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## STAGES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUFI SCHOOLS AND TARIQAS IN UZBEKISTAN

**Abstract.** *This article examines the historical development stages of Sufi schools and tariqas in Uzbekistan. The theoretical foundations of Sufism were established in the ninth to eleventh centuries, followed by the emergence of the Yassaviya and Kubraviya tariqas in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, and the rise of the Naqshbandiya tariqa in the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries as the dominant spiritual movement in Central Asia. The study highlights the doctrinal continuity, mutual influence, and socio-cultural impact of these tariqas on the basis of primary sources. It concludes that Sufi schools remain relevant today, contributing to the moral education of individuals and the strengthening of national and religious values.*

**Keywords:** *Sufism; Yassaviya; Kubraviya; Naqshbandiya; Central Asia; spiritual heritage; tariqa; aqida; fiqh; moral education; socio-cultural influence; historical development.*

### INTRODUCTION

The history of Sufism in Uzbekistan constitutes an inseparable component of Islamic civilization. Over several centuries, the Sufi schools that took shape in the territories of Mawarannahr and Khurasan “the Yassaviya, Kubraviya, and Khwajagan-Naqshbandiya tariqas “not only enriched the cultural and spiritual life of the region but also spread widely across other lands of the Islamic world, leaving an indelible mark

in the history of religious thought. The emergence and development of these tariqas embodies not only their religious but also their socio-political and cultural-educational dimensions.

Sufism, as a spiritual-philosophical tradition within Islamic civilization aimed at the believer's spiritual approach to God and inner purification, took shape as an independent system in the eighth to ninth centuries. In Central Asia, this teaching began to spread from the ninth century onward: Hakim al-Tirmidhi of Termez (ninth century) and the Bukharan Sufis "al-Kalabadhi and al-Mustamli al-Bukhari" developed its theoretical foundations. In the twelfth century, the first organized Sufi schools and tariqas of Mawarannahr "the Yassaviya and Kubraviya" emerged. Subsequently, with the formation of the Khwajagan-Naqshbandiya tariqa in the fourteenth century, the Sufism of Mawarannahr entered a new stage of development.

The relevance of the topic is determined by several factors. First, the Sufi tariqas constitute one of the foundational pillars of the centuries-long spiritual heritage of the peoples of Uzbekistan, and their comprehensive, source-based study is among the principal tasks of contemporary Islamic studies. Second, since independence, scholarly interest in the history of Sufism has increased sharply and numerous studies have been published, yet comprehensive research that analyzes the formation and development stages of the tariqas as a unified systematic whole remains insufficient. Third, the comparative study of the development of Sufism in Mawarannahr alongside the Sufism of other lands of Islamic civilization holds important theoretical and practical significance.

Research in the Soviet period on Sufism was conducted within ideological constraints, though scholars such as Mu'minov endeavored to assess objectively the positive cultural and intellectual role of the Naqshbandiya tariqa (Mu'minov, 1976:153). Since independence (1991), opportunities for the free and impartial study of Sufi history have expanded. The research of Komilov, Rahimov, Karimov, Bo'riyev, Razzaqova, and Hasaniy constitutes the principal scholarly achievements of this period (Komilov, 2009:86–130; Karimov, 1996:87–109). Among foreign Islamicists, the works of Trimingham, De Weese, and Köprülü have made a worthy contribution to the international study of Central Asian Sufism (Trimingham, 1971; De Weese, 1988; Köprülü, 1991).

The sources for this study consist of several categories of written monuments. The first group comprises the principal Sufi texts authored by the shaykhs of the tariqas: al-Kalabadhi's "al-Ta'arruf" (tenth century), Khwaja Ahrar Vali's collection of "Tabarruk Treatises," Khwaja Muhammad Parsa's "Fasl al-Khitab" and "Maqamat-i Shaykh Ala'

al-Din ‘Attar.” The second group consists of biographical works in the *manaqib* and *tazkirah* genres: “Rashahat ‘Ayn al-Hayat” (‘Ali Safi), “Nafahat al-Uns” (Jami), and Alisher Navoi’s “Nasayim al-Muhabbat.” These works constitute a primary and reliable source on the history of the *tariqas*, the chains of *shaykhs* (*silsila*), and the processes of doctrinal transmission. The article’s purpose is to analyze, on the basis of primary sources, the historical development stages, mutual relations, doctrines, and socio-cultural influence of the three Sufi schools of Uzbekistan: the Yassaviya, Kubraviya, and Khwajagan-Naqshbandiya.

## METHODS

The study employs historical-analytical, comparative-typological, and source-critical methods. The primary sources consist of the Sufi texts and biographical works listed above. Secondary sources include the monographs, dissertations, and articles of Uzbek scholars produced since independence, as well as the international Islamic studies scholarship of Trimingham (1971), De Weese (1988), and Köprülü (1991). The analysis proceeds chronologically, examining the three principal stages of development “formation (twelfth to thirteenth centuries), flourishing (fourteenth to fifteenth centuries), and diffusion and renewal (sixteenth to twenty-first centuries) “while also examining the doctrinal continuities and distinctions among the three *tariqas*.

## RESULTS

Stage 1: Theoretical foundations (9th–11th centuries). The scholarly-cultural environment necessary for the emergence of Sufism in Mawarannahr had taken shape as early as the ninth century. Bukhara and Samarkand “the major centers of Islamic learning of that era “produced the first theorists of Sufi teaching. Although formal *tariqa* structures did not yet exist in this period, Sufi practice, spiritual discipline, and ascetic traditions were already well developed. The first major theorist of Mawarannahr Sufism is Abu ‘Abdullah Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi (ca. 820–910), who, in his works “*Khatm al-Awliya*” and “*Kayfiyyat al-Suluk*,” was the first to devote systematic analysis to the theory of sainthood (*walaya*) (Hakim al-Tirmidhi, 2017:12; 2018:4). According to al-Tirmidhi, sainthood is the state in which God illumines His servant through spiritual purification by the light of His attributes. This theoretical heritage of al-Tirmidhi became the conceptual foundation for Central Asian Sufism in the subsequent centuries.

In the tenth century the Bukhara Sufi school grew more vigorous. Abu Bakr Muhammad al-Kalabadhi al-Bukhari's (d. ca. 990) "al-Ta'arruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Tasawwuf" ("Introduction to the School of the People of Sufism") became one of the first treatises to expound Sufism systematically and to compile the first detailed glossary of Sufi terminology (Rahimov, 2019:47–65; Boltaboyev, 2005:38–44). Around the same period, Abu Ibrahim al-Mustamli al-Bukhari wrote a detailed commentary on this work under the title "Sharh al-Ta'arruf." Both works are subsequently described as the theoretical foundation of the Khwajagan school as well. The ninth to eleventh centuries thus constituted the period of initial theoretical formation for Mawarannahr Sufism: the consolidation of Sufi practice, ascetic traditions, and the spiritual-philosophical system are the principal indicators of this development (Rahimov, 2019:14–22).

Stage 2a: The Yassaviya tariqa (12th century). As the first organized Sufi school in Central Asia, the Yassaviya tariqa was founded in the twelfth century by the Turkic Sufi Khwaja Ahmad Yassawi (ca. 1093–1166) in the city of Turkestan in present-day Kazakhstan. Yassawi studied in his youth in Bukhara under the celebrated scholar Yusuf Hamadani (1049–1140) and mastered from his master the practices of seclusion (khalwat), remembrance of God (dhikr), and spiritual wayfaring (suluk). Yusuf Hamadani was one of the earliest shaykhs of the Khwajagan tariqa in Mawarannahr, and through his disciples the spiritual paths of the two great tariqas "Yassaviya and Khwajagan-Naqshbandiya "became organically intertwined (Köprülü, 1991:62–89; Komilov, 2009:54–72).

The distinctive feature of Yassaviya teaching is that it propagated the Islamic creed in a language comprehensible to Turkic peoples "through the medium of Turkic poetry. Yassawi's "Diwan-i Hikmat" (Book of Wisdom) was created for this purpose and spread widely among the people. The tariqa's dhikr practice "audible (jahri) dhikr "was adapted for Turkic nomadic and semi-nomadic populations and acquired a popular character (Komilov, 2009:56–58). The geographical spread of the Yassaviya was very wide. In the twelfth to fourteenth centuries it penetrated the Syr Darya basin, Khwarazm, the Dasht-i Qipchaq, and even Anatolia. The influence of the Yassaviya is clearly discernible in the Sufi poetry of great Turkic poets such as Fuzuli and Yunus Emre. The pir-murid system and the development of the khanqah institution played a decisive role in the tariqa's wide diffusion (Ne'matova, 2001:45–52).

Stage 2b: The Kubraviya tariqa (12th–13th centuries). Contemporaneously with the Yassaviya "at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century "the Kubraviya tariqa emerged in Khwarazm. Its founder, Najm al-Din Kubra (1145–1221),

elaborated the theoretical and practical foundations of Sufi wayfaring in his treatises “Fawa’ih al-Jamal wa-Fawatih al-Jalal” and “Usul al-‘Ashara.” Najm al-Din Kubra was honored with the title “Wali-tarash” (Fashioner of Saints) “for through the Kubraviya tariqa he trained numerous major Sufis (De Weese, 1988:46–51).

The distinctive feature of Kubraviya teaching is its great emphasis on the experience of luminous visions (*mushahadat al-nur*) and its detailed description of the inner spiritual process. The tariqa’s practice treats extended seclusion and devotion (*khalwat/chilla*) as the primary method of spiritual development. The rational-philosophical character of the tariqa made it very popular among the urban intelligentsia and the scholarly class (Karimov, 1996:87–109).

Stage 3: The Khwajagan-Naqshbandiya (14th–15th centuries and beyond). Following the death of Baha’ al-Din Naqshband (1389), the continuation of the tariqa fell to his three great caliphs: ‘Ala’ al-Din ‘Attar (d. 1400), Muhammad Parsa (1348–1420), and Ya‘qub Charkhi (d. 1447). These caliphs played an important role in theoretically consolidating the Naqshbandiya teaching and in spreading it to Khurasan, Mawarannahr, and the countries of the East (Bo’riyev, 1994:11–19; Razzaqova, 2001:20–28).

Khwaja Muhammad Parsa (1348–1420) occupies a special place as the first major theorist of Naqshbandiya teaching. His works “Fasl al-Khitab,” “Qudsiyya,” and “Maqamat-i Shaykh ‘Ala’ al-Din ‘Attar” set out the conceptual foundations of the tariqa and exercised a great influence on subsequent Sufi literature. Parsa died during a journey to Medina, and his mausoleum became a place of pilgrimage for Muslims (Khidirova, 2004:52–88).

Mu’minov, in his scholarly works, emphasized that the Naqshbandiya, Yassaviya, and Kubraviya tariqas were formed in the lands of Mawarannahr and Khwarazm and subsequently spread widely to other countries of the Muslim East. In particular, the Naqshbandiya tariqa spread broadly among the urban intelligentsia and craftsmen, exercising a great ideological influence on the development of Islamic culture and learning in its era (Mu’minov, 1976:153). This assessment reveals the Naqshbandiya’s significance not only in religious but also in civilizational terms.

## DISCUSSION

The three principal Sufi schools formed in the territory of Uzbekistan “Yassaviya, Kubraviya, and Khwajagan-Naqshbandiya” should be analyzed not as separate independent phenomena but as a cultural-historical system in which each logically

complements the others. The common feature uniting these three tariqas is that all of them received their doctrinal formation from the school of Yusuf Hamadani and reached their full development in the cultural-religious environment of Mawarannahr. The differences among the tariqas “audible versus silent dhikr, popular versus scholarly-elite appeal, urban versus nomadic social orientation “do not contradict one another; on the contrary, they harmoniously disseminated Central Asian Islamic culture to broader social strata (Komilov, 2009; Trimingham, 1971).

From a chronological perspective, the development stages of the three tariqas can be expressed in three phases. The first stage (twelfth to thirteenth centuries) “formation: the Yassaviya Islamicized the Turkic world, the Kubraviya developed the theoretical foundation, and the Khwajagan tariqa defined the practical principles. The second stage (fourteenth to fifteenth centuries) “flourishing: the Naqshbandiya synthesized this heritage and, as a systematized tariqa, penetrated the religious, political, and cultural life of Mawarannahr. The third stage (sixteenth to twenty-first centuries) “diffusion and renewal: the Naqshbandiya spread to India, Turkey, China, Russia, and Europe; and in the independence period the heritage of the tariqas returned to its homeland and is being renewed both scientifically and culturally (Rahimov, 2019; Ismoilov, 2021:18–21).

The conquest of Turkestan by the Russian Empire (1865–1876) and the subsequent establishment of Soviet power delivered a heavy blow to the Sufi tariqas. Under the policy of suppressing religious influence, khanqahs were closed and tariqa activity was subjected to pressure. Nevertheless, the tariqas did not disappear entirely “many shaykhs continued their activities clandestinely. For example, Shaykh Muhyiddin Urgutiy’s “Maktubat” treatise was copied and circulated secretly even during the Soviet period. The achievement of Uzbekistan’s independence in 1991 created a historic opportunity for the study and revival of the Sufi schools. The sacred centers of the Naqshbandiya tariqa “the Baha’ al-Din Naqshband complex near Bukhara, the shrine of Khwaja Ahrar (Tashkent), and the mausoleum of Ahmad Yassawi in Turkestan “were given serious attention and restoration (Rahimov, 2019:156–172; Komilov, 2009:128–130).

## CONCLUSION

The development stages of Sufi schools and tariqas in the territory of Uzbekistan manifested a distinctive and remarkable experience in the history of Islamic spirituality and culture. The early theoretical foundations formed in the ninth to eleventh centuries

“the works of Hakim al-Tirmidhi, al-Kalabadhi, and al-Mustamli al-Bukhari “served as a solid foundation for the organized tariqas of the subsequent period. The Yassaviya tariqa, founded in the twelfth century by Khwaja Ahmad Yassawi, played an important role in popularizing Islam among Turkic peoples. The Kubraviya tariqa, formed under the leadership of Najm al-Din Kubra in the same period, theoretically refined the inner spiritual experience and spread broadly among the intelligentsia and scholarly class. From the fourteenth century onward, through the activities of ‘Abd al-Khaliq Ghijduvani and Baha’ al-Din Naqshband, the Khwajagan-Naqshbandiya tariqa became the leading school of Central Asian Sufism.

The Sufi tariqas profoundly shaped not only religious-spiritual life but also socio-political and cultural processes. The Yassaviya promoted Islamic values among the broad popular masses; the Kubraviya enriched spiritual-philosophical thought among the intelligentsia; and the Naqshbandiya strengthened spiritual order and social responsibility in society. The doctrinal continuity and mutual influence among these tariqas developed the Sufism of Central Asia in a synthetic manner “harmonizing local traditions with the universal Islamic heritage (Ismoilov, 2021; Komilov, 2009; Trimmingham, 1971).

From a contemporary perspective of Islamic studies, the general characterization of the Mawarannahr Sufi tariqas is that they offered Islamic civilization not only a religious-cultural achievement but also a unique experience from the perspective of social organization and political history. Yassaviya Islamicized the Turkic world; Kubraviya enriched Sufi theory; and Naqshbandiya synthesized this heritage and presented it as a spiritual legacy to Uzbekistan and the entire Islamic world. These three stages together constitute the great trilogy of Sufi history in Central Asia (De Weese, 1988; Köprülü, 1991; Rahimov, 2019).

The Sufi schools of Uzbekistan remain relevant today as important pillars of Islamic spirituality, contributing to the moral education of individuals, the strengthening of national and religious values, and the formation of a spiritual immunity against contemporary ideological threats. The need for comprehensive research that analyzes the development stages of the tariqas as a unified system remains strong, and the present study contributes to the integration of Islamic studies and historical scholarship through the comparative, source-based analysis of the historical development of the Yassaviya, Kubraviya, and Naqshbandiya tariqas (Ismoilov, 2006; Ismoilov, 2021).

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