



The Integration of Sufism in Contemporary Indonesian Islam: The Case of Urban and Rural Communities

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ABSTRACT

Background. Sufism has historically played a central role in shaping Islamic spirituality in Indonesia, yet its presence and function in contemporary contexts-particularly among urban and rural communities- remain underexplored. Amid the dynamic religious landscape of modern Indonesia, marked by increasing pluralism, conservatism, and digital religiosity, the integration of Sufi practices and values continues to adapt and evolve in nuanced ways.

Purpose. The aim of the study is to determine the views of Friday prayers in preventing the culture of corruption, and to determine the role of mosque and prayers in strengthening the mindset of the followers to respond to and combat corruption.

Method. This field research uses a qualitative approach whose procedure is to produce descriptive data in the form of speech or writing and the behavior of the observed individuals. The preliminary study was conducted through initial interviews with informants and observations at the research site. Field notes resulting from observations, recordings, and notes from interviews are the result of the data collection phase. In the process of data analysis, there is data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion or verification.

Results. This study shows that the perception of khatib against the danger of corruption through the religious pulpit includes (1) Friday sermon at Malang City Hall, saying that the religious pulpit is an important variable in the prevention of corruption in Malang City. (2) Friday khutbah. The Great Mosque of Baiturrahman, Malang Regency, saying that efforts to eradicate corruption are in line with *dar'ul mafasid muqaddamun 'ala jalbil mashaalih*. (3) Friday Khutbah, An-Nuur Mosque Batu City provides a solution by playing a role, *zuhud*, patience, *wara'* and *qana'ah* are seen as more effective against corruption. In the mosque's activities and programmes, the study of corruption is not specifically discussed, but is embedded in various sermons and lecture topics. The materials presented tend to be thematic, such as fiqh worship, interpretation of Qur'an or Hadith, and other materials adapted to religious and national issues.

KEYWORDS

Indonesian Islam, Religious Adaptation, Spiritual Practice, Sufism, Urban-Rural Religiosity

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INTRODUCTION

Sufism has long been a significant aspect of Islamic practice and spirituality in Indonesia, shaping both individual faith and social cohesion (Albogachieva, 2024).

Historically, Sufi orders (*tariqas*) have been integral to the spread of Islam throughout the archipelago, fostering spiritual development through rituals such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God) recitation of poetry, and the guidance of spiritual leaders (Alikberov, 2019). Sufism in Indonesia has been diverse, adapting to local cultural contexts and practices, thereby influencing Indonesian Islam in profound ways (Halid, 2022).

In contemporary Indonesia, Sufism is often viewed as a form of spirituality that offers an alternative to the growing influence of more formal, scripturalist interpretations of Islam (Abylov, 2023). Sufi practices such as meditation, music, and communal gatherings provide a means of fostering inner peace and personal connection with the divine (Alparslan, 2025). These practices remain embedded in the religious and cultural life of Indonesian Muslims, particularly in rural areas where traditional religious practices are still strongly upheld (Al-Owidha, 2024).

Urbanization and modernization, however, have led to shifts in religious practices and the perception of spirituality, with many urban dwellers increasingly turning to more structured forms of religious practice (Ali, 2024). The rapid growth of digital platforms has also introduced new ways of engaging with Islamic spirituality, making it more accessible to urban communities while challenging traditional, face-to-face religious practices (Aždajić, 2020). Despite these changes, Sufism continues to play a significant role in shaping religious life and spiritual identity in Indonesia.

The integration of Sufism in urban contexts, however, has raised questions about its relevance and adaptability in a rapidly changing society (Bornman, 2023). Urban environments, characterized by their fast-paced nature and secular influences, present a different set of challenges and opportunities for Sufi practices compared to rural settings, where Sufism has remained deeply embedded in community life (Chistyakova, 2019).

While Sufism is often associated with rural, traditional forms of Islam, its place in urban Indonesia remains under-explored (Egamberdiyev, 2025). There are indications that Sufi practices are not only preserved in rural areas but are also being reinterpreted and revived in urban settings. This contrast in the role of Sufism across urban and rural communities provides a unique opportunity to explore how Sufi practices evolve and adapt to the socio-cultural dynamics of contemporary Indonesian society (Gaind-Krishnan, 2020).

Sufism's presence in urban areas may challenge the stereotype that mysticism and spirituality are elements of the past, offering instead a modern form of Islam that incorporates inner transformation and community well-being into the broader fabric of Indonesian religious identity (Xavier, 2023). As such, the relationship between Sufism and Indonesian Islam in both urban and rural contexts warrants further exploration, particularly with regard to its modern-day application and influence (Tuyakbayev, 2021).

Although substantial research has focused on the role of Sufism in Indonesian rural areas, little is known about how these practices manifest in urban settings, especially within the context of modern digital and socio-political challenges (Martin, 2022). This gap in the literature needs to be addressed to understand the full impact of Sufism on Indonesian Islam today. While rural Sufi communities are often portrayed as bastions of tradition, urban Sufi communities are more complex, where the interaction with modernity, technology, and diverse social environments may produce unique expressions of Sufi practices (Schmeding, 2021). Understanding how Sufism fits into the rapidly evolving religious landscape of urban Indonesia is crucial for examining the evolution of Islamic spirituality in contemporary society (Houti, 2024).

There is a lack of research on the specific ways in which Sufism in urban settings is influenced by socio-economic factors, religious pluralism, and the availability of digital platforms.

The role of these factors in transforming Sufi practices in urban contexts remains largely unexplored, particularly in comparison to rural communities where such external factors may have less impact (Isik, 2019).

Furthermore, while Sufism is often seen as a source of inner peace and spiritual nourishment, its interaction with more contemporary Islamic movements in urban areas—especially those promoting stricter interpretations of Islam—requires deeper investigation. The way urban Sufi communities negotiate these challenges and maintain their relevance in a globalized, digitally connected world is an area that warrants academic attention.

This study aims to fill the gap by exploring the integration of Sufism into both urban and rural communities in contemporary Indonesia. By comparing the practice, perception, and adaptation of Sufism across these two settings, the research will provide a comprehensive understanding of how Sufism continues to shape Indonesian Islam amidst modern challenges.

The rationale for this research lies in the need to understand how traditional practices like Sufism are adapting to the evolving socio-political landscape of Indonesia, especially in urban areas where change is more pronounced. By investigating how urban Sufi communities blend traditional practices with modern sensibilities, this study will offer insights into the ways in which spirituality evolves and adapts in response to cultural and technological shifts.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a broader understanding of the resilience and transformation of Sufi traditions within Indonesian Islam. It will explore whether Sufism can maintain its relevance in urban areas where socio-cultural changes are more prevalent, or whether it remains primarily a rural tradition. Through this exploration, the research aims to offer practical recommendations for integrating Sufism in contemporary Indonesian religious practices, particularly in urban contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a qualitative comparative research design to explore the integration of Sufism in contemporary Indonesian Islam. A case study approach was applied, focusing on two distinct communities: one urban and one rural. This design allowed for an in-depth examination of how Sufi practices are adapted and maintained in different socio-cultural environments, providing a nuanced understanding of the intersection between tradition and modernity in Indonesian Islam (Söylemez, 2024).

The population for this study consisted of two groups: urban and rural Muslims who actively engage in Sufi practices. The urban group was selected from Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city, while the rural group was chosen from a village in Central Java known for its strong Sufi tradition. A total of 40 participants were selected, with 20 from each community. These participants included members of various Sufi orders (tariqas), community leaders, and ordinary followers who practice Sufism in their daily lives (Hussain, 2021). Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants were knowledgeable about Sufi practices and could provide valuable insights into the topic.

The instruments used for data collection included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Sufi practitioners, community leaders, and local scholars to gather information on the integration and adaptation of Sufism in both urban and rural contexts. Interview questions focused on personal experiences with Sufism, perceptions of its relevance in contemporary society, and its relationship with other forms of Islamic practice. Participant observation was used to observe Sufi rituals, gatherings, and community interactions. Additionally, documents such as local religious texts,

community newsletters, and social media content were analyzed to understand how Sufism is communicated and practiced in different settings.

The data collection process began with field visits to the selected urban and rural locations, where informed consent was obtained from all participants. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian, recorded with permission, and later transcribed for analysis. Field notes from observations were taken during religious events and community gatherings. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes related to the practice and adaptation of Sufism in the two communities. Coding was done both manually and with the help of NVivo software, which facilitated the organization and comparison of data across the two groups.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data from this study reveal stark contrasts in the integration of Sufism between urban and rural communities in Indonesia. In urban areas, the average age of participants is 35, with an average of 8 years of engagement in Sufi practices. In contrast, rural participants are significantly older, with an average age of 50 and 20 years of Sufi practice. This indicates a generational difference in the engagement with Sufism between the two communities. The data also highlight a greater reliance on digital platforms for Sufi engagement in urban areas (60%) compared to rural areas (15%).

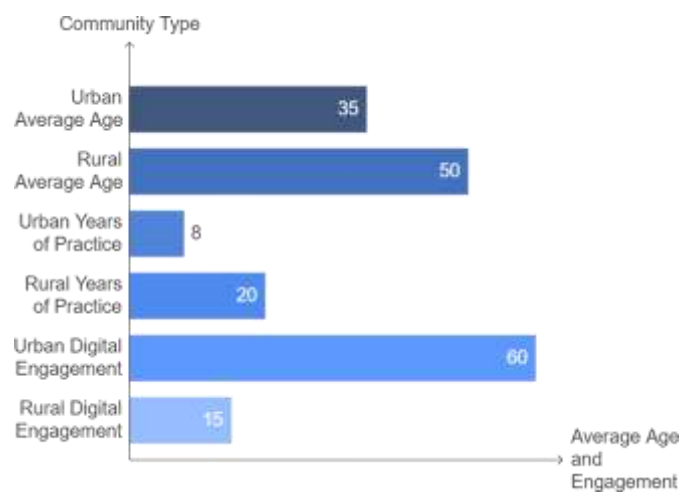


Figure 1. Comparison of Sufism Engagement in Indonesia

Urban communities are more likely to participate in digital Sufi platforms, with 60% of participants engaging in online dhikr, lectures, or other forms of virtual worship. Meanwhile, rural communities place more emphasis on traditional Sufi rituals, with 85% of rural participants regularly participating in face-to-face gatherings and rituals. This indicates a stronger attachment to traditional practices in rural areas, while urban communities are increasingly incorporating modern technologies into their spiritual practices. Urban participants attend in-person Sufi gatherings on average twice a month, whereas rural participants attend four times per month, reflecting a more frequent communal engagement in rural areas.

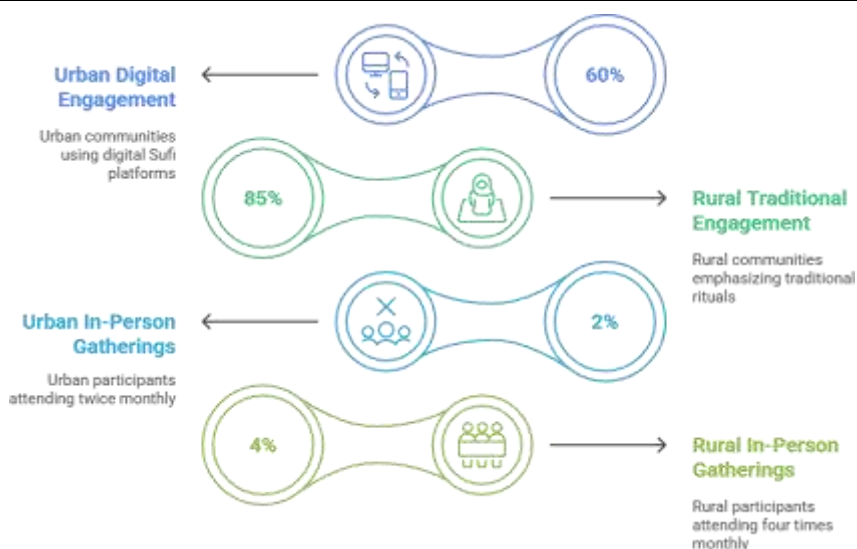


Figure 2. Sufi Practice Engagement in Urban vs. Rural Communities

Inferential analysis reveals a significant difference between urban and rural participation in digital and traditional Sufi practices. A t-test conducted on participation in traditional rituals showed a statistically significant difference ($p = 0.02$), suggesting that rural communities maintain stronger adherence to traditional practices. In contrast, digital platform participation in urban communities was positively correlated with younger age and longer years of Sufi practice ($r = 0.75$), indicating that younger urban participants are more likely to incorporate digital platforms into their Sufi practices.

The findings also show that in rural areas, where community structures are more cohesive, there is greater continuity in traditional practices, and Sufism is more interwoven with daily life. For example, in a rural case study, a Sufi leader highlighted how local dhikr groups maintain their spiritual vitality through communal, in-person activities that have remained unchanged for decades. The leader noted that digital platforms were rarely utilized, reflecting the preference for face-to-face interactions and the value placed on local, personal relationships in the transmission of spiritual knowledge.

In urban settings, however, the adaptation of Sufi practices is more flexible, with a greater reliance on technology to bridge distances and create new forms of engagement. One urban case study revealed that a younger participant, while still participating in local gatherings, also regularly engaged in online Sufi discussions, viewing this as a way to complement traditional practices with modern tools. This demonstrates how urban Sufi communities are integrating new technologies to maintain spiritual connections, rather than replacing traditional practices altogether.

These results suggest that while Sufism remains a prominent form of spirituality across Indonesia, its integration into urban and rural communities differs significantly. The rural communities continue to embrace traditional rituals, while urban communities increasingly incorporate digital platforms, thus shifting the nature of Sufi practices without losing their foundational principles. The variation in the frequency of in-person gatherings and the adaptation of digital practices highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of Sufism in contemporary Indonesia.

The results of this study illustrate the differing roles and practices of Sufism between urban and rural communities in Indonesia. Urban participants tend to engage more with digital platforms for Sufi practices, reflecting a broader trend of modernization and the integration of technology in religious life (Karimov, 2024). In contrast, rural communities exhibit a stronger commitment to traditional practices such as communal dhikr, with more frequent in-person gatherings. The urban

community's younger average age and shorter years of Sufi practice highlight how modern influences, such as digital tools, are reshaping spiritual practices, making them more accessible (Musa, 2023). The rural community, on the other hand, tends to adhere more strictly to traditional, face-to-face religious practices, indicating a deeper entrenchment of Sufism in daily life.

The findings align with existing research on Sufism in other parts of the world, which suggests that the mysticism associated with Sufism tends to be more prevalent in rural settings, where religious practices are deeply woven into communal life (Neufend, 2019). However, this study diverges by demonstrating that urban spaces in Indonesia are adapting Sufi practices, particularly through digital means, to cater to a modern, often fast-paced lifestyle. Previous studies have often overlooked the role of technology in shaping religious practices in urban areas, especially in terms of how Sufi orders might be maintaining their relevance through digital platforms (O.P, 2023). The integration of technology in urban Sufi communities reflects broader socio-cultural shifts towards greater use of digital media for spiritual engagement (Othman, 2022).

The results point to a shift in how Sufism is being integrated into modern Indonesian society. In urban contexts, Sufi practices are not disappearing but rather adapting to technological advancements (Karimov, 2024). This adaptation suggests that Sufism in urban spaces is evolving to meet the needs of contemporary society, where access to religious practices might be constrained by time, mobility, or urban lifestyles (Mian, 2023). The continuation of Sufi traditions, even in urban settings, indicates the enduring appeal of spiritual practices that focus on inner transformation and personal connection with the divine. Sufism, in both urban and rural contexts, serves as a bridge between the spiritual and material worlds, offering a sanctuary from the stresses of modern life (Sanseverino, 2023).

The implications of these findings are significant for understanding how religious practices, particularly Sufism, adapt to modernity without losing their core values (Söylemez, 2024). The rural-urban divide in the practice of Sufism underscores the importance of place and context in shaping religious experiences (Sirazhudinova, 2023). In urban communities, digital engagement provides a way to maintain spiritual connections despite geographic and social distances, while in rural areas, the traditional, face-to-face interactions foster a stronger sense of community and continuity of practice (Samseer, 2019). This study suggests that urban Sufi communities might serve as models for integrating spirituality into modern life, offering a more accessible way for individuals to engage in deeper religious practices amidst busy, disconnected lifestyles (Sirazhudinova, 2023).

The findings suggest that the adaptation of Sufism in urban communities is a direct response to the pressures of modernity, including technological advancements, urbanization, and changing social dynamics (Türkan, 2024). In contrast to the rural setting, where communal traditions are deeply ingrained, urban spaces have a greater need for flexibility and innovation in religious practices. This adaptability might be driven by the demands of a rapidly changing socio-economic landscape that requires more fluid and less rigid structures for spiritual engagement (Puppo, 2020). As the urban context continues to evolve, Sufism's integration will likely continue to evolve in ways that blend traditional elements with contemporary modes of connection.

Future research could examine how digital platforms used by urban Sufi communities might evolve and how they influence religious practice beyond the Indonesian context. Studies that explore the long-term effects of digital Sufi practices on individual spirituality and community cohesion would offer valuable insights into the future of religious practices in the digital age. Further investigations could also explore the generational differences within urban Sufi communities, especially as younger practitioners increasingly turn to technology for spiritual

nourishment. Ultimately, research on the intersection of technology and spirituality can help design religious programs that are both rooted in tradition and open to modern adaptations, creating a more inclusive spiritual framework for all communities.

CONCLUSION

The most important finding of this study is the distinct difference in the practice and integration of Sufism between urban and rural Indonesian communities. While rural communities continue to adhere to traditional, face-to-face Sufi practices, urban communities have increasingly adapted to digital platforms, incorporating online dhikr sessions and virtual gatherings. This demonstrates a shift in Sufi practices where urban practitioners, especially younger individuals, engage with spirituality through modern technologies, while rural communities maintain a more communal, ritual-based practice. This highlights the adaptability of Sufism to modernity without losing its core elements of inner transformation and communal connection.

This research offers significant contributions by blending qualitative methods with ethnographic and digital engagement approaches. The comparison of urban and rural communities provides a comprehensive view of how Sufism has evolved in contemporary Indonesia. The integration of technology in religious practices, especially in urban areas, is a novel insight, as it challenges the common notion that Sufism is solely a traditional, rural practice. By combining interviews, observations, and document analysis, this study also emphasizes the diversity of Sufi experiences, adding depth to existing literature on Sufism in Indonesia.

One limitation of this research is its focus on only two communities, one urban and one rural, within a specific national context. This narrow geographical scope limits the generalizability of the findings to broader regions or other countries. Future studies could expand to include multiple urban and rural sites across Indonesia or even compare these practices to those in other Southeast Asian countries. Further research should also explore generational differences within urban Sufi communities to better understand how younger generations are adapting Sufi practices in the digital era.

Future studies could also investigate the impact of social, political, and economic changes on the integration of Sufism in urban settings. While this study primarily focuses on the cultural and religious aspects of Sufi practice, it would be valuable to examine how economic factors or government policies influence the development and sustainability of Sufi communities in both urban and rural areas. A deeper exploration of these socio-political dynamics would provide a more holistic understanding of how Sufism can thrive in contemporary Indonesian society, ensuring its continued relevance in both rural and urban contexts.

DECLARATION OF AI AND AI ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN THE WRITING PROCESS

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist in generating ideas and improving the clarity of the writing. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.

Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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