

AN ANALYSIS OF THE MEANING OF THE *SHI'R ṢALAWĀT SIMṬ AL-DURAR* BY ḤABĪB 'ALĪ IBN MUḤAMMAD AL-ḤABSHĪ IN THE SEMIOTIC STUDY OF RIFFATERE

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

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meaning.

Ṣalawāt is a religious form of expression in the Islamic world that serves as a form of prayer and praising the prophet Muhammad and a tool of preaching and cultural identification. One of the most influential texts of the *ṣalawāt Simṭ al-Durar* of Ḥabīb 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad Al-Ḥabshī, but the symbolic expressions contained are usually not fully interpreted. The paper uses qualitative textual analysis to apply the Riffaterre semiotic theory developed by Michael Riffaterre which is based on the idea of indirect expression by displacement, distortion and meaning creation. The *Simṭ al-Durar* manuscript was used as primary sources with the support of the *sharḥ* literature, scholarly research, and interviews with religious leaders. The symbols that are identified in the analysis include light (*nūr*), which means prophetic guidance, pearls and jewels, which is a symbol of spiritual purity, fragrance, which is a blessing of God, and journey, which is the spiritual development of the believer. These symbols are multilayered theological and devotional meanings not to be interpreted literally. The results indicate that *Simṭ al-Durar* is an enriched semiotic text that reinforces religious tradition and gives communal spiritual awareness.

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الكلمات المفتاحية:
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المخلص

الصلوات هي شكل من أشكال التعبير الديني في العالم الإسلامي، وهي بمثابة الصلاة ومدح للنبي محمد وأداة للوعظ والهوية الثقافية. ومن أكثر نصوص الصلوات تأثيراً نص "سِمْطُ الدُرَر" لحبيب علي بن محمد الحبشي، لكن التعبيرات الرمزية الواردة فيه لا تُفسر عادةً بشكل كامل. تستخدم هذه الورقة التحليل النصي النوعي لتطبيق نظرية السيميائية التي طورها مايكل ريفاتير، والتي تستند إلى فكرة التعبير غير المباشر عن طريق الإزاحة والتشويه وخلق المعنى. تم استخدام مخطوطة "سِمْطُ الدُرَر" كمصدر أساسي، مع دعم من الأدب الشرعي والبحوث العلمية والمقابلات مع القادة الدينيين. تشمل الرموز التي تم تحديدها في التحليل النور، الذي يعني الإرشاد النبوي، واللالئ والمجوهرات، التي هي رمز للنقاء الروحي، والعطر، الذي هو نعمة من الله، والرحلة، التي هي التطور الروحي للمؤمن. هذه الرموز هي معاني لاهوتية وعبادية متعددة الطبقات لا يجب تفسيرها حرفياً. تشير النتائج إلى أن سِمْطُ الدُرَر هو نص سيميائي غني يعزز التقاليد الدينية ويمنح الوعي الروحي الجماعي

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INTRODUCTION

In the treasury of Islamic tradition, *Ṣalawāt* is not only regarded as a form of

supplication and praise for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), but also holds an important position as a medium of *da'wah*, a means of spirituality, and a cultural expression of the Muslim community. The recitation of *ṣalawāt* has become an inherent part of the religious life of Muslims across the world, including in Yemen (Yuhmansyah et al, 2024). One of the monumental works that occupies a special place in the tradition of *ṣalawāt* recitation is *Simṭ al-Durar* or “The String of Pearls,” composed by the great scholar Ḥabīb ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad Al-Ḥabshī (1843–1915 CE). This text is widely recited in various *mawlid* gatherings and religious celebrations, and has been passed down through generations as a meaningful religious text.

The verses in *Simṭ al-Durar* not only contain praises for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) but are also composed with symbolic language rich in spiritual, ethical, and cultural meaning. This complex content makes *Simṭ al-Durar* not merely a reading text, but also a religious literary work that requires scholarly examination. Many of its messages cannot always be grasped literally, but instead demand deep interpretation to uncover the hidden meanings behind the words used (Ella et al., 2023). Semiotic studies provide a relevant theoretical framework for exploring the depth of meaning in religious texts. One of the influential figures in literary semiotics is Michael Riffaterre, who introduced key concepts such as indirect expression, displacing, distorting, and creating meaning.

According to Riffaterre, the meaning of a literary text often does not appear directly, but is conveyed implicitly through symbols, metaphors, and certain linguistic patterns. In this context, the symbol of light *nūr* often represents divine guidance and spiritual purity that cannot be understood literally but must be interpreted as a deeper indication of the Prophet’s sacred presence. Likewise, the symbol of journey signifies not merely physical movement but a metaphorical spiritual progression, reflecting the believer’s inner path toward closeness with God. Through these symbolic layers, the text communicates meanings beyond its surface structure, aligning with Riffaterre’s concept of indirect expression. With this approach, the reading of *Simṭ al-Durar* can reveal how the text conveys profound spiritual messages while simultaneously shaping the collective consciousness of Muslims regarding their love for the Prophet.

Ḥabīb ‘Alī did not merely compose a collection of praises; he created a spiritual and literary text that guides believers toward *ma‘rifah* (divine knowledge) and sincere love for the Prophet Muhammad. Each stanza carries symbolic layers that invite deeper interpretation beyond the literal meaning. For instance, the verse:

وَمَا مِنْ شَمْسٍ تَظْهَرُ إِلَّا مِنْ نُورٍ وَجْهِهِ

No sun rises except from the light of his face

Illustrates how the Prophet’s presence is symbolically described as the ultimate source of light and existence. From a Riffaterrian semiotic perspective, this line functions as a *displacing meaning* where the term “sun” is displaced from its literal sense and transformed into a symbol of divine illumination and guidance that emanates through the Prophet. Another example can be found in the verse:

وَبَدَتْ مِنْهُ الْأَنْوَارُ وَالْفَضْلُ وَالْكَرَمُ

From him radiate light, excellence and glory

This line expresses not only admiration but constructs the Prophet as the semiotic center the origin of all light (*anwār*), virtue, and grace. Through Riffaterre’s concept of

indirect expression, this verse encodes a theological message using metaphorical language: that the Prophet embodies the manifestation of divine attributes and functions as a mirror reflecting God's mercy upon creation (Waqfin et al., 2022). Furthermore, Ḥabīb 'Alī's verses often employ poetic imagery that requires interpretative decoding. According to Riffaterre, the meaning in poetry is usually indirect, conveyed through symbols that transcend grammatical or literal expression. In the following line:

فَصَلُّوا عَلَى مَنْ بِرَحْمَتِهِ غَاصَّتِ الْبَرَايَا فِي النُّعْمِ

So pray to him, by whose grace all creatures are immersed in pleasure

The act of sending blessings by saying *ṣallū 'alayhi* is not only a command but also a symbol of inner transformation. It calls upon believers to emulate the Prophet's merciful character, turning linguistic praise into an ethical and spiritual act (Agha, 2025). Through Riffaterre's theory of creating meaning, such language becomes a semiotic process that generates new layers of significance uniting devotion, emotion, and moral awareness.

The repetition of symbols such as *nūr* (light), *rahmah* (mercy), and *faḍl* (virtue) throughout *Simṭ al-Durar* serves as more than mere poetic ornamentation. These words form a semiotic network that reflects Qur'anic concepts, especially the idea of the Prophet as *rahmatan lil-'ālamīn* (a mercy to all the worlds). In Riffaterre's framework, this underlying concept can be identified as the hypogram, an implicit text that governs the surface meaning of the poem, shaping its structure and guiding its interpretation (Zahro, 2022). In the Islamic religious context, the recitation of *Simṭ al-Durar* functions not only as a religious ritual but also as a cultural expression of communal identity. During *mawlid* celebrations, the rhythmic chanting and symbolic invocation of light and mercy form a collective semiotic experience that unites the community in emotional and spiritual devotion to the Prophet.

Simṭ al-Durar is also a work that is important not only due to its religious aspect but due to its cultural entrenchment. Its recitation has taken a formal status in the communal practices of Yaman especially on the birthday of the Prophet (*mawlid*). In this way, the text serves socially and culturally on top of its devotional one. In this study, the verses of *Simṭ al-Durar* are viewed through the lens of the semiotic analysis of Riffaterre to analyze how the verses create two meanings: the direct message of the praise of the Prophet and the indirect messages of the verse that support the values of faith, morality, and religious identity of Muslim communities (Al-Hamimy, 2025).

Moreover, prior research to *Simṭ al-Durar* has attributed most of its work to theology, ritual or history of the same. Yuhmansyah et al. (2024) explored its place in the devotional life of Indonesians; Ella et al. (2023) analyzed the symbolic expressions in general and Agha (2025) emphasized its poetic form. The article by Azimah and Kusumawati (2020) explored the symbolism of light and the historical meaning of light in *mawlid* texts as a manifestation of spiritual awakening of society. Waqfin et al. (2022) investigated the role of religious symbols within Islamic poetry and demonstrated that such aspects like light, mercy, and glory are metaphors highlighting that the Prophet was the religious center of the community. In other researches, like in those by Dewi and Yani (2023) and Saehudin et al. (2022), the performative aspect of *mawlid* recitation in society is highlighted, especially the role in which the rhythm and chanting of prayers create religious experiences shared by a community. Research by Istiqlaliyah et al. (2025) and Ni'mah and Masyhud (2024) revealed that the relationship between *Simṭ al-Durar* and classical *mawlid* texts in the form of *Barzanjī* and *Dībā'ī* is due to the fact that the work of Ḥabīb 'Alī is an extension of the intertextual tradition that unites narrative, praise, and expressions of love to the Prophet. Yet, all those studies did not use a systematic semiotic

approach based on the framework of Riffaterre, in particular, with regard to the symbolic expressions like *nūr*, pearls, fragrance, and spiritual voyage. This gap is an analytical gap that is filled by the current study.

The current study provides a novelty as it uses the semiotic approach of Riffaterre to decipher the multifaceted symbolic meaning in *Simṭ al-Durar* and bring a more profound insight into the theological, literary and cultural aspects of *Simṭ al-Durar*. Light, pearls and jewels, fragrance among other symbols are discussed not literally but as a multidimensional metaphor that symbolizes prophetic guidance, spiritual cleanness and divine grace.

Through Riffaterre's semiotic analysis, this study aims to uncover how the verses of *Simṭ al-Durar* communicate layered meanings literal and symbolic that reinforce faith, moral values, and the sense of religious identity among Muslims. This approach reveals *Simṭ al-Durar* as both a work of sacred literature and a living text that embodies the synthesis of art, faith, and culture in the Islamic world. Ultimately, this research seeks to demonstrate that Ḥabīb 'Alī's *Simṭ al-Durar* is not merely a compilation of poetic praise but a profound semiotic text that expresses the intertwined relationship between language, spirituality, and meaning. Through Riffaterre's framework, every metaphor and symbol in the text becomes a gateway to understanding the depth of prophetic love and divine illumination within Islamic literary tradition (Khasanah & Fauzi, 2025).

This research methodologically uses qualitative analysis of textual material rooted in the semiotic theory of Riffaterre, which includes the action of displacement, distortion and creation of meaning. Primary sources include the *Simṭ al-Durar* manuscript with the aid of *sharḥ* literature, academic literature, and interviews with religious leaders to gain more contextual insight. The comprehensive approach guarantees that textual framework and conventional meanings are taken into account.

Therefore, this study is expected to contribute to the development of religious literary studies, particularly within the tradition of Islam, while also opening broader interpretative space for the spiritual meanings contained in *Simṭ al-Durar*. Within this interpretative space, symbols such as pearls and jewels, which metaphorically represent the Prophet's exalted status and spiritual perfection, and fragrance, which signifies divine blessings and the spread of prophetic virtues, become essential elements that deepen the reader's understanding of the text's spiritual dimension. This approach not only highlights the literary beauty embedded within the text but also affirms the crucial role of *Ṣalawāt* as a medium for spiritual and social empowerment for Muslims.

To systematically explore how such spiritual meanings are generated and structured within the text, this study situates its analysis within a semiotic framework that foregrounds the operation of signs and symbolic relations in literary discourse.

Semiotics, as a theoretical framework, generally examines how signs operate within a text and how meaning is produced through symbolic structures rather than through direct reference to external reality. Within literary semiotics, meaning emerges through interaction among signs, cultural codes, and intertextual relations that shape the reader's interpretive process. It is within this broader semiotic tradition that Michael Riffaterre formulates his influential theory of poetic meaning. Riffaterre views poetry as a system of signs that communicates indirectly through deviations, displacements, and reformulations of linguistic conventions. In his perspective, poetic language ceases to be merely referential; instead, it becomes self-referential and intertextual, forming an autonomous network of signs that interact internally within the poem and externally with earlier textual traditions (Jailani & Rachman, 2020).

Riffaterre emphasizes that poetic meaning arises primarily from indirection, a concept that encompasses ungrammaticality, metaphoric displacement, semantic

distortions, paradoxes, hyperboles, and associative structures that exceed literal logic. These linguistic “departures” signal to the reader that the text must not be processed in a referential manner. In the context of *Ṣalawāt* or *shiʿr*, such as *Simṭ al-Durar*, expressions like “light,” “pearls,” “ocean of mercy,” or “prophetic fragrance” are not literal descriptions of physical objects; they function as symbolic devices that activate spiritual, devotional, and cultural meaning fields related to faith, virtue, intercession, and prophetic veneration (Ashfiyah et al., 2022).

To guide readers through this indirect system of meaning, Riffaterre proposes two sequential modes of reading. The first is heuristic reading, in which the reader initially interprets the text at the grammatical and literal level to obtain a surface-level paraphrase. This stage involves mapping dictionary meanings, syntactic structures, and literal relations within the text. The second is hermeneutic (retroactive) reading, in which the reader returns to the text with awareness of its poetic, cultural, and religious dimensions. At this stage, ungrammaticality is decoded, symbolic references are interpreted, and intertextual echoes such as allusions to Qurʾanic verses, *ḥadīth*, *sīrah*, or classical praise poetry are recognized as essential to the poem’s deeper meaning (Niʾamah et al., 2024).

In elaborating this process, Riffaterre introduces several conceptual tools. The matrix is the underlying abstract force or core idea that generates the entire poem for example, “the Prophet as the source of divine mercy.” From this latent idea emerges the model, a more concrete symbolic formulation, such as images of light, pearls, fragrance, or oceans, which then expand into multiple textual variants across lines and stanzas. Complementing these is the descriptive system, a cluster of lexemes drawn from a shared semantic field such as jewelry, illumination, or scent that reinforce one another to intensify certain devotional or aesthetic nuances. All these devices operate in relation to the hypogram, namely the foundational texts and traditions (Qurʾanic passages, *ḥadīth*, *sīrah* narratives, or earlier poetry) that serve as the intertextual background and primary source of meaning resonance (Dira & Rohanda, 2024).

In this study, the application of Riffaterre’s theory is limited to several key concepts most relevant to religious poetry, particularly *Simṭ al-Durar*: (1) indirect meaning through ungrammaticality and metaphorical displacement, (2) heuristic and hermeneutic reading stages, and (3) the structural triad of matrix, model, and hypogram. These components are selected because they effectively reveal the symbolic richness and intertextual depth characteristic of prophetic praise poetry, allowing a more systematic interpretation of the spiritual meanings embodied in the text.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Semiotic study in religious texts

Semiotic studies are essentially grounded in the view that a text is a system of signs that conveys meaning beyond its literal sense. In the context of religious texts such as *shiʿr*, prayers, or sacred scriptures, the semiotic approach becomes particularly important because these texts are always embedded with symbols, metaphors, and layers of meaning that cannot be unraveled merely through the logic of everyday language. Religious texts often employ symbolic language to express transcendent realities: the greatness of God, the nobility of the Prophet, the promise of salvation, or profound spiritual feelings (Saukani & Hakim, 2020). Thus, semiotics functions as an analytical tool that enables researchers to read religious texts not only at the surface level of words but also within the network of meanings, signs, and cultural-spiritual references that surround them.

In the Islamic tradition, religious texts whether in the form of the Qurʾan, *ḥadīth*, prayers, or *shiʿr ṣalawāt* frequently employ poetic signs with broad resonance. For instance, the word “light” does not merely refer to a physical phenomenon, but symbolizes

divine guidance, prophethood, or divine mercy. Similarly, the word “pearl” is not just a precious object, but a symbol of purity and the majesty of the Prophet Muhammad. A semiotic approach allows researchers to unpack such symbols, to understand how words function as signs, and to relate them to broader intertextual traditions. Within Riffaterre’s framework, this becomes even more relevant, as he emphasizes indirect meaning, ungrammaticality, and intertextuality (hypogram), which strongly characterize religious-poetic texts (Dewi & Asrifan, 2023).

The application of semiotic studies to religious texts also reveals how religious language functions in two ways: first, as a medium of devotion and prayer that connects humans with God and the Prophet; and second, as a cultural medium that unites communities within particular traditions. When religious texts are analyzed semiotically, it becomes evident that poetry or *shi’r* is not only beautiful in its language but also holds a transcendental function that shapes collective spiritual consciousness (Nurwati, 2023). In this sense, semiotics serves to uncover multiple layers of meaning: from the literal (heuristic) meaning to the symbolic and spiritual (hermeneutic) meaning. Thus, semiotic analysis not only unpacks language as “signs” but also helps us to understand how religious texts function as phenomena of faith, culture, and spiritual experience (Fidaraini, 2022).

Within this framework, the *Shi’r Ṣalawāt Simṭ al-Durar* by Ḥabīb ‘Alī can be read not merely as a literary text but as a living religious text. It integrates prayer, praise, poetic symbols, and the resonance of *mawlid* traditions that shape the collective experience of the Muslim community. Semiotic analysis helps to show how words such as “*Simṭ al-Durar*” (string of pearls), “light,” “ocean,” and “fragrance” are not merely aesthetic choices, but signs that embody profound religious meanings. Therefore, semiotic study in the analysis of such religious texts is not simply a linguistic inquiry but simultaneously a spiritual-cultural study that unveils the depth of meaning and function of the text in the life of the community.

Representation of religious symbols and hidden meanings in *Simṭ al-Durar*

The *Simṭ al-Durar* by Ḥabīb ‘Alī is a masterpiece of Islamic devotional poetry, constructed with profound symbolic language that reflects both spiritual depth and aesthetic beauty. From Riffaterre’s semiotic perspective, the text is rich in indirect expressions (indirections), metaphors, and displacement of meaning that convey layers of theological and emotional significance. Every verse functions not only as a praise to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) but also as a semiotic structure that guides readers toward a deeper understanding of divine love, humility, and devotion. For instance, when Ḥabīb ‘Alī writes:

وَبَلَغَ الْقَمَرُ مَنْزِلَ الشَّمْسِ

And the moon reached the position of the sun

The verse appears to describe a celestial event, but in Riffaterre’s semiotic reading, it represents the Prophet Muhammad as the “sun” the ultimate source of light and guidance and his followers as the “moon,” reflecting his light upon the world. The displacement here transforms a natural image into a symbol of spiritual hierarchy and illumination (Cahyani & Akmaliah, 2025). The meaning does not lie in the literal words but in the intertextual relationship between divine light (*nūr Muḥammad*) and human devotion. Another example can be found in the line:

طَلَعَ الْبَدْرُ عَلَيْنَا مِنْ تَنِيَّاتِ الْوَدَاعِ

The full moon has appeared upon us from the Wada' valley

Although this verse echoes the historical moment of the Prophet's arrival in Medina, its semiotic depth conveys a timeless message the coming of light that dispels darkness, symbolizing the awakening of the heart from ignorance to faith. Riffatere's concept of *retroactive reading* applies here: the reader reconstructs meaning not from isolated words, but through recognizing the cultural and spiritual codes embedded within the text (Azimah & Kusumawati, 2020). Moreover, the imagery of light (*nūr*), fragrance (*'itr*), and pearls (*durar*) frequently appears throughout *Simṭ al-Durar*, serving as recurrent semiotic motifs that signify purity, divine beauty, and eternal guidance.

يَا نُورَ الْعُيُونِ يَا سِرَّ الْوُجُودِ

O light of the eyes, O secret of existence

Here, the Prophet is not merely praised as a human being but as the embodiment of divine mercy (*rahmatan li-l-‘ālamīn*). The repetition of such symbols reinforces a semiotic network of meaning transforming *Simṭ al-Durar* into a linguistic tapestry of love, reverence, and cosmic order. Through Riffatere's framework of displacing, distorting, and creating meaning, the hidden messages in *Simṭ al-Durar* emerge clearly: the text aims to awaken the reader's spiritual perception rather than simply to convey information (An-Nabiil & Sarifudin, 2024). Every metaphor is a sign, and every rhythm is a code that leads the heart toward divine remembrance (*dhikr*). Thus, the *Simṭ al-Durar* stands not only as poetry but also as a map of spiritual experience one that bridges the human and the divine through the semiotic beauty of Arabic language and Islamic devotion.

وَصَلِّ وَسَلِّمْ عَلَى مَنْ بِهِ انْشَرَحَتْ صُدُورُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

Give prayers and greetings to him (the Prophet) through whom the chests of the believers become spacious

In this verse, Ḥabīb ‘Alī expresses not only a prayer but also a shared emotional memory the remembrance (*dhikr*) that unites the hearts of believers across generations. Riffatere's theory of matrix and hypogram helps explain how the meaning here extends beyond the linguistic surface: the “matrix” (core idea) of divine love is re-expressed in countless ways through communal chanting, melodies, and repetition, forming an evolving pattern of collective spirituality (Dira & Rohanda, 2024). The *Simṭ al-Durar* also functions as a medium for transmitting spiritual values. Through its recitation, listeners are immersed in a sensory and emotional atmosphere that stimulates feelings of humility, gratitude, and longing for the Prophet.

هُوَ الْحَبِيبُ الَّذِي تُرَجَى شَفَاعَتُهُ لِكُلِّ هَوَلٍ مِنَ الْأَهْوَالِ مُقْتَحِمٍ

He is the lover whose intercession is hoped for in every fearful trouble

This verse encapsulates the essence of *maḥabbah* (love) and *tawassul* (seeking intercession), which are central to the emotional dimension of Islamic spirituality. When interpreted through Riffatere's semiotics, such verses signify not only the Prophet's

exalted status but also the believer's inner journey toward divine nearness (*taqarrub ilallah*). The indirect expression (indirection) here turns the praise of the Prophet into a metaphor for the soul's longing for God. Furthermore, the act of reciting *Simṭ al-Durar* together constructs a collective semiotic experience, where sound, rhythm, and emotion form a communal sign-system of devotion. The beauty of its rhythmic repetition accompanied by the beating of drums (*rebana*) and the reciter's melodic tone produces what Riffaterre would describe as a "textual performance," in which meaning transcends the written word and becomes embodied in ritual (Indiraphasa & Roselani, 2024).

Thus, the *Simṭ al-Durar* becomes not only a text to be read but a spiritual practice to be lived. Its meaning unfolds through time, through repetition, and through the collective consciousness of those who love the Prophet. In this sense, the *Simṭ al-Durar* functions as a living semiotic text one that continually renews the faith, emotion, and unity of the Muslim ummah through the shared memory of praise, love, and devotion.

Meaning construction through Riffaterre's semiotic framework

The indirect meaning in *Shi'r Simṭ al-Durar* emphasizes how the work of Ḥabīb 'Alī presents religious symbols that cannot be interpreted literally. In Riffaterre's semiotic framework, every literary text contains layers of meaning that go deeper than its surface interpretation. This process of meaning-making begins with a heuristic reading, which only captures the denotative meaning, and is followed by a hermeneutic reading that seeks to uncover the symbols, metaphors, and associations shaping its latent meaning. Through this approach, *Shi'r Simṭ al-Durar* is not merely a series of beautiful praises, but also carries profound spiritual messages (Asya'roni, 2023).

One of the main features of *Simṭ al-Durar* is its use of ungrammaticality, namely linguistic forms that deviate from common norms in order to produce higher meanings. For example, the use of terms such as "light," "pearls," "ocean of mercy," or "musk fragrance" are not literal physical depictions, but rather symbols referring to the greatness of the Prophet Muhammad. These words form a network of metaphors that guide readers to understand that the Prophet is portrayed as a source of guidance, nobility, and compassion for all humankind.

If understood only at the literal level, readers might perceive the text as mere poetic praise. However, through hermeneutic reading, it becomes clear that each symbol carries a spiritual dimension affirming the Prophet's position as *raḥmatan li-l-‘ālamīn* (a mercy for the universe). Thus, the indirect meaning in *Shi'r Simṭ al-Durar* not only enhances the aesthetic beauty of the text but also strengthens its religious function (Waqfin et al., 2022).

Ḥabīb 'Alī crafted poetic language rich with metaphors to evoke an inner experience for his readers, so that they do not merely recite praises but also feel an emotional and spiritual closeness to the Prophet. This illustrates how the work harmoniously integrates literary and religious functions. Through Riffaterre's semiotic approach, the reading of this text reveals the depth of hidden meanings behind its symbols and ultimately affirms that *Simṭ al-Durar* serves as both a medium of devotion and a means of cultivating love for the Prophet Muhammad.

In Riffaterre's semiotic theory, a literary text never stands alone but is always connected to other texts that serve as sources of meaning. This interrelation between texts is known as intertextuality, namely the dialogue among discourses that provides a richer understanding of a work. In the context of *Simṭ al-Durar*, intertextuality appears through references to Qur'anic verses, the sayings of the Prophet (*ḥadīth*), as well as the tradition of *mawlid* writing and devotional poetry that have flourished for centuries.

Ḥabīb 'Alī constructed *Simṭ al-Durar* not merely as a poetic work but as a continuation of an established Islamic literary tradition. For example, the depiction of the

Prophet as light that illuminates darkness is not a new concept, but refers to the Qur'anic narrative of the Prophet as *sirāj munīr* (a radiant lamp). Similarly, expressions about the Prophet's blessings, mercy, and intercession are closely related to various hadith that affirm his role as a mercy for all creation (Khoir & Masruroh, 2023). Thus, *Simṭ al-Durar* weaves meaning through the repetition, adaptation, and enrichment of symbols already known in earlier texts, enabling readers to feel the continuity between this work and the foundational sources of Islamic teachings.

Furthermore, intertextuality in *Simṭ al-Durar* is also evident in its relationship with earlier *mawlid* works, such as *Mawlid al-Barzanjī* or *Mawlid al-Dibā'ī*, both of which emphasize praise, supplication, and the narrative of the Prophet's birth. Ḥabīb 'Alī adopted the narrative patterns and linguistic style of these works, yet presented them with his own distinctive features, particularly by emphasizing emotional and spiritual atmosphere (Istiqlaliyah et al., 2025). This intertextuality shows that *Simṭ al-Durar* is not an isolated creation but part of a living network of religious texts within Islamic tradition. This continuity has ensured that the text is not only read but also chanted and transmitted across generations in *mawlid* celebrations throughout the world.

Thus, an intertextual reading of *Simṭ al-Durar* reveals that this text functions as a bridge between sacred texts, earlier religious-literary works, and the lived religious experiences of Muslims. The strength of this *shi'r* lies not only in the beauty of its language but also in its ability to connect readers with the broader treasury of Islamic heritage. Through Riffaterre's semiotic framework, it becomes clear that the meaning in *Simṭ al-Durar* is shaped by a network of interconnected symbols, making each verse not merely poetry but also a representation of the deeply rooted religious traditions of the Muslim community.

In Riffaterre's semiotic theory, the hypogram is understood as the foundational or underlying text that gives rise to a new one. The hypogram functions as a source of inspiration, reference, and framework of meaning, which is then developed within a literary work. In the context of *Simṭ al-Durar*, its primary hypograms are the Qur'an, the Hadith of the Prophet, and earlier *mawlid* texts, such as *Mawlid u al-Barzanji* by Ja'far al-Barzanji and *Mawlid al-Dibā'ī* by Abdurrahman ad-Dibā'ī (Ni'mah & Masyhud, 2024). In other words, *Simṭ al-Durar* does not stand as an isolated text but rather absorbs, reworks, and expands upon the meanings of preexisting texts.

The *mawlid* tradition itself can be seen as a living space of intertextuality, where multiple texts converge, interact, and form multilayered networks of meaning. In practice, the celebration of the Prophet's birthday in various Muslim communities always involves the recitation of different *mawlid* texts, yet they share recurring themes, symbols, and narratives. For instance, the depiction of the Prophet as a light that brings salvation is a recurring theme across almost all *mawlid* texts, from *Barzanjī* and *Dibā'ī* to *Simṭ al-Durar* (Wasi', 2024). This similarity reveals the existence of a collective hypogram that shapes the religious consciousness of Muslims, in which praise for the Prophet is always linked to the teachings of *tawḥīd*, mercy, and love for the Messenger of God.

Ḥabīb 'Alī, in *Simṭ al-Durar*, reinterprets this hypogram in his distinctive style, placing greater emphasis on expressions of love and spiritual longing for the Prophet. This is evident in the text's structure, which flows through poetic praise, supplications, and emotionally charged narratives of the Prophet's birth. Thus, *Simṭ al-Durar* not only repeats what earlier texts contained but also enriches religious experience by offering profound emotional depth. From an intertextual perspective, this demonstrates how a new text can engage in dialogue with older ones, continuing an established tradition while also presenting fresh and unique nuances.

Furthermore, the presence of hypogram and intertextuality in *Simṭ al-Durar*

illustrates that *mawlid* texts function not only as religious literary works but also as vehicles of cultural and spiritual transmission. Each time *Simṭ al-Durar* is recited during a *mawlid* gathering, what is presented is not solely the text of Ḥabīb ‘Alī but also the resonance of the Qur’an, the Hadith, and earlier *mawlid* works that serve as its foundation (Wati et al., 2024). This is what makes *Simṭ al-Durar* an integral part of the *mawlid* tradition, where text, meaning, and ritual converge within a shared spiritual space. Through Riffaterre’s semiotic theory, we can thus understand *Simṭ al-Durar* as a text rich in layered meanings, grounded in strong hypograms, and engaging creatively with other religious texts.

In the semiotic framework of Riffaterre, literary meaning is often the result of a transformation process in which linguistic signs are rearranged to produce symbolic or indirect meanings (Tajalla & Ulfa, 2023). This concept of semiotic transformation becomes essential in analyzing *Simṭ al-Durar*, as Ḥabīb ‘Alī’s composition transcends the level of literal praise and constructs a network of spiritual symbols that point toward divine love, moral purification, and the metaphysical beauty of the Prophet Muhammad.

In *Simṭ al-Durar*, the transformation occurs when words that normally refer to worldly elements acquire new layers of meaning through context and intertextual resonance. For instance, in the line:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ بَدَا تَظْمُ الدَّرَرِ

In the name of Allah, a string of pearls was formed

The term *naẓm al-Durar* (string of pearls) is not merely an aesthetic metaphor, but a transformed symbol representing the Prophet himself as the “jewel of creation,” whose virtues and attributes form the perfect order of divine manifestation. The transformation of this symbol from its literal to its metaphysical dimension exemplifies Riffaterre’s idea that meaning in poetry is generated through a system of displacement and indirection, where words shift from their referential to their symbolic function (Chairiyah, 2023). Furthermore, Ḥabīb ‘Alī’s use of rhythmic repetition and euphonious diction strengthens the symbolic structure of the text. Repetition of phrases such as:

صَلُّوا عَلَى خَيْرِ الْبَشَرِ

Give prayers to the best of humanity

Serves not only as devotional exhortation but as a semiotic mechanism that reinforces the spiritual focus of the text. The repetitive rhythm induces a contemplative state among readers and listeners, transforming the act of recitation into an experiential journey toward divine remembrance (*dhikr*). In Riffaterre’s semiotic perspective, this transformation of linguistic rhythm into spiritual experience demonstrates the way poetic language mediates between textual sign and transcendent meaning (Saukani & Hakim, 2020).

Moreover, the symbolic structure in *Simṭ al-Durar* operates through binary oppositions and harmonization between the material and the divine, the human and the prophetic, the visible and the unseen. Ḥabīb ‘Alī constructs an aesthetic equilibrium that mirrors the Prophet’s role as the bridge between God and creation. This structural harmony can be read as a semiotic system where each linguistic choice, image, and metaphor is interconnected to produce a totality of meaning that transcends its textual surface.

In summary, the semiotic transformation and symbolic structure in *Simṭ al-Durar* reveal Ḥabīb ‘Alī’s mastery in weaving theological, mystical, and literary elements into one coherent text. Through Riffaterre’s semiotic lens, the reader can perceive how the poem operates as both an act of devotion and a coded system of signs that continuously points toward the ineffable reality of divine beauty embodied in the Prophet Muhammad.

Simṭ al-Durar functions semiotically as a medium that shapes collective memory and religious identity through its devotional language. According to Riffaterre’s semiotic framework, literary meaning is never isolated within the text alone but interacts dynamically with the social and cultural consciousness of its readers. In this sense, the *Simṭ al-Durar* operates not only as a poetic expression of love for the Prophet Muhammad but also as a semiotic system that encodes and transmits communal values, beliefs, and emotions across generations (Hamdy & Shalihah, 2024).

Ḥabīb ‘Alī’s language in *Simṭ al-Durar* is devotional, rhythmic, and imbued with affective intensity. It invites participants not only to understand the Prophet but to emotionally and spiritually experience his presence. For instance, in the line:

وَأَشْرَقَ الْكَوْنُ بِنُورِ الْمُصْطَفَى

And the universe shone with the light of the chosen one (Muhammad)

The imagery of “light” (*nūr*) is more than a metaphor of illumination it becomes a semiotic key that unites personal piety with the cosmic manifestation of divine truth (Dewi & Yani, 2023). The recitation of such verses in communal gatherings transforms language into a performative act, where participants reaffirm their shared spiritual heritage and reinforce their emotional bond with the Prophet. Through this lens, the *Simṭ al-Durar* functions as a collective signifier a living symbol within Muslim communities, Yemen and the wider Middle East, where the tradition of *mawlid* recitation has become part of the social fabric. Every recitation becomes a semiotic reactivation of faith; the words, melody, and rhythm operate as cultural codes that transmit the same spiritual emotion from one generation to another (Saehudin et al., 2022). This aligns with Riffaterre’s concept of intertextuality and hypogram, where meaning is continuously renewed through its repetition and recontextualization within communal practice.

Moreover, the devotional language of *Simṭ al-Durar* embodies the synthesis of beauty *jamāl* and reverence *ta’zīm*. The poetic structure, full of alliteration, parallelism, and euphonious sounds, heightens the aesthetic experience of worship. Riffaterre would interpret this as a form of semiotic reinforcement where linguistic beauty itself becomes a sign that reflects divine perfection. The language thus does not merely describe holiness but enacts it, transforming the act of recitation into a semiotic ritual of remembrance (*dhikr al-maḥabbah*) (Kurniawan et al., 2024).

In the context of collective memory, *Simṭ al-Durar* acts as both text and practice. It preserves the historical image of the Prophet as *raḥmatan lil-‘ālamīn* (a mercy to all worlds) while continually renewing his presence in the hearts of believers. The repetition of verses such as:

صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ

Bless him and his family

Functions as a semiotic bridge linking the community’s spiritual past with its present consciousness. Each utterance of *ṣalawāt* becomes a symbol of continuity a

reaffirmation that the love for the Prophet transcends time, place, and linguistic boundaries. Thus, through Riffaterre's semiotic analysis, the *Simṭ al-Durar* can be seen not only as a text of devotion but as a living semiotic organism. Its language operates beyond aesthetic or doctrinal dimensions it sustains a collective spiritual identity through the interplay of symbols, emotions, and memory, making it one of the most profound examples of religious poetry that merges art, faith, and culture into a unified system of meaning (Saehudin et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing discussion, it can be concluded that *Simṭ al-Durar* is a religious text rich in multilayered meanings, and that a semiotic approach is essential for uncovering its underlying spiritual dimensions. By employing the general framework of semiotics and focusing on key concepts from Michael Riffaterre such as indirect meaning, ungrammaticality, heuristic and hermeneutic reading, and the matrix model hypogram structure this research seeks to reveal how religious symbols such as light, pearls, oceans of mercy, and prophetic fragrance form a network of meaning within the *shi'r*. The formulated research questions emphasize identifying forms of indirection, mapping the central symbolic expressions, applying the two stages of reading, and explaining the intertextual relationship between *Simṭ al-Durar* and earlier Islamic sources and mawlid traditions. Through this framework, the study aims to demonstrate that *Simṭ al-Durar* is not merely a devotional poem, but a living system of signs that nurtures collective consciousness, spiritual identity, and deep affection for the Prophet Muhammad within Muslim communities.

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