

THE ISSUE OF PROTOTYPES IN ALISHER NAVOI'S EPIC "SADDI ISKANDARIY"

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Abstract: Alisher Navoi's epic "Saddi Iskandariy" (Iskandar's wall) is one of the most remarkable works of Uzbek literature. This masterpiece portrays the life and achievements of Iskandar Zulkarnain while addressing significant socio-political issues of Navoi's time. Through the events depicted in the epic, the poet explores solutions to pressing societal challenges and presents his vision of an ideal ruler.

Although Iskandar Zulkarnain is the central figure of the epic, the influence of Amir Temur is also vividly reflected in the narrative. Navoi endeavors to construct the image of a just and benevolent ruler, emphasizing qualities essential for the political and social landscape of his era.

Keywords: justice, fairness, compassion, heroism, enlightenment, courage, religious tolerance, great commander.

Alisher Navoi completed his epic poem "Iskandar's Wall" in December 1484. That same year, the scribe Abduljamil successfully copied it, and in 1485, Navoi made several revisions to the text.

As in all the epic poems of Alisher Navoi's Khamsa, Saddi Iskandariy embodies the ideal of a just ruler. The poem explores fundamental themes such as justice in human society, the qualities of a righteous leader, and the enlightenment of the perfect individual.

At the beginning of the epic, Iskandar is presented as the historical figure Alexander of Macedon; however, as the narrative progresses, Navoi gradually transforms him into an artistic and idealized portrayal. This transformation is evident from the very beginning, particularly in Iskandar's philosophical exchanges with his teacher, Aristotle. Throughout the poem, allegorical tales and life stories serve to illuminate different facets of Iskandar's character, further enriching his depiction as an ideal ruler.

Before beginning "Saddi Iskandariy", Hazrat Alisher Navoi meticulously studied the history of the great conqueror. This makes it evident that although the great thinker wrote "Tarihi Anbiyo va Hukamo" (History of Prophets and Sages) after completing his Khamsa, he had begun gathering materials for this historical work much earlier.

In his work "Tarihi Anbiyo va Hukamo", it is stated that Iskandar is the fourth son of Zulkarnain Yafas. Iskandar is described as surpassing all rulers before and after him, as a sage and a saint, and even as a prophet in the eyes of some. The text recounts that four hundred sages served under him, including Aristotle, and that he built a barrier against Gog and Magog. It also attributes the founding of cities such as Merv, Herat, Samarkand and Isfahan to him. While Navoi made extensive use of these historical materials, he primarily based his portrayal of Iskandar on the story of Zulkarnain in the surah "Al-Kahf" of the Holy Quran. Across historical, scientific, and literary sources, Iskandar's most significant service to humanity is often cited as the construction of a wall against Gog and Magog. This historical event serves as the foundation of Saddi Iskandariy, shaping its title, plot, and composition.

In the work of "Tarihi Muluki Ajam" (The History of the Persian Kings), Navoi acknowledges his sources, stating: "In the humble Saddi Iskandariy, I have preferred the words of those two great historians (Nizami and Dehlavi – P.I.) over those of others and have chosen to render them

into poetry” [3, 217]. This demonstrates that in composing Saddi Iskandariy, Navoi drew inspiration from Nizami’s Iskandarnama (Iskandar’s book) and Khusrau’s Ainayi Iskandari (The mirror of Iskandar), as well as numerous historical accounts. Indeed, historical scholarship was a fundamental element in the works of earlier poets, particularly Nizami Ganjavi, and many themes, motifs, and images in the Khamsa have identifiable historical sources. In this regard, Navoi’s epic stands apart from those of his great predecessors, Nizami Ganjavi and Khusrau Dehlavi [3,12]. Aware of the long-standing literary tradition surrounding Iskandar’s legend, Navoi sought to provide scientifically accurate details in his epic and to critically analyze the works of those who came before him.

Alisher Navoi portrays Iskandar as a guardian. In the poet’s view, Iskandar is not merely an ordinary king but a sovereign endowed with supernatural power.

The epic Saddi Iskandariy extols universal human values such as justice, fairness, and kindness. Moreover, it dedicates significant attention to issues such as the standard of living, the spiritual world, and the aspirations of the people. This allows us to interpret Saddi Iskandariy not merely as a historical narrative but as a work of art imbued with profound philosophical and social significance [10,56].

With its artistic excellence and deep ideological substance, Saddi Iskandariy remains one of the most distinguished masterpieces of Uzbek literature. Engaging with the text offers invaluable lessons not only about past history but also for contemporary times [16,125].

In Chapter XI, Alisher Navoi explicitly states that the overarching purpose of Saddi Iskandariy is to derive knowledge from the sources of historical science. Although it is “absolutely unfounded to consider the Iskandar as a biography of the famous conqueror or a chronicle of his campaigns” [1,10], Navoi’s statement suggests that Saddi Iskandariy possesses a historical foundation to some extent and cannot be dismissed as purely fictional or allegorical. Adhering to the traditions of historiography, Navoi briefly recounts the histories of the Peshdadi, Kayanid, Ashkanid, and Sasanid dynasties, as Iskandar’s legacy is directly linked to these lineages. Such an approach is absent in the works of his predecessors.

When depicting Iskandar Zulkarnain’s conquests, Navoi does not merely present him as a conqueror but also as a ruler who fostered peace and stability in the lands he subdued. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that, through this portrayal, Navoi sought to establish a model for the rulers of his own time, illustrating principles of governance [16,23].

Navoi depicts Iskandar as a just, benevolent, and powerful ruler. His laws apply equally to all, and his judgments are fair. Iskandar strives for the prosperity of his nation and the well-being of his people. Through this portrayal, Navoi seeks to set an example for the rulers of his time [3,345].

In his works, Alisher Navoi not only portrays Iskandar as a just ruler but also aims to provide a moral example for contemporary leaders. In Tarikhi Muluki Ajam, Navoi discusses Iskandar’s commitment to justice: “With fairness and integrity, I earned the satisfaction of Allah’s creation. Whether guilty or innocent, I passed judgment with compassion and righteousness”[3,23].

Another example can be found in the Khamsa, specifically in the section “Hayrat ul-Abror” (The Wonder of the Pious), where Navoi describes Amir Timur’s sense of justice:

“Amir Timur, the sovereign of the world, ruled with justice, upholding order unfurled.” [4,124]

In these lines, Amir Timur is depicted as a great ruler who governed the world with justice, ensuring peace and stability.

Thus, by portraying Amir Timur as a just ruler, Navoi sought to convey a message to both contemporary and future leaders: they must govern with justice, protect the interests of their people, and strive for the prosperity of their nation.

In the epic, Iskandar places great emphasis on the advancement of science and culture. He protects scholars and artists, establishes madrasahs and libraries, and fosters an environment where knowledge can flourish. Through this, Navoi highlights the crucial role of enlightenment in the progress of society [5,52].

In Alisher Navoi's epic *Saddi Iskandariy*, the figure of Amir Temur is reflected in the character of Iskandar not only as a formidable commander but also as an enlightened ruler. Throughout the epic, Iskandar is depicted engaging in scholarly discussions, protecting intellectuals, and rewarding those who make significant contributions to scientific progress through artistic imagery.

Navoi's Iskandar is portrayed as a just king, yet still a mortal man. The poet's ultimate goal is to create the image of an ideal ruler one who embodies wisdom, justice, and virtue.

For state policy to be perfectly systematized, for society to develop and prosper, and for individuals to attain true freedom and dignity, a ruler like Iskandar is necessary. Because of his unwavering fairness, Iskandar is even willing to relinquish his throne to a beggar if the latter proves to be more intelligent. His love for his wives is not driven by greed or desire but by their intellect, as seen in *Nazmeh*, their erudition, as exemplified by *Lubati Chini* (wise), and their heroism. He cherishes scholarly gatherings, bestows generous endowments upon cities for the benefit of scholars, and continuously promotes the pursuit of knowledge.

During his era, cities such as Samarkand, Bukhara, and Herat flourished as centers of science and technology, producing numerous great scholars and thinkers. This, in turn, led to the intellectual and cultural elevation of society [13,25].

In this epic, Alisher Navoi introduces a revolutionary idea for the political thought of his time, the notion that kingship should not be inherited by birthright alone. Instead, ascension to the throne should be determined by justice and merit.

According to the poet, the primary foundation of a strong state is the satisfaction of its army. He conveys this idea through poetic verses:

"My dear, when the soldier prospers,
His heart rejoices in vanquishing the foe.
If the people of the martyrs do not grieve,
There is no harm; strength prevails.
But by Allah, if the people despair,
It matters not, ruin is inevitable."

For this reason, historians and Navoi himself report that the poet made substantial donations and gifts to the **cherik** (army) from his own funds every year.

While artistically crafting the image of Fair King, Navoi the thinker gradually integrates himself into the narrative. As he describes the final years of Iskandar's life, he increasingly scrutinizes the ideal he has created. That is, Iskandar's greed, his lust for wealth and luxury, and even his desire to possess water itself do not earn Navoi's approval. At this point, Navoi's intellectual and philosophical depth is fully revealed in a pivotal episode. Although the philosopher-king he envisions makes mistakes throughout his life, as he approaches death and enters the afterlife, he once again emerges before the reader as a true thinker [9,112].

In the epic, Iskandar is portrayed as a bold and courageous commander. He fights valiantly against his enemies and emerges victorious in every battle. Through this depiction, Navoi promotes the ideals of patriotism and heroism [12,74]. Throughout the work, Alexander's military campaigns, battlefield prowess, and strategic intelligence are vividly rendered.

For instance, during the conquest of Egypt, Amir Temur's troops faced significant challenges in crossing the Nile. The river's current was swift, and its banks were steep and high, making passage nearly impossible. However, Amir Temur overcame this obstacle with his intelligence and ingenuity. He ordered the construction of specially designed wooden bridges, allowing his army to cross the river safely [3,342].

Navoi skillfully utilized historical sources to construct the image of Amir Temur. In particular, Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi's "Zafarnama" (The Book of Triumph) served as a crucial reference. However, Navoi did not merely replicate historical events; instead, he artistically reinterpreted them to express his own ideas.

For example, while Zafarnama provides detailed accounts of Amir Temur's military campaigns and victories, Navoi distills these events to their essence. He shifts the focus from the sheer scale of conquests to the ruler's personal qualities: his justice, bravery, and wisdom embodied in the character of Iskandar.

Navoi idealized Iskandar's character, driven by his aspiration to present a model ruler for his own time. Through Iskandar, Navoi sought to convey a vision of leadership founded on justice, intellect, and moral strength.

The episode of the open hand emerging from the coffin further exemplifies the ideal king envisioned by the poet, a ruler who embodies the pinnacle of human virtue. This scene also deeply impressed the Russian orientalist, academician Conrad, who argued that this single episode, crafted by Alisher Navoi in Saddi Iskandariy, would have been sufficient to secure his place among the world's greatest thinkers, even if all his other works were excluded [11,112].

Through this epic, Alisher Navoi once again demonstrates that his philanthropic ideals are not bound by time but remain ever relevant and alive. In this work, the poet subtly alludes to the power of knowledge, the vital role of scholars in shaping society, and the transformative force of enlightenment. Navoi's Iskandar dedicates an entire city to scientists, underscoring their significance in the progress of civilization. Notably, in one section of the epic, Navoi himself appears as an inventive chemist and scholar. It is well known that his scientific imagination was not mere legend but had tangible foundations in reality.

Thus, in creating his Khamsa, Alisher Navoi seamlessly continued the themes introduced in his earlier epics, ultimately presenting his final conclusions in Saddi Iskandariy.

Alisher Navoi's Khamsa was hailed by his contemporaries as a "great literary phenomenon - an extraordinary discovery". The content of the work itself makes it evident that Navoi, as a profound thinker, was fully aware of the magnitude and uniqueness of his creation.

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