



SUFI MORAL TEACHINGS IN HABIBURRAHMAN EL SHIRAZY'S AYAT-AYAT CINTA: RELEVANCE OF CLASSICAL ETHICS IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

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Abstract

This article examines the Sufi moral teachings embedded in Habiburrahman El Shirazy's novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* and their relevance to the challenges of ethical and spiritual life in the contemporary age of globalization. As global culture increasingly promotes materialism, individualism, and moral relativism, classical Sufi ethics—rooted in the cultivation of *akhlaq al-karimah* (noble character)—offer an alternative framework for restoring balance and spiritual depth in human life. This study employs a qualitative library research method with a descriptive—analytical approach, drawing upon primary data from the novel and secondary sources from classical Sufi scholars, especially Imam al-Ghazali. The findings reveal that El Shirazy integrates central Sufi virtues such as *faqr* (detachment from worldly attachments), *sabr* (patience in adversity), and *tawakkul* (trust in divine providence) into the narrative, particularly through the main character's responses to personal and moral dilemmas. These values, while rooted in classical Islamic ethics, are presented in a way that resonates with modern readers, demonstrating the continued relevance of Sufi moral teachings in addressing ethical crises in the global era. Thus, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* not only serves as popular Islamic fiction but also as a medium of da'wah that recontextualizes timeless spiritual values for contemporary society.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji ajaran moral sufistik yang terdapat dalam novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* karya Habiburrahman El Shirazy serta relevansinya dengan tantangan kehidupan etis dan spiritual di era globalisasi. Dalam konteks budaya global yang semakin menonjolkan materialisme, individualisme, dan relativisme moral, etika sufistik klasik—yang berakar pada pembinaan *akhlaq al-karimah* (akhlak mulia)—menawarkan kerangka alternatif untuk mengembalikan keseimbangan dan kedalaman spiritual dalam kehidupan manusia. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis, berdasarkan data primer dari novel dan data sekunder dari karya ulama sufi klasik, khususnya Imam al-Ghazali. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa El Shirazy mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai utama tasawuf seperti *faqr* (melepaskan keterikatan duniawi), *sabr* (kesabaran dalam menghadapi ujian), dan *tawakkul* (ketergantungan penuh kepada kehendak Ilahi) ke dalam narasi, terutama melalui respons tokoh utama terhadap dilema moral dan personal. Nilai-nilai ini, meskipun berakar pada etika Islam klasik, disajikan dengan cara yang relevan bagi pembaca modern, sehingga menunjukkan bahwa ajaran moral sufistik tetap aktual dalam menjawab krisis etika di era global. Dengan demikian, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai fiksi Islami populer, tetapi juga sebagai media dakwah yang merekontekstualisasikan nilai-nilai spiritual yang abadi bagi masyarakat kontemporer.



INTRODUCTION

Modernity has brought about various advances in science, technology, and communication. However, on the other hand, it has also had a serious impact on human spiritual and moral life. Moral crises, inner emptiness, and existential tension have become increasingly prevalent phenomena in modern society (Hajjaj, 2013). In facing this reality, Sufism emerges as a spiritual path that not only teaches about the relationship between humans and God, but also shapes a strong moral order that is relevant to contemporary life.

Sufism, according to Abdul Halim Mahmud, is the deepest dimension of Islam, serving to purify the heart and clarify the soul from worldly traits. He writes that Sufism is "the path that leads humans to witness the truth of God by cleansing the inner impurities" (Mahmud, 2002). Meanwhile, Syed Muhammad Zauqi Shah emphasized that the essence of Sufism is the process of self-improvement through an approach of love and awareness of Allah, not merely mechanical ritualistic practices (Shah, 2008).

A similar sentiment was expressed by M. Solihin and Rosihon Anwar, who explained that Sufism is a branch of knowledge that aims to educate the heart to be upright, sincere, and pure, so that every deed is not distorted by worldly interests (Rosihon Anwar, 2008). In more contemplative language, Bambang Saputra refers to Sufism as "the art of God," an inner practice that unites love, logic, and consciousness in order to fully attain the presence of the Divine (Saputra, 2017). Thus, Sufism is not an escape from reality, but rather an active approach to understanding reality more deeply and wisely. It emphasizes the dimension of *ihsan*, worshiping as if seeing Allah as the foundation of a noble and holistic way of life. Thus, when the realities of modern life give rise to a drought of meaning and a crisis of values, Sufism offers a path back to authentic and transformative spirituality.

In the current context, when Islamic preaching and education no longer take place solely through podiums or pulpits, literary works have emerged as an effective medium for conveying spiritual and moral values to society. Literature is not merely an aesthetic expression, but also an educational and reflective vehicle capable of touching the deepest dimensions of the human soul. In this regard, Islamic literary works have great potential to convey Sufi teachings in a more subtle and down-to-earth manner. One novel that successfully combines narrative strength with spiritual depth is *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy. The novel tells the story of an Indonesian student named Fahri bin Abdillah at Al-Azhar University in Cairo (Mu'asyara, n.d.). Behind the narrative of love and socio-cultural conflict lie Sufi teachings rooted in Islamic values, particularly ethical Sufism. The character Fahri is portrayed as someone who is not only intellectually intelligent but also spiritually pure, steadfast in patience, consistent in prayer, and trusting in God when facing life's trials (al-Munafi, 1996).

Habiburrahman El Shirazy, better known as Kang Abik, is not only a popular novelist, but also a preacher and educator. In interviews and in the foreword to his novels, he often mentions that his writing is part of *dakwah bil-qalam*, or preaching through the pen. The novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, first published in 2006 and has undergone numerous reprints, has even been adapted into a feature film. It is not only commercially successful but also contributes to spreading moral and spiritual messages to the younger generation of Muslims. Interestingly, the ethical Sufi values in this novel are not explicitly presented as

doctrine but are implied through the characters' actions, contemplative dialogue, and the internal conflicts they experience. Through this literary medium, values such as *fakir* (humility before Allah), *sabr* (patience), and *tawakkul* (total reliance on Allah's will) can be conveyed in a contextual and touching manner (Shirazi, 2006b).

Against this backdrop, research on Ayat – Ayat Cinta as an object of moral Sufism study becomes relevant. This is because it offers a Sufi model of understanding that is not only normative, but also contextual and applicable in modern life. In Sufism studies, one model that emphasizes the dimension of morality is the moral Sufism approach. This approach focuses on character building and purification of the soul, based on the principle that human spiritual perfection lies in controlling desires, total submission to Allah, and the formation of noble character (*akhlaq al-karimah*). The central figure in this approach is Imam al – Ghazali, who in his monumental works such as *Ihya' Ulum al – Din* and *Sharh al – Mughni*, outlines a spiritual journey based on moral character (Burhanuddin, 2020).

For al – Ghazali, the essence of spiritual journey does not lie in formalistic rituals, but in inner cultivation through ethical practices. He compiled *maqamat* (spiritual stages) based on inner qualities such as *fakir* (feeling of need for Allah), *shabr* (patience in the face of trials), and *tawakkul* (total dependence on Allah's will). In his book *Sharpening the Inner Eye*, al – Ghazali writes that "gnosis does not arise from knowledge alone, but from inner experience guided by upright moral conduct."

In the context of this study, these moral Sufi values serve as the main framework for reading and analyzing the characters, narrative conflicts, and religious content in the novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta*. The choice of this framework is not without reason. The main character in the novel, Fahri bin Abdillah, often displays attitudes that reflect the teachings of al – Ghazali's Sufism: not being quick to judge, being patient in enduring slander, and always deferring all decisions to the will of Allah SWT.

To analyze these Sufi aspects, a deductive library research – based content analysis approach was used. The researcher began with a theoretical framework of moral Sufism, then applied it to the analysis of literary texts through in – depth and contextual reading. This method allows for the systematic and logical testing of the validity of Sufi values in literary works. Based on the previous theoretical and cultural context, this study was formulated to answer two main questions: What are the forms of ethical Sufism values reflected in Habiburrahman El Shirazy's novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta* based on Imam al – Ghazali's concept?; To what extent are these ethical Sufi values relevant to the spiritual problems of modern society? The main objective of this study is to systematically identify and describe ethical Sufi values in popular Islamic literature and evaluate their significance in addressing spiritual and ethical crises in the global era. With this approach, it is hoped that the study will not only be descriptive but also offer conceptual and practical contributions to the study of Islam, literature, and ethics (Mu'asyara, n.d.).

The urgency of this research is based on the fact that previous studies of the novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta* have mostly been conducted from a structural, semiotic, or narrative perspective, while studies from an ethical Sufi perspective, particularly the model of Imam al – Ghazali, are still minimal. For example, Virry Grinitha's (2015) research highlights the general moral values in the novel, but does not specifically analyze them through a Sufi framework (al – Ghazali, 2007). Thus, the novelty (scientific novelty) of this research lies in:

- The use of popular fiction as a source of Sufi meaning.
- The application of Imam al – Ghazali's moral Sufism theory in literary analysis.
- The assertion that literary works can effectively and contextually serve as a space for moral and spiritual education for modern Muslim societies.

This research is expected to enrich Islamic scientific discourse, particularly in the fields of Islamic ethics, Sufi aesthetics, and spiritual literary hermeneutics, while remaining grounded in classical scientific foundations yet responsive to contemporary challenges (al – Munafi, 1996).

BIOGRAPHY OF HABIBURRAHMAN EL SHIRAZY

Habiburrahman El Shirazy was born on September 30, 1976, in Semarang, Central Java (Shirazi, 2014). He is widely known as a prolific novelist, director, poet, and preacher. Since 2008, he has been dubbed the "No. 1 Novelist in Indonesia" by Insani Universitas Diponegoro, Semarang. His works have not only been warmly received domestically but have also penetrated the reading markets in countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Australia (Shirazi, 2014).

His formal education began at MTS Futuhiyyah 1 Mranggen, which he then continued at Madrasah Aliyah Program Khusus (MAPK) Surakarta until graduating in 1995. He then continued his studies at Al – Azhar University, Cairo, Egypt, at the Faculty of Ushuluddin, Department of Hadith, and completed it in 1999. In 2001, he successfully completed the Postgraduate Diploma (Pg.D) program at The Institute for Islamic Studies in Cairo, founded by Imam al – Baiquri (Shirazi, 2006).

In Cairo, El Shirazy was known for his active participation in various intellectual and scientific forums. He chaired the Intensive Council for Jurisprudence and Islamic Knowledge Studies (MISYKATI) from 1996 to 1997 and served as coordinator of ICMI Orsat Cairo for two terms, from 1998 to 2000 and from 2000 to 2002. He was also the initiator of the establishment of the Forum Lingkar Pena (FLP) and the Komunitas Sastra Indonesia (KSI) in Cairo (Shirazi, 2006). His work in the arts is evident in the plays he wrote and directed while in Egypt. Some of his works include: *Wa Islama* (1999), *Sang Kyai dan Sang Durjana* (2000), and *Darah Syuhada* (2000). His writings have also been published in various media and journals, such as *Republika*, *Annida*, *Jurnal Sastra dan Budaya Kinanah*, and *Jurnal Justisi*.

In 2002, he was invited by the Malaysian Language and Literature Council to participate in the 9th Kuala Lumpur World Poetry Reading. His poems were then published in the PPDKL World Poetry Anthology and *Dewan Sastra Magazine* (2002) in two languages: English and Malay. His participation in this international forum reinforced his position as a writer who has contributed to the world of Islamic literature. After completing his studies in Cairo, Habiburrahman El Shirazy returned to Indonesia in mid – October 2002. Upon his return to his homeland, he was immediately asked by the Jakarta Center for Education Quality Development (P2MP) to be involved in the process of revising the Arabic – Indonesian Popular Dictionary compiled by Keluarga Mahasiswa Nahdlatul Ulama (KMNU) Egypt and published by Diva Pustaka Jakarta (2003). Additionally, he contributed to the compilation of the *Encyclopedia of Pesantren Intellectualism: Portraits of Figures and*

Their Thoughts, published in three volumes by Diva Pustaka in the same year (Grinitha, 2015).

His contributions to the field of education became increasingly evident when he dedicated himself as an educator at MAN 1 Yogyakarta (2003–2004), and later became a permanent lecturer at the Abu Bakar Ash Shiddiq UMS Surakarta Arabic and Islamic Language Teaching Institute since 2006. In addition to teaching, he also founded the Basmala Indonesia Islamic Boarding School and Entrepreneurship Center, an educational and da'wah institution co-founded with Anif Sirsaeba and cultural figure Prie GS in Semarang.

Habiburrahman El Shirazy is a prolific writer whose works have had a widespread influence on the character development of the Muslim community, particularly among young Muslims. His novels, such as *Ayat–Ayat Cinta* (2004), *Ketika Cinta Bertasbih* (2007), *Dalam Mihrab Cinta* (2007), and *Cinta Suci Zahrana* (2012), have not only received widespread acclaim from the public but have also been adapted into films and television series. These works highlight strong Islamic spiritual values and present a peaceful, loving, and morally grounded image of Islam.

Some of his other works, such as *Api Tauhid* (2014), *Bidadari Bermata Bening* (2017), and *Kembara Rindu* (2019), further solidify his reputation as a novelist who is able to convey messages of da'wah through literature. In *Ayat–Ayat Cinta*, El Shirazy subtly incorporates teachings of ethical Sufism rooted in the works of Imam al–Ghazali, such as the values of poverty, patience, and trust in God, which will be analyzed in this study. His contribution in blending literary aesthetics and Sufi values has made his works the subject of academic study at various universities. In a previous study, Grinitha (2015) examined the novel *Ayat–Ayat Cinta* from a structural–genetic perspective and found strong religious moral values, but did not specifically analyze ethical Sufi values in depth (Shirazi, 2006).

THE MORAL SUFI VALUES FOUND IN THE NOVEL AYAT-AYAT CINTA BY HABIBURRAHMAN EL SHIRAZY

The novel *Ayat–Ayat Cinta* by Habiburrahman El Shirazy is not merely a story of romance within an Islamic framework, but also a literary work rich with moral values rooted in Sufi teachings. Through its characters, the author portrays the life of a Muslim who strives to endure trials with patience, humility, and steadfast faith. Values such as asceticism (*zuhud*), reliance on God (*tawakkul*), patience (*sabr*), and sincerity (*ikhlas*) serve not only as a religious backdrop to the narrative but also as profound moral foundations that remain relevant to everyday life. Therefore, examining the Sufi moral values embedded in this novel is essential to uncover its spiritual dimensions and to understand how literature can function as a medium for internalizing Sufi ethics in the context of modern life.

1. *Fakir*

The value of poverty is one of the important *maqamat* in the treasure trove of Sufism, which has a very high spiritual meaning (Farida Nurus Sofa, 2020). In the view of Sufis, *fakir* does not simply mean not having wealth or material poverty, but rather an inner state in which a servant fully realizes that he has nothing except Allah SWT. Imam al–Ghazali in *Ihya' 'Ulum al–Din* explains that the state of poverty is the stage where

one lets go of all dependence on creatures and relies solely on Allah. Wealth may be in one's possession, but it must not enter the heart. In the Sufi sense, poverty is the full awareness that a servant's existence is entirely dependent on the All – Rich Lord, and it is to Him alone that a Sufi turns in hope and submission (Burhanuddin, 2020). In Surah Fāṭir verse 15, Allah SWT emphasizes:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ أَنْتُمُ الْفُقَرَاءُ إِلَى اللَّهِ ۚ وَاللَّهُ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ

Meaning: "O mankind! You are the ones who need Allah; and Allah is the All-Rich (who needs nothing), the All-Praised." (QS. Fatir 35: Ayat 15)

This concept emphasizes that all beings, without exception, are ontologically poor because they absolutely need sustenance and mercy from Allah. Poverty is not a deficiency, but perfection in emptying oneself of possessiveness. A truly poor person is one who, despite being wealthy in worldly terms, does not rely on wealth. Even if given wealth, they feel disturbed, and if not given, they feel content. In this state, one does not feel proud when acquiring wealth nor sad when losing it. Poverty, as understood by al – Ghazali, is a permanent spiritual achievement, not merely a temporary condition resulting from economic hardship. Therefore, being poor does not mean living in physical deprivation, but living with the full awareness that one possesses nothing except Allah.

In the novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta*, the main character Fahri is portrayed as a devout Muslim with a strong spiritual character. He is known as a person who is diligent in worship, such as performing tahajud prayers, congregational dawn prayers, increasing his recitation of the Quran and remembrance of Allah, and always spending his nights in supplication to Allah. When faced with difficulties, false accusations, and social pressure, Fahri does not immediately seek protection from people or the legal system, but instead begins by purifying his heart, increasing his prayers, and placing his trust in Allah SWT. In one scene, it is even mentioned that after Subuh prayer, Fahri does not immediately go to sleep but instead reads the Quran and reflects on its meanings until he performs the Dhuha prayer, then finally rests. This routine demonstrates that he has established a strong vertical connection with Allah. However, this religious expression more reflects the value of 'ubudiyyah or servitude, and does not fully capture the profound Sufi meaning of the state of poverty (*maqam fakir*) (Shirazi, 2006).

Although the novel depicts Fahri as not being overly interested in material possessions, and even feeling awkward when accepting luxuries from his wife, Aisyah, who comes from a wealthy family, there is no deep psychological and spiritual exploration of how he interprets and lets go of his attachment to the world. It is not explained whether Fahri experiences an inner struggle in rejecting dependence on the world, or how he undergoes the process of self – discipline to uproot his love for the world from his heart. This is important because, in Sufism, the station of the poor (*maqam fakir*) cannot be judged solely by outward attitudes such as avoiding wealth, but rather by the process of emptying the heart of everything except Allah. Here lies the fundamental difference between the *fakir* in the legal sense and the *fakir* in the true sense (Mu'asyara, n.d.).

Thus, the representation of poverty in the novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta* is more oriented toward outward acts of worship and servitude, rather than the spiritual state within al – Ghazali's Sufi framework, which demands complete liberation from feelings of possession and hope in anything other than Allah. Nevertheless, the presence of elements of worship such as prayer, remembrance of Allah, and night vigil in this novel remains an effective medium for instilling moral and spiritual messages in readers. The novel successfully conveys that dependence on Allah is the key to spiritual strength, especially when facing severe trials. However, to reach the true level of poverty in the Sufi perspective, a deeper depiction of the process of purifying the soul and freeing oneself from worldly bonds is needed, which has not been fully portrayed in Fahri's narrative.

In Sufism, the value of poverty does not only require a salik to let go of attachment to material possessions, but also to purify the heart from dependence on creatures. This includes reliance on human assistance, acknowledgment of power beyond Allah, and a sense of security derived from sources other than His mercy. Poverty necessitates that the soul be emptied of all reliance except on Allah, so that all thoughts, feelings, and desires are directed solely toward Him. This is no easy matter, as most people naturally lean on worldly causes. Therefore, the station of poverty is regarded as a sign of spiritual tenderness and the breadth of knowledge, as stated by Sahl bin 'Abdullah al – Tustari, "Poverty is the crown of the wise; if the people of the world saw it, they would surely vie to obtain it (Ritonga, 2023)."

If we look at the character Fahri in *Ayat – Ayat Cinta*, there are indeed elements that reflect a strong sense of devotion. In one of his dialogues with Aisha, he says, "By Allah, I fear that my love for humanity may surpass my love for Allah. If I were to marry, it would be because Allah is pleased, not because I seek to fulfill my desires." This statement reveals a spiritual awareness that all aspects of love and marriage must be grounded in Allah's pleasure, not merely worldly desires. However, the value of poverty in the Sufi context goes beyond that. It demands the dissolution of the ego and the complete severing of worldly attachments. In crucial scenes such as when Fahri receives expensive gifts from his in – laws or excessive praise from the women around him, there is no depiction of intense inner struggle to resist such worldly tendencies.

The absence of a narrative that describes the inner struggle in facing the temptations of this world makes the representation of the value of poverty in novels tend to be external and symbolic, rather than internal and transcendental. This is because, in Sufi teachings, the *maqam* of poverty is not only obtained through rituals, but through spiritual training (*riyadhah*) and a continuous struggle against lust (*mujadah*). For some Sufis, the rank of *fakir* is even higher than that of *zuhud*. While *zuhud* is the attitude of renouncing the world because it is considered lowly, *fakir* is the awareness that this world is not one's own, nor is one's self. Al – Junayd once said, "The *fakir* is one who possesses nothing, feels he possesses nothing, and feels no desire to possess anything." In this context, the value of *fakir* becomes the path to *fana'* (dissolution in the will of Allah), the highest point in the spiritual journey of Sufism (Rosihon Anwar, 2008).

The portrayal of poverty in this novel also seems to have failed to touch upon the contradictory aspects of modern life, where people live in an era of consumerism, capitalism, and instant gratification. Modern humans experience existential anxiety not

because they lack something, but because they are too attached to what they have. In such a life, poverty should appear as a spiritual answer to the crisis of meaning and inner turmoil. However, Fahri, as a representation of a religious figure, is not shown struggling to detach himself from the world, but rather living a disciplined and obedient life, without a strong Sufi struggle against wealth, reputation, or social relations. This makes the value of poverty in the novel more suitable to be classified as a value of Islamic preaching and modern Islamic ethics, rather than a spiritual state within the structure of a Sufi order or pure Sufism.

Nevertheless, the presence of servitude values in the novel remains important in introducing lay readers to the importance of closeness to Allah amid the moral crisis of this era. The portrayal of characters who are diligent in worship, sincere in accepting destiny, and not trapped in material arrogance is an early reflection of the *maqam fakir*. In other words, although this novel has not yet reached the depth of the Sufi meaning of *fakir*, it has opened the door for readers to understand that dependence on the world is fragile, and only by placing one's heart in Allah can humanity attain true peace. This novel serves as an inspiration that the nobility of a servant is not determined by what he possesses, but by how far he surrenders himself to Allah with full awareness and submission (Tualeka, 2011).

The value of poverty in Sufi teachings is a spiritual bridge to total servitude, which can only be achieved through a long process of purification of the heart (*tazkiyatun nafs*). In this case, a person must free himself from feelings of ownership and entitlement to everything, including his own life. In the novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta*, the character Fahri is portrayed as a person who upholds religious and moral values. He not only loves knowledge but also consistently places Allah at the center of his life. In one scene, after being cleared of false accusations and resuming his life, Fahri says, "I have no one in this world except Allah, and Allah is sufficient for me." This statement, verbally, aligns with the essence of the *fakir* station in Sufism. However, this value remains merely a fleeting emotional expression, not the result of the prolonged process of spiritual struggle (*mujahadah*) as required in pure Sufism (Muhammad, 2003).

In Sufism, poverty is not about financial poverty, but rather the elimination of desire for power, honor, and worldly possessions. For the root of all dependence on the world is inner attachment. When someone feels "entitled" to possess something, that is where spiritual deviation begins. The Qur'an in Surah Al – 'Ankabut verse 64 emphasizes that awareness of the transience of the world is the gateway to the state of poverty. In the context of the novel, this awareness has not been developed through Fahri's complex inner dialectic process. He lives his life religiously, but it is not repeatedly narrated that he experiences inner conflicts with the world so closely surrounding him, such as praise, popularity, wealth from Aisha's family, and his social status as a prominent student. Instead, he appears as an ideal, steadfast character, but static, without showing the inner transcendence process that is usually the main focus in Sufi works.

Thus, the value of poverty in this novel does not fully reflect the *maqam faqr* as described in classical Sufi works such as *Risalah Qusyairiyah* or *Manazil al – Sa'irin*. The values presented are closer to strengthening the character of pious and moral Muslims, rather than spiritual transformation in the deeper sense of Sufism. This is not a shortcoming, but rather indicates that the novel prioritizes a popular da'wah approach

over elitist spirituality. In other words, the Sufi values in Ayat – Ayat Cinta serve as an introduction to modern Islamic morality, not as an exploration of spiritual stations along the path of the *tariqat*.

However, the presence of values such as worship, humility, and dependence on Allah in the novel remains an important foundation for gradually introducing the meaning of poverty to readers. In the context of literary da'wah, these values serve as a bridge to draw modern society back to Allah in a life full of pressure and competition. By reading Fahri's story, readers are invited to understand that worldly life is merely a path, not the destination, and that inner peace will only be attained when one fully relies on God. Although the novel has not yet reached the level of "*maqam faqr*" in the pure Sufi sense, the messages it conveys remain relevant in fostering spiritual awareness and moral values in a modern, materialistic society.

2. Patience (*sabr*)

Patience (*ṣabr*) in the Sufi tradition is one of the most fundamental stages in the spiritual journey of a *salik* (one who walks the path toward Allah). Imam al – Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al – Din* explains that patience is the soul's ability to remain steadfast in the face of various pressures of desire, life's trials, and obedience to Allah, without complaint, without anxiety, and without deviating from the straight path. Al – Ghazali divides patience into three dimensions:

- a. Patience in obedience (*ṣabr 'ala ṭa'ah*),
- b. Patience in avoiding sin (*ṣabr 'anil ma'ṣiyah*),
- c. Patience in the face of calamity or trials (*ṣabr 'ala al-balā*) (al – Ghazali, 2007).

All three must work together to form a person's spiritual wholeness. In Surah Al – Baqarah verses 155 – 156, Allah SWT says:

"And indeed, We will test you with a little fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives, and fruits. And give good news to those who are patient, who, when afflicted with calamity, say, 'Inna lillahi wa inna ilaihi raji'un.'" (QS. Al – Baqarah: 155 – 156)

The concept of patience in this verse emphasizes that human life is never free from trials, and it is the attitude of patience that distinguishes those who pass the trials of life from those who fail. In the context of Sufism, patience is not a passive attitude, but an active ability to endure and direct oneself according to Allah's will, even in extremely challenging situations. Patience is the most evident expression of self – control, not out of fear of worldly consequences, but out of sincerity in carrying out Allah's commands and loving Him. In this regard, patience serves as a means of purifying the soul and simultaneously as a tool for ascending to a higher spiritual station. A true Sufi is not only patient when faced with adversity but also patient in prolonged obedience and the subtle control of desires.

In the novel Ayat – Ayat Cinta, the character Fahri is consistently portrayed as a person who practices patience in various situations in life. When he is falsely accused of rape by a Coptic Christian woman named Maria Girgis, he does not react with anger or

seek revenge. Instead, he chooses to remain silent, draw closer to God, increase his nightly prayers, and trust that God will provide a way out. In one scene, Fahri is depicted praying at night with tears streaming down his face, then seeking forgiveness from Allah so that the truth may be established. This reaction reflects the attitude of patience in the Sufi tradition, though it does not fully capture the inner struggle of facing anger, trauma, and a deep sense of injustice, as is commonly portrayed in classical Sufi texts (Shirazi, 2006).

Fahri also demonstrated patience in obedience and in avoiding sin. As a young, intelligent, handsome student who attracted the attention of many women, he chose to keep his distance from members of the opposite sex who were not his mahram. Even when a beautiful woman named Noura openly flirted with him and slandered him, Fahri remained polite and did not give in to lust or emotion. Here, the form of patience in avoiding sin (*sabr 'anil ma'siyah*) is strongly evident. He did not use the opportunity to give in to his biological desires but instead strengthened his principles of faith. This is a form of self-control over desires, which is an important foundation in Sufi teachings. However, once again, it is not explicitly explained whether this patience arose from a long inner process or deep spiritual training (*riyadhah an-nafs*), or was simply the result of his strong religious education.

Patience is also reflected in Fahri's married life with Aisha. He must navigate his marital relationship amid a challenging and jealous atmosphere. When Aisha feels uneasy due to Maria's presence in their home, Fahri remains calm, patient, and wise in explaining the situation. He does not easily succumb to emotions, does not blame his wife, and maintains proper decorum in his speech. This is an example of patience in the face of adversity, not in the form of a major disaster, but rather a test of social relationships filled with emotional dynamics. In this case, the value of patience in this novel is successfully portrayed both narratively and practically, though it is more socially and psychologically oriented than spiritually and esoterically, as in classical Sufi tradition.

In Sufism, patience is not merely the ability to control emotions or passively accept trials. Patience is an active process of strengthening the soul to remain on the path of sincerity, continuing to walk in obedience, and not wavering even when the world seems to reject it. A Sufi is patient not out of necessity, but out of love. They endure Allah's commands because they seek to draw closer to Him, not out of fear of punishment or desire for reward alone. Here, patience transforms into a spiritual station that forms the foundation for the emergence of the stations of contentment and trust. Such patience does not arise suddenly but is the fruit of continuous spiritual discipline, striving, and purification of the soul. According to Imam Al-Ghazali, patience is not merely about refraining from complaint but also the ability to embrace trials as part of divine mercy (Miswar, 2017).

In the novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, the narrative depicting Fahri facing trials with silence, prayer, and increased worship is a form of patience rooted in faith and belief. However, this value of patience is conveyed in a normative manner, failing to reveal the deeper psychological and spiritual processes involved. It is not explained whether Fahri experiences inner conflict between anger and forgiveness, between wanting to fight back and surrendering. Nor is there any indication of his spiritual struggle in seeking

meaning from the misfortune that befalls him, as experienced by Sufi figures in classical works. In Sufism, patience is the "light" that emerges after the soul has wrestled with its inner darkness. Thus, the aspect of patience in this novel resembles a moral value more than a mystical one.

Nevertheless, Fahri remains an important example of patience as a functional Islamic moral value. When slandered, he did not respond with slander. When unjustly punished, he did not curse or seek blindly for worldly power to defend him. He remained submissive and maintained his manners. Such patience has not yet reached the level of *maqam* in Sufism, but it has become a *madkhal* (gateway) for the general public to recognize spiritual virtues. In Surah Al – Anfal verse 46, Allah SWT emphasizes:

"Inna Allaha ma'a al-sabirin."

Meaning: "Verily, Allah is with those who are patient."

This verse serves as an important foundation that patience is not merely a passive attitude, but rather a manifestation of God's presence within the steadfast servant.

It should be noted that in the context of Sufism, patience has different levels. The lowest level is patience in the face of physical misfortune, such as poverty or illness. Higher than that is patience in restraining one's desires, and the highest is patience in longing for Allah when feeling distant from Him. This kind of patience is what Rabi'ah al – 'Adawiyyah referred to as "patience out of love." In the novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta*, the level of patience depicted is more focused on social and religious self – control, rather than mystical patience filled with tears of longing and spiritual solitude. For example, when Fahri is in prison, he continues to write, read, and recite prayers, but there is no apparent expression of spiritual anxiety due to feeling disconnected from Allah. Instead, he is portrayed as very calm, as if he is not struggling internally. This makes the patience in the novel feel stronger ethically than mystically (Ahmad, 2011).

However, it is precisely at this point that the value of patience in *Ayat – Ayat Cinta* becomes significant in terms of preaching. Readers from a general background will find it easier to understand and emulate Fahri's patience as an applicable value that can be practiced in everyday life. In the modern world filled with social pressures, work – related stress, relational conflicts, and existential crises, patience in the form of self – control, steadfastness of character, and sincerity is a genuine necessity. This novel teaches that patience is not a weakness but a strong inner strength. Therefore, even though it has not yet reached the level of patience in classical Sufism, the representation of this value in *Ayat – Ayat Cinta* remains highly relevant for fostering spiritual awareness in the modern era, which tends to be impulsive and turbulent.

In the framework of moral Sufism, patience is an inner quality that serves as a measure of the depth of a servant's relationship with his Lord. Patience is the spirit of all forms of worship and spiritual sincerity. It is not only a form of moral obedience, but also an expression of unwavering love for Allah, even when the realities of the world strike mercilessly (Saputra, 2017). Sufis such as Abu Yazid al – Busthami and Ibrahim bin Adham describe patience as guarding the heart from complaining about creatures and guarding the tongue from lamenting, for everything that happens is the wise will of Allah. Thus, when one can smile in trials, give thanks in adversity, and remain steadfast amid the storm of slander, there lies the true station of patience. In this context,

patience transforms from ethics into spirituality, from endurance into enjoyment, and even from difficulty into goodness (Mahmud, 2002).

However, in *Ayat – Ayat Cinta*, the depiction of patience still remains at the narrative and normative levels. Fahri is portrayed as patient, but readers are not presented with internal dynamics or inner monologues that illustrate deep spiritual conflict. It is not clear how Fahri interprets suffering as a form of "tajalli" (manifestation) of God's love. There is no depiction of how tears of sorrow are transformed into tears of divine love, as is often recounted in the stories of classical Sufis. Instead, Fahri is more often portrayed as an emotionally stable, rationally strong, and consistently obedient character. This is certainly inspiring in an ethical context, but it fails to highlight the mystical elements that characterize patience in Sufism. Therefore, although the value of patience in this novel is highly applicable, from a Sufi perspective, it still requires deeper exploration in a more transcendental manner.

Nevertheless, the value of patience in *Ayat – Ayat Cinta* remains important to emphasize as an effective bridge for da'wah to modern society. In today's reality, where people live under psychological pressure due to digital lifestyles, a crisis of meaning, and the rapid flow of negative information, patience becomes the most tangible mental and spiritual fortress. Many people suffer from anxiety disorders, depression, and even lose their will to live simply because they are not accustomed to facing problems with steadfast patience. In this context, the novel serves as a rational spiritual intermediary, conveying the teachings of patience in a format that is intellectually acceptable and easy to emulate. The character Fahri serves as an example that patience is not merely a passive attitude, but an active effort to guard one's speech, control one's heart, and uphold moral principles even amidst the whirlwind of slander and injustice.

In addition, patience in this novel also has very strong social relevance (Mutmainah, 2022). When Fahri was slandered and imprisoned, he did not fight back with violence or revenge, but instead continued to uphold justice and ethics. This kind of attitude is very important to emulate in a society that is plagued by polarization, intolerance, and emotional volatility (Plus.kapanlagi.com, 2022).

In conclusion, it can be said that the value of patience highlighted in the novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta* is a form of patience in the basic moral – social and spiritual sense. Although it has not yet reached the depth of meaning of patience as a spiritual station in pure Sufism, the representation of this value remains highly strategic in forming the foundation of Islamic morality for the general reader. Through a humanistic approach, the character Fahri teaches that patience is the middle path between the strength of the soul and the tenderness of the heart. The novel indirectly conveys that within patience lies maturity, within patience lies strength, and within patience lies the love of Allah. Thus, even without dominant mysticism, the value of patience in this work remains a beacon of light for those seeking peace amidst the chaos of the times.

3. *Tawakal*

Tawakal is one of the fundamental values in Sufism that supports other spiritual stations such as patience, contentment, and sincerity. In Arabic, tawakkul derives from the root word "wakala," which means to entrust matters to another party. In a spiritual context, tawakal signifies a complete surrender to Allah SWT after exerting maximum

effort, with full conviction that Allah alone is the sole decision-maker and determiner of outcomes. Imam al-Ghazali in *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* explains that tawakal is a high station because it pertains to the deepest belief in tawhid, namely the awareness that everything in this world is under the will and control of Allah. One who practices tawakal is one who has successfully uprooted dependence on creatures and external causes, and entrusts all matters solely to Allah (Ahmad, 2011). In Surah At-Talaq verse 3, Allah SWT says:

"Wa may yatawakkal 'alallahi fahuwa ḥasbuh."

Meaning: *"And whoever puts their trust in Allah, then Allah is sufficient for them".*

This verse emphasizes that tawakal is not an abdication of responsibility, but an affirmation that Allah is the only place to depend on, after all efforts have been made.

In the novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, the value of tawakal is seen narratively through Fahri's steadfastness in facing various difficult trials in his life. When he was accused of harassing Noura and eventually thrown into prison, Fahri did not blame the circumstances or blame others. Instead, he increased his zikr, night prayers, and prayers of hope to Allah to be given a way out. In one scene, Fahri is depicted praying on the prison floor with tears streaming down his face, saying, "O Allah, if You will that I be free, then free me. But if You wish for me to stay here longer, then I accept Your decree." This statement reflects a deep sense of tawakal (trust in God), though it is more ethical in nature than mystical. It demonstrates an acceptance of fate, yet remains rooted in sincerity and steadfastness of heart throughout the process (Shirazi, 2006).

However, from a Sufi perspective, true tawakal is not merely accepting fate or remaining calm in the face of trials. True tawakal is when one does not depend on the outcome, nor even hope for worldly rewards in return. A person who practices tawakal in the Sufi station no longer worries about the good or bad aspects of fate, as their entire heart is dedicated solely to Allah. They do not care whether their desires are fulfilled or not, as what they seek is not the outcome, but rather Allah's pleasure as the ultimate goal (Sholikhin, 2009). In the novel *Ayat-Ayat Cinta*, Fahri does not show a strong attachment to worldly possessions, but it is not explained whether he has achieved *fana'* (merging with Allah's will), which is a sign of true tawakal. Thus, the concept of tawakal in this novel is better understood as a form of sincere submission and inner peace in the face of uncertainty, rather than a complete relinquishment of personal will.

The fundamental difference between tawakal syar'i (tawakal as a principle of life) and tawakal tasawufi (tawakal as a spiritual station) lies in the source of spiritual comfort. In tawakal syar'i, a person feels at peace because they believe that Allah will provide a way out. However, in tawakal tasawufi, a person feels at peace because whatever Allah has decreed is undoubtedly the best, even if they do not understand its wisdom. In the works of the Sufis, such as *Manazil al-Sa'irin* by Al-Harawi, it is explained that tawakal is a spiritual station where a servant no longer relies on causes, but continues to act because Allah commands it, not because they expect a result. In this novel, Fahri continues to strive to complete his thesis, defend himself in court, and

plan his life—all of which are commendable and worthy efforts. However, his reliance on *tawakal* is still rooted in intellectual awareness and has not yet led to a profound spiritual experience (Faruqi, Ma'afi, & Haibaiti, 2022).

Even so, the representation of *tawakal* values depicted in the novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta* is very suitable for grounding Sufi teachings in everyday life. In the reality of modern society, which lives under existential pressure, layoffs, career failures, broken relationships, and identity crises, *tawakal* becomes a spiritual solution that provides peace and direction in life. The character Fahri teaches readers that life does not always go according to plan, but as long as we have *tawakal* in Allah, our hearts will remain stable. He does not merely practice *tawakal* in words but in concrete actions: continuing to study, continuing to pray, and continuing to honor others even when treated unfairly. These values make *tawakal* in this novel feel alive, even though it has not yet reached the full level of the *maqam* of *tasawuf*.

The character of Fahri in the novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta* is a representation of an ideal Muslim who strives to practice Sharia law comprehensively in his life. He is portrayed as a calm individual who does not easily panic in the face of pressure and always places his trust in Allah. However, in Sufi analysis, *tawakal* is not merely about not panicking, but rather the inner ability to not depend on outcomes and fully entrust all matters to Allah with sincerity and awareness. True *tawakal* can only be achieved when the heart no longer fluctuates in response to anything that occurs outside of itself. In this case, Fahri does demonstrate a basic form of *tawakal* remaining calm when slandered, sincere when betrayed, and maintaining a positive outlook toward destiny but he is not depicted as experiencing spiritual turmoil leading to absolute submission (total surrender).

In classical Sufism, as explained by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah in *Madarij as-Salikin*, *tawakal* has five elements: *ma'rifah* (knowledge of Allah), faith, effort, tranquility of the heart, and total surrender. These five elements work simultaneously and cannot stand alone. The novel *Ayat – Ayat Cinta* highlights the elements of faith and effort, but it does not sufficiently explore *ma'rifah* and the transformation of the heart as a path toward true surrender. Fahri is indeed diligent in prayer and nightly worship, but he is not presented to the reader as a character embarking on a transcendental spiritual journey. He appears more as a rational—theological figure rather than a Sufi—mystical one. This is understandable since the novel targets a general audience, but from the perspective of ethical Sufism, the potential for deeper trust in God has not been fully maximized (Grinitha, 2015).

The difference in understanding *tawakal* between the general public and Sufis is an important issue that needs to be discussed. The general public often understands *tawakal* as a passive attitude toward circumstances, even using it as an excuse not to try their best. In modern society, this manifests as a fatalistic attitude: not seeking employment because one feels that one's livelihood has already been determined; not studying seriously because one feels that one's fate has already been decided. This perspective is incorrect and contradicts the true principle of *tawakal*. In Sufism, *tawakal* emphasizes earnest effort but does not place hope in the outcome, as the outcome is entirely in Allah's hands. In the novel, Fahri illustrates this well. He continues to write his thesis, defend himself in court, and plan for the future, yet he never shows excessive anxiety about what will happen. This serves as an important lesson for modern society,

which often gets trapped in anxiety due to overreliance on personal abilities and neglecting the transcendent dimension of life.

True tawakal can also create psychological peace and moral strength. People who have tawakal are not easily depressed when they experience failure, and are not arrogant when they experience success. Fahri's character reflects both of these aspects. After being released from prison, Fahri did not boast or seek revenge. Instead, he expressed gratitude, thanked everyone who had helped him, and quickly resumed his life with a sense of gratitude. In his story, there is no sign of excessive regret or trauma, as his heart had been trained to accept whatever Allah had decreed (Faruqi et al., 2022). This is in line with Allah's words in Surah Al – Imran verse 159:

Artinya: *"If you have made up your mind, then put your trust in Allah. Indeed, Allah loves those who put their trust in him."*

This verse shows that tawakal is a spiritual path that is taken after a person has tried hard and made a decision. In this case, the novel describes the value of tawakal in its entirety from the perspective of effort and surrender, although it is still within a moral rather than mystical framework.

Thus, the value of tawakal in the novel Ayat – Ayat Cinta is relevant as a model for building modern Muslim character, not as an explicit representation of Sufi maqam. This novel offers a narrative that balances effort and dependence on Allah, without falling into the misconception that tawakal means to remain silent and wait. The character of Fahri demonstrates that in a world filled with competition, social pressure, and misinformation, one can still survive with a foundation of faith and a calm inner attitude. Although he has not yet reached the true level of tawakkul as depicted in the biographies of great Sufis, the values he embodies remain highly beneficial for introducing the spirit of Sufism in a down – to – earth and easily accessible manner to the broader public.

THE RELEVANCE OF MORAL SUFISM VALUES IN THE NOVEL AYAT-AYAT CINTA TO MODERN LIFE

Ethical Sufism is a spiritual branch of Islamic tradition that emphasizes the purification of the heart, the control of desires, and the formation of character through a moral approach rooted in divine values. In the modern era marked by the overwhelming tide of materialism, consumerism, and a crisis of meaning in life, the teachings of Sufism emerge as a spiritual oasis offering inner balance amidst the turmoil of the external world. Sufi values such as poverty, patience, and trust in God not only have deep roots in Islamic theological tradition but are also highly relevant as a psycho – social approach to addressing the existential anxieties of modern humanity (Amrullah, 2015). The novel Ayat – Ayat Cinta by Habiburrahman El Shirazy is a real representation of how these Sufi values are actualized in contemporary life through the main character, Fahri. Although set in Egypt, the narrative of this novel is very contextual to today's social reality, because the characters live with moral challenges, social pressures, and inner struggles that are familiar to the current generation. In this regard, religious literary works like Ayat – Ayat Cinta serve not only as

entertainment but also as a medium for spiritual and moral education, bridging classical Islamic traditions with the spiritual needs of the modern soul.

The concept of poverty in the novel does not merely refer to material poverty, but rather to an awareness of humanity's total dependence on Allah SWT. In a world obsessed with wealth and social image, the attitude of poverty becomes an important foundation for building a soul free from worldly attachments. The character Fahri is portrayed as someone who is not deceived by wealth, not dazzled by status, and always prioritizes worship and his vertical relationship with God in every decision he makes in life. In one part, even though he is entitled to receive awards and luxuries because of his marriage to Aisha, he remains humble and avoids dependence on fleeting wealth. This value of poverty is highly relevant in the context of the digital generation, which is often trapped in a culture of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), showing off one's lifestyle, and measuring self-worth based on material possessions. From the perspective of ethical Sufism, poverty is the spiritual awareness that everything belongs to Allah, and humans are only tasked with safeguarding His trust. This novel teaches that true happiness does not lie in material possessions, but in the clarity of the heart that feels content and always relies on Allah in every aspect of life. (Shirazi, 2006).

The value of patience in the novel *Ayat–Ayat Cinta* is strongly reflected in Fahri's attitude in facing slander, life's trials, and complex social pressures. He is accused of committing a crime he never committed, but he does not respond with anger or violence, instead increasing his worship, surrendering to Allah, and maintaining good character in every action. In the context of modern life filled with uncertainty from economic crises, social media pressures, to personal relationship conflicts—patience becomes a crucial psychological and spiritual strength. In a world that is increasingly instantaneous and impulsive, the ability to exercise self-control, remain calm, and act wisely is a rare form of emotional maturity. Patience in Sufism is not merely about not complaining, but also the inner ability to accept fate with an open heart and remain steadfast in goodness. This novel teaches that patience is not a weakness, but the light of the heart that saves one from despair, resentment, and destructive actions (Tualeka, 2011).

Meanwhile, the value of *tawakal* in the novel appears as a synthesis of maximum effort and complete trust in Allah. Fahri never stops striving, whether in completing his studies, facing legal slander, or in building his household, but he leaves everything entirely to Allah's will. This attitude is highly contextual in modern society, which often finds itself trapped in a crisis of control, where everything must be planned, controlled, and determined independently. In reality, many people experience severe stress, mental exhaustion, and anxiety because they feel they have failed to control their lives. This is where *tawakal* in ethical Sufism becomes a spiritual solution: efforts are made wholeheartedly, but the results are entrusted to Allah with full acceptance. The Quranic verse Surah At–Talaq:3 serves as the foundation of this teaching: "Whoever places their trust in Allah, then Allah is sufficient for them." By using Fahri as an example, the novel demonstrates that those who practice *tawakal* are not passive but remain active outwardly, calm inwardly, and morally steadfast. This is the value greatly needed in building a resilient modern generation, emotionally stable, and spiritually mature. Thus, ethical Sufism in *Ayat–Ayat Cinta* is not presented as an abstract heavenly concept but as a practical guide to navigate modern life's challenges with a pure soul, patience, and complete surrender to Allah SWT.

CONCLUSION

Based on the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that Habiburrahman El Shirazy's novel *Ayat–Ayat Cinta* systematically embodies moral values rooted in Sufi ethics, particularly in the attitudes of *faqr* (poverty), *ṣabr* (patience), and *tawakkul* (trust in God). These values are not merely narrative attributes of the characters but represent profound moral principles aligned with classical Sufi teachings, especially those articulated by Al–Ghazali. Through its plot and characterization, the novel serves as a literary medium that conveys spiritual wisdom in a form accessible to contemporary readers.

Contextually, the relevance of these moral values becomes evident in addressing the complex challenges of modern human life, characterized by materialistic orientation, individualism, and the weakening of spiritual awareness. The value of frugality functions as a moral corrective to the tendency toward hedonism and consumerism; the value of patience strengthens emotional and ethical resilience in the face of trials; and the value of *tawakkul* cultivates a balanced perspective that combines human effort with sincere submission to divine will. These dimensions make the novel not only a work of fiction but also a source of ethical reflection.

Thus, *Ayat–Ayat Cinta* transcends its aesthetic function as a popular literary work and assumes the role of a transformative medium for spiritual and moral values. By integrating Sufi ethics into its narrative structure, the novel demonstrates the potential of literature to bridge the gap between classical Islamic teachings and the needs of modern society. This study affirms that such literary works can contribute to the moral and spiritual formation of readers, offering practical guidance for living a meaningful and balanced life amidst the uncertainties of the contemporary era.

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