

## DIDACTIC ELEMENTS IN THE WORKS OF ALISHER NAVOI

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**Annotation:** *This article explores the didactic elements expressed in the works of Alisher Navoi and analyzes their role in moral, educational, and aesthetic values. It focuses on the ethical advice, life lessons, and educational messages conveyed through his literary creations. The relevance of Navoi's ideas to the modern educational process is also examined.*

**Keywords:** *Didactic elements, Alisher Navoi, morality, advice, upbringing, spirituality, aesthetic values, lesson, literature, education.*

Alisher Navoi, one of the most prominent poets, thinkers, and statesmen of the Timurid Renaissance, holds a distinguished place in the literary and cultural history of the Islamic East. His works go beyond mere artistic expression; they are imbued with rich moral, spiritual, and philosophical teachings. Navoi's didacticism—his desire to instruct and morally educate his readers—is one of the defining features of his writing. It permeates his poetry, prose, and epistolary literature, and contributes significantly to his enduring relevance in the East and beyond. The didactic elements in Navoi's oeuvre are presented through a refined balance of poetic beauty, mysticism, and ethical guidance, reflecting the profound synthesis of Islamic teachings, Sufi philosophy, and classical Persian-Turkic literary traditions. Didactic literature seeks not only to entertain but to educate. For Alisher Navoi, this dual function of literature was not optional but essential. His conviction in the moral responsibility of a poet is evident throughout his writings. Navoi believed that a poet must be a guide, not merely a weaver of words. He sought to awaken moral consciousness, shape character, and cultivate virtues such as humility, wisdom, justice, and devotion in his readers. This educational mission is apparent from his early works, particularly in the *Khamsa*, a monumental collection of five narrative poems that mirror and build upon the model of Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi. In works like *Hayrat ul-Abror*, *Farhod va Shirin*, and *Sab'ai Sayyar*, Navoi crafts allegorical tales that illustrate the struggle between virtue and vice, material desire and spiritual aspiration.

In *Hayrat ul-Abror* (The Wonder of Good People), Navoi's didacticism takes a central role. This work, which is structured around conversations between rulers and sages, serves as a manual for ethical governance and moral behavior. The poet addresses themes such as justice, generosity, humility, and the dangers of arrogance and despotism. Each narrative episode is interwoven with aphorisms and moral reflections. For example, the story of a tyrannical king being rebuked by a dervish offers more than a plot; it delivers a timeless lesson about the responsibilities of power. The king is reminded that “a crown

becomes a collar of fire if worn without justice” [1]. This is a vivid metaphor illustrating the burden of leadership and the necessity of righteous rule.

Another crucial feature of Navoi’s didactic style is his use of allegory and symbolism. These techniques allowed him to present complex spiritual and ethical ideas in an engaging, accessible manner. In *Farhod va Shirin*, a romantic epic based on the classic tale of love and sacrifice, Navoi embeds lessons about perseverance, sincerity, and self-control. Farhod’s character, while initially a figure of romantic passion, gradually transforms into a model of selfless devotion and spiritual awakening. His laborious task of digging through mountains for his beloved becomes a metaphor for the soul’s struggle toward divine truth. This journey is not only a physical endeavor but a spiritual one, symbolizing the purification of the self from ego and desire. Through Farhod, Navoi emphasizes the importance of inner strength and the idea that “true love is not the search for possession, but the path to selflessness and divine connection.” Navoi’s engagement with Sufi ideas further enriches the didactic content of his works. Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, emphasizes inner purification, love for the divine, and the transcendence of the material world. Navoi, deeply influenced by Sufi thinkers such as Attar and Rumi, often used his poetry to guide readers along the spiritual path. His ghazals, particularly those in *Diwan*, are not merely love poems but contain layers of mystical interpretation. The beloved in these poems is often a symbol of God, and the yearning of the lover reflects the soul’s desire to reunite with the divine. This symbolic language is deeply didactic, as it encourages readers to look beyond surface emotions and contemplate higher truths. In his prose work *Mahbub ul-Qulub* (*The Beloved of Hearts*), Navoi adopts a more direct didactic tone. The book, composed as a collection of moral essays and reflections, covers various topics such as friendship, honesty, generosity, and knowledge. Navoi addresses his readers in the voice of a wise elder, often drawing on real-life examples and anecdotes to illustrate his points. He critiques hypocrisy and corruption and advocates for intellectual development, ethical living, and spiritual growth. One striking passage reflects on the value of truthfulness: “A single word of truth outweighs a thousand lines of poetry. For beauty without honesty is like a flower without fragrance” [2]. Here, Navoi articulates his belief that the worth of art and eloquence depends on the moral integrity it conveys.

Navoi's sense of moral responsibility was not confined to the personal or spiritual level; it extended into the social and political spheres. As a high-ranking official and advisor to Sultan Husayn Bayqara, Navoi saw firsthand the workings of court life and governance. His experiences are reflected in the subtle political commentary of his writings. He urged rulers to exercise justice and compassion, advocated for the education of the populace, and condemned tyranny and selfishness. In *Saddi Iskandariy*, his adaptation of the Alexander the Great legend, Navoi presents an idealized vision of a ruler who embodies wisdom and virtue. This portrayal serves not only as a historical narrative but also as a blueprint for ethical leadership. Moreover, Navoi's commitment to moral education extended to the linguistic and cultural levels. He championed the

Chagatai Turkic language, asserting its capacity to express the highest intellectual and artistic ideas. Through this linguistic nationalism, Navoi implicitly taught pride in cultural heritage and encouraged the intellectual development of Turkic-speaking peoples. His defense of Turkic in *Muhokamat ul-Lughatayn* (The Comparison of the Two Languages) is itself a didactic act—an assertion that one's native language can be a vehicle for knowledge, beauty, and wisdom. He writes not just as a linguist but as a cultural educator, seeking to elevate his audience's understanding of their own literary identity.

An important aspect of Navoi's didactic strategy is his use of characters as moral exemplars or cautionary figures. In *Layli va Majnun*, Navoi draws from the well-known tale of tragic love but reinterprets it through a spiritual lens. Majnun becomes a symbol of divine madness, his passion for Layli reflecting the mystic's absorption in the divine. Yet the poet also warns against uncontrolled passion and social detachment. Navoi's characters are not merely romantic figures but mirrors of the human condition, through which he explores the balance between emotion and reason, desire and discipline. Each character's choices carry implicit moral messages that guide the reader toward introspection. Despite the serious themes he often addresses, Navoi never resorts to dogmatism or didactic monotony. His moral messages are seamlessly woven into the fabric of his stories, characters, and metaphors. His poetic mastery ensures that his teachings are both memorable and aesthetically pleasing. The musicality of his verse, the richness of his imagery, and the elegance of his language all contribute to the power of his didactic voice. He does not lecture; he inspires. His lessons are internalized not through coercion but through beauty and empathy.

Navoi's legacy as a didactic writer is also evident in the impact he had on later generations. His works became educational texts across the Islamic world, studied not only for their literary excellence but for their moral wisdom. Schools and Sufi lodges used his poems to instill ethical values, and his name became synonymous with virtue and learning. In Central Asia especially, Navoi's influence shaped a cultural ethos that prized knowledge, piety, and social responsibility. His writings continue to resonate today, offering guidance in an age often marked by moral ambiguity and spiritual emptiness.

To understand Alisher Navoi is to recognize the profound unity he achieved between art and ethics. His literature teaches without preaching, enlightens without alienating, and uplifts without imposing. The didactic elements in his works are not merely historical or cultural artifacts; they remain living principles that speak to the human soul across time and space. His insistence on the moral purpose of literature reminds us that art, at its best, serves not only to reflect reality but to improve it. In conclusion, Alisher Navoi's works are exemplary manifestations of didactic literature that transcend their historical context. Through allegory, character, poetic expression, and direct moral counsel, Navoi instructs and elevates his readers. His writings demonstrate that literature can be a powerful tool for shaping character, guiding society, and awakening spiritual insight. As a poet,

philosopher, and teacher, Navoi leaves behind not just a literary legacy but an ethical one—an enduring testament to the transformative power of the written word.

Alisher Navoi, the towering figure of Turkic literature, is revered not only for his linguistic mastery and poetic genius but also for the profound didacticism that permeates his oeuvre. His works are not merely artistic achievements but repositories of ethical guidance, moral philosophy, and social instruction. By embedding educational and moralistic themes into his poetry and prose, Navoi ensured that his literature served as both a mirror and a mentor to the society of his time—and beyond.

Didactic literature seeks to teach, to instruct, and to morally guide. In Navoi's writings, the didactic impulse is neither superficial nor forcibly appended; it emerges organically from his Sufi worldview, deep humanism, and commitment to intellectual and spiritual upliftment. He did not write solely for the court or the elite; his messages were intended for the common reader, the seeker, the ruler, and the servant alike. His language, while refined and poetic, also remained accessible, so that the lessons he imparted might spread more widely and be internalized more effectively. In the preface to *Hayrat ul-Abror*, the first of his famed *Khamsa* (Quintet), Navoi makes clear his purpose: he seeks not mere literary delight but spiritual and ethical edification. This work, a didactic *masnavi*, is structured around moral tales, philosophical reflections, and guidance for rulers. Each chapter opens with praise for divine attributes or philosophical musings, and then transitions into narratives that reflect on justice, piety, humility, and social responsibility. Through vivid storytelling, Navoi paints portraits of both virtuous and wicked individuals, inviting readers to emulate the former and shun the latter. In one of the tales from *Hayrat ul-Abror*, a tyrannical ruler is punished for his cruelty while a just king is praised and rewarded by Providence. Such narratives are not simply moral lessons; they are reflections of a broader worldview that places justice and compassion at the core of human and political conduct. Navoi believed that literature could reform society by refining the individual's character. He saw poetry as a vehicle of transformation—not only aesthetic but spiritual.

This didactic approach is also evident in Navoi's *Mahbub ul-Qulub* (“Beloved of Hearts”), a prose work in which he discusses virtues and vices, the behavior of kings, the duties of officials, and the character of common people. The work is an ethical compendium, enriched with stories and aphorisms. His insights into human nature are sharp and compassionate. He criticizes greed, hypocrisy, and tyranny while promoting humility, generosity, and sincerity.

Navoi's Sufi leanings also shaped the didactic nature of his works. He was greatly influenced by Sufi thinkers such as Attar and Rumi, whose teachings emphasized inner purification, love for the divine, and service to humanity. For Navoi, the outer world was a metaphor for the inner journey. He uses the language of allegory and metaphor to point the reader toward deeper spiritual truths. In *Farhod and Shirin*, for instance, the hero's quest for love becomes a symbolic journey toward divine truth. The obstacles he faces are not merely physical but spiritual trials that refine the soul. Navoi teaches his readers

that true love is selfless, ennobling, and ultimately divine. In his didacticism, Navoi also reflects on the fleeting nature of worldly wealth and status. He warns against pride and attachment to material things. This is particularly resonant in the context of courtly life, where power struggles, vanity, and ambition were rampant. Navoi, who himself held a high position in the Timurid administration, used his platform to remind rulers and officials of their duty to the people and to God. He believed that a ruler's greatness lay not in conquest but in justice and compassion. As he writes, "A just ruler is the shadow of God on Earth" [3]. This quote underscores his belief in the sacred responsibility of leadership and the moral accountability of those in power. Furthermore, Navoi viewed knowledge as a moral obligation. He was a fierce advocate for education and intellectual development. His treatises and poems often promote learning not as a means to personal gain but as a path to enlightenment and service. He warns scholars against arrogance and urges them to use their knowledge for the betterment of society. In this, his vision aligns with the classical Islamic understanding of *ilm* (knowledge) as a sacred trust.

In *Lison ut-Tayr* ("Language of the Birds"), an allegorical poem inspired by Attar's *Conference of the Birds*, Navoi explores the soul's journey toward union with the Divine. This work is rich in mystical symbolism and moral instruction. Each bird in the story represents a different type of soul, with its own weaknesses and virtues. The journey they undertake is fraught with spiritual lessons, reminding readers that the path to truth requires sacrifice, sincerity, and self-awareness. The didacticism here is subtle yet powerful, appealing to both the intellect and the heart.

One of the most striking aspects of Navoi's didactic literature is its universality. While deeply rooted in Islamic and Turkic traditions, his ethical teachings transcend time and culture. He addresses themes that remain relevant today: the need for justice, the value of truth, the danger of tyranny, the importance of self-knowledge, and the transformative power of love. His works invite readers into a dialogue not only with literature but with life itself. Navoi's use of metaphor and allegory also serves his didactic purpose. He seldom preaches directly; instead, he constructs layered narratives that require reflection and interpretation. In doing so, he respects the reader's intelligence and autonomy. He does not impose meaning but evokes it. This method fosters deeper engagement with the text and encourages readers to internalize the lessons rather than merely absorb them.

Another dimension of Navoi's didacticism is his emphasis on language and expression as moral acts. He believed that words carry immense power, and that writers and speakers bear responsibility for how they use them. In his *Mukhammas*, he writes: "Let every word be a lantern to guide, not a flame to burn" [4]. This aphorism captures his belief that literature should enlighten, not inflame; should heal, not harm. Moreover, Navoi's commitment to didacticism was not limited to content but extended to linguistic form. By choosing to write in Chagatai Turkic rather than the more prestigious Persian, he made a deliberate statement about cultural and educational inclusivity. He elevated the Turkic language to a literary level, thereby empowering Turkic-speaking communities to access ethical and spiritual literature in their native tongue. This decision was itself a



didactic gesture, asserting the value of one's own culture and language in the face of dominance by others.

In this regard, Navoi was not only a poet but a reformer. His works laid the foundation for a literary and moral renaissance among Turkic peoples. He modeled how literature could be both beautiful and beneficial, both artistic and instructional. His ethical vision permeated all genres he touched—lyric poetry, epic romance, philosophical prose, and allegorical fiction. Even today, Navoi's works continue to be read and studied not only for their aesthetic brilliance but for their ethical depth. His writings are included in school curricula, studied in universities, and revered by scholars of literature, ethics, and philosophy. His legacy testifies to the enduring power of didactic literature to shape minds and societies. In conclusion, the didactic elements in the works of Alisher Navoi are central to his literary mission. They reflect his profound commitment to moral education, spiritual awakening, and social reform. Through allegory, narrative, and poetic insight, he crafted works that both delight and instruct. His literature is a luminous testament to the belief that words, when used wisely, can guide humanity toward truth, justice, and divine love. As long as readers seek wisdom and meaning, Navoi's didactic voice will continue to resonate across generations and geographies.

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