



Love as Merit, Grief as Practice: Buddhist Narrative Ethics in the Memoir *Mengenang Mama Linda*

Latifah

efi.latifah@gmail.com, Sekolah Tinggi Agama Buddha Kertarajasa, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: efi.latifah@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines how the text reframes personal grief as a Buddhist ethical practice, articulating love as karmic merit (*puñña*) and mourning as a ritualized form of spiritual cultivation (*bhāvanā*). This study employs narrative ethics and close reading to analyze Hendry Filcozwei Jan's memoir *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* (2023). The analysis demonstrates that the memoir integrates Theravāda doctrine, Confucian filial piety, and Indonesian cultural rituals to construct a hybrid narrative of healing. The findings reveal that Jan's literary practice functions as *dāna* (generosity), transforming private loss into a communal moral resource. This research contributes to Buddhist literary studies by providing a granular model of how contemporary Southeast Asian memoirs navigate grief through narrative ethics, offering an alternative to Western paradigms focused on individual catharsis.

Keywords: Buddhist literature; Grief; Narrative ethics; Memoir; *Dāna*; Indonesian Buddhism.

Abstrak

Studi ini menggunakan etika naratif dan pembacaan mendalam (close reading) untuk menganalisis memoar Hendry Filcozwei Jan, Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang (2023). Penelitian mengkaji bagaimana teks tersebut memaknai kembali duka personal sebagai praktik etika Buddhis, yang menyatakan cinta sebagai jasa kebajikan (puñña) dan perkabungan sebagai bentuk ritual dari pembinaan spiritual (bhāvanā). Analisis menunjukkan bahwa memoar tersebut mengintegrasikan ajaran Theravāda, bakti Konfusian, dan ritual budaya Indonesia untuk membangun narasi hibrida penyembuhan. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa praktik sastra Jan berfungsi sebagai dāna (kedermawanan), mengubah kehilangan pribadi menjadi sumber moral komunal. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian sastra Buddhis dengan menyajikan model rinci tentang bagaimana memoar kontemporer Asia Tenggara menavigasi duka melalui etika naratif, menawarkan alternatif terhadap paradigma Barat yang berfokus pada katarsis individual.

Kata Kunci: Sastra Buddhis; Duka; Etika Naratif; Memoar; *Dāna*; Buddhisme Indonesia.

1. Introduction

The modern world faces an escalating crisis of meaning, marked by increasing spiritual alienation, emotional fragmentation, and a decline in empathetic human connection. In an age dominated by technological advancement and material pursuits, many individuals experience a profound sense of existential emptiness, struggling to reconcile secular lifestyles with deeper spiritual longings (Taylor, 2009). This crisis is further exacerbated by globalization, which, while fostering interconnectedness, often erodes traditional belief systems and communal bonds that once provided emotional and moral grounding (Berger, 2014). Literature, as a vessel of cultural memory and spiritual inquiry, offers a vital counterbalance to this

disenchantment, preserving and reinterpreting religious wisdom in ways that speak to contemporary human struggles.

Within this context, Grief and loss emerge as universal yet deeply personal experiences that reveal the fragility of human existence. The psychological toll of unresolved grief—manifested in depression, withdrawal, and existential despair—exposes the limitations of purely secular approaches to healing (Neimeyer, 2015). Religious and literary traditions provide frameworks that situate personal sorrow within larger cosmic narratives of love and transcendence. As illustrated in Hendry Filcozwei Jan's *Remembering Mama Linda* (Jan, 2023), Buddhist teachings on mettā (loving-kindness) and dāna (generosity) reframe grief as a transformative journey intertwined with communal solidarity. Such narratives challenge the modern tendency to medicalize sorrow, offering reconciliation through ethical reflection and ritual remembrance.

Moreover, the decline of shared cultural narratives has contributed to a crisis of collective empathy, making it difficult for individuals to articulate suffering constructively in ways that foster mutual understanding. Literature that integrates religious and humanistic perspectives, such as Jan's memoir, plays a vital role in bridging personal grief and collective healing while nurturing the moral imagination (Nussbaum, 1997). Within this context, this study examines how *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* constructs love as *puñña* and grief as a spiritual practice (*bhāvanā*), and how its cultural hybridity offers a model of ethical reflection and communal solidarity in the face of loss.? This research addresses a critical gap in contemporary discourse: the need for narratives that restore spiritual and emotional resilience in an increasingly fragmented world. In doing so, it illuminates literature's enduring capacity to reconcile the sacred and the secular, offering solace and meaning amid the pervasive crises of modernity.

The relationship between religion and literature has been a central theme in scholarly discourse, reflecting humanity's enduring search for meaning and spiritual values. As Barbara A. Heavilin (2013) observes, literature serves as a profound medium for exploring the divine-human relationship—a grand theme that has persisted since ancient times. This interdisciplinary field examines how religious traditions shape and are reflected in literary works, with particular attention to theological influences and textual representations of spirituality (Ziolkowski, 2019). The significance of this intersection becomes especially evident when considering religion's historical role in shaping civilizations, governance structures, and societal norms across cultures (Handoko, 2024). Moreover, as Risky et al., (2018) demonstrate, the concept of ultimate happiness in literary works often engages with religious frameworks that envision fulfillment as encompassing both worldly and spiritual dimensions.

Within this broader context, the convergence of religion, love, and humanism forms a rich field of inquiry. Hendry Filcozwei Jan's *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* (2023) exemplifies how religiously grounded literature offers meaningful frameworks for interpreting love, grief, and spiritual resilience. This book is a heartfelt tribute to the author's late wife, Linda Muditavati Jan, who passed

away in 2022. Structured as a compilation of short reflections, personal anecdotes, and community testimonials, the book combines elements of memoir, single-paragraph stories (Cerita 1 Alinea), poetry, interviews, letters, and community testimonials. Through thematic entries—ranging from family memories and workplace recollections to Buddhist practices such as *pattidāna* and *dāna Kathina*—the narrative frames Linda's life in light of Buddhist virtues including *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (ethical conduct), *mettā* (loving-kindness), and *puñña* (merit). More than a memorial, the work offers spiritual inspiration and ethical reflection, transforming personal grief into spiritual storytelling and affirming the enduring impact of a life shaped by compassion and devotion.

Jan's work is noteworthy for synthesizing intimate personal narrative with Buddhist teachings—particularly *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (ethical conduct), and *mettā* (loving-kindness)—while remaining deeply rooted in *peranakan* Indonesian cultural traditions; its rich depictions of family rituals and local mourning practices show how Buddhist frameworks interact with communal values to shape distinctive approaches to grief. This resonates with findings from studies in other Indonesian religious-cultural contexts, such as research on bereaved husbands in Padangsidempuan, where Islamic teachings and familial support are integrated to navigate loss. Studies by Harahap (2019) and Harahap (2023) demonstrate that the psychological condition of grieving husbands—characterized by profound sadness, loneliness, and confusion—is often addressed through a framework that combines religious counsel (*nasihat keagamaan*) and active familial guidance (*bimbingan keluarga*). In these contexts, grief is not merely a private emotional state but is managed through a socio-spiritual pathway that involves internalizing religious values like *sabar* (patience) and *tawakal* (surrender to God's will), facilitated by the family's role as an external support system (N. A. Harahap, 2023; S. S. Harahap, 2019). Similarly, in Jan's memoir, Buddhist doctrine is embodied through narrative and ritual, reinforced by the communal testimony of the *sangha*.

While contemporary Buddhist literary studies have productively examined Western adaptations and modernist critiques (Havnevik et al., 2017; P. McLaughlin, 2020; Najarian, 2016; Samuel, 2014; Segall, 2021), a significant gap remains in understanding how Buddhist narrative ethics are embodied in non-Western, vernacular memoirs that address intimate loss. This research posits that the memoir constitutes a significant, yet underexplored contribution to the corpus of Southeast Asian Buddhist literature. The work moves beyond mere doctrinal illustration by presenting a narrative ethic in which storytelling itself becomes an act of virtue (*kathā-dāna*) and a means of communal healing. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, the study bridges literary studies, the psychology of emotion, and religious studies, while maintaining textual analysis as its primary method and integrating theoretical perspectives from religious literature (Ziolkowski, 2019) and trauma narratives (Herman, 1997). It emphasizes how cultural traditions mediate between doctrine and lived experience. In an era marked by growing empathy deficits and spiritual alienation, such culturally rooted narratives function both as personal catharsis and as a broader humanistic dialogue.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative approach, centered on literary text analysis (close reading) to explore the representation of love, grief, and spiritual resilience in the memoir *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* (2023). By examining the author's narrative strategies, the analysis elucidates how personal experiences are constructed into meaningful discourse. The primary data source is the memoir itself, treated as a self-contained textual artifact that encodes both individual and universal dimensions of humanistic values (e.g., love, grief, and spiritual resilience).

The analytical process involves three layered stages of close reading: (1) literal interpretation of explicit textual meaning, (2) narrative analysis of story structure, symbols, and metaphors, and (3) cultural contextualization of universal themes. This multilayered approach aligns with Scott's (1999) framework for analyzing religious literature, which interrogates how spiritual doctrines—here, Buddhist teachings—are formalized into narrative structures. For instance, the memoir's engagement with concepts like *anicca* (impermanence) is examined as both doctrinal reflection and a heuristic tool for processing grief.

To examine the text's thematic and narrative dimensions, thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring patterns, such as love as a form of resilience and memorialization as a strategy for coping with loss. This involved descriptive-thematic coding of the text to identify recurring themes and motifs related to Buddhist concepts, emotional states, and cultural practices, establishing the core data set for analysis. The study further integrates Herman's (1997) trauma recovery model to analyze how the memoir structures grief processing—particularly through ritualized retellings of memory (cultural trauma integration) and the reinterpretation of Buddhist doctrines (e.g., *anicca* as a framework for acceptance). For instance, Herman's (1997) model of trauma recovery—particularly the stages of “safety” and “testimony”—was used to examine how Jan's ritualized writing creates a “safe” narrative container for grief and how the act of publishing constitutes a form of communal testimony. This approach highlights how personal narrative transforms spiritual and psychological concepts into tools for healing.

To ensure rigor, theoretical triangulation cross-references findings with established literary and psychological theories. Furthermore, insights from studies on grief in other religious contexts, such as the psychological conditions of grieving husbands in Indonesian Muslim communities (N. A. Harahap, 2023; S. S. Harahap, 2019) and the existential search for meaning in life among widowed elderly men (Latifah & Rahmasari, 2023), provide a comparative lens. This enriches the analysis by highlighting both shared human experiences of loss and the distinct ways different religious frameworks—Theravāda Buddhism, Islam, and Logotherapy-infused spirituality—structure narrative healing. Reflexivity is maintained by acknowledging the researcher's positionality as a non-Buddhist scholar, thereby delimiting interpretations to observable textual features and avoiding overgeneralization. This dual emphasis on methodological transparency and

theoretical grounding strengthens the study's analytical validity. A key methodological limitation is the study's focus on a single primary text, which limits generalizability but allows for deep, context-rich analysis. Reflexivity was maintained by explicitly acknowledging that interpretations are constrained to the text's rhetorical and narrative constructions.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Memoir as Buddhist Narrative Ethics: Love, Karma, and Impermanence

Contemporary cultural narratives explore spiritual wisdom through diverse lenses, blending traditional and modern elements to create rich, multifaceted representations. Scholars like Andrada-Ramona Marinău (Andrada, 2024) emphasize the dynamic interplay between myth, memory, and modernity in shaping spiritual identities, illustrating how ancient traditions are reinterpreted in contemporary contexts. For instance, Danarto's short stories skillfully weave indigenous myths and wayang (Javanese shadow puppet) traditions with modern themes, offering a unique perspective on spirituality that bridges past and present (Sudibyo, 2022). Similarly, Filiananur's novel *Sang Maha Sentana* employs character dialogues and narrative techniques to highlight local wisdom, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage while engaging contemporary audiences (Kartika et al., 2024).

These literary works reveal how spiritual wisdom is deeply embedded in cultural and religious discourses, reflecting broader societal values and identities. Elias (2020) demonstrates this intersection in her analysis of motherhood in East African and Indonesian literature, where spiritual and cultural narratives merge to shape personal and collective identities. By integrating traditional beliefs with modern storytelling, these narratives showcase the evolving nature of spirituality, illustrating how collective memory and cultural heritage continue to inform contemporary interpretations. Ultimately, such works highlight the enduring relevance of spiritual wisdom in literature, serving as a bridge between historical traditions and modern existential inquiries.

The dynamic interplay between spiritual wisdom and cultural identity, as exemplified in Elias's (2020) study of East African and Indonesian literature, finds a parallel in the realm of Buddhist literary adaptation. Just as traditional beliefs are reinterpreted through modern storytelling to address collective memory and identity, contemporary Buddhist literature similarly reconfigures ancient teachings to grapple with the existential dilemmas of modernity. Where Elias highlights how spiritual narratives shape cultural identities, scholars of Buddhist literature—such as Najarian—examine how texts like Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* or Snyder's poetry transpose Buddhist concepts (e.g., impermanence, non-attachment) into Western frameworks, often blending them with Romantic individualism or ecological activism (Najarian, 2016, pp. 312–318). This process, however, is not merely one of preservation but of critical negotiation; while these works bridge historical traditions and contemporary life, they also invite scrutiny for their potential dilution of doctrinal

rigor—a tension that mirrors broader debates about cultural hybridity and authenticity in spiritual discourse.

Contemporary Buddhist literature serves as a vital conduit for adapting ancient spiritual wisdom to modern existential concerns, bridging historical traditions with contemporary life. This literature engages with universal themes such as suffering, impermanence, and the nature of the self, resonating deeply with audiences navigating the alienation, consumerism, and mental health crises of modernity. Works like Jack Kerouac's *The Dharma Bums* and Gary Snyder's poetry reframe Buddhist concepts—such as mindfulness and non-attachment—as tools for addressing the chaos of contemporary existence (Najarian, 2016, pp. 312–313). However, this adaptation is not without critique; scholars like David McMahan argue that Western Buddhism often merges with Romantic individualism and psychotherapy, creating a hybrid form that, while accessible, risks diluting traditional practices (Najarian, 2016, p. 312). For instance, Snyder's eco-poetry integrates Zen principles with environmental activism, offering a spiritual response to ecological crises, yet this synthesis has been scrutinized for selectively interpreting Buddhist texts to fit Western narratives (Najarian, 2016, p. 318).

A significant feature of contemporary Buddhist literature is its capacity for self-reflection and critique. Memoirs such as Peter Matthiessen's *Nine-Headed Dragon River* (1986) and David Chadwick's *Thank You and OK!* (1994) reveal contradictions within Buddhist modernism, including teacher scandals and the commodification of spiritual practice (Najarian, 2016, pp. 315–317). Rather than idealizing Buddhism, these works critically examine its Western expressions, blending personal transformation with social commentary and humor. Najarian identifies such autobiographies and memoirs as a distinctive form of Buddhist "life writing," integrating spiritual conversion, social critique, and personal reflection while candidly portraying the challenges of practicing Buddhism in modern contexts. Similarly, Jane Dobisz's *The Wisdom of Solitude* (2004) offers a modest account of intensive Zen retreats, and Lawrence Shainberg's *Ambivalent Zen* (1997) humorously depicts an American practitioner's struggles in Japan (Najarian, 2016, p. 317). This genre not only demystifies Buddhist practice but also highlights the tensions between idealized spiritual goals and the messy realities of human behavior.

However, the commercialization of Buddhism poses a significant challenge. Scholars like Donald Lopez and Richard King critique how late capitalism has repackaged Buddhist practices into consumer-friendly products, stripping them of their ethical and communal dimensions (Najarian, 2016, pp. 310–311). The rise of "celebrity Buddhism," exemplified by figures like Chögyam Trungpa and the Beat poets, further complicates this issue by promoting spirituality as a lifestyle rather than a disciplined path (Najarian, 2016, pp. 314–316). Despite these challenges, contemporary Buddhist literature remains a powerful medium for exploring the human condition, offering both a mirror to modern dilemmas and a lamp illuminating paths to clarity and compassion. By navigating the tension between tradition and adaptation, this literature ensures the enduring relevance of Buddhist wisdom in addressing the complexities of contemporary life.

While critiques of Buddhism's commodification reveal the risks of diluting its core principles, they also underscore the need for authentic expressions of Buddhist thought in contemporary media. In response to this tension, some literary works offer a counter-narrative—reclaiming Buddhism not as a consumer brand, but as a lived ethical and spiritual framework. Such texts ground abstract teachings in intimate, often emotional contexts, demonstrating how Buddhist values continue to shape responses to suffering, love, and loss in deeply personal ways. One compelling example can be found in Hendry Filcozwei Jan's *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang*, where the author weaves Buddhist teachings into a poignant memoir that transforms personal grief into a testament of spiritual resilience through acts of compassion, ethical living, and enduring karmic bonds.

The core finding of this analysis is that *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* functions as a sophisticated work of Buddhist narrative ethics. Jan interprets Linda's life and his grief through active doctrinal application, portraying love not merely as emotion but as karmic merit (*puñña*). Accounts of her generosity (*dāna*)—such as financing a colleague's dialysis (Jan, 2023, p. 19), are meticulously plotted as karmic seeds whose fruits—like her children's scholarships—are revealed later (Jan, 2023, pp. 16–21). This narrative enactment of *kamma-vipāka* (action and result) transforms biography into a moral lesson on causality. Comparable processes of meaning-making appear in other religious contexts: research on elderly widowers (*lansia*) by Fadhilah & Diana shows resilience developing through stages of suffering, self-acceptance, meaning discovery, and ultimately a meaningful life, grounded in creative values (fulfilled duties), experiential values (accepting destiny, religious devotion), and attitudinal values (patience, sincerity, moral reflection) (Lathifah & Rahmasari, 2023, pp. 15–18). While Jan's memoir is an active literary construction of *puñña*, the *lansia* in that study embody a lived, reflective practice of meaning, with religion (in that case, Islam) providing the framework for acceptance (*menerima takdir*) and patience (*sabar*).

Hendry Filcozwei Jan's *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* offers a profound literary exploration of how Buddhist teachings—particularly metta (loving-kindness) and karma (intentional action)—shape a deeply personal narrative of grief, love, and healing. More than a conventional memoir, the text becomes a site where religious experience, ethical values, and affective memory converge to produce a spiritually charged account of everyday life. Through close reading, we see how Jan reframes Buddhist virtues not as abstract doctrines, but as lived experiences embedded in familial, emotional, and socio-cultural realities.

Linda's life, as narrated by her husband, unfolds as a tapestry of *dāna* (generosity), *sīla* (ethical conduct), and *puñña* (merit). Her actions—such as consistently supporting a colleague's dialysis treatment (Jan, 2023, p. 19) and volunteering at Buddhist Sunday School—are not simply commemorated as acts of personal virtue but are represented as karmic legacies that transcend death. These stories serve not only to honor the deceased but to embed her moral influence in the fabric of ongoing life. This is especially evident in the recurring motif of *beasiswa* (scholarships), awarded to their children, which are depicted as karmic fruits of

Linda's past sacrifices (Jan, 2023, pp. 16–21). These events are not presented as isolated anecdotes; instead, Jan carefully emplots them into a coherent arc of spiritual resilience, reflecting what Paul Ricoeur (Ricoeur, 1984) calls the "emplotment of meaning"—a process by which scattered life events are integrated into a unified moral narrative. This narrative construction of a moral legacy as a response to loss shares a functional similarity with the role of family in other grieving contexts. In studies of Muslim husbands in Padangsidempuan, the family plays an active, external role in providing direction (*arahan*), advice (*nasihat*), motivation, and guidance (*bimbingan*) to help the husband accept the loss as destiny and focus on his responsibilities, especially towards his children (S. S. Harahap, 2019, pp. 22, 60–64). In Jan's memoir, this guiding function is internalized into the narrative itself; the story becomes the *pembimbing* (guide), performing the ethical labor that in other settings is done by kin.

Jan's narrative technique, particularly the use of Cerita 1 Alinea (One-Paragraph Stories), lends emotional intensity and ethical clarity to seemingly mundane moments. These concise yet evocative reflections transform everyday activities into sacred gestures, illustrating the Buddhist view that the ordinary can become a field of merit through mindfulness and intention. For example, in the vignette "Cuci Darah" (p. 19), the minimalist style reflects *upekkhā* (equanimity), emphasizing that the ethical weight of an act lies not in spectacle, but in quiet, sustained compassion.

The memoir also embodies what David Scott (1999) describes as a "refashioning of futures"—a narrative practice that seeks to articulate possible ethical trajectories in the wake of loss, disruption, or historical rupture. In *Refashioning Futures*, Scott (1999) critiques linear, progressivist modes of historical thinking and instead calls attention to how people in postcolonial and post-traditional contexts construct meaning through memory, ethics, and affective ties. *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* operates within this paradigm by reconfiguring Buddhist memory as a tool for navigating the present. Linda's mantra—"Apa yang kau tabur, itu yang kau tuai" (Jan, 2023, p. 17)—becomes not only a reminder of karmic law but also an intimate, intergenerational ethic that informs daily life and future choices. The law of karma, often viewed abstractly, is here embodied and relational, transformed into a concrete guide for love, parenting, and communal responsibility.

This personalization of religious doctrine is further reinforced by the memoir's fluid temporality. Rather than follow a linear chronology, the text moves between flashbacks, present reflections, and projections of future hopes. This narrative strategy aligns with Richard Kearney's (2001) notion of the transcendental narrative—a form of storytelling that mediates between the immanent and the spiritual, opening the imagination to meanings that exceed empirical verification. In *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang*, domestic acts such as family meals or school applications are imbued with sacred resonance. The spiritual is not abstracted from everyday life, but lived through caregiving, sacrifice, and

remembrance. The result is a textured, multidimensional portrayal of samsāric continuity, where karmic ties weave across lifetimes.

Moreover, the memoir's recurring emphasis on impermanence (*anicca*) does not render relationships transient, but instead deepens their spiritual significance. Linda's presence lingers—not through attachment, but through mindful continuation in ritual, language, and ethical living. This echoes what Kearney (2001) calls "narrative eschatology," where storytelling helps to envision futures beyond grief, anchoring hope in ethical remembrance and embodied compassion.

Ultimately, *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* functions as a Buddhist transcendental narrative: it mourns loss while affirming interbeing; it honors impermanence while celebrating karmic endurance. It illustrates how religious storytelling in contemporary, post-traditional life becomes a vehicle not only for mourning, but for spiritual becoming. As Scott (1999) argues, such narratives are not merely critiques of the past, but "imaginative rehearsals of possible futures"—rooted in memory, oriented toward ethical action, and sustained by faith and love.

Similarly, grief is framed not as a problem to be solved but as a field for practicing the core Buddhist insight of *anicca* (impermanence). The memoir's very form—50 stories for a 50th birthday—ritualizes remembrance, enacting *saṃvega* (the poignant sense of life's fragility) while channeling it into structured devotion. Jan's reflection on cremation (Jan, 2023, p. 23) embodies this tension: accepting the physical impermanence of the body while committing to the enduring moral legacy through narrative. This aligns with what Kearney (2001) terms a "transcendental narrative," where storytelling mediates between immediate loss and enduring spiritual meaning. This structured, ritualized approach to grief through narrative finds a parallel in the communal religious practices observed in other studies. The grieving process for husbands in Padangsidempuan, for instance, is often framed within Islamic rituals and the communal support of *pengajian* (religious lectures) held for several days after a death, where the family is advised to be patient (*sabar*) and steadfast (*tegar*) (S. S. Harahap, 2019, p. 55). Jan's memoir can be seen as a literary internalization and extension of such communal ritual, where the writing itself becomes the *pengajian*, and the reader becomes the attending community.

The memoir's structure enacts the Buddhist insight of *saṃvega*—a sudden awakening to the fragility and impermanence of life. This emotional jolt, a central concept in early Buddhist soteriology, is refracted in Jan's decision to collect "50 stories for Linda's 50th birthday" (Jan, 2023, p. 13). On the surface, the gesture appears commemorative; however, a close reading reveals it to be a narrative ritual—a structured act of spiritual reorientation. Rather than allowing grief to spiral into nihilism or stagnation, Jan's writing becomes an active practice of *saddhā* (faith), as he transforms personal loss into devotional offering. Like a layperson's *patidāna* ceremony (merit-sharing for the deceased), each anecdote functions as a textual garland (*puñṇakusuma*), offered not only to Linda's memory, but also to readers as moral inspiration.

In particular, the anecdote “Jadi Guru Sekolah Minggu Lagi” (Jan, 2023, p. 20) shows how Jan’s memory work reconstructs Linda’s selfless acts into enduring moral presence. The details—her return to Buddhist Sunday School teaching despite health issues, her quiet sense of duty—are narrated with restraint, echoing the Buddhist literary style of *uddesa* (pointing without embellishing). The effect is meditative: the prose invites readers to contemplate rather than to emote. Here, *anicca* (impermanence) is not expressed in despair but in subtle affirmation: what is impermanent is also ethically urgent.

This approach resonates with Judith Herman’s (1997) trauma recovery model, particularly the phase of “testimony.” Jan’s repeated reference to “membaca ulang kenangan” (Jan, 2023, p. 3)—rereading memories—is not simply nostalgic. It constitutes a kind of narrative *vipassanā*, a reflective unpacking of grief that both witnesses and reorders suffering. The ritual of narration becomes curative, turning sorrow into coherence. His writing is not only for the dead but also for the self—as a process of reasserting moral order in the face of existential rupture. The psychological need to reorder suffering after loss is a universal theme. Research on the psychological condition of grieving husbands details the initial state of sadness, loneliness, confusion, and anxiety (*kesepian, sedih, bingung, dan cemas*) (N. A. Harahap, 2023; S. S. Harahap, 2019, p. 18). Jan’s memoir demonstrates one potent method for this reordering: the imposition of a karmic narrative structure that replaces chaos with moral causality and purpose.

The memoir also reveals how cultural hybridity intensifies and complicates this healing. Jan does not confine his mourning to Theravāda orthodoxy; rather, he weaves together Chinese-Indonesian customs such as *Céng Béng* or grave visiting (Jan, 2023, p. 23), vegetarian rituals, and references to Confucian filial piety. This hybrid grief ritual reflects the ethos of Buddhayana Indonesia—a localized form of Buddhism that embraces plural devotional expressions while maintaining core doctrinal anchors.

A particularly striking moment occurs when Jan rejects burial in favor of cremation (Jan, 2023, p. 23), a decision laden with both Buddhist and cultural significance. From a Buddhist standpoint, cremation embodies the realization of *anicca* and non-attachment to form. Yet paradoxically, Jan simultaneously initiates an ebook project and digital memorialization, effectively immortalizing Linda in narrative form. This tension illustrates a diasporic paradox: while the Buddhist path counsels letting go, the Confucian-rooted impulse to preserve memory and honor familial ties pulls in the opposite direction. In diasporic Chinese-Indonesian grief practices, these two tendencies do not cancel each other out; instead, they are held in creative tension. This negotiation between release and preservation is also observed, though differently resolved, in other contexts. The elderly widowers studied by Fadhillah & Diana (Latifah & Rahmasari, 2023) achieve meaning by accepting (*menerima*) the loss as destiny while simultaneously finding value in the ongoing relationships with children and grandchildren and in the enjoyment (*menikmati*) of remaining life. Their resolution is less about creating a legacy and more about finding contentment in present interdependencies.

This interplay becomes most apparent in how Jan narrates the *Kathina* offering (Jan, 2023, p. 19)—a traditional Theravāda ritual—alongside Chinese-style vegetarian memorial feasts. The spiritual logic of *puñña* (merit) crosses linguistic, cultural, and temporal boundaries. Acts of giving are not fixed in tradition but move fluidly between Theravāda doctrinal intention, Mahāyāna-inspired ancestor reverence, and modern familial love. The narrative structure itself reflects this hybrid rhythm, alternating between Buddhist liturgical moments, daily memories, and reflections on digital legacy.

From the perspective of grief in religious literature, *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* exemplifies what Ariella Azoulay (2021) calls “ethical witnessing”—a process in which grief is not privatized but shared across a moral community through narrative. Religious literature, as Douglas Davies (2002) notes, often transforms mourning into meaning-making, allowing the bereaved to articulate continuity through ritualized memory and theological reflection. In this case, Jan’s memoir becomes both a testimony of loss and a ritualized artifact. It reframes grief as an opportunity for spiritual cultivation (*bhāvanā*), and for re-establishing moral bonds across temporal divides.

Moreover, Jan’s narrative stands within a longstanding tradition of religious mourning literature that blurs personal remembrance and collective spiritual practice. As Davies explains in *Death, Ritual and Belief* (2002), religious grief texts do more than console: they reshape cosmological understanding, reaffirm communal values, and mediate relationships between the living and the dead. In this sense, *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* functions not merely as a private elegy but as a Buddhist *upadesa*—a work that instructs, consoles, and transmits ethical insight to a wider *sangha* of readers. Close textual analysis reveals the memoir as a “living sutra,” interweaving *anicca* and *Kathina*, *puñña* and piety, mortality and digital remembrance, grief and gratitude into a coherent healing discourse, thereby modeling how contemporary Buddhist subjects—especially in diasporic and post-traditional settings—transform mourning into an ethical and narrative practice.

3.2. Situating the Memoir in Global Buddhist Literary Discourse

When placed in conversation with global Buddhist literature, Jan’s memoir offers a distinct contrast. Unlike Western Buddhist memoirs that often foreground individual seeking, critique of institutions, or the romanticization of emptiness (Najarian, 2016), *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* is firmly oriented toward community (*sangha*) and ethical continuity. Where Kerouac or Snyder (Najarian, 2016) might explore Buddhism as a tool for personal liberation or artistic expression, Jan employs it as a framework for familial and social obligation. The memoir’s communal function is explicit: it is offered as free digital *dāna*, includes testimonies from friends and colleagues, and aims to inspire moral conduct in readers. This underscores a key contribution of the text: it recenters Buddhist narrative on relational ethics and merit-making, aspects sometimes marginalized in Western modernist adaptations. This communal orientation strongly aligns with the

findings from social-support based studies on grief. The crucial role of the "pihak keluarga" (family party) in providing advice, guidance, motivation, and support to grieving husbands demonstrates that in many Indonesian contexts, healing from loss is fundamentally a relational and communal process, not an individual psychological journey (S. S. Harahap, 2019, pp. 60–64). Jan's memoir transposes this communal support from the social sphere into the literary sphere, making the text itself an agent of communal care.

Jan's memoir transcends personal catharsis by functioning as *dāna* for readers. The ebook's free distribution (p. 3) and invitations for communal contributions (pp. 10–11) reflect the *sangha* (spiritual community) ideal. Stories from Linda's colleagues (pp. 30–32) and vihāra friends (pp. 33–35) depict her as a *kalyāṇamitta* (spiritual friend), reinforcing the text's didactic aim: to model *mettā* as collective healing.

This aligns with Ziolkowski's (2019) view of religious literature as a "moral laboratory." Jan's use of CIA (Cerita 1 Alinea)—mini-stories with Dhammic morals (Jan, 2023, pp. 12–28)—echoes the Jātaka tales, where parables convey *paññā* (wisdom). Thematically, the memoir critiques modern alienation (e.g., gossip; Jan, 2023, p. 24) through Buddhist *sīla* (right speech), positioning Linda's life as an antidote to societal *dukkha* (suffering).

Hendry Filcozwei Jan's *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* contributes meaningfully to Southeast Asian Buddhist literature by localizing universal Buddhist doctrines into culturally specific, emotionally resonant narratives. In contrast to many Western grief memoirs—often centered on individual catharsis and psychological closure—Jan's work foregrounds *paticca-samuppāda* (dependent origination) as the central grammar of grief and healing. A close reading reveals how Linda's karmic legacy reverberates relationally—through her children's educational success (Jan, 2023, p. 21), her husband's continued ethical vows (Jan, 2023, p. 18), and the readers' own potential acts of *dāna*. Grief here is not resolved but transformed into interdependent continuity.

This transformation is structurally encoded in the memoir's episodic format. Each story is brief, often a paragraph in length, yet rich with ethical resonance. These vignettes operate like narrative mandalas, wherein each act—be it a donation, a lesson, or a family moment—forms a karmic node. In stories like "Hadiah dari Karma Baik" (Jan, 2023, p. 21), the scholarship Linda's child receives is not merely a reward, but a karmic echo—a narrative device that binds the moral agency of the deceased with the ongoing lives of the living. These narrative gestures enact what in Buddhist literary tradition may be called *kathā-dāna*—the giving of Dhamma through storytelling.

Moreover, Jan's memoir challenges the reductive stereotype that Buddhism is emotionally detached or indifferent to suffering. In a passage where he refuses to remarry (Jan, 2023, p. 17), Jan reframes fidelity not as clinging (*upādāna*) but as an expression of *saddhā* (faithful commitment). In doing so, he expands the interpretation of *anattā* (non-self), showing it not as a negation of relational bonds, but as a mode of identity shaped by ethical and affective interdependence. Through a minimalist prose style that avoids melodrama, Jan embodies a Buddhist aesthetic

of restraint, where emotion is neither repressed nor indulged, but integrated into mindful narration. This nuanced engagement with emotion is crucial. It contrasts with and complements findings from other studies. For instance, the psychological condition of grieving husbands often includes emotional turmoil like anger, longing (*rindu*), and unresolved feelings (*tidak rela*) (S. S. Harahap, 2019, p. 20). Jan's narrative demonstrates a method of processing these raw emotions not by eliminating them, but by sublimating them into a structured ethical narrative focused on *mettā* and *puñña*. Similarly, the elderly widowers studied by Fadhilah & Diana (Lathifah & Rahmasari, 2023) manage their sadness and loneliness by directing their focus to positive future engagements with family and community, and through religious practices that provide comfort.

This approach enriches global conversations on religion and emotional well-being. As Lopez and King observe in *Religiousness and Emotional Well-being in Buddhism* (Buswell Jr & Lopez Jr, 2013), Buddhist religiousness is often inseparable from emotional practice—particularly in its emphasis on cultivating wholesome mental states (*kusala citta*) and spiritual resilience through lived experience. *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* exemplifies this ethos: it does not treat grief as a psychological disorder to be cured, but as an opportunity for cultivating *mettā*, *saddhā*, and *upekkhā* through relational storytelling.

Furthermore, the memoir's hybridity—weaving Theravāda rites, Confucian filial ethics, and Chinese-Indonesian customs—reflects the inclusive ethos of Buddhayana Indonesia. Jan integrates *Kathina* offerings (Jan, 2023, p. 19) with *Céng Béng* ancestral rituals (Jan, 2023, p. 23), creating a narrative landscape where impermanence (*anicca*) and remembrance coexist. This hybrid storytelling mode not only reflects real-world ritual syncretism, but also positions the reader as part of a wider participatory *sangha*, invited to engage ethically with the text.

This participatory dimension is extended further through the digital format of the memoir. Jan's offering of the book as a free e-book (Jan, 2023, p. 2) reframes the act of reading as digital *dāna*—a modern adaptation of Buddhist merit-making in the online era. The memoir thus becomes both a memorial and a merit field (*puññakkhetta*)—a place where ethical intention is activated through engagement, reflection, and emotional resonance. This opens avenues for future research in digital Buddhism and e-*sangha* practices, particularly in the context of transnational grief and online religious expression.

Ultimately, *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* demonstrates that Buddhist literature can articulate grief not only as a private loss, but as a collective, transformative spiritual practice. By grounding doctrinal abstractions like *anicca*, *paticca-samuppāda*, and *anattā* within emotionally textured familial narrative, Jan affirms the capacity of Buddhist storytelling to hold space for sorrow, memory, and hope in pluralistic societies. His memoir becomes not only an act of mourning, but a living Dhamma in literary form.

Taken together, the exploration of contemporary spiritual literature—from myth-infused modern fiction to autobiographical Buddhist narratives—reveals a vibrant field where tradition and innovation converge. Across diverse cultural and religious

contexts, these texts demonstrate how spiritual wisdom adapts to modern life without losing its ethical depth or transformative power. Works like *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang* exemplify this movement by integrating doctrinal concepts such as *mettā*, *anicca*, *anattā*, and *paticca-samuppāda* into intimate, lived experiences of love, grief, and remembrance. Through close reading, it becomes evident that such literature not only mediates the tension between heritage and hybridity but also reclaims spirituality as an evolving, collective practice. Whether through digital *dāna*, narrative ritual, or transgenerational karmic continuity, these narratives offer healing frameworks that transcend doctrinal rigidity and consumerist distortions. They present storytelling as a moral field—where memory, mourning, and merit coalesce—and affirm the enduring role of literature in sustaining ethical and emotional resilience in pluralistic, post-traditional societies.

3.3. Ethical and Cultural Implications: Hybridity as Healing

The memoir's significant ethical contribution lies in its creative hybridity, integrating Theravāda Buddhist practices such as *Kathina* offerings with Confucian-influenced ancestor veneration like *Céng Béng* and contemporary digital commemoration. Rather than reflecting doctrinal laxity, this syncretism exemplifies an authentic Indonesian Buddhayana ethos, showing how Buddhist ethics are embodied within a diasporic cultural setting. The result is a healing framework that is both doctrinally grounded and culturally responsive—honoring impermanence while preserving enduring bonds of love and filial duty—thus addressing what Davies (2002) identifies as the dual need in mourning: to let go of form and to preserve meaning. The effectiveness of such hybrid, culturally-grounded frameworks is supported by comparative findings. The success of familial intervention in helping Muslim husbands in Padangsidempuan hinges on the integration of religious advice (*nasihat keagamaan*) with practical family support, a hybrid of spiritual and social care (S. S. Harahap, 2019). Likewise, the resilience of elderly widowers is linked to a combination of religious acceptance, social support from children, and engaging in meaningful activities with friends (Lathifah & Rahmasari, 2023, pp. 7–8, 12–13). Jan's memoir represents a literary instantiation of this principle: healing is most potent when it synthesizes doctrinal depth, cultural rituals, and communal engagement.

A crucial theoretical insight emerging from this comparative analysis is the complementary theological frameworks offered by Buddhism and Islam for managing grief. While both religious traditions provide powerful resources for navigating loss, they do so through distinct, culturally embedded logics. Buddhism emphasizes the understanding of impermanence (*anicca*) and the release of attachment through meditative practices aimed at achieving inner peace. This approach is vividly enacted in Jan's memoir, where the acceptance of Linda's physical departure through cremation (Jan, 2023, p. 23) and the structured, contemplative act of writing serves as forms of narrative meditation, transforming grief into a field for cultivating wisdom and non-attachment. Conversely, Islam directs individuals to face suffering through the concepts of patience (*sabar*) and complete surrender to God's decree

(*tawakka*), with the belief that death is a gateway to eternal life in the afterlife. This constitutes a validated religious psychotherapeutic approach within mental health contexts. This framework is evident in the studies from Padangsidempuan, where the family's guidance consistently urges the grieving husband to be *sabar* and *tawakal*, framing the wife's death within God's plan and redirecting focus to worldly responsibilities and the hope of reunion in paradise (S. S. Harahap, 2019). Thus, while Buddhists focus on transforming consciousness to break the chain of suffering, Muslims often rely on the strength of prayer and the hope of a heavenly reunion as primary coping mechanisms in the face of loss. Jan's memoir, by narrativizing love as *puñña* and grief as *bhāvanā*, showcases the Buddhist path of transformative consciousness, while the social-support studies illuminate the Islamic path of faithful surrender and hope. Together, they reveal how Indonesia's pluralistic religious landscape offers diverse, yet mutually enriching, scripts for enduring life's most profound sorrows.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that contemporary Buddhist literature, exemplified by Hendry Filcozwei Jan's *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita Luar Biasa nan Penyayang*, provides a compelling framework for articulating grief, love, and spiritual resilience. A close reading shows how teachings such as *mettā*, karma, *anicca*, and *anattā* are embedded in everyday acts of care, remembrance, and relational ethics. By integrating personal narrative, cultural ritual, and doctrine, Jan transforms mourning into a communal practice of *puñña*, bridging sacred and secular experience. The memoir challenges dominant Western grief paradigms by privileging interdependence (*paticca-samuppāda*) over individual closure and situating loss within broader ethical-spiritual ecosystems. Its hybrid form—combining Theravāda Buddhism, Confucian filial piety, and Indonesian cultural traditions—illustrates the adaptability of Buddhist storytelling in pluralistic societies. As a form of *kathā-dāna*, it preserves memory while cultivating moral imagination and collective healing.

The study's distinctive contribution lies in applying Buddhist narrative ethics to a contemporary Indonesian memoir, showing how grief is reconstructed as both personal *bhāvanā* and communal *puñña-kamma*. Moving beyond psychological catharsis or doctrinal exegesis, it presents literature as a site of lived Buddhist ethics, where love is narrativized as karmic merit and mourning as ethical discipline. Situated within interdisciplinary research—from familial-religious interventions in Padangsidempuan (N. A. Harahap, 2023; S. S. Harahap, 2019) to existential meaning-making among elderly widowers (Lathifah & Rahmasari, 2023)—the analysis highlights a shared cross-cultural insight: healing from profound loss requires integrating spiritual understanding, ethical reorientation, and communal support. It also illuminates Indonesia's complementary theological landscapes, where Buddhism emphasizes transformative insight into *anicca* and meditative release, while Islam offers patient surrender (*sabar* dan *tawakka*) and eschatological hope—both functioning as culturally rooted psychospiritual resources.

Practically, the memoir underscores the value of religiously grounded life writing for ethical education and communal healing in pluralistic societies. While limited to a single text, the study invites comparative research on Southeast Asian Buddhist memoirs, reader reception, and emerging forms of digital *dāna* and online *sangha*. Overall, it affirms the potential of religiously infused literature as a vital resource for emotional and spiritual recovery and calls for further interdisciplinary exploration of how literature, religion, and cultural identity intersect to address enduring human concerns in Southeast Asia.

5. Bibliography

- Andrada, R. M. (2024). Myth, Memory, and Modernity: The Role of Cultural Heritage in shaping Contemporary Spiritual Narratives. *DIALOGO*, 11(1), 31–44. <https://doi.org/10.51917/dialogo.2024.11.1.1>
- Azoulay, A. (2021). *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Princeton University Press.
- Berger, P. L. (2014). The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age. In *The Many Altars of Modernity: Toward a Paradigm for Religion in a Pluralist Age*. De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614516477>
- Buswell Jr, R. E., & Lopez Jr, D. S. (2013). Religiousness and Emotional Well-being in Buddhism. In *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton University Press.
- Davies, D. (2002). *Death, Ritual, and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites*. A&C Black.
- Elias, S. (2020). Comparative Reading of Motherhood Identities in East African and Indonesian Literature. *Humaniora*, 32(2), 170–180. <https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.49832>
- Handoko, A. (2024). Paradigm Of The Relationship Of Religion And The State. *Asian Journal of Engineering, Social and Health*, 3, 271–284. <https://doi.org/10.46799/ajesh.v3i2.243>
- Harahap, N. A. (2023). *Kondisi psikologis suami yang ditinggal mati istrinya di Lingkungan 1 Panyanggar Kota Padangsidimpuan* [Undergraduate, UIN Syekh Ali Hasan Ahmad Addary Padangsidimpuan]. <https://etd.uinsyahada.ac.id/10247/>
- Harahap, S. S. (2019). *Peran pihak keluarga dalam menangani kondisi suami yang ditinggal mati istrinya di Kelurahan Losung Lingkungan IV Padangsidimpuan Selatan*. [Skripsi, IAIN Padangsidimpuan]. <https://etd.uinsyahada.ac.id/2729/>
- Havnevik, H., Hüsken, U., Teeuwen, M., Tikhonov, V., & Wellens, K. (Eds.). (2017). *Buddhist Modernities: Re-inventing Tradition in the Globalizing Modern World*. Routledge.
- Heavilin, B. A. (2013). *From an Existential Vacuum to a Tragic Optimism: The Search for Meaning and Presence of God in Modern Literature*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Herman, J. L. (1997). *Trauma and recovery* (Rev. ed). BasicBooks.
- Jan, H. F. (2023). *Mengenang Mama Linda: Wanita luar biasa nan penyayang* (2B ed.) [Ebook]. <https://vihara.blogspot.com/2022/12/selamat-jalan-mama-linda.html>
- Kartika, L., Rahmaniah, N. F., Lestari, W. A., & Mulyaningsih, I. (2024). Representasi Kearifan Lokal pada Novel Sang Maha Sentana Karya Filiananur: Kajian Sosiologi Sastra. *Literature Research Journal*, 2(2), 14–25. <https://doi.org/10.51817/lrj.v2i2.891>

- Kearney, R. (with Internet Archive). (2001). *The God who may be: A hermeneutics of religion*. Bloomington : Indiana University Press.
<http://archive.org/details/godwhomaybeherme0000kear>
- Lathifah, F. N., & Rahmasari, D. (2023). Kebermaknaan Hidup Pada Lansia Pria Akibat Kematian Istri. *Character Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi*, 10(2), 413–438.
<https://doi.org/10.26740/cjpp.v10i2.53849>
- McLaughlin, P. (2020). Imagining Buddhist modernism: The shared religious categories of scholars and American Buddhists. *Religion*, 50(4), 529–549.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2019.1664674>
- Najarian, J. (2016). The “Problem” of Buddhism for Western Literature: Edwin Arnold to Jack Kerouac. In *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion*. Routledge.
- Neimeyer, R. A. (Ed.). (2015). *Techniques of Grief Therapy: Assessment and Intervention*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315692401>
- Nussbaum, M. C. (1997). *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Harvard University Press.
- Ricoeur, P. (1984). *Time and Narrative, Volume 1* (K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, Trans.). University of Chicago Press.
<https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/T/bo5962044.html>
- Risky, S. N., Saraswati, R. R., & Puspitasari, R. (2018). Agama dan Kebahagiaan: A Literatur Review. *Risenologi*, 3(2), 56–63.
<https://doi.org/10.47028/j.risenologi.2018.32.84>
- Samuel, G. (2014). Between Buddhism and Science, Between Mind and Body. *Religions*, 5(3), 560–579. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel5030560>
- Scott, D. (1999). *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400823062>
- Segall, S. Z. (2021). Mindfulness in and out of the context of western Buddhist modernism. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 49(1), 40–55.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/hum0000159>
- Sudibyo, S. (2022). Yang Indigenous, yang Kontemporer, dan yang Futuristik Dimensi Spiritual Cerpen-cerpen Setangkai Melati di Sayap Jibril Danarto. *Hasta Wiyata*, 5, 63–85.
<https://doi.org/10.21776/ub.hastawiyata.2022.005.01.06>
- Taylor, C. (2009). *A Secular Age*. Harvard University Press.
- Ziolkowski, E. (2019). *Religion and Literature: History and Method*. Brill.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004423909_002