

**RELIGIOUS FANATICISM AND ITS CHALLENGES TO CHARACTER EDUCATION IN
CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM SOCIETIES**

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ABSTRACT

Religious fanaticism has emerged as a prominent social phenomenon in contemporary Muslim societies and poses significant challenges to the development of inclusive and moderate character education. Fanaticism is not merely an expression of strong religious commitment, but rather manifests as an exclusive and absolutist attitude that undermines core character values such as tolerance, empathy, and openness to social diversity. This study aims to analyze religious fanaticism as a multidimensional phenomenon and to examine its implications for character education within the context of contemporary Muslim societies. Employing a qualitative approach, this research adopts a library research method with a descriptive-analytical framework. Data were collected from scholarly books and peer-reviewed journal articles addressing religious fanaticism, religious moderation, and character education. The findings indicate that religious fanaticism functions as a structural challenge to character education by influencing religious culture, social relations, and educational practices. Therefore, character education developed through a contextual and moderation-based approach plays a strategic role in fostering reflective, inclusive, and socially harmonious religious attitudes. Such an approach positions character education not only as moral instruction but also as a long-term preventive strategy for addressing the social consequences of religious fanaticism.

Keywords: Religious fanaticism; Character education; religious moderation; Muslim societ.

INTRODUCTION

Religion constitutes a significant factor in modern social life, particularly in countries with a predominantly religious population such as Indonesia. Empirical studies indicate that religion is regarded as highly important by the majority of Indonesian citizens and serves as a primary framework for interpreting everyday values and social norms (hendra64, 2025).

This strong religiosity, while contributing positively to the formation of moral values and social ethics, also presents challenges when religious understanding and practice tend to become absolutist or exclusive. Religious fanaticism may emerge when religious teachings are interpreted rigidly and without openness to dialogue, potentially limiting social differentiation and diminishing respect for diversity.

Religious fanaticism is not merely associated with strong personal beliefs but has evolved into a broader social phenomenon with implications for societal polarization and shifts in social values. Empirical evidence from various educational institutions suggests that narrow religious teachings can foster intolerance from an early age. Even at the elementary and secondary school levels, and alarmingly as early as kindergarten, students may be exposed to excessive and intolerant religious doctrines (Susana Aditiya Wangsanata, 2022).

At higher levels of education, issues of religious fanaticism and radicalism have also been documented within university environments. Several surveys reveal exposure to radical ideologies among students at prominent universities in Indonesia. These findings indicate that religious fanaticism is not a marginal issue but one that permeates formal education systems, from primary education to higher education.

The relationship between fanaticism and educational challenges is not unique to Indonesia. International literature has consistently demonstrated links between religious fanaticism and intolerance, as well as associations with broader social risks, including support for violence and tendencies toward extremism.

Within the educational context, this issue is particularly critical because schools, madrasahs, and other educational institutions function not only as centers for knowledge transmission but also as arenas for character formation and moral development. Religious education that prioritizes cognitive aspects without reinforcing affective and social dimensions may foster intolerant attitudes that ultimately contribute to the development of fanaticism (Jumaa, 2021).

Previous studies have shown that inclusive religious education incorporating moderation-oriented curricula is effective in cultivating tolerance and reducing the potential for fanatical attitudes among students (Jumaa, 2021). However, many of these studies remain descriptive in nature and do not explicitly integrate the structural consequences of religious fanaticism on character education.

Other research has found that comprehensive interpretations of religious texts are positively correlated with the development of tolerant character traits and a reduced likelihood of extremist or radical orientations (Suaidi, 2023). Nevertheless, these studies are largely confined to textual comprehension and have yet to be directly connected to character education approaches within the broader framework of religious fanaticism. Furthermore, studies on character education as a strategy for reducing radical and intolerant attitudes suggest that integrated character instruction can contribute to shifts in students' perspectives on radicalism (Diah Rahayu, 2023). Despite these contributions, such research has not specifically examined the relationship between religious fanaticism and the structural weaknesses of character education arising from socio-religious dynamics.

Theoretically, religious fanaticism is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon involving psychological, social, and ideological dimensions. However, empirical studies that directly link this concept to the challenges of character education within contemporary Muslim societies remain limited. Additionally, although religious moderation has been widely promoted as a key educational strategy, many studies focus primarily on curricular recommendations or general pedagogical methods without sufficiently exploring how religious moderation functions as an internalized character-building mechanism capable of addressing fanaticism at a deeper level.

Accordingly, a significant research gap exists in the literature. There is a lack of comprehensive studies that structurally and contextually integrate religious fanaticism with character education in contemporary Muslim societies, particularly those examining its impact on character values and its alignment with national socio-cultural dynamics.

Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by analyzing religious fanaticism as a social phenomenon that influences character education and by identifying how character education can

serve as a strategic educational response within the context of a pluralistic and contemporary Muslim society.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach, specifically a library research method, focusing on a conceptual and analytical examination of religious fanaticism and its implications for character education in contemporary Muslim societies. A descriptive-analytical approach is utilized to present religious fanaticism as a multidimensional phenomenon while simultaneously analyzing its relationship with the challenges of character education and the role of character education as a strategic educational response.

The data sources comprise both primary and secondary sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and relevant prior research that address religious fanaticism, religious moderation, and character education. Data collection was conducted through documentary study, systematically tracing information from reliable academic databases and publications.

Data analysis followed a rigorous, multi-step process, including data reduction, thematic categorization, critical interpretation, and systematic conclusion drawing, with the aim of producing a comprehensive and argumentative conceptual synthesis. This approach ensures that the study not only describes the phenomena but also provides a structured analytical framework to understand the interplay between religious fanaticism and character education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Fanaticism from the Perspective of Scholarly Literature

Scholarly literature indicates that religious fanaticism cannot merely be reduced to excessive expressions of piety; rather, it represents a form of religiosity that experiences a narrowing of meaning. Fanaticism is conceptualized as an absolutist attitude, which positions a single religious interpretation as the only legitimate truth, accompanied by rejection of alternative interpretations and resistance to dialogue. Numerous studies suggest that fanaticism arises when religion is positioned more as a social and ideological identity than as a reflective ethical value system.

Several studies emphasize that religious fanaticism stems from exclusive and rigid patterns of religiosity. This attitude is characterized by claims of moral superiority within one's own group, the construction of rigid "us versus them" boundaries, and perceiving differences as threats rather than as inevitable social realities. In this context, fanaticism is not merely a matter of personal belief but a social construct produced and reproduced through group interactions, religious narratives, and certain symbolic authorities. These findings align with research that positions fanaticism as a consequence of ahistorical and non-contextual internalization of religious teachings (Dian Fitriana, 2024).

From the perspective of the sociology of religion, fanaticism is understood as a response to social uncertainty and identity crises. In societies undergoing rapid social change due to globalization, modernization, or digital disruption, religion often serves as an anchor of certainty. However, when religion is understood narrowly and defensively, it may foster fanaticism. Some literature emphasizes that fanaticism often thrives in social environments marked by polarization, inequality, and identity tension, where religion becomes a tool to legitimize exclusivism and symbolic conflict.

Social psychology literature further enriches understanding of religious fanaticism by highlighting the affective and cognitive dimensions of individuals. Fanaticism is not only related to what individuals believe but also to how these beliefs are emotionally experienced. Excessive group loyalty, perceived threats from difference, and the need for moral certainty are psychological factors that reinforce fanatic attitudes. Studies linking fanaticism and mental health indicate that fanaticism is often accompanied by reduced cognitive flexibility and an increased tendency to stereotype out-groups (Kania Azzahra Putri, 2023).

Within the Islamic context, both classical and contemporary studies show that fanaticism contradicts the Islamic scholarly tradition, which emphasizes *ikhtilaf* (differences of opinion), dialogue, and layered pursuit of truth. Fanaticism emerges when religious learning is reduced to mere doctrinal reproduction without critical reflection. Research on the roots of fanaticism among religious learners suggests that it often originates from misoriented learning, where religion is used as a tool for self- and group-justification rather than as a medium for cultivating ethics and wisdom.

Moreover, the literature underscores that religious fanaticism does not always manifest in extreme or violent forms. In many cases, it appears more subtly, such as symbolic rejection of other

groups, delegitimization of differing views, and normalization of hate speech within religious discourse. These subtle forms of fanaticism are often overlooked but carry long-term implications for social relations and the process of value education.

Therefore, a critical reading of the literature demonstrates that religious fanaticism is a complex phenomenon rooted in religious interpretation, social dynamics, and the process of internalizing values. Fanaticism is not solely a theological issue but a socio-educational problem influencing how individuals build relationships, understand diversity, and interpret human values. This understanding provides a crucial foundation for situating fanaticism as a serious challenge for character education, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Religious Fanaticism as a Multidimensional Phenomenon

The analyzed literature consistently demonstrates that religious fanaticism cannot be understood through a single dimension. Rather, it constitutes a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the complex interaction between individual psychological factors, group social dynamics, and ideological religious constructions. A multidimensional approach is essential to avoid reducing fanaticism merely to doctrinal misunderstandings or individual moral deviations.

1. Psychological Dimension of Religious Fanaticism

From a psychological perspective, religious fanaticism is closely related to individuals' need for certainty, emotional stability, and a sense of belonging to a group. Social psychology literature indicates that individuals experiencing identity uncertainty or social pressure often seek belief systems offering simple, absolute answers. In this context, fanaticism functions as a psychological mechanism to reduce ambiguity and existential anxiety.

Several studies highlight that fanaticism is frequently accompanied by low cognitive flexibility and a dichotomous thinking pattern, perceiving reality in rigid right-wrong terms. Such cognitive patterns constrain reflective space and reinforce resistance to differing perspectives. Research on fanaticism and mental health further suggests that fanatic attitudes may increase prejudice, symbolic anger, and emotional tension within social relations (Kania Azzahra Putri, 2023,).

2. Social Dimension of Religious Fanaticism

At the social level, religious fanaticism is produced and reproduced through group interactions, authority structures, and power dynamics. Fanaticism does not emerge in isolation but develops within social contexts characterized by polarization, identity competition, and social segregation. Sociology of religion literature emphasizes that fanaticism is often reinforced by collective narratives that establish rigid boundaries between the ingroup and outgroup.

In plural societies, fanaticism serves both as a tool for internal group cohesion and as a mechanism of exclusion toward others. Excessive group loyalty is often construed as piety, and criticism of fanatic attitudes may be perceived as a threat to collective identity. Empirical studies indicate that such patterns contribute to increased social disharmony and weaken intergroup solidarity, particularly in multicultural contexts (Dian Fitria1, 2024).

3. Ideological Dimension of Religious Fanaticism

Ideologically, religious fanaticism relies on rigid and normative constructions of religious understanding. Islamic studies literature shows that fanaticism often emerges when religious teachings are interpreted textually without consideration of historical, social, or ethical contexts. Such interpretive patterns tend to limit *ijtihad*, dialogue, and differences of opinion (*ikhhtilaf*).

Studies on religious learners indicate that ideological fanaticism frequently stems from misoriented learning, where religion becomes a tool to legitimize claims of truth and group superiority. Under these conditions, religion loses its moral-transformative dimension and transforms into a defensive ideology. This perspective aligns with the views of scholars and Islamic academics who emphasize that fanaticism represents a deviation from the Islamic intellectual tradition, which values diversity of opinion and ethical respect for difference.

4. Integration of the Three Dimensions

The psychological, social, and ideological dimensions are interconnected rather than independent, collectively shaping attitudes of religious fanaticism. Individual psychological factors are reinforced by social group structures, while ideological constructions provide normative legitimacy for fanatic behavior. This multidimensional integration explains why religious fanaticism is persistent and resistant to partial approaches.

Understanding fanaticism as a multidimensional phenomenon carries important implications for education. Addressing fanaticism cannot be achieved solely through doctrinal correction or normative approaches; it requires educational strategies that engage cognitive, affective, and social aspects of learners. Consequently, character education emerges as a strategic space to deconstruct the roots of fanaticism while fostering a more reflective and inclusive religiosity.

The Impact of Religious Fanaticism on Character Education Values

Based on the analysis of the reviewed literature, religious fanaticism has a significant impact on weakening the internalization of character education values. Fanaticism not only affects how individuals understand religion but also shapes attitudes, behaviors, and social relations that contradict the primary objectives of character education.

1. Weakening of Tolerance and Respect for Diversity

Findings indicate that religious fanaticism is consistently associated with lower levels of tolerance. Exclusive religious attitudes drive individuals to perceive differences in beliefs, schools of thought, or religious perspectives as threats to their perceived truth. In the context of character education, this condition hinders the development of mutual respect and acceptance of social pluralism. Several studies emphasize that fanaticism narrows the space for dialogue and reinforces social relations based on rejection of out-groups.

2. Reduction of Empathy and Social Concern

The literature also shows that religious fanaticism weakens empathy and social concern. Fanaticism tends to establish rigid emotional boundaries between one's own group and others, resulting in empathy being directed only toward those deemed ideologically aligned. Studies linking fanaticism and mental health highlight that fanatic attitudes are associated with increased prejudice and reduced sensitivity to the suffering of out-groups. Such conditions contradict character education objectives, which emphasize social sensitivity and human solidarity.

3. Impediments to Critical Thinking and Open-Mindedness

Analysis of the literature further indicates that religious fanaticism negatively affects critical thinking and cognitive openness. Fanaticism promotes dogmatic acceptance of teachings without reflection or dialogue. Within educational contexts, this pattern can impede the development of students' critical reasoning and limit their ability to comprehend the complexity of social and religious realities. Several studies note that fanaticism is often accompanied by black-and-white thinking, which is incompatible with character education aims of fostering wisdom and moral maturity.

4. Distortion of Justice and Social Equality Values

Religious fanaticism also contributes to the distortion of justice and social equality values. Fanatical attitudes encourage labeling, stereotyping, and unfair treatment of individuals or groups perceived as different. In social and educational environments, this dynamic can legitimize symbolic and structural discrimination. Literature on fanaticism and social conflict emphasizes that claims of absolute truth are frequently employed to justify injustices in the name of religion, directly contradicting justice as a core value of character education.

5. Reduction of the Transformational Function of Character Education

Overall, the literature suggests that religious fanaticism has the potential to diminish the transformational function of character education. When fanaticism is entrenched in social and religious environments, character education risks being narrowed to the mere teaching of formal moral norms without deep internalization of values. Under such conditions, character education loses its role as a tool for cultivating moderate, inclusive personalities oriented toward social welfare.

Religious Fanaticism as a Structural Challenge to Character Education

Analysis of the literature indicates that religious fanaticism does not operate solely at the individual attitudinal level but also constitutes a structural challenge that affects the implementation of character education. Fanaticism becomes internalized within social structures, religious cultural practices, and educational processes, thereby influencing how character values are transmitted and internalized in contemporary Muslim societies.

1. Fanaticism and Religious Culture within Educational Settings

Studies reveal that religious fanaticism is frequently legitimized through prevailing religious cultures within educational and societal environments. In this context, exclusive attitudes and claims to singular truth are often perceived not as problems but as expressions of piety and religious loyalty. Such conditions create an educational climate that is less conducive to fostering tolerance and openness. Empirical evidence shows that rigid religious cultures contribute to the reproduction of fanatic attitudes within both formal and non-formal educational contexts (Putra, 2019).

2. Fanaticism as a Barrier to the Internalization of Character Education Values

The literature indicates that religious fanaticism represents a structural barrier to the internalization of character education values. Fanaticism encourages value education to be conducted in a normative and doctrinal manner rather than through reflective and dialogic processes. Consequently, character education tends to emphasize formal compliance with religious norms, while its ethical and social dimensions are marginalized. These findings align with studies indicating that education conducted within a framework of fanaticism risks losing its function in fostering moral awareness among students (Utami, 2020).

3. Religious Authority and Character Education

Research also shows that religious fanaticism influences the relationship between religious authority and character education. In social structures permeated by fanaticism, religious authorities are often positioned as incontestable sources of truth, limiting space for dialogue and critical reflection. As a result, essential character values such as critical thinking, intellectual honesty, and social responsibility are difficult to cultivate. Several studies highlight that non-dialogical dominance of religious authority reinforces indoctrinative educational patterns (Ardana Patrisia, 2021).

4. Fanaticism and Social Polarization as Challenges to Character Education

Findings further indicate that religious fanaticism contributes to social polarization, which directly impacts character education. Identity-based polarization fosters social segregation, narrowing opportunities for intergroup interaction. Under such conditions, character education faces structural challenges, as values such as solidarity, empathy, and social justice are unable to be practiced effectively. Research on fanaticism and social conflict emphasizes that fanaticism strengthens symbolic boundaries between groups and undermines social cohesion (Siregar, 2022).

5. Reduction of Character Education's Role as a Social Transformative Agent

Overall, the literature suggests that religious fanaticism has the potential to diminish the role of character education as an agent of social transformation. In social structures dominated by fanaticism, character education tends to become symbolic and normative, lacking the critical capacity to address socio-religious problems substantively. Contemporary studies assert that without a moderate and contextualized approach, character education struggles to function as an effective instrument for social change (Kamali, 2019).

Character Education as an Educational Strategy to Address Religious Fanaticism

The findings indicate that character education occupies a strategic position in addressing religious fanaticism, primarily because this approach operates at the level of shaping awareness, attitudes, and value orientation of individuals. This aligns with educational scholarship emphasizing that fanaticism cannot be countered solely through structural or normative approaches, but requires a sustained and transformative educational process (Lickona, 2013). Character education, in this context, is understood not merely as the teaching of formal morality but as a process of value internalization that shapes how individuals understand themselves, others, and socio-religious realities. Religious fanaticism flourishes when education fails to instill reflectivity, empathy, and cognitive openness. Therefore, character education functions as a learning space capable of correcting rigid and exclusive patterns of religiosity.

1. Character Education and Religious Moderation

Recent literature highlights that character education is closely linked to the promotion of religious moderation. Kamali emphasizes that the principle of *wasathiyah* in Islam provides an ethical foundation for cultivating balanced, just, and non-extremist religious attitudes. The study's findings reinforce this argument, showing that character education based on religious moderation can reduce tendencies toward fanaticism arising from claims of absolute truth (Kamali, 2019). In Islamic education contexts, values such as justice, compassion, and respect

for difference are central to character education oriented toward social welfare. When these values are systematically internalized, character education not only serves as a medium for transmitting religious teachings but also as an instrument for fostering inclusive and contextualized religiosity (Qardhawi, 2010).

2. Character Education as a Reinforcer of Critical and Reflective Thinking

Religious fanaticism often stems from limited critical thinking skills in understanding religious teachings. The findings indicate that character education plays a crucial role in cultivating reflective attitudes and cognitive openness. This aligns with Freire's view that authentic education should liberate individuals from naive consciousness toward critical awareness (Freire, 2005).

In character education, strengthening critical thinking is not intended to relativize religious values but to enable learners to understand religious teachings more deeply and responsibly. Educational practices promoting dialogue, reflection, and contextual understanding have proven more effective in preventing the internalization of fanatic attitudes than dogmatic or indoctrinative instruction.

3. Strengthening Social Empathy through Character Education

The results also demonstrate that character education contributes significantly to the strengthening of empathy and social concern as a response to religious fanaticism. Fanaticism tends to establish rigid emotional boundaries between in-groups and out-groups, leading to selective empathy. Character education, by contrast, emphasizes universal human awareness and social responsibility.

Multicultural education studies indicate that internalizing empathy through education can reduce prejudice and religious identity-based stereotypes (Banks, 2015). These findings are consistent with this study, which shows that character education serves as a vital medium for fostering harmonious social relations within plural Muslim societies.

4. Integration of Islamic Scholarly Traditions in Character Education

Classical and contemporary Islamic literature demonstrates that effective character education in responding to fanaticism must be rooted in Islamic scholarly traditions that value *ikhtilaf* (differences of opinion) and ethical dialogue. Al-Ghazali emphasizes that the primary aim of education is the cultivation of morality and wisdom, not merely doctrinal mastery (Al-Ghazālī, 2011). When religious education is reduced to doctrinal transfer without moral cultivation, fanaticism is likely to emerge.

This study reinforces the view that character education grounded in inclusive Islamic values is more adaptive in confronting the challenges of religious fanaticism. Education integrating spirituality, rationality, and social responsibility has been shown to effectively shape moderate and humanistic religious attitudes (Utami, 2020).

5. Character Education as a Long-Term Preventive Strategy

Overall, the discussion emphasizes that character education represents the most relevant long-term preventive strategy in addressing religious fanaticism. Unlike repressive or reactive approaches, character education works at the level of personality formation and moral consciousness. This aligns with Lickona's assertion that character education has long-term impacts in shaping responsible and ethical citizens (Lickona, 2013).

Thus, character education not only functions as a response to religious fanaticism but also serves as a foundation for building a pluralistic, just, and socially harmonious contemporary Muslim society.

The Need for a Contextual and Moderate Character Education Approach

The study's findings indicate that the effectiveness of character education in addressing religious fanaticism largely depends on the approach employed. Character education that is normative, ahistorical, or detached from social realities risks losing relevance and may even reinforce exclusive attitudes if values are taught dogmatically. Consequently, the literature emphasizes the importance of a contextual and moderate approach as a prerequisite for addressing the challenges of religious fanaticism in contemporary Muslim societies.

1. Character Education and the Importance of a Contextual Approach

A contextual approach to character education emphasizes the connection between moral values and the social, cultural, and religious realities faced by learners. Religious fanaticism does not emerge in a vacuum; it develops within specific social contexts shaped by political

dynamics, culture, media, and identity relations. Thus, character education that ignores these contexts risks failing to comprehensively address the root causes of fanaticism.

Several educational studies highlight that contextual value education enables learners to understand religious teachings as a living and relevant value system, rather than a rigid set of doctrines (Banks, 2015). In this regard, character education functions as a space for social reflection, helping learners relate religious values to plurality, diversity, and communal life. Such an approach is crucial in preventing the reduction of religion into an exclusive identity that shuts down opportunities for dialogue.

2. Moderation as an Ethical Principle in Character Education

Contemporary Islamic literature positions moderation (*wasathiyah*) as a fundamental ethical principle in character education. Kamali asserts that moderation in Islam is not about compromising values but about balancing conviction and openness, religious commitment, and social responsibility. The study's findings reinforce this view, demonstrating that character education that internalizes moderation values is more effective in countering tendencies toward religious fanaticism (Kamali, 2019).

In a moderate approach, character education is not intended to weaken religious identity but to foster a proportional and inclusive religiosity. Values such as justice, wisdom, and compassion serve as the foundation for cultivating religious attitudes that are non-extremist. Moderation-based character education allows learners to understand differences as a social reality to be ethically managed, rather than as threats to faith (Qardhawi, 2010).

3. Integration of Local Wisdom and Islamic Scholarly Traditions

Findings also indicate that contextual and moderate approaches in character education should be integrated with local wisdom and Islamic scholarly traditions. Local wisdom acts as a medium for contextualizing values, bridging religious teachings with community social practices. Studies show that character education accommodating local wisdom is more easily accepted and internalized by learners because it aligns with their social experiences (Utami, 2020).

Meanwhile, Islamic scholarly traditions that respect differences of opinion (*ikhtilaf*), deliberation, and ethical dialogue provide a normative foundation for moderate character education. Al-Ghazali emphasizes that the ultimate goal of education is the cultivation of morality and wisdom, not mere mastery of religious knowledge (Al-Ghazālī, 2011). Reviving this tradition in character education enables religious fanaticism to be addressed through persuasive and educative approaches, rather than confrontational methods.

4. Character Education as a Space for Socio-Religious Dialogue

A contextual and moderate approach also positions character education as a space for socio-religious dialogue. Education should not merely transmit values from authority to learners but serve as a forum for ethical and civil exchange of perspectives. Critical education literature emphasizes that dialogue is key to developing critical awareness and avoiding dogmatic thinking (Freire, 2005).

In the context of religious fanaticism, such a dialogical space is essential for deconstructing prejudice, stereotypes, and claims of absolute truth. Dialogic character education allows learners to develop empathy, openness, and social responsibility as part of their religious practice. Thus, character education functions not only as a preventive measure against fanaticism but also as a medium for learning to live harmoniously in diversity.

5. Implications for Character Education in Contemporary Muslim Societies

Overall, the findings emphasize that the need for contextual and moderate character education is a direct response to the complexities of religious fanaticism in contemporary Muslim societies. Character education that is insensitive to social context and moderation principles risks becoming empty normativity, losing its transformative potential. Conversely, contextual, moderate, and dialogic character education holds significant potential to cultivate reflective, inclusive, and socially-oriented patterns of religiosity.

CONCLUSION

Religious fanaticism in contemporary Muslim societies is a complex phenomenon that cannot be understood merely as an expression of strong religious belief. Based on the analysis, religious fanaticism emerges as an exclusive and absolutist form of religiosity, shaped by the interaction of psychological, social, and ideological factors. Such patterns of religiosity encourage claims of absolute

truth, resistance to differences, and weakened dialogical social relations, making fanaticism a serious challenge in pluralistic socio-religious contexts. The implications of religious fanaticism for character education are evident in the erosion of core values such as tolerance, empathy, critical thinking, and social justice. Fanaticism affects not only individual attitudes but also creates structural challenges within educational practices, including rigid religious cultures, non-dialogical authority relations, and identity-based social polarization. These conditions risk reducing character education to the mere teaching of formal moral norms, with limited transformative impact. Character education, therefore, holds a strategic role as an educational approach in responding to religious fanaticism, particularly when implemented through contextual and moderate approaches. Character education that integrates inclusive Islamic values, principles of religious moderation, and local wisdom can cultivate reflective, dialogical, and socially-oriented religious attitudes. With such an approach, character education functions not only as a means of individual moral development but also as a long-term preventive instrument for building an inclusive, just, and harmonious Muslim society amid contemporary socio-religious dynamics.

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