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Living Sufism in the Tablighi Jamaat: A Hermeneutic Interpretation of Living Zuhd in Contemporary Indonesia

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Abstract

*This study explores the practice of zuhd (asceticism) within the Tablighi Jamaat community in Palu, Indonesia, through the framework of Dilthey's hermeneutics. It attempts to interpret the subjective meaning of zuhd as a lived spirituality, rather than merely a doctrinal discipline, emphasizing how the Tablighi ethos of simplicity, resilience (tahammul), and detachment from politics reflects the enduring influence of Chishtiyya Sufism. The study employed qualitative methods with in-depth interviews and field observations, involving 15 informants from diverse backgrounds within the Tablighi Jamaat in Palu. Over a six-month observation period, the study employed Dilthey's dual interpretive model—*verstehen* (understanding the meaning) and *erklären* (explaining the context)—to uncover the inner experiences and ethical structures of zuhd among the participants. The main findings of this study indicate that the asceticism of the Tablighi Jamaat is characterized by (1) ritual movement (*khuruj*) as a spiritual discipline, (2) apoliticality as an ethical manifestation of separation, and (3) hospitality and humility as an extension of Chishtiyyah mysticism. This study concludes that Tablighi asceticism is a living form of Sufism, which shows the continuity of classical Chishtiyyah ethics in the contemporary Islamic da'wah movement. This study contributes theoretically to the hermeneutical understanding of Islamic asceticism and empirically enriches the study of spiritual practices in modern Muslim societies.*

Introduction

The Tablighi Jamaat, originating in India in the early twentieth century, represents one of the most influential transnational Islamic movements today ¹. It is widely recognized for its da'wah activities, itinerant preaching (khuruj fi sabilillah), and strict adherence to ritual observance ². In Indonesia, particularly in cities like Palu, the movement has gained a unique configuration, balancing a rigorous missionary ethos with deep spiritual undertones that parallel the Sufi traditions of the subcontinent. Yet, while scholarship on the Tablighi Jamaat has flourished—focusing on its missionary strategies, apolitical stance, and social mobilization—very little attention has been paid to its ascetic dimension, or zuhd, as a lived and inherited spiritual ethic.

The dominant academic discourse situates the Tablighi Jamaat within the framework of Islamic revivalism, often emphasizing its scriptural orientation and its roots in the Deobandi reformist milieu ³. Scholars such as Barbara Metcalf and Yoginder Sikand have provided comprehensive accounts of its institutional development and transnational expansion. However, such readings tend to underplay the continuity of Sufi ethos embedded in its practices, particularly the Chishtiyya legacy that historically shaped the Deobandi spiritual environment (Mukhlis et al. 2023). The absence of this genealogical perspective has resulted in a partial understanding of the Tablighi movement—viewed primarily as a puritanical reform rather than a continuation of classical Sufi ethics in a modern form.

Previous research on the life of Sufism and the practice of asceticism in the Tablighi Jamaah in Indonesia shows that the values of asceticism (zuhd) are very prominent in their spiritual life. Zuhd is practiced through a simple lifestyle, sacrifice of time, wealth and energy for da'wah, as well as rejection of involvement in political affairs. This practice is supported by internal traditions such as the reading of the books Fadhilah Amal and Fadhilah Sedekah, which emphasize the importance of leaving the world in order to get closer to Allah ³⁵. Apart from that, research also highlights the influence of the Chishtiyya order which is very dominant in shaping the principles, ethics and rituals of the Tablighi Jamaah, such as the practice of khuruj (going out to preach), jaulah (preaching visits), and talim (group learning). Sufi values such as honesty,

¹ A. Amanullah, A.H. Nadaf, and T.A. Neyazi, "Constructing the Muslim 'Other': A Critical Discourse Analysis of Indian News Coverage of the Tablighi Jamaat Congregation during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Journalism* 25, no. 8 (2024): 1773–91, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849231188260>.

² P. Ghasiya and K. Sasahara, "Rapid Sharing of Islamophobic Hate on Facebook: The Case of the Tablighi Jamaat Controversy," *Social Media and Society* 8, no. 4 (2022), Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051221129151>.

³ S. Hamdi, "Covid-19, Social Stigma and Changing Religious Practice in Tablighi Jamaat Communities in Lombok, Indonesia," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 76 (2022), Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdr.2022.102996>.

humility, and compassion are part of the ethos of da'wah and the daily lives of Tablighi Jamaat members.

The Tablighi Jamaat's apolitical stance is also a prominent characteristic, where they consistently avoid involvement in politics and prefer to focus on the spiritual and moral development of individuals and their communities. This stance is seen as a manifestation of the hermeneutics of asceticism, where withdrawal from politics is seen as a form of self-emptying for the sake of spiritual purity. This ethical withdrawal is not only interpreted as an avoidance of the world, but also as a way to build moral authority and community solidarity, and create a space for authentic religious experience outside of dominant political and social structures.

Previous research has extensively discussed the practice of asceticism, the legacy of Sufism (especially Chishtiyya), and the apolitical stance of Tablighi Jamaat in various regions of Indonesia and around the world. These studies highlight patterns of da'wah, the emphasis on sacrificing time and money, and withdrawal from politics as part of spirituality and the formation of moral identity.⁴ Research has also examined the adaptation of Tablighi Jamaat's da'wah to the modern context, minority dynamics, and changes in religious practices due to the pandemic.⁵

However, several gaps remain underexplored. First, no study has specifically interpreted the meaning and function of asceticism in the spiritual life of Tablighi Jamaat in Palu using Dilthey's hermeneutic approach, which emphasizes the subjective and historical interpretation of religious experience. Second, while the Chishtiyya heritage has been identified as a major influence on the ethical and ritual practices of Tablighi Jamaat, research detailing how this heritage is embedded and lived out in the local context of Palu remains very limited. Third, the apolitical aspects and ethical withdrawal as hermeneutic manifestations of asceticism are generally discussed in general terms, but have not been specifically examined as interpretative modes of religious experience at the local community level, such as in Palu.

⁴ Aep Saepuloh, Nandang Koswara, and Asep Dadan Wildan, "The Religious Patterns of the Tablighi Jamaat in Indonesia," *Ijd-Demos* 4, no. 2 (July 2022), <https://doi.org/10.37950/ijd.v4i2.284>; Vahit Gökteş et al., "Spirituality in the Context of Tablighi Jamaat and Its Implication on Muslim Society: The Sufi Perspective," *International Journal of Social, Political and Economic Research* 9, no. 1 (April 2022): 49–66, <https://doi.org/10.46291/IJOSPERvol9iss1pp49-66>.

⁵ Saipul Hamdi, "Covid-19, Social Stigma and Changing Religious Practice in Tablighi Jamaat Communities in Lombok, Indonesia," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 76 (June 2022): 102996, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2022.102996>; Umdatul Hasanah et al., "The Transformation of Tablighi Jamaat's Da'wah: Digital Adaptation and Political Engagement in Indonesia," *Ilmu Dakwah: Academic Journal for Homiletic Studies* 19, no. 1 (June 2025): 235–66, <https://doi.org/10.15575/idajhs.v19i1.45960>; Siti Khodijah Nurul Aula, Derry Ahmad Rizal, and Nur Afni Khafsoh, "Penyebaran Nilai-Nilai Ideologis Kelompok Minoritas Muslim: Kajian Atas Jamaah Tabligh Wonosobo, Jawa Tengah," *Jurnal Ilmu Agama: Mengkaji Doktrin, Pemikiran, Dan Fenomena Agama* 23, no. 2 (December 2022): 224–40, <https://doi.org/10.19109/jia.v23i2.15077>.

This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the zuhd practices of the Tablighi Jamaat in Palu, Indonesia, through the lens of Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutics⁶. Dilthey's interpretive philosophy offers a framework that bridges inner experience and historical context through the twin concepts of *verstehen* (understanding subjective meaning) and *erklären* (explaining contextual phenomena)⁷. Applying this framework allows the study to uncover how zuhd embodied through simplicity, endurance (*tahammul*), humility, and apoliticism operates as both spiritual experience and ethical habitus. Therefore, this research aims to interpret the meaning and function of zuhd within the spiritual life of Tablighi members in Palu, trace the Chishtiyya legacy embedded in the ethical and ritual practices of the Tablighi Jamaat, and theorize apoliticism as a hermeneutic manifestation of zuhd, demonstrating how ethical withdrawal can serve as an interpretive mode of religious experience.

In doing so, this study contributes to a broader understanding of Islamic asceticism in modern contexts and advances the theoretical dialogue between hermeneutical philosophy and lived Sufism, offering a new perspective on the spiritual dynamics of transnational Islamic movements.

Empirically, this research is grounded in field observations and in-depth interviews with Tablighi adherents in Palu⁸. It focuses on how daily practices, such as *khuruj* (missionary travel), communal hospitality, and detachment from political engagement, reflect a sustained Chishtiyya influence within a reformist movement⁹. Through hermeneutic interpretation, the study aims to reconstruct the inner logic of asceticism within the Tablighi Jamaat, revealing that what appears as outward discipline is, in essence, an ongoing enactment of living Sufism.

Data were obtained from interviews with 15 informants who are active members of the Tablighi Jamaat in Palu, with diverse backgrounds, including members who joined in the last two years and senior members with more than ten years of involvement. Informants were selected based on diverse criteria such as membership duration, level of involvement in *da'wah* activities, and experience with *khuruj*. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the spiritual experiences of the informants, focusing on their understanding of *khuruj*, apoliticity, simplicity

⁶ G.K. Jha, "Congregation of Tablighi Jama'at During the Pandemic COVID-19 and Its Agenda in India and Indonesia," *International Studies* 59, no. 1 (2022): 76–96, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208817221093157>

⁷ A. Khan, "Pious Publicity, Moral Ambivalence and the Making of Religious Authority in the Tablighi Jamaat in Pakistan," *History and Anthropology* 35, no. 3 (2024): 568–83, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2022.2119231>.

⁸ R. Timol, "Born-Again Muslims? Intra-Religious Conversion and the Tablighi Jama'at," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 33, no. 3 (2022): 281–306, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2022.2049110>.

⁹ Lubis Mukhlis and Yustika Saidah, "Dynamics of Nature-Based Learning in Developing Children's Motoric Skills: Teacher and Parent Perspectives," *HUMANISMA: Journal of Gender Studies* 9, no. 1 (June 2025): 64–79, <http://dx.doi.org/10.30983/humanisme.v4i2.9366>.

in daily life, and the connection between asceticism and Sufi spirituality. Interviews were conducted individually for approximately 45 minutes to an hour per session, using Indonesian, with note-taking and audio recording to ensure data accuracy.

In addition to the interviews, field observations were conducted over a six-month period to directly observe khuruj activities and the daily lives of Tablighi Jamaah members. Researchers participated in da'wah activities, congregational prayers, and social interactions among members of the Jamaah, and observed how the practice of asceticism (zuhud) was manifested in communal life. Observations were conducted using participatory techniques, where the researchers were involved in the activities but maintained an external observer position to maintain objectivity. This study also observed two groups with different durations of Khuruj: one group that performed Khuruj for 40 days and the other group that performed it for a shorter duration, around 10 to 14 days. These different durations provide insight into the variations in spiritual experiences experienced by Tablighi Jamaah members during Khuruj.

Data obtained through interviews and observations were analyzed using thematic coding and triangulation techniques. Thematic coding was conducted by repeatedly reading interview transcripts, identifying key themes emerging from informants' narratives, and grouping these themes into relevant categories such as simplicity, apoliticality, and inner experiences during Khuruj. Triangulation was used to verify findings by comparing data from interviews, field observations, and field notes taken by the researcher during the observation period. This technique helps increase the validity of the findings and ensures objective interpretation. As part of the analysis, researcher reflexivity was also considered, with the researcher consciously identifying the influence of personal background and theoretical understanding on data interpretation, ensuring more transparent and accountable results.

Dilthey's Hermeneutics and Religious Experience

Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutical philosophy situates human understanding (*verstehen*) as the interpretive foundation of the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*)¹⁰. Unlike positivist models that rely on external observation and causal explanation (*erklären*), Dilthey emphasizes the comprehension of inner experience (*Erlebnis*) as a way to uncover the meaning structures underlying human life (Mukhlis, 2025). For Dilthey, understanding is not mere psychological empathy, but a rigorous interpretive act that relates lived experience to historical and cultural

¹⁰ J.-F. Côté, "George Herbert Mead's Pragmatism and Wilhelm Dilthey's Hermeneutics: Similarities and Differences That Widen and Deepen Sociological Analysis," *American Sociologist* 52, no. 4 (2021): 702–20, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-021-09501-4>.

contexts¹¹. In this sense, hermeneutics serves not only to interpret texts but to reconstruct the web of meaning that constitutes lived reality.

This framework is particularly relevant for the study of religious experience, where meaning is always mediated through symbols, rituals, and practices¹². Religious behavior, according to Dilthey, must be interpreted not as abstract belief but as a historically situated expression of spiritual life (*Ausdruck des Lebens*)¹³. Within this interpretive horizon, *zuhd*—the practice of ascetic detachment—is approached not merely as theological doctrine but as an inner attitude manifested in daily acts of simplicity, self-restraint, and surrender to God¹⁴.

Applying Dilthey's hermeneutics to the study of the Tablighi Jamaat enables a dual interpretive movement in which *Verstehen* seeks to grasp the subjective meaning of *zuhd* as it is lived and experienced by individual adherents, while *Erklären* situates those personal experiences within the broader socio-historical context of the Tablighi Jamaat as a modern Islamic movement, thus integrating individual spirituality with the collective historical and cultural formation of the community.

This dual interpretive model bridges the inner and outer dimensions of spirituality, providing a nuanced analytical lens to understand how ascetic practices emerge as ethical forms of religious expression¹⁵. Thus, Dilthey's hermeneutics offers a theoretical path to decode living Sufism that is, Sufism as embodied experience rather than as static textual heritage.

As a concrete example to illustrate how Dilthey's concept can improve understanding of Tablighi practice, we can refer to one important aspect of the life of the Tablighi Jamaah, namely the practice of *khuruj* (propaganda journey). Based on field observations, Tablighi Jamaah members routinely perform *khuruj*, which involves leaving daily life, work, and family to travel around in the context of *da'wah*. This practice is not simply seen as a physical transfer, but rather as a spiritual discipline that allows participants to cleanse their hearts of the material world and deepen their relationship with God.

¹¹ J.C. Gagnon, K.M. Murphy, and S.M. Howie, "'I Grew Up... I Was Still Small': Experiences before and after Juvenile Incarceration in South Africa," *Exceptionality* 28, no. 4 (2020): 294–311, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2020.1727329>.

¹² H.S. Husain, "Hermeneutical Reflections on Mathematical Significance," *Philosophical Readings* 12, no. 2 (2020): 331–35, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3865590>.

¹³ K. Kinzel, "Neo-Kantianism as Hermeneutics? Heinrich Rickert on Psychology, Historical Method, and Understanding," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 29, no. 4 (2021): 614–32, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2019.1709039>.

¹⁴ Lubis Mukhlis and M. Nur Abdullah, *Hukum Keluarga Islam di Indonesia*, 1st ed. (Mukhlisina Revolution Center, 2025).

¹⁵ L. O'Sullivan, "Heinrich Gomperz and 'Vienna Contextualism' Historical Epistemology and Logical Empiricism," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 17, no. 2 (2022): 70–94, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2022.170204>.

Using Dilthey's concept of *verstehen*, we can understand the practice of khuruj not simply as a physical action, but as an inner experience filled with meaning. Tablighi Jamaat members describe khuruj as "soul training" (*tarbiyatun nafs*) that cleanses their intentions and strengthens their dependence on God. A senior participant in the interview explained: "When we perform khuruj, we are not running away from the world; we are cleansing our hearts of things that make us forget Allah."

Thus, khuruj as a spiritual practice demonstrates how the concept of *verstehen* enhances our understanding of this practice, as we not only view it from an external or physical perspective, but also interpret the deeper inner meaning behind the act. *Erklären*, in this case, provides historical and cultural context by placing khuruj within the Sufi tradition, specifically the Chishtiyya heritage that prioritizes service and humility as the core of spirituality. Using Dilthey's framework, we can see that the act of khuruj is not simply a matter of renunciation, but also a form of spiritual recontextualization connected to the broader tradition of Sufi asceticism.

Zuhd and the Chishtiyya Genealogy

The concept of zuhd occupies a foundational place in Islamic spirituality¹⁶. Traditionally understood as detachment from material excess and self-centered desires, zuhd functions as the ethical and psychological preparation for attaining *ma'rifah* (gnosis)¹⁷. Classical Sufi authors such as al-Qushayri, al-Ghazali, and Ibn al-'Arabi consistently emphasized zuhd as the first stage of the spiritual journey, guiding the seeker toward sincerity (*ikhlas*) and divine proximity (Mukhlis et al. 2025). Yet, in lived practice, zuhd transcends ascetic withdrawal—it becomes an ethos of moderation, humility, and social service, deeply integrated into daily life.

Among the many Sufi orders (*turuq*), the Chishtiyya of South Asia stands out for transforming zuhd into a socially engaged spirituality¹⁸. Originating in the teachings of Mu'in al-Din Chishti and Nizam al-Din Awliya, the Chishtiyya cultivated a form of *fakr* (voluntary poverty) that combined detachment from political power with unconditional service (*khidmah*) and hospitality

¹⁶ D.M.M. Meerasahibu, "Origin of Tasawwuf (Sufism) and Critiquing the Thesis of Transition From Zuhd," *Afkar* 26, no. 2 (2024): 255–94, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol26no2.8>.

¹⁷ A.M. Özel, "Approach of Şūfī Orders at Their Formative Phase to Some Extreme Practices Specific to The Zuhd Period (The Case of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī)," *Cumhuriyet İlahiyat Dergisi* 26, no. 2 (2022): 647–59, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.18505/cuid.1140063>.

¹⁸ A. Wahid et al., "UTILIZING ZUHD HADITHS FOR UPPER-CLASS CRIME PREVENTION," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 23, no. 2 (2023): 263–82, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v23i2.17353>.

(mehmaan-nawazi) ¹⁹. This ethos redefined asceticism as compassion-oriented simplicity rather than monastic isolation.

The Chishtiyya influence persisted into the Deobandi intellectual environment of nineteenth-century India, where the founders of the Tablighi Jamaat were educated ²⁰. Although the movement adopted reformist rhetoric and scriptural rigor, it retained Chishtiyya ethical residues—manifested in tahammul (endurance), khidmah, and collective humility ²¹. The Tablighi Jamaat's strict discipline, itinerant preaching, and apolitical ethos can thus be viewed as the continuation of Chishtiyya ethics in modern form, rearticulated through a revivalist idiom.

By combining Dilthey's hermeneutics with the Chishtiyya genealogy, this study approaches zuhd not as a doctrinal abstraction but as a living hermeneutical field where historical continuity, subjective experience, and ethical practice intersect. This framework enables the researcher to interpret zuhd as both a structure of meaning and a structure of action, revealing how the Tablighi Jamaat internalizes Sufi ideals within contemporary socio-religious life.

Zuhd as Spiritual Discipline: Khuruj and the Reversal of Worldly Attachment

Field observations in Palu reveal that members of the Tablighi Jamaat conceptualize *zuhd* not as withdrawal from the world but as discipline through movement. The practice of *khuruj fi sabilillah*—leaving one's home and occupation for several days or weeks—functions as an intentional detachment from worldly dependencies. Participants consistently described this temporary migration as a “training of the soul” (*tarbiyatun nafs*), designed to purify intention and strengthen reliance on God.

A senior participant, identified as Amir H., remarked: “When we go for *khuruj*, we are not running from the world; we are cleansing our hearts from what makes us forget Allah.”

This statement encapsulates the dual dimension of *khuruj*: the physical displacement becomes a means of inner purification, while communal preaching reinforces self-discipline through structured routines—five daily congregational prayers, memorization of *hadith*, and collective meals emphasizing humility. Observations at the *markaz* in Palu showed that participants avoided discussions about wealth, politics, or personal status. They shared simple

¹⁹ M.S. Zaprul Khan, Z. Abas, and A. Sarif, “Zuhd and Mahabbah: Liberating Modern Society From Spiritual Desolation and Moral Decadence,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 15, no. 1 (2025): 205–28, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2025.15.1.205-228>.

²⁰ S. Aree and C.M. Joll, “The Religious Geography of Thailand's Malay Southern Provinces: Revisiting the Impact of South Asian and Middle Eastern Transnational Islamic Movements,” *Sojourn* 35, no. 2 (2020): 343–63, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1355/sj35-2f>.

²¹ Lubis Mukhlis, Yadi Janwari, and Rahmat Syafe'i, “INDONESIA STOCK EXCHANGE: THEORETICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF MUDHARABAH AND MUSYARAKAH CONTRACTS,” *Yurisprudencia: Jurnal Hukum Ekonomi* 9, no. 2 (December 2023): 243–64, <https://doi.org/10.24952/yurisprudencia.v9i2.8466>.

food, often cooked collectively, symbolizing voluntary renunciation of comfort. In this way, *zuhd* manifests as embodied simplicity, transforming deprivation into spiritual affirmation.

Through repeated practice, members internalize the conviction that *zuhd* is less about rejecting the material world than about reconfiguring one's relationship to it—turning daily action into devotion. The act of leaving home for *da'wah* thus becomes a lived metaphor for leaving the ego behind.

The Ethic of Endurance (Tahammul) and Quiet Perseverance

Another key finding concerns the pervasive ethos of *tahammul*—patient endurance amid hardship. Members interpret physical exhaustion, hunger, and social misunderstanding as tests of sincerity that refine their spiritual character. During interviews, several respondents framed endurance as a moral indicator of faith. One participant noted: “The more difficult the journey, the more we taste the sweetness of faith.”

This ethos of endurance creates a communal culture of quiet perseverance, where hardship is sanctified as part of divine pedagogy. During field visits, members emphasized that sleeping on mosque floors, eating simple meals, and tolerating discomfort were not signs of poverty but of liberation from dependence. Interestingly, endurance was never expressed in terms of self-pity but rather as gratitude. Members' language consistently linked *mujahadah* (struggle) with *lazzah* (joy), revealing an affective transformation in which pain becomes devotion. This finding resonates with the *Chishtiyya* tradition's concept of *fakr*—voluntary poverty as spiritual freedom. In Palu, the ethic of *tahammul* thus sustains *zuhd* as a collective, emotionally charged discipline rather than solitary asceticism.

Apoliticism as an Expression of Zuhd

Across interviews, apoliticism emerged as a central expression of *zuhd*. Members deliberately avoid political discourse, perceiving it as a potential source of *fitnah* (division) and ego-centered competition. A recurring statement among participants was that “our politics is *da'wah*,” reflecting a worldview in which preaching supersedes public power.

One senior *tablighi* explained: “If our hearts are filled with worldly debates, we cannot be filled with remembrance (*dhikr*).”

This perspective reveals that apoliticism within the Tablighi Jamaat is not mere passivity but a theological stance of detachment, rooted in the conviction that social transformation begins with personal reform. In this sense, abstaining from politics becomes a manifest form of *zuhd*, redirecting energy from external activism to inner purification. Field observations confirmed that during *bayan* (religious talks), leaders explicitly discouraged discussions on governance,

elections, or sectarian issues. Instead, they emphasized repentance, self-correction, and *tabligh* (conveying the message).

This creates a distinctive moral atmosphere—a zone of spiritual neutrality—where detachment from power is equated with closeness to God. Thus, apoliticism is not an absence of engagement but a reorientation of engagement, a form of spiritual self-restraint that mirrors the *Chishtiyya* ideal of independence from rulers (*ghina ‘an al-sultan*). The community’s silence toward politics becomes a performative act of faith, reaffirming *zuhd* as ethical self-limitation in a world of constant assertion.

Simplicity, Humility, and Hospitality as Social Forms of Zuhd

The final dimension concerns how *zuhd* is socially enacted through humility and hospitality. In communal gatherings, every participant—regardless of status—shares the same sleeping quarters, eats from the same plates, and participates in cleaning and cooking. This ritualized equality blurs social hierarchies, transforming humility into an institutionalized virtue.

During one evening observation, a local leader washed the dishes after dinner while junior members prepared tea. When asked about it, he replied: “Service to others (*khidmah*) is the proof of our sincerity. A person who refuses to serve cannot be close to Allah.”

This episode demonstrates how *zuhd* in the Tablighi context transcends personal piety; it is collectively performed through service, echoing the *Chishtiyya* emphasis on *khidmah* and *mehmān-nawāzī* (hospitality). Furthermore, simplicity in clothing and language reinforces communal humility. Members dress uniformly—usually in plain white garments—and address one another as *akh* (brother) or *jama‘ah* rather than by professional titles. Through these micro-practices, the Tablighi Jamaat in Palu transforms *zuhd* into a visible and repeatable social ethic, rendering spirituality tangible in everyday interactions.

Thematic Synthesis: Zuhd as a Multi-Layered Hermeneutic Field

The integration of empirical observations and interpretive analysis produced the following thematic synthesis:

Table 1. Thematic Matrix of Zuhd in the Tablighi Jamaat (Hermeneutic Synthesis)

Theme	Empirical Illustration	Interpretive Meaning	Hermeneutic
Spiritual Discipline (Khuruj)	“When we go for <i>khuruj</i> , we are not running from the world; we are cleansing our hearts...”	<i>Khuruj</i> as intentional detachment through movement; <i>zuhd</i> as discipline-in-action, not retreat.	<i>Verstehen</i> : lived meaning of detachment as moral training (<i>tarbiyatun nafs</i>).
Ethic of Endurance (Tahammul)	“The more difficult the journey, the more we taste the sweetness of faith.”	Endurance (<i>tahammul</i>) as sanctified suffering; hardship as spiritual pedagogy.	Resonates with <i>Chishtiyya</i> concept of <i>fakr</i> (voluntary poverty as liberation).

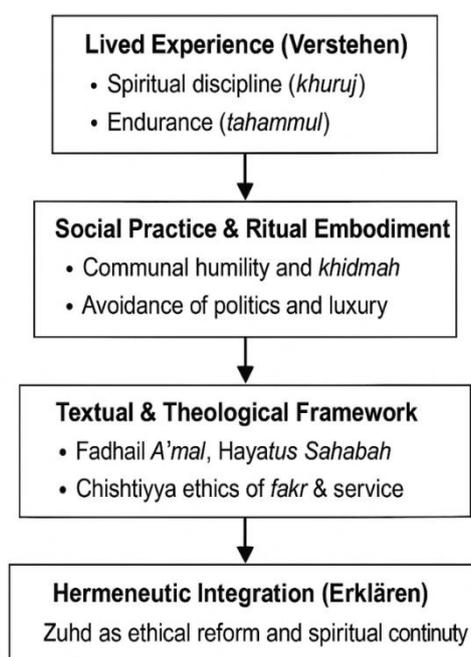
Theme	Empirical Illustration	Interpretive Meaning	Hermeneutic
Apoliticism as Zuhd	“Our politics is <i>da’wah</i> .”	Apoliticism as moral restraint and detachment from worldly power; spiritual neutrality.	<i>Erklären</i> : socio-theological distancing from power reflects ascetic independence (<i>ghina ‘an al-sultan</i>).
Social Humility and Hospitality (Khidma)	Leader washing dishes, members eating together.	<i>Zuhd</i> enacted through humility, equality, and collective service.	Ricoeur’s <i>ethics of selfhood</i> : service as self-transcendence through others.

This synthesis reveals *zuhd* within the Tablighi Jamaat as an active moral formation—embodied, collective, and relational—where spiritual discipline, endurance, detachment, and humility converge into a unified ascetic ethic.

Hermeneutic Integration: The Circle of Understanding and Explanation

The findings can be visualized as a hermeneutic circle, representing the interpretive movement between *lived experience (Verstehen)* and *contextual explanation (Erklären)*.

Figure 1. The Hermeneutic Circle of Zuhd in the Tablighi Jamaat



This circular process captures how individual spiritual experiences and collective practices are interwoven within the Tablighi Jamaat’s moral universe. *Zuhd* thus emerges not as isolation but as an ongoing dialogue between interior transformation and historical tradition a living continuity of Chishtiyya ethics refracted through modern missionary movement.

Discussion

The findings reveal that *zuhd* among members of the Tablighi Jamaat in Palu is not a mere moral prescription but a lived hermeneutical act a dynamic process through which participants

interpret their own existence in relation to divine meaning²². Using Dilthey's framework, this phenomenon can be understood as the fusion of *verstehen* (understanding the inner meaning) and *erklären* (contextual explanation)²³.

Through *verstehen*, members internalize *zuhd* as self-understanding of faith—an awareness that renunciation of comfort leads to purification of intention (*niyyah*) (Çakmaktaş 2025).²⁴ Each practice sleeping on mosque floors, eating simple food, or leaving home for *khuruj* serves as a text of spiritual life that participants “read” and “rewrite” daily²⁵. The act of *khuruj* thus becomes a ritualized hermeneutic: by detaching from materiality, they learn to interpret life itself as a divine narrative.

At the same time, *erklären* situates these practices within the historical continuity of the Deobandi–Chishtiyya tradition, in which discipline and humility form the backbone of spiritual renewal²⁶. The outward simplicity of the Tablighi Jamaat, often perceived as revivalist austerity, is in fact a reinterpretation of classical asceticism—adapted to the social realities of modern Muslim life²⁷. Hence, Dilthey's dual model helps decode *zuhd* as both inner interpretation and cultural expression, bridging subjective spirituality with collective religious form.

The participants' deliberate detachment from political discourse illustrates how apoliticism becomes an ethical manifestation of *zuhud*²⁸. This finding expands existing interpretations of Islamic quietism by framing it not as passivity but as moral restraint rooted in ascetic ethics²⁹. In Dilthey's terms, such restraint reflects a hermeneutical choice—an intentional withdrawal from external conflict to preserve the integrity of inner meaning.

²² R. Timol, “Ethno-Religious Socialisation, National Culture and the Social Construction of British Muslim Identity,” *Contemporary Islam* 14, no. 3 (2020): 331–60, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11562-020-00454-y>.

²³ Lubis Mukhlis, “A Phenomenological Study of Personal Spiritual Experiences in Navigating Religious Pluralism within Interfaith Communities,” *Irfana: Journal of Religious Studies* 1, no. 6 (June 2025): 212–20.

²⁴ B. Çakmaktaş, “From Cinema to Sufism: The Artistic and Mystical Life of Turkish Screenwriter Ayşe Şasa (1941–2014),” *Religions* 16, no. 6 (2025), Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16060787>.

²⁵ U. Hammed and D. Vishanoff, “Arabic Literary Papyri and Islamic Renunciant Piety: Zabūr and Hadith in Vienna Papyrus AP 1854a–b,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 35, no. 2 (2025): 309–47, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186324000208>.

²⁶ Lubis Mukhlis et al., “Reformulation of Islamic Stock Law: The Application of *Taşarrufāt al-Rasūl* and *Maqāshid al-Syarī'a* to Develop a Dynamic and Sustainable Islamic Capital Market in Indonesia,” *Journal of Posthumanism* 5, no. 3 (2025): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i3.913>.

²⁷ S. Sa'ad et al., “The Repercussions of Sufi Thoughts in the Contemporary Qur'anic Interpretation to Sustainable Development in Indonesia,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 106, no. SpecialIssue-2 (2025): 1–15, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.106.2018>.

²⁸ Robith Fadyan Asfa et al., “Evaluative Analysis of Basic Education Facilities and Infrastructure Management: Case Study at SDN Gambiran 01 Jember,” *Chatra: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran* 3, no. 2 (2025): 63–74.

²⁹ Lubis Mukhlis, Siti Maryam, and Salman Alparis Sormin, “Model Pembelajaran Living History Berbasis PjBL Untuk Meningkatkan Keterampilan Histografi Mahasiswa,” *Jurnal Educatio FKIP UNMA* 9, no. 4 (October 2023): 1800–1809, <https://doi.org/10.31949/educatio.v9i4.5595>.

In many modern readings, the Tablighi Jamaat's apoliticism has been interpreted as a symptom of disengagement or social withdrawal³⁰. However, when viewed hermeneutically, apoliticism emerges as a mode of meaning-making, where the refusal to engage in political contestation is itself a spiritual declaration: that worldly authority is transient, while divine remembrance (dhikr) is eternal³¹.

This ethical reframing aligns with the Chishtiyya maxim of independence from rulers (ghina 'an al-sultan), emphasizing the spiritual autonomy of the seeker³². For the Tablighis, zuhd does not mean rejecting society but redefining engagement—channeling energy toward personal reform (islah al-nafs) rather than political reform³³. Through this lens, apoliticism becomes a performative hermeneutic, an act of self-interpretation through silence, echoing Dilthey's view that meaning arises in the lived tension between experience and history.

The findings also highlight a subtle but enduring Chishtiyya imprint within the Tablighi Jamaat's ethical life³⁴. While the movement originated within a Deobandi framework, its emotional, aesthetic, and spiritual orientation continues to mirror Chishtiyya ideals—particularly fakr (voluntary poverty), tahammul (endurance), and khidmah (service)³⁵.

This continuity challenges the dichotomy between reformist Islam and Sufism³⁶. Instead, it suggests that reformist movements like the Tablighi Jamaat are genealogical extensions of Sufi ethics, not ruptures from them. As Sulastrı (2025) and Sukmawati (2025) note, Chishtiyya spirituality integrates simplicity and compassion into the core of social life. The Tablighi Jamaat replicates this synthesis: by transforming zuhd into collective humility, it reconstitutes spiritual egalitarianism within a modern missionary structure.

In hermeneutic terms, this demonstrates what Dilthey describes as the historical continuity of meaning (geschichtlicher Zusammenhang): spiritual values survive by adapting to new social

³⁰ B.J. Smith, "Sufism and the Sacred Feminine in Lombok, Indonesia: Situating Spirit Queen Dewi Anjani and Female Saints in Nahdlatul Wathan," *Religions* 12, no. 8 (2021), Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080563>.

³¹ M.F. Zenrif et al., "RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL SUFISM STUDIES: Quranic Sufism as the Basis of Internalizing Social Character and Identity," *Ulumuna* 28, no. 2 (2024): 620–54, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v28i2.1113>.

³² I. Zein and A. El-Wakil, "'Umar Ibn Al-Khattāb's Encounter with an Unnamed Monk: From History to Legend," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 34, no. 2 (2023): 157–81, Scopus, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2023.2229615>.

³³ Lubis Mukhlis et al., "Integrating Artificial Intelligence and Maqāṣid Al-Syarī'ah: Revolutionizing Indonesia's Sharia Online Trading System," *Computer Fraud and Security* 2024, no. 11 (December 2024): 301–9, <https://doi.org/10.52710/cfs.238>.

³⁴ Titik Hariyanti, "Curriculum-Based Empowerment through Local Knowledge Integration in Vocational Schools," *Chatra: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran* 3, no. 2 (2025): 131–40.

³⁵ Yustikasari, "Digital Self-Reconstruction: Postgraduate Reflections on YouTube's Role in Identity Formation," *CommVersa: Journal of Communication Studies* 1, no. 5 (August 2025): 175–81.

³⁶ Yera Yulista, "Meaning-Making among Islamic Philosophy Students through Engagement with Sufi Literature," *Humanexus: Journal of Humanistic and Social Connection Studies* 1, no. 7 (July 2025): 253–60.

forms³⁷. The Tablighi Jamaat's communal asceticism, therefore, represents a translation of Chishtiyya ethics into the idiom of da'wah, where preaching replaces monastic seclusion, and endurance replaces ecstatic isolation³⁸. The act of khuruj becomes a journey not only through physical space but through the memory of Sufism itself.

From a phenomenological perspective, zuhd in the Tablighi Jamaat operates as a form of living Sufism—a spirituality enacted through routine, movement, and interpersonal relations³⁹. The findings demonstrate that asceticism is not confined to withdrawal but is embodied in everyday ethical gestures: serving food, cleaning, sharing, and refraining from self-promotion.

This transition from personal to collective spirituality marks a crucial shift in the sociology of asceticism. In traditional Sufism, zuhd is an individual's path toward divine proximity; in the Tablighi Jamaat, it becomes a socialized virtue, democratized and institutionalized through communal life⁴⁰. This corresponds to what Dilthey identifies as objectified spirit (*der objektive Geist*)—when inner experience externalizes itself in social forms, rituals, and collective values.

Thus, the Tablighi Jamaat reinterprets zuhd as both hermeneutical understanding and social ethics⁴¹. The movement's simplicity, apoliticism, and hospitality are not accidental traits but structural embodiments of meaning⁴². The members' lived experiences reveal how ascetic ideals are preserved, transmitted, and renewed in the flux of modernity—proving that Sufism is not merely inherited but continuously reinterpreted through practice.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on religious phenomenology and Islamic hermeneutics in three interrelated ways. First, it reconceptualizes asceticism by situating *zuhd* within Dilthey's interpretive philosophy, reframing it as a dynamic process of understanding and meaning-making rather than mere renunciation. Second, it bridges the domains of tradition and reform by demonstrating how the Tablighi Jamaat embodies Sufi ethical sensibilities within a reformist framework, thus challenging the conventional divide between orthodoxy and

³⁷ Agus Satory, "Emotional Meaning-Making in Legal Consultants Managing Digital Contract Disputes: An Interpretative Phenomenological Study," *Hukumna: Journal of Law and Policy* 1, no. 5 (May 2025): 195–202.

³⁸ Nismawati, "Exploring Lived Experiences of Post-Therapy Recovery after Spinal Cord Injury," *Journal of Regenerative Medicine and Molecular Innovation* 1, no. 5 (May 2025): 174–81.

³⁹ M Indra Martadinata, "Phenomenological Study of Airport Staff's Experiences in Managing Increased Air Traffic during Peak Periods," *Journal Homepage: <https://journals.ai-mrc.com/jmri> Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation* 1, no. 5 (May 2025): 194–202.

⁴⁰ Linda Handayani, "Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of University Students' Experiences of National Identity among Indonesian University Students in the Digital Age: An IPA Approach," *Journal of Educational Innovation and Research* 1, no. 5 (May 2025): 173–79.

⁴¹ Sunday Ade Sitorus, "Phenomenological Study of Senior Executive Experiences in Navigating Strategic Ambiguity in VUCA Environments," *Journal of Business, Management, and Accounting* 1, no. 5 (May 2025): 194–202.

⁴² Fida Syahidah et al., "Financial Literacy Intervention for Rural Farmers: A Qualitative Study on Collective Wealth Building through Simulation-Based Learning in Mekarmanik Village, Indonesia," *Journal Homepage: <https://journals.ai-mrc.com/finanomics> Journal of Economic and Financial Studies* 1, no. 7 (July 2025): 323–29.

mysticism. Third, it expands the application of hermeneutics by integrating *Verstehen* and *Erklären* into ethnographic inquiry, showing how philosophical interpretation can illuminate the lived continuity of religious meaning across temporal and cultural contexts. Ultimately, the study reveals that *zuhd* within the Tablighi Jamaat represents a living hermeneutic tradition—a continuous dialogue between history, ethics, and personal experience.

This research demonstrates that the practice of asceticism within the Tablighi Jamaat in Palu, Indonesia, not only reflects ascetic discipline but is also an integral part of a broader spiritual experience. Through the application of Wilhelm Dilthey's hermeneutical framework, it is found that practices such as khuruj (da'wah journey), apoliticality, and simplicity in the daily lives of Tablighi Jamaat members are expressions of a hermeneutical process that combines inner understanding (*verstehen*) and contextual explanation (*erklären*). In this context, *verstehen* helps us understand the subjective meanings inherent in the actions of Tablighi Jamaat members, who view khuruj as a "training of the soul" that brings them closer to God. Through this understanding, we can see that the practice of asceticism is not merely a renunciation of the material world but also a means to achieve deeper spiritual purification.

The application of *erklären* in this research allows us to situate the practice within a broader historical and social context, particularly in relation to the legacy of Chishtiyya Sufism. The ethos instilled in the Tablighi Jamaat, such as apoliticality and humility, reflects continuity with the principles taught by the Chishtiyya order, which prioritizes devotion to God and service to others without political involvement. Therefore, the application of Dilthey's theory not only enriches our understanding of the inner experiences of Tablighi Jamaat members but also connects them to the broader Sufi tradition and facilitates an understanding of the social and cultural dynamics that shape this practice.

However, it is important to note that the interpretations generated in this study are not independent of the researcher's position. As a researcher with a background in Islam and Sufism, this position potentially influences how I interpret the data obtained. In this case, the researcher tends to view apoliticality in the Tablighi Jamaat not simply as a withdrawal from politics, but as a deeper form of self-restraint aimed at maintaining spiritual purity. This position, informed by an understanding of Sufi ethics, can enrich this analysis with a critical dimension regarding larger social and political structures. However, this interpretation may not fully reflect the perspectives of participants who view this apoliticality as a purely spiritual choice, without considering critiques of political structures.

While the researcher strives to maintain objectivity in following a qualitative methodology, she recognizes that an understanding of hermeneutical theory and Sufism can influence how the data is read. Therefore, she strives to remain open to other possible interpretations that may emerge from the participants' lived experiences. With this awareness, she strives to ensure that the analysis presented remains balanced and reflects the participants' experiences as they experienced them.

Overall, the relationship between Dilthey's hermeneutical theory and the data obtained through interviews and field observations suggests that the practice of asceticism within the Tablighi Jamaat is more than simply isolated personal asceticism. It represents a dynamic interaction between the individual's inner experience and the larger social structure. Through a hermeneutical approach, it is possible to understand that asceticism within the Tablighi Jamaat reflects not only an outward act but also a process of internalizing spiritual values connected to the Sufi tradition, which continues to adapt to modern social and cultural contexts. Thus, Dilthey's hermeneutics provides new insights into viewing this spiritual practice as an ongoing dialogue between the inner and outer dimensions of contemporary religious life.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the zuhd practices of the Tablighi Jamaat in Palu, Indonesia, represent a living form of Sufism that integrates ascetic discipline, ethical endurance, and communal humility into everyday life. Through Dilthey's hermeneutical framework, zuhd emerges not merely as renunciation but as a mode of understanding and interpreting existence as a continuous dialogue between inner experience (*verstehen*) and social expression (*erklären*). Practices such as *khuruj fi sabilillah*, simplicity, and apoliticism constitute interpretive acts through which believers translate spiritual ideals into lived ethics. These embodied disciplines reflect the genealogical continuity of Chishtiyya Sufism, rearticulated within a reformist structure that values sincerity (*ikhlas*), endurance (*tahammul*), and service (*khidmah*) as the essence of faith.

The findings affirm that the Tablighi Jamaat's spirituality is not a rupture from Sufi heritage but a reinterpretation of classical ethics in modern religious life. By uniting Dilthey's philosophy of understanding with ethnographic insight, this research contributes to a broader hermeneutics of Islamic asceticism—demonstrating that faith is preserved through practice, and meaning through simplicity. Ultimately, zuhd in the Tablighi Jamaat signifies a hermeneutics of simplicity and humility, where detachment becomes devotion, and service becomes the living expression of divine remembrance in the contemporary Muslim world.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is a hermeneutical understanding of Islamic asceticism, particularly in the context of the Tablighi Jamaat movement, which involves applying Dilthey's hermeneutical framework to interpret the practice of asceticism as a dynamic inner experience connected to historical and social contexts. This study develops a model of understanding *verstehen* and *erklären* in the study of contemporary Sufism, showing that asceticism is not merely a solitary ascetic practice, but also a social expression that influences collective interactions within the community. By integrating Dilthey's concepts, this study opens up new avenues for viewing spiritual practices within transnational Islamic movements, where the tension between the inner and outer dimensions can be interpreted as a way to draw closer to God and build more harmonious social relationships. This study also contributes to the literature on Islamic hermeneutics by introducing a new perspective on how hermeneutical theory can be used to understand spiritual practices that are alive and developing in modern Muslim societies.

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