



# Spirituality, Education, and the Struggle for Peace: A Case Study of Nusantara Clerics in Mecca

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## Abstract

This study aims to explore the relationship between extreme riyāḍah practices, spiritual leadership, and ṭarīqah-based character education within the 19th-century Muslim communities of the Nusantara. Using a historical-qualitative approach, data were collected through analysis of primary and secondary literature as well as interviews with relevant experts. The findings indicate that extreme riyāḍah practices strengthen the effectiveness of spiritual leadership among Nusantara ‘ulamā’, building deep emotional bonds with the community. Ṭarīqah-based education became a means of non-violent resistance against colonialism through the internalization of moral and spiritual values. The study discussion affirms that Sufi values remain relevant in building character education in the contemporary era, offering a holistic approach to forming ethical and resilient individuals. This study contributes to the enrichment of Islam Nusantara studies by demonstrating how traditional spiritual practices can be adapted within the context of modern challenges. The implications of this research open pathways for developing Sufi-based character education models that can be applied in both formal and non-formal education today.

## A. INTRODUCTION

In the historical journey of Islam in the Nusantara, spirituality played a crucial role in shaping the character of ‘ulamā’, particularly during the colonial period. The ‘ulamā’ functioned not only as inheritors of religious teachings but also as agents of social change who utilized spiritual values to address external pressures from colonialism (Hafid, 2007; Syafe’i, 2017). Spiritual practices, including tasawuf practices and dhikr rituals, became primary methods in building moral resilience and Islamic identity amid systematic colonial efforts to transform the social and cultural structure of society (Mahrus et al., 2022; Nurhisam, 2016). The moderate, tolerant, and patriotic character instilled by ‘ulamā’ such as Shaykh Kholil demonstrates how

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spirituality was not merely part of religious life, but also a foundation in intellectual and social struggle (Dalimunthe, 2023; Syafe'i, 2017).

The role of *riyāḍah* practices in the Sufi tradition further clarifies the relationship between spirituality and non-violent resistance. *Riyāḍah* as deep spiritual training equipped the 'ulamā' with patience, wisdom, and steadfastness in facing oppression (Azmi, 2022; Hidayatulloh et al., 2023). The principles of nonviolence taught in this spiritual context formed the basis for strong moral resistance, where Islamic education became the primary arena in fighting for values of justice and humanity (Bizawie, 2020; Budiono, 2024). Collaboration, peaceful da'wah (religious propagation), and the dissemination of humanistic values through educational institutions demonstrate the close connection between spiritual strengthening and efforts to resist colonialism through non-confrontational means.

One prominent 'ulamā' figure who stood against communism through a spiritual-intellectual approach was Shaykh Kholil of Bangkalan, a charismatic scholar who combined spiritual depth, Islamic scholarship, and non-violent resistance strategies (As'ad, 2018). In the global context, the nonviolent resistance movement has become an important study, especially after the success of figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. Shaykh Kholil (1820-1925) was known as the teacher of the founders of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), such as K.H. Hāshim Ash'arī and K.H. Wahāb Hasbullāh. He not only mastered *fiqh*, *taṣawwuf*, and *tafsīr*, but also developed educational methods that integrated values of exemplary conduct (*uswah ḥasanah*), patience (*ṣabr*), and wisdom (*ḥikmah*) as foundations for struggle. This concept aligns with the theory of spiritual resistance, which suggests that resistance can be conducted through moral resilience and community awareness without violence (Hartarta & Aryanto, 2016).

Shaykh Kholil was born on 11 Jumādā al-Ākhirah 1235 AH (corresponding to March 14, 1820 CE), on Sunday Pahing. Kyai Abdul Latif, Shaykh Kholil's father, was known as a great and respected scholar in Bangkalan. He was a descendant of Kyai Asror Karomah, so Shaykh Kholil grew up in an environment rich with Islamic scholarly tradition. Moreover, his lineage connects to Sunan Gunung Jati (1448-1570 CE), one of the Wali Songo (Nine Saints) in Java. Thus, the scholarly and saintly blood of Sunan Gunung Jati flowed within him.

Before traveling outside Madura, Shaykh Kholil first studied in Melajeh Village, Bangkalan, under Tuan Guru Dawuh. The learning system provided by Tuan Guru Dawuh was nomadic and conditional, and thus was not based in a single location. Additionally, Shaykh Kholil also studied under Tuan Guru Agung. He pursued religious knowledge with tireless dedication. Tuan Guru Agung not only possessed exoteric knowledge (*'ilm zāhir*) but also mastered esoteric knowledge (*'ilm bāṭin*). Shaykh Kholil developed himself to acquire religious knowledge at several pesantren in Java, including Pesantren Bungah in Gresik Regency under Kyai Sholeh, Pesantren Langitan in Tuban Regency under K.H. Mohammad Noer, Pesantren Cangaan in Bangil, Pasuruan Regency with K.H. Asyik, Pesantren Darussalam in Kebon Candi Pasuruan under the guidance of Kyai Arif, Pesantren Sidogiri in Pasuruan fostered by Kyai Noer Hasan, Pesantren Winongan guided by Kyai Abu Dzarrin, and Pesantren Salafiyah Syaf'iyah in Banyuwangi with Kyai Abdul Bashir as the caretaker. Genealogically, this intellectual academic journey of Shaykh Kholil further strengthened networks and relationships with several pesantren in Madura and Java.

Furthermore, Shaykh Kholil (1820-1925 CE) was a pesantren scholar whose scholarly quality was already recognized by the 'ulamā' of Madura and Java. He was a scholar who had equipped himself with Islamic knowledge tools, such as *naḥw* (Arabic grammar) and language grammar, before departing to Mecca. He had even memorized the Qur'ān while still in Indonesia. In Mecca, he continued to deepen his study of *qirā'ah sab'ah* (Qur'ānic recitation with seven different readings). In the context of mastering basic Islamic sciences, it could be categorized that Shaykh Kholil had reached the peak of scholarly qualification (Cholil, 2018).

Most studies on Shaykh Kholil focus primarily on his scholarly achievements. However,

few have explored the correlation between his spirituality, intellectuality, and his commitment to nonviolent struggle. Yet, he actively encouraged his students (santri) to resist colonizers through education, diplomacy, and civil society strengthening—a strategy relevant to the concept of civilian-based defense. This research aims to demonstrate how spiritual values (tawāḍu' [humility], tawakul [trust in God]) and intellectual values (ijtihād, inter-scholarly dialogue) can become instruments of social change without violence.

In the context of Islamic education, ṭarīqah-based education became an effective means to awaken Muslim intellectuality in the 19th century. This system harmoniously integrated spiritual and intellectual dimensions in institutions such as pesantren, producing a generation of 'ulamā' who not only mastered Islamic sciences but also possessed high moral strength and social commitment (Hidayatulloh et al., 2023). Figures such as K.H. Hāshim Ash'arī and Shaykh Ahmad Khatib proved how spirituality-based education could produce critical and innovative Muslim thinkers (Al Farisi, 2023).

Moreover, ṭarīqah-based education also contributed to the development of socio-political awareness among Indonesian Muslims. Through learning focused on ethical and moral values, this education encouraged active student participation in social and political struggle, strengthening the modernization of Islamic thought while forming commitment to social justice (Hidayatulloh et al., 2023; Raya & Samsodden, 2022). Continuous learning integrated within riyāḍah affirms the importance of understanding the essence of worship, not merely performing rituals formalistically. Thus, traditional ṭarīqah contributed to forming a society oriented toward deep inner transformation (Fauzi, 2019; Hidayatulloh et al., 2023).

Although Shaykh Kholil is often mentioned in NU historical literature, in-depth studies on the correlation between his spirituality, intellectuality, and non-violent resistance remain minimal. Therefore, this study aims to specifically examine how Shaykh Kholil's spirituality and intellectuality shaped his non-violent resistance strategies. This study will also analyze the impact of his thought and exemplary conduct on socio-religious movements in Indonesia. By highlighting personal spiritual practices within a broader social context, this research offers novelty in understanding the role of spirituality as a foundation for non-violent resistance and strengthening Islamic education in Indonesia.

## **B. METHOD**

This research employs a historical-spiritual method with a qualitative approach to explore how Shaykh Kholil's spirituality and intellectuality shaped his non-violent resistance strategies. The historical method is the primary approach used in this study, considering the importance of contextual reconstruction of the life journey and spiritual experiences of this scholarly figure within the context of colonialism in Indonesia. According to Rohmah & Miskiyah (2023), the historical method involves systematic stages from topic selection, collection of primary and secondary sources, information verification, to critical analysis aimed at producing a comprehensive understanding of the study object.

Primary sources used in this research include kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts) authored by 'ulamā', historical records, and interviews with descendants of Shaykh Kholil who still preserve his traditions. Additionally, analysis is also conducted on secondary literature discussing the historical development of spirituality and intellectuality of 'ulamā' in Indonesia, particularly those related to the role of education in shaping student character. A biographical approach is used to deeply understand the life, teachings, and contributions of Shaykh Kholil to the spiritual and social development of Muslim society in the Nusantara (Al Farisi, 2023; Heilitik, 2024).

Besides the historical method, a qualitative approach is used to reconstruct Shaykh Kholil's riyāḍah experiences. This approach is considered essential in research focusing on a deep understanding of individual subjective experiences. Bambang Triyono & Elis Mediawati (2023) and Shobihah & Walidah (2021) state that qualitative methods enable researchers to

explore inner dimensions and spiritual meanings underlying *riyāḍah* practices.

Narrative interview techniques are employed in this research to collect life stories and spiritual experiences inherited by Shaykh Kholil's descendants or *santri* communities that maintain his teachings. These interviews provide space for personal narratives that capture emotional nuances, spiritual reflections, and deep meanings of *riyāḍah* experiences (Suri, 2021).

Data analysis is conducted thematically, where data from interviews and documents are analyzed to identify main themes related to *riyāḍah* practices and the influence of spirituality and intellectuality on the character formation of 'ulamā'. This process involves stages of open coding, axial coding, and selection of main themes aligned with the research focus.

The scope of this research encompasses the study of Shaykh Kholil's *riyāḍah* practices and the influence of spiritual guidance on the moral transformation of *santri* within the Islam Nusantara environment. This study is limited to relevant historical data and contemporary narratives, focusing on critical analysis of spirituality's contribution to character building among non-violent resistance 'ulamā'.

This method is expected to provide a more holistic understanding of how individual *riyāḍah* experiences contribute to the construction of collective identity of Muslims in Indonesia. By combining historical and qualitative approaches, this research seeks to enrich literature on the relationship between spirituality, education, and social struggle in the history of Indonesian Islam.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. *Shaykh Kholil's Riyāḍah Practices*

*Riyāḍah* practices involve intensive *dhikr* (remembrance of God) implementation, strict discipline in worship, and the integration of multisensory methods in the learning process, such as oral teaching, writing, and direct spiritual experience (Muchofifah, 2016; Qomar, 2015). The Nusantara 'ulamā' viewed *riyāḍah* as a total self-formation process that integrates exoteric and esoteric aspects. Furthermore, these 'ulamā' integrated values of sanctity in how they connected theology with local customs, creating *riyāḍah* practices that combined faith with their cultural reality (Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 2020). This consciousness also fostered a sense of social responsibility to create a more harmonious and civilized society (Mahfud, 2020). Thus, spiritual experience became the foundation for developing Nusantara Muslim communities that were resilient to the currents of modernity while remaining rooted in pure Islamic values.

While in Mecca, Shaykh Kholil performed strict *riyāḍah* like the Sufis. Syaikhona Kholil engaged in rigorous *riyāḍah* akin to the Sufis. Out of reverence for the sacred land (*ḥaram*), he would never relieve himself within its boundaries—instead, he would travel outside the *ḥaram* to do so. This mirrors the story of Abū 'Amr al-Zajjājī, who lived in Mecca but would leave the sacred precincts to relieve himself as a sign of respect. To exit the sacred territory, a journey of approximately 6 kilometers. With deep determination and spiritual devotion, this was done for years. Additionally, Shaykh Kholil lived in Mecca by fasting and practicing hunger asceticism (*tirakat lapar*). Hunger was chosen by some Sufis to suppress carnal desires as the primary enemy of Sufis because it was considered a veil (*ḥijāb*) from Allah. The story of al-Zajjājī is mentioned in *al-Luma'*, the oldest Sufi work written by Sirāj al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (Cholil, 2018).

During his studies in Mecca, Shaykh Kholil performed various spiritual exercises or *riyāḍah*. This information was obtained from his great-grandson, Muhammad Faishol Anwar. Shaykh Kholil practiced continuous fasting as a way to reduce worldly pleasures. For three years, he only ate watermelon rinds for nutrition. In scientific terms, this was a method of strict self-discipline to reduce desires for delicious food. From a neuroscience perspective, reducing

such pleasant stimuli can enhance focus. This enabled him to be more devoted to worship and study. This practice reflects the concept of *zuhd* (asceticism) in Sufism, namely detaching oneself from worldly attachments to achieve spiritual enlightenment. Additionally, he was very consistent in reciting *wird* (prayers or *dhikr*) until the end of his life. These recitations were later written in two of his books: "*Rātib Shaykh Kholil*" and "*Ṣiḡḡah Tahlil*." Both books contain collections of his daily *dhikr*. From a psychological perspective, this ritual repetition can trigger meditative conditions that help someone remember and understand spiritual teachings. From the sociology of religion perspective, documenting the *wird* helps standardize religious practices and transmit spiritual knowledge from one generation to the next.

Furthermore, another important aspect of Shaykh Kholil's *riyāḍah* is *ta'ẓīm al-mu'allim* (revering the teacher). He greatly respected all his teachers. One example is that he refused to ride a horse from Bima, because Bima was the hometown of one of his teachers. In moral teachings, respecting teachers is an important foundation for forming a student's moral character. In Sufi teachings, respecting teachers is not merely courtesy, but is also considered a channel for obtaining the blessing of knowledge (*barakah al-'ilm*). This means that the benefit and integrity of knowledge depend not only on intelligence, but also on the spiritual relationship between student and teacher. Thus, Shaykh Kholil's practice of *ta'ẓīm al-mu'allim* can be interpreted as a way to optimally obtain beneficial knowledge through the formation of deep and mutually respectful teaching-learning relationships.

## 2. The Concept of Educational *Ṭarīqah* (*Faṣīḥ al-Ḥāl*)

The implementation of the "educational *ṭarīqah*" concept in traditional *pesantren* education emphasizes integration between academic education and moral-spiritual formation. Education in *pesantren* focuses not only on knowledge transmission but also on instilling moral values and spirituality in *santri* (Hidayatulloh et al., 2023). This educational *ṭarīqah* is manifested through *kitab kuning* learning practices, collective *dhikr*, and social activities based on Islamic values that strengthen social cohesion.

In this model, close interaction between *kyai* and *santri* becomes the key. *Kyai* acts not only as a teacher but as a moral and spiritual exemplar who guides *santri* in daily life (Hidayatulloh et al., 2023; Lembong et al., 2023). This educational system also enables active discussion-based learning, enriching *santri* learning experiences, and fostering intellectual independence. Shaykh Kholil's Sufism was characterized by a focus on practical application of Sufi principles (*faṣīḥ al-ḥāl*), rather than on theoretical discussions or written works (*faṣīḥ al-lisān wa al-qalam*). His approach emphasized living Sufi values through daily actions and personal example, not through speeches or books (Cholil, 2018).

Shaykh Kholil of Bangkalan did not prioritize armed struggle in efforts to achieve independence and serve the nation. Instead, he chose non-physical struggle paths that actually had strategic value and a more sustainable impact. One method he used was education and scholarly development, which produced generations of resilient fighters. Many of his *santri* later became important figures in resistance against colonialism, particularly in the Tapal Kuda region, such as *Pesantren Sidogiri Pasuruan* and *Talangsari*, where resistance leaders were direct students or successor generations of Shaykh Kholil's *santri*.

Similar influence was also seen in various regions, including Malang, Mojokerto, Sidoarjo, Jombang, Gresik, Lamongan, and Tuban. Even on the north coast of Central Java, from Rembang, Pati, Jepara, Semarang, to Kudus, the *kyais* who led resistance against colonizers had scholarly chains (*sanad*) connected to Shaykh Kholil. Outside Java, the same pattern can be found, such as in Jambi, Palembang, and Borneo, where independence fighters were students or intellectual descendants of his. The shared vision and resistance spirit among Shaykh Kholil's *santri* was not coincidental, but the result of systematic guidance. He was known as a figure who strongly opposed colonization, and his residence was often used as a protection headquarters for fighters. Additionally, he trained *santri* with special *riyāḍah* (spiritual exercises) to strengthen their mental capacity and abilities in fighting colonialism. Through this

scholarly approach, Shaykh Kholil not only contributed to the independence struggle but also prepared generations who excelled intellectually and spiritually, particularly in religious fields, enabling them to fill independence with noble moral values.

In education, Shaykh Kholil emphasized mastery of fiqh, taṣawwuf, and Arabic grammar (naḥw-ṣarf) to his santri. This aimed to ensure they not only deepened religious knowledge, but were also capable of accessing other scholarly treasures written in Arabic. Additionally, his role was crucial in the birth of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Through Shaykh Kholil's spiritual guidance, K.H. Hāshim Ash'arī finally resolved to establish that organization.

Previously, K.H. Hāshim Ash'arī had performed istikhārah (prayer for guidance) repeatedly but had not received clarity. When doubt enveloped him, Shaykh Kholil sent K.H. As'ad Shams al-ʿĀrifin, who would later become the caretaker of Pesantren Sukorejo Situbondo, to convey signs of approval. In the first meeting, K.H. As'ad brought a staff accompanied by Qur'ānic verses (Ṭāhā: 17-23) that tell of Prophet Moses's miracle. In the second meeting, he conveyed prayer beads (tasbīḥ) as a symbol of blessing. Through these signs, K.H. Hāshim Ash'arī was convinced that his teacher supported the establishment of NU. Shaykh Kholil passed away nine months before NU was officially established, precisely on 29 Ramaḍān 1343 AH (April 1925). Nevertheless, his intellectual and spiritual legacy continued to live through that organization and thousands of santri who continued his struggle.

Works produced by Shaykh Kholil in the field of writing include: *al-Matn al-Sharīf*, *Isti'dād al-Mawt*, *Taqrīrāt 'alā Matn al-'Izzī*, *Taqrīrāt 'alā Nuzhat al-Ṭullāb*, *Kitāb al-Binā'*, *Mukhtaṣar Awzān al-ʿArūḍ*, *Sharḥ Khalīl 'alā al-Ājurrūmiyyah*, *Rātib Shaykh [Kholīl]*, *Ṣiḡḥah Tahlīl Shaykh [Kholīl]*, and *Ta'lim al-Ṣibyān*.

Local wisdom-based pesantren curriculum also plays an important role in implementing educational ṭarīqah. Curriculum flexibility enables santri to develop individual potential while strengthening their Islamic foundation (Lailiyah & Imami, 2023). The integration of local values in this education demonstrates pesantren adaptability to modernity and globalization challenges, keeping pesantren relevant in forming the character of contemporary Muslim generations (Syafe'i, 2017).

The influence of teachers' spiritual conduct on santri moral transformation in the Islam Nusantara tradition is very significant. Kyais as central figures in pesantren become primary models in internalizing moral and spiritual values (Redi et al., 2022). Through exemplary conduct in worship, simple living, and commitment to Islamic values, Kyais shape santri character deeply.

This influence is strengthened through kyai involvement in santri daily activities, where values such as politeness, sincerity, and empathy are taught not only through sermons but through life examples (Novayanti et al., 2023). Santri learn to imitate kyai attitudes in various aspects of life, which accelerates moral value internalization and increases their social awareness. This transformation is strengthened through pesantren social programs such as charity, mutual cooperation, and community service directly led by kyais (Asmar et al., 2023). These activities enrich santri's understanding of the concept of social worship in Islam, strengthening the connection between personal faith and social responsibility.

Furthermore, kyai spiritual conduct gives santri understanding that religious knowledge is not merely conceptual knowledge, but must be lived in real daily practice (Asdlori, 2023). This exemplary conduct trains santri to become individuals of integrity, capable of internalizing Islamic values in their personal, social, and professional lives in the future. Thus, in the Islamic Nusantara context, the concept of educational ṭarīqah and kyai spiritual conduct function as important foundations in forming Muslim generations who are knowledgeable, moral, and contribute positively to broader society. This educational model proves the effectiveness of the Sufi approach in integrating universal Islamic values with local realities, creating a balance between spirituality, intellectuality, and social engagement.

### **3. Correlation between Extreme Riyāḍah Practices and Spiritual Leadership Effectiveness in Traditional Muslim Communities**

Riyāḍah literally means "exercise" or "discipline," which in the Sufi context encompasses a series of ascetic practices (zuhd) and spiritual strengthening through rigorous worship. According to Qomar (2015), *riyāḍah involves three main dimensions: 1) External dimension: discipline in daily worship, fasting, and avoiding worldly pleasures; 2) Internal dimension: strengthening the relationship with Allah through dhikr (remembrance of Allah) and contemplation; 3) Social dimension: respect for teachers (ta'zīm al-mu'allim) and responsibility toward the community.*

Extreme riyāḍah practices undertaken in traditional Muslim communities demonstrate a complex relationship to spiritual leadership effectiveness. As noted by Wajdi (2022), intense and profound spiritual practices can strengthen the position of spiritual leaders through strong emotional influence over their followers. Rigorous riyāḍah demonstrates the leader's total commitment to the spiritual path, which becomes the basis of moral authority within the community. This practice strengthens follower trust, increases respect, and deepens loyalty to their leadership.

Supartono et al. (2024) and Widiyanto & Zebua (2022) emphasize that moderate leadership in riyāḍah tends to be more successful in fostering communities that are spiritually and socially healthy. Spiritual leaders who can translate riyāḍah experiences into collective moral and ethical inspiration have the potential to strengthen solidarity and increase active community participation in building a religious life that is inclusive and tolerant.

However, as warned by (Koridiyah, 2023), excessively deep emotional attachment risks creating cult tendencies, where followers' rationality regarding the leader's teachings and behavior can be disturbed. This shows the importance of balance in riyāḍah practices, namely ensuring that spiritual intensity remains within the framework of moderation and does not deviate toward emotional extremism. In this context, leadership effectiveness depends on the leader's ability to maintain a balance between spiritual depth and social sensitivity.

Extreme practices such as those performed by Shaykh Kholil, including withstanding hunger, avoiding urination on forbidden land, and eating only watermelon rinds for three years, demonstrate a high level of riyāḍah aimed at achieving khalwah (self-isolation from the world) and faqr (spiritual poverty) (Cholil, 2018).

Spiritual leadership in traditional Muslim communities is measured not only by intellectual capacity but also by the level of piety and charisma (barakah) possessed by a leader. Several indicators of spiritual leadership effectiveness include: 1) Ability to guide the community: a leader who has undergone extreme riyāḍah is considered to possess spiritual depth that enables them to provide authentic guidance; 2) Moral exemplarity: ascetic practices such as those performed by Shaykh Kholil form high integrity, thus influencing followers to emulate them; 3) Ability to preserve tradition: Integration between Islamic values and local customs (Zuhdi & Sarwenda, 2020) enables spiritual leaders to maintain their authority amid the currents of modernization.

Shaykh Kholil's influence through his riyāḍah discipline successfully formed strong networks of santri (Islamic students) and ulama (Islamic scholars). His works, such as Ratib Shaykh Kholil and Shigah Tahlil, became spiritual guidance for many of his followers, showing that the depth of his spiritual experience impacted the effectiveness of his dakwah (Islamic propagation).

Mahfud (2020) states that spiritual consciousness formed through riyāḍah is not only individual but also collective. Leaders who undergo strict spiritual discipline tend to have a high commitment to social harmonization. For example, Shaykh Kholil's respect for his teacher (such as refusing to ride a horse from his teacher's city of origin) reflects adab (etiquette) values that were then transmitted to his students, strengthening community cohesiveness.

#### **4. Concept of Nonviolent Struggle Based on Education and Spirituality in the Colonial Islamic World**

The struggle against colonialism in the Islamic world did not always rely on physical force, but also involved education and spirituality-based strategies. This concept developed rapidly in the Archipelago through pesantren (Islamic boarding school) institutions and tarekat (Sufi order) networks, where figures like Shaykh Kholil Bangkalan played central roles in forming intellectual and moral resistance. Traditional pesantren in the Archipelago functioned not only as religious educational institutions, but also as centers for developing anti-colonial consciousness. The tarekat learning model applied emphasized integration between: 1) Knowledge transmission: learning kitab kuning (classical Islamic texts), Arabic grammar (nahwu-sharaf), and fiqh enabled santri to access Islamic intellectual treasures independently (Hidayatulloh et al., 2023); 2) Character formation: moral and spiritual values were instilled through collective dhikr, kiai (religious teacher) exemplarity, and social activities (Lembong et al., 2023); 3) Social cohesion strengthening: mutual assistance (gotong royong) and charity became means of strengthening Muslim community solidarity amid colonial pressure (Asmar et al., 2023). Shaykh Kholil encouraged his santri to master religious knowledge while developing mental resilience through riyāḍah (spiritual training). This approach produced a generation of fighters such as KH Hasyim Asy'ari and kiai in Tapal Kuda who led resistance without weapons, but through strengthening intellectual and spiritual networks (Cholil, 2018).

The Sufi teachings promoted by Shaykh Kholil and other Archipelago ulama emphasized: 1) Patience and tawakkul (trust in Allah): Sufi values such as ṣabr (patience) and tawakkul (surrendering to Allah) became the moral foundation for facing colonization without violence (Shohib & Hadi, 2020). 2) Teacher exemplarity (murshid): Kyai not only taught, but became life models in rejecting colonialism through simplicity, worship discipline, and social commitment (Redi et al., 2022). 3) Tarekat networks: Tarekat functioned as underground organizations spreading resistance ideas through religious study sessions, khidmah (service), and transmission of scholarly chains (sanad) (Widiyanto & Zebua, 2022). The real role of Shaykh Kholil, who encouraged the establishment of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) through spiritual guidance to KH Hasyim Asy'ari. NU later became a vehicle for struggle that combined education, dakwah, and social movements against colonialism.

Spirituality-based education produced two main impacts:

- 1) Leader cadre formation: Shaykh Kholil's santri became important figures in various regions, such as Sidogiri, Talangsari, Jombang, and outside Java (Jambi, Palembang), who led resistance with cultural and intellectual approaches.
- 2) Preservation of Islamic and local identity: flexible pesantren curricula enabled integration of Islamic values with local wisdom, strengthening resistance to forced westernization (Lailiyah & Imami, 2023).

Non-violent struggle in the colonial Islamic world proved effective through education and spiritual approaches. The tarekat learning model and Sufi discipline not only formed critical consciousness but also created resilient ulama-santri networks in facing colonialism. The legacy of Shaykh Kholil and traditional pesantren shows that moral and intellectual strength can become powerful weapons against oppression.

Wiksuarini et al. (2021) add that this spirituality-based education was also adopted by feminist and social activist groups in the colonial Islamic world, strengthening values of equality, justice, and respect for human dignity. Thus, Sufi education became a force that drove social change without violence, creating solidarity networks among Muslim communities. This concept not only formed collective consciousness but also trained young Muslim generations to navigate colonial challenges with resilient moral and intellectual strategies. This spirituality-based education built foundations for social and religious reform movements that continued into the independence era.



Non-violent struggle based on education and spirituality by Shaykh Kholil's santri manifested in several forms:

**Table 1: Non-violent struggle**

<b>Community Solidarity Strengthening</b>	<b>Religious Identity Preservation</b>	<b>Anti-Colonial Consciousness Dissemination</b>
Pesantren became centers for forming strong social networks, creating a sense of brotherhood and solidarity among santri and surrounding communities. This network became the foundation for passive resistance to colonial policies, such as rejection of taxes or programs deemed harmful.	By firmly upholding Islamic teachings and pesantren traditions, santri effectively maintained their religious identity from the erosion of colonial influence. This was a form of cultural resistance that hindered assimilation attempts by colonizers.	Through religious study sessions and community interactions, santri indirectly spread awareness of their rights and colonial injustice. Although without direct political agitation, the religious narratives they conveyed often inspired a resistance spirit (Ricklefs, 2008).

The legacy of Shaykh Kholil and pesantren tradition in non-violent struggle is seen as continuous in organizations later born from pesantren environments, such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). NU, founded by Shaykh Kholil's students, often plays important roles in reconciling conflicts between religious communities in Indonesia. This role manifests the spiritual and moral values instilled in pesantren: emphasizing unity, tolerance (*tasāmuḥ*), moderation (*tawassuṭ*), and justice.

This philosophy is rooted in understanding that peace is a prerequisite for social and spiritual progress, and that inter-religious harmony is a reflection of peaceful Islamic principles. Thus, NU's role in conflict mediation can be seen as a continuation of the non-violent resistance spirit against all forms of injustice, whether from colonial power or internal post-independence community conflicts. This confirms that education and spirituality, promoted by Shaykh Kholil's santri, are not only relevant in anti-colonial struggle contexts, but also fundamental in building harmonious and just societies.

### **5. Relevance of Sufi Values in Building Character Education in the Contemporary Era**

In the contemporary era, the need for character education rooted in spiritual values becomes increasingly urgent. Sufi values offer valuable alternatives for building student character that balances academic intelligence and emotional maturity. Alexandri & Zahra (2017) confirm that integration of Sufi values such as patience, compassion, and *tawāḍu'* (humility) in education curricula can strengthen students' moral foundations.

In the context of modern education challenges faced with moral crisis, spiritual value degradation, and digital disruption, Sufi values developed in the Archipelago pesantren tradition offer alternative paradigms for strengthening character education. This is relevant to the Sufi education model as practiced by Shaykh Kholil Bangkalan in contemporary education contexts, focusing on three main dimensions: (1) spiritual-intellectual integration, (2) character formation based on exemplarity, and (3) a transformative education approach.

Sufi education in Archipelago tradition develops distinctive philosophical frameworks: 1) Concept of *tazkiyat al-nafs* (soul purification) includes: heart (*qalb*) cleansing process through *riyāḍah rūḥiyyah* (spiritual training) (Azmi, 2022) and *muḥāsabah* (self-introspection) mechanism as basis for character development (Hidayatulloh et al., 2023), 2) Theory of *'ilm al-akhlāq* (moral science) with al-Ghazali's approach about unity of knowledge and practice (Al Farisi, 2023) and concept of *al-ḥubb fillāh* (love for Allah's sake) as basis for social relations (Bizawie, 2020), 3) Integralistic education philosophy such as: unity of *fiqh*

(jurisprudence), tasawwuf (spirituality), and ḥaqīqah (essence) dimensions (Cholil, 2018) and tarbiyah rūḥiyyah (spiritual education) model based on uswah ḥasanah (good exemplarity) (Redi et al., 2022).

Shaykh Kholil applied a very comprehensive education system in various aspects such as: 1) integrated curriculum: integration of instrumental sciences (naḥwu-ṣarf) with wisdom sciences (tasawwuf) with emphasis on mastering qirā'ah sab'ah as basis for spiritual literacy (Cholil, 2018), 2) teaching methods: faṣīḥ al-ḥāl (behavioral eloquence) approach through direct exemplarity and sorogan and bandongan systems that develop intellectual independence (Lembong et al., 2023), 3) learning evaluation through: material mastery, akhlāq al-karīmah, and worship practice.

**Table 2 Role and implementation of Sufi values in addressing contemporary problems**

<b>Role of Sufi values in addressing contemporary education problems</b>	<b>Implementation of Sufi values</b>
1. Answering spiritual crisis with collective dhikr practices as therapy for existential anxiety (Novayanti et al., 2023) and riyāḍah as a method for developing mental resilience (Asmar et al., 2023).	1. Basic level includes: integration of tasawwuf material in Islamic Religious Education curriculum and tahajjud and sunnah fasting programs as extracurricular.
2. Strengthening character education through khidmah (service) to overcome individualism and ta'zīm al-mu'allim (teacher respect) in digital culture (Lailiyah & Imami, 2023).	2. Intermediate level through: school culture development based on Ma'rifah values and spiritual pedagogy teacher training.
3. Peace education by instilling principles of ṣabr (patience) and ḥikmah (wisdom) for conflict resolution and a nonviolent resistance approach in multicultural education (Budiono, 2024).	3. High level (policy) with: holistic assessment model in Merdeka Curriculum and pesantren-public school collaboration through sister school programs

Implementation challenges: 1) negative stereotypes toward tasawwuf, 2) lack of teachers mastering tasawwuf science and modern pedagogy, 3) resistance to traditional approaches. Strategic solutions: 1) reformulation of Sufi language relevant to developmental psychology, 2) development of applicative tasawwuf modules for Generation Z, 3) applied research on the effectiveness of Sufi methods in learning. Sufi values developed by Shaykh Kholil offer holistic and relevant character education models for answering disruption era challenges. Integration between spiritual resilience, intellectual depth, and social care becomes an ideal framework for forming generations excelling academically and having strong character.

Sufi-based character education not only emphasizes academic achievement but also pays attention to individual inner development. (Rerung, 2022) emphasizes that through inclusive and holistic education approaches, students can be guided to find meaning in their actions and develop social relationships based on compassion and empathy.

Shaykh Kholil prioritized developing students skilled in attitude rather than producing written works or public lectures about tasawwuf. He believed that Sufi doctrine must be maintained through actual practice and exemplary behavior ('amalī), making Sufi life experience the center of his sulūk (spiritual journey) (Cholil, 2018).

The relevance of Sufi values is also reflected in efforts to overcome mental and emotional challenges faced by today's young generation. With increasing social pressure and alienation tendencies, Sufism-based education can offer space for self-reflection, emotional control, and spiritual resilience strengthening. Not only in formal education, Sufi value application also finds its place in communities and arts. Values of cooperation, moral

leadership, and social solidarity promoted in Sufi-based communities can become social strengthening models greatly needed in modern society.

In the overall context, Sufi values contribute to forming individuals with integrity, social sensitivity, and strong spiritual orientation. Sufism-based character education can become a bridge between intellectual sophistication and spiritual depth, which is very important for building a civilized society amid globalization complexity.

#### D. D.CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that extreme *riyāḍah* practices undertaken by the Archipelago ulama in the 19th century contributed significantly to forming effective spiritual leadership in traditional Muslim communities. Such *riyāḍah* practices, when conducted with a balance between spiritual discipline and humanitarian values, strengthen leaders' moral authority and tighten social bonds within communities. Furthermore, tarekat-based education implemented in pesantren successfully became a means of non-violent struggle against colonialism, showing that education and spirituality can be effective tools of social resistance. These findings reinforce the relevance of Sufi values in building character education in the contemporary era, emphasizing the importance of integrating spiritual aspects in forming individuals who are morally upright and competitive. This research contributes to Islam Nusantara studies by highlighting the close connection between personal spiritual experience and collective social structure formation. For future research, it is recommended to explore more deeply the dynamics of Sufi value transformation in the context of digital-based modern education and globalization.

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