



THE IMAGE OF BAHÁ' AL-DIN NAQSHBAND IN CLASSICAL LITERATURE: ARTISTIC INTERPRETATION AND SPIRITUAL SYMBOLISM

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Abstract: This thesis examines the artistic representation of Baha' al-Din Naqshband through the literary heritage of Alisher Navoi and Abdurahman Jami. The study explores the concept of the Perfect Human, which constitutes a fundamental principle of the Naqshbandi Sufi order, the famous maxim “Dil ba yor-u dast ba kor” (“Keep your heart with the Beloved and your hands at work”), and the reflection of high human virtues in literary works. Particular attention is also paid to the transition of Shaykh Baha' al-Din's image from religious and hagiographical sources into literary epics and to the stages through which he developed into a distinctive literary symbol.

Key words: Baha' al-Din Naqshband, the Naqshbandi Sufi order, Alisher Navoi, Abdurahman Jami, Sufism, Uzbek classical literature, artistic symbol, analysis of motifs and imagery.

Introduction

One of the most prominent Sufi figures to have left an indelible mark on the spiritual history of the peoples of Central Asia was Khwaja Baha' al-Din Naqshband (1318–1389), the spiritual master whose name became synonymous with the Naqshbandi Sufi order. His spiritual influence was not confined to religious and mystical circles; it also penetrated deeply into the classical literary traditions of the Persian-speaking and Turkic peoples. Over time, Naqshband's personality became an enduring literary embodiment of profound wisdom, humility, and spiritual purity. Alisher Navoi and Nur al-Din Abdurahman Jami, two towering figures of Eastern literature, skillfully employed distinctive poetic devices and artistic techniques to portray the revered spiritual master in their writings. The principal aim of this study is to explore how the image of Baha' al-Din Naqshband was represented in Persian-Tajik and Turkic literature. It examines the historical development of this image, the artistic methods used in its creation, and the ethical and spiritual meanings associated with the Shaykh's personality. By studying the literary heritage of Navoi, Jami, and other writers, the article seeks to demonstrate how the fundamental principles of Naqshbandi teaching were incorporated into the fabric of literary texts.



Baha' al-Din Naqshband: The Historical Etymology and Mystical Significance of His Name

Before turning to the literary representations of Naqshband, it is appropriate to briefly consider the historical and spiritual foundations of the subject. Baha' al-Din Naqshband of Bukhara is revered as a great spiritual guide. The Naqshbandi Sufi order itself bears his name. The word *Naqshband* is commonly associated with the meanings “embroiderer” and “one who imprints a pattern,” and it has been interpreted in two principal ways.

First, the name is associated with the historical account that the young Baha' al-Din grew up in a family of artisans and engaged in embroidery. Second, Sufi tradition gives the term a mystical interpretation, portraying him as a person who imprinted the name of God upon his heart. In this way, the Shaykh's epithet became a symbol of his inner spiritual path: never forgetting the Creator and keeping the Divine constantly present in one's heart, as though His name were permanently engraved there.

Unlike certain other Sufi traditions that place particular emphasis on ecstatic states, the Naqshbandi path prioritizes inner tranquillity and spiritual awareness. The great Shaykh advocated silent, or *khafi*, remembrance of God and the pursuit of spiritual perfection alongside honest, everyday work. This principle is expressed in the famous Persian maxim “Dil ba yor-u dast ba kor,” meaning “Keep your heart with the Beloved and your hands at work.” Baha' al-Din Naqshband also regarded humility and the avoidance of arrogance as essential virtues, strongly condemning pride and self-conceit.

His attitude towards death was likewise distinctive. Rather than viewing death solely as a terrifying tragedy, he understood it as the soul's return to its Creator, or the Beloved's arrival in the presence of the Friend. From this perspective, excessive grief over death was considered inappropriate. These principles—the imprint of the Divine Name upon the heart, silent remembrance, worship through honest labour, and profound humility—subsequently became key motifs in the creation of Naqshband's image in classical literature.

The Representation of Naqshband in the Literary Heritage of Alisher Navoi

One of the major figures to portray Baha' al-Din Naqshband with exceptional artistic mastery in Turkic literature was the thinker and poet Alisher Navoi (1441–1501). Navoi's connection with the Shaykh extended beyond admiration. Historical accounts indicate that, under the guidance and influence of his mentor and close friend Abdurahman Jami, Navoi formally entered the Naqshbandi Sufi order around 1476. Thus, Navoi was spiritually connected with this tradition, a connection clearly





reflected in his worldview and literary works. In his writings, the poet places Baha' al-Din Naqshband among the foremost spiritual figures of the Islamic world and its cultural heritage.

The Interpretation of Naqshband in Historical and Biographical Works

Navoi portrayed the Shaykh directly in his prose works devoted to the history of Sufi figures. In this respect, *Nasayim al-Muhabbat*, a biographical compendium written in Chagatai Turkic around 1498, is of particular importance. The work is an adapted and expanded rendering of Jami's *Nafahat al-Uns*. While acknowledging his mentor's contribution, Navoi added substantial new information about the Sufi masters of Central Asia, particularly representatives of the Khwajagan and Naqshbandi traditions.

The section devoted to Baha' al-Din Naqshband presents biographical details that are not found in precisely the same form in Jami's work or in Ali Safi's *Rashahat Ayn al-Hayat*. Navoi traces the spiritual lineage associated with the Shaykh, referring to earlier masters such as Yusuf Hamadani and Amir Kulal, thereby emphasizing the continuity of spiritual transmission within the Sufi tradition.

He also explains the origin of the name *Naqshband*, drawing attention to both its outward association with embroidery and its inward, mystical interpretation as the imprint of God's name upon the heart. Consequently, Baha' al-Din Naqshband emerges from the work as a towering figure of the Sufi world and a revered spiritual master.

By preserving this heritage in Turkic, Navoi fulfilled an important literary and cultural mission, making accounts of the great spiritual tradition accessible to future generations in their own language. The work also reflects his profound respect for the spiritual path represented by Naqshband.

The Eulogy in the Epic *Hayrat al-Abror*

Navoi celebrated the image of the great Shaykh not only in prose but also through elevated poetic expression. In *Hayrat al-Abror* (*The Wonder of the Righteous*, 1483), the first poem of his *Khamsa*, Naqshband is honoured in a dedicated passage.

In this section, the poet skilfully employs wordplay, including *tajnis* (paronomasia), to reveal the layered meanings associated with the Shaykh's name. The word *naqsh* ("pattern" or "imprint") is repeatedly used, presenting the Shaykh as *Shah Naqshband* ("the King of Patterns") and his spiritual teaching as an extraordinary pattern of perfection. Through this artistic device, the Naqshbandi path is portrayed as a refined model of spiritual life and a pattern worthy of emulation by believers.





The poem also employs traditional honorific epithets associated with the Shaykh, including *Bala-gardan*, meaning “one who averts calamity.” This epithet reflects the popular belief that the Shaykh’s prayers could protect the community from misfortune. In this panegyric portrayal, Naqshband appears as a great spiritual figure whose life bears the imprint of the Creator, yet who remains a profoundly humble dervish, regarding himself as merely an instrument in the hands of God.

Allegory in the Epic *Lison al-Tayr*

Towards the end of his life, Alisher Navoi composed the allegorical poem *Lison al-Tayr* (*The Language of the Birds*, 1498), inspired by the celebrated bird allegory of Farid al-Din Attar. Throughout the poem, Navoi introduces passages that reflect ideas associated with the Naqshbandi tradition.

In one such passage, the poet compares Baha’ al-Din Naqshband and his spiritual successors to tranquil birds resting on the branches of a lofty, paradisaical cedar. These birds live in a state of profound spiritual serenity. Unlike other birds, they do not fly restlessly from place to place, for they have attained inner contentment.

According to Navoi’s depiction, the birds’ freedom from complaint and agitation is associated with their adherence to four fundamental principles of the Naqshbandi path: *hush dar dam* (“awareness in every breath”), *nazar bar qadam* (“keeping one’s gaze upon one’s step”), *safar dar vatan* (“journeying within oneself”), and *khalwat dar anjuman* (“being inwardly alone with God while outwardly present among people”). These principles express the importance of mindfulness, self-discipline, inner spiritual transformation, and maintaining awareness of God in the midst of everyday social life.

In the course of the poem, Navoi also acknowledges the influence of Naqshbandi spiritual masters on his own ethical and spiritual outlook. This allegorical representation does more than praise historical figures: it conveys complex mystical teachings through the accessible language of poetry. Through this imagery, readers are encouraged to understand more deeply the inner tranquillity and spiritual fulfilment of those who remain engaged with the world while freeing their hearts from excessive attachment to it.

Conclusion

The literary representation of Baha’ al-Din Naqshband in the works of Alisher Navoi demonstrates the close relationship between Sufi thought and classical Turkic literature. Through biographical narrative, poetic eulogy, wordplay, and allegory, Navoi presents Naqshband as an embodiment of wisdom, humility, spiritual awareness, and inner purity.



The recurring motifs of the Divine Name imprinted upon the heart, silent remembrance, honest labour, and detachment from worldly vanity provide a conceptual framework for understanding the Shaykh's literary image. In both *Nasayim al-Muhabbat* and Navoi's poetic works, Naqshband's personality acquires significance beyond historical biography: it becomes a moral and spiritual ideal through which the poet communicates the enduring values of the Naqshbandi tradition.

The study of this image therefore contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between Sufism and classical literature, as well as the ways in which spiritual teachings were transformed into enduring artistic symbols in the literary heritage of Central Asia.

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