

**FREEDOM OF RELIGION  
IN *JANNAH AL-AT FĀL* (HEAVEN OF CHILDREN)  
THE WORKS OF NAJIB MAHFUZ**

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**Abstract**

*This study based on the theory of structuralism Robert Stanton, which focuses on the elements of theme in short story *Jannah al -At fāl* (Children of Heaven) by Najib Mahfuz. The result of study was found that the etching of religious freedom to children as a religious education it's aims to instill competency mastery of basic religious knowledge, attitude differences religious and religious tolerance, interfaith friendship, think and act freely, child relationship and God the Creator, child and the particulars of life and death as well as children and happenings in heaven and hell. This seventh aspect becomes interconnectivity and integrative unity to allow freedom of religion.*

*Penelitian ini menggunakan teori strukturalisme Robert Stanton yang menfokuskan pada unsur tema cerita pendek *Jannah al-Atfāl* (Surga Anak-Anak) karya Najib Mahfuz. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa penanaman kebebasan beragama sebagai pendidikan agama di dalam diri anak-anak kecil bertujuan untuk menanamkan kompetensi penguasaan pengetahuan dasar agama, sikap perbedaan agama dan toleransi beragama, persahabatan lintas agama, berpikir dan bersikap bebas, hubungan anak dan Tuhan Maha Pencipta, anak dan ihwal hidup dan mati serta anak dan ihwal Surga Neraka. Ketujuh aspek ini menjadi kesatuan yang interkoneksi dan integratif untuk memungkinkan kebebasan beragama.*

**Keywords:** Theme; Freedom of religion; religious education ; children

## A. Introduction

This paper attempts to examine the elements of theme the religious freedom in environmental education of children at schools and families of Egyptian society as depicted in the fiction of short story *Jannah al -At̄ fāḻ* (Children of Heaven) by Najib Mahfuz. This theme will discuss some motifs of stories a covering the competence mastery of basic religious knowledge, attitude differences of religious and religious tolerance, interfaith friendship, think and act freely, child relationship and God the Creator, the child and the particulars of life and death as well as children and happenings in heaven and hell. These seventh aspect was becomes interconnectivity and integrative unity to allow freedom of religion. Description of theme in this story is using the theory of structuralism Robert Stanton who explains that intrinsic elements of literature have structured of three major elements: first theme or message, second is fact of story: plot, characters and background, and third is instrument of story: the title, the point of view, style and tone, symbolism and irony.<sup>2</sup> This theme is motivated mind that as a great writer Najib Mahfuz was care about presentation of aesthetic ideas and criticism of life the children world and their families, communities and even children with the country. In some aspects, Egypt was became center of Islam such as at University of al-Azhar but it's has a pluralistic society in terms of religion, there are Catholic, Orthodox Catholic, Coptic and Jewish. Najib mahfuz was describe in *Jannah al -at̄ fā l* a portrait predictive about what and how children proceed of kindness in their family, school and community to become teenagers which have open minded and to appreciate the differences and in the next they will become adults who love of peaceful . Portraits by Najib Mahfuz is also seems to said that if the process of religious freedom was Reserved by moral, civilized and educated as a child so it's will be familiar to adults in their community.

Najib Mahfuz is a great author of Egyptian who has been awarded by Nobel Prize; it's certainly having a big message that conveyed his through of fiction. *Jannah al -At̄ fā l* is one of his fiction literary of short stories<sup>3</sup> which containing theme of interesting ideas to discussed as learning for children, parents and the society and even of country. *Jannah al -At̄ fāḻ* was invited the readers either in directly or indirectly, to understanding that home is a

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<sup>1</sup>Jannah al -At̄ fāḻ by Najib Mahfouz was one of the last short story from anthologies al - Sah m are printed by Maktabah Usrah in 1997, ten years before he died .

<sup>2</sup>Robert Stanton, *Teori Fiksi*, translated by Sugihastuti and Rossi Abi Al Ershad (New York: Student Library , 2012) , p . 22.

<sup>3</sup>The short story is a literary work that is usually Fiction as which can be interpreted as fiction, it is restricted to work in prose, prose narrative, or narrative text. The short story is a work of literature that includes the kind of prose, at most approximately fifteen thousand words, equivalent to fifty pages. See more details Robert Stanton, *Teori Fiksi*, translated by Sugihastuti and Rossi Abi Al Ershad. (New York: Pustakapelajar , 2007), p . , 20

gathering place for social systems as simple as a family. In everyday family of life was occurred of verbal and non-verbal communications, such as conversations between children and other children and children with both parents even with people in their society. The main character in this fiction is a girl (Putri) who she are Muslims and in primary school. She has a friend (Nadia) and her friend was difference of religious, she is Christianity. The discussion theme of differences of religious both of them was unavoidable and has involved both their parents because their worlds are curious, want to try, exploration in the game's entire atmosphere.

## **B. Religious Freedom Themes**

The vision of a story is a big message. Robert Stanton said that the theme is a parallel aspect of story with 'meaning' in human experience; something that makes a living experience is always remembered. In certain cases, theme is often being synonymous with idea or the main purpose of the story.<sup>4</sup> Themes can be classified into several different categories its depending on side of the classification was done. This classifications can viewed from three perspectives, namely classification of dichotomist which traditional and non-traditional; this classification seen from experience of character life and the classification the level of virtue that is main theme and additional themes.<sup>5</sup>

It's seemed that education of religious freedom in sense of one's right to choose his or her religion is became a major theme of short stories *Jannah al-At̄fāl̄*. It Mind can be parsed from a collection of some motives that brought in the story whit the main character is a girl who is still at second grade of elementary school and she was 8 years old. This character is always curious, dynamic and active. She often troublesome her father - mother's mind because they are often overwhelmed to answer her questions were straightforward but complicated to be answered spontaneously. As an institution informal education that is very strategic, the role of families are very aware of both parents, they are aware that their responsibility to his daughter as a child is very challenging to instill and maintain the education of religious freedom in accordance with social norms, religious norms which understanding that human as individual beings and social morals (*akhlak*). Both of parents not only have functioning of the family as a unit derived biological but also as a source of happiness in a society, they instill basic knowledge of life, the religious sense, motivation, a sense of joy in the aesthetic, the economically

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<sup>4</sup>Robert Stanton , *TeoriFiksi...* , p., 36

<sup>5</sup>Nurgiyantoro, Burhan .*Teori Pengkajian Fiksi* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 2007), p ., 77

skills, knowledge of child guard and put a framework in children.<sup>6</sup> Education of children in family is determining the development of child in later life phases. The purpose of religious education is to form a good mental character, attitude of behavior in positive actions. Without education designed to trim, then the child will grow and develop of incompatible with religious moral and social morals.

Competency the mastery of basic religious knowledge to children is as a major necessity for development the freedom of religion. Differences between the daughter and her friend had a question for both of parents why their daughter (putri) who is Muslim and her friend (Nadia) is Christianity. In the short story, the father of Putri give the genesis argument why someone have certain of religious. According to her father, Putri was a Muslim because both father and mother's descent is Islam. This argument as revealed in conversation Daughter and father:

"Dady is a Muslim, Mommy is also Muslim, therefore you are also Muslim."

"If Nadia?"

"Because her Grandfather is Christians<sup>7</sup>, his father was also a Christian, her mother a Christian, therefore she was Christian...<sup>8</sup>

One of the basic religious knowledge competencies of children as described in *Jannah al -At, fa`l* is the child's ability to explain origin of diversity. Indirectly Najib Mahfuz wants to describe to the parents how to help their child in simply get an explanation of origin a child religious. This demands an explanation as asked by character as Putri which in dialog she give questions why his friend (Nadia) are Christian and she is Muslim.<sup>9</sup> The Competence of basic knowledge religious the child it's including about knowledge of who is God, bout life and death, and heaven and hell. In this short story, Putri is 8 years old and she requires of knowledge to be able think and have a fierce desire to learn the religion. In certainly this knowledge is a great asset for the child to her adolescent, to her adult, and her future. In a modern society that is increasingly global and open era, child's competence sense of religion increasingly to challenged. Shorty, one motif of theme in this

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<sup>6</sup>See more details in Muri Joseph A. ,*Pengantar Ilmu Pendidikan*, ( Jakarta: Ghalia Indonesia, 1996), , p. 268

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269

<sup>8</sup> NajibMahfuz , *al - Saḥm* , ( Cairo : MaktabahUsra , 1977), p. 268-271

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268

short story is a portrait of competence in the basic knowledge<sup>10</sup> of religious freedom.

Freedom of religion child is absolute based on knowledge and attitudes towards the development of respect for differences among and between adherents of religions. This is evident in knowledge and sense of friendship between the character of Putri and Nadia were maintained even though there is a temporal split because they get different religious lessons in different classrooms. Character Putri is open to accept the differences of religious as a right of each as in conversation below:

" ... In religion lessons we are not in the classroom, "said Putri.  
The father replied, "Because you and she is a different religion", " You are a Muslim and she is Christian"<sup>11</sup>

The fact of difference of religious between the two characters Putri and Nadia is proves that religious differences do not to reduce communication, friendship and mutual respect of differences as clear described in explicitly of the Qur'an :

" I worship not that which ye worship, nor will ye worship that which I worship, And I will not worship that which ye have been wont to worship, Nor will ye worship that which I worship, to you be your Way, and to me mine"<sup>12</sup>

As a creature of God, the verses were put clearly that every individual have equal rights in determining to choice system to implementation of religion. In other words, respect for religious of rights for each individuals with respect for the right to life for each. The interaction between the individual children is not bothered just by the difference of religion because religious freedom guarantees it's.

Above of conversation between *Putri* and her father it's also imply that religious education for children period and it's directed to developing the competence of spiritual<sup>13</sup> attitude with planting of Tauhid or *aqidah* system

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<sup>10</sup> Motif pengetahuan dasar agama its according to Shirpley as described Sugiyantoro (2007 ) including theme divine level , which is about religiosity .

<sup>11</sup> NajibMahfuz , al - Sah̄ m , ... p . , 267-268

<sup>12</sup> Translation of the Quran , Surat al - Kafirun , verse of 2-6

<sup>13</sup> Its Borrowing the term competency curriculum in 2013 which states that each subject has a core competence consists of two aspects, namely the development of social attitudes and spiritual attitudes . According to the Qur'an , called the spiritual attitude as a potential spiritual attitude that God entrusted to man when the content in the age of 3-4 months for the development of human potential Godliness . ( ونفخت ) ( روجي من فيه ) Qur'an , Surat al - Hijri : 29

that can't be mixed with other religious systems without reducing one's sense of friendship. Feelings to accept differences of religious its can show a sense of awe to God's creation diverse as revealed in Surat al - Hujarat: "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And god has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)".<sup>14</sup> This dream of education is to develop an attitude of spiritual education and social attitudes in children who can reconcile in differences religious beliefs.

Tolerance and respect of reality to other religions is absolute as a pillar in freedom of religion. The development of tolerant attitude it's can be interpreted willingness of person who believing truth itself but she or he while learning to understand, to appreciate and to accept the social virtues in order to cooperate actively in the middle of a difference.<sup>15</sup> That like any religious reality, someone doesn't deserve the contempt. Friendship between same or different religion was demanded absolute to respect for the person's belief system. Najib Mahfuz describes the attitude of the award in a conversation the father with *Putri*, the father said:

"Being a good Muslim and also became a Christian good too."<sup>16</sup>

His father tried to divert to other problems, but *Putri* asked again:

"Who is better?"

"Dad, you must to choose one, which one is better?"

"What we could not to live with the Christians forever?"<sup>17</sup>

The father went to explain, and saying:

"Every religion is good, a Muslim worship God (Allah), as well as a Christian also worships God (Allah)."<sup>18</sup>

*Putri* was answered the statement of her father as he wanted to know the real the meaning of togetherness in friendship and it's instead of the unity of religion as expressed by *Putri*:

"But I want always to be with Nadia" and

"Even when in religious lesson"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Translation of the Quran , Surat al - Hujarat , Verse 13 .

<sup>15</sup> Compare with writing Muhammad Ali – *Teologi Pluralis-Multicultural: Menghargai Kemaajemukan Menjalin Kebersamaan* , ( Jakarta Kompas Book Publishers , 2003 ) , p . , Xii .

<sup>16</sup> NajibMahfuz , al - Sah , m , ... p. 269

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p . 269

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* , p . 270

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 280

Shortly, the respect for religious differences makes be easy to someone for relation of friends to develop the spirit of freedom of religion. Najib Mahfuz does not explicitly provide an overview of the child, parents and community to respect and appreciate the reality of religious differences each other.

It seems that attitude the religious of freedom is enriches to easy the friendship among and between both of religions it's attitude the reality of religious freedom. Interfaith friendships are birth and maintain a sense of togetherness in joy and sorrow. Children's feeling was built based on a sense of togetherness in joy and sorrow has warmed the friendship. In friendship context, the character of *Putri* and Nadia is always in togetherness; go to inside and outside of classroom together, play together even to eat together. The peaceful of interfaith friendship atmosphere it will give affect of attitudes value the child at a time when they were teenagers, they adults and in next year's they will to build a peaceful of a society or nation. This atmosphere is described by Najib Mahfuz through the experience of character *Putri*.

"I am and Nadia is always go together"

"In classroom, on the playground, and even when we eating"<sup>20</sup>

Education of religious is absolutely taught to children as early as possible. It's to prepare when they get a friends who have a different religion, they will not easily influenced by the friend's religious. With the knowledge and broad thinking, the children are accustomed for appreciate and respect each other, especially in worship.

Making playing have fun in psychology aspect it's can facilitate their warm friendship and communication interfaith. This relationship must build without tendency except the live and playing for fun and merry to fill out the person's life. Najib Mahfuz against described the children was seem to give a sign that the peaceful world, cheerful and happy are the world of children and its regardless of differences in religion, such as the portrait of *Putri* who was about 8 years, where her mindset, her heart and soul patterns was spawned the acts of peace more fun. The atmosphere of playing in psychological dimension it's many lost of adults who lead a disputes, conflict, and misery. This is would greatly disrupt the lives of religious freedom. In mind and feelings of the children is desire to playing with peers in confidence regardless the religion of the playmates have. Because for them a friend or best friend is one who can be invited to play, joke an especially in outside the home such as at school or on the playground.

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<sup>20</sup>NajibMahfuz , al - Sah , m , ... p . , 267

The communication patterns and relationships was familiarized with psychological warmth of religious freedom its will to develop children to have a high social competence which will be easier to establish a good relationship with others. Social competence is socialized through interaction and social action in their family, in the environment of society which are in particular guided by parents. It seems that Najib Mahfuz want to give a portrait of a child who has a good social competence.

To develop an attitude of religious freedom the child then they needs to be fostered think and act freely. In this short story there are some fundamental differences in family environment, inadvertently father was encourage the child to think in pluralism. This can be seen in most of the conversation between *Putri* and her father as below:

"You are a Muslim and She (Nadia) is a Christian"

"No father!"

"You're still young, you might not understand if I am explain now, someday you'll know it"

"I was great, Dad"

"No, you're still young!"<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the father explains an option as described by Najib Mahfuz :

"Do you not want to wait a little while until you be adult?"

"No father!"

"Nice One. Putri do you knows about passion right? A person is free to choose a particular passion and others are also free to choose other passion. You have selected to become a Muslim, the last passion. Therefore, you like to be a Muslim."<sup>22</sup>

"I didn't imagine that this conversation will lead to questions such as these."

"Someday you will grow as a woman, and you are able to see the reality in there around of you"<sup>23</sup>

His father was like being in silence, contemplating what has been described from the truth and irony. And he was realizes that his children will be a beautiful embroidery.

The knowledge of children about the relationship with God became a basic understanding of absolute religious freedom. This Attitude is based on a sense of ownership the human relationship with the presence of God. The

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p . 268

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*,p. 270

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*,p. 280-181



presence of God for a person is started on the domain the cognitive knowledge of the Lord as a Creator. This cognitive knowledge will to evolve in the process of becoming a affective feeling to awe of God and in the turn it's will become a possession of devotion to God the Exalted. The ownership of presence the God appears it's can show in portrait by Najib Mahfuz with the further question about who the God is.

The children knowledge about only the God's name is not enough for to underlying attitude of religious freedom. To know God, it seems not enough the children just to read the Holy Qur'an and learn to pray. Children need to learning experiences that to prove their belief in the empirical nature of God. Apparently, the portrait of *Putri* by Najib Mahfuz absolutely have to know the God's competency requirements, namely the ability to read the Qur'an as a training activities to refine feelings and also to learn to do the prayer. With both competencies, children need emprise of theoretical explanations, such as the creation of this world, as in a conversation *Putri* with her father:

"We read the Holy Qur'an, we also learn to pray. But I don't know who is ALLAH, dad? Who Is He?"

The father thought for a moment, then laughed and said:

"Allah is created the world and its contents"

"And so on ..."<sup>24</sup>

Najib Mahfuz was described the diversity of children who sometimes or often give mysterious questions like why we should die after life. In addition the child's feelings of competence and knowledge the presence of God in their self, to understanding of religious freedom for children is must supported by the competencies about particulars purposes of life which just to serving to God and to account their life after death in the Day of Judgment. The reality of death after a person's life is the certainty something commonly seen by children.

Children's understanding of the process of life and death will facilitate to understanding of the purpose of children life. Children will teach about meaning of life on earth, and what the origin of human beings, who created her/him, why she/he was born then why life and subsequent of death, who killed him and then to be resurrected at the end of the day. Religious experience of mysterious questioned like why the child should die after life as the *Putri* question's to her father about the death of her grandfather, who experience pain and suffer from weakness age and die:

" ... But why grandpa is not healed? Why did he die? "

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. , 271-274

"Because he's sick and elderly" said his father.  
"If the mother is elderly and sick later, whether the mother will  
died too?"<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, Najib Mahfoz describes character *Putri* with an explanation of his father and father saying:

"Our death was already established by Allah"  
"What Allah is wants us dead yet?" Replied the *Putri*  
"He freely to pass whatever he wants," his father replied  
"As well as is our death?" Asked Putri  
"Yes, my dear"<sup>26</sup>  
"We'll go to a more beautiful place"  
"Where is?"  
"To the top"  
"In side of Allah"<sup>27</sup>

In addition of the children competent about the meaning of life and death, it seems that children absolutely in early taught to understand heaven and hell as a consequence of religious freedom. In childhood period's child has been accustomed to understand about worldly life is not an eternity but a process leading to the result of choice. Heaven and hell are the consequences of the causes of what has been done as a result of one's thoughts, feelings and soul; everyone is free to choose heaven or hell. An image of Putri as a child's is need to get habits to do good or charitable piety to fruition heaven and familiarized to avoid malicious or mischievous actions that result in hell. Character of Putri is also as a educated child, she must to realize that world is not an eternity so the goodness act in this world is the beauty of encounter with God in the afterlife. Instead, deeds of evil and mischievous in the world are misery in hell. Najib Mahfuz describing the situation in most the conversation between Putri and her father, as below:

"We're going to do good deeds here before we go"  
"Are we not forever living in this world?"  
"No ..., human can't to eternal in the world"  
"We'll go to a more beautiful place"<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the father explained to *Putri*:

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p . 276

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p . 276-277

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p . 278

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*,p . , 278

"Everything will die. Whoever does good, then he will go to Allah (Heaven), but if he committed a crime and ugliness so he will go to hell".<sup>29</sup>

### **C. Conclusion**

Based on structuralism Robert Stanton to analysis of texts, theme of short story *Jannah al -At̄ fāl̄ I* ( Heaven of Children ) works by Najib Mahfuz are about the cultivation of religious freedom as a religious education within a children who basic competence of religious knowledge, attitude differences of religion and religious tolerance, interfaith friendship, think and act freely, child relationship with God the Creator, the child and the particulars of life and death as well as children and happenings in heaven and hell. This seventh aspects were becomes interconnectivity and integrative unity to allow freedom of religion.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p , 280

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