

Constructing Moral Authority in Tere Liye's "Bulan": A Critical Book Review

Elfa Latifatul Ulfa
Kh. Abdul Chalim University
elfaulfatifatul@gmail.com

Submitted: January 2026

Accepted: February 2026

Published: April 2026

Book Information

This paper provides a comprehensive review of the novel *Bulan* by Tere Liye, the second installment in the *Earth* series. The analysis focuses on the author's intricate world-building techniques and the narrative evolution of the main characters—Raib, Seli, and Ali—as they navigate the socio-political challenges within the Sun Clan. By examining the "Sun Flower Festival" as a central plot device, this review explores themes of integrity, teamwork, and the struggle against systemic corruption. Furthermore, a personal student perspective is included to bridge the gap between fictional fantasy and real-life moral dilemmas. This review concludes that *Bulan* serves as a significant benchmark for contemporary Indonesian fantasy literature, offering both entertainment and profound ethical reflections.

Keywords: *Tere Liye, Bulan Novel, Parallel Universe, Young Adult Fantasy, Character Development, Narrative Analysis.*

INTRODUCTION

Fantasy literature has long served as a powerful medium for exploring complex social, political, and ethical questions within imagined worlds. Through symbolic settings and extraordinary characters, fantasy narratives often reflect real-world concerns about authority, justice, identity, and moral responsibility. In contemporary Indonesian literature, Tere Liye has emerged as one of the most influential authors in popular fiction, particularly through his fantasy series that combines adventure with philosophical reflection. *Bulan*, as part of this larger narrative universe, extends beyond mere entertainment by presenting a story that intertwines leadership, power struggles, and ethical decision-making within a richly constructed fictional realm. The novel invites readers to engage not only with its imaginative landscapes but also with the moral dilemmas faced by its characters.

This critical book review examines *Bulan* through the lens of power, leadership, and moral agency. By focusing on the dynamics of authority and resistance portrayed in the narrative, the review aims to evaluate how the novel constructs heroism and governance within a fantasy framework. The investigative tension, character development, and depiction of political conflict provide fertile ground for academic discussion, particularly in relation to ethical leadership and the legitimacy of power. Rather than offering a mere summary, this review analyzes the novel's narrative strategies, thematic coherence, and literary contributions. Through this approach, the article seeks to demonstrate that *Bulan* functions not only as popular fantasy fiction but also as a text that stimulates critical reflection on the nature of authority and individual responsibility within complex social systems.

SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

The story follows the journey of three inseparable friends: Raib, Seli, and Ali. After their previous adventure in the Moon Clan, they are invited by their teacher, Miss Selena, to visit the Sun Clan for a diplomatic mission. The goal was simple: to reconnect the long-lost

ties between clans. However, things take a sharp turn when Ali's curiosity gets them accidentally registered for the Sun Flower Festival. This festival is far from a celebration; it is a brutal, high-stakes competition. The participants must ride giant tigers through extreme terrains, including poisonous swamps and frozen mountains, to find the first blooming sunflower. As they race, they realize that the competition is being manipulated by a dark political conspiracy led by the Clan's Consul, who aims to unlock a forbidden power that could destroy the balance of all clans.

Tere Liye is a master of "World-Building." In *Bulan*, he manages to create a society that feels technologically advanced yet culturally grounded. His writing technique is unique because he mixes hard science (through Ali's gadgets) with mystical elements seamlessly. The pacing is also excellent; he starts with a slow diplomatic introduction and then ramps up the tension during the festival scenes. His choice of simple, straightforward language makes the complex world-building easy to visualize for any reader, especially students who want a fast-paced but meaningful story. What I find most fascinating about this book is how it handles the theme of "Morality under Pressure." During the race, Raib and her friends face a dilemma: to win the race or to save their rivals who are in danger. As a student, I find this very relatable to our real-life academic or professional competition. The way they prioritize humanity over victory is a powerful lesson. Additionally, the transition of Seli from a shy girl to a brave fighter who masters her lightning powers is incredibly satisfying to follow. It shows that courage isn't about not being afraid, but about acting despite your fear.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Overall, this novel is a huge success as a sequel. Its strength lies in the adrenaline-pumping plot and a powerful moral message that doesn't feel preachy. The only downside might be some of the lengthy explanations regarding the high-tech gadgets, but that's still forgivable because it helps us visualize the technology logically. For a local fantasy novel, *Bulan* truly meets international standards. Rating: 4.8/5. It is a rare sequel that actually surpasses the original book in terms of stakes and emotional depth.

One of the primary strengths of *Bulan* lies in its ability to merge imaginative fantasy with meaningful political and ethical inquiry. Through the depiction of the Klan Bulan's contested leadership and institutional fragility, Tere Liye constructs a narrative that subtly interrogates the nature of power and legitimacy. Authority in the novel is not portrayed as inherently virtuous but as something that must be justified through moral responsibility and collective trust. The development of Raib as a leader is particularly significant, as her growth reflects a transition from reactive participation to conscious ethical decision-making. Rather than glorifying dominance, the novel emphasizes collaboration, strategic restraint, and accountability. The complementary roles of Seli and Ali reinforce the idea that leadership is multidimensional, requiring intellectual rigor, innovation, and emotional intelligence. Furthermore, the sophisticated world-building strengthens the allegorical dimension of the story. The technological advancement of the Klan Bulan contrasts sharply with its political instability, suggesting that progress without moral grounding remains vulnerable to corruption and manipulation.

Despite these strengths, the novel exhibits certain structural and stylistic limitations. The extensive descriptive passages detailing political systems and technological mechanisms, while enriching the fictional universe, occasionally slow the narrative pace and may challenge readers who prefer tighter storytelling. In addition, the moral positioning of antagonistic characters tends to be relatively explicit, which can reduce psychological ambiguity and limit opportunities for deeper character complexity. A more

layered portrayal of opposing figures might have intensified the ethical tension within the plot. From an academic standpoint, however, the clarity of moral conflict enhances the text's accessibility and pedagogical value, particularly in discussions of leadership ethics and governance. Overall, *Bulan* succeeds in presenting fantasy as a reflective medium through which readers can examine questions of authority, responsibility, and collective agency, affirming its relevance both as popular literature and as a subject of critical scholarly engagement.

REFLECTION & CONCLUSION

Reading *Bulan* was a breath of fresh air amidst my busy college schedule. It felt like I was right there with them, riding the giant tigers and facing the freezing blizzards. I honestly felt a bit emotional during the scenes where their friendship was tested. It reminded me of my own circle of friends, how we all have different strengths but somehow we complete each other. The plot twist at the end regarding the Consul's betrayal was a total shocker. It made me realize that even in a world full of wonders, the real monsters are often human greed and the hunger for power. It's a very "human" story disguised as a fantasy epic. In conclusion, *Bulan* is more than just a teen fantasy novel. It is a story about integrity, the weight of leadership, and the unbreakable bond of friendship. Tere Liye has proven that Indonesian authors can create a high-quality fantasy universe that resonates with global themes. Whether you're a fan of adventure or looking for a story with deep moral values, this book is a must-read.

Bulan invites readers to reflect on the ethical dimensions of leadership within both fictional and real-world contexts. Through its portrayal of contested authority and collective struggle, the novel encourages a deeper consideration of how power should be exercised and legitimized. The journey of Raib and her companions demonstrates that leadership is not merely a matter of strength or intelligence, but of moral clarity and responsibility toward others. The political instability within the Klan *Bulan* mirrors contemporary societal realities, where technological advancement and institutional sophistication do not automatically ensure justice or integrity. In this regard, the novel functions as more than an imaginative adventure; it becomes a reflective space in which readers can question assumptions about governance, loyalty, and the ethical limits of ambition. The emphasis on collaboration rather than individual dominance also reinforces the importance of shared responsibility in sustaining social order.

In conclusion, *Bulan* stands as a significant contribution to contemporary Indonesian fantasy literature. By combining accessible storytelling with layered political and moral themes, Tere Liye demonstrates how popular fiction can engage with complex intellectual concerns without sacrificing narrative appeal. Although certain structural elements may slow the pacing and some characters could benefit from greater psychological depth, the novel's thematic coherence and symbolic richness remain its strongest attributes. As a subject of critical book review, *Bulan* offers valuable insights into the intersections of power, ethics, and collective agency. Ultimately, the novel leaves readers with an enduring message: that authority must be guided by conscience, and that true leadership emerges not from control, but from accountability and moral courage.

REFERENCES

Liye, T. (2015). *Bulan*. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.