



Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a Purpose-and-Return Cycle: Martyrdom, Guidance, Ritual Identity and the Renewal of Ashura Memory

SeyyedAbdolHojjat MoghadasNian*

University of Religions and Denominations (URD), s14110213@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a Purpose-and-Return Cycle through which Ashura remembrance moves from recollection of martyrdom into purpose clarification, guidance, ritual return, ritual identity, covenantal continuity, and renewed memory. The study addresses a reduction problem: Arbaeen is often interpreted either through grief alone or through the contemporary walk, service system, and mass-gathering literature, while the Ziyarat text itself explains why the memory of Karbala returns. Using qualitative, source-sensitive conceptual analysis, phrase-function coding, and evidence-matrix claim control, the article treats the Ṣafwān al-Jammāl version attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq as the primary textual corpus, while using the sign-of-the-believer tradition and early Arbaeen visitation reports as supporting reception evidence. The findings show that the Ziyarat begins with sacred address, interprets martyrdom as guidance, diagnoses the opposing camp as moral-cognitive failure, converts walāyah and barā'ah into return alignment, frames Arbaeen as a ritual-identity sign rather than a metric of inward faith, and renews Ashura memory through the forty-day return. The article contributes a non-reductionist model of Arbaeen as return to telos: Imam al-Husayn's self-offering is read as rescue from ignorance and misguidance, and the believer's return is read as covenantal re-entry into that purpose. The boundary condition is explicit: faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, thawāb, intercession, wilāyah truth, sanctity, and metaphysical rank are not measured.

Keywords: Ziyarat al-Arba'in; Ashura memory; Purpose-and-Return Cycle; Shi'i ritual studies; source-sensitive textual analysis; sign of the believer; covenantal continuity.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context



Ziyarat al-Arba'in occupies a distinctive position in Imami Shi'i devotional literature because it joins the memory of Karbala to the fortieth day after the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn. The text is linked in the source field to the narration of Ṣafwān al-Jammāl from Imam al-Ṣādiq and is transmitted through major visitation sources, including al-Ṭūsī's *Tahdhīb al-Aḥkām* and *Miṣbāḥ al-Mutahajjid*, Ibn Ṭāwūs's *al-Iqbāl*, Ibn al-Mashhadī's *al-Mazār al-Kabīr*, al-Kaf'amī's *al-Miṣbāḥ*, al-Qummī's *Mafātīḥ al-Jinān*, and later encyclopedic reception in *Biḥār al-Anwār* [1–7]. Contemporary reference and explanatory materials identify the Ziyarat as a visitation of Imam al-Husayn on the twentieth of Ṣafar and summarize its core movements as salutation, testimony, clarification of the purpose of the uprising, identification of the opposing camp, walāyah, barā'ah, covenantal following, and final blessing [8,9].

The conceptual center of the Ziyarat is the phrase: *wa badhala muhjatahu fika li-yastanqidha 'ibādaka min al-jahālah wa ḥayrat al-ḍalālah*. This wording presents Imam al-Husayn's self-offering not only as martyrdom, tragedy, or heroic death, but as a purposive act of guidance: rescue from ignorance and bewilderment in misguidance [2,3]. The phrase is decisive because it protects Ashura remembrance from reduction to sorrow alone. Grief remains real, but the text asks what grief remembers, what memory returns to, and what kind of covenantal responsibility follows from remembrance.

Why now? The contemporary visibility of Arbāeen is increasingly shaped by the walk to Karbala, mawākib, hospitality, service systems, logistics, health, crowd movement, and multi-level coordination. These are important for the separate study of Arbāeen as embodied ritual presence and service governance, but they can obscure the internal structure of Ziyarat al-Arba'in when the Ziyarat is treated merely as a devotional preface to mass pilgrimage or as a symbolic marker of collective participation [35,36]. This article therefore returns to the text itself. Its primary theoretical lens is ritual memory and cultural memory, supported by source-sensitive sacred-text analysis; the main rival lens is pilgrimage-management and KPI-governance analysis, which is relevant to Arbāeen service systems but insufficient for explaining the Ziyarat's textual movement [13–21,35,36].

Within the wider Ashura–Arbāeen research sequence, this article functions as the fourth textual layer. Ziyarat Ashura establishes covenantal stance and ethical dissociation from injustice; Ziyarat Warith locates Karbala within prophetic inheritance, imamate, sacred legitimacy, and human dignity; Ziyarat Nahiya protects witness-memory from abstraction and forgetting; Ziyarat al-Arba'in explains why the memory returns [10–12]. The argument can be previewed as follows: the text presents martyrdom as guidance, this guidance activates return to the purpose of Karbala, and return renews covenantal identity and Ashura memory; the sign-of-the-believer tradition functions as a ritual-identity marker, not as a metric of inward faith.

1.2 Statement of Problem



The central problem is analytical and methodological. Ziyarat al-Arba'in is frequently approached through one of two reductions. In the first, Arbaeen is absorbed into the contemporary walk, service system, mass-gathering literature, and pilgrimage-management discourse. In that frame, the Ziyarat risks becoming a preface to event management, a marker of mass devotion, or a symbolic slogan. In the second, the Ziyarat is treated only as devotional recitation, so its internal logic remains under-theorized. Both reductions miss the text's ordered movement from sacred address to purpose clarification, diagnosis of moral-cognitive failure, jihad and covenant, walāyah and barā'ah, ritual identity, preparedness for support, and renewed alignment with the Ahl al-Bayt.

The problem affects three scholarly fields. In Shi'i studies, it limits the ability to explain Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a structured theological text rather than an isolated devotional formula. In ritual studies, it weakens the account of how an annual Ziyarat performs return, identity, and renewal without being collapsed into the social dynamics of the walk. In cultural memory studies, it leaves underdeveloped the mechanism by which Ashura memory is reactivated after the forty-day interval and transmitted through recurring liturgical practice.

The problem also has a measurement boundary. Prior Arbaeen KPI and pilgrimage-management works show that service quality, operational efficiency, safety, health, satisfaction, crowd coordination, and environmental performance may be evaluated through indicators in the social Arbaeen layer [35,36]. This article does not reject that work; it assigns it to the correct layer. The textual-theological layer of Ziyarat al-Arba'in cannot be governed by the same logic. Faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, thawāb, intercession, wilāyah truth, sanctity, and the metaphysical rank of Imam al-Husayn or the visitor are not empirical variables. The measurable element in this article is not sacred reality, but claim traceability: whether each scholarly claim is linked to a textual unit, source layer, interpretive construct, theoretical support, and boundary condition [30–33].

1.3 Research Gap: Critical Synthesis

The relevant literature explains important parts of the field but does not yet resolve the central tension of this article. Classical and devotional sources establish the textual and reception field of Ziyarat al-Arba'in [1–9]. Memory and ritual theories explain how communities preserve meaning through shared frameworks, ritual repetition, sacred calendars, and embodied practice [13–21]. Prior Ashura–Arbaeen portfolio articles clarify complementary layers: covenantal stance in Ziyarat Ashura, sacred inheritance and legitimacy in Ziyarat Warith, and witness-memory in Ziyarat Nahiya [10–12]. Prior KPI-governed pilgrimage and civilizational-governance works clarify how operational, institutional, and service layers may be evaluated without measuring sanctity [35–44].

The unresolved gap is not simply that “few studies exist.” The higher-value gap is that Ziyarat al-Arba'in is often cited through selected phrases—especially rescue from ignorance and the sign of the believer—without being modeled as a complete interpretive sequence. A second gap is boundary confusion: the social Arbaeen walk is often blended with the Ziyarat text,



causing the textual argument to drift into tourism, logistics, or service governance. A third gap is validity control: claims about Arbaeen memory are often made without a clear evidence matrix distinguishing textual evidence, source status, theory, reception, claim boundary, and reviewer risk.

This article addresses these gaps by constructing a source-grounded Purpose-and-Return Cycle. Purpose is operationally defined as the text's explicit explanation of Imam al-Husayn's self-offering as guidance and rescue from ignorance and misguidance. Return is operationally defined as the liturgical and memory-forming movement by which the reciter re-enters the meaning of Karbala through the Arbaeen visitation. Ritual identity is operationally defined as the received sign-of-the-believer function, interpreted as belonging and covenantal orientation rather than a measure of inward faith. Memory renewal is operationally defined as the reactivation of Ashura's meaning through the forty-day return and repeated recitation. The article therefore treats the sequence as: martyrdom → purpose → guidance → rescue from ignorance → awakening from misguidance → Arbaeen visitation → return → sign of the believer → covenantal continuity → renewal of Ashura memory [1–9,13–21,30–33].

1.4 Research Purpose and Research Questions/Objectives

The purpose of this article is to examine Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a Purpose-and-Return Cycle through which Ashura remembrance is moved from recollection of martyrdom into purpose clarification, guidance, ritual identity, covenantal continuity, and memory renewal. The study develops a source-sensitive textual model that preserves Shi'i theological grammar while using ritual and memory theory as supporting analytical lenses.

The primary research question is: How does Ziyarat al-Arba'in transform Ashura from the remembrance of martyrdom into a Purpose-and-Return Cycle of guidance, ritual identity, covenantal continuity, and memory renewal?

The subsidiary questions examine How does the text clarify the purpose of Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom beyond the category of tragedy; How do the phrases of ignorance, bewilderment, and misguidance structure the article's cognitive and ethical reading of Ashura; How does Arbaeen function as a ritual return after the forty-day interval; How should the sign-of-the-believer tradition be interpreted without turning faith into an empirical metric? And How can the article preserve a clean boundary between Ziyarat al-Arba'in and the separate phenomenon of Arbaeen walking, hospitality, mawkib service, and service governance?

Accordingly, the objectives are to establish the source field of Ziyarat al-Arba'in; to define its major textual constructs; to map the phrase-function sequence of the Ziyarat; to build a traceable Purpose-and-Return Cycle; to integrate cultural memory and ritual theory without replacing the Shi'i source field; and to specify the non-reductionist boundary that prevents sacred realities from being treated as empirical variables.

1.5 Significance and Contributions



The study is significant for Shi'i studies because it treats Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a structured liturgical text with its own internal logic, rather than as a devotional appendix to the Arbaeen walk. It is significant for ritual studies because it explains how a Ziyarat performs return, identity, and renewal through recitation and sacred-calendar placement. It is significant for cultural memory studies because it shows how Ashura memory is not merely preserved as information but reactivated through textual repetition, covenantal language, and annual return [13–21]. It is also significant for pilgrimage and governance scholarship because it clarifies the boundary between what can be evaluated in Arbaeen service systems and what must remain outside measurement in sacred devotion [35–44].

This paper contributes by (1) demonstrating that the phrase of rescue from ignorance and misguidance functions as a checkable textual mechanism for purpose clarification, (2) modeling Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a complete Purpose-and-Return Cycle rather than a set of isolated devotional phrases, (3) interpreting the sign-of-the-believer tradition as a ritual-identity marker without converting faith into a metric, and (4) establishing a boundary protocol that separates Ziyarat al-Arba'in from Arbaeen walk, mawkib, logistics, and service-governance analysis.

1.6 Scope and Boundary Conditions

The study is bounded by source, method, object, and claim. The unit of analysis is the Ṣafwān al-Jammāl version of Ziyarat al-Arba'in attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq and transmitted in the Shi'i visitation corpus [1–7]. The sign-of-the-believer tradition and the Jābir-ʿAṭiyyah visitation report are used as reception and identity supports, not as replacements for the primary text [7–9]. The study does not conduct a new full isnād, rijāl, or manuscript-variant ruling. Its purpose is to construct a source-aware interpretive model, not to settle all hadith-critical questions.

The article is a qualitative, source-sensitive, conceptual textual study. It does not use interviews, surveys, field observation, private records, participant tracking, crowd datasets, biometric data, or operational dashboards. The analytical object is the Ziyarat text and its reception field, not all contemporary pilgrims, all Shi'i rituals, or all forms of Islamic mourning. The argument is expected to hold where Ziyarat al-Arba'in is treated as a received Imami liturgical text and where its purpose phrase, return structure, and ritual-identity function are accepted as the central textual mechanisms. It should not be generalized automatically to all ziyārāt, all Ashura practices, or all pilgrimage systems.

The article does not claim causal effects on reciters, measurable spiritual transformation, universal reception across all Shi'i communities, or empirical outcomes in contemporary pilgrimage behavior. It does not analyze crowd governance, mawkib logistics, WASH, health, border management, transport, hospitality systems, service KPIs, or pilgrimage tourism performance. Those belong to the separate study of Arbaeen as embodied ritual presence and service governance. The ethical boundary is interpretive responsibility: the study analyzes textual function, reception status, ritual identity, public memory, pedagogical meaning, and



ethical implication, but it does not measure faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, thawāb, intercession, wilāyah truth, sanctity, or metaphysical rank.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Search and Selection Logic

This review is integrative and theory-building. It does not aim to provide a statistical meta-analysis or exhaustive systematic review. Its purpose is to construct a source-sensitive and theoretically disciplined foundation for analysing Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a Purpose-and-Return Cycle. The review therefore integrates four bodies of literature: classical and received Shi'i visitation sources; modern explanatory and source-access materials; cultural memory and ritual theory; and the author's prior KPI-governed pilgrimage, taqrīb, dialogue, and civilizational-governance works used only as boundary literature.

The inclusion logic follows the article's research problem. Sources are included when they clarify at least one of five functions: the textual transmission or reception of Ziyarat al-Arba'in; the distinction between the Ṣafwān al-Jammāl Ziyarat and supporting Arbaeen visitation reports; the relationship between Ashura memory, ritual return, and sacred-calendar repetition; the interpretation of the "sign of the believer" as ritual identity rather than inward faith measurement; or the methodological boundary between textual-theological analysis and Arbaeen walk/service governance. Sources are excluded when they function only as devotional exhortation, unsupported polemic, general Arbaeen celebration, tourism description without direct relevance to Article 4, or empirical pilgrimage-management material that belongs more properly to Article 5.

Evidence strength is graded qualitatively. Classical Ziyarat sources are strongest for textual wording and liturgical reception, but they require source-status caution. Modern explanatory works are useful for reception and pedagogy, but they do not replace Arabic primary-source verification. Cultural memory and ritual theory provide strong conceptual vocabulary for transmission, repetition, and collective remembrance, but they remain secondary to the Shi'i source field. KPI and governance works provide strong boundary logic for operational layers, but they are not evidence for the spiritual meaning of the Ziyarat. This layered review protects the article from two errors: treating devotional reception as final isnād proof, and treating social theory or KPI logic as superior to the sacred text's own grammar.

2.2 Theoretical Background: Foundation and Rival Lenses

The primary theoretical lens of this article is Purpose-and-Return. Purpose refers to the Ziyarat's explicit explanation of Imam al-Husayn's self-offering as guidance and rescue from ignorance and bewilderment in misguidance. Return refers to the ritual and memory-forming movement through which the reciter re-enters the meaning of Karbala at Arbaeen. The construct is theological in its textual source, ritual in its form, and mnemonic in its social implication.

Cultural memory theory provides the first supporting lens. Collective memory explains why Ashura is not preserved merely as information but through shared frames, symbols, and



practices [13]. Cultural and communicative memory clarify how durable texts, sacred calendars, and ritual repetition transmit identity across generations [14,15]. Connerton's account of embodied remembering explains why repeated practice matters, although this article remains focused on the Ziyarat text rather than the walk [16]. Ricoeur's account of memory, history, and forgetting helps name the ethical risk of memory degradation when mourning becomes routinized or detached from moral purpose [17].

Ritual theory provides the second supporting lens. Bell's theory of ritualization clarifies how repeated sacred acts form structured orientation rather than mere expressive repetition [18]. Turner's ritual-process and *communitas* lens is relevant to the broader Arbāeen field, but it has limited explanatory power for this article because Ziyarat al-Arba'in is not reducible to the social dynamics of collective walking [19]. Hervieu-Léger's chain-of-memory lens explains how religious continuity depends on authorized memory, transmission, and belonging [20]. Durkheim's account of collective ritual remains useful for social reinforcement, but it is not sufficient because the article does not reduce sacred meaning to social cohesion [21].

Three rival lenses require boundary control. A grief-only lens explains sorrow, tears, lamentation, and affective intensity, but it cannot explain why the text moves from martyrdom to purpose, guidance, moral diagnosis, covenantal alignment, and ritual return. A pilgrimage-management lens explains the contemporary walk, *mawākib*, hospitality, logistics, WASH, health, safety, transport, and service quality, but it cannot explain the internal textual sequence of the Ziyarat [34–36]. A KPI-reductive lens explains auditability and operational improvement in institutional contexts, but it fails if it converts faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, *thawāb*, *wilāyah* truth, or the visitor's spiritual rank into measurable variables [37–44]. The rival lenses are useful only when assigned to their correct layer.

2.3 Conceptual Domain Map: Constructs and Boundaries

The central constructs are limited to six: Ziyarat al-Arba'in, purpose clarification, ritual return, sign of the believer, covenantal continuity, and memory renewal.

Ziyarat al-Arba'in is theoretically defined as a received Imami visitation text for Imam al-Husayn on the twentieth of Šafar. Operationally, it refers to the Šafwān al-Jammāl version attributed to Imam al-Šādiq and transmitted in the classical visitation field [1–7]. Its level of analysis is textual-liturgical. Its boundary condition is that the article does not treat all Arbāeen practices, walking routes, or service systems as equivalent to the Ziyarat text.

Purpose clarification is theoretically defined as the movement by which martyrdom is interpreted through *telos* rather than tragedy alone. Operationally, it is anchored in the phrase *li-yastanqidha 'ibādaka min al-jahālah wa ḥayrat al-ḍalālah*, which frames Imam al-Husayn's self-offering as rescue from ignorance and bewilderment in misguidance [2,3]. Its level of analysis is phrase-function. Its boundary condition is that the article analyses textual meaning, not measurable psychological effect on all reciters.



Ritual return is theoretically defined as the re-entry of the believer into the meaning of Karbala through Arbaeen visitation. Operationally, it is identified through the fortieth-day Ziyarat, the timing of the visitation, and the reception field around early Arbaeen return [7–9,22]. Its level of analysis is ritual-calendar practice and liturgical memory. Its boundary condition is that return means return to purpose and memory, not only physical movement to Karbala.

Sign of the believer is theoretically defined as a ritual-identity marker within Imami devotional tradition. Operationally, it is linked to the tradition attributed to Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari that lists Ziyarat al-Arba’in among the signs of the believer [2,7]. Its level of analysis is reception and identity grammar. Its boundary condition is strict: it is not a scale for measuring inward faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, salvation, or metaphysical rank.

Covenantal continuity is theoretically defined as the continuation of loyalty, alignment, and responsibility after remembrance. Operationally, it appears in clauses of walāyah, barā’ah, inward submission, and preparedness for support: innī waliyyun li-man wālāh, qalbī li-qalbikum silm, and nuṣratī lakum mu‘addah [3,6]. Its level of analysis is textual-ethical. Its boundary condition is that covenantal alignment is interpreted as ethical dissociation from injustice, not unregulated hostility.

Memory renewal is theoretically defined as the reactivation of Ashura’s meaning through repeated sacred-text recitation and ritual return. Operationally, it appears in the article’s 360-degree cycle: martyrdom → purpose → guidance → rescue from ignorance → Arbaeen visitation → return → sign of the believer → covenantal continuity → renewed Ashura memory. Its level of analysis is conceptual and ritual-memory oriented. Its boundary condition is that the model is an interpretive artifact, not an empirical causal model.

2.4 Critical Synthesis by Themes and Mechanisms

2.4.1 Source Field, Reception, and Textual Control

The strongest source consensus is that Ziyarat al-Arba’in belongs to the Shi‘i visitation field and is connected to the Ṣafwān al-Jammāl narration from Imam al-Ṣādiq [1–7]. Modern summaries and the Persian *Maqṭal-e Jāme‘* confirm the same broad reception profile: the Ziyarat includes salutation, testimony, purpose of the uprising, identification of the opposing camp, walāyah, barā’ah, covenantal following, and final blessing [8,9]. Evidence strength is moderate-to-strong for reception and textual function, but source-critical certainty still requires page-level Arabic verification across editions.

The contested issue concerns how much can be inferred from reception. A liturgical text may be widely received and ritually authoritative without every attribution question being resolved at the same level of certainty. This is why the article distinguishes sanad-critical status, textual-transmission status, liturgical-reception status, and analytical-function status. The conflict exists because devotional, hadith-critical, and academic disciplines use different standards of authority.



The missing element in much writing on Arbāeen is not reverence for the Ziyarat but source-function separation. The Ṣafwān text, the sign-of-the-believer tradition, the Jābir–‘Aṭīyyah report, and contemporary Arbāeen walking practices are often placed in one narrative field without methodological separation.

2.4.2 From Grief to Purpose

Ashura literature has frequently foregrounded grief, redemptive suffering, martyrdom, lamentation, sacrifice, political protest, communal identity, and embodied mourning [24–26]. These themes are essential for understanding Shi‘i ritual life. However, they do not fully explain the particular logic of Ziyarat al-Arba’in. The Ziyarat does not merely intensify grief; it interprets martyrdom through a purpose clause.

The contested issue is whether Ashura remembrance should be read primarily as affective mourning, political protest, identity formation, or moral transformation. Each reading captures part of the tradition. The grief lens explains sorrow; the political lens explains confrontation with oppressive power; the identity lens explains continuity and belonging; the moral-transformation lens explains ethical responsibility. Yet none is sufficient if detached from the text’s phrase-function sequence.

The conflict exists because different literatures privilege different evidence bases. Ritual studies often prioritize practice; political readings prioritize conflict and resistance; devotional commentary prioritizes piety and meaning; memory studies prioritize transmission. Ziyarat al-Arba’in requires a source-led synthesis: martyrdom is remembered, but the text explains what martyrdom is for.

2.4.3 Return as Ritual-Memory Mechanism

Memory theory supports the claim that communities preserve meaning through shared symbolic frames, ritual repetition, and authorized transmission [13–21]. Ziyarat al-Arba’in fits this theoretical field because it returns the believer to Karbala through a specific sacred-calendar point: the fortieth day. The return is not only geographic. It is a re-entry into the telos of the event.

The contested issue is whether Arbāeen return should be explained by sacred text, collective practice, pilgrimage movement, or social identity. The walk to Karbala is important for Article 5, but Article 4 is concerned with the return logic of the Ziyarat. If the walk becomes the primary evidence, the textual model becomes secondary. If the text is treated without ritual-calendar context, the return mechanism becomes underdeveloped.

The conflict exists because Arbāeen has become visible as a mass-gathering phenomenon, while the Ziyarat is a textual-liturgical corpus. Public visibility pulls analysis toward crowd scale, logistics, and service governance. Source-sensitive analysis pulls it back toward text, purpose, and covenantal return.

2.4.4 Sign of the Believer and Non-Reductionist Identity



The sign-of-the-believer tradition gives Ziyarat al-Arba'in distinctive identity force within Imami devotional life [2,7]. It marks the visitation as part of a recognisable ritual grammar. The evidence is strong for reception significance, but it is not an empirical instrument for ranking inward faith.

The contested issue is whether “sign” language should be read as theological classification, social identity marker, ritual belonging, or exclusionary boundary. A purely sociological reading may reduce the sign to group marking. A careless theological reading may imply that researchers can infer inward faith from external practice. The article avoids both extremes by treating the sign as ritual identity and covenantal orientation.

The conflict exists because the same term can function at multiple levels: devotional, communal, theological, and analytical. Academic analysis must clarify which level is being used. In this article, the sign is analysed as a received marker of belonging and memory, not as a measurable condition of salvation.

2.4.5 KPI Governance, Measurement, and Sacred Boundary

The author's prior Arbæen pilgrimage-management works treat Arbæen as a large-scale religious tourism and service-governance phenomenon and identify KPI families for operational efficiency, accommodation, transportation, health and safety, pilgrim satisfaction, environmental sustainability, stakeholder coordination, and real-time decision support [34–36]. These works are relevant, but they belong primarily to the social-service Arbæen layer.

The contested issue is whether governance language can be used in sacred-text studies without reducing religion to management. The answer depends on the object being governed. Service quality, safety, coordination, communication accuracy, educational reach, translation quality, and source transparency may be evaluated. Faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, thawāb, wilāyah truth, intercession, sanctity, and spiritual rank may not be evaluated through KPIs [37–44].

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Corpus

This article uses qualitative, source-sensitive conceptual analysis. Its claim type is interpretive and model-building, not causal, predictive, statistical or behavioural. The method combines close reading, phrase–function coding, source-boundary mapping and evidence-matrix control to explain how Ziyarat al-Arba'in constructs a Purpose-and-Return Cycle. The study is design-science-informed only in the limited sense that it constructs an auditable analytical model; it does not convert sacred devotion into an engineering, managerial or KPI-measurement object [24–27]. The unit of analysis is the Ṣafwān al-Jammāl version of Ziyarat al-Arba'in attributed to Imam al-Ṣādiq and transmitted in the classical visitation corpus [1–7]. The sign-of-the-believer tradition and the Jābir-ʿAṭīyyah visitation report are used as supporting reception evidence, not as substitutes for the primary text [7–9].

3.2 Source Sampling and Operationalization



The data consist of secondary textual and reception sources selected purposively for their relevance to the article's core constructs: Ziyarat al-Arba'in, purpose clarification, ritual return, sign of the believer, covenantal continuity and memory renewal. Included sources clarify the Ṣafwān Ziyarat, its classical transmission, its reception, or its source-sensitive interpretation. Excluded materials include general Arbaeen commentary, pilgrimage-management evidence, unsupported polemic and sources that do not clarify the textual mechanism. The coding unit is the phrase–function unit. Purpose clarification is coded through phrases that interpret Imam al-Husayn's self-offering as rescue from ignorance and bewilderment in misguidance. Ritual return is coded through Arbaeen designation, forty-day return logic and visitation reception. The sign of the believer is coded as ritual identity rather than inward-faith measurement. Covenantal continuity is coded through walāyah, barā'ah, inward submission and preparedness for support.

3.3 Analysis, Validity and Traceability

Analysis proceeded through five stages: corpus delimitation, phrase–function extraction, construct coding, cycle mapping and claim-boundary testing. SRQ1 is addressed through the purpose-of-martyrdom phrases; SRQ2 through the ignorance, bewilderment and misguidance cluster; SRQ3 through Arbaeen return and forty-day visitation logic; SRQ4 through the sign-of-the-believer tradition; and SRQ5 through the separation between Ziyarat al-Arba'in and Arbaeen service governance. Rival readings—grief-only, politics-only, pilgrimage-only, identity-only and KPI-reductive—are used as negative-case controls. Trustworthiness is supported by stable coding categories, repeated checks against the text, separation of primary and supporting evidence, source control, construct control and boundary control. The model is not treated as empirical causality; its validity depends on textual traceability, interpretive coherence and non-reductionist boundary discipline [30–33].

Because the study uses only textual and reception sources, no human-subject data, private records, interviews or observational datasets are involved; trustworthiness is supported through a non-statistical audit trail consisting of the working text, source hierarchy, phrase–function codebook, construct definitions, evidence matrix and claim-boundary log.

4. Findings and Results

4.1 Data Overview and Evidence Base

The findings are conceptual-textual rather than statistical. The evidence base consists of the Ṣafwān al-Jammāl version of Ziyarat al-Arba'in as the primary corpus, the sign-of-the-believer tradition and early Arbaeen visitation reports as supporting reception evidence, the source field of Shi'i Ziyarat literature, and the theoretical literature on ritual memory, cultural memory, and non-reductionist sacred-text analysis [1–9,13–21]. The unit of analysis is the phrase–function unit: each relevant phrase is examined according to what it does in the movement from martyrdom to purpose, guidance, return, ritual identity, covenantal continuity, and memory renewal.



No human participants, interviews, surveys, field observations, statistical samples, behavioural datasets, or operational Arbaeen service records are used. Accordingly, there are no missing cases, exclusions, response rates, imputation procedures, group comparisons, power calculations, confidence intervals, or p-values to report. The relevant evidence quality issue is not statistical completeness but source traceability: each result is retained only where it can be linked to a textual phrase, source layer, construct, interpretive function, and boundary condition.

4.2 Measurement Checks and Quality Diagnostics

Quantitative diagnostics such as reliability coefficients, factor loadings, model-fit indices, multicollinearity tests, common-method-bias tests, p-values, and confidence intervals are not applicable because the study does not use survey, experimental, archival, or statistical modelling data. The relevant quality diagnostics are qualitative and source-critical.

Three checks structure the findings. First, source-boundary checking separates the Ṣafwān Ziyarat text from supporting reception reports and from contemporary Arbaeen walk/service-governance evidence. Second, phrase–function coding distinguishes phrases that perform sacred address, purpose clarification, moral-cognitive diagnosis, covenantal alignment, ritual identity, and memory renewal. Third, claim-boundary testing separates textual claims, reception claims, theoretical claims, and empirical claims. This prevents devotional reception from being treated as automatic isnād certainty and prevents social-governance evidence from replacing the Ziyarat text.

4.3 Main Findings Mapped to the PRQ and SRQs

4.3.1 PRQ: Ziyarat al-Arba'in transforms Ashura remembrance into a Purpose-and-Return Cycle

The primary finding is that Ziyarat al-Arba'in operates as a structured Purpose-and-Return Cycle. The text does not simply commemorate martyrdom; it moves from sacred address to the purpose of Imam al-Husayn's self-offering, from purpose to guidance, from guidance to the diagnosis of ignorance and misguidance, from diagnosis to covenantal alignment, and from alignment to renewed memory. This finding answers the PRQ by showing that the Ziyarat explains why the memory of Karbala returns.

The cycle can be stated as follows: martyrdom → purpose → guidance → rescue from ignorance → awakening from misguidance → Arbaeen visitation → return → sign of the believer → covenantal continuity → renewal of Ashura memory. The result is interpretive, not causal. It does not claim that every reciter experiences measurable transformation; it shows that the text itself structures remembrance as return to purpose.

4.3.2 SRQ1: The purpose of martyrdom is clarified beyond tragedy

The first subsidiary finding is that the Ziyarat clarifies the purpose of Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom through the phrase *wa badhala muhjatahu fika li-yastanqidha 'ibādaka min al-*



jahālah wa ḥayrat al-ḍalālah [2,3]. The phrase does not erase grief, but it prevents grief from becoming the final interpretive category. Martyrdom is framed as purposeful self-offering in the path of God and as rescue from ignorance and bewilderment in misguidance.

This finding answers SRQ1 by showing that the Ziyarat reads Ashura through telos. The result is not “martyrdom as death,” but “martyrdom as guidance-bearing sacrifice.” The practical materiality threshold is conceptual rather than numerical: the phrase is material because it changes the interpretive center of the text from sorrow alone to guidance, rescue, and responsibility.

4.3.3 SRQ2: Ignorance, bewilderment, and misguidance form the text’s cognitive-ethical diagnosis

The second subsidiary finding is that the Ziyarat diagnoses the opposing camp through moral-cognitive failure. Phrases describing worldly deception, the selling of the hereafter for a lower price, surrender to desire, angering God and His Prophet, and obedience to people of schism, hypocrisy, and burdens of sin present the conflict as more than political rivalry. The text depicts opposition to Imam al-Husayn as a disorder of perception, desire, judgment, and loyalty [3].

This finding answers SRQ2 by showing that ignorance and misguidance are not decorative theological terms. They perform analytic work: they identify the condition from which the martyrdom seeks to rescue God’s servants. The text therefore connects cognition, ethics, and allegiance in a single interpretive field.

4.3.4 SRQ3: Arbaeen functions as ritual return to meaning

The third subsidiary finding is that Arbaeen functions as ritual return rather than chronological remembrance alone. The forty-day visitation point re-enters Karbala after the immediate mourning of Ashura and reactivates the purpose of the event through recitation. The return is therefore not reducible to physical movement toward Karbala, although physical visitation and later walking practices may express it in the wider ritual field.

This finding answers SRQ3 by distinguishing ritual return from pilgrimage logistics. In Article 4, return means return to the purpose of Karbala, return to the covenantal orientation of the Ziyarat, and return to Ashura memory as a living criterion. The result also explains why this article must remain separate from the later study of Arbaeen as embodied ritual presence, mawkib, hospitality, and service governance.

4.3.5 SRQ4: The sign of the believer is a ritual-identity marker, not a faith metric

The fourth subsidiary finding concerns the sign-of-the-believer tradition attributed to Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari, in which Ziyarat al-Arba’in is listed among five signs of the believer [2,7]. The finding is that “sign” functions as received ritual-identity language. It marks affiliation, memory, orientation, and covenantal belonging within Imami devotional practice.



It does not provide an academic instrument for measuring sincerity, divine acceptance, salvation, spiritual rank, or inward faith.

This finding answers SRQ4 by preventing a category error. The sign has theological and ritual meaning, but it is not a KPI, scale, or empirical index. Its function in the model is identity and return, not ranking and measurement.

4.3.6 SRQ5: Ziyarat al-Arba'in remains analytically separate from Arbaeen walk and service governance

The fifth subsidiary finding is that the textual Arbaeen layer and the social-service Arbaeen layer must remain analytically distinct. Ziyarat al-Arba'in clarifies purpose, return, identity, covenantal continuity, and memory renewal. The Arbaeen walk, mawākib, logistics, WASH, health, crowd safety, transport, and service-quality KPIs belong to a separate empirical and governance domain [34–36].

This finding answers SRQ5 by establishing the article's central boundary. Prior KPI-governed pilgrimage works can support operational service evaluation, but they cannot measure the inward truth of Ziyarat. This separation protects both sides: it allows service systems to be improved without reducing sacred devotion to management metrics, and it allows the Ziyarat text to be analysed without ignoring the wider social field.

4.4 Additional Analyses: Rival Readings and Negative Cases

The rival-reading analysis confirms the need for the Purpose-and-Return model. A grief-only reading explains lamentation and sorrow but cannot explain the purpose clause, moral-cognitive diagnosis, and covenantal return. A politics-only reading explains opposition to injustice but cannot fully account for the Ziyarat's sacred address, testimony, walāyah, inward submission, and final blessing. A pilgrimage-only reading explains the later social visibility of Arbaeen but cannot explain the internal phrase sequence of the Ṣafwān text. An identity-only reading explains belonging but risks reducing the sign of the believer to group marking. A KPI-reductive reading supports operational governance in the social Arbaeen layer but fails if it treats faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, or wilāyah truth as measurable variables.

The negative case is therefore not an anomalous phrase inside the text, but a boundary pressure outside the text: the contemporary scale of Arbaeen can pull analysis toward mass-gathering governance. The finding is that this pressure must be acknowledged but not allowed to redefine the unit of analysis.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary of Principal Findings

The findings show that Ziyarat al-Arba'in operates as a structured Purpose-and-Return Cycle rather than a disconnected devotional text. Its internal movement links martyrdom, purpose clarification, guidance, rescue from ignorance, ritual return, identity marking, covenantal continuity, and renewed Ashura memory [1–9].



The most decisive textual result is the purpose clause: Imam al-Husayn's self-offering is framed as rescue from ignorance and bewilderment in misguidance, not merely as heroic death or tragedy [2,3]. This does not reduce grief; it disciplines grief by returning it to purpose.

The results also show that the Ziyarat's diagnosis of the opposing camp is moral-cognitive. Worldly deception, surrender to desire, and obedience to people of schism and hypocrisy are presented as failures of perception, loyalty, and ethical orientation [3].

Arbaeen emerges as return to meaning before it appears as movement in space. The contemporary walk may express Arbaeen socially, but the textual finding concerns return to the telos of Karbala.

The "sign of the believer" functions as ritual-identity language, not as a measurable test of inward faith [2,7]. This finding is important because it prevents an identity marker from becoming a spiritual ranking device.

The boundary finding is equally important: Arbaeen service governance, mawākib, logistics, WASH, transport, crowd movement, safety, and pilgrimage-management KPIs are relevant to the social-service layer, but they do not explain the internal textual mechanism of Ziyarat al-Arba'in [34–36].

There are no statistical null results because the study is not quantitative. The main negative result is conceptual: grief-only, pilgrimage-only, identity-only, politics-only, and KPI-reductive readings each explain part of the Arbaeen field but fail to account for the full phrase–function sequence of the Ziyarat.

5.2 Interpretation and Mechanisms

Evidence-supported interpretation. The Purpose-and-Return Cycle shows that the Ziyarat does not merely remember a past martyrdom; it directs the reciter back to the reason for martyrdom. The phrase of rescue from ignorance and misguidance functions as the interpretive hinge of the text. It moves Ashura memory from affect alone to guidance, responsibility, and covenantal orientation [2,3].

Evidence-supported interpretation. The moral-cognitive diagnosis of the opposing camp explains why the text treats Karbala as more than a battlefield event. The opposition to Imam al-Husayn is described through distorted desire, worldliness, misjudgment, and disordered allegiance. The mechanism is therefore not only conflict remembrance but moral discernment.

Evidence-supported interpretation. The sign-of-the-believer tradition gives the Ziyarat identity force while requiring strict boundary control [2,7]. It marks ritual affiliation and covenantal memory, but it does not authorize empirical measurement of faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, or spiritual rank.



Interpretive but bounded. The article's 360-degree logic suggests that the return does not close the memory cycle once and for all; it reopens Ashura as a recurring criterion for loyalty, justice, guidance, and moral accountability. This claim is interpretive because the study analyses textual function rather than measuring reciter behaviour.

Interpretive but bounded. The separation between textual Arbaeen and social-service Arbaeen suggests a layered theory of Arbaeen: the Ziyarat provides the purpose-and-return grammar, while the walk and service system express a later embodied and institutional layer. This distinction requires further development in the separate Article 5 stream.

5.3 Comparison with Prior Literature

The findings align with classical and received Shi'i visitation sources that present Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a recognized visitation text attached to the twentieth of Šafar and associated with Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom, purpose, walāyah, barā'ah, covenantal following, and final blessing [1–9]. The article extends this source field by modelling these elements as a connected sequence rather than treating them as isolated devotional themes.

The findings also align with cultural memory theory, which explains how communities preserve meaning through shared frames, ritual repetition, authorized texts, and sacred-calendar practices [13–21]. However, the article qualifies secular memory theory by insisting that Shi'i source grammar remains primary. Memory theory explains transmission and recurrence; it does not replace the theological claim structure of the Ziyarat.

The discussion also reframes the relationship with the first three articles in the Ashura–Arbaeen portfolio. Ziyarat Ashura explains covenantal stance and ethical dissociation from injustice; Ziyarat Warith explains prophetic inheritance, legitimacy, imamate, and human dignity; Ziyarat Nahiya protects witness-memory from abstraction and forgetting; Ziyarat al-Arba'in explains return to purpose [10–12]. The contribution is not repetition but portfolio completion: covenant, inheritance, witness, and return become distinct but connected layers.

The findings diverge from pilgrimage-management literature in scope, not in value. Prior Arbaeen KPI works rightly frame the contemporary pilgrimage as a large-scale event requiring safety, service, coordination, stakeholder alignment, and continuous improvement [34–36]. The present article does not dispute that layer. It shows that those indicators belong to the operational Arbaeen field, not to the inward truth or textual telos of Ziyarat al-Arba'in.

The findings also qualify broader KPI-governance work in religious and civilizational contexts [37–44]. Those frameworks are valuable when the object is institutional performance, dialogue quality, data stewardship, service coordination, or educational delivery. They become invalid when used to measure sanctity, sincerity, divine acceptance, thawāb, wilāyah truth, or spiritual rank. The article therefore strengthens the governance literature by clarifying the boundary between measurable translation and non-measurable sacred reality.



5.4 Alternative Explanations and Rival Mechanisms

A grief-only explanation would argue that the Ziyarat primarily extends mourning after Ashura. The findings do not deny grief, but they show that grief is not the whole mechanism. The purpose clause, moral-cognitive diagnosis, covenantal alignment, and preparedness for support require a broader interpretive model.

A politics-only explanation would read the Ziyarat mainly as protest against oppression. This captures the text's opposition to injustice but under-explains sacred address, divine proximity, walāyah, inward submission, and final blessing.

A pilgrimage-only explanation would treat Arbaeen as a visitation movement or mass gathering. This explains the public visibility of Arbaeen but not the internal textual sequence of Ziyarat al-Arba'in.

An identity-only explanation would treat the sign of the believer as group marking. This is partially useful, but it risks flattening the sign into sociological affiliation. The article interprets the sign as ritual identity and covenantal orientation, not only group differentiation.

A KPI-reductive explanation would transfer governance logic from Arbaeen service systems into the Ziyarat itself. This rival mechanism fails at the sacred boundary. Operational indicators may evaluate service delivery, safety, logistics, educational transparency, or translation quality, but they cannot evaluate divine acceptance, faith, sincerity, or wilāyah truth [34–44].

5.5 Theoretical Implications

First, the article contributes a new mechanism to Shi'i Ziyarat studies: purpose clarification as the hinge between martyrdom and return. This contribution resolves the literature gap in which Ziyarat al-Arba'in is often cited through famous phrases without modelling its full movement.

Second, the article strengthens cultural memory theory by showing how sacred memory is renewed not merely through repetition but through return to telos. This qualifies memory theory by showing that the content of what is remembered matters as much as the social process of remembering [13–21].

Third, the article clarifies a boundary condition for ritual identity theory. The “sign of the believer” can be analysed as a ritual-identity marker without becoming a metric of inward faith [2,7]. This resolves the gap around identity language and non-reduction.

Fourth, the article contributes to the Ashura–Arbaeen portfolio by defining the return layer. Ziyarat Ashura forms covenantal stance, Ziyarat Warith forms inheritance legitimacy, Ziyarat Nahiya protects witness-memory, and Ziyarat al-Arba'in reactivates purpose through return [10–12].



Fifth, the article contributes to governance and KPI literature by establishing a sacred-boundary rule. KPI-governed systems may evaluate operational, educational, and institutional translations, but not sacred acceptance or metaphysical truth [34–44]. This contribution is directly tied to the finding that Article 4 and Article 5 require different units of analysis.

5.6 Practical and Policy Implications

The practical implication of the study is primarily interpretive and pedagogical. Scholars, religious educators and institutional actors should treat Ziyārat al-Arbaʿīn first as a source-grounded ziyārah text that clarifies the purpose of Karbala, not as an appendix to Arbaeen service governance. Operational indicators may remain useful for the separate social-service layer of Arbaeen, but the ziyārah itself should be taught and analysed through source traceability, phrase–function coherence and the non-reductionist boundary that prevents faith, sincerity, divine acceptance and wilāyah truth from being treated as measurable variables.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This article examined how Ziyarat al-Arbaʿīn transforms Ashura from the remembrance of martyrdom into a Purpose-and-Return Cycle of guidance, ritual identity, covenantal continuity, and memory renewal. The primary finding is that the Ziyarat does not function as a disconnected devotional text; it moves through a structured sequence in which martyrdom is interpreted through purpose, purpose is expressed as guidance, and guidance is framed as rescue from ignorance and bewilderment in misguidance.

The first subsidiary finding is that Imam al-Husayn’s self-offering is not presented merely as tragedy or heroic death, but as a purposive act directed toward the rescue of God’s servants from ignorance and misguidance. The second finding is that the opposing camp is diagnosed through moral-cognitive failure: worldliness, desire, distorted judgment, and disordered allegiance. The third finding is that Arbaeen functions as ritual return to meaning, not only as chronological remembrance or physical movement. The fourth finding is that the sign of the believer operates as ritual-identity language within Imami devotional life, not as an empirical measure of inward faith. The fifth finding is that Ziyarat al-Arbaʿīn must remain analytically distinct from Arbaeen walk, mawkib, hospitality, logistics, WASH, health, transport, crowd governance, and service KPIs. No statistical null results are reported because the study is conceptual-textual rather than quantitative; the negative result is theoretical, namely that grief-only, pilgrimage-only, identity-only, politics-only, and KPI-reductive readings cannot explain the full phrase–function sequence of the text.

6.2 Scholarly Contributions

This article makes four contributions. First, it refines Shiʿi Ziyarat studies by modelling Ziyarat al-Arbaʿīn as a complete Purpose-and-Return Cycle rather than as a set of isolated devotional phrases. Second, it contributes to ritual and cultural memory studies by showing that Arbaeen return is not mere repetition; it is a return to telos, guidance, covenant, and renewed Ashura memory. Third, it clarifies the sign-of-the-believer tradition as a ritual-



identity marker without converting faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, thawāb, wilāyah truth, sanctity, or spiritual rank into empirical variables. Fourth, it strengthens the wider Ashura–Arbaeen portfolio by positioning Ziyarat al-Arba'in as the return layer after covenantal stance, prophetic inheritance, and witness-memory.

6.3 Limitations

The first limitation is source-critical. The article treats Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a received Imami liturgical text and uses the Ṣafwān al-Jammāl version as the primary corpus, but it does not provide a new full isnād, rijāl, or manuscript-variant ruling. This limits the study to source-aware interpretive modelling rather than hadith-critical final adjudication.

The second limitation is methodological. The study is qualitative, conceptual, and textual. It does not measure behavioural outcomes, reciter transformation, pilgrim experience, institutional performance, or social impact. Accordingly, it cannot make causal claims about what the Ziyarat produces in all readers, visitors, or communities.

The third limitation is contextual. The model is most applicable where Ziyarat al-Arba'in is treated as a received Imami Ziyarat text. It should not be generalized automatically to all ziyārāt, all Ashura practices, all Islamic pilgrimage systems, or all religious memory traditions.

The fourth limitation is operational. The article does not analyse Arbaeen walk, mawākib, hospitality, logistics, WASH, health, transport, crowd safety, or service governance. This restriction narrows the scope but protects the article from conflating the textual Arbaeen layer with the social-service Arbaeen layer.

6.4 Directions for Future Research

Future research should first verify the Arabic source-status of Ziyarat al-Arba'in through edition-controlled comparison across al-Ṭūsī, Ibn Ṭāwūs, Ibn al-Mashhadī, al-Kaf'amī, al-Qummī, and al-Majlisī. A second direction is close philological comparison of the purpose clause to assess whether textual variants affect the Purpose-and-Return Cycle. Third, reception studies with seminary teachers, translators, preachers, and religious educators could examine how the purpose phrase and sign-of-the-believer tradition are taught and bounded in practice. Fourth, comparative phrase–function coding across Ziyarat al-Arba'in, Ziyarat Ashura, Ziyarat Warith, and Ziyarat Nahiya could develop a typology of covenant, inheritance, witness, and return. Finally, longitudinal discourse analysis of Arbaeen media and educational materials could examine whether Arbaeen is framed primarily through grief, purpose, return, identity, service, scale, or governance.

6.5 Closing Synthesis

Ziyarat al-Arba'in matters because it returns Ashura memory to the purpose of Karbala: guidance, rescue from ignorance, covenantal alignment, and renewed responsibility. Its scholarly value lies in showing that Arbaeen is not only a date, a walk, a service system, or an identity marker; in the Ziyarat text, it is a disciplined return to telos. This paper changes Shi'i



Ziyarat and Ashura–Arbaeen memory studies by modelling Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a source-grounded Purpose-and-Return Cycle and enables practitioners and policymakers to distinguish sacred textual meaning from the governable service layer of Arbaeen.

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