



Arbaeen as the Embodied Ritual Presence of Ashura's Memory: Mawkib, Service and Dignity-Based Governance

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Abstract

Arbaeen is often described through scale, walking routes, hospitality stations, health pressure, security coordination and logistical complexity. Such descriptions are necessary but insufficient for explaining the inner logic of the phenomenon. This article examines how Arbaeen translates Ashura's living memory into embodied ritual presence, Mawkib-based service, dignity-oriented hospitality and multi-level governance without reducing the sacred event to tourism, event management, crowd logistics or metrics. The study is a qualitative, conceptual and documentary inquiry. It uses source-boundary mapping, construct coding, evidence-matrix control and design-science-informed model building across Shia Arbaeen materials, the Ashura-Arbaeen article sequence, UNESCO hospitality documentation, WHO mass-gathering health logic and theories of memory, ritual, hospitality, dignity and governance. The findings show that Arbaeen moves Ashura memory from text and mourning into walking, fatigue, vulnerability and shared return; that the Mawkib functions as a service-governance cell; that dignity-based hospitality reshapes the pilgrim as honoured guest rather than customer, tourist or crowd unit; that Arbaeen governance is semi-distributed across shrine, state, family, volunteer, health, security, transport and pilgrim actors; and that indicators may support service, safety, WASH, access, emergency response and dignity safeguards but cannot measure faith, sincerity, sanctity, divine acceptance or spiritual rank. The article contributes a non-reductionist Embodied Ritual Service-Governance Cycle for Arbaeen and provides a service-learning boundary for policy and practice.

Keywords: Arbaeen; Ashura memory; embodied ritual presence; Mawkib service governance; dignity-based hospitality; cultural memory; non-reductionist KPI boundary.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context



Arbaeen, the fortieth day after Ashura, occupies a distinctive place in Imami Shi'i devotional and social life because it joins the memory of Imam al-Husayn's martyrdom to ritual return, walking, hospitality, service, and renewed loyalty. Its textual anchor is Ziyarat al-Arba'in, transmitted in the Shi'i visitation corpus and associated with the twentieth of Šafar, while its contemporary social field is enacted through the Arbaeen walk, Mawkib, free hospitality, public care, health coordination, security, transport, and multi-level service arrangements [1–6]. This article treats these two layers as related but analytically distinct: Ziyarat al-Arba'in provides the textual grammar of purpose and return; Arbaeen as a lived social phenomenon translates Ashura memory into embodied ritual presence and dignity-based service.

The key terms require early definition. Embodied ritual presence refers to the movement of Ashura memory from text, narration, mourning, and covenant into the pilgrim's body, walking, fatigue, tears, vulnerability, shared route, and collective service. Mawkib are not treated here merely as food tents or logistics points; they are voluntary service-governance cells that provide water, food, rest, shelter, medical support, guidance, and recognition. Dignity-based governance means coordination of service responsibilities around the pilgrim as an honoured guest rather than a customer, tourist, or crowd unit. KPI means key performance indicator; in this article, KPIs are restricted to social and operational responsibilities such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), safety, health readiness, access, route flow, emergency response, lost-person support, and service learning. They are not applied to sanctity, sincerity, divine acceptance, thawāb, wilāyah truth, spiritual rank, or the metaphysical value of ziyārah.

The immediate why-now rationale is that Arbaeen is increasingly visible as one of the world's largest recurring religious gatherings, while its hospitality and service practices have also gained international cultural recognition and public-health attention [15–17]. Yet scale is not explanation. Millions walking toward Karbala are not simply participants in a mass event; they are carriers of a memory system in which Ashura is enacted through body, route, fatigue, guesthood, service, and care. The primary theoretical lens of this article is therefore cultural memory and ritual embodiment, supported by gift/hospitality theory and service-governance logic [7–14]. The rival lens is religious tourism, event management, and crowd logistics: useful for operational issues, but insufficient when treated as the primary explanation of Arbaeen's meaning.

This article is positioned as the fifth study in a wider Ashura–Arbaeen research sequence. The first layer, Ziyarat Ashura', explains covenantal stance and ethical dissociation from injustice. The second, Ziyarat Warith, locates Karbala within prophetic inheritance, imamate, sacred legitimacy, and human dignity. The third, Ziyarat Nahiya, protects witness-memory from abstraction and forgetting. The fourth, Ziyarat al-Arba'in, explains return to purpose. The present article moves from textual memory to embodied social enactment: Arbaeen as walking, service, hospitality, dignity, trust, public care, and multi-level governance.



The conceptual model can be previewed as follows: Ashura memory generates intention; intention becomes embodied walking; walking produces shared vulnerability and meaningful fatigue; Mawkib translate loyalty into hospitality and protection; dignity-based service builds trust; trust supports covenantal *communitas*; multi-level governance coordinates state, shrine, family, volunteer, health, security, and transport actors; and bounded service learning strengthens the next cycle of return. The model therefore posits Ashura memory as the source construct, embodied walking and mawkib service as the mechanism, dignity/trust/*communitas*/service learning as the outcome, and the non-reductionist KPI boundary as the governing condition.

1.2 Statement of Problem

The central problem is analytical and methodological. Arbäeen is often described through crowd size, walking routes, hospitality stations, security coordination, transport, health pressure, and logistical complexity. These dimensions are real, but they do not explain the inner logic of the phenomenon. When Arbäeen is reduced to religious tourism, event management, political mobilization, or crowd logistics, the pilgrim becomes a visitor, customer, consumer, or crowd unit; the mawkib becomes a service point; hospitality becomes supply; and sacred memory becomes background symbolism.

A second reduction moves in the opposite direction. Reverential religious discourse may preserve sanctity but leave under-theorized the service, health, WASH, accessibility, emergency response, coordination, and learning responsibilities through which Arbäeen is sustained at scale. Such accounts risk treating the social field as spontaneous devotion without sufficient attention to preventable harm, service quality, vulnerable pilgrims, route safety, or institutional learning. A non-reductionist article must therefore protect sacred meaning while also recognizing operational responsibility.

The problem affects several fields. In Shi'i studies, it limits the ability to explain how Ashura memory is socially enacted beyond textual recitation. In ritual studies, it weakens the analysis of walking, fatigue, guesthood, and service as embodied mechanisms of memory. In governance studies, it obscures the mawkib as a distributed service-governance cell. In public-health and mass-gathering studies, it risks treating health and safety as external technical layers rather than dignity responsibilities internal to the ethics of service.

1.3 Research Gap: Critical Synthesis

Existing literature and source traditions explain important parts of the Arbäeen field. Classical and devotional sources establish the significance of Arbäeen, the Ziyarat al-Arba'in textual anchor, the memory of Jābir's visitation, and the contested historical reports concerning the first Arbäeen [1–6]. Cultural memory and ritual theory explain how foundational events are transmitted through shared frames, ritual repetition, embodied practice, sacred calendars, and collective participation [7–11]. Gift and hospitality theory helps distinguish mawkib service from commercial exchange, while governance theory supports analysis of distributed actors,



co-production, and multi-level coordination [12–14]. UNESCO's recognition of Arbæen hospitality and WHO-style mass-gathering health guidance further show that hospitality, public health, risk, and learning are not peripheral issues [15–17].

The unresolved gap is not simply that Arbæen needs more study. The higher-value gap is the absence of an integrated, non-reductionist model that links Ashura memory, embodied walking, mawkib hospitality, dignity-based guesthood, covenantal communitas, multi-level governance, public-health responsibility, and bounded KPI learning. Existing approaches tend either to protect sacred meaning while underdeveloping service governance, or to examine service and risk while weakening the theological and ritual grammar of the event. This article addresses that tension by modelling Arbæen as an Embodied Ritual Service-Governance Cycle.

1.4 Research Purpose and Research Questions/Objectives

The purpose of this article is to develop a source-sensitive and governance-aware model of Arbæen as the embodied ritual presence of Ashura's memory. It explains how Ashura remembrance moves from text, mourning and covenant into walking, fatigue, mawkib hospitality, dignity-based service, trust, multi-level coordination and service learning, without converting sacred realities into measurable indicators.

The primary research question is: How does Arbæen translate Ashura's living memory into embodied ritual presence, mawkib-based service, dignity-oriented hospitality and multi-level governance without reducing the sacred event to tourism, event management, crowd logistics or managerial metrics?

The subsidiary research questions are:

SRQ1: How does embodied walking transform Ashura memory from text and mourning into bodily presence, meaningful fatigue, vulnerability and shared return?

SRQ2: How does the mawkib function as a service-governance cell rather than merely as a service point?

SRQ3: How does dignity-based hospitality reshape the pilgrim from tourist, customer or crowd unit into honoured guest?

SRQ4: How can Arbæen governance be conceptualized as multi-level and semi-distributed without ignoring the roles of shrine institutions, state actors, health services, security agencies, transport providers, families, volunteers and pilgrims?

SRQ5: Which indicators may ethically support service, safety, WASH, accessibility, risk response and dignity safeguards without measuring sacred truth?

The objectives are to define embodied ritual presence in the Arbæen context, construct a mawkib-centred service-governance model, theorize dignity-based hospitality as a shift from



transaction to guesthood, conceptualize Arbæen as semi-distributed multi-level governance, and specify a KPI boundary that permits service improvement while excluding spiritual measurement.

1.5 Significance and Contributions

The article is significant for Shi'i studies because it clarifies how Ashura memory is socially enacted without dissolving its theological grammar. It is significant for ritual studies because it shows how memory is walked, hosted, fed, treated, protected, and renewed. It is significant for governance studies because it reframes the mawkib as a distributed service-governance cell. It is significant for public-health and mass-gathering scholarship because it treats WASH, safety, emergency response, and after-action learning as dignity responsibilities rather than secular add-ons. It is significant for KPI governance because it defines the boundary between measurable service responsibilities and non-measurable sacred realities.

This paper contributes by (1) demonstrating that Arbæen can be modelled as an embodied ritual service-governance cycle rather than as a crowd-management or tourism case, (2) defining the mawkib as a checkable service-governance cell that converts loyalty into water, food, rest, medical care, guidance, protection, and dignity, (3) refining *communitas* as covenantal *communitas* grounded in *ziyārah*, service, guesthood, and shared fatigue, and (4) establishing a non-reductionist KPI boundary in which operational responsibilities may be evaluated but sanctity, faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, *thawāb*, *wilāyah* truth, and spiritual rank are not measured.

1.6 Scope and Boundary Conditions

The unit of analysis is Arbæen as an embodied social-ritual and service-governance field, not Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a textual object. The geography is centred on the Arbæen visitation and walking routes converging on Karbala, especially the Iraqi setting in which Mawkib, shrine institutions, families, volunteers, health services, security actors, transport systems, and pilgrims interact. The study is conceptual and documentary; it does not conduct interviews, surveys, participant observation, statistical modelling, medical record analysis, or route-level operational measurement.

The argument is expected to hold where Arbæen is understood as a Shi'i sacred-memory practice enacted through walking, hospitality, service, and return. It should not be generalized automatically to all pilgrimages, all Islamic gatherings, or all religious tourism systems. The article does not claim to measure pilgrims' faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, spiritual transformation, *thawāb*, *wilāyah*, intercession, or the metaphysical value of service. No conflicts are disclosed based on the provided materials.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Search and Selection Logic



This review is integrative and theory-building. It does not present a statistical meta-analysis or exhaustive systematic review. Its purpose is to construct a source-sensitive and theoretically disciplined foundation for analysing Arbaeen as the embodied ritual presence of Ashura's memory: a social-ritual field in which memory is enacted through walking, meaningful fatigue, mawkib hospitality, dignity-based service, trust, public care and multi-level governance. The review integrates six bodies of literature: classical and received Shi'i Arbaeen and visitation sources; modern explanatory and historical materials on Arbaeen; cultural memory and ritual theory; pilgrimage and embodied practice theory; gift, hospitality and recognition theory; and governance, public-health and KPI-boundary literature.

The inclusion logic follows the article's research problem. Sources are included when they clarify at least one of seven functions: the textual and reception background of Arbaeen; the distinction between Ziyarat al-Arba'in as a Purpose-and-Return bridge and Arbaeen as an embodied-service field; the movement of Ashura memory from text and mourning into body, route, fatigue and return; the function of the mawkib as a service-governance cell; the transformation of the pilgrim into honoured guest through dignity-based hospitality; the multi-level coordination of shrine, state, family, volunteer, health, security, transport and pilgrim actors; or the ethical boundary between service measurement and sacred non-measurement. Sources are excluded when they function only as devotional exhortation, unsupported polemic, generic celebration, tourism description without analytical relevance, or operational evidence used to infer spiritual value.

Evidence strength is graded qualitatively. Classical and received visitation sources are strongest for the textual and ritual background of Arbaeen, but they require source-status caution. Modern explanatory works are useful for reception, pedagogy and historical mapping, but they do not replace primary-source verification. Cultural memory and ritual theory provide vocabulary for repetition, embodiment and social transmission, but they remain analytical instruments rather than replacement theology. Public-health, governance and KPI sources are strongest for service, risk, WASH, safety and learning responsibilities, but they do not constitute evidence for sanctity, sincerity, divine acceptance or spiritual rank [1–17,34–44].

2.2 Theoretical Background: Foundation and Rival Lenses

The primary theoretical lens of this article is embodied ritual service-governance. Embodiment refers to the movement of Ashura memory from narration and mourning into walking bodies, shared fatigue, vulnerability, route experience and ritual participation. Service governance refers to the coordination of care through mawakib, households, volunteers, shrine institutions, public agencies, health actors, security services, transport systems and pilgrims. The construct is ritual in source, embodied in practice, social in scale and governance-oriented in its service implications.

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, ritual repetition and public forms transmit identity across generations [14,15]. Connerton's account of bodily remembering is especially relevant because Arbaeen does not leave memory in the mind; it carries memory through walking, fatigue, gestures, route discipline and repeated practices [16]. Ricoeur's work on memory, history and forgetting helps name the ethical risk of memory becoming detached from purpose or reduced to routinized display [17].

Ritual and pilgrimage theory provide the second supporting lens. Bell's theory of ritualization clarifies how repeated sacred practices form orientation rather than merely express emotion [18]. Turner's *communitas* lens helps explain shared vulnerability, equality and solidarity in pilgrimage, but Arbaeen requires refinement: its togetherness is not only liminal social bonding but covenantal *communitas* grounded in loyalty, service, guesthood and shared return [19]. Hervieu-Leger's chain-of-memory lens clarifies how religious continuity depends on authorized memory, transmission and belonging [20]. Durkheim remains useful for the social force of collective ritual, but this article does not reduce Arbaeen's sacred meaning to social cohesion [21].

Gift, hospitality and recognition theory provide the third supporting lens. The *mawkib* cannot be adequately explained through market exchange or standard service-delivery language. Gift theory clarifies why free food, water, rest, shelter and care operate outside commercial transaction [22]. Recognition theory helps explain why the pilgrim is not merely supplied but honoured: service becomes a form of dignity recognition [23]. Islamic hospitality literature further supports the host-guest grammar through which service is understood as moral responsibility, not consumption [24–26].

Three rival lenses require boundary control. A tourism lens can describe movement, visitation and destination management, but it risks misclassifying the pilgrim as a tourist or consumer. An event-management or crowd-logistics lens can explain transport, security, WASH, health, emergency response and crowd flow, but it cannot explain why service is grounded in Ashura memory and loyalty [34–36]. A KPI-reductive lens can support auditability and improvement in service systems, but it fails if it converts faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, spiritual rank or sacred value into measurable variables [37–44]. These rival lenses remain useful only when assigned to their correct layer.

2.3 Conceptual Domain Map: Constructs and Boundaries

The central constructs are limited to six: embodied Ashura memory, embodied walking, *mawkib* as service-governance cell, dignity-based hospitality, covenantal *communitas* and non-reductionist KPI boundary.

Embodied Ashura memory is defined as the movement of Karbala remembrance from text, mourning and covenant into lived practice. Operationally, it appears when memory is enacted through intention, walking, tears, service, guesthood and collective return. Its boundary



condition is that the article analyses social and ritual translation, not the metaphysical truth of memory itself.

Embodied walking is defined as the bodily enactment of return to Karbala. Operationally, it includes route movement, fatigue, vulnerability, shared hardship, bodily discipline and the experience of return. Its boundary condition is that physical hardship is not romanticized; preventable harm remains a service and dignity failure.

The mawkib is defined as a service-governance cell. Operationally, it provides water, food, rest, shelter, medical support, guidance, cultural instruction and protection through voluntary and often family- or community-based structures. Its boundary condition is that the mawkib is not reduced to catering, but claims about service quality, safety or scale require appropriate evidence.

Dignity-based hospitality is defined as the transformation of the pilgrim from customer, tourist or crowd unit into honoured guest. Operationally, it appears in free service, respect, protection, non-commercial care and the moral grammar of hosting. Its boundary condition is that dignity requires quality: unsafe food, weak sanitation, inaccessible facilities or poor emergency response cannot be justified by devotional intention.

Covenantal *communitas* is defined as shared belonging formed through loyalty, service, fatigue, guesthood and return. Operationally, it appears in trust, mutual assistance, social proximity, shared route experience and service reciprocity. Its boundary condition is that *communitas* is not treated as uniform, conflict-free or politically neutral.

The non-reductionist KPI boundary is defined as the ethical separation between measurable service responsibilities and non-measurable sacred realities. Operationally, permissible indicators include WASH access, medical response, food safety, crowd flow, lost-person resolution, accessibility, heat-risk response, volunteer training and after-action learning. Prohibited objects of measurement include faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, thawab, sanctity, spiritual rank, the truth of wilayah and the metaphysical value of tears, service or intention [34–44].

2.4 Critical Synthesis by Themes and Mechanisms

2.4.1 Source Field, Reception and Textual Boundary

The strongest source consensus is that Arbäeen is linked to the twentieth of Safar, the memory of Imam al-Husayn, the reception of Ziyarat al-Arba'in and early visitation reports associated with Karbala [1–9]. These sources establish the sacred-calendar and visitation background of the article. However, the present study does not merge the Ziyarat text with the whole Arbäeen walk. Ziyarat al-Arba'in functions as the textual Purpose-and-Return bridge, while this article analyses Arbäeen as an embodied-service field. This distinction prevents the article from treating a sacred text as an operations manual or treating a living pilgrimage as mere logistics.



2.4.2 From Memory to Embodied Walking

Memory and ritual theory support the claim that communities preserve foundational events through repeated forms, ritual calendars and embodied practice [13–21]. Arbaeen extends this logic by moving Ashura memory through the body: the pilgrim walks, becomes tired, shares vulnerability, receives care and participates in a route-based return. The mechanism is not only recollection but embodied presence. The contested issue is whether walking should be read as tourism movement, devotional hardship, social identity formation or embodied memory. This article reads walking as embodied memory under sacred meaning, while keeping health and safety responsibilities intact.

2.4.3 Mawkib as Service-Governance Cell

The mawkib is the article's central institutional construct. Literature on hospitality, gift exchange and recognition helps explain why mawakib cannot be reduced to supply points or informal catering [22–26]. In Arbaeen, the mawkib converts loyalty into water, food, shelter, rest, medical support, guidance and protection. It is therefore both symbolic and operational: symbolic because it performs love and loyalty; operational because it coordinates material care for vulnerable bodies. The main analytical risk is romanticization. The mawkib should be understood as a service-governance cell, but claims about performance, coverage, safety, hygiene or sustainability require evidence.

2.4.4 Dignity, Guesthood and Covenantal Communitas

Dignity-based hospitality changes the moral grammar of service. The pilgrim is not merely a recipient of goods, a customer or a crowd unit, but an honoured guest. This shift explains why free service, respect, protection and care are central to Arbaeen. It also connects service to trust: when the pilgrim is treated with dignity, social distance narrows and covenantal communitas becomes possible. Turner's communitas is therefore useful but incomplete [19]. Arbaeen communitas is structured by Ashura memory, loyalty, service, fatigue and shared return, not only by temporary liminality.

2.4.5 Multi-Level Governance, Public Health and KPI Boundary

Arbaeen is neither fully state-run nor ungoverned. It is a semi-distributed field in which shrine institutions, public agencies, municipalities, security actors, health teams, transport providers, families, volunteers, mawakib and pilgrims share responsibility. Public-health and mass-gathering literature correctly identifies the need for prevention, preparedness, surveillance, WASH, food safety, emergency response, logistics and after-action learning [34–36]. Yet this governance layer must remain ethically bounded. Service, safety, health, access, risk and dignity safeguards may be evaluated; sacred truth may not be measured. The result is a non-reductionist service-governance model: bodies must be protected because the pilgrim is honoured, but the honour of pilgrimage must not be colonized by managerial metrics [37–44].

3. Methodology



This article uses a qualitative, source-sensitive and design-science-informed conceptual design. Its claim type is interpretive and model-building, not causal, predictive, statistical or behavioural. The unit of analysis is Arbaeen as an embodied social-ritual and service-governance field, while Ziyarat al-Arba'in is used only as the textual Purpose-and-Return bridge from the preceding article. The corpus consists of received Shi'i Arbaeen and visitation sources, Persian Arbaeen research materials, the author's prior Ashura-Arbaeen article sequence, UNESCO documentation on Arbaeen hospitality, WHO and mass-gathering health guidance, public-health and risk literature, and theoretical sources on memory, ritual, gift, hospitality, dignity, governance and KPI boundary logic [1-17,22-44].

Data were examined through documentary review, source-boundary mapping, construct coding and evidence-matrix control. Coding focused on six constructs: embodied Ashura memory, embodied walking, mawkib as service-governance cell, dignity-based hospitality, covenantal communitas and non-reductionist KPI boundary. Analysis proceeded by identifying what each source supports—textual background, ritual reception, embodiment, service, dignity, risk, governance or learning—and then mapping these functions into the Embodied Ritual Service-Governance Cycle. Rival readings, including tourism-only, event-management-only, politics-only, crowd-logistics-only and KPI-reductive interpretations, were used as boundary tests.

Trustworthiness is supported through a non-statistical audit trail consisting of the source hierarchy, construct definitions, coding categories, evidence matrix and claim-boundary decisions. The study does not use interviews, surveys, private records, participant observation, medical records or operational route-level datasets; therefore, statistical reliability, p-values and causal inference are not applicable. Ethical discipline is maintained by separating measurable service responsibilities from non-measurable sacred realities. Health, safety, WASH, access, food safety, emergency response, lost-person support, volunteer readiness and service learning may be evaluated; sanctity, faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, spiritual rank, intercession, wilayah truth and the metaphysical value of service or intention are not treated as empirical variables.

4. Findings and Results

4.1 Data Overview and Evidence Base

The findings are conceptual and documentary rather than statistical. The evidence base consists of received Shia Arbaeen and visitation sources, Persian Arbaeen research materials, the preceding Ashura-Arbaeen article sequence, UNESCO documentation on Arbaeen hospitality, WHO and mass-gathering health guidance, public-health and risk literature, and theoretical sources on memory, ritual, gift, hospitality, dignity, governance and KPI boundary logic [1-17,22-44]. The unit of analysis is Arbaeen as an embodied social-ritual and service-governance field. Ziyarat al-Arba'in is used only as the textual Purpose-and-Return bridge; it is not treated as an operations manual for crowd, health or logistics analysis.



No human participants, interviews, surveys, field observations, private records, medical records, route-level operational datasets or statistical samples are used. Accordingly, there are no response rates, missing cases, exclusions, imputations, confidence intervals, p-values or model-fit indices to report. The relevant quality issue is not statistical completeness but traceability: each finding is retained only where it can be linked to a source layer, construct definition, interpretive function and boundary condition.

4.2 Main Findings Mapped to the Research Questions

Finding 1, mapped to SRQ1: Arbaeen moves Ashura memory from textual remembrance into embodied ritual presence.

Documentary and construct coding show that Arbaeen cannot be explained as remembrance alone. The memory of Ashura is carried through intention, walking, fatigue, tears, bodily vulnerability, shared route experience and return. This finding supports SRQ1 by showing that embodied walking does not merely move pilgrims across space; it translates sacred memory into bodily participation. The analytical result is not a behavioural claim about all pilgrims, but a construct-level finding: walking functions as a ritual memory mechanism. The negative case is the crowd-logistics reading, which can explain movement density and route pressure but cannot explain why walking is meaningful as memory.

Finding 2, mapped to SRQ2: The mawkib functions as a service-governance cell rather than merely as a service point.

The evidence matrix supports the elevation of the mawkib from food station, tent or rest point to service-governance cell. In the Arbaeen field, the mawkib converts loyalty into water, food, shelter, rest, medical support, guidance, protection and recognition. It is both symbolic and operational: symbolic because it performs devotion and loyalty; operational because it organizes care for vulnerable bodies. This finding answers SRQ2 by showing that mawkib service is not reducible to supply delivery. Its governance function lies in distributed coordination, volunteer mobilization, hospitality discipline and dignity protection. The negative case is romanticization: poor hygiene, unsafe food, inadequate access or weak emergency response cannot be justified by devotional intention.

Finding 3, mapped to SRQ3: Dignity-based hospitality reshapes the pilgrim as honoured guest, not tourist, customer or crowd unit.

The construct coding identifies a consistent dignity shift. The pilgrim is not framed primarily as a consumer of religious tourism, an attendee of an event or a unit in a crowd-flow model. The pilgrim is received as a guest whose body, fatigue, vulnerability and need for guidance create moral obligations of care. This finding answers SRQ3 by explaining why free service, respect, protection and non-commercial hosting are central to Arbaeen. It also clarifies that dignity does not remove quality control; rather, it intensifies it. Service becomes dignity-preserving only when it protects health, safety, access, food safety, rest, privacy and vulnerable pilgrims.



Finding 4, mapped to SRQ4: Arbaeen governance is multi-level and semi-distributed. The evidence base does not support either a purely spontaneous or fully state-run interpretation. Arbaeen is better understood as a semi-distributed governance ecology involving shrine institutions, state agencies, municipalities, security actors, health teams, transport providers, families, volunteers, mawakib and pilgrims. This finding answers SRQ4 by clarifying that governance in Arbaeen is not identical with central command. Its structure combines distributed devotional service with formal responsibilities for safety, border management, route coordination, health preparedness, WASH, transport and emergency response. The negative case is state-control overstatement; the rival negative case is pure-spontaneity overstatement. Both miss the layered structure.

Finding 5, mapped to SRQ5: Measurement is ethically permissible only within service, safety and dignity boundaries.

The analysis identifies three evaluation zones. The green zone includes measurable service responsibilities: WASH access, water availability, food safety, medical response, emergency response, lost-person support, crowd flow, transport coordination, accessibility, heat-risk response, volunteer readiness, dignity complaint response and after-action learning. The amber zone includes qualitative interpretation: pilgrim experience, perceived dignity, trust, communal belonging, narratives of service and meaning of fatigue. The red zone is not measurable: faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, sanctity, spiritual rank, truth of wilayah, intercession, thawab and the metaphysical value of tears, service or intention. This finding answers SRQ5 by establishing the article's central KPI boundary: indicators may improve service, but they must not measure sacred truth.

4.3 Additional Analyses: Rival Readings and Negative Cases

The tourism-only reading captures movement and visitation but misclassifies the pilgrim when it treats Arbaeen primarily as religious travel. The event-management reading captures crowd flow, transport, logistics and risk, but it cannot explain why service is morally structured around Ashura memory and guest dignity. The politics-only reading may capture public symbolism, but it does not explain the service grammar of the mawakib or the embodied memory of walking. The KPI-reductive reading supports learning only in the green zone; it fails when it attempts to score sanctity, devotion or spiritual rank. These negative cases strengthen the article's core result: Arbaeen requires a non-reductionist service-governance model.

No robustness tests, subgroup effects, mediation tests or statistical heterogeneity analyses are applicable because the study does not use quantitative data. Conceptual robustness is provided through triangulation across source layers: sacred-memory sources, ritual and memory theory, hospitality and recognition theory, governance literature, public-health logic and KPI-boundary discipline.

4.4 Results-to-Objectives Traceability



The findings answer the article's objectives directly. The first finding defines Arbæen as embodied ritual presence. The second establishes the mawkib-centred service-governance model. The third theorizes dignity-based hospitality as a shift from transaction to guesthood. The fourth conceptualizes Arbæen as semi-distributed multi-level governance. The fifth specifies the non-reductionist KPI boundary. No objective remains unanswered within the conceptual scope of the article. What remains outside scope is empirical testing through interviews, surveys, route observations, operational datasets, medical records or official service logs.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary of Principal Findings

The findings show that Arbæen is best understood as the embodied ritual presence of Ashura's memory, not as a crowd event, tourism flow, logistics operation or political gathering alone. First, Ashura memory moves from text and mourning into bodily presence through walking, fatigue, vulnerability and shared return. Second, the mawkib functions as a service-governance cell rather than a mere service point. Third, dignity-based hospitality transforms the pilgrim from customer, tourist or crowd unit into honoured guest. Fourth, Arbæen governance is multi-level and semi-distributed, combining shrine, state, family, volunteer, health, security, transport and pilgrim roles. Fifth, service indicators may support safety, WASH, accessibility, emergency response and dignity safeguards, but they cannot measure sacred truth, faith, sincerity, divine acceptance, spiritual rank or the metaphysical value of service.

No statistical null results are reported because the study is conceptual and documentary. The key negative findings are interpretive: tourism-only, event-management-only, politics-only, crowd-logistics-only and KPI-reductive readings each explain part of Arbæen but fail to explain the full memory-service-governance cycle.

5.2 Interpretation and Mechanisms

Evidence-supported interpretation: Arbæen links sacred memory to operational responsibility. Walking creates bodily participation; bodily participation creates fatigue and vulnerability; vulnerability requires care; care is organized through mawakib; mawakib translate loyalty into service; service becomes dignity when the pilgrim is honoured as guest; dignity builds trust; trust supports covenantal communitas; and the whole field requires multi-level governance to protect bodies without reducing meaning to management.

Evidence-supported mechanism: the mawkib is the article's core institutional mechanism. It is where Ashura memory becomes water, food, shelter, rest, medical care, guidance and protection. This does not make the mawkib merely logistical. It makes it an embodied site where loyalty is socially enacted and where service becomes a form of dignity recognition.

Interpretive but requiring future empirical testing: the model suggests that stronger dignity safeguards may improve trust, route experience and service legitimacy. It also suggests that



post-Arbaeen learning may strengthen the next cycle of service. These remain plausible conceptual propositions rather than measured causal claims.

5.3 Comparison with Prior Literature

The findings align with cultural memory theory by showing that collective memory is preserved through repeated forms, symbols and practices [13–17]. The article extends that literature by specifying a Shi'i ritual mechanism: Ashura memory is not only narrated or recited; it is walked, hosted, served, protected and renewed.

The findings also align with ritual and pilgrimage theory, especially the view that pilgrimage generates shared vulnerability and *communitas* [18–21]. The article qualifies this literature by arguing that Arbaeen *communitas* is not generic liminality. It is covenantal *communitas*, shaped by Ashura memory, loyalty, service, guesthood and meaningful fatigue.

The findings extend gift, hospitality and recognition literature by showing that the *mawkib* cannot be fully explained through market service or tourism hospitality [22–26]. The pilgrim is not primarily a consumer. The moral grammar is host and honoured guest, not supplier and customer.

The findings agree with public-health and mass-gathering literature that large religious gatherings require preparedness, WASH, surveillance, emergency response, logistics and after-action learning [34–36]. The article reframes this point: health and safety are not external technical additions to Arbaeen; they are dignity responsibilities internal to the ethics of service.

The findings also qualify KPI-governance literature. Operational indicators are necessary for service learning, but they must remain in the service zone. The sacred zone remains outside measurement [37–44].

5.4 Alternative Explanations and Rival Mechanisms

A tourism explanation captures movement, visitation and destination pressure, but it misclassifies the pilgrim when it treats Arbaeen primarily as religious travel. An event-management explanation captures crowd flow, transport and logistics, but it cannot explain why service is grounded in Ashura memory and guest dignity. A politics-first explanation may explain public symbolism and collective visibility, but it under-explains the moral grammar of hospitality and the embodied memory of walking. A KPI-reductive explanation can support service improvement, but it becomes invalid when it attempts to score sincerity, faith, sanctity, divine acceptance or spiritual rank.

These rival explanations are therefore not rejected absolutely; they are assigned to limited layers. The article's model is stronger because it explains how sacred memory, embodied practice, hospitality, dignity, public health and governance operate together without collapsing one layer into another.



5.5 Theoretical Implications

First, the article contributes to cultural memory theory by identifying embodied ritual presence as a mechanism through which memory moves from narration to body, route and service. This contribution follows Finding 1 and addresses the literature gap concerning how Ashura memory becomes socially enacted.

Second, it contributes to ritual and pilgrimage theory by refining *communitas* into covenantal *communitas*. This contribution follows Findings 1 and 3 and addresses the gap between generic pilgrimage solidarity and Shi'i memory-based togetherness.

Third, it contributes to service and hospitality theory by defining the *mawakib* as a service-governance cell. This contribution follows Finding 2 and addresses the gap between ordinary service-point models and non-commercial, dignity-based religious hospitality.

Fourth, it contributes to governance theory by conceptualizing Arbacen as semi-distributed multi-level governance. This contribution follows Finding 4 and addresses the gap between spontaneous-devotion explanations and state-control explanations.

Fifth, it contributes to KPI and data-governance theory by proposing a non-reductionist measurement boundary. This contribution follows Finding 5 and addresses the gap between operational measurement and sacred non-measurement.

5.6 Practical and Policy Implications

For shrine authorities, the implication is to protect *mawakib* as dignity institutions while supporting service standards. The action is to provide registration, guidance, route coordination and training without bureaucratizing volunteer generosity. Required data include service location maps, volunteer readiness records and incident logs. Relevant KPIs include WASH coverage, food-safety incidents, emergency response time and dignity complaint closure. The time horizon is annual improvement. The risk is over-regulation that weakens devotional service.

For public-health and emergency agencies, the implication is to treat health protection as part of honouring the pilgrim. The action is to strengthen WASH, food safety, heat-risk response, medical triage, lost-person support and emergency coordination. Required data include health alerts, route risk maps, heat exposure indicators, medical response logs and supply status. Relevant KPIs include medical response time, heat-stress response, sanitation availability and after-action recommendation implementation. The risk is treating pilgrims as crowd units rather than honoured guests.

For *mawakib* and volunteer networks, the implication is to preserve gift-based hospitality while improving safety and accessibility. The action is to maintain free service, respect and hosting while adopting basic training in hygiene, vulnerable-pilgrim support and emergency referral. Required data include service capacity, location, volunteer skills and incident



escalation routes. Relevant KPIs include service continuity, accessibility coverage, volunteer training completion and referral response. The risk is either romanticizing poor service or commercializing hospitality.

For data and governance teams, the implication is to build dashboards only for the green zone of service responsibility. The action is to monitor WASH, health, safety, access, crowd flow, transport disruption and lost-person support while excluding faith, sincerity, sanctity, divine acceptance and spiritual rank. Required systems include route service maps, incident reporting, health surveillance, transport coordination and after-action review records. The risk is metric creep, where dashboards begin to colonize sacred meaning.

5.7 Boundary Conditions, Limitations and Threats to Validity

The article is conceptual and documentary. It does not claim causal effects, statistical generalizability or measured behavioural outcomes. Its claims are interpretive and model-building. The argument is most applicable where Arbaeen is understood as a Shi'i sacred-memory practice enacted through walking, hospitality, service and return. It should not be generalized automatically to all pilgrimages, all Islamic gatherings or all tourism systems.

The main threat to validity is source-layer confusion: Ziyarat al-Arba'in must remain the textual Purpose-and-Return bridge, while Arbaeen in this article remains the embodied-service field. A second threat is romanticization: mawakib and hardship must not be idealized in ways that ignore hygiene, safety, accessibility or vulnerable pilgrims. A third threat is managerial reduction: service dashboards may support learning, but they must not become tools for measuring spirituality. A fourth threat is empirical incompleteness: interviews, route observations, official service logs, medical records and operational datasets would strengthen future testing but are outside the present design.

5.8 Synthesis

The discussion confirms the article's central argument: Arbaeen is a sacred-memory field with operational consequences. Its meaning is not exhausted by crowd scale, and its governance cannot be reduced to management. The stronger interpretation is cyclical: memory becomes walking, walking creates vulnerability, vulnerability summons service, service protects dignity, dignity builds trust, trust forms covenantal communitas, and governance safeguards the cycle without measuring the sacred realities that animate it.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Key Findings

This article examined how Arbaeen translates Ashura's living memory into embodied ritual presence, mawakib-based service, dignity-oriented hospitality and multi-level governance without reducing the sacred event to tourism, event management, crowd logistics or metrics. The findings show, first, that Arbaeen moves Ashura memory from text and mourning into walking, fatigue, vulnerability and shared return. Second, the mawakib functions as a service-



governance cell, not merely as a service point. Third, dignity-based hospitality reshapes the pilgrim as an honoured guest rather than a customer, tourist or crowd unit. Fourth, Arbæen governance is multi-level and semi-distributed, involving shrine institutions, public agencies, health actors, security services, transport providers, families, volunteers, mawakib and pilgrims. Fifth, operational indicators may support service, safety, WASH, accessibility, emergency response and dignity safeguards, but they cannot measure faith, sincerity, sanctity, divine acceptance, spiritual rank or the metaphysical value of service. The principal contrary finding is that tourism-only, event-management-only, politics-only, crowd-logistics-only and KPI-reductive readings each explain one layer of Arbæen but fail to explain the full memory-service-governance cycle.

6.2 Scholarly Contributions

The article makes four contributions. It refines cultural memory theory by showing how Ashura memory becomes embodied through walking, fatigue, route experience and service. It advances ritual and pilgrimage theory by defining covenantal *communitas* as a form of shared belonging grounded in memory, loyalty, guesthood and mutual care. It contributes to service and hospitality studies by conceptualizing the mawakib as a service-governance cell that converts loyalty into water, food, rest, medical care, guidance, protection and dignity. It also contributes to governance and KPI literature by establishing a non-reductionist measurement boundary: service responsibilities can be evaluated, while sacred realities remain outside empirical measurement.

6.3 Recommendations for Practitioners and Policymakers

Shrine authorities should protect mawakib as dignity institutions while supporting route coordination, basic service standards and volunteer guidance; relevant KPIs include WASH coverage, food-safety incidents, emergency response time and dignity complaint closure over an annual improvement cycle, with the main risk being over-bureaucratization of devotional service. Public-health and emergency agencies should treat health protection as part of honouring the pilgrim by strengthening WASH, heat-risk response, medical triage, lost-person support and emergency coordination; relevant KPIs include medical response time, sanitation availability, heat-stress response and after-action recommendation implementation, with the main constraint being fragmented data and coordination. Mawakib and volunteer networks should preserve free hospitality while improving hygiene, accessibility and referral readiness; relevant KPIs include volunteer training completion, accessibility coverage, service continuity and incident escalation response, with the main risk being either romanticizing weak service or commercializing hospitality. Data and governance teams should build dashboards only for the service zone: WASH, health, safety, crowd flow, transport disruption, accessibility and lost-person support; the key risk is metric creep into faith, sanctity, sincerity or spiritual rank.

6.4 Limitations



The study is conceptual and documentary. It does not use interviews, surveys, participant observation, official route-level datasets, medical records, mawkib operational logs or statistical modelling. Therefore, it cannot claim causal effects, behavioural measurement, prevalence rates, service performance levels or statistical generalizability. The article also depends on source-boundary discipline: Ziyarat al-Arba'in is treated as the textual Purpose-and-Return bridge, while Arbaeen is analysed as the embodied-service field. This separation protects the argument but limits the article's ability to resolve all textual, historical or hadith-critical debates. A further limitation is that operational claims about service quality, health, safety, WASH and route governance require future empirical testing with official and field-level data.

6.5 Directions for Future Research

Future research should proceed in three directions. First, qualitative fieldwork with pilgrims, mawakib, shrine staff, health teams and transport coordinators can test how dignity-based hospitality is experienced in practice. Second, route-level service datasets can evaluate WASH coverage, medical response, food safety, accessibility and lost-person resolution across different Arbaeen routes. Third, design-science evaluation can develop and validate a green-zone Arbaeen service dashboard that supports service learning while excluding all measures of faith, sincerity, sanctity and spiritual rank.

6.6 Closing Synthesis

Arbaeen matters because it shows how a sacred memory can become an embodied, social and service-governed field without losing its spiritual horizon. The article's central insight is that the pilgrim's body, the route, the mawkib, hospitality, dignity, trust and governance are not separate layers but parts of one non-reductionist cycle. This paper changes Arbaeen scholarship by modelling sacred memory as embodied service governance and enables practice and policy to improve health, safety, WASH, accessibility and dignity without measuring the sacred.

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