

## **Digital Sufism: Naqshbandi Haqqani and the Transformation of Contemporary Tariqa**

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### **Abstract**

The rapid advancement of digital technology, shifting patterns of religiosity, and changing forms of religious authority have transformed how Muslims access, experience, and practice Sufism, compelling Sufi orders to adapt to contemporary contexts. This article examines the transformation of the Haqqani Naqshbandi Order in response to the dynamics of digital Sufism, spiritual practice, religious authority, and urban religiosity. The study employs an integrative literature review by analyzing academic publications indexed in Scopus, Sinta, and Google Scholar, together with relevant books and digital sources. The findings reveal that the Haqqani Naqshbandi Order recontextualizes classical Sufi teachings through digital platforms, simplified membership participation, and the promotion of *mahabbah* as a universal spiritual value. These transformations have fostered a socially adaptive model of Sufism capable of addressing urban life, globalization, and shifting religious authority. This article contributes by mapping the recontextualization of

spiritual authority, religious practices, and communal engagement within the digital sphere.

Keywords: Digital Sufism, Contemporary Sufism, Modern Spirituality, Naqshbandi Haqqani

### Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi digital, perubahan pola religiositas, dan pergeseran otoritas keagamaan telah mengubah cara masyarakat mengakses, menghayati, dan mempraktikkan ajaran tasawuf, sehingga menuntut tarekat untuk beradaptasi dengan konteks kontemporer. Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis transformasi Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Haqqani dalam merespons dinamika tasawuf digital, praktik spiritual, otoritas keagamaan, dan religiositas urban. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan integrative literature review dengan menganalisis publikasi akademik terindeks Scopus, Sinta, Google Scholar, serta buku dan sumber digital yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Haqqani mencoba untuk merekontekstualisasi ajaran tasawuf melalui pemanfaatan platform digital, penyederhanaan partisipasi keanggotaan, dan penguatan nilai *mahabbah* sebagai nilai spiritual universal. Transformasi tersebut membentuk model tasawuf yang adaptif terhadap dinamika kehidupan urban, globalisasi, dan perubahan otoritas keagamaan. Artikel ini memberikan kontribusi ilmiah melalui pemetaan rekontekstualisasi otoritas spiritual, praktik keagamaan, dan keterlibatan komunal Tarekat Naqsyabandiyah Haqqani dalam ruang digital sehingga memperluas kajian tentang tasawuf digital, spiritualitas urban, dan religiositas Islam kontemporer.

Kata kunci: Naqshbandi Haqqani, Spiritualitas Modern, Tasawuf Digital, Tasawuf Kontemporer

### Introduction

The development of Sufi orders in the contemporary era faces significant challenges posed by modernity, secularization, and shifting patterns within Muslim societies. Instrumental rationality and materialism, which dominate urban life, have generated spiritual anxiety that fuels the emergence of new adaptive forms of religiosity. Amid these dynamics, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order presents itself as a contemporary spiritual movement capable of bridging the tension between tradition and modernity (Asmarani & Monica, 2023; Putra & Abdurahman, 2024). Established by Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani (1922–2014) following the death of his master, Shaykh Abdullah Faiz al-Daghestani in 1973, this order has evolved into one of the most dynamic transnational Sufi movements in the contemporary Muslim world, characterized by strong penetration into rapidly modernizing urban regions (Al-Haqqani, 1998; Kabbani, 2001). This phenomenon is crucial to examine as it demonstrates the adaptive capacity of Islamic mystical tradition amid the complexities of modern life, while also highlighting the resilience of religion in the face of secularization pressures.

The academic literature on the Naqshbandi order in general has produced extensive studies on its classical history, spiritual genealogy, and dhikr practices within traditional contexts, including analyses of its branches such as Khalidiyya and Mujaddidiyya across diverse geographical regions, from Central Asia to the Indonesian archipelago (Asbury, 2022; Bruinessen, 1998). However, specific studies on the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order as a contemporary phenomenon, particularly within the Indonesian context, remain limited and have yet to integrate the multifaceted dimensions of its development in a comprehensive manner. Previous research has tended to concentrate on single aspects, such as socio-religious transformation, ritual practice, or the digitalization of proselytization, without offering a holistic account of this order as a phenomenon situated within its dynamic relationship to modern society.

This study seeks to address the existing gap by conducting a systematic literature review that traces the historical development of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order from its classical Naqshbandi roots to its emergence as a contemporary transnational movement. It further examines the doctrinal features and spiritual practices that distinguish this order from other Naqshbandi branches and illuminate its unique appeal to modern communities. In addition, the study explores the order's influence on the religious life of contemporary Muslim societies, particularly in urban Indonesia, as well as the processes of socio-spiritual transformation that unfold within these dynamics.

To understand the Naqshbandi Haqqani phenomenon comprehensively, it is essential to appreciate the historical, theological, and socio-cultural contexts underlying its emergence. The Naqshbandi Order, one of the major Sufi orders within the Sunni mystical tradition, derives its name from its founder, Baha al-Din Naqshband (1318–1389), a prominent Sufi figure from Bukhara in Central Asia. Its distinctiveness lies in a dual spiritual lineage (*silsilah*) tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad through both Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and Ja'far al-Sadiq a duality referred to as the "confluence of two oceans" (*majma' al-bahrayn*). This dual lineage provides a form of spiritual legitimacy that strengthens the order's position within the constellation of Sufi traditions and reflects its balanced synthesis between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Islam (Bottcher, 2006; Gazali, 2015).

The development of the Naqshbandi Order since the fourteenth century reflects multiple phases of transformation. Significant consolidation occurred in the fifteenth century under Khwaja Ubaidullah Ahrar (1404–1490), who organized Naqshbandi circles in Central Asia. Geographical expansion followed through Ahmad Sirhindi (1564–1624), who established the Mujaddidiyah branch in India,

and Diya al-Din Khalid (1776–1827), who founded the Khalidiyah branch in the Ottoman territories, making the Naqshbandi tradition one of the most widely spread Sufi orders in the Islamic world (Bruinessen, 1996). Contemporary Sufism faces complex dynamics in its relationship with modernity, secularization, and Islamic fundamentalism. The processes of modernisation are marked by systematic rationalisation, rapid urbanisation, and cultural individualisation, creating challenges for traditional spiritual practices that require intensive commitment and personalised transmission of knowledge (Howell & Bruinessen, 2008; Nurani, 2020). At the same time, puritan movements such as Salafism and Wahhabism delegitimise Sufi practices as heretical innovations (*bid'ah*) and superstition, allegedly contradicting an idealised model of “pure” Islam (Sirriyeh, 2013). Within this dual tension, urban Sufism has emerged as an adaptive response to spiritual needs that are not fulfilled by rationalistic or legalistic forms of religious expression. Sociological studies indicate that, although membership in rural Sufi orders has declined, new forms of Sufism have successfully attracted followers from urban communities with modernist or secular backgrounds who seek more emotional and personal religious experiences (Bruinessen & Howell, 2007). This phenomenon demonstrates that Sufism has not disappeared within modernity; rather, it has transformed into new forms that are responsive to contemporary spiritual needs.

This study employs a qualitative approach using an integrative literature review method to examine the transformation of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order in contemporary society, particularly in relation to digital Sufism, spiritual practices, religious authority, and urban religiosity. Data sources consist of academic publications indexed in Scopus, Sinta, and Google Scholar, alongside books, institutional publications, and digital materials related to the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order. Literature was selected based on thematic relevance to Sufism, digital religion, Naqshbandi networks, Islamic spirituality, and contemporary Muslim religiosity. The data collection process involved identifying relevant literature, screening sources based on relevance and scholarly credibility, and conducting an in-depth review of eligible materials. Data were analyzed through thematic synthesis, including categorization, comparative interpretation, and conceptual mapping to identify patterns of religious transformation and digitally mediated Sufism. To ensure credibility, this study emphasizes procedural transparency, interpretive consistency, and researcher reflexivity throughout the analytical process (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

## The Spiritual Genealogy of the Ṭarīqa Naqshbandi Haqqani

The emergence of the Ṭarīqa Naqshbandi Haqqani is closely associated with the spiritual relationship between Shaykh Abdullah Faiz ad-Daghestani (1891–1973) and his prominent disciple, Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani (1922–2014). While rooted in the broader historical trajectory of the Naqshbandi tradition, which developed in Central Asia since the fourteenth century, the Haqqani branch underwent notable transformation under the leadership of Shaykh Nazim, particularly in response to changing socio-religious contexts and expanding transnational religious networks. Born in Larnaca, Cyprus, on 21 April 1922, Shaykh Nazim occupied a socio-cultural position that enabled him to mediate between Eastern Islamic traditions and Western modernity (Al-Haqqani, 1998; Kabbani, 2001).

Within the Naqshbandi Haqqani tradition, Shaykh Nazim's genealogical background constitutes an important source of symbolic and spiritual legitimacy. Through his paternal lineage, he is associated with Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī (1077–1166), founder of the Qādiriyya Order, while his maternal lineage is linked to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273), whose teachings emphasize universal love and spiritual tolerance (Shadiqin et al., 2024). From an analytical perspective, such genealogical claims may be understood not merely as historical assertions but as mechanisms for constructing spiritual authority and reinforcing charismatic leadership within contemporary transnational Sufism. Genealogical legitimacy functions as a symbolic resource that strengthens continuity with classical Islamic spirituality while simultaneously fostering institutional trust and follower loyalty across diverse social settings (Schimmel, 1975).

Shaykh Nazim's educational experience in Istanbul, where he studied chemical engineering while also engaging with Islamic scholarship, reflects an important feature of contemporary Sufi movements: the negotiation between modern-secular education and traditional religious authority. This combination later contributed to the adaptability of the Haqqani Order in engaging diverse social groups, particularly urban and educated Muslim communities (Weismann, 2007). The encounter between Shaykh Nazim and Shaykh Abdullah Faiz ad-Daghestani in Damascus in 1945 occupies a central place within internal Naqshbandi narratives. Although accounts of this meeting frequently contain hagiographical elements, such as descriptions of rapid spiritual elevation and extraordinary transmission and remain analytically significant for understanding the symbolic construction of charisma within the order. Concepts such as *tawajjuh* (direct spiritual transmission) and *fayḍ* (spiritual grace) function not only as

theological principles but also as mechanisms for legitimizing spiritual authority and strengthening institutional cohesion. In this context, spiritual narratives serve to reinforce the *murshid's* charismatic position, cultivate affective attachment among followers, and sustain organizational continuity within the expanding transnational Naqshbandi Haqqani network.

### **Transnational Expansion: From Damascus to London, the United States, and Indonesia**

Following the passing of Shaykh Abdullah Faiz ad-Daghestani on 30 September 1973, Shaykh Muhammad Nazim Adil al-Haqqani was formally recognized as the spiritual successor (*khalifa*) of the order (Al-Haqqani, 1980b). Under his leadership, the branch became widely known as the Naqshbandiyya Haqqaniyya, marking a period of accelerated transnational expansion extending from the Middle East to Europe, North America, and Southeast Asia. Rather than understanding this expansion merely as geographic diffusion, it may be interpreted through the framework of transnational religion and global Islam, in which religious movements increasingly operate beyond territorial, ethnic, and national boundaries.

The Haqqani Order's successful reception across diverse contexts can be partly explained through what scholars describe as the deterritorialization of Islam, namely the ability of Islamic movements to detach from localized cultural forms and adapt to global religious environments. Under Shaykh Nazim's leadership, the order developed a flexible model of spiritual outreach that emphasized universal themes such as *mahabbah* (divine love), tolerance, ethical self-transformation, and spiritual intimacy with God. This discursive flexibility enabled the Haqqani network to appeal not only to traditionally observant Muslims but also to spiritually seeking individuals in plural and post-secular societies.

Shaykh Nazim's regular visits to London beginning in the mid-1970s marked an important phase in the order's institutionalization in Europe. Unlike confrontational or legalistic forms of Islamic preaching, the Haqqani approach relied on a universal Sufi discourse that resonated with Western audiences seeking alternative spiritual frameworks outside rigid institutional religion (Milani et al., 2017). The expansion further intensified in 1990 with the appointment of Shaykh Hisham Kabbani to the United States, where he established the Islamic Supreme Council of America and several Naqshbandi Haqqani centers. Beyond institutional expansion, Shaykh Hisham positioned the order within broader public discourses

on interfaith dialogue, religious moderation, and counter-radicalization, thereby strengthening its legitimacy in Western Muslim minority contexts (Damrel, 2006; Dickson, 2014).

The reception of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order in Southeast Asia, particularly Indonesia, reveals a different but equally significant pattern of adaptation. In West Sumatra, the arrival of Shaykh Mustafa Mas'ud in the aftermath of the Padang earthquake intersected with local experiences of trauma and existential uncertainty (Putra & Abdurahman, 2024). In this context, the order gained relevance not merely as a provider of ritual spirituality but also as a source of psychological healing and emotional resilience. The flexibility of the Haqqani model is maintaining core Sufi teachings while adapting methods of transmission to local social needs, enabled its integration into contemporary Indonesian Muslim life (Putra & Karali, 2025).

In Jakarta, the order adopted a distinctly urban and cosmopolitan strategy. The establishment of Rumi Café in South Jakarta in 2008 illustrates how the Haqqani network negotiated contemporary urban culture by creating alternative spaces for spiritual engagement (Estu, 2022). Rather than relying exclusively on conventional informal Islamic learning assemblies (*majlis ta'lim*) settings, the "spiritual café" model reflected an adaptive strategy aimed at urban professionals seeking religious meaning within fast-paced modern lifestyles. Such developments demonstrate that the transnational success of the Haqqani Order derives not solely from charismatic authority or institutional structure, but also from its ability to construct globally transferable yet locally adaptable forms of religiosity, capable of negotiating the demands of globalization, urbanization, and shifting spiritual aspirations.

### **Mahabbah Teachings as the Core of Spirituality**

The dimension of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Ṭarīqa that most distinguishes it from other branches of the Naqshbandi order is its strong emphasis on the concept of *mahabbah* (divine love), deeply influenced by the teachings of Jalaluddin Rumi (Shadiqin et al., 2024). Shaykh Nazim, who was genealogically linked to Rumi, incorporated Rumi's universalistic understanding of love into the framework of the more orthodox Naqshbandi tradition. In this context, *mahabbah* is not merely framed as an esoteric, individualistic, or exclusive mystical experience, but rather as a universal ethical and spiritual principle capable of transcending sectarian boundaries and informing social relations in everyday life (Al-Haqqani, 2008).

In Shaykh Nazim's perspective, love is the greatest divine gift bestowed upon humanity, and the highest human obligation is to reciprocate this love through dhikr, worship, and ethical conduct toward fellow beings. This teaching emphasizes universal human fraternity (*ukhuwah insaniyah*) as an embodiment of devotion to God. True love for Allah, therefore, must be translated into compassion, tolerance, respect, and service to all creatures regardless of religion, ethnicity, or social status (Al-Haqqani, 2008; Stjernholm, 2011). Such an interpretation has contributed to the Naqshbandi Haqqani Ṭarīqa's appeal among diverse audiences, including urban Muslims, converts to Islam, spiritual seekers, and even non-Muslims interested in Islamic mysticism (Dickson, 2014; Nugroho, 2021).

This strategy becomes particularly evident in the order's active engagement with interfaith dialogue and its openness toward followers from different cultural and religious backgrounds. The emphasis on shared ethical values, compassion, and universal spirituality creates a symbolic bridge between Islamic mysticism and broader humanitarian discourses. In this sense, *mahabbah* serves not only as a spiritual ideal but also as a discursive mechanism for fostering cross-cultural acceptance and reducing religious distance. The official mission of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order, as expressed through its publications and official platform, explicitly promotes "human brotherhood and the unity of belief in God present in all religions and genuine spiritual paths," reflecting an attempt to frame Sufism as a spiritually inclusive tradition compatible with global diversity.

At the same time, the prominence of *mahabbah* may also be interpreted as part of a broader effort to construct an image of what may be termed "moderate global Sufism." In contrast to puritanical and literalist Islamic movements often associated with exclusivism, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Ṭarīqa projects an image of Islam that is peaceful, dialogical, and spiritually universal. This positioning enables the order to gain legitimacy among educated middle-class and urban communities seeking a form of religiosity that is tolerant, emotionally meaningful, and adaptable to the realities of modern pluralism (Ernst & Martin, 2010). Nevertheless, such inclusivist orientations have also attracted criticism from conservative and puritanical groups, who accuse the order of promoting syncretism or religious relativism.

From a theological perspective, however, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order continues to situate itself firmly within the framework of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*, adhering to the Hanafi school in jurisprudence and the Maturidi tradition in creed. Yet, certain mystical teachings remain contested, particularly regarding

the concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being) associated with Ibn Arabi (1165–1240). Shaykh Nazim advocated a moderated interpretation of *wahdat al-wujud*, emphasizing that spiritual union with God through *fana'* should be understood as the harmonization of will and consciousness (*ittihad al-iradah*) rather than an ontological fusion of essence, thereby preserving the Islamic principle of *tawhid* (M. H. Kabbani, 2004; S. M. H. Kabbani, 2015). This theological moderation, together with the discourse of *mahabbah*, further reinforces the order's positioning as a form of globally adaptable Sufism capable of negotiating the tensions between orthodoxy, spirituality, and pluralism in contemporary society.

### **Spiritual Practices: Dhikr and Modern Flexibility**

The dimension of religious practice and ritual within the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order reflects a complex synthesis between the preservation of classical Naqshbandi traditions and creative adaptation to the demands of modern life. The most fundamental practice remains *dhikrullah* (remembrance of Allah), which in the Naqshbandi tradition is predominantly performed silently (*khafi*). Silent dhikr rests upon dual foundations: philosophically, it is believed to produce a deeper and more enduring spiritual impression upon the heart; pragmatically, it enables disciples to engage in remembrance continuously throughout daily activities without interrupting work routines or attracting social attention (Naqshbandi Haqqani Indonesia, 2009). This flexibility illustrates how the order has adapted classical spiritual discipline to the rhythms of contemporary urban life while maintaining its core mystical orientation.

The daily litanies (*awrad*) prescribed for followers of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order further demonstrate an adaptive spirituality responsive to modern conditions. Core practices generally include reciting *la ilaha illallah* between 1,500 and 5,000 times daily, offering blessings upon the Prophet (*salawat*) at least 300 times, performing *istighfar* at least 100 times, engaging in *muraqabah* through visualization of the *murshid* as a medium of *tawajjuh*, reflective Qur'anic recitation (*tadabbur*), and performing voluntary prayers such as *tahajjud* and *Dhuha* (Profil Yayasan Haqqani Indonesia, 2009). These quantitative devotional targets are designed to habituate disciples so that remembrance of God becomes embedded within ordinary existence rather than remaining confined to isolated ritual moments.

However, the flexibility of these ritual practices also raises important questions regarding the transformation of traditional Sufi authority structures. In classical Sufism, spiritual discipline is inseparable from embodied supervision by

the *murshid*, where ritual practice is monitored through prolonged companionship (*ṣuḥbah*), physical proximity, and gradual moral cultivation. The increasing flexibility of Naqshbandi Haqqani devotional practices, particularly their accommodation to digital mediation and individualized schedules that potentially reconfigures this relationship. Ritual authority no longer depends solely upon physical participation within the *zawiyah* or direct interaction with the spiritual master; instead, it increasingly operates through online sermons, recorded instructions, livestreamed dhikr, and digital networks connecting disciples transnationally.

This transformation becomes especially significant in relation to the concept of *sanad* (spiritual chain of transmission). Traditionally, *sanad* in Sufi orders is not merely textual or symbolic but embodied, involving direct spiritual transmission through the physical presence and supervision of the *murshid*. Within the Naqshbandi Haqqani network, however, digital ritual participation allows followers to receive spiritual instruction remotely, often without sustained face-to-face interaction. While the order continues to emphasize genealogical continuity tracing back to the Prophet Muhammad through an uninterrupted spiritual lineage, digital mediation potentially transforms the epistemology of spiritual transmission itself. The authority of *sanad* increasingly shifts from exclusively embodied transmission toward digitally mediated access, where charisma, symbolic legitimacy, and virtual proximity supplement traditional physical companionship.

The implications of this transformation are particularly visible in the practice of *baiat* (spiritual initiation). In classical Sufi traditions, *baiat* represents a solemn covenant enacted through physical presence, bodily gestures, and direct encounter between disciple and *murshid*. Yet, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order has increasingly facilitated forms of online or mediated *baiat*, particularly for geographically distant disciples seeking affiliation with the order. This development raises an important epistemological question: does online *baiat* fundamentally alter the nature of spiritual transmission in classical Sufism? On one hand, digital *baiat* expands accessibility and enables the globalization of spiritual affiliation across national and cultural boundaries. On the other hand, it may gradually transform initiation from an embodied process of disciplined spiritual formation into a more symbolic and affective relationship mediated through digital technologies.

The relationship between *murshid* and disciple has likewise undergone significant reconfiguration. Classical Naqshbandi spirituality emphasizes intimate

companionship and disciplined observation, wherein disciples cultivate spiritual refinement through close interaction with the *murshid*. In contrast, digitalization creates what may be described as a form of “mediated spiritual intimacy,” in which disciples experience proximity through recorded lectures, online consultations, social media interactions, and virtual ritual participation. Although such arrangements expand inclusivity and transnational participation, they also decentralize traditional forms of spiritual monitoring and potentially alter the locus of authority. The *murshid* increasingly functions not only as a physically present guide but also as a digitally mediated religious authority whose charisma circulates through online platforms and algorithmically amplified visibility.

One ritual practice that most distinguishes the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order from other Naqshbandi branches is the adoption of the *Sema* dance, or whirling dervishes, inherited from the Mevlevi tradition associated with Jalaluddin Rumi. *Sema*, involving rhythmic spinning accompanied by dhikr, was introduced by Shaykh Nazim as an embodied spiritual expression intended to harmonize body, soul, and divine consciousness. Although absent from classical Naqshbandi ritual orthodoxy and sometimes viewed as contradicting the principle of *khilwat dar anjuman* (solitude amidst society), Shaykh Nazim legitimized this innovation by connecting it to Rumi’s philosophy of *mahabbah*, framing it as an aesthetic manifestation of divine love capable of producing mystical awareness and spiritual ecstasy (*hal*) (Ridwan et al., 2025). The incorporation of *Sema* therefore illustrates the order’s willingness to negotiate between inherited orthodoxy and ritual innovation in ways appealing to contemporary spiritual seekers.

Despite these ritual adaptations, the spiritual identity of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order remains rooted in the heritage of the *Khwajagan* dhikr, originating from the early Naqshbandi tradition in Central Asia. The *Khwajagan* tradition emphasizes silent remembrance, structured *muraqabah*, and disciplined inner concentration progressing through the stages of *maqāmāt*, transmitted by foundational figures such as Khwaja Abdul Khaliq al-Ghujdawani and Baha’ al-Din Naqshband (Al-Haqqani, 1980a, 1980b). Within the contemporary Haqqani context, however, this tradition has been recontextualized through digital instruction, transnational online dhikr assemblies, and virtual forms of spiritual companionship (Hidayat, 2022). Consequently, while ritual innovations such as *Sema* demonstrate the order’s adaptive capacity, the *Khwajagan* dhikr continues to function as an epistemological anchor that preserves continuity with classical Naqshbandi spirituality while simultaneously legitimizing new modes of ritual participation in the digital age.

## Contemporary Dynamics: The Transformation of Urban Religiosity and the Digitalization of Spirituality

The contemporary influence of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order on the religious life of Muslim communities, particularly in urban Indonesia, can be understood through three interrelated dimensions: the transformation of religious orientation, the reconfiguration of devotional practices, and broader socio-cultural change (Nurani, 2020; Putra & Abdurahman, 2024; Shadiqin, 2018). However, rather than merely representing an expansion of Sufi influence, these transformations should be situated within wider shifts in contemporary urban religiosity, where spirituality increasingly emerges as a response to the existential pressures, fragmentation, and emotional exhaustion associated with urban modernity.

The rise of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order in urban spaces reflects a broader tendency toward what scholars describe as *urban spirituality*, in which religious engagement becomes increasingly individualized, experiential, therapeutic, and emotionally meaningful. In densely populated and highly rationalized urban environments, many middle-class Muslims experience dissatisfaction with formalistic and legalistic forms of religiosity that emphasize doctrinal correctness while often neglecting emotional and spiritual fulfillment. Within this context, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order offers an alternative religious framework centered on experiential spirituality, emotional intimacy with God, and practices of inner healing through dhikr, contemplation, and spiritual companionship.

Field studies in Padang demonstrate how the order has significantly transformed the religious orientation of communities previously dominated by reformist-modernist perspectives sceptical of Sufism. Ethnographic findings indicate that the order successfully engages three socio-religious groups simultaneously: reformist Muslims formerly critical of Sufi traditions, traditionalist communities already familiar with devotional Islam but seeking deeper spiritual experiences, and lay individuals with limited prior engagement in organized religious practice (Putra & Abdurahman, 2024; Putra & Karali, 2025). These transformations may be analytically categorized into three interconnected patterns: first, the reactualization of religious commitment, wherein previously inactive individuals become engaged in devotional practices such as dhikr and night prayer (*tahajud*); second, spiritual transformation characterized by a shift from mechanical ritual observance toward emotionally meaningful religious

consciousness; and third, the reconstruction of religious understanding through the integration of esoteric spirituality with exoteric Islamic observance.

From the perspective of *lived religion*, these findings suggest that religiosity is no longer confined to formal institutions or doctrinal adherence but increasingly negotiated through everyday experiences, emotions, and practical engagements with the sacred. The Naqshbandi Haqqani Order appears particularly effective in addressing what may be termed the “spiritual vacuum” of urban religiosity, where individuals seek not merely theological certainty but emotional reassurance, existential meaning, and practices capable of responding to psychological distress. In this sense, the order’s appeal lies not only in doctrinal teachings but also in its ability to make spirituality experientially accessible and personally transformative.

The most striking phenomenon is the order’s success in attracting followers from groups traditionally sceptical of Sufi practice, including members of reformist organizations such as Muhammadiyah and even puritanical-literalist circles that frequently criticize Sufism as *bid’ah*, superstition, or religious deviation. This shift may be interpreted through the lens of *post-Islamic religiosity*, in which contemporary Muslims increasingly seek forms of religious expression that move beyond rigid ideological divisions between “traditionalist” and “modernist” Islam. Rather than abandoning orthodoxy, these individuals pursue spiritually enriching practices that remain compatible with rationality, professional life, and modern subjectivities. The Naqshbandi Haqqani Order successfully appeals to such audiences through three strategies: an explicit commitment to *shari’ah*, an inclusive approach that does not require abandoning prior organizational affiliations, and the use of modern intellectual language that to drawing upon psychology, philosophy, and science to frame spiritual experience in ways accessible to educated urban Muslims (Husein & Slama, 2018).

The emergence of Rumi Café in Jakarta as a center of Naqshbandi Haqqani activity illustrates another significant transformation in urban spirituality. Functioning as a “spiritual café,” Rumi Café provides a space where religious engagement is integrated with aesthetics, sociability, and contemporary lifestyles. Professionals, entrepreneurs, artists, students, and middle-class urban Muslims participate in dhikr, meditation, spiritual consultation, and religious gatherings in an environment deliberately designed to feel modern, welcoming, and culturally refined (Asyadily et al., 2025; Aulia, 2023; Sulistiana, 2008). From one perspective, this model represents an innovative adaptation of Islamic spirituality to urban culture, making religious participation more accessible to those alienated by

traditional *majlis ta'lim* associated with rigid conservatism or anti-modern attitudes.

However, the rise of aestheticized spiritual spaces such as Rumi Café also invites critical reflection concerning the commodification of religion. The integration of spirituality with café culture, aesthetic ambience, and lifestyle branding raises the question of whether contemporary Sufism is increasingly shaped by the logics of urban consumerism. Spirituality may become packaged as a therapeutic and emotionally satisfying experience tailored to middle-class sensibilities, potentially transforming religious participation into a form of symbolic consumption. Rather than rejecting this development outright, it may be more analytically productive to view it as a negotiation between spiritual authenticity and the cultural demands of late modern urban life, where religious communities increasingly adopt market-oriented forms of engagement to remain socially relevant.

The digitalization of spiritual practices constitutes perhaps the most innovative yet controversial dimension of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order (Dudoignon, 2020; Rozehnal, 2019). Digital platforms such as *eshaykh.com* provide access to spiritual guidance through instructional videos, livestreamed dhikr, online consultations, and even virtual *baiat* (pledges of allegiance to the *murshid*). Such practices challenge classical assumptions concerning spiritual authority and transmission, which traditionally rely upon physical proximity, embodied companionship (*shūbah*), and face-to-face ritual interaction (Hegazy, 2020; Hidayat, 2022). Yet, digital spirituality may simultaneously deepen and dilute religious experience.

On the one hand, digital mediation democratizes access to spiritual knowledge and allows geographically dispersed disciples to sustain meaningful religious connections. For many urban Muslims constrained by demanding schedules and fragmented social lives, online participation creates new opportunities for consistent spiritual engagement. In this regard, digital spirituality may deepen religiosity by integrating remembrance of God into everyday routines and by fostering transnational spiritual belonging. On the other hand, critics argue that digital spirituality risks reducing religious experience into fragmented, consumable, and individualized practices detached from embodied discipline and communal accountability. The possibility of “on-demand spirituality” may shift religious engagement from long-term spiritual formation toward selective and convenience-oriented participation.

The phenomenon of online *baiat* exemplifies this tension most clearly. While proponents argue that spiritual sincerity (*niyyah*) matters more than physical mediation, critics question whether digitally mediated initiation fundamentally transforms the epistemology of classical Sufi transmission, traditionally grounded in embodied presence and disciplined submission to the *murshid* (Piraino, 2016). Consequently, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order should not merely be understood as a Sufi movement adapting to technology but as a significant case through which to examine broader transformations in urban Muslim religiosity where spirituality increasingly intersects with therapeutic culture, digital mediation, and the tensions between authenticity and commodification in late modern society.

### **Digital Sufism: Naqshbandi Haqqani and Modern Transformation**

The findings of this study suggest that the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order represents a transformative model of *digital Sufism*, demonstrating how a contemporary *ṭarīqa* negotiates the structural tensions between tradition and modernity through multidimensional strategies of adaptation. Rather than indicating a rupture with classical Sufism, *digital Sufism* in this context refers to the reconfiguration of spiritual authority, ritual practice, religious community, and devotional experience through digital mediation. The Naqshbandi Haqqani Order does not abandon classical Sufi foundations; rather, it reformulates them into adaptive forms capable of operating within contemporary urban, transnational, and technologically mediated environments.

This transformation may be understood through four interconnected dimensions: institutional transformation, expansion of socio-religious functions, hybrid religiosity, and digitally mediated spirituality. First, at the institutional level, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order extends beyond the conventional *zawiyah*-based structure of the *ṭarīqa* through transnational digital networks, online ritual participation, and technologically mediated forms of authority. Unlike classical Sufi communities, which relied heavily upon localized interaction and embodied discipleship, the Haqqani network operates across geographical boundaries through websites, livestreamed dhikr, online spiritual instruction, and transnational virtual communities. This development reflects broader processes of what Olivier Roy (2004) describes as the deterritorialization of Islam, in which religious communities increasingly transcend geographical and institutional boundaries.

Second, the transformation of the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order involves an expansion of the socio-religious functions of the *ṭarīqa*. While classical Sufi orders traditionally emphasized inward spirituality, ascetic discipline, and individual moral purification, the Haqqani Order actively engages with broader public concerns such as interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, environmental ethics, counter-radicalization, and humanitarian initiatives (Asmarani & Monica, 2023; Nugroho, 2021). Such developments resonate with Julia Howell's (Howell & Bruinessen, 2008) notion of *public Sufism*, in which Sufi communities become increasingly visible and socially engaged actors within the public sphere. In this sense, the *ṭarīqa* no longer functions solely as a private spiritual institution but also as a platform for civic ethics and social intervention.

Third, the findings indicate the emergence of what may be described as *hybrid religiosity* within contemporary urban Muslim life. The Naqshbandi Haqqani Order attracts followers from diverse ideological and social backgrounds, including reformist Muslims, urban professionals, spiritually unaffiliated individuals, and communities previously sceptical of *ṭarīqa*-based Islam. This phenomenon challenges rigid dichotomies between "traditionalist" and "modernist" Islam, suggesting instead that contemporary religiosity is increasingly fluid, selective, and experiential. Urban Muslims, particularly educated middle-class groups embedded within global digital culture that approach religion pragmatically, integrating spiritual, intellectual, and therapeutic dimensions according to their existential needs. Consequently, affiliation with the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order does not necessarily signify a rejection of rationality or modernity but rather reflects a search for spiritual meaning compatible with contemporary lifestyles.

Fourth, and most significantly, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order illustrates the rise of digitally mediated spirituality, whereby religious authority, ritual participation, and spiritual companionship increasingly transcend physical proximity. Through online dhikr, livestreamed sermons, virtual *baiat*, digital consultation, and transnational spiritual communities, the order exemplifies how devotional life may be sustained through technological infrastructures. This transformation, however, raises important epistemological questions concerning the nature of spiritual transmission in classical Sufism. Traditionally, spiritual authority depended upon direct companionship (*ṣuḥbah*), physical presence, and embodied transmission through the *murshid-disciple* relationship. In digital Sufism, these processes are increasingly mediated through screens and virtual communication, potentially redefining concepts such as *sanad*, *baiat*, and spiritual intimacy.

Within the sociology of religion, this phenomenon resonates with José Casanova's (1994) argument that religion does not disappear under modernity but instead undergoes institutional and cultural transformation. Similarly, Grace Davie's (2007) analysis concerning the adaptive persistence of religion helps explain how Sufism survives not by resisting social change but by selectively appropriating modern technologies and cultural forms. The Naqshbandi Haqqani case demonstrates that Sufi traditions have not diminished under conditions of urbanization, globalization, and rationalization; rather, they have been reformulated into digitally mediated forms of religiosity capable of responding to contemporary existential concerns.

Nevertheless, the emergence of digital Sufism should not be understood uncritically as an entirely emancipatory development. The integration of spirituality into digital environments also generates new tensions and contradictions. On the one hand, digital mediation enhances accessibility, inclusivity, and continuity of spiritual engagement for geographically dispersed followers and urban populations constrained by modern lifestyles. Digital platforms enable disciples to maintain devotional routines and participate in transnational spiritual networks despite spatial limitations. On the other hand, digital spirituality raises concerns regarding religious commodification, symbolic branding, and the potential fragmentation of disciplined spiritual formation traditionally central to *ṭarīqa* life. The risk of reducing spirituality into consumable and individualized spiritual experiences that are readily accessible on demand, thereby challenging the depth of spiritual discipline and the embodied mentorship that characterize classical Sufism.

Practically, these findings demonstrate that the Naqshbandi Haqqani Order represents a significant example of how *contemporary ṭarīqa* adapts to the demands of digital modernity while preserving its essential spiritual commitments to dhikr, ethical refinement, and spiritual discipline. Rather than representing a post-*ṭarīqa* spirituality detached from Islamic orthodoxy, the Haqqani Order illustrates a process of adaptive continuity, in which digital technologies function not as substitutes for spiritual tradition but as infrastructures enabling its transformation and broader accessibility in contemporary society.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the Haqqani Naqshbandi Order exemplifies digital Sufism by recontextualizing classical Sufi traditions through adaptive forms of religious authority, ritual practice, and spiritual community. Rather than

abandoning foundational elements such as dhikr, the *murshid*-disciple relationship, *sanad*, and *baiat*, the order reformulates them within digital technologies and urban socio-cultural contexts while balancing *shari'ah* and *ṭarīqa*, expanding spiritual access through virtual networks, and promoting *mahabbah* as an inclusive spiritual ethic. However, this transformation also generates tensions by challenging traditional modes of spiritual transmission, embodied discipline, and the continuity of *sanad*, while raising concerns over the commodification of spirituality and criticism from puritanical Muslim groups regarding ritual innovation and digitally mediated authority. The study contributes to scholarship on digital religion, urban religiosity, and contemporary Sufism by demonstrating that Sufi traditions are reconfigured rather than diminished by technological change. Future research should adopt comparative, gender-based, and digital ethnographic approaches to further examine the psychosocial implications of digitally mediated Sufi engagement.

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