Semantic Formation in the Miracle of Abdul Qadir al-Jilani

التشكّل الدلالي في كرامة عبد القادر الجيلاني

Taoufik MESSADIA *(1)
[1] University of Constantine 1/Mentouri Brothers
messadia.toufik@umc.edu.dz
Khadidja KOUICEM (2)
[2] University of Constantine 1/Mentouri Brothers
khadidja.kouicem@umc.edu.dz

submission date: 01/01/2026 acceptance date: 09/09/2026 published date 15/09/2026

******

Abstract:
This study delves into the dynamics by which meaning unfolds in Sufi discourse, through an examination of the miracle "Karamah" of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani as a model where the spiritual and the narrative dimensions intersect. Adopting a semiotic approach, the study examines how the narrative discourse moves from the verbal to the semantic level, revealing the underlying structure that transforms a miraculous event into an open field of interpretation, founded on linguistic deviation and symbolic density, and thus highlighting the essence of Sufism as a form of both spiritual and semantic knowledge. The study concludes that the Sufi Karama extends beyond its miraculous aspect to constitute a meaningful and symbolic structure. The semiotic analysis reveals a tension between opposing values, while the semiotic square reveals a semantic progression from loss to revelation and from disorder to order. Sainthood, thus, emerges as an active force in restoring balance and harmony between the human being, the world, and the unseen, which reflects the Sufi vision of existence based on the principle of unity.

***Key words**:* Miracle (Karamah), Sufism, Spiritual experience, Narrative form, Semiotic analysis, Abd al-Qadir al-Jjlani

ملخص باللغة العربية:

يبحث هذا العمل في آليات تشكّل الدلالة داخل الخطاب الصوفي، من خلال دراسة كرامة عبد القادر الجيلاني بوصفها نموذجاً تتقاطع فيه التجربة الروحية مع التعبير السردي. بحيث يستند التحليل على المقاربة السيميائية التي ترصد انتقال الخطاب من مستوى اللفظي إلى المستوى الدلالي، كاشفاً في ذلك عن البنية الخفية التي تُحوّل الحدث العجائبي إلى فضاء تأويلي مفتوح يتأسّس على الانزياح اللغوي والتكثيف الرمزي في سبيل الكشف عن جوهر التصوف كمعرفة روحية ودلالية في آن. وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى أن الكرامة الصوفية تتجاوز بعدها العجائبي لتشكل بنية دلالية ورمزية، يكشف تحليلها السيميائي عن صراع بين قيم متقابلة، كما أظهر المربع السيميائي أن بنية الكرامة تقوم على مسار دلالي ينتقل من الفقد إلى الكشف، ومن الفوضى إلى النظام، بما يجعل الولاية عنصرا فاعلا في استعادة التوازن والانسجام بين الإنسان والعالم والغيب، ويبرز الرؤية الصوفية للوجود القائمة على التوحيد

الكلمات المفتاحية: الكرامة، التصوف، التجربة، السرد، السيميائية، عبد القادر الجيلاني

Introduction

The Sufi experience is rooted as a spiritual domain deeply embedded in history and intimately connected to human existence as an anthropological dimension. Thus, any attempt to define this phenomenon precisely and comprehensively faces significant challenges, rendering efforts in this regard risk diminishing the value of a vibrant and exceptional experience whose meanings exceed the bounds of conventional and generalized definitions. Specifically, the Sufi experience, as Rashaq (n.d.) stated, has never belonged exclusively to any one culture or religion; in fact, it is a universal heritage that reflects humanity across ages and civilizations.

It would be inaccurate also to regard Sufism merely as the inner dimension of Islamic civilization; for despite the diversity of schools and movements that have appeared throughout the centuries of Islam, it has persisted as the vital conscience that breathes sincerity into the heart of the Muslim community. Drawing on its methods and principles, the Sufis established an ethical framework that defines how human beings relate to their Creator and to one another. According to Zaydan (1991, p. 9) this framework rests on true morality and firm conviction, derived from the heart of spiritual values, founded on the belief that the inner self is what properly shapes the outward form.

Human beings are, by nature, driven toward knowledge and seek to understand the world around them and uncover the causes behind what they see. However, despite all the sciences and wisdom humanity has attained, the true essence of existence still eludes them, and so they remain in a state of wonder and uncertainty. Each time they sensed the tightening of the circle of doubt enclosing them, they turned desperately to knowledge and understanding, but still, they found no escape. Upon embracing the way of Sufism, however, they felt the circle begin to loosen. Hassan (2003, p. 19) explained that there are no steps taken in pursuit of truth whose ultimate goal and destination is not Sufism. For this reason, Sufism has been viewed as a phase in the evolution of human thought, or a mode of experience inherently difficult to define.

Because the Sufi experience constitutes an inner mode of life brimming with spiritual meanings and refined realities that transcend the bounds of ordinary human existence, it has, due to its particularity, required a distinctive linguistic mode that distinguishes it from conventional linguistic forms. Accordingly, some have viewed it as an obscure form of discourse described as a special mode of using language, as Tawfik (2006, p. 64) identified, and a unique pattern in constructing meaning, departing from the direct, singular, and limited signification toward an indirect meaning marked by multiplicity and implication.

Since the Sufi experience is a spiritual and contemplative journey that relies on spiritual discipline that seeks to uplift the human soul to the sphere of gnosis and to attain spiritual bliss that transcends all material and instinctual dimensions, the Sufis adopt diverse literary modes to express their inner visions. Some spoke through verse, others through prose; and among these, the karamah (miracle) was one of the artistic forms through which the Sufis expressed the movements and secrets of the human soul. Although the Sufi Karamah has been examined in many studies, few of them have approached it from a semiotic perspective, especially from the perspective of Greimas's model. The present study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by exploring the semantic and symbolic structure of the Karamah and the processes through which meaning is structured, using the Karamah of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani as a case study.

1. The Sufi Experience and the Horizons of Spirituality

Sufism undoubtedly represents one of the foundational components in shaping contemporary Arab thought, clearly influencing patterns of thought and behavior, irrespective of the varying responses it provokes, whether of acceptance, rejection, certainty or skepticism. On this basis, studies concerned with this prominent intellectual trend have not ceased and appear likely to continue. The diverse Sufi contributions, in particular, have offered abundant material and fertile ground for a wide array of literary achievement, both modern and contemporary. According to Kindi (2010, p. 43) literary figures and innovators have drawn on these resources through a range of creative approaches, making Sufi components an essential part of the structure of modern literary works. In certain works, these elements have become a central feature thoughtfully integrated to reflect the author's distinctive vision.

Kindi (2010, pp. 43-4) further clarified that despite its widespread and prominence, and despite its importance and high standing, the term Sufism stands as one of the key terms in Islamic heritage whose meaning is continually revisited due to its association with diverse concepts. Reviewing certain linguistic works and classic Sufi writings, this term has been attributed at times to wool (ṣuf), worn by early ascetics, others have linked it to the veranda (ṣuffah), while at other times it has been connected to purity (ṣafa), or ṣufanah, among other linguistic derivations. Al-Kalabadhi (1980, pp. 28-9) mentioned these differing views, supporting that the Sufis were so named for the purity of their hearts and the sincerity of their outward deeds. Some have said that the Sufi is the one whose dealings with God are sincere. Others said that they are so named because they occupy the foremost rank near to God. Some traced the name to their resemblance to the People of the Ṣuffah, while others said it comes from their woolen clothes. The following is an overview of these derivations:

Suf: Most Sufi scholars believe that the term Sufism comes from "Suf" or wool, which they regard as the clothing of prophets and the distinguishing sign of the saints. This connection with their simple clothing symbolizes

their withdrawal from worldly indulgence and their restraint from the desires to which the soul inclines; that is, they stay away from worldly comforts and devote their attention wholly to the matters of the Hereafter. This etymology is fitting: one speaks of Sufism "taṣawuf" because of wearing "suf"/wool, as one speaks of "taqammas" because of wearing "Kamis"/ shirt. Referring to their outward clothing also makes them easier to identify and better captures their defining qualities, (Al-Saharwardi, 1983, p. 59) because the wool itself reflects a quiet resolve toward asceticism and inner detachment (Shawqili, 1999, p. 8).

Ṣuffah: for Ibn al-Jawzi (1949, p. 161), the term "Sufism" is also traced back to a man called "Suffah" or (al-Ghawth ibn Marr), a pre-Islamic Arab who devoted himself entirely to God. Over time, people who shared his dedication and detachment from worldly concerns joined him, and they eventually earned the name Sufis. This is also what Arabic dictionaries and lexicons have addressed (Ibn Mandour, 1997, p. 80). As for the reason why Al-Ghawth ibn Mar came to be called a "Sufi," it lies in a story from his infancy where his mother had dedicated him to God and placed a piece of wool on his head. One hot day, she passed by and saw it had fallen off and he was lying peacefully. She then said, "My son has become nothing but wool" (Farukh, 1981, p. 23).

Safa: Some people, Saliba (1994, p. 23) explained, link the origin of the term Sufi to purity (ṣafaa), because the Sufi is a person whose heart is purified by turning away from desire and devoting himself entirely to the remembrance of God. This derivation, however, cannot be sustained linguistically because the word that came from ṣafaa (purity) is ṣafawi, not ṣufi.

Al-Ṣuffa: The term "Al-Ṣuffa" in its Islamic sense refers to the shaded veranda that the Prophet (peace be upon him) established next to the Prophet's Mosque for the poor Emigrants who had no relatives, no shelter, and no guardian (Al-Ḍari, 2002, p. 35). Thus, the Ṣuffa served as a refuge where the Prophet hosted those who were homeless or without family. This explanation is also unsound linguistically, because the Arabic derivative from ṣuffa would be ṣuffi (صُفِّي), not ṣufi (صُوفِي).

Al-Saff al-awwal (the first raw): according to another view, Sufism comes from the first row, because the Sufis are believed to stand always in the foremost row in the presence of God. Again, this interpretation does not fit linguistically, since the adjective from ṣaff is ṣaffi, not ṣufi. (Al-Ashi, 2003, p. 45)

Greek Sophia: others suggest that Sufism takes its name from the Greek word Sophia, which means "wisdom" (Zaydi, 1966, p. 61). According to this view, the Greek S was replaced with the Arabic sad (ص). However, some scholars have rejected this view, pointing out that the Greek S is written in Arabic as sin (س), not sad (ص), and that there is no Aramaic term that could connect sophos in Greek with sufi in Arabic (Massignon, & Abd al-Razzaq, 1984, p. 26).

An examination of the different views reveals that most of the proposed etymologies for the word Sufi or Sufism (Tasawof) did not actually explore the origin of these terms. For Kindi (2010, pp. 44-7), they focused on defining its meaning or referring to the group associated with it. The only exception lies in the word "suf"/ "wool" which symbolizes humility, austerity, and voluntary renunciation of worldly pleasures and complete devotion to God. This interpretation is well-supported in Islamic tradition, where wool is known as the garment of prophets, a sign of virtue and simplicity, and thus became the symbol of ascetics and devotees who followed in their footsteps through the centuries.

Putting aside the various linguistic theories concerning the debated origin of the term, defining Sufism proves to be a challenging endeavor. Kindi (2010, p. 50) identified that the reason lies in the vast scholarly attention the subject has attracted, which results in more than a thousand definitions. Regardless of the accuracy of that number, this clearly demonstrates the undeniable fact of how complex and overlapping the term of Sufism has become. This complexity arises not only from its dynamic and elusive nature, but also from the variety of sources from which Sufis derived their mystical and experiential insights in their quest for pure inner purification and union with the Absolute, beyond the constraints of the ego.

Since Sufism represents a personal and experiential path, Zadadika (2008, p. 91) stated that its foundation lies in giving supremacy to the spirit over the body, and of the heart over the senses. The spirit is regarded as the true source of knowledge, and the Sufi exerts every effort to attain the depths of this spirit, which surpasses any other force in existence. In doing so, he endures various trials and hardships in pursuit of this goal. Zadadika added that to attain such a state, the Sufi must keep away as much as possible from the physical and sensory world. This principle is common to all forms of mystical knowledge, whether termed unveiling, gnosis, illumination, or any other name given by different cultures. The intellect, being dependent on the senses, is bound to the body, whereas spiritual knowledge proceeds from the soul, which transcends reason and is prior to the physical form.

It is worth pointing out that the priority of the spirit over the body is the core principle of Sufism. Based on this precedence, Jawdah (2006, pp. 136-7) indicated that sufis maintain that human beings possess a supernatural cognitive potential that remains in a state of latency. This capacity remains only potential when one follows the Sufi path and cleanses the heart entirely. This possibility rests on the belief that higher spirit belongs to the world of divine lights. If a person were able to distance himself from the impulses of the animal soul and the constraints of the body, he would be able to reconnect with that world and become a vessel for inspiration and spiritual unveiling.

From this vantage point, any attempt to offer a precise definition to Sufism or capture its full scope becomes exceedingly difficult. Jawdah (2006, pp. 154-5) added that this term, like many others, has undergone continuous historical growth, shaped by different cultural and spiritual factors that gradually distanced it from its original meaning and granted it new meanings while discarding older ones that once formed part of its semantic field. In the Arab-Islamic context, the word tasawuf originally referred to deep asceticism. Over time, however, it came to mean a unique, personal stance in the spiritual sphere, and ultimately became linked to a distinct approach to knowledge and existence. In this way, the concept evolved in step with the historical development of Sufism.

The earliest phase of Sufism corresponds to a person's deep faith to the foundations of religious devotion. In response to this deep faith, Zadadika (2008, p. 59) reported that the Sufi abandons everything that distracts him and embarks on a long and demanding journey of inner struggle, fighting desire and resisting temptation. He gradually trains himself to live with the least possible, practicing asceticism and detaching from worldly ornaments and comforts. This life style relies on austerity and hardship, accompanied by practices such as prayer, fasting, Quranic recitation, hunger, night vigils, and remembrance. Through these practices, the physical aspect weakens while the spiritual aspect gains power. It is a process of subjecting the body to the soul in the pursuit of moral perfection and the knowledge of the Divine essence.

This stage, which marks the initial step of the Sufi path, is only the starting point of spiritual levels that the seeker gradually ascends, and where his soul becomes purified. He starts with humility and giving up all forms of showiness, then turns away from worldly pleasures while persisting in worship. At the height of this journey comes the second stage, when the seeker, Zadadika (2008, p. 56), indicated, is overtaken by a profound love of God that brings about a state of spiritual intoxication, where awareness fades, and he does not return to himself until he reaches his long-sought goal: the vision and witnessing of God.

However, this Sufi view, rooted in asceticism and divine love, soon evolved to form a third stage in the history of Sufism, granting it a more complex metaphysical dimension. According to Zadadika (2008, p. 61), at this point, Sufis went beyond the early central concerns of asceticism, repentance, and the love of God, and established a new concept of union or "arrival". It is the quest for an immediate bond with God that transcends simple commands and prohibitions, and strives for the seeker's attributes to melt away in the attributes of the Divine. In this sense, the "separation of union" is the appearance of multiplicity within unity and a sense of distance from God, whereas the "completion of union" is the return to closeness, where multiplicity is gathered into unity once again, just as it was in eternity.

Given the stages through which Sufism has evolved, it becomes impossible to settle on a single and clear-cut definition of it. The Sufi experience, as Abd al-Darwish (2009, p. 227) stated, manifests in disparate forms and multiple modes; it is a deeply personal journey that tends to attract only a few rare souls among religious communities. Its essence is inherently inward, grounded in psychological state and emotional stance rather than a logical system like philosophy, theology, or law. It cannot easily be expressed in exact terms, as the Sufi is mainly concerned with conveying the essence of the experience he undergoes, and language, no matter how accurate it is, fails to transmit the true depth of that experience.

The legitimacy of scholarly disagreement over a unified definition of Sufism is further reinforced by its inherently fluid nature; it has no stable identity. For Abd al- Darwich (2009, p. 203), sufism, by its very nature, is a living experience that grows and transforms as the Sufi upward through the phases of spiritual growth. Because each phase brings with it evolving psychological states, the experience becomes richer and takes on different forms. This naturally leads to different expressions and understandings of it. Accordingly, the Sufi experience, as explained by Badr (2010, p. 8), unveils its unique space for discovering truth: the inner emotional and intuitive realm of a person. It manifests through intuitive intent, direct vision, or inner insight that meets the truth head-on when it appears within the soul and fuses with it. This stands in contrast to the indirect knowledge of rational thought, which reaches truth only step by step, through its outward manifestations and through what the senses can pick up.

In his spiritual experience, Badr (2010, p. 10) added that the Sufi rises above the world of the unseen and unites with the Truth, reaching the ultimate stage of self-annihilation in divine unity. At this point, he feels as if he speaks for the Truth itself, in a kind of living exchange between the human soul and the Divine. In this state, he speaks of the invisible as it truly is, and of the absolute as it truly is. From here arises the need to approach the Sufi experience through its symbolic meanings. The Sufi resorts to symbolic interpretation, especially in moments of ecstatic expressions, where the whole world is seen as a set of signs that reflect his deep and sometimes mysterious experiences. Because of this, Sufi language steps

beyond the ordinary linguistic horizons, relying on subtle hints rather than explicit formulations, symbolizing the Sufi's inner states and struggles in a form full of living abstraction.

What the Sufi experiences, therefore, is a move from a literal adherence to faith, understood as rules and rituals, toward a deeper internalization of these elements within the heart and consciousness. Faith thereby shifts from the realm of the outward to that of the inward. Badr (2010, p. 7) supported that the mystical experience reveals a harmony between the exterior and the interior, and builds a bond between the self and what it seeks. In this union, the human experience becomes whole, which is a truth emphasized repeatedly in the Quran.

2. Sufi Miracles and the Shaping of Narrative Form

The Sufi path mirrors a continuous movement between the dualities of earth and heaven, matter and spirit, the human and the divine, clay and light, and the lower and higher worlds. It is a gradual ascent from one level to another, after which the seeker returns to the essence of humanity. In this dance of opposites, the Sufi steps beyond self-boundaries to apprehend the world, and transgresses worldly limits to grasp the self, thus harmonizing all dimensions beneath an exalted ideal and a constant light whose radiance never fades.

Staying faithful to its inner meaning, Sufism can be seen as a symbolic voyage of the spirit, where the seeker purifies himself from earthly attachments and rises through spheres of the soul and the universe to reach his Creator. According to Badr (2010, p. 20), this ascent is fulfilled only when the seeker follows a spiritual path, built upon subduing desires, restraining the cravings of the self, and engaging in disciplines formulated and structured into what the Sufis called the path. At the summit of this path, the seeker encounters what he longs for and gains access to what remains hidden from others.

The manifestations of beauty and majesty that unfold before the Sufi in his spiritual world remain beyond the reach of expression, for they admit neither limit nor containment; they are wholly spiritual in nature. He

therefore turns to the world of sense, drawing upon its imagery to approximate those meanings, though he is scarcely able to convey these spiritual images to the minds of others (Badr, 2010, p. 10). What he can recount, however, is the journey itself with its scenes and representations. This is why, Settar (2003, p. 50) stated, Sufi writings take on the quality of texts bearing an artistic identity of their own, which built on direct narration. This serves as a tool of suspense and engagement whether the events are grounded in reality or imagination.

Sufi authors broadened the expressive potential of language, exploiting every form it allowed to reproduce, represent, or model reality and experience, whatever their origin. According to Bellala (2001, p. 20), this led them to generate a system of varied textual types such as poetry, narratives, supplications, and reports governed by their own internal rules and patterns. All of this was in service of a single quest: to articulate their experiential communion with God, which is emotional, cognitive, and intrinsically linked to the act of writing and artistic creation. Perhaps the aim of the Sufi in this kind of discourse is that he operates as the primary agent guiding the narrative. He becomes the one who sets the text's progression, reflecting the same dynamic path he experiences in the reality he lives or imagines (Bellala, 2001, p. 168).

Given the specificity of its spiritual foundations, the Sufi experience is a world closed upon itself. When it seeks expression through narrative, the reader is confronted with ever-changing stories that reflect the evolving nature of the experience. Awad (2005, p. 283) explained that the Sufi only voices his insights after he has merged with the truth he is pursuing, becoming identical with his own knowledge in both description and judgment. His speech, therefore, stems from inner tasting or a lived experience, not abstract thought. This is what renders Sufi narratives exceptionally fertile and rich in meaning.

Sufi narratives differ significantly from the conventional narrative structures found in novels or short fiction. Sufi narration, at its core, recounts the mystic's "major story," and what the narrator records are only hints and symbols that compress the experience or parts of it (Awad, 2005,

284). Consequently, Sufi narrative is characterized by conciseness, density, and symbolic expression, as it expresses a divine knowledge and is marked by a wondrous and supernatural dimension that transcends the laws of nature.

The very occurrence of the extraordinary that transcends the natural order in the Sufi experience signals the inevitability of narrative. For Al-Wakil (1998, p. 13) any text that incorporates such an event becomes open to narration, because a supernatural incident necessarily unsettles a previous balance, which is an essential feature of what constitutes a narrative.

Seeking to ground the emergence of narrative as a genre in Sufi heritage, one must look at a range of early experiences that leaned naturally toward storytelling. Foremost among these are the tales of Sufi miracles, which constitute a unique and recognizable type of narrative in Arabic literature. A miracle (Karamah), according to Al-Ghiṭani (1985, p. 90), is an event that breaks the ordinary course of nature. It transcends the constraints of the real world through feats such as crossing great distances instantly, moving outside the limits of time, communicating with objects, or engaging with different kinds of beings. For Sufis, the Karamah represents one of the highest forms of symbolic articulation within Sufi experience (Al-Qushayri, 2007). It compresses rich inner experiences and conveys profound human concerns. As a narrative form, it is like a miniature tale: concise, intense, and slender, yet vast in meaning, swift and striking.

A Karamah is not classified as a miracle, because miracles are attributed solely to prophets and messengers. Karamah, as Al-Ghitani (1985, p. 91) specified, remains situated within the realm of human potential, granted to those endowed with the capability and spiritual rank of sainthood (walayah). According to Al-Manufi (1967, p. 105) the Karamah of a saint is a secondary station compared to the miracle of a prophet, following it immediately in spiritual hierarchy. The prophetic miracle is inherently linked to challenge, inviting observers to faith by breaking the natural order, such as Muhammad’s Isra, Moses’s parting of the sea, Jesus’s raising of the dead, and so on. As for the Prophet Muhammad’s greatest miracle, peace be upon him, is that the Quran was revealed to him although he was unlettered.

Viewed from this angle, a Karamah is a symbolic narrative event that appears through the actions of saints to demonstrate the realization of something contrary to natural laws. It signifies an event which is unfamiliar to people and which surpasses what is normally expected in the natural order. Abd al-Mawla (2005, p. 41) stated that karamah manifestations might include walking across water, conversing with animals or inanimate beings, disclosing hidden truths, traveling great distances in remarkably short times, flying, suspending or altering movement, or communicating with birds and other creatures. These acts clearly defy what is considered normal.

As the saintly miracle (Karamah) falls within the scope of narrative art, it inherently contains a story. From this perspective, Al-Ghanduri, (2006, p. 89) explained that the Sufi Karamah becomes a literary form carrying two intertwined dimensions: a historical dimension, reflected in the textual space occupied by the chain of transmission preceding the extraordinary events; and an artistic dimension shaped by diverse narrative forms, ranging from realism to fantasy. Given that the aim focuses more on the narrative core than on the chain of transmission (isnad) itself, this study approaches the Karamah as an independent narrative unit. It seeks to shed light on its artistic and aesthetic uniqueness by exploring the deeper structures that shape its narrative and semantic patterns, thereby placing it within its social and cultural framework and within the broader field of narrative literature.

3. The Miracle “Karamah” of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani and its Semantic Formation

A thoughtful examination of Sufi miracle traditions reveals that nearly all of them exhibit clear narrative features. Since the semiotic-narrative method is dedicated to examining how meaning is organized within narrative texts, employing this framework to study the Sufi karamah is not only appropriate but offers valuable insight into their modes of signification. Such an analysis, according to Al-Abid (2008, p. 59) helps uncover the structures through which meaning is generated in this particular type of spiritual narrative. It is worth noting that adopting a semiotic framework for studying the Karamah is not a risky undertaking, but rather a methodological attempt to revisit traditional texts using contemporary

approaches, so long as these texts contain narrative features. Since the Karamah text functions as a narrative, it fully accommodates the analytical tools of narrative semiotics (Aḥmin, 2006, pp. 107-108)

The Karamah of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani was selected as a case study because of its rich semantic and symbolic content, along with a variety of of events and opposing values it brings together. This makes it possible to approach the Karamah from a semiotic perspective and explore how meaning is constructed, particularly in relation to Greimas's model. Given the diversity of hagiographic texts, one of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's wondrous accounts was specifically selected as cited by Al-Nabahani (1991, p. 203) in the Compendium of the Saints' Miracles. He recounts that "a man from Baghdad came pleading that the jinn had seized his daughter. The shaykh told him to go to a certain place, draw a circle, and repeat, 'In God's name, with Abd al-Qadir's intention. The man did exactly as instructed. Soon, groups of jinn began passing by, one after another, until their king finally appeared. He stopped at the edge of the circle and asked, 'what do you need?' The man told him about the girl. The king summoned the one who had taken her, returned her to him, and ordered the culprit executed. I said to him, 'I have never witnessed such readiness to obey a shaykh.' He replied, 'he watches the most rebellious among us from his own home, even when they are at the farthest corners of the earth, and they flee from his awe."

In line with the procedures of semiotic analysis, Alawi (2006, p. 116) indicated that the initial step is to examine the textual segments that constitute the narrative. Approaching the entire text as a single unit within a semiotic framework inevitably leads to ambiguity and conceptual interference. For this reason, segmenting the text becomes an essential methodological procedure in narrative semiotics. It provides the only method to understand the text and trace the evolution of its signification. Each narrative segment can stand on its own as an independent story, yet it can also merge into a broader narrative framework (Al-Abid, 2008, p. 60).

Upon scrutinizing the miracle narrative under analysis, three main sections clearly emerge:

- The introductory section stretches from the beginning of the narrative to the statement, “The man did exactly as instructed.” This section hints at the relationship that ties the man to the mystic ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Jilani.

- The second narrative segment begins with “The man did exactly as instructed” to “The king summoned the one who had taken her, returned her to him,” highlights the man’s compliance with al-Jilani’s instructions and his eventual recovery of his daughter from the jinn.

- The final section which starts at “and ordered the culprit executed,” reaches the end of the story. In this section, the jinn admits the commanding spiritual force and awe associated with Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani.

In narrative semiotics, the text is constructed through applying a generative pathway (*parcours génératif*) that sets out the layers through which meaning is produced. Meaning is conceivable only through such a process which begins at highly abstract levels composed of units governed by logical relations referring solely to themselves. This abstraction then unfolds into more tangible levels, where conceptual values turn into perceptible semantic ones manifested through human situations. At this stage, characters act, move, form friendships, and defend their interests according to a fixed canonical pattern composed of interdependent levels (Al-Abid, 2008, p. 108). In this sense, the narrative sequence represents, as Ben Afiya (2010, p. 112) showed, a shift from immanence to manifestation, that is, from the logical semantic structure of the generative model to the concrete narrative text.

Shifting from the discursively expressed structure to the intermediate space between immanence and manifestation calls for a mechanism that clarifies how the discursive and the narrative levels intersect, Al-Abid (2008, p. 68) mentioned. This procedure passes through a mediating level that links the immanent status of values to their modes of manifestation. This is essentially the narrative dimension, which connects the abstract to the tangible. At this stage, the relations indicated by the basic semantic structure are transformed into compositional processes that mark the first steps of narrative action. (Aḥmin, 2006, p. 108)

- At the surface narrative level, the text unfolds as a sequence of states (États) and transformations. According to Greimas, this shows how narrativity permeates all semiotic systems. States are associated with being (Être), while transformations relate to action and appearing (Paraître). This differentiation, in turn, presupposes two distinct types of narrative statements (Al-Abid, 2008, p. 68).

- A state utterance (énoncé d'état) reveals the subject's condition in relation to its object, indicating either a relation of conjunction or one of disjunction with the desired object (Al-Abid, 2008, p. 68).

- The action utterance (énoncé de faire), or the utterance of transformation, is what drives the change, moving the subject from conjunction to disjunction, or the opposite, depending on the dynamics of desire. This type of utterance necessarily entails an active subject who carries out the transformation (Aḥmin, 2006, p. 108).

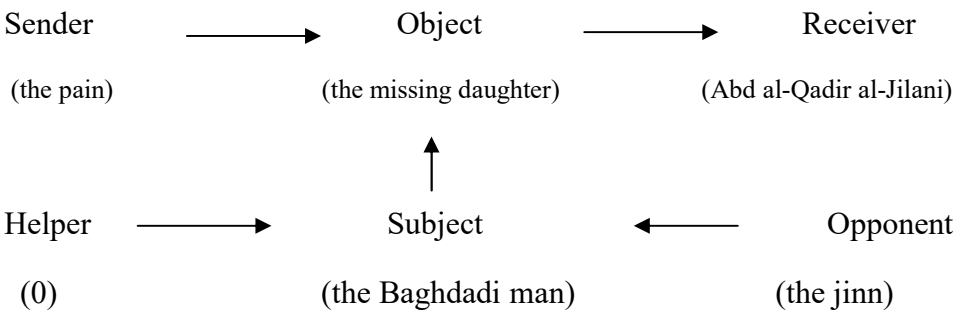
Greimas refers to the rationale governing states and transformations as the narrative program (programme narratif), which is anchored in the relation between the subject and the object and the shifts that either connect or separate them. The realization of this programme requires an operational subject (sujet opérateur) who performs the transformation (Al-Abid, 2008, p. 69).

Within this framework, Greimas asserts that the narrative utterance is defined through the relations established among the actants. The actant, he argues, is not something inherently present in the text but a constructed semantic unit delineated through its actantial figures. It is also tied to the narrative structures on the surface level and is identified as either the performer of the action or the one subjected to it. Characters in a text are therefore interpreted through the actantial roles attributed to them and through the relations they maintain with other characters. Greimas confines these roles to six actants: the sender, the receiver, the object, the subject, the helper, and the opponent. (Aḥmin, 2006, pp. 108-9)

When analyzing the selected narrative of the miracle of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, the actantial schema of the initial situation can be outlined as follows:

Figure 1

The Actantial Schema of the Initial Situation



From this actantial schema, it becomes clear that the subject (the Baghdadi man) is unable to reach the object (the missing daughter) in the initial scenario; in other words, he remains disconnected from the object.

The programme remains inactive until the subject establishes a connection with its object of value. Nevertheless, this stage serves as a preliminary phase within the narrative program, setting the groundwork for the core narrative to unfold through the attainment of the object of value. At this point, the subject becomes directly linked to its object, facilitated by the active subject's use of suitable actantial patterns.

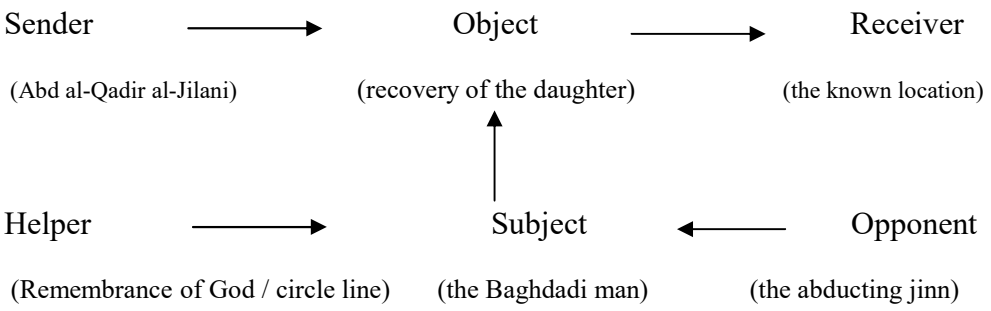
The shift from the suspended narrative program to the core narrative program involves a performance. For the operational subject to carry out this transformation, the latter must first be motivated by another actant, the sender (Destinateur), who convinces the actant to undertake the action; this motivational process referred to as manipulation. The operational subject must then possess the prerequisites for executing the action, defined in terms of modal values (modalités). Greimas identifies four key values: obligation to act (Devoir faire), ability to act (Pouvoir faire), knowledge of how to act (Savoir faire), and willingness to act (Vouloir faire). These

conditions and modal values together form what is called competence (Al-Abid, 2008, p. 69).

Based on this transformation, the core narrative program is presented as follows:

Figure 2:

The Core Narrative Program



Through this narrative program, the unfolding of events can be outlined as follows:

Manipulation (or the act of performing the action): the sender (Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani) convinces the subject (the Baghdadi man) to recover the daughter (the valued object) by directing him to a specific location, drawing a circle, and invoking God's name. Yet, in this narrative, the persuasion remains potential rather than actual, because it is embedded in the jurist's symbolic authority; the act of requesting alone implies the action will be carried out, without the subject's full personal conviction (Al-Abid, 2008, p. 71).

Competence (or the state of being able to act): persuasion and conviction are not sufficient to fulfill the desired goal; the subject must have the required competence, that is, the necessary conditions enabling the performance (Al-Abid, 2008, p. 71). These include:

- Willingness to act: the Baghdadi man genuinely wishes to retrieve his daughter. He carries within him both emotional and spiritual motivation.

- Ability to act: he can perform the action through the spiritual efficacy of God's name and Abd al-Qadir's name.

- Knowledge of how to act: he learns the procedure required to perform the action from Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani.

- Obligation to act: the command issued by Abd al-Qadir makes the action compulsory.

Performance, also referred to as the act of being, is the third phase in the narrative schema. It represents the phase in which the transformation of state is concretely realized. Such realization requires an agent, the operational subject, who takes on the responsibility of making it happen. At this point, the narrative moves from the realm of potentiality to factual achievement.

Yet the realization of desire is never achieved effortlessly. The process is shaped by a dialectical structure inherent to the actantial model. Within this dialectic, a counter-program emerges, carried out by an antagonist operational subject whose role is to counter the primary program and complicate its fulfillment (Al-Abid, 2008, p. 71).

In this miracle narrative, the actual operational agent, the Baghdadi man, completes his mission of recovering the girl without any dialectical structure or opposing programme. This highlights the specificity of miraculous Sufi narratives, founded upon spiritual faith, remembrance of God, and the sincerity of Sufi sainthood.

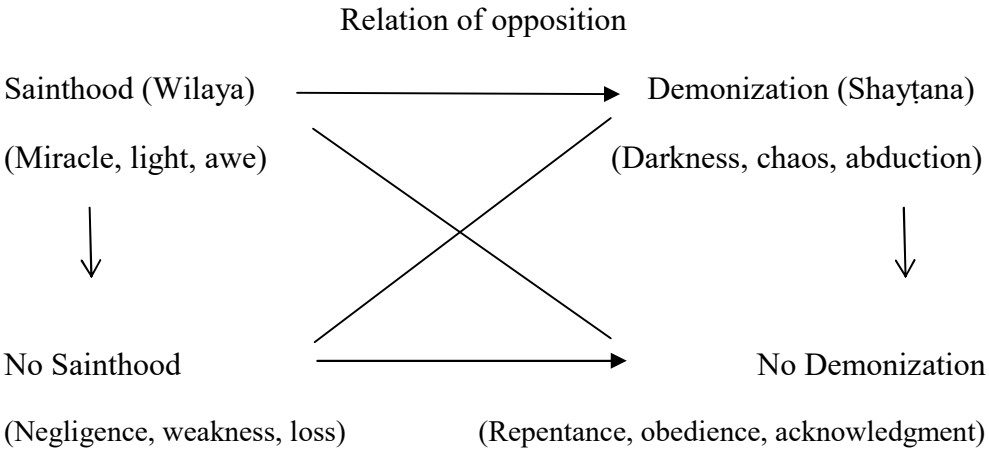
Sanction, or the judgment of the accomplished act, serves to evaluate the outcome of the narrative programme. This concept in the miracle narrative appears in two connected ways: the event sanction, seen in the recovery of the girl and the killing of the abducting jinn; and the value sanction, reflected in the recognition of the shaykh's authority as he shifts from an operative agent into a universal symbol of divine authority.

A close examination of the formation of this Karamah demonstrates that the core semantic mechanism shaping the production of such miraculous narratives is the affirmation of the miracle, and consequently the affirmation of sainthood. Based on Greimas's semiotic square, the deep semantic

structure underlying the karamah of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani is revealed, reflecting a dual struggle between sainthood and satanic forces, order and chaos, light and darkness, as represented in the diagram below:

Figure 3:

The Semantic Diagram Underlying the Karamah of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani



The application of the semiotic square reveals the nature of the relationships shaping the Sufi karamah of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani. The square rests on the fundamental binary of sainthood (wilaya) and demonization (shayṭana), set alongside the pair of non-sainthood and non-demonization. This structure is not merely formal; it shows the deeper conflict and meaning in the text. The miracle narrative does not portray a material struggle between a human and a Jinn, but rather stages a symbolic drama of oppositions: body and spirit, light and darkness, ignorance and knowledge, strength and weakness. Under this perspective, the Karamah constitutes an ontological and spiritual transformation, from loss to being, from estrangement from the light to union with it, made possible through the mediating force of sainthood, which restores balance to the universe. In other words, through Sufi sainthood, the Karamah reenacts the re-establishment of cosmic harmony between the human and the unseen.

Conclusion

The Sufi experience is essentially an inner spiritual and intellectual journey, through which the Sufi attempts to transcend the sensory world and reach ultimate truth. Its symbolic nature has shaped the ways in which this experience is expressed in Sufi writing, with the Karamah representing one of the forms that embody this experience. The analysis of this study shows that the Sufi Karamah has contributed to the development of a distinctive narrative form in Sufi literature. Its extraordinary events, characters, settings, and temporal dimensions, together with its reliance on symbolic representation, allow the spiritual experience to be represented through a narrative structure with distinctive artistic and semantic features. In this way, the Karamah provides insight into the Sufi view of the human being, the world, and existence.

The application of Greimas's semiotic approach to the Karamah of Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani shows that the Sufi narrative is not just a miraculous account but a semantic construction that stages a value-laden struggle between light and darkness, sainthood and demonization. The semiotic square indicates that the miracle is a movement from loss to epiphany, from disorder to order, guided by Wilaya which re-establishes harmony between the human being, the world, and the unseen. In this light, the miracle shifts from an extraordinary event into a symbolic discourse of a Sufi worldview, built on light, divine unity, and the restoration of cosmic balance.

References

1. Abd al-Darwish. (2009). Mulaḥadat minhajiya fi al-ṭasawuf al-muqaran (Methodological reflections on comparative sufism). *Al-Marifa Journal*, 48(553), 227–230.

2. Abd al-Mawla, M. (2005). Al-awliya wa al-karamat (The Saints and miracles). *Al-Ḥayat al-Thaqafiya Journal*, 30(161), 41.

3. Aḥmin, Ḥ. (2006). Al-Tashakkul al-dalali fi al-karama (Semantic formation in the miracle). In *Al-Karamat al-sufiya: Dirasa simiyaiya* (The Sufi miracles: A semiotic study). Rabat: Judur Publishing.

4. Al- Abid, A. M. (2008). *Mabaḥith fi al-simiyaiya* (*Studies in semiotics*). Casablanca, Morocco: Dar El Kirawiyin.

5. Al-Ashi, A. B. A. (2003). Al-ṭasawuf wa al-irfan (Sufism and gnosis). *Jarash lil-Buḥuth wa al-Dirasat Journal*, 7(2).

6. Alawi, Ḥ. (2006). Al-Khiṭab al-karamati wa tafil al-aliyat al-simiyaiyya (Karamah discourse and the activation of semiotic mechanisms). In *Al-Karamat al-sufiyya: Dirasa simiyaiya* (*The Sufi miracles: A semiotic study*). Rabat: Judur Publishing.

7. Al-Ḍari, Ḥ. S. (2002). Ahl al-ṣifa wa dawruhum fi al-Islam (The people of the Ṣuffa and their role in Islam. *Afaq al-Thaqafa wa Al-Turath Journal*, 10(39).

8. Al-Ghanduri, A. W. (2006). Al-masar al-sardi wa bina' al-dalalah fi al-karamah (Narrative progression and the construction of meaning in Karamah) In *Al-karamat al-sufiya: Dirasa simiyaiya* (*Sufi miracles: A semiotic study*). Rabat: Judur Publishing.

9. Al-Ghiṭani, J. (1985). Karamat al-awliya (The miracles of the saints). *Al-Hilal Journal*, Cairo, June.

10. Al-Kalabadhi. (1980). *Al-Taaruf li-madhhab ahl al-tasawuf* (*An inquiry into the doctrine of the Sufis*) (M. A. al-Nawawi, Ed.) Cairo, Egypt: Al-Kulliyat al-Azhariya Library.

11. Al-Manufi, M. A. H. (1967). *Jumhurat al-awliya wa aalam Ahl al-Ṭasawuf* (*A compendium of the saints and the leading figures of Sufism*). Beirut: Al-Ḥalabi Publishing.

12. Al-Nabahani. (1991). *Jami karamat al-Awliya* (*Compendium of the miracles of the saints*). Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-Thaqafiya.

13. Al-Qushayri, Abd al-Karim ibn Hawazin. (2007). *Al-Risala al-Qushayriyya fī ʿilm al-tasawwuf (Al-Qushayri's epistle on Sufism*) (A. D. Knysh, Trans.). Garnet Publishing.

14. Al-Saharwardi. (1983). *Awarif al-maarif* (*The gifts of gnosis*). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani.

15. Al-Wakil, S. (1998). *Taḥlil al-naṣ al-sardi: Maarij Ibn Arabi namudhajan* (*Analyzing the narrative text: Ibn Arabi's Maarij as a model*). Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization.

16. Awad, A. Y. (2005). *Al-quud fi thuqb al-ibrah: Mudkhal li-dirasat sard al-talqi inda al-Nifri* (*Sitting in the eye of the needle: An introduction to the narrative of reception in al-Niffari*). Yarmouk University Publications, 23(2), 283–284.

17. Badr, A. M. (2010). *Al-Tawil al-ramzi li-al-shaṭaḥat al-ṣufiya* (*The symbolic interpretation of sufi ecstatic utterances*). Cairo: Dar Miṣr al-Maḥrusa.

18. Bellala, A. (2001). *Al-harakiya al-tawaṣuliya fi al-khiṭab al-Sufi* (*Communicative dynamics in Sufi discourse*). Damascus: Union of Arab Writers Publications.

19. Ben Afiya, W. (2010). Al-Nadariya al-sardiya al-Greimasiya bayna al-tandir wa al-ijra (Greimasian narrative theory between theory and practice). *Social and Human Sciences Journal*, 22, 112.

20. Farukh, U. (1981). *Al-ṭassawuf fi al-islam* (*Sufism in Islam*). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi.

21. Hassan, A. Ḥ. (2003). *Al-ṭasawuf fi al-shiir al-Arabi* (*Sufism in Arabic poetry*). Cairo, Egypt: Al-Adab Library.

22. Ibn al-Jawzi. (1368/1949). *Talbis iblis* (*The devil's deception*). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiya.

23. Ibn Mandur. (1997). *Lissan al Arab* (*The tongue of Arabs*). Beirut, Lebanon : Dar Sadir.

24. Jawdah, N. H. (2006). *Al-marifa al-ṣufiya* (*Sufism knowledge*) Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Hadi.

25. Kindi, M. A. (2010). *Fi lughah al-qasida al-sufiya* (*On the language of Sufi poetry*). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid al-Muttaḥid.

26. Massignon, & Abd al-Razzaq, M. (1984). *Dairat al-maarif al-islamiyya* (*The Islamic encyclopedia*). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani.

27. Rashaq, A. (n.d.). *Al-tajriba al-sufiya fi hudud al-lugha: Min tajribet al lugha ila tejribet al-lugua* (*Sufi experience at the threshold of language: From the language of experience to the experience of language*). Retrieved from https://www.mominoun.com.

28. Saliba, J. (1994). *Al-Muajam al-falsafi* (*The philosophical dictionary*). Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Sharikah al-Alamiya lil-Kitab.

29. Settar, N. (2003). *Bunyat al-sard fi al-qas al-ṣufi* (*The narrative structure of Sufi narratives*). Damascus: Union of Arab Writers Publications.

30. Shawqili, J. (1999). *Al-tasawuf wa al-mutaṣawwifa* (*Sufism and the sufis*). Casablanca, Morocco: Ifriqiya al-Sharq.

31. Tawfiq, K. (2007). Al-talaqi fi al-shiir al-ṣufi (Reception in Sufi poetry). *Alamat Journal*, 28.

32. Zadadika, S. (2008). *Al-haqiqa wa al-sarab kiraa fi al bued el sufi ind Adounis marjaa wa mumarasseten* (*Truth and mirage: Reading the Sufi dimension in Adonis as theory and practice*). Algeria/Lebanon: Manshurat al-Ikhtilaf wa al-Dar al- Arabiya lil-Ulum.

33. Zaydan, Y. M. T. (1991). *Al-ṭariq al-Sufi wa furue al-qadiriya bi-miṣr* (*The Sufi path and the Qadiriya branches in Egypt*). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Jil.

34. Zaydi, S. (1966). *Al-Munqidh min al-dalal* (*Deliverer from misguidance*). Al-Kitab al-Arabi, 5(30)..