



KHOJA AHRAR VALI'S SPIRITUAL AND INTELLECTUAL HERITAGE IN THE HISTORY OF CENTRAL ASIAN SUFISM

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Abstract. This article examines the spiritual and intellectual legacy of the prominent Sufi thinker Khoja Ahrar Vali and analyzes historical sources related to his life, scholarly activity, and contribution to the development of Sufism in Central Asia. Particular attention is devoted to his role in reforming and strengthening the Naqshbandi order, as well as to his philosophical views on moral perfection and the education of the ideal human being. The paper also highlights the historiography of studies devoted to the life and creative heritage of the thinker.

Keywords: history, Sufism, heritage, spirituality, thinker, source studies, philosophy, Naqshbandiyya, intellectual tradition.

Introduction

At the present stage of development of historical scholarship in Uzbekistan, the study of spiritual heritage and Sufi teachings occupies a special place in the intellectual and cultural life of society [1]. In particular, the investigation of the origins and development of the Khojagon-Naqshbandiyya tradition remains highly relevant. One of the most influential representatives of this spiritual school was Khoja Ubaydullo Ahrar Vali (1404–1490), whose personality and activity left a profound mark on the history of Central Asia.

During the years of Uzbekistan's independence, the figure of Khoja Ahrar Vali received a more objective and balanced historical evaluation. Historical sources demonstrate that for nearly three decades he played an important role in maintaining social stability and political harmony in Central Asia. Through his moral authority and influence, he contributed to preventing conflicts among rulers and strengthening unity among peoples. Contemporary society recognized him as a spiritual guide whose opinions were respected by rulers, governors, and the wider population alike.

Khoja Ahrar Vali's intellectual and spiritual ideas significantly influenced the socio-cultural development of the Timurid era. His efforts elevated the Naqshbandi



order to a new stage of institutional and ideological development. In recognition of his contribution, the 600th anniversary of the thinker was widely celebrated in Uzbekistan in 2004.

On the occasion of this anniversary, a number of his major works, including “Fiqarat ul-Arifin” and “Risolai Volidiya,” together with important historical sources dedicated to his life and activity, were republished. Numerous academic studies devoted to his philosophical and spiritual heritage also appeared, demonstrating the continued scholarly interest in his legacy.

Historical Sources on Khoja Ahrar Vali

Research on the life and intellectual heritage of Khoja Ahrar Vali began during his own lifetime. One of the most important sources in this regard is the work “Rashahat Ayn al-Hayat” (“Drops from the Spring of Life”) written by Fakhruddin Ali Safi (1463–1532), the son of the famous preacher Husayn Kashifi [2].

Ali Safi personally met Khoja Ahrar Vali on two occasions, in 1485 and 1488, and benefited from his spiritual guidance and education. Consequently, the information provided in his work is regarded as highly reliable and comprehensive.

“Rashahat Ayn al-Hayat” consists of an introduction, several thematic sections, and a conclusion. The work contains detailed information about Khoja Ahrar Vali’s life, worldview, intellectual activity, disciples, ancestry, and lifestyle. Without this source, it is impossible to fully understand the ideological foundations of the Naqshbandi order and the philosophical outlook of Khoja Ahrar Vali.

Ali Safi presents the thinker with great admiration and respect. He explains that Khoja Ahrar Vali received his early education with the support of Ibrahim Shashi and later pursued spiritual training under the Naqshbandi master Yaqub Charkhi. According to the author, Khoja Ahrar Vali eventually emerged as one of the leading spiritual authorities of his era.

Another significant contemporary source is Abdurahman Jami’s work “Tuhfat ul-Ahroriya” (“Gift to Khoja Ahrar”). Historical evidence indicates that Jami maintained correspondence with Khoja Ahrar Vali and highly valued his contribution to the development of Sufism and the Naqshbandi tradition [3].

Among the reliable historical testimonies concerning Khoja Ahrar Vali, the views of Alisher Navoi occupy a special place. In his poem “Hayrat ul-Abror,” Navoi praises Khoja Ahrar Vali as an unparalleled spiritual guide and mentor [5]. Later, in “Nasayim ul-Muhabbat,” written in 1495, Navoi dedicated a separate section to the thinker and emphasized that the Naqshbandi order would continue to flourish until the Day of Judgment owing to the spiritual strength and intellectual depth of Khoja Ahrar Vali.

Navoi’s evaluation reveals the exceptional philosophical and moral authority enjoyed by Khoja Ahrar Vali during his lifetime. The thinker’s ideas were perceived as profound, refined, and spiritually elevated.



Additional information about Khoja Ahrar Vali can be found in works written by his disciples, including Muhammad Qazi's "Silsilat al-Arifin" and Mir Abdulavval's "Masmuot." These texts further demonstrate the continuous respect and recognition accorded to the thinker from the fifteenth century onward.

Development of Scholarly Approaches to Khoja Ahrar Vali

By the late nineteenth century, scholarly approaches to the study of Khoja Ahrar Vali gradually emerged. One of the earliest academic studies was conducted by the Russian orientalist V.L. Vyatkin, who published an article about Khoja Ahrar in 1898.

Vyatkin was among the first scholars to initiate systematic academic research devoted to Khoja Ahrar Vali. He argued that the thinker's influence contributed to the formation of the "Ahrariya" branch within the Naqshbandi tradition. According to Vyatkin, this development reflected the increased engagement of Naqshbandi sheikhs in social and political life [6].

In the 1920s, the well-known orientalist V.V. Bartold also addressed the figure of Khoja Ahrar Vali in his work "Ulughbek and His Time." However, Bartold offered contradictory assessments. On the one hand, he acknowledged Khoja Ahrar Vali as a defender of the interests of ordinary people [7]. On the other hand, he claimed that the thinker opposed the cultural development associated with the reign of Ulughbek.

The second interpretation later became dominant in Soviet historiography, where Khoja Ahrar Vali was frequently portrayed as a "reactionary sheikh" and even indirectly associated with the death of Ulughbek. These conclusions, however, lacked convincing historical evidence and eventually penetrated not only scholarly literature but also public consciousness and artistic works.

Historical facts indicate that at the time of Ulughbek's death in 1449, Khoja Ahrar Vali was living in Tashkent and moved to Samarkand only several years later during the reign of Abu Said Mirza. Therefore, accusations against him were historically unfounded [8].

For many decades Soviet historiography continued to describe Khoja Ahrar Vali negatively, portraying him as a feudal landowner and an opponent of science and progress. Nevertheless, these interpretations rarely relied on primary historical sources.

A significant shift occurred in 1985, when the orientalist A.N. Boldyrev attempted to provide a more balanced evaluation of Khoja Ahrar Vali's activity. Boldyrev called upon scholars to avoid slanderous accusations against the thinker and argued that he had played a constructive role in the cultural and intellectual life of his era [10].

This reassessment encouraged scholars to revisit historical sources and critically reconsider earlier ideological interpretations. Academic discussions



increasingly focused on restoring an objective understanding of Khoja Ahrar Vali's personality and contribution.

Modern Uzbek Scholarship on Khoja Ahrar Vali

A major contribution to the objective study of Khoja Ahrar Vali was made in 1993 by the Uzbek academician B. Valikhojayev. Relying on primary historical sources, the scholar conducted a comprehensive analysis of the thinker's life, writings, and socio-political activity [4].

Valikhojayev emphasized several important characteristics of Khoja Ahrar Vali:

- his ability to analyze events and derive conclusions through spiritual insight;
- his constant concern for the welfare of others;
- his profound understanding of Sufi philosophy and ethics.

The scholar also provided detailed descriptions of Khoja Ahrar Vali's works, including "Fiqarat ul-Arifin," "Risolai Volidiya," "Risolai Havroiya," and "Ruqoat."

Based on his research, Valikhojayev concluded that Khoja Ahrar Vali successfully continued the intellectual and spiritual traditions established by such prominent Sufi figures as Abdulkhaliq Gijduvani, Abu Said Abulkhayr, Bahauddin Naqshband, Sa'duddin Kashgari, and Yaqub Charkhi [11].

According to the scholar, major cultural figures of the era, including Jami, Navoi, and Babur, regarded Khoja Ahrar Vali as their spiritual mentor. Furthermore, his disciples and descendants continued to influence the intellectual development of the region until the nineteenth century.

Following these studies, modern Uzbek scholarship increasingly focused on the political, social, historical, and philosophical dimensions of Khoja Ahrar Vali's activity. Researchers such as B. Babajanov, Z. Qutiboyev, and E. Karimov investigated different aspects of his legacy and provided positive scholarly assessments based on documentary evidence [12].

Conclusion

The analysis of historical and scholarly sources allows several important conclusions to be drawn.

First, the study of Khoja Ahrar Vali's life, intellectual activity, and spiritual heritage began during his own lifetime and continues to the present day. Different historical periods produced varying interpretations of his personality and contribution.

Second, most scholarly works have focused primarily on his socio-political and historical activity, while his philosophical views remain insufficiently explored in a systematic manner.

Third, the gradual reassessment of Khoja Ahrar Vali in modern scholarship



has made it possible to restore a more objective understanding of his role in the development of Sufism, intellectual culture, and social life in Central Asia.

Today, Khoja Ahrar Vali is increasingly recognized not only as a major representative of the Naqshbandi order but also as an influential thinker whose spiritual and ethical ideas continue to retain intellectual and cultural significance.

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