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The Contributions of 'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī to Political Stability and Cultural Development in the Timurid State during the Reign of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara

Ali Şir Nevaî'nin Sultan Hüseyin Baykara Döneminde Timurlu Devleti'nde Siyasi İstikrar ve Kültürel Gelişime Katkıları

Abstract

'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī, one of the most eminent scholars and statesmen of the fifteenth century, attained a distinguished position within the Timurid State during the reign of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara and emerged as one of the most influential figures in the administration of the realm. Throughout his political career, he held significant offices such as Keeper of the Seal, Amīr of the Dīvān-i A'ālā, na'ib of Astarābād, as well as serving as the Sulṭān's close companion and special adviser. An examination of the historical sources demonstrates that Navā'ī played an influential role in crisis management, the mitigation of political tensions, and the maintenance of order throughout the Timurid dominions. In addition to his political identity, Navā'ī is also recognized as a statesman profoundly devoted to culture. His patronage of the scholars, poets, and artists of the period laid the foundations for scientific and literary flourishing at the Herat court, while his extensive efforts toward the advancement of knowledge, literature, and the arts elevated the cultural prestige of the reign of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara. Moreover, by employing both personal and state resources, he actively contributed to architecture and urban development and commissioned the construction of numerous public works. In this respect, Navā'ī may be regarded as one of the foremost figures who shaped the cultural and social life of the Timurid era. This article aims to examine analytically Navā'ī's political position and his functions within the sphere of state administration during the reign of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara.

Keywords: 'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī, Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara, Herat, Timurids, State Administration.

Öz

Ali Şir Nevaî, 15. yüzyılın en önde gelen âlim ve devlet adamlarından biri olarak, Sultan Hüseyin Baykara döneminde Timurlu Devleti'nde seçkin bir konuma sahip olmuş ve devlet yönetiminde Sultan'ın en etkili şahsiyetlerinden biri hâline gelmiştir. Siyasi hayatı boyunca mühürdarlık, Dīvān-ı Âlâ emirliği, Esterabad vali naibliği ile Sultan'ın yakın dostu ve özel danışmanlığı gibi önemli görevler üstlenmiştir. Kaynaklar incelendiğinde, Nevaî'nin bu görevlerde kriz yönetimi, siyasi gerilimlerin azaltılması ve Timurlu ülkesinde düzenin sağlanması konusunda etkili bir rol oynadığı görülmektedir. Siyasi kimliğinin yanı sıra Nevaî, kültüre derinden bağlı bir devlet adamı olarak da tanınmaktadır. Dönemin âlim, şair ve sanatkârlarını himaye etmesi, Herat sarayında ilmî ve edebî gelişmenin zeminini hazırlamış; bilgi, edebiyat ve sanatın ilerlemesine yönelik geniş kapsamlı çalışmaları Sultan Hüseyin Baykara devrinin kültürel seviyesini yükseltmiştir. Ayrıca hem şahsî hem de devlet imkânlarını kullanarak mimarlık ve şehircilik alanlarında faaliyet göstermiş, çok sayıda eser inşa ettirmiştir. Bu yönüyle Nevaî, Timurlu döneminin kültürel ve toplumsal hayatına yön veren önemli şahsiyetlerden biri olarak değerlendirilebilir. Bu makale, Sultan Hüseyin Baykara döneminde Nevaî'nin siyasi konumunu ve devlet yönetimi alanındaki görevlerini analitik bir yaklaşımla incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ali Şir Nevaî, Sultan Hüseyin Baykara, Herat, Timurlular, Devlet İdaresi.

Introduction

In the fifteenth century, the Western world, which for centuries had remained confined within the static and obscure atmosphere of the Middle Ages, gradually entered a new phase of civilizational and cultural transformation. This period later came to be known as the Renaissance and was regarded as the point of departure for profound changes in European history. This major movement initially emerged through gradual and fragmented scientific advancements and geographical discoveries. However, following the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire and the discovery of the American continent, it gained considerable momentum and paved the way for more profound transformations across Europe. Thereafter, Western historians designated this period as the “Modern Age” and regarded it as a decisive turning point in the history of European civilization¹. Concurrently, the Islamic world—which had previously experienced a remarkable period of cultural and civilizational flourishing—entered a prolonged phase of stagnation following the devastating invasions of Chinggis Khan and the Mongol Empire. This stagnation extended across vast regions of the Islamic world and persisted until the emergence of the Timurid Empire. In effect, after an era of prosperity and intellectual vitality, the Islamic world entered a period of cultural and civilizational inertia whose consequences endured for centuries.

The Timurid, or Gürkānī, state, which endured for more than one hundred and twenty years, existed from 1380 to 1507. During the final six decades of its existence, owing to its contemporaneity with the scientific and cultural developments taking place in Europe, historians have referred to this period as the “Renaissance of the East.” The legacy of this dynasty was not confined to its splendid rule over Khurāsān and Transoxiana; rather, it continued on the Indian subcontinent through the Mughal Empire and also exerted a significant influence upon Safavid Iran and even the Ottoman realm. In other words, cities such as Iṣfahān and Delhi followed the cultural and social example of Herat, drawing inspiration from its model in the advancement of art and learning².

The founder of this dynasty was Amīr Tīmūr Gürkānī, who was born in the present-day city of Kish in Shahr-i Sabz. His father belonged to the military aristocracy and the tribal nobility and enjoyed a distinguished social standing. In 1370, Tīmūr selected Samarqand as his capital and embarked upon extensive campaigns of conquest. His empire came to encompass Transoxiana, Khwārazm, the regions surrounding the Caspian Sea, India, Iraq, the South Caucasus, and parts of Western Asia. In 1404, while preparing for a military campaign against China, he passed away³. After Tīmūr’s death, Shāh Rukh ascended the throne in Herat in 1405 and ruled for more than four decades. During his reign, his son Ulugh Beg governed Samarqand and developed a profound interest in astronomy. Under his patronage, a magnificent observatory was constructed, the works of which became known as the Zīj-i Ulugh Beg and the Zīj-i Sulṭānī. In 1449, he was killed by his son, ‘Abd al-Laṭīf⁴.

During the reigns of Shāh Rukh and Ulugh Beg, Bāysunghur Mīrzā, another son of Shāh Rukh, governed Herat and its surrounding regions. He was regarded as one of the prominent figures of the Timurid dynasty and played a significant role in cultural and architectural development. Although, following the death of Shāh Rukh, Herat experienced numerous political upheavals and a strong centralized authority did not re-emerge until the reign of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara, Shāh Rukh, his consort Gawharshād Begum, and his sons Ulugh Beg and Bāysunghur devoted particular attention to cultural patronage and urban development. Between the reigns of Shāh Rukh and Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara, Abū al-Qāsim Bābur, the son of Bāysunghur, also ruled in Herat, and his reign was distinguished by notable cultural flourishing. Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara, a grandson of Amīr Tīmūr, was born in Herat in June 1438 and ascended the throne in the same city in 1469. His reign, which lasted approximately four decades, is regarded as one of the most powerful periods of the Timurid dynasty. Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara was a great patron of learning and culture and a steadfast supporter of literature, craftsmanship, and the arts. Despite prolonged conflicts with neighboring states and internal rivals, he endeavored to strengthen governance while promoting education and the arts.

In this regard, he founded several educational institutions, including the Sulṭāniyya, Badī’iyya, and Ikhlāṣiyya madrasas. Through his patronage and sustained efforts, science, art, and literature attained remarkable advancement. One of the distinguishing features of his reign was the presence of ‘Alī-Shīr Navā’ī, a statesman and learned companion, at the court. In addition to Navā’ī, the court of Sulṭān Ḥusayn served as a gathering place for numerous eminent scholars and poets, among them Mawlānā ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, the distinguished historians Mīr Khwānd and Khwāndamīr, the renowned painter Kamāl al-Dīn Bihzād, and the celebrated calligrapher Sulṭān ‘Alī Mashhadī⁵.

¹ Sardar Alam et al., *A Study of Afghanistan’s History* (Kabul: Navisa, 2020), 220.

² Sardar Alam et al., *A Study of Afghanistan’s History*, 220.

³ A. Kargar, *The Timurids* (Peshawar: Al-Azhar, 2008), 8.

⁴ Kargar, *The Timurids*, 24.

⁵ Jafari, Mir Hüsaying, *History of the Timurids and Turkmens* (Tehran: SAMT, 2009), 182.

The Relations between 'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī and Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara

Nizām al-Dīn 'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī was born in Herat on 17 Ramaḍān 844 AH, corresponding to 9 February 1441. Navā'ī's ancestors occupied esteemed positions within the Timurid administration in Herat, serving figures such as 'Umar Shaykh, a son of Amīr Timūr, while his father, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Kichkina, served prominent rulers including Mīrzā Abū al-Qāsim Bābur and Sulṭān Abū Sa'īd Mīrzā⁶.

'Alī-Shīr's mother served as a wet nurse at the Timurid court, and for this reason her children were regarded as kŭkaltāsh—namely, milk siblings or foster brothers—of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara. During their childhood, while Sulṭān Ḥusayn was in the service of Abū al-Qāsim Bābur, 'Alī-Shīr reportedly accompanied him as a close companion, attending the same school and pursuing their studies together. It is related that the two made a pact whereby, should either of them attain fortune and power, he would not forget the other. In accordance with this pact, when Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara ascended to power, Navā'ī was appointed as a high-ranking amīr and trusted confidant at court. Nevertheless, many historians have expressed doubts regarding the authenticity of this account. They argue that the narrative does not correspond with the social realities of education in Herat, since Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara was a Timurid prince, whereas 'Alī-Shīr was the son of a court wet nurse, rendering such an intimate childhood association improbable⁷.

'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī's early life was marked by political upheaval. Following the death of Shāh Rukh Mīrzā in 1447, Herat experienced intense political conflict and instability. Navā'ī's father was consequently compelled to migrate with his family to Iraq. 'Alī-Shīr remained in Iraq for five years, during which he continued his education and became acquainted with the renowned Timurid historian and man of letters, Mawlānā Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī Yazdī. In 1452, when Mīrzā Abū al-Qāsim Bābur seized Herat, the Navā'ī family returned to the city⁸. 'Alī-Shīr's entry into the court of Abū al-Qāsim Bābur, in addition to renewing his association with Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara, further advanced his education in various branches of knowledge. Owing to his intelligence and talent, Navā'ī attracted the attention and favor of Bābur to such an extent that the latter regarded him almost as his own son. This opportunity proved to be of immense significance for the young scholar, enabling him to attain mastery in the literary and poetic arts. Navā'ī accompanied Bābur Mīrzā from Herat to Tūs and remained there and in Mashhad until Bābur's death in 1466⁹. During this period, he continued his studies in logic, philosophy, mathematics, and other sciences. Subsequently, he spent three years in Samarqand, where he further advanced his learning under the guidance of the city's leading scholars¹⁰.

While Navā'ī was in Samarqand, Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara ascended the Timurid throne in Herat. Upon Bayqara's accession to sovereignty, Navā'ī immediately departed from Samarqand for Herat and entered the Sulṭān's court. Although historical accounts indicate that the relationship between Bayqara and Navā'ī dated back to their childhood, and that 'Alī-Shīr's scholarly reputation had already secured him a respected position with the Sulṭān, some scholars examining Navā'ī's political role during Bayqara's reign maintain that his true presence at court began when he composed a qaṣīda in honor of the Sulṭān and thereby attracted his attention. They regard this event as the beginning of Navā'ī's active involvement in the political sphere of Bayqara's reign¹¹.

Regardless of the manner in which he entered the court, Navā'ī rapidly became one of the Sulṭān's principal advisers. He served in Bayqara's administration for nearly thirty-three years, occupying both formal and informal high-ranking positions, including Mihrdārī (chief of protocol), Amīr of the Dīvān-i A'lā, the governorship of Astarābād, and the office of the Sulṭān's counsellor. Benefiting from his elevated political standing, Navā'ī undertook numerous initiatives in the spheres of cultural patronage and urban development while extending support to the leading scholars and poets of his age.

Navā'ī and His Governmental Offices

The term mihr denotes a seal or stamp, while mihrdār refers to the keeper of the seal. A mihrdār was entrusted with the custody of the royal seal and, in addition to safeguarding it, was responsible for affixing it to official documents and royal decrees. During the Timurid period, particularly under the reign of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara, the office of mihrdārī enjoyed considerable prestige, and its holder maintained close proximity to the Sulṭān. At the beginning of the Timurid era, this office

⁶ Kargar, *The Land and Figures of Turkestan* (Kabul: Al-Azhar, 2011), 53.

⁷ R. A. Behzadi and A. F. Anoush, "The Role of Ali-Shir Nava'i in the Political Conflicts during Sultan Husayn Bayqara's Era," *Research in History* 5, no. 1 (2014): 3.

⁸ Kargar, Abdullah, *The Timurids*, 60.

⁹ M. A. Sh. Nava'i, *Diwan Fani*, ed. S. A. R. Sincharki (Kabul: Amiri, 2016), 59.

¹⁰ Kargar, *The Timurids*, 61.

¹¹ Behzadi and Anoush, "The Role of Ali-Shir Nava'i," 4.

was held by Īgū Tīmūr, one of Tīmūr's close attendants. Following his death, custody of the royal seal and the associated privileges passed to his relative, Shāh Malik. Both Īgū and Shāh Malik were among the most distinguished amīrs of Tīmūr¹².

After Navā'ī entered the court of Sulṭān Ḥusayn, the Sulṭān offered him the office of mihrdār. Navā'ī accepted the position at the Sulṭān's insistence, although he did not regard it as commensurate with his own standing. According to the protocol governing seating arrangements in official court assemblies, Navā'ī was assigned a place corresponding to his formal office, which he found unsatisfactory. The Uyghur amīrs associated with Navā'ī's family, in accordance with Turco-Mongol custom, were seated alongside the other amīrs at court. Although Navā'ī occupied one of the most influential positions at court, established convention required him to sit behind the leading amīrs of the realm, and his seal was impressed upon official decrees only after those of the senior amīrs. Navā'ī found this arrangement intolerable, yet the Sulṭān was unable to alter the traditional order of precedence among the amīrs¹³.

Navā'ī's standing at the court of Sulṭān Ḥusayn derived not from the official offices he held, but rather from the close personal relationship he maintained with the Sulṭān and the distinction he displayed in scholarly pursuits. Consequently, he sought to withdraw from formal governmental positions and remain solely as the Sulṭān's trusted confidant¹⁴. After some time, Navā'ī resigned from the office of mihrdār and requested that the Sulṭān appoint Amīr Nizām al-Dīn Shaykh Aḥmad Suhaylī to the position. The Sulṭān accepted his request¹⁵.

Navā'ī in the Office of Amīr of the Dīvān-i A'lā

'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī resigned from the official office of mihrdār (keeper of the royal seal) in order to avoid holding any formal governmental position. He preferred instead to serve as the Sulṭān's close confidant (nadīm) and to exert influence over affairs of state through informal means, employing this influence in support of learning and culture. Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara, however, desired that Navā'ī formally assume certain administrative responsibilities. Following Navā'ī's resignation from the office of mihrdār, the Sulṭān conferred upon him the rank of amīr, a position of considerable prestige. At first, Navā'ī expressed reluctance, arguing that, as a close companion of the Sulṭān, he already possessed substantial influence without occupying an official post, and that accepting a formal office might encourage certain senior nobles to claim precedence over him. Nevertheless, at the insistence of the Sulṭān, Navā'ī accepted the appointment in February 1472 and formally assumed the rank of amīr, or beg, although the populace had long been accustomed to addressing him by this title. Previously, this honorific had been bestowed only upon Muẓaffar Barlās in recognition of his distinguished service to Sulṭān Ḥusayn during military campaigns.¹⁶

As Amīr of the Dīvān-i A'lā, Navā'ī exercised extensive authority and was regarded as one of the most powerful figures in the Timurid state after the Sulṭān. Whenever Sulṭān Ḥusayn was absent from the capital, Navā'ī administered the affairs of the state on his behalf. For example, following the Sulṭān's victorious return from the suppression of Mīrzā Abū Bakr, Navā'ī, acting as the Sulṭān's deputy, formally received him with full ceremonial honors¹⁷. The Sulṭān consulted Navā'ī on all major affairs of state, and no significant decision was taken without his counsel and approval. Owing to this influence, he was frequently honored with the titles *Muqarrab al-Khāqān* and *Muqarrab-i Ḥaḍrat-i Sulṭānī*¹⁸.

Navā'ī was repeatedly entrusted with the suppression of rebellions and the resolution of political disputes. When the people of Herat revolted against excessive taxation, he intervened by abolishing unlawful levies, arresting corrupt officials, and granting tax exemptions to artisans and villagers for a period of two years. Although these measures won the approval of the populace, they provoked the hostility of tax officials¹⁹. He also mediated sectarian disputes, including clashes between Sunnī and Shī'ī communities during 'Īd prayers, advising the Sulṭān to prevent further escalation rather than impose harsh punishments upon the populace. Scholars have noted that Navā'ī's counsel was motivated by the preservation of political stability rather than by opposition to the Shī'ī faith²⁰.

¹² S. Sasanpour and A. Ayvazlu, "Structure, Institutions, and Functions of the Bureaucratic System in the Timurid Era until the End of Shah Rukh's Reign," *Research in History* 2, no. 4 (2011): 55.

¹³ Behzadi and Anoush, "The Role of Ali-Shir Nava'i," 5.

¹⁴ V. Bartold, *The Political Life of Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, trans. M. H. Shah (Kabul: Historical Society, 1967), 22.

¹⁵ Behzadi and Anoush, "The Role of Ali-Shir Nava'i," 5.

¹⁶ Bartold, *The Political Life of Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, 23.

¹⁷ Bartold, *The Political Life of Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, 24.

¹⁸ Nava'i, *Diwan Fani*, 63.

¹⁹ Nava'i, *Diwan Fani*, 63.

²⁰ A. N. Limayi and A. Hasani, "The Role of Ali-Shir Nava'i in the Policies of Sultan Husayn Bayqara," *Quarterly Journal of History* 7, no. 26 (2012): 84.

Navā'ī also sought to resolve conflicts among the sons of Sulṭān Ḥusayn, mediating disputes concerning appointments in Balkh and Astarābād in an effort to prevent armed confrontation, although some of his efforts proved unsuccessful owing to political complications²¹. Navā'ī's authority derived from multiple sources: his close personal relationship with the Sulṭān, his position as a representative of the military aristocracy, and his elevated standing within the tribal hierarchy, all of which enabled him to exert considerable influence over the bureaucratic administration. He played a decisive role in the appointment and dismissal of ministers and nobles, and his counsel frequently shaped the Sulṭān's decisions. Although some modern Iranian scholars have argued that Navā'ī opposed Persian ministers in order to strengthen Turkic influence at court, evidence drawn from his patronage of Persian literary figures suggests that his interventions were motivated primarily by considerations of governance and political loyalty rather than ethnic bias²².

Among Navā'ī's notable political confrontations was his opposition to Khwāja Sanā'ī, which resulted in the latter's imprisonment, as well as his disputes with Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Khāfī, whose political career had initially advanced under Navā'ī's patronage but later encountered difficulties owing to court intrigues. At one point, in order to resolve conflicts surrounding the appointment of Majd al-Dīn, the Sulṭān temporarily appointed Navā'ī as deputy governor of Astarābād, compelling him to accept the office despite his initial reluctance²³.

In sum, 'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī's political career under Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara was characterized by a delicate balance between informal influence and formal authority. Through his interventions, he contributed significantly to the stabilization of the state, the mediation of political disputes, and the guidance of both Turkic and Persian elites, thereby demonstrating his pivotal role in the governance of the Timurid Empire.

Alī-Shīr Navā'ī and His Governorship of Astarābād (Gurgān)

Astarābād (modern-day Gurgān in Golestān Province, Iran) was an important city during the Islamic period, renowned for its prosperity and cultural significance. In 1487, 'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī was appointed governor of Astarābād. According to a number of historians, this appointment effectively constituted a form of "honorable exile" from the political center in Herat owing to his opposition to the appointment of Khwāja Majd al-Dīn Khāfī to the vizierate. Navā'ī accepted the office reluctantly, as he had done with his previous appointments, and proceeded to Astarābād, where he enjoyed the same respect and honors accorded to him in Herat. Gifts and tributes were even sent to him by neighboring rulers²⁴.

After a year of governance, Navā'ī returned to Herat and requested that the Sulṭān permit him to remain in the capital while transferring his administrative responsibilities to another official. The Sulṭān rejected this request, compelling Navā'ī to return to Astarābād for several additional months. During this period, he learned of a plot in which an individual had allegedly been commissioned to poison him. When Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara became aware of the matter, he dispatched an envoy to Astarābād in order to reassure Navā'ī, emphasizing that the report was unfounded and inviting him to return to Herat. Navā'ī complied with the Sulṭān's request and returned to the capital, where he resumed his position as one of the Sulṭān's closest advisers²⁵.

After returning to Herat, Navā'ī expressed his desire to withdraw from political life and devote himself to a quiet scholarly existence. Sulṭān Ḥusayn, however, who was frequently preoccupied with military campaigns and the suppression of rebellions led by his sons, repeatedly refused his request. During these campaigns, whenever the Sulṭān was absent from Herat, Navā'ī supervised the administration of the capital alongside the official ministers. On one occasion, when the Sulṭān departed for Marv to suppress the rebellion of his sons, Navā'ī traveled to Mashhad and requested permission to undertake the ḥajj pilgrimage to Mecca. The Sulṭān declined the request, citing concerns for his safety, and instead invited Navā'ī to meet him in Marv. Following this audience, Navā'ī returned to Herat.²⁶

In 1499, following his return from Marv, Navā'ī organized a grand reconciliation ceremony at a mausoleum located along one of the city's thoroughfares, bringing together religious scholars, jurists, nobles, and leading citizens in an effort to secure their support for a life devoted to piety and semi-retirement²⁷. Nevertheless, the Sulṭān once again refused his request, continuing to rely upon Navā'ī's expertise in political and administrative affairs.

²¹ Sardar Alam et al., *A Study of Afghanistan's History*, 218.

²² Behzadi and Anoush, "The Role of Ali-Shir Nava'i," 7; Limayi and Hasani, "The Role of Ali-Shir Nava'i," 100.

²³ Bartold, *The Political Life of Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, 29.

²⁴ Bartold, *The Political Life of Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, 29.

²⁵ Bartold, *The Political Life of Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, 31.

²⁶ Bartold, *The Political Life of Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, 36.

²⁷ Bartold, *The Political Life of Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, 39.

When Sulṭān Ḥusayn launched a campaign against Shībān Khān in order to recapture Samarqand and suppress his own son, who governed Astarābād, Navā'ī proceeded to welcome the Sulṭān upon his victorious return to Herat. This, however, proved to be the final ceremonial reception he conducted. By that time, both the Sulṭān and Navā'ī, aged sixty-two and sixty respectively, were afflicted by the infirmities of old age. During the reception, Navā'ī fell gravely ill and was immediately transported to Herat for medical treatment. Despite the efforts of physicians, he passed away on Sunday, 11 May 1501, corresponding to 11 Jumādā al-Ākhira 906 AH²⁸. The Sulṭān personally supervised Navā'ī's funeral, which was conducted with full honors befitting his rank and status, and he was subsequently buried in Herat.

Following the death of Navā'ī, the Timurid state of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara in Herat entered a period of political instability. Although his eldest son, Badī' al-Zamān, born to Bīga Sulṭān Begim, the daughter of Sulṭān Sanjar, was expected to succeed him, he encountered opposition from Khādīja Begum, who supported her own son, Muẓaffar Ḥusayn, as claimant to the throne. This situation resulted in the emergence of two rival centers of authority within the same realm, while rebellious princes and feudal lords refused to remit taxes to the central administration. Ultimately, this state of disorder paved the way for the Shībānid forces to capture Herat in 1507, thereby bringing Timurid rule in the city to an end²⁹.

The Political Activities of 'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī during the Reign of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara

'Alī-Shīr Navā'ī, through both his formal and informal governmental roles, established a distinguished and undeniable record of service. His presence at the court of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara and his prudent counsel exerted a profound influence upon the organization of the state and the preservation of political order. Navā'ī's guidance directly shaped the Sulṭān's decisions in both domestic and foreign affairs, rendering him not merely a trusted adviser, but also one of the principal architects, inspirers, and at times executors of court policy.

Mediator and Peacekeeper

Navā'ī played a crucial role in suppressing rebellions and restraining ambitious factions that sought to overthrow Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara. He consistently endeavored to mediate between the Sulṭān's rebellious sons and the central government, as demonstrated by his intervention on behalf of Badī' al-Zamān. Although his initial efforts were obstructed by opportunistic political actors, Navā'ī ultimately succeeded in brokering reconciliation following a series of conflicts. One of the most notable examples of his political acumen was his role in the suppression of Muḥammad Yādgār's seizure of Herat in July 1470. Navā'ī advised the Sulṭān regarding the timing, secrecy, and strategy of the operation. During the campaign, he personally led the assault to secure Yādgār's palace in the Bāgh-i Zāghān, displaying exceptional courage and ensuring the capture of the rebel without unnecessary bloodshed. This event further consolidated his position as a loyal and indispensable ally of the Sulṭān³⁰.

Political Counsel and Influence in State Administration

Navā'ī's court was renowned for its simplicity and freedom from ostentation, and he surrounded himself with scholars, historians, poets, calligraphers, painters, architects, mathematicians, musicians, athletes, and skilled artisans. He extended both political and financial patronage to these intellectual and cultural elites, incorporating them into the administrative sphere and cultivating a productive and harmonious environment. Contemporary figures such as Khwāndamīr emphasized Navā'ī's humility despite his elevated rank, observing that his piety and reverence for scholars remained unwavering even as his authority expanded. He personally attended to the needs of scholars and the poor, thereby combining political authority with a strong sense of moral and social responsibility³¹.

Patronage of Knowledge, Culture, and Public Welfare

Navā'ī possessed extraordinary wealth; however, he devoted the greater part of his fortune to the promotion of education, culture, and public infrastructure. He did not accept gifts from the Sulṭān; rather, the Sulṭān annually bestowed presents upon him. His personal estates generated substantial revenues, which he allocated to the construction and maintenance of schools, bridges, hospitals, mosques, waterworks, and charitable endowments³². Over the course of thirty years, Navā'ī founded approximately 370 charitable institutions, including caravanserais, madrasas, khānqāhs, mosques, and

²⁸ M. Y. Jowzjani, *Amir Ali-Shir Nava'i* (Kabul: Historical Society, 1967), 57.

²⁹ Sardar Alam et al., *A Study of Afghanistan's History*, 219; Bartold, *The Political Life of Mir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, 45.

³⁰ Limayi and Hasani, "The Role of Ali-Shir Nava'i," 86.

³¹ G. D. Khwandamir, *Makarim al-Akhlaq*, ed. M. A. Ashiq (Tehran: Miras, 2000), 126.

³² M. G. M. Ghubar, *Afghanistan in the Course of History* (Kabul: Khawar, 2007), 291.

various public facilities, thereby leaving an enduring material and cultural legacy. He also financed stipends for students and salaries for teachers in order to ensure the advancement of the sciences and arts of his age. Through these efforts, he sought to promote learning and culture while preserving them from direct governmental interference³³.

A Model of Governance

Through his prudent counsel, personal courage, humility, and commitment to public welfare, Navā'ī embodied the ideal of the exemplary statesman. He combined administrative competence with moral integrity, mediating political disputes, preserving social stability, and fostering cultural and educational development. His life illustrates the close relationship between political acumen and cultural patronage during the Timurid period, reflecting the interconnected nature of governance, social responsibility, and intellectual advancement.

1. **The Akhlāṣiyya Madrasa and Khānqāh:** Located near the Anjīl Canal, this complex functioned both as a center of learning and as a Sūfī lodge devoted to spiritual instruction and training.
2. **The Shifā'iyya Madrasa:** This institution focused primarily on religious studies, and possibly medical sciences, while providing support for scholars and students in Herat.
3. **The Niẓāmiyya of Herat:** This institution promoted advanced Islamic learning and higher education in the Timurid capital.
4. **The Khusrāwiyya of Marv:** By extending Navā'ī's educational patronage beyond Herat, this institution contributed to the encouragement of scholarship and learning in the region³⁴.

ʿAlī-Shīr Navā'ī founded the Akhlāṣiyya Madrasa on lands granted to him by Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara. He named the institution "Akhlāṣiyya" in order to reflect his sincerity and loyalty toward the Sulṭān. Khwāndamīr, who himself studied at the madrasa, records that over the course of twenty years, thousands of students from across the Islamic world attended the Akhlāṣiyya Madrasa and its affiliated khānqāh. Many of these students later returned to Herat and other regions as distinguished scholars and teachers, thereby contributing to the intellectual prestige of the city³⁵.

Navā'ī possessed a profound interest in architecture and construction and personally supervised numerous building projects. He patronized artists and architects and participated actively in the reconstruction of the Great Mosque of Herat. Khwāndamīr relates that Navā'ī engaged in daily oversight of the works, personally supervising craftsmen and at times laboring alongside them. His patronage included the distribution of generous rewards and gifts to workers, thereby ensuring both the high quality of construction and the continued motivation of artisans. Owing to these intensive efforts, projects that would ordinarily have required several years to complete were finished within remarkably short periods, sometimes in as little as six or seven months³⁶.

Beyond the sphere of architecture, Navā'ī employed his political influence to support scholars, artists, and cultural figures. He encouraged them to engage in scholarly, artistic, and literary pursuits, thereby cultivating a flourishing intellectual environment in Herat. Despite the considerable demands of governance and administration, he himself contributed actively to science, literature, and the arts, leaving behind a body of invaluable works. Navā'ī's patronage of education, culture, and the arts profoundly transformed the intellectual and artistic life of his age. Contemporary scholars frequently describe the period shaped by the patronage of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara and Navā'ī as an "Eastern Renaissance," emphasizing the remarkable cultural and scientific developments that took place in Herat during this era.

Conclusion

ʿAlī-Shīr Navā'ī was one of the most prominent scholars and statesmen of the Timurid period in Herat. His active involvement in the political and cultural affairs of the age contributed significantly to the advancement of culture and to the formation of a distinguished historical epoch. For approximately thirty-three years, Navā'ī served in various governmental capacities under Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara, including the offices of mihrdār (Keeper of the Royal Seal), Amīr of the Dīvān-i A'lā, governor of Astarābād, as well as confidant and special adviser to the Sulṭān. Owing to his exceptional standing at court, he frequently declined official posts that he regarded as incompatible with his rank and prestige.

³³ Jowzjani, *Amir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, 44.

³⁴ Jowzjani, *Amir Ali-Shir Nava'i*, 29.

³⁵ Khwandamir, *Makarim al-Akhlaq*, 64.

³⁶ Khwandamir, *Makarim al-Akhlaq*, 98.

As a statesman, Navā'ī exercised direct influence over the policies and actions of Bayqara's government and effectively functioned as one of the principal architects and intellectual forces behind the administration. The Sulṭān rarely acted without consulting him, even in military affairs. During the campaign against Yādgār Mīrzā, who had seized the capital, for instance, Sulṭān Ḥusayn followed Navā'ī's counsel, resulting in the swift capture of the rebel and the restoration of the capital to Timurid control. Navā'ī likewise played a crucial role in suppressing uprisings throughout Bayqara's reign. When the inhabitants of Herat revolted in response to excessive taxation, he intervened and resolved the unrest peacefully. Similarly, sectarian disputes—such as conflicts arising from sermons invoking the names of the Twelve Imāms of Shī'ī Islam—were settled through Navā'ī's counsel without violence, despite the Sulṭān's initial inclination toward severe measures. He was also instrumental in mediating conflicts between Sulṭān Ḥusayn and his rebellious sons, as well as disputes involving neighboring states, thereby preventing multiple military confrontations. His mediation between the Sulṭān and his eldest son, Badī' al-Zamān, which restored peace between them, stands as a notable example of his political acumen.

In his capacity as adviser to the Sulṭān, Navā'ī wielded decisive authority in the appointment and dismissal of ministers. Most state officials attained office through his recommendation and support. When their performance proved unsatisfactory, they were removed from office and, in some cases, subjected to trial and the confiscation of their property, as documented in numerous historical sources. Above all, Navā'ī was a steadfast patron of science, learning, and culture. As one of the foremost scholars of his age, he encouraged both the Sulṭān and the state administration to support intellectuals and artists. Employing both his political influence and personal wealth, he promoted cultural development, attracted scholars to Herat, and facilitated remarkable achievements in science, literature, and the arts.

Navā'ī also demonstrated a profound interest in urban development and architecture, commissioning numerous building projects. Many of the structures erected under his patronage continue to stand in present-day Iran and Afghanistan, constituting enduring monuments to his contribution to culture, learning, and civic infrastructure.

Thus, Navā'ī emerged not merely as a high-ranking court official, but as one of the principal architects of political stability and cultural flourishing in the Timurid realm during the reign of Sulṭān Ḥusayn Bayqara. Through his political insight, administrative influence, mediation of internal conflicts, and patronage of learning and the arts, he contributed substantially to the consolidation of the Timurid state and to the transformation of Herat into one of the foremost intellectual and cultural centers of the Islamic world. His contributions played a central role in the cultural efflorescence that modern historians have frequently described as the "Eastern Renaissance." In this respect, Navā'ī's legacy endured not only in the sphere of statecraft, but also in the broader development of Timurid civilization, leaving a lasting impact upon the political, intellectual, and cultural history of the region.

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