky et al., 2024; Veronika, 2025). *Malam Seribu Jahanam* does not mainly explain militancy through networks, doctrine, or recruitment. It stages a reversal. *Jannah* appears as compensation; *Jahanam* appears as consequence. Annisa's act becomes thinkable not because violence is naturally sacred, but because transcendence is imagined as able to absorb worldly loss. Novel feminizes this logic through the trusted figure of the "soleha" daughter. It also turns it gothic: promised paradise returns as haunting, guilt, and domestic hell. Salvation no longer belongs only to the future. It becomes the story that makes devastation possible now.

Eschatological religious violence can be traced through four main indicators. First, sacrificial framing: Annisa's death is aligned with a logic of offering rather than simple destruction (Buc, 2021; Jackson, 2025). Second, transcendental compensation: *Jannah* appears as the language that justifies present loss through future reward (Hu, 2025; Jonkers, 2017). Third, hostile pious agency: pious female subject is not outside violence, but may inhabit it as a meaningful act within a sacred horizon (Macfarlane, 2024; Phelan, 2023; Veronika, 2025). Fourth, ethical collapse: the promised beyond produces *Jahanam* as lived reality for the family, house, and social world left behind (Buc, 2021; Hu, 2025; Jackson, 2025). Together, these indicators track movement from desire to sanction, from sanctity to damage, from promise to aftermath. Taken together, these movements show that the novel's *Jannah/Jahanam* reversal is not a rhetorical flourish. It is the point at which transcendence loses its ethical weight. What should guide moral life begins to authorize injury. Once the promise of the afterlife is joined to feminine virtue and purity, it can turn into a language that justifies harm. The price is not paid in heaven, but in the present: by the family, the house, and the living bodies left behind (Jonkers, 2017; Resnyansky et al., 2024; Veronika, 2025).

These three ideas move through the novel as a chain, not as separate labels. Annisa is first made readable through daughterhood, bridal destiny, bodily respectability, and the "soleha" ideal. Her femininity carries moral trust because Indonesian Muslim piety often becomes visible through modesty, domestic responsibility, bodily discipline, and public respectability (Rinaldo, 2014; Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024). That trust is then intensified through sensory and ritual signs: white cloth, jasmine, fragrance, ablution, *Ramadan*, and *Jannah*. These signs give purity beauty, texture, and emotional force, yet they also become unstable when touched by blood, burial, shame, and dread (Douglas, 1966; Duschinsky, 2013; Papastergiadis, 2014; Sunesti, 2019). Finally, the same signs are drawn into the promise of sacrificial salvation. *Jannah* becomes the language through which violence appears meaningful; *Jahanam* becomes the world left behind for the living. This movement matters because studies of women and terrorism warn against reading female perpetrators only as victims, anomalies, or irrational figures (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Macfarlane, 2024; Veronika, 2025). This novel offers another path. It first builds a

trusted feminine subject, then surrounds her with an atmosphere of purity, then shows how trust and purity can be turned toward violence. The movement from *Jannah* to *Jahanam* is therefore not a rejection of religion. It is a descent from sacred promise into social devastation.

Methods

This study reads Intan Paramaditha's *Malam Seribu Jahanam* (2023) as a single literary case rather than as social documentation of terrorism. The material object is the novel's narrative construction of Annisa, Hajjah Victoria's prophecy, Rumah Victoria, the forbidden well, sisterly guilt, and the *Jannah/Jahanam* reversal. These elements are selected because they condense the article's central problem: how female piety, purity, shame, and religious violence are gothicized within contemporary Indonesian fiction. Focus of this study is therefore textual, symbolic, and narratological. It does not measure radicalization, classify terrorist networks, or reconstruct empirical causality. Instead, it treats the novel as a cultural text in which gendered religious signs acquire narrative force. This delimitation follows recent terrorism-and-gender studies, which warns that women's participation in violence must be read through roles, representation, ideology, and agency, not through victimhood alone (Macfarlane, 2024; Margolin & Cook, 2024; Veronika, 2025). Accordingly, the novel becomes the bounded site of interpretive inquiry here.

The research design is qualitative and interpretive. It combines three concept-guided lenses: gendered pious femininity, aestheticized purity or purity politics, and eschatological religious violence. Gendered pious femininity directs attention to Annisa as daughter, bride, disciplined body, and socially recognizable "soleha" woman. Aestheticized purity tracks how *wudu*, *Ramadan*, whiteness, jasmine, fragrance, and heavenly imagery turn innocence into a sensory regime. Eschatological religious violence examines how *Jannah* becomes a compensatory promise that can authorize present destruction. This design is appropriate because literary meaning emerges through recurrence, juxtaposition, irony, and narrative placement, not through numerical distribution. It also reflects methodological trends in women-and-terrorism research, where qualitative inquiry remains dominant because it can address roles, motivations, representation, media, and gendered meaning in context (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Margolin & Cook, 2024; Phelan, 2023). The model therefore privileges depth, proportionality, and conceptual coherence over breadth, quantification, or causal prediction alone.

The study draws on primary and secondary information sources. The primary source is the full text of *Malam Seribu Jahanam* (Paramaditha, 2023), especially passages involving Annisa's bombing, prophecy, ritual signs, bridal imagery, the house, the well, shame, and haunting. Secondary sources include peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, theses, proceedings, and critical essays on Intan Paramaditha, Indonesian gothic fiction, women's piety, and women's involvement in terrorism. The secondary corpus is used to situate the reading, not to replace the novel as evidence. Following review-based work that moves beyond core terrorism journals to include gender studies, criminology, communication, psychology, and regional studies, this article also draws information from interdisciplinary studies where women, representation, and violence intersect (Margolin & Cook, 2024; Schmidt, 2021). This layered sourcing prevents the analysis from becoming either purely thematic or narrowly security-centered in its interpretive scope overall.

Data collection was conducted through desk review. First, the novel was read repeatedly to locate scenes where piety, purity, shame, violence, and gothic space converge. Relevant textual units were then excerpted as narrative events, character descriptions, symbolic images, ritual references, sensory details, and recurrent oppositions

such as *Jannah/Jahanam*, purity/contamination, bride/bomber, and house/grave. Second, previous studies were reviewed to identify debates on Paramaditha's fiction, Indonesian religious media, women's terrorism, and gendered agency. This procedure follows qualitative document analysis, where documents are selected, read, annotated, and interpreted according to the research problem (Bowen, 2009). It also adapts terrorism-review practice by clarifying inclusion boundaries, source types, and thematic relevance before analysis begins (Margolin & Cook, 2024). Only materials directly linked to the research questions were retained for coding and interpretation in the final corpus thereafter.

Data analysis proceeded in three stages. The first stage was reduction: textual units were grouped under the three concepts, namely gendered pious femininity, aestheticized purity, and eschatological religious violence. The second stage was display: the grouped units were arranged in a matrix linking signs, scenes, narrative functions, and research questions. The third stage was verification: provisional interpretations were checked against narrative context, repetition, contradiction, and relevant studies. Analytically, the study combines content analysis, discourse analysis, and interpretive analysis. Content analysis identifies recurring motifs; discourse analysis examines how piety, purity, shame, and salvation are articulated as moral language; interpretive analysis explains how those articulations produce gothic meaning. Trustworthiness is maintained through transparent coding, concept consistency, and interpretive adequacy, following qualitative criteria for credibility, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017). The outcome is an evidence-based reading rather than thematic impressionism or speculation alone.

Gendered pious femininity and the moral legibility of Annisa

Annisa's pious femininity is first produced through the family's language of intimacy, beauty, and religious trust. The novel introduces her not as an ideological actor but as "*adik cantik soleha, kesayangan Papa*" (the beautiful pious little sister, Papa's favorite") (Paramaditha, 2023). The phrase compresses daughterhood, bodily charm, obedience, and religious virtue into one affective label. Annisa is "*adik kita—adikmu, adikku*" (our sister—your sister, my sister), so her later violence immediately becomes a family wound rather than an external political event (Paramaditha, 2023). The grandmother's prophecy deepens the same coding: "*Kau akan jadi pengantin yang cantik*" (You will become a beautiful bride) (Paramaditha, 2023). Piety is therefore attached to bridal destiny before it is attached to militant agency. The evidence shows a gendered sequence: Annisa is made legible as daughter, sister, beloved child, and future bride; only afterward is she recognized as bomber. This sequence matters because research on Muslim femininity in Indonesia shows that female virtue often becomes publicly readable through modest appearance, familial responsibility, and respectable comportment (Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024). It also matters for terrorism studies, since women's violent participation is repeatedly misread when analysts treat women only as passive victims or emotional dependents (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Veronika, 2025). Paramaditha's fiction refuses both simplifications. Annisa's "*soleha*" identity is not private faith alone. It is a social code attached to a feminine body already trusted by kin, memory, and religious expectation. This novel thus constructs gendered pious femininity as moral legibility: a mode of recognition that makes Annisa appear innocent, lovable, and protected before making her violence narratively unbearable. Such framing also converts terror into retrospective inquiry. After the bombing, the sisters search not merely for a culprit, but for the lost girl whom family language had already sanctified, softened, and failed to understand. Again and again, inside their own haunted home.

This pattern becomes clearer when Annisa's femininity is read through bridal futurity and bodily respectability. Her destiny is not imagined as argument, vocation, or leadership, but as a scene of being seen. The novel later recalls the preferred image of Annisa through whiteness: "*putih, putih melati, murni, tak ternoda*" (white, jasmine-white, pure, unstained) (Paramaditha, 2023). It then folds her into the spectacle of marriage: "*gaun dan kerudung brokat putih*" (a white brocade dress and veil) (Paramaditha, 2023). These images describe more than costume. They stage femininity as public moral display. Annisa's body becomes meaningful when it is dressed, watched, protected, and interpreted through familial and religious ideals. Such construction resonates with studies of Indonesian piety that link Muslim women's respectability to modest aesthetics, veiling, beauty, and domestic virtue (Rinaldo, 2014; Sunesti, 2019). It also resonates with work on Indonesian gender order, where ideal womanhood remains tied to pious obedience, wifehood, motherhood, and male guardianship (Veronika, 2025). These norms do not simply oppress from outside. They offer Annisa a script through which she can be recognized. The problem is that recognition arrives as enclosure. To be valued, she must be daughterly, bridal, beautiful, and pure. The construction of pious femininity therefore works by narrowing agency into socially approved forms. Annisa is not voiceless, but her voice is expected to emerge only within roles already written for her. This is why the later image of the bomber unsettles narrative so deeply: it does not replace the bride; it reveals the violence that can inhabit a bride's grammar. From the very beginning itself.

Paramaditha's novel places Annisa inside a moral economy where love, protection, and discipline are difficult to separate. Family calls her beloved, but that love also regulates her future. The prophecy that she will become a bride does not merely predict marriage; it assigns value to a feminine destination. In this sense, Annisa's piety is produced by relational pressure. She is loved as long as she remains readable within approved forms of femininity. Feminist studies on agency warns that religious discipline should not be reduced either to domination or to liberation, because pious subjects may inhabit norms while also acting through them (Avishai, 2008; Rinaldo, 2014). Terrorism studies adds another caution: women's movement into political violence cannot be explained only by manipulation, romance, or psychological weakness (Margolin & Cook, 2024; Nacos, 2005). Paramaditha brings these cautions into literary form. Annisa's pious femininity is credible because it is ordinary: good daughter, obedient wife, white bride, modest woman. Yet that ordinariness becomes dangerous when it is treated as moral certainty. Novel suggests that femininity becomes vulnerable to capture precisely when it is overtrusted as purity. Annisa's transformation therefore should not be interpreted as a fall from authentic piety into false violence. It is better read as a violent refunctioning of very signs that once made her socially admirable, emotionally protected, and religiously intelligible. The horror lies in that continuity, not in a sudden break between faith and terror. Inside the same feminine script itself.

Gendered pious femininity functions both as social trust and as narrative danger. Its first function is stabilizing. Annisa's identity as "the beautiful pious little sister" allows family to remember her through affection rather than suspicion; her bridal destiny gives the household a familiar story about feminine fulfillment; her bodily respectability makes her appear morally legible. Yet the same structure becomes dysfunctional when trust turns into blindness. The narrative states that blood has touched everyone's face, "*tak luntur oleh air wudu*" (not washed away by ablution) (Paramaditha, 2023). The phrase joins family guilt, ritual cleansing, and failed purification. Annisa's pious femininity had promised moral order, but her violence leaves contamination that no sacred routine can erase. This is where novel exceeds a simple critique of terrorism. It shows how a family and a class culture may

mistake visible piety for ethical relation. Studies of women and violent extremism in Indonesia show that female actors can occupy domestic, ideological, logistical, and violent roles simultaneously (Macfarlane, 2024; Veronika, 2025). Novel translates that simultaneity into gothic language. Annisa is not merely bride or bomber, victim or perpetrator, daughter or threat. She is the site where these categories collapse into each other. The phrase “*Demi Jannah ia ciptakan Jahanam*” (For Jannah she created Jahanam), condenses this collapse (Paramaditha, 2023). It implies that pious femininity becomes disastrous when it carries transcendental promise without accountability to living bodies. The social function of “soleha” femininity is to make virtue visible; its dysfunction is to make that visibility too persuasive. The novel’s answer is severe: moral beauty, when isolated from care, can become a vehicle for sacred harm. What appears gentle may also conceal command, resentment, injury, and coercive hope. Paramaditha makes this danger legible by letting the ideal daughter return as a problem no family can domesticate. Through ritual memory and domestic mourning alone anymore. Now.

Annisa’s story moves through a series of substitutions. Family affection takes the place of ethical attention. Bridal destiny takes the place of an open future. Visible modesty takes place of moral complexity. *Jannah* takes place of responsibility to the world. Each substitution narrows Annisa’s subjectivity while raising her symbolic value. She becomes easier to love, easier to trust, and harder to question. This pattern matters because studies of women and terrorism warn that female perpetrators are often framed as immature, deceived, naturally peaceful, or merely acted upon, even when their agency is more complex (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Nacos, 2005; Phelan, 2023; Veronika, 2025). Studies of Indonesian Muslim piety also show that feminine virtue often becomes visible through modesty, bodily discipline, domestic respectability, and social trust (Rinaldo, 2014; Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024). Novel does not answer those stereotypes by simply making Annisa powerful. It shows something more disturbing: power can grow from a damaged script of obedience. Annisa’s piety becomes convincing because others have already named, desired, and displayed it. Her violence becomes shocking because that same readability had been mistaken for innocence. Gendered pious femininity does not cause terrorism. Yet it creates a symbolic ground from which violence can borrow trust, sanctity, and beauty. From that borrowed authority, the passage from *Jannah* to *Jahanam* becomes culturally plausible and ethically terrifying.

Aestheticized purity and the collapse of sacred signs

Paramaditha’s novel aestheticizes purity by placing sacred and sensory signs inside the scene of explosion, mourning, and retrospective shame. The opening catastrophe is framed by religious cry, bodily debris, and failed cleansing: “*ya Allah, ya Allah*” (O God, O God) is heard amid “*pecahan kaca*” (*shards of glass*) and “*potongan tubuh di aspal*” (*body parts on the asphalt*) (Paramaditha, 2023). The family then recognizes Annisa as “the beautiful pious little sister, Papa’s favorite”, yet the narration immediately stains that memory: “*darah telah memercik wajah kita semua, tak luntur oleh air wudu*” (*blood has splashed all our faces, not fading through ablution*) (Paramaditha, 2023). Here, *wudu* no longer functions as secure purification. It remains a sacred sign, but its promised cleansing is defeated by blood. *Ramadan* undergoes the same reversal. The text recalls “*Ramadan yang datang menghantam telinga dengan dentuman kencang, memedihkan mata dengan kobaran api dan daging terbakar*” (*Ramadan arriving by striking the ear with a loud boom, hurting the eyes with flames and burned flesh*) (Paramaditha, 2023). Sacred time becomes sensory assault. The final image gathers whiteness, jasmine, bridal fabric, fragrance, and afterlife desire: Annisa prefers “jasmine-white, pure, unstained” and appears in memory

with “a white brocade dress and veil” followed by a scent “*seperti datang dari surga, atau kuburan*” (as if from heaven, or a grave) (Paramaditha, 2023). The closing reversal, “For *Jannah* she created *Jahanam*” makes purity beautiful and catastrophic at once. This textual pattern supports studies on Indonesian piety as a mediated field of visible virtue, disciplined bodies, and affective religious signs (Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024). It also situates horror in the unstable threshold between devotion and desecration, a threshold that recent readings of the novel identify as sacred-profane ambiguity rather than mere supernatural spectacle (Anitasari, 2026). The effect is precise: sanctity becomes unstable there.

Purity in this novel moves from beauty to contamination. At first, it appears through white dress, white veil, jasmine, bridal procession, and heavenly scent. These signs recall a social world in which Muslim femininity is often judged through modest appearance, bodily discipline, refined beauty, and public respectability (Rinaldo, 2014; Husein & Slama, 2018; Sunesti, 2019; Jati et al., 2024). Yet the novel places the same signs after the bombing, when Annisa’s body has become “*tidak keruan*” (no longer intact). The body that should carry white innocence appears through ruin. The scent that should promise paradise becomes uncertain: “heaven, or a grave” (Paramaditha, 2023). The bridal image remains, but it can no longer secure meaning. The novel therefore does not simply oppose purity and violence. It shows how purity can make violence aesthetically bearable. A white bride is easier to mourn and sanctify than a bomber. Jasmine softens horror. Fragrance delays disgust. *Jannah* turns attention away from broken bodies and toward reward. Purity politics here works through the senses, not doctrine alone: color, smell, fabric, sacred time, ritual water, and family memory. These surfaces do not erase violence. They arrange it in a familiar language of grace, respectability, and afterlife desire. In that language, destruction becomes readable before it becomes condemnable (Douglas, 1966; Duschinsky, 2013; Bouvier, 2016; Veronika, 2025).

This pattern occurs because purity in text is never merely theological. It is social, gendered, and affective. This novel assumes that signs of cleanliness and whiteness already carry public authority in Indonesian Muslim culture, where modest fashion, veiling, domestic respectability, and pious performance often make women’s morality readable to others (Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024). Paramaditha then gothicizes that authority. She does not remove the sacred sign; she lets the sacred sign fail under pressure. *Wudu* is still named, but it cannot wash blood. *Ramadan* is still present, but it arrives as burning flesh. *Jannah* is still desired, but it produces *Jahanam*. The interpretation is therefore not that religious symbols are false. Rather, the novel shows how symbols become dangerous when their sensory beauty replaces ethical relation. Purity becomes an image detached from care. Once detached, it can circulate as affective proof: white means innocent, fragrant means heavenly, bridal means blessed, and *Jannah* means justified. The horror arises when text forces these associations to coexist with bodies, guilt, and ruin. The result is not iconoclasm, but a critique of moral shorthand itself here.

The consequence of this reading is that aestheticized purity becomes both a narrative resource and an ethical risk. Its enabling role lies in concentration. By gathering *wudu*, *Ramadan*, white brocade, jasmine, heavenly scent, and *Jannah* around Annisa, this novel gives religious violence a sensuous surface that readers can recognize before they can judge it. This is why the sentence: “*harum meruap, seperti datang dari surga, atau kuburan*” (fragrance rose, as if coming from heaven, or a grave), is decisive (Paramaditha, 2023). The smell does not belong to one semantic field. It binds paradise to burial. Purity therefore works, first, as a mode of attraction. It draws Annisa into a language of beauty and salvation. It also draws the family into retrospective disbelief: how could the white bride

become the bomber? Its disabling role lies in exposure. The same signs that make Annisa beautiful also reveal the fragility of moral perception. If readers rely on sensory purity, they misrecognize violence. If they rely on ritual purity, they miss the blood that remains. This implication aligns with studies arguing that women's participation in political violence is often distorted by gendered expectations of innocence, emotionality, and victimhood (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Margolin & Cook, 2024; Nacos, 2005). Paramaditha's novel turns that distortion into form. The purer Annisa appears, the more disturbing the violence becomes; the more heavenly the vocabulary, the more visible the hell it produces. Aestheticized purity thus functions as critique. It demonstrates how culture can beautify moral danger, but also how literature can contaminate that beauty from within by forcing paradise, grave, bride, and bomber into one unbearable image. The effect is not decorative; it reorganizes the reader's moral perception itself and judgment too.

The deeper relation behind this result is a chain of sensory substitution. Ethical accountability is replaced by ritual cleanliness; embodied suffering by visual innocence; political harm by eschatological reward. The chain is not accidental. It emerges from a social field in which women's bodies are expected to carry signs of communal virtue, while terrorism research shows that women's violent roles are often interpreted through the very gender norms that make their agency difficult to see (Macfarlane, 2024; Phelan, 2023; Veronika, 2025). Purity politics in text supplies that hidden infrastructure. Annisa's whiteness is not only her preference; it is the language through which family, religion, and memory make her intelligible. Once this language is attached to *Jannah*, violence can borrow affected of innocence. Once blood interrupts it, *Jahanam* becomes visible as the truth of that borrowing. This passage from purity to terror is therefore a passage from sign to consequence: beauty authorizes, then betrays, the violence it had made bearable before.

Eschatological violence and the moral grammar of female terrorism

Paramaditha's novel turns eschatology into a grammar of violence by making *Jannah* appear not only as theological promise. It becomes the language through which destruction gains moral height. *Jannah/Jahanam* reversal does not simply contrast heaven and hell. It shows what happens when salvation is cut off from responsibility to the living. The bombing is framed through sacred shock, bodily ruin, public panic, and failed purification. Religious speech appears beside torn bodies. Ritual cleansing stands beside blood that cannot be removed. Annisa is also remembered through family affection and pious femininity: a beloved daughter, cherished sister, future bride, and "soleha" girl. Because of that, her violence cannot be pushed outside the family as pure monstrosity. The bomber remains inside the grammar of kinship, femininity, and religious trust. Eschatological violence in this novel emerges from this collision: heavenly longing, feminine virtue, ritual language, and public death. This is why Annisa's act cannot be reduced to fanaticism or victimhood. Terrorism studies have repeatedly warned against gender-blind readings of women's violence, especially those that cast female perpetrators only as dupes, anomalies, or emotional dependents (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Margolin & Cook, 2024; Phelan, 2023; Veronika, 2025). This novel offers a sharper literary account. It shows how the promise of *Jannah* can be converted into present catastrophe, and how *Jahanam* becomes socially real for those left behind. Eschatology no longer stays in the future. It becomes a way to decide whose life can be sacrificed, whose grief can be postponed, and whose body can be turned into proof of sacred arrival.

The pattern develops through a series of substitutions that make eschatological violence narratively intelligible. First, substitution replaces ordinary death with sacrifice.

Annisa does not simply die; she “*melilitkan bom di pinggang dan meledakkan tubuhnya*” (wrapped a bomb around her waist and exploded her body) (Paramaditha, 2023). The reflexive bodily act matters. It makes her body both weapon and offering. Second, substitution replaces ethical relation with heavenly compensation. *Jannah* becomes the imagined good that can absorb loss, even when the living inherit debris, shame, and grief. Third, substitution replaces accountability with purity. Annisa’s bridal image survives beside destruction, as if sensory innocence could soften moral injury. Fourth, substitution replaces social aftermath with sacred destiny. *Ramadan* is not described as quiet discipline, but as a time that arrives through “*dentuman kencang*” (a loud boom), “*kobaran api*” (flames), and “*daging terbakar*” (burned flesh) (Paramaditha, 2023). Sacred time is thus forced to carry the material consequences of violence. These substitutions define eschatological religious violence as a narrative mechanism: harm becomes thinkable when worldly life is subordinated to imagined reward. Female actors may occupy roles as supporters, ideologues, recruiters, wives, mothers, and perpetrators, and that their agency is often obscured by expectations of feminine innocence or dependency (Macfarlane, 2024; Veronika, 2025). Paramaditha transforms that political problem into literary structure. Annisa’s piety and femininity do not prevent violence; they make shock of violence sharper because they lend it credibility, intimacy, and sacrificial aura. The final reversal from *Jannah* to *Jahanam* therefore condenses a longer process in which transcendence becomes a form of moral displacement. This process also turns Annisa’s family into unwilling witnesses of transcendental calculation. They inherit not reward she imagines, but the damaged world her imagination leaves behind for those who must remember after the promised ascent has vanished.

This novel treats eschatology as a social imagination, not as a distant doctrine. Heaven enters family memory, gendered expectation, and language of purity. Annisa’s bridal destiny gives violence an emotional surface before doctrine is even explained. Her “*soleha*” status builds trust. Her whiteness suggests innocence. *Jannah* offers reward. These signs matter because they are familiar. They belong to a cultural world where Muslim femininity is often read through modesty, beauty, domestic virtue, and disciplined bodily conduct (Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024; Rinaldo, 2014). Text turns that familiarity into gothic unease. It does not argue that belief in the afterlife naturally leads to violence. Its concern is sharper: afterlife promise becomes dangerous when joined to purity politics and detached from care for living bodies. Transcendence then loses its ethical force. It no longer protects life. It reorganizes death as devotion, injury as redemption, and destruction as sacred passage. In this way, the afterlife is not narrated beyond the world. It returns through family grief, bodily ruin, and social *Jahanam* left behind.

Religious violence in this novel gains force because it is given a horizon beyond crime. *Jannah* raises destruction into the language of sacred passage, while feminine purity softens its horror. Annisa can be imagined as “*bidadari dengan untaian melati*” (an angelic maiden with a garland of jasmine) even after the narrative has shown bodies, fire, and public grief (Paramaditha, 2023). That is where the danger lies. Eschatology makes violence look like movement toward salvation, not only an act that destroys bodies. Yet this novel refuses to let this promise remain clean. Every sacred sign returns in a damaged form. Paradise leans toward burial. Fragrance carries the trace of death. Ablution cannot remove blood. The family is marked. The city mourns. The sisters search for what violence has taken from them. *Jannah* fails because it leaves *Jahanam* for the living. This movement challenges common portrayals of female terrorists as spectacle, deviance, or gendered surprise, rather than as subjects shaped by symbolic worlds that make violence intelligible (Nacos, 2005). It also responds to recent calls for gender-sensitive terrorism studies by showing

how fiction can reveal the emotional and moral routes through which violence becomes thinkable (Margolin & Cook, 2024; Phelan, 2023; Veronika, 2025). The novel's critique is sharp: religious violence is not prepared by doctrine alone. It is also prepared by beauty, kinship, shame, purity, and salvation. What should console the faithful can, under violent pressure, teach them to see death as beautiful before its victims are counted.

The deeper relation behind Annisa's reversal is a causal chain of moral abstraction. First, female piety is abstracted from lived ethics and turned into visible credibility. Second, purity is abstracted from care and turned into innocence. Third, *Jannah* is abstracted from divine mercy and turned into compensation for harm. Once these abstractions converge, violence can borrow the language of devotion. This does not make Annisa less responsible; it explains how responsibility becomes narratively obscured. The novel's gothic force lies in returning every abstraction to matter: blood, burned flesh, shattered glass, ruined kinship, a grieving city, and a house that cannot contain its secrets. Such return matters because terrorism studies has long warned that women's agency is misread when gender norms overdetermine interpretation (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Macfarlane, 2024; Veronika, 2025). Paramaditha's answer is literary: the same norms that make Annisa appear pure also help hide the route by which purity becomes violent. *Jannah* becomes *Jahanam* when transcendence ceases to judge violence and begins to justify it. The movement is not linear radicalization, but symbolic compression: piety, purity, sacrifice, and reward are folded into one fatal image survivors must decipher.

Conclusion

Malam Seribu Jahanam (2023) makes religious violence intelligible through signs that usually promise moral safety. Annisa first appears through gendered pious femininity: daughter, sister, beloved child, bride, and "soleha" woman. This framing does more than shape character. It gives her body social credibility before the bombing becomes narratively thinkable. Such a reading unsettles the tendency to cast women in terrorism as passive, immature, or exceptional actors, a pattern often criticized in studies of female terrorism and gendered counterterrorism discourse (Jacques & Taylor, 2009; Nacos, 2005; Veronika, 2025). Purity then deepens that credibility. *Wudu*, *Ramadan*, whiteness, jasmine, fragrance, *Jannah*, and *Jahanam* no longer remain stable religious signs. This novel makes them beautiful, sensuous, and then contaminated. Purity becomes a visual and affective language that can mislead ethical judgment, especially when feminine virtue is mistaken for moral transparency. This resonates with studies of Indonesian piety that link Muslim subject formation to visibility, bodily discipline, and public respectability (Husein & Slama, 2018; Jati et al., 2024; Rinaldo, 2014). Finally, *Jannah* becomes the horizon through which destruction is imagined as sacred passage, while *Jahanam* names the ruin left for the living. Violence, then, is not only doctrinal or organizational. It is also symbolic, sensory, familial, and literary. Horror becomes ethical knowledge: it shows how sacred language can beautify harm when detached from responsibility to living bodies.

The value of this reading comes from the way it holds together piety, purity, shame, and salvation as parts of the same violent grammar. Paramaditha's novel is not treated as a fictional mirror of terrorism, but as a literary work that shows how sacred signs can make violence morally persuasive. This approach refreshes Indonesian literary criticism by connecting gendered piety, purity politics, and women's involvement in terrorism without reducing radicalization to brainwashing, failed deradicalization, or deviant religiosity. Recent surveys note that studies on women and terrorism have grown, yet the field still often returns to familiar questions of roles, recruitment, motivation, and media portrayal (Margolin & Cook, 2024; Phelan, 2023). Fiction opens another route. It can follow what

security discourse often misses: the affective and aesthetic paths through which violence becomes thinkable. In this novel, signs move gradually. First as trust. Then as beauty. Finally as ruin.

This reading gains depth by staying close to one novel and one central figure of pious femininity. At the same time, that focus leaves other paths open. *Malam Seribu Jahanam* (2023) cannot stand for the full range of Islamic prose, horror writing, or women's militancy in modern Indonesian literature. This analysis also stays mainly with textual and symbolic signs. It does not yet follow reception, publishing history, reader response, or the wider movement of gothic and Islamic themes across genres. Further work could place this novel beside Islamic novels, digital popular fiction, films, short stories, and post-Reformasi horror that stage piety, martyrdom, veiling, obedience, and afterlife desire in different ways. Indonesian cinema would offer a useful comparison, especially because visual media can shape public distinctions between moderation, extremism, religious authority, and moral legitimacy (Schmidt, 2021). Readers' responses to Annisa also deserve attention. Is she seen as victim, perpetrator, martyr, monster, failed daughter, or something less stable than these categories? Such questions would extend the discussion beyond one gothic text and show how religious affect, gendered embodiment, literary form, and political violence continue to meet in contemporary Indonesian cultural production.

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