

BIBI HOJAR – A SPIRITUAL FIGURE AND SAINTLY MOTHER

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Abstract. This article explores the life and spiritual legacy of Bibi Hojar, a revered saintly woman who lived in Khorezm during the 12th–13th centuries. She is examined not only as the mother of the great Sufi thinker Najm al-Din Kubra, but also as an independent spiritual leader distinguished by asceticism and moral discipline. Furthermore, the article highlights the role of family spiritual upbringing—especially maternal influence—in shaping Najm al-Din Kubra’s personality and the formation of the Kubrawiyya Sufi order.

Keywords: Bibi Hojar, Najm al-Din Kubra, Kubrawiyya, Sufism, saintly women, Khorezm, Nasayim al-Muhabbat, spiritual education, asceticism, women’s history

Bibi Hojar Momo was a prominent spiritual woman who lived in the land of Khorezm during the 12th–13th centuries and is recognized in history as one of the leading female spiritual figures of her time. She occupies a worthy place in Islamic intellectual history not only as the mother of the great Sufi and thinker Najm al-Din Kubra, but also as a revered ascetic and saintly personality in her own right. Information about her life and virtues has been preserved mainly through oral traditions and several literary and historical sources.

According to Alisher Navoi’s *Nasāyim al-Muhabbat*, Imam Yafi’i narrates in his historical work, quoting one of the scholars, that he encountered a woman in the regions of Khorezm who, for more than twenty years, showed no concern for food or drink. Some researchers suggest that this woman may have been Bibi Hojar. Her extreme ascetic discipline, complete control over worldly desires, and elevated spiritual state portray her as a saintly figure of exceptional moral authority.

Bibi Hojar’s husband, Nasir al-Din Umar ibn Muhammad ibn Abdullah, was also known as a pious and enlightened individual of his time. The intellectually and spiritually rich family environment in which they lived played a decisive role in shaping their son, Najm al-Din Kubra, into one of the greatest scholars and Sufi masters in Islamic history.

Najm al-Din Kubra—whose full name was Ahmad ibn Umar ibn Muhammad al-Khivaqi al-Khwarazmi—was widely known in the Islamic world by the honorific titles “Najm al-Din” (“Star of the Religion”) and “Kubra” (“The Great” or “The Supreme”). He was born in 1145 in the village of Sayat near Khiva and was martyred in 1221 during the Mongol invasion in the Khorezmshah capital of Gurganj.

The virtues of patience, devotion, commitment to knowledge, and spiritual self-discipline embodied by Bibi Hojar were clearly reflected in Najm al-Din Kubra’s character. Scholars emphasize that her influence was a key factor in his being given the epithet “Abu’l-Janab,” meaning one who abstains from worldly desires and maintains spiritual purity. This title reflects

his exceptional mastery over the ego and his lifelong dedication to asceticism and inner refinement.

The Kubrawiyya Sufi order, founded by Najm al-Din Kubra, spread widely across Central Asia, Iran, and other regions, becoming one of the most influential mystical movements in the Islamic world. The success and spiritual depth of this order were deeply rooted in his personal moral upbringing, shaped largely by the spiritual environment of his family—especially the guidance of his mother, Bibi Hojar.

Najm al-Din Kubra is remembered not only as a Sufi master, but also as a symbol of chivalry, self-sacrifice, and courage in defending his homeland. His establishment of a spiritual school and his martyrdom ensured his lasting legacy in both religious and national history.

According to popular legends, when Najm al-Din Kubra wished to take his mother to the Khorezmshah capital of Urgench, Bibi Hojar declined the offer, replying, “My humble dwelling is my garden.” This statement illustrates her rejection of worldly luxury and her preference for spiritual contentment and modest living. It is said that this expression later gave rise to the name “Gullambogh” for the surrounding area of their village.

Ethnographic sources indicate that Bibi Hojar’s sisters—Bibi Shodmon, Bibi Robiya, and Bibi Fatima—were also regarded as saintly women and are remembered in folk memory for their bravery, including resistance during the Mongol invasions. Their graves, located in present-day Sayat village, are preserved and revered as sacred pilgrimage sites.

In the 19th century, a mausoleum was built over Bibi Hojar’s grave. When Muhammad Amin Khan of Khiva (r. 1846–1855) offered financial support for its construction, the custodian of the shrine refused the donation, insisting that only funds earned through honest labor should be used. This incident vividly reflects the ethical and spiritual values associated with Bibi Hojar’s legacy and the culture of piety that developed around her memory.

Bibi Hojar left an indelible mark on history not merely as the mother of Najm al-Din Kubra, but as an independent spiritual leader, saint, and enlightened woman of her era. Her life, virtues, and moral guidance played a foundational role not only in the formation of Najm al-Din Kubra’s personality, but also in the broader development of Sufi teachings. Her legacy remains an important source for the study of Central Asian Sufism, women’s spiritual history, and Islamic culture.

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