

Sufism and Devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt: The Role of the Shādhiliyya Shiddqiyya Order in the Commemoration of Imam Husayn's Mawlid in Cairo

**Muhammad Andhika Adha¹, Kholid Al Walid² Muhammad Aulia Achyar
Nasution³**

^{1,2} UIN Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta, Indonesia

³ Al-Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt.

Corresponding Email: Muhammadandhika1703adha@gmail.com



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Abstract: This article examines the role of the Shādhiliyyah Shiddqiyyah Sufi order in the commemoration of the Mawlid of Imam Husayn in Cairo as a manifestation of Sufi expression and devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt within the Sunni Islamic tradition. Employing a qualitative approach, the study draws upon library research and phenomenological hermeneutical analysis to explore spiritual practices, ritual symbolism, and the social responses of the order to the challenges of modernity. The findings indicate that the Shādhiliyyah Shiddqiyyah order plays a central role in preserving the tradition of Imam Husayn's Mawlid through spiritually meaningful rituals such as *haḍrah*, *awrād*, and the recitation of *qaṣīdah*. Beyond the religious dimension, the tradition also incorporates socio-economic aspects, including seasonal markets (*sūq al-mawlid*) and charitable offerings (*nadr*), which strengthen communal solidarity. Amidst criticisms from reformist groups, the order has demonstrated adaptability by utilizing digital media and reinforcing its institutional affiliation with religious authorities such as al-Azhar. This article argues that the Sufi order should not be perceived merely as a spiritual entity, but also as a dynamic social actor within the landscape of contemporary Islam.

Keywords: Sufism, Ahl al-Bayt, Shādhiliyyah Shiddqiyyah Order, Imam Husayn's Mawlid

Abstrak: Artikel ini membahas peran Tarekat Syāziliyyah Shiddqiyyah dalam peringatan Maulid Imam Hussain di Kairo sebagai bentuk ekspresi sufisme dan kecintaan terhadap Ahlul Bait dalam tradisi Islam Sunni. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi pustaka dan analisis hermeneutika fenomenologis terhadap praktik-praktik spiritual, simbolisme ritual, serta respon sosial tarekat terhadap tantangan modernitas. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa Tarekat Syāziliyyah Shiddqiyyah

memainkan peran sentral dalam pelestarian tradisi Maulid Imam Ḥussain melalui ritual hadrah, awrād, dan pembacaan qasidah yang penuh makna spiritual. Selain aspek keagamaan, tradisi ini juga mengintegrasikan dimensi sosial-ekonomi seperti pasar musiman (*sūq al-mawlid*) dan sedekah (*nazr*) yang memperkuat solidaritas komunitas. Di tengah kritik kelompok reformis, tarekat ini mampu beradaptasi dengan memanfaatkan media digital dan memperkuat afiliasi kelembagaan dengan otoritas keagamaan seperti Al-Azhar. Artikel ini menegaskan bahwa tarekat bukan sekadar entitas spiritual, tetapi juga aktor sosial yang dinamis dalam lanskap Islam kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: Sufisme, Ahlul Bait, Tarekat Syāziliyyah Shiddiqiyyah, Maulid Imam Ḥussain, Mesir

Introduction

The commemoration of the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn in Egypt represents a deeply rooted religious tradition within the Muslim community, particularly in Cairo. This practice is not merely a celebratory ritual, but also a collective manifestation of devotion to the Prophet Muhammad's family (*Ahl al-Bayt*). The historical introduction of Imam Ḥusayn's Mawlid in Egypt is closely linked to the presence of the Fāṭimid dynasty (969–1171 CE), which established reverence for the Prophet's household as a central marker of its religious identity. Through Fāṭimid policies, various religious celebrations associated with the *Ahl al-Bayt* were formally institutionalized, including the commemoration of Imam Ḥusayn's birth.¹

The shrine of Imam Ḥusayn in Cairo—despite ongoing historical debates concerning the authenticity of the relics interred therein—serves as a spiritual center and a symbol of communal fidelity to the values of sacrifice embodied in Karbala.² The shrine complex has long been a major destination for religious pilgrimage, attracting devotees from diverse social backgrounds, both domestic and international.³ Thus, the commemoration of Imam Ḥusayn's Mawlid functions not only as a spiritual occasion but also as a social space that reinforces networks of solidarity among Muslims.

From a spiritual perspective, the celebration is marked by Sufi practices, particularly through the involvement of prominent orders such as the Shādhiliyyah and Rifā'iyyah. The Shādhiliyyah order, for instance, interprets this moment as an avenue for *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul) through *dhikr*, invocations of blessings upon the Prophet (*ṣalawāt*), and the recitation of *manāqib* (hagiographical narratives) that emphasize devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt.⁴ Followers of the order believe that participating

¹ Heinz Halm, *Shi'a Islam: From Religion to Revolution* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1997).

² Paul E. Walker, *Exploring an Islamic Empire: Fatimid History and Its Sources* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002).

³ Amina Elbendary, “Saints, Mawlid, and the City: Cairo in the Seventeenth Century,” *Mamluk Studies Review* 16 (2012): 129–150.

⁴ Valerie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).

in the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn brings about *barakah* (divine blessing) while simultaneously strengthening spiritual bonds with the paradigmatic virtues of patience, courage, and sincerity exemplified by Imam Ḥusayn.

The celebration also functions as a medium for the internalization of Sufi values that emphasize the balance between historical consciousness and transcendental experience. The historicity of Karbala is understood not merely as a political tragedy but as a symbol of sacrifice in the defense of truth. Within the Sufi framework, the commemoration of Imam Ḥusayn's Mawlid in Cairo revives collective awareness of the imperative of spiritual struggle against the lower self (*al-jihād al-akbar*), which parallels Imam Ḥusayn's outward struggle against tyranny.⁵

Moreover, the spirituality that emerges from this celebration imparts a distinctive character to the religious life of Egyptian society. Traditions of pilgrimage, communal prayers, and the recitation of the Karbala narrative serve as instruments for strengthening faith and expressing humanitarian solidarity across social strata. Here, one observes the integration of ritual, historical memory, and Sufi spirituality, which transforms the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn into more than a symbolic festivity; it becomes a lived and evolving religious practice in Egypt.

Against this background, the commemoration of Imam Ḥusayn's Mawlid organized by the Shādhiliyyah Shiddiqiyah order constitutes a concrete example of how Sufism not only endures but also adapts in the face of modernity. This spiritual tradition should be understood not merely as a historical celebration, but as a medium for the transmission of mystical values, an expression of devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt, and a religious practice that unites the exoteric (*zāhir*) and esoteric (*bātin*) dimensions of Islam. The richness and symbolic depth of this tradition render it a significant subject of inquiry for understanding the dynamics of contemporary Islam in the Middle East, particularly in examining the intersections between Sufism, ritual practice, and religious identity.

This study employs a qualitative approach through library research and phenomenological hermeneutical analysis. Such an approach is deemed appropriate given the symbolic, spiritual, and cultural nature of the object of inquiry—namely, the commemoration of Imam Ḥusayn's Mawlid as performed by the Shādhiliyyah Shiddiqiyah order in Cairo. In this context, the researcher not only investigates textual and documentary sources but also interprets the esoteric meanings embedded in Sufi rituals such as the recitation of *awrād*, *hadrah*, and *qaṣīdah*, which are centered in the Imam Ḥusayn Mosque.

The library research involves examining authoritative sources, including classical works on Sufism, academic literature on the Shādhiliyyah order, studies on the history of Islam in Egypt, and documents pertaining to expressions of devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt within the Sunni-Sufi tradition. In addition, digital and visual documentation is utilized to complement the description of the form and atmosphere of Imam Ḥusayn's Mawlid celebrations. To analyze the data, hermeneutics is applied as an interpretive approach to

⁵ Ali Asani, “The Karbala Paradigm in Shi'a Spirituality,” *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 9, no. 2 (2016): 145–160.

Sufi texts and religious rituals. In this regard, Paul Ricoeur's framework is employed to understand texts as carriers of meaning that remain open to new interpretations across varying socio-cultural contexts.⁶

At the same time, a phenomenological perspective is adopted to grasp the lived religious experiences of the Sufi adherents, with emphasis on inner consciousness and personal spiritual encounters.⁷ The analysis is conducted on three levels: first, the historical level, which traces the development of the Shādhiliyyah order and the practice of Imam Husayn's Mawlid from the Fāṭimid period to modern Egypt; second, the symbolic-ritual level, which seeks to uncover the Sufi meanings inherent in *dhikr*, poetry, and bodily expressions in *hadrat* as manifestations of love for Imam Husayn; and third, the socio-cultural level, which examines the connection of these rituals with community solidarity, seasonal micro-economies (*sūq al-mawlid*), and responses to modernization and reformist critiques.

Primary and secondary sources are selected purposively based on their relevance and scholarly authority. Foundational works such as *The Sufi Orders in Islam* by J. Spencer Trimingham, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* by Valerie J. Hoffman, and *al-Hikam al-Shādhiliyyah* as an internal text of the order serve as key references for analyzing theological and ritual aspects. The collected data are then interpreted through a process of critical hermeneutics, ensuring validity by triangulating sources and cross-referential readings. This methodological framework enables the researcher to uncover the deeper meanings of the commemoration of Imam Husayn's Mawlid, not merely as a cultural expression but also as a representation of Sufi spirituality that is both complex and dynamic.

Spiritual Lineage (Silsilah) of the Shādhiliyyah Shiddiqiyah Order

1. Mawlānā al-Imām ‘Alī Jum‘ah ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (ḥafizahullāh)
2. Mawlānā Imām Sayyid ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ṣiddīq al-Ghumārī (1328–1413 AH)
3. Al-Imām ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn al-Ṣiddīq ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Mu’min al-Ghumārī al-Sharīf al-Hasanī (1295–1354 AH)
4. Al-Imām Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Fāsī (d. 1326 AH)
5. Al-Imām ‘Abd al-Wāhid al-Bānānī (d. 1285 AH)
6. Al-Imām Muḥammad ibn al-Ğālī Ayyūb (d. 1273 AH)
7. Al-Imām Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Mu’min (grandfather of Shaykh Muḥammad ibn al-Ṣiddīq) (1200–1262 AH)

⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

⁷ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Trans. F. Kersten* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983).

8. Shaykh al-Imām al-‘Arabī ibn Aḥmad al-Darqāwī (1152–1239 AH)
9. Shaykh al-Imām ‘Alī al-Jamāl al-‘Imrānī (d. 1194 AH)
10. Shaykh al-Imām al-‘Arabī ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh (1079–1166 AH)
11. Shaykh al-Imām Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd Allāh (1042–1120 AH)
12. Shaykh al-Imām Qāsim al-Khussāṣī (1002–1083 AH)
13. Shaykh al-Imām Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Fāsī Ma‘n (978–1062 AH)
14. Shaykh al-Imām ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad al-Fāsī (972–1036 AH)
15. Shaykh al-Imām Yūsuf ibn Muḥammad al-Fāsī (938–1013 AH)
16. Shaykh al-Imām ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Majdhūb (909–976 AH)
17. Shaykh al-Imām ‘Alī al-Dawwār (d. 947 AH)
18. Shaykh al-Imām Ibrāhīm Ifhām al-Zarhūnī (d. 926 AH)
19. Shaykh al-Imām Zarrūq al-Burnusī (846–899 AH)
20. Shaykh al-‘Ārif al-Kabīr Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn ‘Uqbah al-Ḥaḍramī (d. 895 AH)
21. Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā ibn Aḥmad (798–857 AH)
22. Shaykh al-Imām ‘Alī Wafā (761–807 AH)
23. Shaykh al-Imām Muḥammad Wafā (702–765 AH)
24. Sayyid al-Imām Abū Sulaymān Dāwūd ibn ‘Umar al-Bākhilī (d. 733 AH)
25. Tāj al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh al-Sakandarī (d. 709 AH)
26. Shaykh al-Imām Abū al-‘Abbās al-Mursī (d. 686 AH)
27. Shaykh al-Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (571–656 AH)
28. Shaykh al-Imām Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Mashīsh (d. 622 AH)
29. Shaykh al-Imām ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Madanī al-‘Aṭṭār al-Zayyāt
30. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nahruwāndī (d. 594 AH)
31. Shaykh al-Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad
32. Shaykh al-Imām Nūr al-Dīn Abū Ḥasan ‘Alī
33. Shaykh al-Imām Tāj al-Dīn Muḥammad
34. Shaykh al-Imām Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad
35. Shaykh al-Imām Zayn al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Quzwaynī
36. Shaykh al-Imām Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Baṣrī
37. Shaykh al-Imām Abū al-Qāsim Aḥmad al-Marwānī
38. Shaykh al-Imām Abū Muḥammad Sa‘īd

39. Shaykh Sayyid Sa‘d
40. Shaykh al-Imām Abū Muḥammad Fath al-Su‘ūdī
41. Shaykh al-Imām Sa‘īd al-Ghazwānī
42. Abū Muḥammad Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī
43. Al-Imām al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (raḍiya Allāhu ‘anhu)
44. Al-Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (karram Allāhu wajhah)
45. The Messenger of God, Muḥammad (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam)⁸

The Preservation of the Mawlid Tradition of Imam Ḥusayn by the Shādhiliyya Shiddiqiya Order

The commemoration of the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn in Egypt represents a religious manifestation deeply rooted in history and sustained through continuous spiritual practice within Sunni Islamic tradition. This observance is not merely a symbolic ritual; rather, it entails the active participation of diverse social groups, particularly the Sufi orders that have been embedded in Egypt's religious culture for centuries.⁹ Among them, the Shādhiliyya Order—recognized as the largest and most influential Sufi order in Egypt since the fourteenth century—plays a central role in preserving this tradition through its Shiddiqiya branch, which is distinguished by its unique approach to spirituality.¹⁰

The Shādhiliyya Shiddiqiya community demonstrates remarkable consistency and vitality in maintaining the ritual of the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn by organizing a series of activities centered at the Mosque of Imam Ḥusayn in Cairo.¹¹ These activities include the recitation of the *mawlid*, *dhikr* gatherings, *qaṣīda* chanting, and the collective ritual of *ḥadra*, which constitutes a hallmark of the order. Such practices indicate that Sufism extends beyond the sphere of individual contemplative devotion and is also embodied in communal rituals that construct a public spiritual space marked by complex dynamics.

The events organized by this order display a structured and systematic character, encompassing temporal, spatial, and liturgical dimensions. *Dhikr* assemblies are typically held in the evening, beginning with the recitation of *awrād* inherited from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, followed by *qaṣīdas* praising the Prophet and his family—particularly Imam Ḥusayn—and culminating in a rhythmically performed collective *ḥadra*.¹² This liturgical

⁸ البرهان الجلي في تحقيق انتساب الصوفية إلى علي : المكتبة الصوفية [Internet Archive](https://www.archive.org/details/Al-Burhan-al-Jali), Ahmād ibn Muḥammad al-Ṣiddīq ibn Ahmād al-Ghumārī al-Ḥasanī, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib fī al-Mīzān al-Islāmī aw al-Riḍā al-Jalī fī Tahqīq Nisbat al-Ṣūfiyyah ilā ‘Alī: wa-yalīhi Kitāb Fath al-Malik al-‘Alī bi-Ṣīḥhat Ḥadīth Bāb Madīnat al-‘Ilm ‘Alī (al-Tab‘ah al-Ūlā, 1389/1969).

⁹ Ahmad S. Moussalli, *Historical Dictionary of Islamic Fundamentalist Movements in the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2019).

¹⁰ Religious Literacy Project Harvard Divinity School, “Sufism in Egypt,” Accessed September 1, 2025.

¹¹ Rachida Chih, *Sufi Networks and the Social Contexts for Scholarship in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Egypt in The Cambridge History of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021).

¹² Catherine Mayeur-Jaouen, “Moulids of Egypt: Religious Festivals and Social Change,” in *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa* Ed. Andrew Hammond (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2019).

structure reflects the depth of a spiritual tradition that has been institutionalized within the Sufi order over centuries.

Within this framework, the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn serves as a collective moment that integrates ritual, spirituality, and Sufi identity. Disciples (*murīdīn*) and Sufi masters (*shaykhs*) perceive their participation in this commemoration as an integral dimension of worship and spiritual devotion inseparable from the Sufi path.¹³ Each year, thousands of adherents from across Egypt and beyond gather for this multi-day celebration, underscoring the continuity of practices transmitted across generations and geographic boundaries.

The preservation of the Mawlid tradition of Imam Ḥusayn by the Shādhiliyya Shiddqiyya not only safeguards a vital religious heritage but also functions as a medium for actualizing Sufi values in wider communal life.¹⁴ Through collective *dhikr*, *hadra*, and spiritual poetry, the disciples do not merely commemorate Imam Ḥusayn as the martyr of Karbala; they also reaffirm their devotion to the Prophet's family (*Ahl al-Bayt*) as an integral aspect of the Sufi path within a moderate Sunni framework.

This tradition likewise embodies a form of cultural resistance against the homogenization of religion often promoted by contemporary reformist groups. In modern Egypt, Sufi practices are frequently subject to critique for allegedly lacking firm scriptural grounding or being classified as *bid'a* (innovation).¹⁵ Yet, through the preservation of the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn, the Shādhiliyya Shiddqiyya affirms that Islamic spirituality can flourish within the framework of tradition, love, and reverence for sacred symbols—particularly the figure of Imam Ḥusayn, who is revered not only by Shi'i communities but also within Sunni Sufi circles.

The active involvement of the Shādhiliyya Shiddqiyya Order in the commemoration of Imam Ḥusayn's Mawlid in Cairo reflects a distinctive spiritual and social commitment within the Sufi tradition. This commemoration is sustained not only as an act of reverence for historical memory and the *Ahl al-Bayt* but also as a space for the actualization of Sufi teachings through dynamic and transformative communal praxis.¹⁶ It demonstrates that Sufi orders are not isolated entities, but integral components of the living Islamic cultural fabric, responsive to societal change.

In the landscape of contemporary Egyptian Islam, the preservation of the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn by Sufi communities such as the Shādhiliyya Shiddqiyya symbolizes the endurance of Islamic spiritual heritage that continues to resonate amid modernization, reformist critique, and complex social transformations.¹⁷ This phenomenon highlights the vitality of Sufism as a spiritual tradition that not only endures but also adapts, offering

¹³ Mark Sedgwick, “Sufism in Contemporary Egypt: Adaptation and Transformation,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 31, no. 2 (2020).

¹⁴ Elbendary, “Saints, Mawlid, and the City: Cairo in the Seventeenth Century.”

¹⁵ Zvi Sela, “Traditional Islam vs. Reformed Islam: The Case of Egyptian Sufism,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 57, no. 4 (2021).

¹⁶ Fouad Ibrahim, “Sufi Brotherhoods and Social Cohesion in Contemporary Egypt,” *Mediterranean Politics* 26, no. 2 (2021).

¹⁷ Sarah bin Mufreh, “Islamic Mysticism and Modern Challenges: The Resilience of Sufi Orders in Egypt,” *Contemporary Islam* 15, no. 1 (2021).

significant contributions to the religious and social life of the contemporary Muslim community.

The Spiritual Meaning and Symbolism of Devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt

The most salient dimension of the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn as practiced by the Shādhiliyya Shiddiqiyya Order lies in its spiritual significance, particularly the embodiment of devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt. Love for Imam Ḥusayn is not understood merely as a historical sentiment or an emotional expression, but as a manifestation of divine love (*al-mahabba al-ilāhiyya*), which constitutes the core of contemporary Sufi teachings.¹⁸ Within the framework of modern Sufi thought, love for the Prophet’s family is regarded as one of the principal pathways to God, since the Ahl al-Bayt are perceived as the epitome of refined character, knowledge, and spiritual purity—a view that has been acknowledged in recent scholarly studies.¹⁹

In every ritual conducted by the Shādhiliyya Shiddiqiyya community—whether *dhikr*, *hadra*, or the recitation of *qaṣīdas*—the name of Imam Ḥusayn is invoked with profound reverence and spiritual solemnity. Praises of his steadfastness and martyrdom at Karbala are symbolically interpreted as the apex of spiritual sacrifice, wherein the servant effaces his or her own will in complete submission to the Divine will.²⁰ The martyrdom of Imam Ḥusayn is not merely commemorated as a historical tragedy; rather, it is internalized as a symbol of *fanā’* (self-annihilation) and *baqā’* (subsistence in God), both of which constitute the essence of the Sufi mystical path in contemporary Islamic spirituality.²¹

The symbolism of devotion is further expressed in the *qaṣīda* texts recited during the commemoration, in which Imam Ḥusayn is often depicted as a “sacred light” (*nūr muqaddas*) inheriting prophetic qualities. Devotion to him is viewed as a form of *ittibā’* (emulative following) that transcends formal legalistic dimensions of Islam, penetrating into deeper domains of spirituality.²² Recent research indicates that within Sufi orders, spirituality is not confined to inward practices such as *dhikr* or *khalwa*, but is equally manifested in affective attachment to figures intimately connected with the Prophet—most notably the Ahl al-Bayt—as part of a comprehensive spiritual methodology.²³

Beyond its spiritual dimension, devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt also bears significant ethical and social implications for the life of the Sufi community. Sufi *murshids* teach that to love Imam Ḥusayn is to emulate his courage, sincerity, and unwavering commitment to

¹⁸ Mohammad Ayoub, “The Concept of Love in Islamic Thought: A Study of Maḥabba in Classical and Contemporary Sufism,” *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 18, no. 3 (2021).

¹⁹ Ahmad Zarruq Foundation, “Foundations and Principles of Ahlul Bayt’s Spiritual Journey Teachings and Their Effect on Sufism,” *University of Religions and Denominations Research Journal* 7, no. 2 (2022).

²⁰ Omid Safi, “The Heart of Islamic Spirituality: Love, Mercy, and the Path to the Divine in Contemporary Sufism,” *Islamic Studies Quarterly* 29, no. 4 (2020).

²¹ Kristin Zahra Sands, “Mystical Language and Metaphor in Contemporary Islamic Spirituality,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 52, no. 1–2 (2021).

²² Alexander Knysh, “Islamic Mysticism and the Question of Religious Authority in the Twenty-First Century,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 61, no. 2 (2021).

²³ Marcia Hermansen, “Contemporary Sufi Movements and the Question of Women’s Spiritual Authority,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89, no. 3 (2021).

justice—values that disciples subsequently translate into their everyday practices.²⁴ Contemporary studies underscore that the symbolism of devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt not only shapes the inner world of individuals but also provides a collective source of inspiration for cultivating a holistic Muslim personality within broader social contexts.

The spiritual meaning of the Mawlid of Imam Husayn as celebrated by the Shādhiliyya Shiddqiyya demonstrates that devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt does not constitute personal veneration, but rather represents the deepest expression of *tawhīd*-consciousness in the form of structured affective devotion.²⁵ In contemporary Sufi praxis, love functions as the bridge between humanity and God, while the Ahl al-Bayt serve as spiritual mediators in this process. The symbolism of Imam Husayn as the supreme martyr transforms the Mawlid commemoration from a mere religious tradition into a continuous project of spiritual renewal in the face of modernity and secularization.²⁶

Integration of Religious Tradition with Socio-Economic Dynamics

One of the most salient aspects of the Mawlid of Imam Husayn as celebrated by the Shādhiliyya Shiddqiyya Order lies in its spiritual dimension, particularly the devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt. Love for Imam Husayn is not perceived merely as a historical sentiment or an emotional expression, but rather as a manifestation of *al-mahabba al-ilāhiyya* (divine love), which constitutes a fundamental axis of contemporary Sufi thought.²⁷ Within the modern Sufi perspective, devotion to the Prophet's family is considered a principal path to God, for the Ahl al-Bayt are regarded as reflections of perfect character, profound knowledge, and spiritual purity—an interpretation affirmed by recent academic studies.²⁸

In each ritual observed by the Shādhiliyya Shiddqiyya—whether *dhikr*, *hadra*, or *qasīda* recitations—Imam Husayn's name is invoked with deep reverence and spiritual solemnity. His steadfastness and martyrdom at Karbala are symbolically represented as the pinnacle of spiritual sacrifice, in which the servant dissolves entirely into the Divine will.²⁹ His martyrdom is not commemorated solely as a historical tragedy but internalized as the archetype of *fanā'* (annihilation of the self) and *baqā'* (subsistence in God), both of which define the essence of the mystical Sufi path in the context of contemporary Islamic spirituality.³⁰

This symbolism of devotion is also articulated in *qasīda* texts recited during the commemoration, in which Imam Husayn is often depicted as a “sacred light” (*nūr muqaddas*) inheriting prophetic qualities. Love for him is construed as a form of *ittibā'*

²⁴ Lila Abu-Lughod, “‘Islamic Revival and the Problem of Tradition in Contemporary Egypt,’” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63, no. 2 (2021).

²⁵ Vincent J. Cornell, “‘The Way of Abu Madyan: The Struggle Between Reason and Mysticism in Islamic Thought,’” *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* 28, no. 4 (2020).

²⁶ Carl W. Ernst, “‘Sufism and Islam in the Contemporary World: Crisis, Adaptation, and Renewal,’” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 53, no. 1 (2021).

²⁷ Ayoub, “‘The Concept of Love in Islamic Thought: A Study of Mahabba in Classical and Contemporary Sufism.’”

²⁸ Foundation, “‘Foundations and Principles of Ahlul Bayt’s Spiritual Journey Teachings and Their Effect on Sufism.’”

²⁹ Safi, “‘The Heart of Islamic Spirituality: Love, Mercy, and the Path to the Divine in Contemporary Sufism.’”

³⁰ Sands, “‘Mystical Language and Metaphor in Contemporary Islamic Spirituality.’”

(emulative following) that transcends the formal legal dimensions of Islam and enters into a deeper spiritual domain.³¹ Recent research has shown that within Sufi orders, spirituality is not confined to inward practices such as *dhikr* or *khalwa*, but also materializes through affective attachment to figures closely connected to the Prophet—most notably the Ahl al-Bayt—as part of a comprehensive spiritual methodology.³²

Beyond its spiritual dimension, devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt carries profound ethical and social significance for the life of the Sufi community. The *murshids* of the order teach that loving Imam Ḥusayn means emulating his courage, sincerity, and commitment to justice—values that disciples subsequently embody in their everyday lives.³³ Contemporary scholarship underscores that the symbolism of devotion to the Ahl al-Bayt not only shapes the inner domain of the individual but also serves as a collective source of inspiration for constructing a holistic Muslim identity in broader social contexts.

The annual commemoration of Imam Ḥusayn’s Mawlid around the Mosque of Imam Ḥusayn in Cairo is not only a spiritual and ritual event but also demonstrates the close intertwining of religious tradition with the socio-economic dynamics of contemporary Egyptian society. This phenomenon illustrates how religious practice functions as both a catalyst for microeconomic activity and a medium for reinforcing social networks in complex urban settings.³⁴ One of the most striking manifestations of this integration is the *sūq al-mawlid*—the seasonal marketplace that emerges alongside the commemoration—where hundreds of small vendors sell food, religious souvenirs, sacred texts, and symbolic items associated with Imam Ḥusayn and the Ahl al-Bayt.

This economic activity is not incidental but has long been an integral component of the social structure of religious celebrations in Egypt, dating back to the Fāṭimid era and persisting into the present.³⁵ Beyond its economic function, the *sūq al-mawlid* creates a unique space of cross-class and cross-sectarian interaction in modern Egyptian society. It brings together informal economic actors, Sufi devotees, religious scholars, domestic pilgrims, and international spiritual tourists, producing a multidimensional and inclusive social dynamic.³⁶ Within this context, religious ritual serves as a trigger for community-based economic activity that is temporally limited but recurrent, generating significant economic impact for the local population.

Alongside commerce, the commemoration is also accompanied by the distribution of food (*nazr*) and organized almsgiving by individuals and religious institutions. These practices are deeply rooted in Islamic and Sufi traditions as expressions of *karāma* (nobility), *sakhā’* (generosity), and social solidarity, which have been adapted to modern

³¹ Knysh, “Islamic Mysticism and the Question of Religious Authority in the Twenty-First Century.”

³² Hermansen, “Contemporary Sufi Movements and the Question of Women’s Spiritual Authority.”

³³ Abu-Lughod, “Islamic Revival and the Problem of Tradition in Contemporary Egypt.”

³⁴ Ahmad Abdel-Gawad, “Religious Festivals and Urban Economics in Contemporary Cairo: The Case of Islamic Moulids,” *Journal of Middle Eastern Urbanization* 123, no. 4 (2021).

³⁵ Yasmin Moll, “Digital Devotion: Islam, Authority, and the Livestreaming of Religious Festivals in Egypt,” *American Anthropologist* 123, no. 4 (2021).

³⁶ Martina Rieker, “Sacred Economies: Religious Tourism and Market Dynamics in Modern Egypt,” *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage* 9, no. 3 (2021).

contexts.³⁷ In contemporary Egyptian society, *naṣr* is perceived both as an act of gratitude to God and as a gesture of reverence for Imam Ḥusayn, while simultaneously serving as a mechanism of informal wealth redistribution for the economically disadvantaged—especially significant in light of Egypt's recent economic challenges.³⁸

The commemoration also functions as a form of non-formal religious education, where Sufi *shaykhs* deliver spiritual advice, narrate stories of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, and provide moral instruction to the broader public in ways that are accessible and contextually relevant. The social space thus created is not merely ritualistic but communicative and dialogical, enabling the transmission of religious knowledge across generations.³⁹ Children, women, and participants from both urban and rural settings are afforded the opportunity to participate actively, generating a form of social inclusion that transcends boundaries of class and gender. For many international pilgrims, the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn constitutes part of a transnational spiritual journey, further reinforcing local economies through religious tourism and contributing to national revenue.⁴⁰

Thus, the Mawlid of Imam Ḥusayn as animated by the Shādhiliyya Shiddqiyya demonstrates that spirituality cannot be separated from the socio-economic realities of contemporary Muslim life. The integration of religious practice with socio-economic dynamics reflects the enduring capacity of Sufism to foster communal solidarity, facilitate spiritually grounded forms of wealth redistribution, and strengthen grassroots economies amidst the challenges of urbanization and modernization.⁴¹ In this sense, the order functions not merely as a religious institution but also as a social actor actively contributing to the sustainability of local communities within the complex landscape of a metropolis like Cairo, thereby underscoring the relevance and adaptability of Sufi traditions in negotiating socio-economic transformations.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Shādhiliyyah Shiddqiyyah ṭarīqa plays a significant role in the preservation and development of the commemoration of Imam Ḥusayn's Mawlid in Cairo, not merely as a form of historical veneration, but also as a medium for actualizing Sufi values within a broader social context. This tradition illustrates how Sufism can harmonize with devotion to the *Ahl al-Bayt* within the framework of a moderate Sunni Islam. Through ritual practices such as *ḥadrah*, *awrād*, and *qaṣīdah*, the order revitalizes the spirit of spirituality grounded in divine love and the values of Imam Ḥusayn's sacrifice.

³⁷ Amr Adly, "Cleft Capitalism: Economic Inequality and Social Cohesion in Contemporary Egypt," *Mediterranean Politics* 25, no. 4 (2020): 478–97.

³⁸ Noha Mellor, "Economic Hardship and Religious Coping Mechanisms in Post-Revolutionary Egypt," *Journal of North African Studies* 26, no. 3 (2021): 923–41.

³⁹ Albrecht Hofheinz, "'Islam and New Media in the Middle East: Transformation and Continuity,'" *Die Welt Des Islams* 61, no. 3 (2021): 289–315.

⁴⁰ Samia Errazzouki, "'Spiritual Tourism and Cultural Heritage in Islamic Egypt: Contemporary Dynamics and Challenges,'" *Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management* 8, no. 2 (2022): 89–107.

⁴¹ Malak Rouchdy, "'Sufi Orders and Social Capital Formation in Urban Egypt: A Contemporary Analysis,'" *Social Science Research Network* 1, no. 3 (2023): 1–28.

The commemoration further serves as an integrative space linking religious dimensions with the socio-economic dynamics of Egyptian society, marked by the emergence of seasonal markets (*sūq al-mawlid*), the tradition of *nadr*, and the strengthening of communal solidarity. Beyond this, the Shādhiliyyah Shiddiqiyyah has demonstrated adaptive capacity in responding to the challenges of reformism and modernity, including the strategic use of digital media as a means of *da'wa* and the transmission of spiritual values. Accordingly, the commemoration of Imam Husayn's Mawlid, as maintained by the order, persists not only as a religious heritage but also as a form of Islamic spirituality that is dynamic, resilient, and contextually relevant.

The implications of this research underscore the importance of viewing Sufi orders as religious actors that are not solely mystically oriented but also socially and culturally engaged. Future studies on the role of *ṭarīqas* in the dynamics of contemporary Islam should adopt interdisciplinary approaches, particularly in examining how traditional spiritualities contribute to shaping the cultural and moral resilience of Muslim communities amidst globalization and identity crises.

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