

HISTORICAL AND SPIRITUAL MANIFESTATIONS OF MAWLUD CELEBRATIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO

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Abstract

The spiritual heritage and ethno-cultural richness of Kosovo are both deep and diverse, manifested through various layers of tradition and practice. Among these is the long-standing tradition of celebrating *Mawlund*, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This practice, which has been present in the region for generations, is distinguished by unique characteristics and cultural expressions that hold significant value for the spiritual life of the Muslim community in Kosovo. The historical development, features, and specific forms of *Mawlund* celebrations, such as the recitation of poetry and singing about the life of the Prophet (PBUH), have played a vital role in preserving Islamic identity and transmitting religious teachings, particularly during the communist period when religious expression was restricted. This article analyses how *Mawlund* has been organised and celebrated, highlighting its importance in sustaining Islamic culture and community life. The research methodology is primarily based on empirical fieldwork and library research. Interviews were conducted with imams and elder community members who have witnessed or participated in *Mawlund* traditions. In addition to oral sources, the study draws

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upon published literature by reputable scholars and examines original vakifnames (or *waqfiyyahs*), some of the oldest surviving manuscript documents from the 16th century.

Keywords: Kosovo; manifestation; *Mawlid*; rite; Suleyman Çelebi; *Vakifname*.

Khulasah

Warisan kerohanian dan kekayaan etno-budaya Kosovo amat mendalam dan pelbagai, yang dizahirkan melalui pelbagai lapisan tradisi dan amalan. Salah satu daripadanya ialah tradisi lama meraikan Maulid iaitu hari kelahiran Nabi Muhammad SAW. Amalan Maulid telah bertapak di rantau ini sejak turun-temurun, menonjol dengan ciri-ciri dan ekspresi budaya yang unik serta memiliki nilai yang besar dalam kehidupan kerohanian komuniti Muslim di Kosovo. Perkembangan sejarah, ciri-ciri, dan bentuk-bentuk khusus sambutan Maulid seperti pembacaan syair dan nyanyian yang mengisahkan kehidupan Nabi SAW telah memainkan peranan penting dalam memelihara identiti Islam dan penyampaian ajaran agama, khususnya semasa era pemerintahan komunis yang menyekat kebebasan beragama. Makalah ini menganalisis cara Maulid dianjurkan dan diraikan serta menekankan kepentingannya dalam mempertahankan budaya Islam dan kehidupan bermasyarakat. Kaedah penyelidikan utama yang digunakan adalah berbentuk kerja lapangan empirikal dan kajian perpustakaan. Temu bual telah dijalankan bersama para imam dan anggota masyarakat yang lebih tua yang pernah menyaksikan atau terlibat dalam tradisi Maulid ini. Selain sumber lisan, kajian ini turut menggunakan literatur terbitan oleh para sarjana yang berwibawa serta meneliti *vakifname* atau *waqfiyyah* asal dokumen manuskrip tertua yang wujud sejak abad ke-16.

Kata kunci: Kosovo; manifestasi; Maulid; ritual; Suleyman Çelebi; *vakifname*.

Introduction

Spirituality in Islam is considered the confession of faith in God Almighty and His messenger and to live in accordance with His rules and guidance.¹ The profound love for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is what inspired Muslims to commemorate his birthday. This same deep affection also motivated many prominent authors throughout history to compose verses and produce remarkable works about the beloved Prophet, expressing their devotion through refined language, artistic style, and heartfelt emotion. As a result, the Prophet's birthday has remained a significant event, celebrated with joy and reverence by Muslims worldwide. This remembrance of the Messenger of God has served. It continues to serve as an exceptional source of inspiration for religious, historical, scientific, cultural, pedagogical, and sociological studies and publications, all of which contribute to spiritual and moral education.

It is within this context that the earliest written works on the life of the Prophet emerged, and from this reverence, the tradition of celebrating *Mawlud* in Kosovo took root. The composition and celebration of the *Mawlud* have played a vital role in preserving the religious identity of the regions where it was written and practised. It has sustained, renewed, inspired, and nourished the souls of Muslims with the radiant biography of the Prophet (PBUH) and his teachings. Moreover, the *Mawlud* is not only a spiritual expression but also holds didactic and aesthetic value. Through its celebration, one can observe an effort to address the lack of broader Islamic religious literature in the Albanian language, filling a cultural and spiritual gap within the community.

This research is divided into two main parts. The first part focuses on the historical aspects of the *Mawlud*,

¹ Wang Yongbao, "The Essence of The Ummah Principle: Islam and The Foundation of Inclusive Social Systems," *AFKAR: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 26(2) (2024): 159-200.

examining when and how it began, how it was organised in its early days compared to contemporary practices, as well as its content and forms of expression. The second part explores the significance and role of the *Mawlud* celebration in safeguarding both religious and national identity, particularly during periods when access to religious teachings and literature was severely restricted.

The History of *Mawlud* Celebration in Kosovo

Before discussing how *Mawlud* was organised and celebrated in Kosovo, an important question arises: when did the population of Kosovo first become familiar with *Mawlud*, either as a form of poetic expression or as a religious rite and public manifestation? Although we were keen to find a definitive answer to this question, it appears to be nearly impossible to determine based solely on historical sources, due to the scarcity of data and written records specifically addressing this issue.

Nonetheless, valuable insight into this issue is provided by the earliest known *vakifnames* (or *waqfiyyahs*) related to Kosovo.² Based on these critical documents, we can trace the beginnings of *Mawlud*'s presence in the region. One significant example is the Vakifname of Mehmet Hajrudini (d. 1556), also known as Kukli Begu, which was formalised in 1538.³ Among the various stipulations in his testament, it is noted that the supervisor of the income generated from his endowed *waqfs* was instructed to allocate 500 Akçe⁴ annually for preparing food during the celebrations of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha at the mosque in the town of Zinova, located in present-day Prizren. The food was to be served to all worshippers who attended prayers at the mosque, regardless of their social

² The charter of *waqf* or the endowment deed.

³ Muharrem Qafleshi, *Opoja dhe Gora Nder Shekuj* (Prishtine: Instituti Albanologjik, 2011), 150.

⁴ Akçe was the silver coin used as currency by the Ottoman Empire, and it remained in circulation until the early 19th century.

status, both poor and rich. As the vakifname addressed the recipients: "Please eat with pleasure and pray for the soul of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and make *du'a* for the soul of Kukli Beg." The endower also provided "two cauldrons and fifty pots" specifically for cooking and serving the food.⁵

This information, drawn from a 16th-century document, strongly indicates that the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) birthday, commonly known as *Mawlud*, was already observed during that period, if not earlier. Originally, the term *Mawlud* referred specifically to the commemoration of the Prophet's birth. However, over time, it evolved to encompass a broader range of religious meanings and associations, including poetic and devotional expressions. It became customary for the recitation of *Mawlud* to be an integral part of such gatherings, serving as a form of spiritual reflection and collective devotion.

The tradition of cooking and distributing food on significant days in the Islamic calendar may no longer be practised in the same way as in the past, but it continued to be respected until the 1970s. During the Eid holidays, for example, sweets were prepared and served to the congregants of the local mosque. Today, however, this tradition has largely been forgotten and is unfamiliar to the younger generations.

Nevertheless, in 2021, in Opoja (historically known as Zinova), a district of Prizren, this tradition was symbolically revived. On the 'night of Qadr',⁶ a sweet dish (*halwa*) was prepared and distributed to all residents of the village, which has a population of over 1,500. Although it

⁵ Qafleshi, *Opoja*, 150.

⁶ The Night of *Qadr* falls on the 27th night of the month of Ramadan and is believed to be the sacred night in the year 610 CE when the Holy Quran first began to be revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is regarded as a night of immense blessing and spiritual significance in Islamic tradition. However, the exact moment of this divine event is known only to God.

was only organised once, the event served as a nostalgic effort to rekindle the collective memory of past communal practices.⁷ On the other hand, during the Ottoman period, the prominent regional governor Koxha Sinan Pasha of Kačanik (Kosovo) included in his *vakifname*, legalised in 1586, a provision that on all the "Great Nights" of the Islamic calendar including the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) a special dish known as *dânâ* and a traditional sweet called *zerde* were to be prepared and distributed to the local Muslim community.⁸

Meanwhile, in 1831, Mahmut Pasha Rrotlla of Prizren stipulated in his endowment that "during the nights of Ramadan, the nights of Eid, and the nights of *Mawlud*," a total of 47 candles were to be lit in various locations as a form of commemoration. Specifically, twelve candles were to be placed in the courtyard of his mosque, one candle outside the mosque, twelve in the minaret, one in the madrasah, two in the *mektep* (library), and seven in the courtyard of the Castle Mosque of the city.⁹

Based on indirect evidence from these authentic historical documents, it can be inferred that the tradition of *Mawlud* celebration in Kosovo is a long-standing one, dating back to at least the 16th century. This period also coincides with the widespread acceptance of Islam in the region. As such, Muslims—both as individuals and as part of the broader Islamic community—were aware of the importance of love and reverence for the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They consistently sought ways to express their devotion, admiration, and respect for the Prophet, his life, and the teachings and obligations he brought to society. Their efforts reflect a sincere desire to

⁷ Interview with Sami Sadiku, the Muazzin of Opoja mosque.

⁸ Hasan Kaleši, "Najstariji vakufski dokumenti u Jugoslaviji na arapskom jeziku," *Starine Kosova-Antikitete* VI (1972), 257.

⁹ Hasan Kaleši & Ismail Eren, "Prizrenac Mahmud paša Rotul, njegove zadužbine i vakufnama," *Starine Kosova-Antikitete* VII (1973), 24-60.

remain faithful to his message and to embody his example in their daily lives.¹⁰

On the other hand, during the course of our research in various libraries, we discovered several works in Arabic and Ottoman Turkish (written in Arabic script) that describe the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). These texts were widely used as foundational manuals in the *madrasas* of Kosovo and enjoyed considerable popularity. Among them were works focusing on the sayings, historical accounts, and the personality of the Prophet (PBUH), such as *Kitab al-Shama'il al-Muhammadiyah* (commonly known as *Shama'il al-Nabawiyyah*) by Imam al-Tirmidhi (d. 892), which presents detailed descriptions of the Prophet's character, appearance, and mannerisms.¹¹

Among the notable works found was *Dala'il al-Khayrat fi Shawariq al-Anwar* by Imam Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad bin Sulayman al-Jazuli (d. 1465), a renowned collection of prayers and *salawat* (blessings) upon the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).¹² This book held a special place in devotional practices and was widely circulated in the Islamic world, including in Kosovo. In later periods, another significant work was *al-Tariqah al-Muhammadiyah* by Imam Muhammad Pir 'Ali al-Birgawi (d. 1573), which included not only ethical and spiritual guidance but also a description of the life and exemplary character of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).¹³

¹⁰ Al-Quran, chapter 3, verse 31.

¹¹ Kasim Dobraća, *Katalog arapskih, turskih i perzijskih rukopisa, svezak prvi* (Sarajevo: Starešinstvo Islamske Zajdenice za SR Bosnu i Hercegovinu, 1963), 123.

¹² Dobraća, *Katalog arapskih*, 123.

¹³ Dobraća, *Katalog arapskih*, 268.

Among the widely known works were the poetic collection *Qasidah al-Burdah*¹⁴ and *Sirah Ibn Hisham*.¹⁵ Both of which were deeply studied and appreciated by Muslim scholars of the time. These scholars not only had a strong command of such texts but were also profoundly influenced by them in shaping their daily lives, ethical conduct, and religious duties. It is evident that compilers of *Mawlud* poetry across the Islamic world, including those in the Albanian tradition, heavily relied on these foundational works and authors for inspiration and content. Furthermore, in the religious schools (*madrasas*) of Kosovo, in addition to the memorisation and recitation of the Noble Quran, the recitation of *Mawlud* was also a regular practice. As a result, *Mawlud* poetry became and remains the most cherished, widely read, and frequently recited poetic genre in the country.¹⁶

The *Mawlud* Poetry Recited in Kosovo and Neighbouring Countries

Another important question to address is the type of poetry about the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that was recited in the territory of Kosovo and neighbouring countries with predominantly Albanian-speaking populations. A definitive answer to this question can only be provided through thorough research of the remaining

¹⁴ Mahmut Kaya, *İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2001), 24:569. The full title of the book is *al-Kawakib al-Durriyyah fi mad'hi Khayr al-Bariyyah*. This was known among the learned people with the name *Qasidah al-Burdah*, written by Sharaf al-Din Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad bin Sa'id al-Busiri (d. 1294). This work was translated and partially annotated by various authors, however, the published version is available in the Encyclopedia of Islam in Turkish.

¹⁵ Mustafa Fayda, *İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1999), 71-73. *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah li Ibn Hisham* was written by Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Malik bin Hisyam bin Ayyub al-Hamiri al-Basri (d. 833).

¹⁶ Hasan Kaleshi, *XV asırdan XVII asrın nihayetine kadar Yugoslav topraklarında şark medeniyeti* (Prishtine: Çevren, 1976), 25.

Oriental-Islamic manuscripts preserved in Kosovo. Social memory alone is insufficient in this regard, as multiple generations have passed, making it difficult to trace oral traditions or popular practices without reliable written sources.

It was discovered that *Wasilah al-Najat*, the renowned *Mawlud* composed in 1409 by the Turkish author Süleyman Çelebi, served as the foundational text for *Mawlud* recitations in Kosovo and the surrounding regions. Its simple Ottoman Turkish language, accessible style, and clear expressions made it suitable for the general public, allowing ordinary believers to engage comfortably with its content, whether reading or singing it. During a time when no *Mawlud* existed in the Albanian language, this work remained in use for approximately two centuries. By the late 18th century, *Mawluds* began to be composed in Albanian, gradually replacing the Ottoman version. Initially, these Albanian *Mawluds* were written using Ottoman (Arabic) script before the later adoption of Latin and other writing systems.¹⁷

Based on the findings of this research, it is evident that in recent decades, the most well-known *Mawluds* written in the Albanian language and used in Kosovo are the *Mawlud of Hafiz Ali Riza Ulqinaku* (d. 1913)¹⁸, published in 1878 and also known as the *Mawlud of Shkodra*, and the *Mawlud of Tahir Efendi Popova*¹⁹, published in 1907. The latter

¹⁷ Faik Luli & Islam Dizdari, *Mawluet në gjuhën shqipe* (Shkoder: Camaj-Pipaj, 2002), 71-262.

¹⁸ Hafiz Ali-Riza Ulqinaku (d. 1913) left many manuscripts and some of them were published after his death, among them also the *Mawlud* with the title *Tarjama-i-mavlûd 'alâ lisâni Arnaûd* (The Translation of *Mawlud* into Albanian Language). It is indeed the translation of the *Mawlud* that was written by Suleyman Celebi with annotated translation into Albanian language.

¹⁹ Faik & Islam, *Mawluet në gjuhën shqipe*, 263-309. Tahir Popova (d. 1949) wrote the poetry of *Mawlud* while he was student at the high school Sultaniye in Istanbul with the title *Manzûma al-mavlûd fî afdali*

remains widely recited today in Kosovo and other Albanian-speaking regions. Despite this rich heritage and longstanding tradition of *Mawlud* in Kosovo, as well as its significant contribution to the preservation of both religious faith and national identity, the celebration of *Mawlud* has undergone notable changes over time, particularly in terms of its form, content, and manner of organisation and expression.

Figure 1: The facsimile of the first page of the *Mawlud* in the Albanian language with Arabic letters by the author, Tahir Popova/Kosovo (1907)



al-mavğūd bi lisāni al-Arnaūd (Poetry in Albanian Language about the Birth of the Best of Human Beings).

The Manifestation of *Mawlud* in Kosovo

The manifestation of *Mawlud* in Kosovo, as previously noted, is distinguished by its unique atmosphere, from the early stages of preparation to the culmination of the event itself. The recitation of the *Mawlud* is not limited solely to the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) birthday. Instead, it has also been incorporated into various joyful occasions such as the birth of a child, weddings, graduations, and other festive gatherings. Interestingly, in some instances, parts of the *Mawlud* were even recited during mourning ceremonies. Following the recitation of selected verses from the Holy Quran for the deceased, portions of the *Mawlud* would also be read as a form of spiritual remembrance.²⁰ Typically, these gatherings were held in the Oda²¹ or guest house—traditional spaces akin to today's social institutions—where community elders and learned individuals would gather to discuss and address important matters of communal life.

During this research, discussions and interviews were conducted with congregants at the mosque regarding the celebration of *Mawlud* and the preparations involved. As they recounted their memories, many spoke with deep emotion and nostalgia about earlier times and the cherished

²⁰ An interview and discussions were conducted in June 2024 with a group of congregants at the Opoja Mosque, including Haji Sami Mehmeti, an 89-year-old Muazzin who has been serving voluntarily for the past 40 years. Located in the Opoja region near the district of Prizren, the mosque remains a central part of the community. Haji Sami provided a detailed account of how *Mawlud* was traditionally celebrated. He observed that although many aspects of the celebration have changed over the past 30 to 40 years, *Mawlud* continues to play an important role in the lives of Muslims in Kosovo.

²¹ 'Oda' is a Turkish word meaning 'room,' but in Kosovo, it refers to a special room reserved for male guests—both familiar and unfamiliar—typically separate from the main living quarters of the family. These rooms played a significant role in social life, serving as important spaces for gatherings and discussions on various issues affecting the community.

experiences associated with *Mawlud*. Their reflections revealed a profound spiritual connection to the tradition, as well as a sense of communal joy and unity that once characterized its celebration.²²

It was found that in certain regions, several days were required to prepare for the celebration of *Mawlud*. The preparations began with arranging the environment and venue, followed by the preparation of food, setting tables for serving meals, and even purchasing and wearing special clothing for the occasion. The planning process typically began with consulting the imam of the local mosque to ensure his availability on the selected date. Once the imam confirmed his participation, invitations were extended to the remaining guests.²³

In preparation for the event, all community members were actively involved, each taking on different roles and responsibilities. Some were tasked with welcoming guests, others with serving drinks, and many with preparing and serving food at the tables. The venue was arranged in such a way that attendees would sit according to a social hierarchy, typically based on age and occupation. In earlier times, food was prepared in a classical and traditional manner, as shown in the photo below. Although the menu was simple, it was always sufficient to feed everyone in attendance. A cook was typically hired to prepare the food outdoors, and community members collaborated to assist with cooking and maintain a clean and orderly environment.²⁴

²² A group discussion with congregants at the mosque in Opoja.

²³ A group discussion with congregants at the mosque in Opoja.

²⁴ A group discussion with congregants at the mosque in Opoja.

Figure 2: Traditional outdoor preparation of food for the Mawlid celebration, reflecting communal participation and classical cooking methods



After the meal, the gathering typically continues with a short lecture delivered by the imam, as participants begin preparing for the Mawlid recitation. During this time, interactive discussions often take place between the attendees and the imams, focusing on various religious topics.

The Mawlid ceremony in Kosovo traditionally begins with the recitation of Surah Yasin, followed by verse 56 of Surah al-Ahzab, which emphasises sending blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).²⁵ The recitation of the Mawlid then begins, combining selected verses from Mawlid poetry with passages from the Holy Quran. The ceremony concludes with the *du'a* (supplication) specific to the *Mawlid*. In most cases, the *Mawlid* is recited in

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إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ
وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

private homes, while in some instances, it takes place in mosques. On rare occasions, it may also be held in public multipurpose venues, but such events are uncommon.²⁶

In Kosovo, the recitation of the *Mawlud* is typically performed by a group led by the local imam. The recitation may be done individually, with participants taking turns, or collectively in chorus. Attendees follow the singing and accompanying lectures with deep interest and devotion, even though the congregation is often diverse in age and professional background. Young people, including children, feel honoured to participate in the event. Women also participate, though traditionally from a separate, adjacent room. Today, with the aid of modern technology, the recitation can be heard clearly throughout the venue, allowing everyone to be spiritually engaged without hindrance.²⁷

Figures 3: Recitation of the *Mawlud* by Imams in pairs and in chorus during a ceremony in Prizren, Kosovo (2000)



²⁶ A group discussion with congregants at the mosque in Opoja.

²⁷ A group discussion with congregants at the mosque in Opoja.

Islam Hasani & Sadik Mehmeti, "Historical and Spiritual Manifestations of *Mawlud* Celebrations in the Republic of Kosovo," *Afkar* Vol. 27 No. 1 (2025): 141-164

Figure 4: Recitation of the *Mawlud* by Imams in pairs and chorus during a ceremony in Prizren, Kosovo (2000)



Figure 5: Participants listening attentively to the recitation of the *Mawlud* (2000)



The format of the *Mawlud* in Kosovo is distinctive in its rhythm, intonation, and melodic elements, which have been meticulously preserved and passed down from generation to generation. The variation in vocal pitch, with deliberate rising and lowering of the voice in specific parts of the *Mawlud* text, as well as changes in tempo and

melodic shifts, makes this tradition a rich subject for ethnomusicological study.²⁸

At the end of the ceremony, several Surahs from the Quran are recited, including Surah al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, al-Nas, and al-Fatihah, as well as the first six verses of Surah al-Baqarah. The event concludes with the *Mawlud du'a'*, recited aloud and with deep emotion, allowing all participants to repeat the supplication and make personal prayers (*du'a'*) in unison.

Figure 6: Participants engaged in the *du'a'* after the *Mawlud* ceremony (2000)



In earlier periods, there is no evidence that *Mawlud* was organised or recited by women during their gatherings or celebrations. However, beginning in the 1980s, particularly in urban centres of Kosovo, female Muslim theologians began to lead *Mawlud* recitations during women-only gatherings. The participation of women in *Mawlud* celebrations—especially their involvement in reciting the *Mawlud* from the 1980s onward—correlates closely with shifting social and political circumstances, both globally and within Kosovo. This period marked the

²⁸ A group discussion with congregants at the mosque in Opoja.

gradual decline of the communist regime, which had previously heavily restricted religious expression. With the loosening of these constraints, new opportunities emerged for the open practice and teaching of Islam.

Consequently, a growing number of young women began attending Islamic classes in the madrasah. Upon graduation, many devoted themselves to educating other Muslim women in matters of religion. These female-led *Mawlud* gatherings typically took place on significant dates in the Islamic calendar, such as the Night of Raghaib, the Night of Power (*Laylat al-Qadr*), and particularly during the month of Rabi' al-Awwal, which is widely known among Albanian Muslims as the "Month of *Mawlud*."

Mawlud celebrations provided a rare opportunity for women to participate actively and publicly in religious activities, whether in mosques or other communal venues. This active participation is notable because, according to Islamic jurisprudence, women are not obligated to attend congregational prayers in the mosque, including the Friday prayer, and are permitted to perform their prayers at home. Therefore, *Mawlud* gatherings represented an important space for religious expression and communal involvement for Muslim women in Kosovo.²⁹

Today, the situation has improved significantly. Many women have graduated from well-recognised Islamic universities and now serve as teachers in *madrasahs*, as well as professors at faculties of Islamic Studies and other prestigious universities across the country and the wider region.³⁰

²⁹ Muhamet Pirraku, *Mevludi shqip në themele të identitetit kombëtar shqiptar* (Prishtina: Dituria Islame, 2010).

³⁰ Islam Hasani, "Filozofia e Edukimit Islam (Rasti i Kosoves)," *BULETINI*, Fakulteti i Studimeve Islame, 2024, 23

The Contribution of *Mawlud* in Protecting Religious and National Identity

As previously emphasised, the celebration of *Mawlud* in Kosovo is an early and deeply rooted tradition, dating back to the period when the region's population adopted Islam. The manifestation of *Mawlud* has played a crucial role in preserving religious identity. It has sustained, revitalised, inspired, and nurtured the spiritual lives of Muslims through the remembrance of the luminous biography and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Beyond its spiritual significance, *Mawlud* also carries didactic and aesthetic values that hold great relevance in everyday life. Notably, it helped bridge the gap created by the absence of extensive Islamic religious literature in the Albanian language, serving as a vital medium for transmitting religious knowledge and values across generations.³¹

The *Mawlud* book contains valuable Islamic teachings that are both accessible and easily understood, making it widely accepted by Muslims of all backgrounds and ages. It has been recited and continues to be recited in mosques, madrasahs, and Muslim homes alike. The significance of *Mawlud* is further elevated by the inclusion of Quranic verses, *salawat* (blessings upon the Prophet), *qasidahs* (Islamic poems), and numerous supplications during its recitation. This multifaceted structure ensures that listeners are not only reminded of the Prophet's life and message but are also engaged in a profound spiritual experience. Thus, *Mawlud* serves as a meaningful vehicle through which the faithful deepen their connection with the Almighty.³²

Furthermore, by listening to the recitation of the *Mawlud*, individuals are reminded of key values and lessons embedded within the teachings of Islam and its rich civilisation. In such moments, many participants are moved

³¹ Hajrullah Hoxha, *Qëndrimi i ulemave myslimanë për Mawludin* (Prishtina: Dituria Islame, 2010).

³² Hoxha, *Qëndrimi i ulemave myslimanë për Mawludin*.

to reflect emotionally on their faith, and this form of spiritual contemplation often occurs collectively in the minds of the wider community. The *Mawlud*, therefore, serves not merely as a religious sermon but as a powerful expression of social cohesion and a deep sense of belonging among members of the Muslim community. During the recitation, although the participants may remain silent, they engage inwardly, each person internally echoing the verses, lending a silent eloquence to this sacred and communal experience.³³

The role and significance of the *Mawlud* in preserving the religious identity of Albanians is most clearly understood when viewed through a historical and appreciative lens, particularly within the context of the development of Islamic religious life during the last five decades of the 20th century, specifically under the former communist regime. During this period, the vast majority of Muslim believers were effectively distanced from the mosque, which had become largely inactive, frequented only by a few elderly individuals. Amid this suppression, the *Mawlud* emerged as virtually the sole form of religious expression through which the 'ulama' maintained contact with the faithful.

Despite the severe restrictions, social inequalities, and systemic discrimination imposed by the regime, the institution of the *Mawlud* remained resilient. Its widespread familiarity and deep-rooted practice rendered it impossible to extinguish. In fact, the recitation of the *Mawlud* became a vital opportunity for delivering religious instruction to large gatherings of believers. The poetic form of the *Mawlud* served as a catalyst for sparking interest in Islamic teachings and reintroducing the faith to those disconnected from traditional religious institutions.

These gatherings, often held outside mosques, created a unique space for the Muslim community to come

³³ Pirraku, *Mevludi shqip në themele*.

together. Through its verses, the *Mawlud* provided a platform for preachers to speak about the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the tenets of Islam, and even to comment discreetly on the prevailing political realities. They served as moments for reinforcing both religious and national identity, regardless of the oppressive circumstances. In this way, the *Mawlud* not only survived but continued to inspire and unify the Muslim faithful, becoming an essential part of their spiritual and communal life.³⁴

Considering the vital role the *Mawlud* has played in preserving Islamic religious values among Albanians, it is important to note that *Mawlud* gatherings were not limited solely to the celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday. Rather, they were also organised on many other significant occasions in the lives of Muslims. The psychological and didactic value of the *Mawlud* should not be underestimated. Many of us still recall, with fondness and a sense of nostalgia, the moments when the *Mawlud* was recited in our homes. These experiences undoubtedly left a lasting impression and played a meaningful role in shaping our spiritual and moral development.

Indeed, it would be difficult to deny the positive influence the *Mawlud* has had in nurturing and safeguarding religious sentiment. From its very beginning, the *Mawlud* poetically conveys fundamental principles of Islamic belief, among them, the essential notion that every task and day should begin with the name of God. Expressed through eloquent verse and melodious recitation, such teachings were not only heard but felt deeply by generations of believers. Among the recitations in the *Mawlud*, it is stated that:

"Allah emnin ta përmendim daima,

³⁴ Sadik Mehmeti, "Shkollate e Mesme (Mektebet Rushdije) ne Kosove me Veshtrim te Vecant Rushdija e Prizrenit dhe Prishtines," *TAKVIMI* (2021), 210.

*Me nis punen me To gjithkush borxh e ka,
Njëherë me zemer Allah kush mundet me thanë,
Rrezon gjynah sa dushku i malit shume me
kanë."*

Its meaning in English is:

"O Allah, we mention your name always and forever,
Everyone must start the work with It,
Whoever mentions the name of Allah sincerely once,
His sins will be forgiven even if they are great in number."

The content and guidance found in the *Mawlud* remain consistently relevant and significant across all times. Through this poetic work, the author has skillfully conveyed the core pillars, key principles, and obligations of Islam in an artistic and exemplary manner. Beyond presenting the biography of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the *Mawlud* discusses the Attributes of Allah, the Islamic Testimony (*Shahadah*), which forms the foundation of the faith, the Quran, prayer, fasting, righteous deeds, and the realities of life and death. All these teachings are presented in a concise, clear, and accessible language, making it easier for the broader community of believers to understand and internalise them, and ultimately, to put them into practice.

Conclusion

The manifestation of the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) birth has, since the earliest days of Islam, served as a heartfelt expression of love and devotion to him and his teachings. Islam has long been a profound source of spiritual support for people and communities across the globe. As Islam spread to new regions, those who embraced it did not lose their cultural identities; rather, they integrated

Islamic values into their existing social fabric. In this regard, Muslims in Kosovo have harmonised their Albanian cultural heritage with Islamic principles, creating a unique tradition that reflects both their faith and their identity.

Kosovo stands out as a place of rich Islamic culture, with a deep heritage that includes distinct traditions and values. These features provide a fertile ground for scholarly exploration. This paper has only touched on some key aspects of the *Mawlud* tradition in Kosovo, without delving into detailed historical and ethnographic accounts. Yet, even a brief overview reveals that the celebration of *Mawlud* in Kosovo carries a unique flavour and significance, and its particular features and nuances are rarely found elsewhere.

The *Mawlud* has played an essential role in preserving both the religious and national identity of Kosovo's Muslim population. Its purpose extends beyond commemorating the life of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); it also fosters religious consciousness and broadens cultural understanding. The tradition serves as a medium for teaching religious, linguistic, historical, cultural, ethnographic, and even patriotic values, conveyed through both its content and ceremonial practice. At its core, the celebration aims not only to strengthen one's relationship with God but also to nurture unity, mutual understanding, cooperation, and tolerance among people as fellow creations of the Almighty.

However, in recent years, a noticeable trend has emerged toward altering or even abandoning this tradition. In many places, including Kosovo, the *Mawlud* is gradually fading. Contributing to this decline is the stance taken by certain contemporary scholars who view the celebration as religiously illegitimate or categorise it as *bid'ah* (innovation), dismissing the spiritual and social benefits it historically offered. Another factor weakening the tradition is the attempt to modernise its form by moving it out of

intimate, familiar settings such as homes and mosques and relocating it to public venues like sports halls and restaurants. Such changes often strip the Mawlut of its traditional spirit and reduce its emotional and cultural impact. These shifts represent a departure from the rich spiritual atmosphere that once permeated the celebration and significantly contributed to the religious and communal life of Kosovo's Muslims.

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