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THE ROLE OF KHWĀJA MUḤAMMAD PĀRSĀ IN THE THEORETICAL CONSOLIDATION OF THE KHWĀJAGĀN-NAQSHBANDIYYA TEACHING

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Ibrohim KHAYDAROV

Master's Student, Tashkent
State University of Oriental Studies,
Tashkent, Uzbekistan

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Abstract. *The article analyses the legacy of Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā (d. 822/1420), a close disciple and successor of Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband, in terms of the transition of the Khwājagān-Naqshbandiyya teaching from an oral tradition to a written theoretical system. Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband left no writings; his teaching was transmitted through companionship and practical training. In the «Risāla-yi qudsiyya» Pārsā collected his master's sayings and commented upon them with the help of Sufi terminology, while in the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb» he grounded the rules of the path in the Qurʾān, the ḥadīth, the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī creed and the views of the shaykhs of Mā warāʾ al-nahr. The study sets out Pārsā's contribution to justifying the path within the framework of Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamāʿa, to linking it with the Malāmatī tradition, to introducing the terminology of Ibn ʿArabī into Naqshbandī thought with caution, and to shaping the memory of the silsila by recording the spiritual stations of the masters.*

Keywords: Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā, Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband, Khwājagān, Naqshbandiyya, Risāla-yi qudsiyya, Faṣl al-khiṭāb, Sufi theory, Māturīdism, Malāmatiyya, silent dhikr.

INTRODUCTION

The Khwājagān-Naqshbandī path occupies a particular place in the history of Sufism in Mā warāʾ al-nahr. The way of the Khwājagān, which began with Yūsuf al-Hamadānī and ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Ghijduwānī, rose to a new stage in the fourteenth century in the person of Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband (1318-1389) and subsequently spread from Central Asia to India, the Ottoman state and the Caucasus (Weismann, 2007;

Knysh, 2000; Trimingham, 1971). Such a wide dissemination of the path, however, could not rest upon practical training alone: the principles of the way had to be clearly formulated, their conformity with the religious sciences had to be grounded, and they had to be defended before the scholars.

Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband himself wrote no book. His teaching was conveyed to his disciples through companionship, allusion and practical training. The task of bringing this oral legacy into written form, of systematising it and of grounding it theoretically fell to the master's close disciples. The greatest work in this respect was accomplished by Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā, one of the scholars of Bukhara and one of Naqshband's successors. H. Algar calls him the founder of the scholarly and literary tradition of the Naqshbandī path (Algar, 1991).

The relevance of the subject lies in the fact that Pārsā's legacy is most often studied in the context of the dissemination of the path and of the history of the silsila, whereas his place in the theoretical consolidation of the teaching of the path has been little illuminated as a separate object of research (Khaydarov, 2026:286-293; Kholnazarov, 2024:61-67). The aim of the present article is to disclose the role of Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā in the theoretical consolidation of the Khwājagān-Naqshbandiyya teaching on the example of his principal works. To this end the following tasks have been set: to describe Pārsā's scholarly and spiritual formation on the basis of the sources; to establish the function of the «Risāla-yi qudsiyya» and the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb» in bringing the teaching of the path into a written system; to analyse Pārsā's methods of harmonising the path with the creed of Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamāʿa; and to assess the influence of his legacy upon subsequent Naqshbandī thought.

The most important primary information concerning Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā is preserved in ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī's «Nafaḥāt al-uns» (Jāmī, 1991), ʿAlī Shīr Nawāʾī's «Nasāʾim al-maḥabba» (Nawāʾī, 2001) and Fakhr al-Dīn ʿAlī Ṣafī's «Rashaḥāt ʿayn al-ḥayāt» (Ṣafī, 1977). These sources contain accounts of Pārsā's relations with Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband, of his scholarly authority and of his miracles. Of Pārsā's own works, the «Risāla-yi qudsiyya» has been published in a critical edition by A. Ṭāhirī ʿIrāqī (Pārsā, 1975), while the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb» was printed several times at the beginning of the twentieth century, including a lithograph edition issued at Tashkent in 1913 (Pārsā, 1913; Boltayev, 2022).

Among foreign studies the works of H. Algar are of particular importance. In his

article on Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband for the «Encyclopaedia Iranica» it is recorded that Pārsā set out and commented upon the teaching of his master systematically in the «Risāla-yi qudsiyya» (Algar, 1988:433-435). In Algar's study devoted to the influence of Ibn ʿArabī in the early Naqshbandī tradition, the manner in which the terminology of Ibn ʿArabī was employed in Pārsā's works is analysed in detail (Algar, 1991). J. Paul studied the teaching and organisational structure of the first generation of Khwājagān-Naqshbandī masters after Bahāʾ al-Dīn (Paul, 1998), while I. Weismann and A. Knysh treated the history of the path in the context of Islamic mysticism as a whole (Weismann, 2007; Knysh, 2000).

Among researchers from Uzbekistan, A. Boltayev has shown the place occupied in the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb» by the views of scholars of this land (Boltayev, 2022); I. Kholnazarov has examined questions relating to Naqshbandī practice in Pārsā's legacy (Kholnazarov, 2024:61-67); and M. Ismoilov has illuminated his contribution to the science of kalām (Ismoilov, 2024). In the present author's earlier article the place of Pārsā in the dissemination of the Naqshbandī path and a list of his works were analysed (Khaydarov, 2026:286-293). The present article is a continuation of that research, with the principal attention directed to the theoretical grounding of the teaching of the path. Historical-comparative, textual-analytical and hermeneutic methods were employed in the study. The content of Pārsā's works was compared with the information of the biographical sources and with modern research, and the divergences in the dates and figures given in the sources were recorded separately.

MAIN PART

Khwāja Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Ḥāfiẓī al-Bukhārī, the scholar celebrated under the sobriquet Pārsā, was born in Bukhara. The year of his birth is given differently in the sources - as 1345 (Boltayev, 2022) or as 1355 (Khaydarov, 2026:287). Pārsā mastered thoroughly the sciences of fiqh, ḥadīth and kalām in the madrasas of Bukhara and acquired high standing among the scholars of the city. At the same time he entered the company of Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband from his youth and became one of his closest disciples.

The sources record the words spoken by Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband concerning Pārsā: the master said that the purpose of his own existence was the existence of Pārsā

(Algar, 1991). According to certain accounts, Naqshband appointed Pārsā his successor during the pilgrimage and confirmed this before his death (Algar, 1988:433-435). The principal silsila of the path, however, passed to Naqshband's son-in-law Khwāja ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār and from him, through Yaʿqūb Charkhī, to Khwāja Aḥrār (Algar, 1988:433-435). This circumstance is important in determining Pārsā's place within the path: he came forward not as the principal organisational continuer of the silsila but as the scholarly and theoretical defender and commentator of the teaching. In the present author's earlier research the proposition that Pārsā was a theoretician rather than a practical spiritual director was likewise advanced as a conjecture (Khaydarov, 2026:289).

Pārsā met the Timurid rulers Khalīl Sulṭān and Shāhrukh and took part in the scholarly disputations held at Bukhara and Samarqand in the time of Mīrzā Ulugh Beg (Khaydarov, 2026:290). He died at Medina in the year 822/1420 during his second pilgrimage and was buried in the Baqīʿ cemetery (Algar, 1991; Algar, 1988:433-435). Jāmī, Nawāʾī and Ṣafī mention him in their biographical collections among the closest disciples of Naqshband and assess his scholarly and spiritual rank highly (Jāmī, 1991; Nawāʾī, 2001; Ṣafī, 1977; Khaydarov, 2026:288).

Pārsā's most important service to the theory of the path consists in his having collected the sayings of Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband, commented upon them and turned them into a continuous text. This work, entitled the «Risāla-yi qudsiyya», was written in Persian; in it the master's brief and concise utterances are adduced, after which the author explains them with the help of Sufi terminology (Pārsā, 1975). As H. Algar has emphasised, it was precisely in this work that Pārsā set out the teaching of Bahāʾ al-Dīn systematically and with commentary (Algar, 1988:433-435).

The theoretical significance of the work appears in three respects. First, by binding the oral accounts to a definite text it protected them from varying interpretations and from corruption. Second, the master's allusive utterances, often consisting of a sentence or two, were turned through commentary into intelligible theoretical rules. Third, because terms characteristic of the school of Ibn ʿArabī were employed in the commentary, the sayings of Naqshband were brought into the broad context of the theory of Islamic mysticism as a whole (Algar, 1991). In this way the path of the Khwājagān ceased to be a local practice peculiar to Mā warāʾ al-nahr and appeared as a scholarly grounded path.

The «Risāla-yi qudsiyya» is also connected with the notion of the «kalimāt-i

qudsiyya» in the tradition of the Khwājagān. ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Ghijduwānī expressed the foundations of the path in the form of eight brief Persian phrases - «hūsh dar dam», «naẓar bar qadam», «safar dar waṭan», «khalwat dar anjuman», «yādkard», «bāzgasht», «nigāhdāsht» and «yāddāsht» (Algar, 1988:433-435). In the later tradition there were added to these the three principles attributed to Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband - «wuqūf-i zamānī», «wuqūf-i ʿadadī» and «wuqūf-i qalbī» - so that a system of eleven foundations took shape (Ṣafī, 1977). Pārsā's method of commenting upon the master's sayings became one of the earliest instances of the tradition of filling these brief formulas with theoretical content.

Pārsā's largest and most systematic work is the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb li-waṣl al-aḥbāb». The work was written in Arabic and Persian; in it questions of theoretical and practical Sufism are illuminated on the basis of the Qurʾān, the ḥadīth and the works of numerous scholars (Algar, 1991; Boltayev, 2022). The number of the questions treated in the work is given differently in the sources: A. Boltayev indicates 458 (Boltayev, 2022), whereas in the present author's earlier article 494 questions are indicated (Khaydarov, 2026:291). This divergence calls for a comparative study of the various copies and editions of the work. H. Algar emphasises that the very title of the work indicates that its content is decisive and conclusive (Algar, 1991).

The significance of the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb» for the theory of the path lies in the fact that Pārsā resolves the questions of Sufism within the framework of the creed of Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamāʿa and supports every proposition with the authoritative views of the scholars of Mā warāʾ al-nahr. According to A. Boltayev's analysis, the work adduces the views of such scholars of this land as Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī the author of «ʿUmdat al-ʿaqāʾid», Abū Bakr al-Kalābādhī the author of «al-Taʿarruf», al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī the author of «Khatm al-awliyāʾ», Abū Ibrāhīm al-Mustamlī and Abū Zayd al-Dabūsī, and even touches upon Ibn Sīnā's «Risālat al-ṭayr» (Boltayev, 2022).

This selection of sources is not accidental. al-Māturīdī and al-Nasafī are the principal supports of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī creed, while al-Kalābādhī is one of the first Bukharan authors to have harmonised Sufism with the creed of Ahl al-Sunna. Relying upon this authoritative chain, Pārsā showed that the way of the Khwājagān is the natural continuation of the scholarly tradition of Bukhara and Samarqand. As a result the Naqshbandiyya was grounded in the eyes of the scholars of the law not as an

innovation but as a path fully conformable to creed and jurisprudence. This is one of the most important theoretical results of Pārsā's legacy, and it subsequently consolidated the reputation of the Naqshbandiyya as a «path resting firmly upon the sharīʿa» (Weismann, 2007).

In the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb» Pārsā compares the Khwājagān with the Malāmatī movement and expresses the view that whatever is true of the Malāmatīs is true of the masters of the Khwājagān as well (Algar, 1988:433-435). This comparison was important for explaining theoretically the distinctive marks of the Naqshbandiyya. The Malāmatī tradition exalted the concealment of the inner state, the avoidance of outward appearance and of claims, and being with God while leading an ordinary life among the people. The principle of «khalwat dar anjuman» - solitude within society - in the Naqshbandiyya, and the renunciation of distinctive dress and outward marks, accord precisely with this spirit.

Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband required silent dhikr strictly and did not accept samāʿ and seclusion as means of spiritual perfection (Algar, 1988:433-435). This approach required explanation in its own time against the background of other paths that practised vocal dhikr and samāʿ. Pārsā's comparison with the Malāmatiyya served to present silent dhikr and the renunciation of outward marks not as a new innovation but as a tradition with deep roots in early Sufism (Knysh, 2000). In this way Pārsā placed the difference between the Naqshbandiyya and the other paths upon a theoretical foundation.

A further important aspect of Pārsā's legacy is connected with his attitude to the teaching of Ibn ʿArabī. According to the words of his son Abū Naṣr Pārsā, for his father the «Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam» was as the soul and the «al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya» as the heart; he held that a deep study of the «Fuṣūṣ» strengthens adherence to the sunna (Algar, 1991). A brief Persian commentary upon the «Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam» is attributed to Pārsā, but the authorship of this commentary is disputed: some researchers consider it to belong to the pen of Mīr Sayyid ʿAlī Hamadānī, while H. Algar considers Pārsā's authorship not improbable (Algar, 1991).

It is noteworthy that in his own works Pārsā scarcely mentions the name of Ibn ʿArabī. In the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb» he is recalled indirectly and only once, while in the «Risāla-yi qudsiyya» a quotation taken from Ibn ʿArabī is adduced with the expression «one of the great ones» (Algar, 1991). H. Algar explains this caution by the environment of Bukhara: the traditionists of the city even complained of Pārsā to Ulugh Beg (Algar,

1991). Pārsā therefore introduced the terminology of Ibn ʿArabī into Naqshbandī theory, but did so in a form that would not lead to open conflict with the scholars and that would remain within the bounds of Sunnī creed.

The results of this cautious approach appeared clearly in the following generations. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī acknowledged that his doubts on the question of waḥdat al-wujūd were removed through Pārsā's works (Algar, 1991). Jāmī collected Pārsā's marginal notes and compiled a collection entitled «Sukhanān-i Khwāja Pārsā»; this text is steeped in the notions and terminology of Ibn ʿArabī (Algar, 1991). In this way Pārsā, having connected Naqshbandī practice with the metaphysics of Ibn ʿArabī, became one of the first links of the synthesis that took full shape in the time of Jāmī and Khwāja Aḥrār.

Among the works attributed to Pārsā there are also such treatises as the «Maqāmāt-i Khwāja Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband», the «Maqāmāt-i Khwāja ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār», the «Taḥqīqāt» and the «Risāla dar ādāb-i murīd» (Boltayev, 2022; Khaydarov, 2026:292). These works in the genre of biography and of spiritual stations performed a function as important for the path as the theoretical treatises: by recording the lives, the sayings and the states of the masters they shaped the memory of the silsila. The teaching of a path is not merely a body of rules; it is also transmitted in the persons of exemplary figures. Pārsā, by consolidating the images of Naqshband and ʿAṭṭār in written form, created a source for the later biographers - Jāmī, Nawāʾī and Ṣafī (Jāmī, 1991; Nawāʾī, 2001; Ṣafī, 1977).

The treatise «Taḥqīqāt» is devoted to the explanation of Sufi technical terms (Khaydarov, 2026:292), and this too was an important means of consolidating the theory of the path. Where there is no precise definition of the technical terms, a teaching remains open to differing interpretations. Pārsā, by ordering the terminological apparatus, contributed to the creation of a single theoretical language for the disciples of the Naqshbandiyya. The «Risāla dar ādāb-i murīd», for its part, established the rules of conduct governing the relations of disciple and director and thus constituted the normative basis of the inner order of the path (Ismoilov, 2024).

Pārsā's scholarly and spiritual tradition was continued through his son Abū Naṣr Pārsā, and a distinct «Pārsāʾiyya» current took shape in Bukhara (Khaydarov, 2026:293). His works were copied and read for centuries; the lithograph publication of the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb» at Tashkent at the beginning of the twentieth century (Pārsā, 1913; Boltayev, 2022) shows that this work remained relevant in the scholarly environment of Mā warāʾ al-nahr even five centuries later.

The principal theoretical results of Pārsā's legacy may be summarised as follows. He turned the oral teaching of Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband into a written, commented text; he grounded the rules of the path in the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī creed and in the authority of the scholars of Mā warāʾ al-nahr; he explained such distinctive practices as silent dhikr and «khalwat dar anjuman» through the Malāmatī tradition; he introduced the terminology of Ibn ʿArabī into Naqshbandī thought with caution and within the Sunnī framework; and, by recording the spiritual stations of the masters, he shaped the memory of the silsila. Each of these directions found its reflection in the subsequent development of the Naqshbandiyya - in the political and social activity of Khwāja Aḥrār, in the theoretical works of Jāmī and in the firm adherence of the Mujaddidī current to the sharīʿa (Weismann, 2007; Knysh, 2000; Paul, 1998).

The study also has its limitations. The authorship of a part of the works attributed to Pārsā is disputed, and a complete Uzbek translation of the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb» does not yet exist (Boltayev, 2022). For this reason the critical study of Pārsā's legacy on the basis of the manuscript copies and the preparation of scholarly annotated translations of his works remain among the important tasks for the future.

CONCLUSION

Khwāja Muḥammad Pārsā was the central figure who secured the transition, in the history of the Khwājagān-Naqshbandiyya, from the tradition of oral training to a written theoretical system. The teaching that Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband transmitted through companionship was brought into written form and commented upon in Pārsā's «Risāla-yi qudsiyya» (Pārsā, 1975; Algar, 1988:433-435), and in the «Faṣl al-khiṭāb» it was grounded in the Qurʾān, the ḥadīth, the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī creed and the views of the scholars of Mā warāʾ al-nahr (Boltayev, 2022). Pārsā, by connecting the path with the Malāmatī tradition, gave a theoretical foundation to its distinctive practices, and by employing the terminology of Ibn ʿArabī with caution within the Sunnī framework he opened the way for Jāmī and for the thinkers who followed (Algar, 1991).

As a result of Pārsā's activity the Naqshbandiyya acquired, in the eyes of the scholars of the law, the standing of a trustworthy path grounded in creed. This factor was one of the important conditions that enabled the path to pass beyond the borders of Mā warāʾ al-nahr and to spread to the wide territories of the Islamic world (Weismann, 2007;

Trimingham, 1971). The deep study of Pārsā's legacy on the basis of the manuscripts and its translation into Uzbek remain a pressing task on the way to the restoration of our national spiritual heritage (Kholnazarov, 2024:61-67).

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