



THE PLACE OF IMAM RABBANI'S "MAKTUBAT" IN THE HISTORY OF SUFI

<https://doi.org/10.57033/mijournals-2026-1-0038>

Avazbek GANIYEV

DSc, Associate Professor at the Islamic History and Source Studies-IRCICA department, International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan
E-mail: avazganiyev@gmail.com

Madina AKOBIROVA

*1st year master's student, History
International Islamic Academy of Uzbekistan*

Received: 12-12-2025

Accepted: 19-12-2025

Published: 11.01.2026



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Abstract. This article analyzes the role of Maktubot, written by Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624), a prominent representative of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidiya order, in the history of Sufism, reform ideas, and the development of Islamic-spiritual thought. Within the framework of the research, the content layers of Maktubot, in particular, the concept of mujaddidiya, the harmony of Sharia and tariqa, the doctrine of "wahdati shuhud" and the theoretical innovations introduced into Sufi practice, were studied based on scientific sources. The impact of the work on the socio-religious environment, the theoretical and spiritual influence it had on the Mujaddidiya direction formed in the next generations of the Naqshbandi order, as well as its role in the moral and spiritual revival of Muslim society are highlighted. The article is edited by Annemarie Schimmel, J.G.J. ter Haar, Yohanan Friedmann, and based on the research of prominent orientalists and mystics, as well as the published main texts of Maktubot. The results show that Maktubot has a special historical significance in the history of Sufism not only as a school of spiritual purification, but also as a socio-spiritual reform movement.

Keywords: Imam Rabbani, Ahmad Sirhindi, Maktubot, Mujaddidiya, Naqshbandiyya, history of Sufism, unity of the witness, reform, tariqat, sharia, Islamic philosophy, spiritual and moral renewal.

INTRODUCTION

The 16th and 17th centuries are considered a period of significant reshaping of the social, political, and spiritual life of Sufism in the Muslim world, particularly in India and Central Asia. Within these complex processes, a new direction of the Naqshbandi order, the Naqshbandi-mujaddidiya school, was formed. At the center of this renewal movement is Imam Rabbani Ahmad Faruqi Sirhindi (1564-1624), whose name occupies a special place in the history of Islamic thought. His famous work "Maktubot" is

recognized as a fundamental source that introduced strict order, spiritual and intellectual stability, and the criteria of reform based on Sharia into the Sufi practice of his time.

“Maktubot” is a comprehensive set of ideas aimed at the conceptual renewal of the order, the purification of Sufism from heresy, the restoration of the foundations of spiritual education based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, and the re-establishment of the balance between “sharia-shari'ah-truth”. Scientific sources emphasize that the ideas put forward by Sirhindi had a significant impact on the enrichment of the Naqshbandi order with new content in India, Afghanistan, Turkey, Central Asia, and other Muslim regions of the East in subsequent periods. Despite this, the scientific role of “Maktubot” in modern Sufism has not been sufficiently comprehensively studied. Academic literature has covered more of the general history of the order, and the internal concept of the work, the methodology of spiritual education, the theory of mujaddidiya, and Imam Rabbani's reformist views based on the teachings of sharia have not yet been fully analyzed. In particular, the composition of the letters, their didactic structure, and the mechanisms for reinterpreting normative Sufi concepts have not been scientifically adequately evaluated.

The purpose of this study is to study Imam Rabbani Ahmad Sirhindi's “Maktubot” as one of the major stages in the history of Sufism on a scientific and theoretical basis, to systematically analyze the doctrinal, spiritual-educational, and socio-religious principles put forward in the work, and to shed light on the role and influence of this work in the formation of the Mujaddidi school based on scientific sources.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a number of theoretical and comparative methods aimed at scientifically analyzing the place of Imam Rabbani Ahmad Faruqi Sirhindi's “Maktubot” in the history of Sufism and the processes of the formation of the “mujaddidiya” school. All approaches provide a deep insight into the text structure, conceptual layers, and historical and social environment of the work.

Source analysis: The focus of the study is on the manuscripts and printed editions of “Maktubot”, commentaries created on them, translations, and additional sources related to the history of mujaddidiya. Textual differences in different editions of the letters, terminological changes, and structural differences of some letters were compared. Also,

along with other treatises belonging to Sirhindi, special attention was paid to the historical layer of the texts - contemporary political allusions, fatwas, and the context of personal letters. This approach served to clarify the source environment.

Sufism analysis: The study used the classical principles of analysis of Sufism. The mystical state and status system, riyazat, suhbat, ikhlos, and huzur, such as the specific directions of Naqshbandiyya, were reviewed in the interpretation of Imam Rabbani. Also, Sirhindi's new interpretation of the difference between "wahdat al-wujud" and "wahdat ash-shuhud", and principles such as "rabita" and "khilvat dar anjuman" in the suluk system were analyzed in a scientific and philosophical context.

DISCUSSION

Imam Rabbani sees his work as a continuation of the tradition of "mujaddidiya" in the history of Islam. The concepts of tasfiya (spiritual purification), ihya (revival of the Sunnah) and islah (ordering religious and practical life) play a key role in his teachings. In Sirhindi's view, the true content of Sufism should be based on the Qur'an and Sunnah, practices should not deviate from the criteria of Sharia, and excessive interpretations and manifestations of innovation in Sufism should be purified. This direction is appreciated as an attempt to return Sufism to a normative basis. One of the central ideas of the Maktubot is the doctrine of the superiority of Sharia over mystical positions, revelations and spiritual states. Imam Rabbani considers the evaluation of spiritual experiences in the criteria of Sharia to be a necessary condition. In his opinion, the goal of Sufism is not intoxication or spiritual experiences, but living with morality like the prophets, turning the Sunnah into a principle of life. This approach is interpreted as an important turning point in the history of Islamic spirituality.

Imam Rabbani criticizes the concept of "wahdat al-wujud", which occupies an important place in the metaphysics of Sufism, and puts forward the theory of "wahdat as-shuhud". According to him, existence is not identical with the essence of Allah; the spiritual maturity of a person lies not in the perception of the transformation of existence into a single existence, but in the observation of the power of Allah and the created world with dominion, order and wisdom, that is, through "shuhud". This approach formed the doctrinal basis of the Mujaddidi school.

An important part of the Maktubot work is made up of doctrinal issues. It contains a detailed explanation of the concept of monotheism, explanations of the attributes of Allah in accordance with the Sunni methodology, views on divine knowledge, destiny, luminous existence, and metaphysical issues. Imam Rabbani also criticizes excessively metaphorical interpretations and superstitious views in Sufism, and defines strict standards of faith.

The letters extensively explain the practical aspects of the tariqa - dhikr, robita, conversation, and the literary standards of the murshid-murid relationship. In particular, he explains in detail the central place of the “hidden dhikr” tradition in Naqshbandi, the deepening of spiritual education through robita, and the impact of conversation on spiritual maturity. These aspects formed the practical system of the Mujaddidi tariqa.

The letters are not only a source of spiritual education, but also an important source of the history of religious and social thought. The work contains topical considerations about the responsibility of rulers, the principle of justice, the relationship between religion and state, the consequences of innovation and political crises in society. Imam Rabbani assessed the ideological crises that arose during the Mughal Empire and emphasized the need for reform.

The work extensively covers the essence of moral statuses such as purification of the soul, asceticism, sincerity, patience, gratitude, and trust. The stages of spiritual maturity, methods of spiritual education, and etiquette are analyzed from the perspective of mystical ethics. This section makes Maktubot particularly important as a moral and educational source.

Imam Rabbani strengthened the Naqshbandi order with the concept of Sufism based on Sharia. He regulated the practice of the order, cleaned it of excessive elements of innovation, and proposed a disciplined model of spiritual education. As a result, a new stage of the order, the Mujaddidiya school, was formed.

Sirhindi's sons and disciples spread his ideas to India, Afghanistan, Transoxiana, Turkey, and other large Muslim territories. In the 17th and 18th centuries, Mujaddidiyya became one of the most widespread mystical movements in India and had a great socio-cultural impact.

The interpretation of the “Tariqat-ul-Muhammadiya” put forward by Imam Rabbani implies following the Sunnah, educating the heart with sincerity and order, and

considering jurisprudence, aqeedah, and morality as a single spiritual system. These principles strengthened the internal ideological basis of the Mujaddidiyya. In Central Asia, the views of Mujaddidiyya became inextricably linked intellectually with the pre-existing Sufi school. Khoja Ubaydullah Ahrar's concept of Sufism, based on Sharia, was close to Sirhindi's "spirit of renewal."

In the following centuries, the mujaddidiya silsila spread widely in the religious circles of Bukhara, Kokand, and Khiva. There are historical sources indicating that the mujaddidiya silsila operated in madrasas, mosques, and religious orders during the Emirate and Khanate periods.

The Jadid intellectuals of the early 20th century interpreted the ideas of Imam Rabbani as an important stage of spiritual renewal in Muslim society. They associated mujaddidiya with the idea of renewal in Islam, the principle of reforming society through enlightenment.

CONCLUSION

The work "Maktubot" written by Imam Rabbani Ahmad Faruqi Sirhindi occupies a special place in the history of Sufism, as a major scientific source that embodies the intellectual and spiritual changes that took place in the 16th and 17th centuries. As it was found during the research, this work, in addition to being a collection of personal and guiding letters, is also a perfect conceptual complex that harmoniously and balanced illuminates the theoretical foundations of Sufism, its practical system of sufi teachings, its doctrinal views, and socio-spiritual issues.

First of all, the Maktubot scientifically and theoretically substantiates the concept of "mujaddidiya". The ideas of reform, revival, and purification put forward by Imam Rabbani indicate the need to return Sufism to the basis of the Quran and Sunnah, to regulate Sufi practice in accordance with the criteria of Sharia, and to purify spiritual life from innovations. In this sense, Maktubot served as a solid ideological foundation for the formation of the Naqshbandi-Mujaddidiya school and its spread to subsequent regions. The work emphasizes the priority role of Sharia in Sufism. Imam Rabbani, seeing Sharia as the main criterion of truth, teaches that all spiritual states, discoveries and inspirations must be absolutely subordinate to Sharia. This approach removes Sufism from excessive metaphysical interpretations and monistic expressions, directs

it to a vital-practical direction, and serves to restore normativity in the history of Sufism. Sirhindi's position on the issue of "wahdat al-wujud" and "wahdat ash-shuhud" is of great importance in the reinterpretation of the metaphysics of Sufism. Through the concept of wahdat ash-shuhud, he rejects the identity between the essence of Allah and existence, clearly defines the place and boundaries of human spiritual perception, and strengthens doctrinal criteria. As a result, the philosophy of Sufism is interpreted in a new way, balanced with kalam and fiqh.

The letter fully reflects the criteria of suluk, which are also necessary for the practical sphere of Sufism. Aspects such as zikri khafi, robita, conversation, etiquette between murshid and murid, self-education, and riyazat are consistently described, forming a disciplined model of spiritual education. Sirhindi suluk

Having a central place in the Naqshbandi-Mujaddid tradition, it is still studied as a methodological basis in many Sufi schools today. In addition, the social, political, and moral views put forward in the work show that the legacy of Imam Rabbani is even more comprehensive. He speaks about the responsibility of the ruler, the principles of justice, the primacy of religious values in society, the impact of spiritual education on the stability of the state and society, emphasizing the need for Sufism to be not isolated from society, but to be inextricably linked with it. This aspect continues the traditions of social activism and has a significant impact on the mystical movements in Central Asia, India, Afghanistan, and the Turkic regions.

The results of the research show that *Maktubot* was also read as an important source in the scientific and educational life of Central Asia in the 18th and 19th centuries. Historical sources confirm that the scholars of Bukhara, Kokand, and Khiva incorporated the ideas of the Mujaddidi into the practice of jurisprudence, Sufism, and moral education. The reassessment of the Sirhindi heritage by the Jadid intellectuals of the early 20th century as one of the important historical sources of the "principles of renewal in Islam" also indicates the breadth of the intellectual influence of "*Maktubot*."

Imam Rabbani's "*Maktubot*" left a deep mark on the return of Sufism to the basis of Sharia, the improvement of the methodology of spiritual education, the influence on the spiritual renewal of society, and the continuation of the process of intellectual awakening in the Muslim world. The scientific and philosophical heritage of the work remains an important methodological source in Islamic studies, Sufism, socio-philosophical research, and the study of Muslim spiritual heritage today.

REFERENCES

1. Ahmad Sirhindi. *Maktubat-i Imam Rabbani* (3 jild). – Karachi:Darul-Isha‘at, 2003.
2. Ahmad Sirhindi. *Mabda’ wa Ma‘ad*. – Lahore:Majlis-e-Nashriyat, 1980.
3. Schimmel A. *Islamic Mysticism*. – Leiden:Brill, 1975. – P. 112–138.
4. Schimmel A. *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent*. – Leiden:Brill, 1980.
5. Ter Haar J. G. J. *A Sufi Saint from India:Ahmad Sirhindi*. – Leiden:Brill, 1992.
6. Ter Haar J. G. J. *Islam and Renewal:Reform in the Muslim World*. – Leiden:Brill, 2004.
7. Friedmann Y. *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi:An Outline of His Thought*. – Montreal:McGill University Press, 1971.
8. Algar H. *The Naqshbandi Order:A Preliminary Survey*. – Berkeley:University of California Press, 1967.