

The Naqshbandiyya: Evolution, Spiritual Practice, And Socio-Political Influence

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Abstract. *The Naqshbandiyya is one of the most influential Sunni Sufi orders in Islamic history. Originating in Bukhara, it emphasizes silent dhikr (remembrance of God), moral discipline, and strict adherence to Sharia. This paper explores the historical emergence of the order, its unique spiritual methodology, and its broad influence across Muslim societies. Special attention is given to its evolution through branches like Khalidi and Haqqani, and its adaptability to modern contexts. The study highlights how the Naqshbandi order successfully combined inner spiritual reform with public activism, shaping both individual lives and broader societal developments.*

Keywords: *Naqshbandi, Sufism, silent dhikr, Sharia, Central Asia, spiritual discipline, Khalidi, Haqqani.*

Introduction

Among the diverse traditions of Islamic mysticism, the Naqshbandiyya stands out for its synthesis of spiritual inwardness and social engagement. Established by Baha' al-Din Naqshband in 14th-century Bukhara, the order quickly spread across Central Asia, the Ottoman Empire, and into South Asia and the modern West. Unlike many other Sufi groups, Naqshbandis practice silent dhikr, emphasize sobriety in worship, and maintain close alignment with Islamic legalism. This paper investigates the order's historical roots, doctrinal features, spiritual practices, and its dynamic relationship with political power. It also examines the contemporary relevance of the order, especially through globalized movements such as the Haqqaniyya. Naqshbandi a major Sufi order within Sunni Islam, named after its 14th-century founder, Baha' al-Din Naqshband. Practitioners, known as Naqshbandis, trace their spiritual lineage (silsila) directly to the Prophet Muhammad through the first caliph, Abu Bakr, via Ja'far al-Sadiq. This order is distinct for its strict adherence to Sharia and silent dhikr practices adopted from earlier Central Asian masters.

Methodology

This research uses a historical-analytical approach, drawing upon academic sources, historical texts, and verified online materials. English-language resources from established scholars (e.g., Itzchak Weismann, Dina Le Gall) and online encyclopedias are integrated. A thematic analysis is applied to categorize the tariqa's development across key domains: spiritual doctrine, institutional structure, and socio-political engagement.

Results

The order is also known as the "convergence of the two oceans" due to the presence of Abu Bakr and Jafar al-Sadiq in the *silsila* and the "Sufi Order of Jafar al-Sadiq". The Naqshbandi order owes many insights to Yusuf Hamadani and Abdul Khaliq Ghijduwani in the 12th century, the latter of whom is regarded as the organizer of the practices and is responsible for placing stress upon the purely

silent remembrance of Allah. It was later associated with Baha al-Din Shah Naqshband in the 14th century, hence the name of the order.

Since it was founded the Naqshbandi order has split into multiple sub-orders founded by several prominent figures within the chain of succession. 'Ubeydullah Ahrar founded the Naqshbandiyya Ahrariyya; Ahmad Sirhindi founded the Naqshbandiyya Mujaddidiyya; Shamsuddin Mirza Mazhar founded the Naqshbandiyya Mazhariyya; and Mawlana Khalid founded the Naqshbandiyya Khalidiyya.

The Naqshbandiyya order became an influential factor in Indian Muslim life, and for two centuries it was the most common Sufi order in the Indian subcontinent. Khwaja Baqi Billah, who was born in Kabul and brought up and educated in Kabul and Samarkand, is credited for bringing the order to India during the end of the 16th century. He tried to spread his knowledge about the order but died three years later. His disciple Ahmad Sirhindi took over after his death, and it was through him that the order gained popularity within a short period of time. Shah Waliullah Dehlawi was an 18th-century member of the order.

The Naqshbandiyya has evolved through distinct phases. Initially rooted in the teachings of Abdul Khaliq Ghijduwani and further systematized by Baha' al-Din Naqshband, the order placed emphasis on "sober Sufism," silent dhikr, and social responsibility. Its influence expanded significantly during the Ottoman period through the Khalidi branch, which integrated Naqshbandi practices with political mobilization and educational reform. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the Haqqani branch became globally influential, spreading Naqshbandi teachings across Western Europe and North America.

Key spiritual practices include the Eleven Principles of Naqshbandi conduct, focusing on remembrance, sincerity, mindfulness, and companionship. The tariqa's balance of inner purification with outer ethical engagement made it both a personal and public path of transformation. In multiple regions, it contributed to both anti-colonial movements and moral education.

Discussion

What distinguishes the Naqshbandi order is its dual emphasis: maintaining deep internal spiritual discipline while remaining outwardly active in social and political life. Unlike ecstatic or antinomian Sufi orders, the Naqshbandiyya upheld orthodoxy and integrated legalistic rigor. This helped it gain state patronage in Ottoman, Mughal, and Timurid courts. Moreover, its modern resurgence—particularly under the Haqqani branch—demonstrates its adaptability in the face of secularism and globalization.

Through educational institutions, charity, and interfaith dialogue, Naqshbandi groups have built transnational networks that retain spiritual authenticity. The silent dhikr continues to define its ritual life, but global outreach and digital communication have modernized its message.

Conclusion

The Naqshbandiyya represents a compelling model of Sufism that merges inner spirituality with societal leadership. Its enduring success stems from its discipline, moral clarity, and institutional flexibility. From Bukhara to Istanbul, from Delhi to London, the order has bridged mystical devotion with civic engagement. As contemporary societies seek spiritual depth and ethical guidance, the Naqshbandi path offers a coherent framework grounded in both tradition and relevance. Future research might further explore its role in peacebuilding, education, and interreligious cooperation.

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