

SUFISM AND ISLAMIC HERITAGE IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract. *Central Asia, with its rich historical and cultural heritage, has long been a significant center of Islamic intellectual and spiritual life. This region has produced numerous prominent scholars, theologians, jurists, and Sufi masters whose contributions have profoundly influenced the development of Islamic thought. The study of Sufi traditions, including major orders such as the Naqshbandiyya, Kubrawiyya, Yasawiyya, and Qalandariyya, provides insight into the historical, philosophical, and educational aspects of Islamic civilization in Central Asia. This research examines the origins, teachings, practices, and social functions of these Sufi orders, as well as their influence on moral values, education, and cultural development. Recent scholarly work in Uzbekistan highlights the role of classical Sufi texts, the systematization of mystical knowledge, and the significance of pilgrimage sites in fostering spiritual and intellectual growth. By analyzing both primary sources and contemporary studies, this article aims to present a comprehensive overview of Sufism’s historical legacy and its continuing relevance in modern Central Asian society.*

Keywords: *Sufism, Naqshbandiyya, Kubrawiyya, Yasawiyya, Qalandariyya, Islamic Studies, Central Asia, Islamic Civilization, Mysticism, Religious Education.*

INTRODUCTION

Central Asia has historically occupied a prominent position in the Islamic world as a cradle of scholarship, spiritual guidance, and intellectual innovation. The region’s contribution to Islamic thought encompasses diverse fields, including theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, and literature. Among these, Sufi traditions have played a central role in shaping religious consciousness, ethical norms, and cultural practices. Sufi orders, or



tariqas, not only provided spiritual guidance but also influenced social structures, education, and moral values across Central Asia. The study of these traditions offers valuable insights into the historical development of Islamic intellectual heritage and highlights the enduring relevance of Sufi teachings in contemporary scholarly and cultural contexts. Post-independence Uzbekistan has witnessed a revival of interest in religious and Sufi studies, with the establishment of specialized academic programs, research initiatives, and publication of critical editions of classical texts. This article seeks to explore the historical, philosophical, and educational dimensions of Sufi traditions in Central Asia, focusing on the major orders, their key figures, and their lasting impact on Islamic civilization.

MAIN PART

Central Asia has historically occupied a prominent position in the Islamic world as a cradle of scholarship, spiritual guidance, and intellectual innovation. The region's contribution to Islamic thought encompasses diverse fields, including theology, jurisprudence, philosophy, and literature. Among these, Sufi traditions have played a central role in shaping religious consciousness, ethical norms, and cultural practices. Sufi orders, or *tariqas*, not only provided spiritual guidance but also influenced social structures, education, and moral values across Central Asia. The study of these traditions offers valuable insights into the historical development of Islamic intellectual heritage and highlights the enduring relevance of Sufi teachings in contemporary scholarly and cultural contexts.

Central Asia, endowed with an ancient and illustrious history as well as a rich cultural heritage, occupies a distinctive place in world civilization (Karaman, 2004). Since antiquity, the region has been recognized as one of the major intellectual and spiritual centers of the Islamic world, producing eminent scholars whose scientific discoveries, theological insights, and literary works have made a lasting contribution to the development of human thought (Mukhamedov, 2020a). The territory of present-day Uzbekistan, in particular, historically served as a cradle of Islamic scholarship, nurturing generations of theologians, jurists, philosophers, and Sufi thinkers whose influence extended far beyond regional boundaries (Muxamedov, 2020b).

The declaration of independence of the Republic of Uzbekistan marked a new stage in the revival and systematic study of the country's religious, spiritual, and intellectual heritage (Mukhamedov & Turambetov, 2024). Independence created favorable condi-



tions for large-scale reforms, especially in the fields of education, culture, and religious enlightenment. Consequently, undergraduate programs in Religious Studies and Islamic Studies were introduced, while graduate-level specializations such as Qur'anic Studies, Hadith Studies, Islamic Law (Fiqh), Islamic Theology (Kalam), and Islamic Civilization were established (Karaman, 2004). These reforms laid an institutional foundation for the academic study of Islam based on modern scholarly standards while remaining rooted in classical sources.

As a continuation of these developments, postgraduate education in Islamic Studies was launched under the specialty code 24.00.00. Doctoral programs were opened in areas such as the History of Islam and Source Studies, Qur'anic and Hadith Studies, Fiqh and Kalam, Theology, and Classical Oriental Literature and Source Studies. Within this interdisciplinary academic framework, particular emphasis has been placed on the study of Sufism as an integral component of Islamic intellectual history (Navoiy, 2011). Sufism is examined not only as a spiritual phenomenon but also as a complex religious, philosophical, social, and cultural system that has profoundly shaped the worldview of Muslim societies.

Research on Sufism focuses on several key directions, including the study of religious mysticism and mystical-philosophical systems, the historical origins of Sufism and the factors contributing to its emergence, its similarities and differences with other mystical doctrines, and the role of Sufi orders (tariqas) in the social and cultural life of Central Asian peoples (Turambetov, 2022). Special attention is also paid to the systematization of Sufi teachings, the structure and function of Sufi brotherhoods, and the lives, intellectual legacies, and doctrinal views of prominent Sufi masters.

In recent years, scholarly research conducted in Uzbekistan has made a significant contribution to understanding the historical and philosophical essence of Sufi teachings. These studies analyze both the theoretical foundations and practical dimensions of Sufism, as well as the major Sufi orders that emerged and developed in Central Asia, including the Naqshbandiyya, Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya, Kubrawiyya, Yasawiyya, and Qalandariyya (Asrorova, 2021; Turambetov, 2022). Researchers have examined the biographies and intellectual heritage of renowned Sufi figures and the role of Sufi orders in shaping moral values, social relations, and individual spiritual development.



Among the various Sufi traditions, the Naqshbandiyya order has attracted particular scholarly attention due to its wide geographical spread, strong intellectual discipline, and enduring influence. A distinct body of research has been devoted to the concept of the “Seven Saints” (Yeti Pir) associated with the Naqshbandi spiritual lineage. One of the most significant contributions in this field is the monograph *Tariqatning yetti piri* by L. Asrorova (Asrorova, 2021), which provides a comprehensive analysis of the Naqshbandiyya order, its foundational principles, and its leading spiritual figures.

It is well established that the Naqshbandiyya order evolved differently across historical periods and regions. This diversity is explored in studies of the Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya order in Central Asia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which analyze the processes of institutionalization and the transmission of spiritual authority (Sirhindi, 2005). These studies reconstruct genealogical and spiritual chains linking masters and disciples.

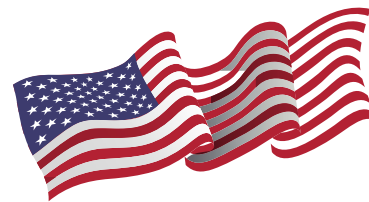
Another important contribution to Sufi studies is research on the Qalandariyya order in Central Asia, which examines the socio-historical factors behind its emergence, its doctrinal characteristics, and the influence of Malamati ideas on Qalandari thought, drawing on rare manuscript and archival sources (Turambetov, 2022).

The philosophical dimensions of Sufism have also been the subject of in-depth analysis. Studies on the doctrine of Wahdat al-Wujud explore the concept of the Unity of Being as articulated by Ibn al-‘Arabi and interpreted by Central Asian thinkers such as Muhammad Parsa, Khwaja Ahrar Wali, and ‘Abd al-Rahman Jami (Navoiy, 2011). These works demonstrate the influence of Sufi metaphysics on Islamic philosophical thought and popular religious consciousness.

Finally, recent scholarship has emphasized the importance of textual criticism, source studies, and hermeneutics in the study of Sufi literature. Doctoral research on works such as *Rashahat* by ‘Ali Safi Hiravi has contributed to a deeper understanding of manuscript traditions and the intellectual heritage of Sufism (Umurzoqov, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Sufi traditions have played a decisive role in the formation of Islamic intellectual, spiritual, and cultural life in Central Asia. Sufi orders functioned not only as spiritual institutions but also as centers of education, ethical guidance, and social organization, significantly influencing religious con-



sciousness and cultural practices in the region. The development of major orders such as the Naqshbandiyya, Kubrawiyya, Yasawiyya, and Qalandariyya reflects the close interaction between Sufism and the historical realities of Central Asia.

The findings also highlight the importance of classical Sufi texts and philosophical doctrines, particularly Wahdat al-Wujud, in shaping Islamic thought and preserving spiritual heritage. Contemporary academic research in Uzbekistan has contributed to the revival and systematic study of Sufi traditions, confirming their enduring relevance for both scholarly inquiry and modern spiritual life.

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