

THE NAQSHBANDIYYA SUFI ORDER: ORIGINS, TEACHINGS, AND SOCIO-  
SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE

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**Abstract**

The Naqshbandiyya is one of the most prominent and influential Sufi orders in the history of Islam. Originating in Central Asia during the fourteenth century, the order became widely known for its emphasis on silent remembrance (*dhikr khafī*), strict adherence to Islamic law (*Sharī'a*), and the integration of spiritual discipline with active participation in social life. Founded and systematized by **Bahauddin Naqshband**, the Naqshbandiyya developed a distinctive spiritual path that rejected extreme asceticism and outward ritualism, focusing instead on inner purification and ethical conduct.

This article examines the historical development of the Naqshbandiyya order, its core doctrinal principles, and its socio-political influence across Central Asia, the Middle East, South Asia, and beyond. Particular attention is given to the order's role in preserving Islamic orthodoxy, shaping religious authority, and responding to political and cultural challenges in different historical contexts. The study argues that the Naqshbandiyya represents a unique synthesis of mysticism, law, and social engagement, which continues to maintain relevance in the modern Muslim world.

**Keywords**

Naqshbandiyya; Sufism; Islamic mysticism; Central Asia; *dhikr khafī*; *Sharī'a*; spiritual ethics; socio-religious movements

The Naqshbandiyya is one of the most influential and enduring Sufi orders in the Islamic world. Originating in Central Asia, the order is distinguished by its emphasis on silent remembrance (*dhikr khafī*), strict adherence to Islamic law (*Sharī'a*), and active engagement in social life. This article explores the historical development of the Naqshbandiyya, its core doctrinal principles, and its spiritual and social impact across various regions of the Muslim world.

Sufism, as the mystical dimension of Islam, has played a significant role in shaping Islamic spirituality, ethics, and culture. Among numerous Sufi orders, the Naqshbandiyya stands out for its sobriety, discipline, and integration of spirituality with everyday life. Unlike many other Sufi paths, the Naqshbandiyya rejects excessive asceticism and emphasizes inner purification while remaining fully involved in society.

The Naqshbandiyya order traces its origins to Central Asia in the 14th century and is named after its principal founder, **Bahauddin Naqshband** (1318–1389), who lived in Bukhara. The spiritual lineage (*silsila*) of the order is believed to reach back to the Prophet Muhammad through Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, which distinguishes it from many other Sufi orders that trace their lineage through Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Although Bahauddin Naqshband systematized the order, its spiritual foundations were laid earlier by figures such as Yusuf Hamadani and Abd al-Khaliq Ghijduwani. Over time, the Naqshbandiyya expanded beyond Central Asia to regions such as Anatolia, South Asia, the Middle East, and later the Ottoman and Mughal domains.

The Naqshbandiyya is characterized by several distinctive spiritual principles. One of its most notable features is the practice of silent *dhikr*, which aims to cultivate constant awareness

of God without outward display. This reflects the order's emphasis on inward spirituality rather than external ritualism.

Another key principle is the strict observance of *Sharī'a*. Naqshbandi masters consistently stressed that true spiritual realization cannot be achieved without full compliance with Islamic law. This approach reinforced the order's reputation as a sober and orthodox Sufi path.

The famous Naqshbandi maxim "*Dil ba yār, dast ba kār*" ("The heart with God, the hands at work") encapsulates the order's worldview. It encourages spiritual mindfulness while actively participating in social, economic, and political life.

Throughout history, the Naqshbandiyya played a crucial role not only in spiritual life but also in social and political spheres. Naqshbandi shaykhs often acted as moral authorities, educators, and advisors to rulers. In Central Asia, the order contributed to the preservation of Islamic learning and moral values during periods of political instability.

In the Ottoman and Mughal empires, Naqshbandi scholars influenced religious reforms and administrative ethics. During the colonial period, particularly in South and Central Asia, members of the Naqshbandiyya were involved in movements aimed at preserving Islamic identity and resisting cultural and religious domination.

The enduring appeal of the Naqshbandiyya lies in its balance between spirituality and practicality. By integrating mystical devotion with social responsibility, the order offers a model of spiritual life that remains relevant in modern contexts. Today, Naqshbandi communities continue to operate in many parts of the world, adapting their teachings to contemporary challenges while preserving their traditional principles.

The Naqshbandiyya Sufi order represents a unique synthesis of inner spirituality, ethical discipline, and social engagement. Its historical development, doctrinal clarity, and wide-ranging influence have made it one of the most significant Sufi orders in Islamic history. Studying the Naqshbandiyya provides valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between mysticism, law, and society in Islam.

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