

THE AESTHETIC WORLD OF ALI-SHIR NAVA’I’S MASNAVI “SAB’A-I SAYYĀRA “SEB’A-İ SEYYĀRE” MESNEVİSİNDE ALÎ ŞÎR NEVĀÎ’NİN ESTETİK DÜNYASI

BADIA MUHITDINOVA*

SORUMLU YAZAR

MUSLIHIDDIN MUHIDDINOV**

DILRABO NAZAROVA***

Abstract

Sab’a-i Sayyāra, the fourth masnavi of Ali-Shir Nava’i’s *Khamsa*, stands out with its layered structure, which consists of the love story of Behram and Dilarom and six secondary tales interwoven into the main narrative. Although the work is built upon the traditions of Eastern literature, the poet’s original artistic vision, philosophical thoughts, and moral principles are clearly visible in every layer of the text. Through the characters of Bahram and Dilorom, Nava’i offers a profound artistic interpretation of love, loyalty, endurance, and the inner conflicts within the human heart. Using striking and convincing depictions, the poet successfully conveys that two loves cannot coexist in one heart and that the human spirit must possess wholeness and unity. This observation emerges as the fundamental spiritual and intellectual axis of the work. Constructed upon the symbolism of seven planets and pavilions of different colors, this narrative also incorporates socio-political and ethical themes such as the responsibilities of rulership, the discipline of the self, and the administration of justice. Furthermore, in *Sab’a-i Sayyāra*, Nava’i analyzes the *masnavis* of his predecessors most notably Nizami Ganjavi and Amir Khusrow Dehlavi who treated the tale of Bahram and Dilarom, employing a comparative and critical methodology. Thus, the work serves both a literary and a pedagogical purpose. Pointing out the intellectual and artistic shortcomings in those works, he develops a more competent and original interpretation within the framework of his own views. This situation reveals that Nevayi is not only a poet but also a profound literary scholar. This article provides a detailed analysis of the masnavis that address the story of Behram and Dilarom, uncovering their similarities and differences on a scientific basis. Moreover, the originality of Nevayi’s approach to this theme, his artistic skill, and his intellectual contributions are examined in a systematic manner. In conclusion, the masnavi *Sab’a-i Sayyāra* is evaluated from a holistic perspective, not only for its literary value but also for its spiritual and educational function.

Keywords: Khamsa, Ali-Shir Nava’i, Bahram and Dilorom, Sab’a-i Sayyāra, hedonism.

İnceleme Makalesi / Künye: MUHITDINOVA, Badia - Muslihiddin MUHIDDINOV - Dilrabo NAZAROVA. “The Aesthetic World of Ali-Shir Nava’i’s Masnavi ‘Sab’a-i Sayyāra’”. *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Veli Araştırma Dergisi*, Özel Sayı 1 (Ağustos 2026), s. 609-623. <https://doi.org/10.60163/tkhcbva.1927297>

* PhD, Institute of Central Asian Peoples’ Languages and Culture under Samarkand State University named after Sharof Rashidov, Semerkant / Özbekistan, e-posta: badeamuhitdinova1978@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-9281-1190

** PhD, Institute of Central Asian Peoples’ Languages and Culture under Samarkand State University named after Sharof Rashidov, Semerkant / Özbekistan, e-posta: muhiddinovmuslihiddin1@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0001-7187-5793

Öz

Ali Şîr Nevâî'nin *Hamse*'sinin dördüncü mesnevisi olan *Seb'a-i Seyyâre*, Behrâm ile Dilarâm arasındaki sevgi öyküsü ve ana anlatıyı dokuyan altı yan öyküden oluşan katmanlı yapısıyla öne çıkmaktadır. Eserin Doğu edebiyatı gelenekleri üzerine kurulmuş olmasına karşın, şairin özgün sanatsal görüşü, felsefî düşünceleri ve ahlakî ilkeleri metnin her katmanında açıkça görülmektedir. Nevâî, Behrâm ve Dilarâm kişileri aracılığıyla sevgi, bağlılık, dayanma gücü ve insan yüreğindeki iç çekişmelere dair derin bir sanatsal yorum sunmuştur. Şair, etkileyici ve inandırıcı canlandırmalar kullanarak bir yürekte iki sevginin bir arada yaşayamayacağını, insan tininin bütünlük ve birlik taşıması gerektiğini başarıyla aktarmıştır. Bu saptama, eserin temel tinsel ve düşünsel eksenini belirlemektedir. Yedi farklı renkteki köşk ve gezegen simgeciligi üzerinden kurgulanan bu anlatı, aynı zamanda hükümdarlık sorumluluğu, nefis terbiyesi ve adalet idaresi gibi siyasal-ahlakî temaları da bünyesinde barındırmaktadır. Bunun yanında *Seb'a-i Seyyâre*'de Nevâî, Nizâmî-i Gencevî ve Hüsrev-i Dihlevî başta olmak üzere kendinden öncekilerin Behrâm ve Dilarâm öyküsünü işleyen mesnevilerini karşılaştırmalı ve eleştirel bir yöntemle çözümlemektedir. Böylece eser edebî hem de eğitici bir amaca hizmet etmektedir. Söz konusu yapıtlardaki düşünsel ve sanatsal eksiklere işaret eden şair, kendi görüşleri çerçevesinde daha yetkin ve özgün bir yorum geliştirmiştir. Bu durum, Nevâî'nin yalnızca bir şair değil, aynı zamanda derinlikli bir edebiyat bilgini olduğunu da ortaya koymaktadır. Bu yazı, Behrâm ve Dilarâm öyküsünü işleyen mesnevilerin ayrıntılı bir tahlilini sunmakta; aralarındaki benzerlik ve ayrılıkları bilimsel bir temelde açığa çıkarmaktadır. Ayrıca Nevâî'nin bu konuya yaklaşımındaki özgünlük, sanatsal becerisi ve düşünsel katkıları da düzenli bir biçimde incelenmektedir. Neticede *Seb'a-i Seyyâre* mesnevisi, yazınsal değerinin yanı sıra tinsel ve eğitici işlevi bakımından da bütüncül bir bakışla değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hamse, Ali Şîr Nevâî, Behrâm ve Dilorom, *Seb'a-i Seyyâre*, hedonizm.

Introduction

Ali-Shir Nava'i's masterpiece, *Sab'a-i Sayyâra* (The Seven Planets), stands as a monumental achievement in the history of Turkic literature, representing a pinnacle of artistic innovation and philosophical depth within the Khamsa tradition. This study seeks to explore how Nava'i, while operating within the established frameworks of Eastern epic poetry, successfully redefined the legend of Bahram Gur and Dilorom by infusing it with a unique socio-political and spiritual dimension. Unlike his predecessors, Nava'i does not merely narrate a tale of royal romance and hunting exploits; instead, he constructs a complex allegorical structure where each of the seven stories told by the various princesses serves as a moral mirror reflecting the internal struggle between earthly desires and divine wisdom.

The epic's compositional complexity is matched by its profound psychological insight, as Nava'i examines the destructive nature of unchecked hedonism and the transformative power of true, unified love. By employing a comparative and critical methodology, this article highlights how Nava'i engaged in an intellectual dialogue with the works of Nizami Ganjavi and Amir Khusrau Dehlavi, pointing out their artistic shortcomings while offering a more refined and "perfected" interpretation that aligns with his own humanistic and Sufi ideals (Levend, 1965, 119).

Furthermore, the analysis delves into the linguistic mastery of Nava'i, who utilized the Chagatai language to create a sophisticated aesthetic experience that elevated the vernacular to the status of a high classical tongue (Erarslan, 1993, 167). The central spiritual axis of the work the impossibility of harboring two conflicting loves in one heart is treated not just as a romantic trope, but as a fundamental principle of human integrity and spiritual salvation. Ultimately, *Sab'a-i Sayyâra* is presented

here as a bridge between the traditional and the innovative, a work that functions simultaneously as a critique of kingship, a manual for moral conduct, and a sublime poetic expression of the soul's quest for wholeness, thereby securing Nava'i's legacy as a profound thinker and a peerless literary scholar in the global canon of classical literature.

Ali-Shir Nava'i's Approach to the Khamsa Tradition

The symbol of Bahrom was one of Nava'i's favorite symbols to be remembered over and over again. While mentioning Bahrom and Dilorom in Nava'i's ghazals, each time he mentioned their different features (depending on the theme and main idea of a particular ghazal) and thereby strengthened and substantiated his ideas. For example:

Chun chiqar Bahromi qotil ko'zlaring andeshasi,

Xasta jonimniki qotil xanjari ozor etar.

Or:

Ey nasimi subh, ahvolim Diloromg'a ayt,

Zulfi sunbul, yuzi gul, sarvi gulandonimg'a ayt.

But these do not satisfy the poet. His noble intention was to create a great epic about Bahrom. It was just a part of the great patriotic poet's great dream, such as the creation of "Khamsa". Consequently, "Khamsa" was the highest peak of medieval Persian-Tajik literature, which was considered a test of the talent of Eastern poets. "Khamsa", which includes one philosophical-didactic and four romantic-heroic epics, was also considered to be the best example of an epic work.

The poets expressed the interesting deep ideas of their time, and their current thoughts through these epics. The main goal of Ali-Shir Nava'i, who reached the peak of Persian-Tajik literature in lyric poetry, was to create the *Khamsa* and delight the Turkish people with these wonderful gems. Whilst beginning each epic, Nava'i did not conceal his intention to make all Turkic peoples possess such poetic gems as the *Khamsa* and was proud to have undertaken this noble task. This blessed dream, the idea of serving his people, gave him wings, inspired him, stirred the sea of souls, and revealed the mine of jewels. Nava'i wrote:

Men turkcha boshlabon rivoyat,

Qildim bu fasonani hikoyat.

Kim shuhrati chun jahong'a to'lg'ay,

Turk eliga dog'i bahra bo'lg'ay.

Nevchunki bukun jahonda atrok

Ko'ptur hush tab'u sof idrok (Navoi, 1960, 454).

From this *Layli and Majnun*, in *Sab'a-i Sayyāra* this idea is further developed:

Ki nekim kilk savti soldi sado,

Forsi lafz birla topdi ado.

Forsi bilgan ayladi idrok,

Lek mahrum qoldilar atrok,

Sen chun nazmimngni turktoz etting,

Forsi tildin ehtiroz etting.

Holiyo chun zamonda sultonlar,

*Ko`pargi keldi taxmisa xonlar,
Dahr aro shah chu turk voqe`dur,
El aro turk lafzi shoye`dur.
Chun bu ma`nini aylading malhuz
Turk ulus dog`i bo`ldilar mahzuz (Navoi, 1960, 608).*

Ali-Shir Nava'i, the master who reached the peak of Persian-Tajik literature in lyric poetry, pursued the primary goal of composing the *Khamsa* in the Chagatai language to delight the Turkish people. The poet openly expressed his desire to make all Turkic peoples inherit such poetic gems, taking immense pride in this cultural endeavor. This noble dream, rooted in the idea of serving his nation, inspired his creative output. The power of Nava'i's metaphorical expression in shaping human thought systems and understanding of the world is also emphasized in contemporary academic studies (Yılmaz, 2025, 313). In *Hayratü'l-Ebrâr*, he incorporates the story of Bahram Gur, using it as an ironic warning to contemporary rulers regarding the dangers of neglecting state administration for the sake of sensual indulgence. Through these narrative devices, the poet prepared the foundational concepts for *Sab'a-i Sayyâra*.

The Political and Historical Context of the Comparison

The parallelism between the failures of Bahram Gur and the Timurid princes of the period is deeply anchored in the socio-political realities of the late fifteenth century. During the reign of Sultan Husayn Bayqara in Herat, the brilliance of the Timurid Renaissance was shadowed by political fragmentation and succession struggles among regional princes. The opulent court lifestyle and neglect of rural welfare created a discrepancy between administrative duties and personal indulgence. Nevâî uses the allegorical figure of Bahram to critique these governance failures, urging the sovereign to recognize that true statehood requires moral vigilance and the protection of justice.

The Differences Between *Sab'a-i Seyyâre* and the Stories About Bahram Written by Its Predecessors

Completed in 889 AH (1483–1484 CE) and consisting of nearly 5,000 verses, the epic is divided into 37 chapters, 14 of which serve as the preface and introduction. Positioned as the fourth work of the *Khamsa*, *Sab'a-i Seyyâre* follows other romantic epics such as *Farhad and Shirin* and *Layli and Majnun*.

While the narrative initially suggests a romantic reunion between Bahram and Dilorom, the happiness proves temporary, ending in a tragic catastrophe that reflects Nevâî's worldview of worldly transience. The structural uniqueness of the work lies in its complex allegorical framework, where the internal stories told by the seven princesses transform the narrative from a simple romance into a profound moral mirror. It had become a tradition to write “*Khamsa*”, to compete in this field, and after Nizami, a number of poets wrote on this subject. It is known that Navoi had to think about the “*Khamsa*” created before him and react to his predecessors before embarking on this work. It should be noted that Navoi did not react to his teachers in any of his works, except for “*Khamsa*”, as in “*Sab'ai Sayyar*”: he did not point out their shortcomings. “*Sab'ai Sayyar*” is the most differentiated and most modified work of Nizami and Khusrav.

“*Sab'ai Sayyar*” was written in response to Nizami Ganjavi's “*Haft Paykar*” and Khusrav Dehlavi's “*Hasht Behisht*”. The common points and differences of Nizami's

and Khusraw's works have been mentioned above. We would like to tell you more about their differences from "Sab'ai Sayyar", especially in the plot, during the analysis of Navoi's work. Now let's talk about the differences that Navoi pointed out, what he saw as shortcomings. After writing traditional chapters such as hamdu naat(praise) , the poet went on to the definition of words, compares prose and verse, considers poetry superior to prose, and enumerates literary genres, emphasizing the achievements of past poets in this regard, and goes on to praise Nizami and Khusrav. The poet compares the work of Nizami with the work of Khusrav and shows the superiority of Nizami:

*Ne bino solsa burnog'i me'mor,
Ul qilib zeru ziynatin zarkor,
Ul ochib yuz guli riyoz Eram,
Gullar uzra bu yog'durub shabnam,
Kelturub ul nigori ro' toza,
Anga surtub bu vusmavu g'ozza.
Yo'qki, har sarv nozkim ul ekib,
Yana bir zod sarv ham bu chekib.
Ul ne gulruhki jilvagar aylab,
Yana birni bu pardadar aylab,
Muni ko'rgan kishi hamon sog'inib,
Ikkisin balki tav'amon sog'inib (Navoi, 1960, 470).*

This shows the role of Navoi's predecessors in the field of literature, the services of style, the importance of his works. He then carefully states his attitude in this chapter in general:

*So'zni aylab alar so'zig'a adil,
Balki tag'yir etib, berib tabdil.
Tab'i beboki noharosondin,
Tortib andoq sipah Xurosondin (Navoi, 1960, 471).*

The great poet uttered, to recognize the skill of the masters, to learn from them, to try to achieve the success they have achieved, to follow them; to take the theme they used, to change, to update, and to create a new work; to compete with these great men without fear, if Nizami from Ganja, Khusraw from India conquered the world by word, I will conquer the world from Khorasan. Then he pretended to be an ant, compared his predecessors to a lion, and sometimes emphasized that an ant approached a lion and considered himself a lion.

Alisher Navoi deepened his thoughts in the next chapter and clearly stated his plans. To do this, he used more interesting method to present an episode of a dream and expressed his thoughts by the character of sage from the dream. By this, he tried to substantiate, to prove his claims. But the poet stated without hesitation, without arrogance, with extreme thoughtfulness, carefully:

*Tab`ham garchi asru rog`ib edi,
Lek ko`p ehtiyot vojib edi (Navoi, 1960, 476).*

The poet's temperament is powerful, even though he realized that he had the ability to compete with his masters, but he was careful. Because, according to Navoi, Nizami

and Khusrav were masters, so they did not need to be careful; the student needs to be careful. When the masters scatter the pearls carelessly, it was less on one side and more on the other side without falling flat - the balance was not maintained. Student - scattered the pearls carefully. The fact that the plot, composition and events in the works of Navoi, Nizami and Khusrav do not coincide means that pearl was scattered. They had a lot of art, but it is not systematized:

Ul ikov ustodi mohir edi,

Kim mahorat alarda zohir edi.

Chun tuzib bu bisot o'tmishlar,

Qilmayin ehtiyot o'tmishlar.

Men de olmanki sahlvar tushmish,

Bexabar tushmish ul agar tushmish (Navoi, 1960, 476).

The errors in their work were not deliberately made consciously, but were inadvertently caused by carelessness. As a student, Navoi tries not to repeat these mistakes. According to Navoi, such shortcomings in the epics of Nizami and Husrav ("Haft paykar" and "Hasht bihisht") are as follows:

First:

Biri bukim, yo'q, anda moyai dard,

Qildilar ishq so'zidin ani fard.

Kim birov mehrdin bari bo'lg'ay,

Boqma, gar mehri xovariy bo'lg'ay!

Bo'lsa tarix alarg'a gar matlub,

Anda so'z bog'lamoq emasdur xo'b.

So'z yasardin chu topti piroya,

Ishqdin xushdur anda sarmoya.

Kim ko'ngulga o'ti asar qilg'ay,

Jonga ko'ydimagi xabar qilg'ay,

Yo'qsa yolg'on demakdakim bezadur

Chun uzoq chekti asru bemazadur (Navoi, 1960, 476).

Alî Şîr Nevâî's critique of his predecessors should not be viewed merely as a list of shortcomings, but rather as an exposition of his own aesthetic, literary, and philosophical principles. Because the great poet held distinct theoretical views, he could not agree with his precursors on these fundamental issues, thereby demonstrating the originality of his own creative method. In his view, a work of art must first and foremost engage the reader, provide aesthetic pleasure, and stir the heart. A fragmentary chronicle of historical events does not satisfy the reader, regardless of how many beautiful metaphors or stylistic embellishments it contains. A true masterpiece must be founded upon the theme of love—an emotion that generates pain, nourishes the soul, and evokes deep emotional resonance. According to the poet, writing ungrounded myths or falsehoods leads to ignorance, as readers do not believe in their veracity. Furthermore, he noted that the works of Nizami Ganjavi and Amir Khusrau Dehlavi contained excessive episodes without this love foundation, which unnecessarily prolonged the narrative. Consequently, when the poet refers to a work based on a "love foundation," he is championing a mature work of art with a cohesive and holistic plot, where events develop progressively and consistently.

The Second Critique: Structural Inconsistency

Regarding his second critical principle, Alisher Navoi cites the following verses:

*Yana bir buki anda ba'zi ish,
Zohiran nomunosabat tushmish.*

As a result of structural disorderliness in the works of his predecessors, many episodes and events become incongruous, and certain images fail to align with reason and logic. Alisher Navoi cites the episodes detailing the construction of the seven towers for the glory of Bahram, excessive feasting with the princesses of the seven climates, drinking wine, and listening to tales while intoxicated. He argues that praising or defending the construction of royal palaces purely for hedonistic amusement is morally and aesthetically impermissible. Moreover, questioning the logic of an intoxicated king listening to tales from princesses highlights a profound contradiction.

Compositional Innovation and Structural Bridge

Notwithstanding these critiques, Alisher Navoi's compositional genius is demonstrated by his integration of the seventh story, which functions simultaneously as an embedded narrative and a crucial bridge within the main plot. The structural innovation of this framework transforms the text from a simple romance into a sophisticated allegorical mirror that drives the narrative's moral and spiritual progression.

The kings' daughters are gentle, caressing, affectionate, and created for love; it is impossible to judge or insult them. It is assumed that even if such events had taken place, it would be unreasonable to include them in a fiction and present them to the public in verse.

The events of a fictional narrative must be convincing to the reader, arising logically from one another and remaining relevant to life and human relationships. This represents Alisher Navoi's attitude toward fiction and his demands for the genre. In this way, Alisher Navoi, on the one hand, demonstrated that he defended and followed justice in literature, and on the other hand, he continued the stated idea, once again demanding integrity, consistency, and logic in the plot and composition of the fiction. The depiction of unrelated, unrealistic events undermines not only the core idea of the work but also its artistic value.

Third

*Bo'yla nodon uchun yozib avsof,
Anga qilg'aylar o'zlarin vassof (Navoi, 1960, 477).*

In the epics of Nizami and Khusraw, they created the image of an ignorant and reveller king, not Bahrom, who set an example for others with his qualities.

*Madhini behisob yozg'aylar,
Balki mavzun kitob yozg'aylar.
Har bir ul nazmida ko'rib ko'p ranj,
Qilg'ay o'z "Panj ganj" idin bir ganj,
Olloh, olloh, ne ganj bo'g'ay bu.
Sarbasar elga ranj bo'lg'ay bu (Navoi, 1960, 477).*

They described Bahrom in this way and approved of his bad qualities. Such a work does not benefit the people, but rather harms them. The true task of literature

is to educate the public, glorify kindness, and champion virtue. Therefore, instead of praising immoral kings, they should be criticized and held accountable, while righteous kings should be exalted.

Thus, we observe that Alisher Navoi presented his critique of his contemporaries through three distinct points, supporting them with clear evidence. The first shortcoming lies in the thematic structure. In the epics of his predecessors, there is a lack of a single, unifying love theme. Instead of reworking historical events around a central motif, they relegated the theme of love to a secondary level. The second shortcoming stems from the first. Because a clear, overarching theme is not established, the narrative structure becomes disjointed, featuring unrelated and illogical episodes. The authors forcibly introduced events into the plot to advance their ideas, which undermined the credibility of the narrative. The third shortcoming concerns the depiction of the protagonist, Bahram. In the precursors' works, the protagonist is portrayed as unstable, and his negative qualities prevail. Rather than condemning these flaws or guiding the character toward moral elevation, the authors treated these traits with unwarranted indulgence.

Alisher Navoi took these critiques as a foundational program for his own creative work. He sought to avoid these shortcomings to craft a useful, persuasive, and artistically sound literary masterpiece. This deliberate approach is clearly reflected in his own words:

*Kim latofatdin elga jon berg'ay,
Tan aro ruhdin nishon berg'ay,
Aql og'ziga kelturub kulgu,
Ko'ziga ruhning solib uyqu,
Har biri zoti yuz g'aroyib ila,
Jilva qilgay o'qush ajoyib ila...
Sen bu da'vida xurram o'lg'aysan,
Nuqta derda musallam o'lg'aysan! (Navoi, 1960, 475).*

Let us consider again how true these views of Navoi are when comparing the epics of the three great poets. However, it should be noted that most of the shortcomings identified by Navoi belong to Amir Khusrav. Because in Nizami at the end of the epic Bahrom became a prudent king who fights for justice, refused luxury; Thus, Navoi concludes his chapter by consistently setting out his views, showing the creative principles of his work:

*Yo'q erdi hech choravu tadbir,
Kim biror yerda bo'lmag'ay tag'yir (Navoi, 1960, 477).*

This means that “Sab’ai Sayyar” is not only a series of episodes, events, symbols, but also a new work that is radically different from “Haft Paykar” and “Hasht Paradise”.

The inner stories of “Sab’ai Sayyar” and their connection to the forming plot

*Lutf bu nazm aro bag'oyatdur,
G'araz ammo yeti hikoyatdur.
Chunki qoyil yeti musofir edi,
Ki alar sayr ishiga mohir edi.
Bo'ldi chu bu raqam ishi tayyor,
Qo'ydim otini “Sab'ai sayyor” (Navoi, 1960, 614).*

Alisher Navoi quoted these verses in the last chapter of his epic. When the poet referred to the “seven stories of greed,” he focused on the inner stories, ensuring that the story of Bahrom was not merely a secondary or functional tool. On the contrary, by focusing on the Bahram narrative, he elevated it into the structural framework of the epic, refined it carefully, and connected all the events of the epic to it.

From this perspective, several significant interpretations emerge. First, Alisher Navoi reflected his socio-political views, progressive ideas, and moral ideals through these inner stories. In Bahram’s narrative, the poet focused heavily on the themes of love and romance. Second, although Bahram’s narrative became an original story in the interpretation of Alisher Navoi, it remained tied to the traditional plot. In the inner stories, however, he was completely free from tradition and had the freedom to create entirely new narrative content. According to convention, Nizami abandoned Firdawsi’s stories and added seven new ones himself, while Amir Khusrau Dehlavi also created new stories. Each author demonstrated the ability to create an epic work in this manner. For this reason, the creators of the *Khamasa* did not name the fourth epic after its protagonist, Bahram Gur, but instead chose a title referring to the seven stories within it (whereas in Firdawsi, the epic was titled *Bahram Gur*).

However, the ratio and proportion between the main story and the inner stories differ among each poet. In Nizami’s epic, the events of Bahram’s adventure retain their primary managerial significance and form a major part of the work. In Amir Khusrau Dehlavi, the events surrounding Bahram are shortened, separated from the inner stories, and relegated to a secondary position. Alisher Navoi, like Amir Khusrau Dehlavi, shortened most of the Bahram story, but composed it in such a way that the protagonist did not lose his leading role. After Alisher Navoi altered the framing plot and adjusted the content of the events, he uniquely defined the connection points between the inner stories and the main plot. In *Haft Paykar*, the inner stories serve to perpetuate Bahram’s negative traits namely, his indifference and revelry rather than encouraging moral elevation. The original goal was simply to establish order in the capital and palace, bringing the ruler from the desert to continue his habits in the city. The castle and the beauties within it served this purpose.

In Ali-Shir Nava’i’s work, the inner stories not only alleviated Bahram’s suffering in exile, but they also influenced him morally in various ways. In addition, the inner stories served as a narrative tool to uncover the protagonist’s main grief his separation from Dilorom. An example of this is the dedication of the seventh inner story to Dilorom. Nizami and Amir Khusrau Dehlavi narrated the inner stories from the perspective of the royal princesses, as both *Haft Paykar* and *Hasht Bihisht* describe the princesses being brought for Bahram’s entertainment. In *Sab’a-i Sayyāra*, Bahram also drinks wine with princesses in his castles. However, he does so not for mere pleasure, but to alleviate the grief of separation from Dilorom. The female characters are not portrayed as sources of hedonistic revelry, but as dignified, delicate lovers possessing independence and dignity. When evening falls, the princesses withdraw, leaving Bahram alone with a stranger who tells a tale.

The number seven holds symbolic meaning in Nizami, rooted in the ancient worldview of the Orient. Amir Khusrau Dehlavi focused on eight stories, comparing them to the gardens of paradise, and titled his epic *Hasht Bihisht*. Nava’i introduced the image of seven travelers (strangers) to separate the princesses from the role of narrators, thereby increasing the logical integrity and authenticity of the work. Travelers who have witnessed diverse adventures possess greater wisdom. In this way, the poet complemented the symbolic content of the epic: Bahram is a wandering

planet that must be surrounded by other planetary figures. Not only are the storytellers themselves wanderers, but the participants in the stories they tell are also wanderers, representing relatives or close individuals. As the main participants of the work represent the seven planets, the poet titled the work *Sab'a-i Sayyāra*.

A primary distinction between *Sab'a-i Sayyāra* and the works of Nizami Ganjavi and Amir Khusrau Dehlavi is that the inner stories do not serve merely for the protagonist's amusement; rather, they are designed for his moral education and the development of his virtues. To this end, Alisher Navoi addressed critical socio-political issues relevant to his era, contrasting the king with virtuous figures in the tales. He directly compared Bahram Gur to Sultan Husayn Bayqara, urging the sultan to embrace justice and learn from the ruler's mistakes. The righteous figures depicted in the narratives serve as moral exemplars for both the character and the contemporary Timurid rulers, demonstrating how to overcome negative traits.

Although the seventh story functions conditionally within the narrative cycle, it differs structurally from the other six as it is a direct continuation of the main plot. The unifying motif of the first six stories is the principle of justice. Through the ruler's implementation of justice, the state achieves prosperity, the public remains secure, and science and culture are able to flourish:

*Podshohi durur ajab odil,
Adli olam eli aro shomil.
Zulm torini sifat uzmish,
Adl sozini ul sifat tuzmish.
Kim aning davlatidin ahli zamon,
Topmamishlar bag'ayri amnu amon.
Mulk aro chunki bo'ldi amniyat,
Yuzlanur mulk eliga jam'iyat.
Andin o'qdur hunar hisobi ham,
Fazl ila donish iqtisobi ham (Navoi, 1960, 552).*

The main theme across these narratives (excluding the Jeweler's story) is love, yet it is interpreted differently in each tale, highlighting various aspects of the emotion. For instance, the first story combines love with honesty, generosity, humanity, and bravery through Farrukh's devotion to his wife, Ahi. The third story celebrates the triumph over difficulty through courage and willpower, while the fourth and fifth stories emphasize the transformative, saving power and immortality of love, showing that it can rescue both lovers and others from calamity.

The sixth story demonstrates that attaining the beloved requires contentment, honesty, and truthfulness. Throughout the narratives, the characters face numerous obstacles and hardships, remaining steadfast in their hope for reunion. Furthermore, the lovers renounce worldly pleasures, demonstrating self-sacrifice and devotion. This steadfastness serves as an implicit rebuke to Bahrom, who tormented his beloved, and functions as a source of hope that encourages him toward eventual reunion with Dilorom.

*Shomi hijronga q'olmog'ay jovid,
Qayda subhi visol tutqay umid ... (Navoi, 1960, 522).*

Another main idea of the stories is generosity. Generosity is widely described as Navoi's best human trait. Since the events of the inner stories are considered

the adventures of kings and princes, they also depicted palace conspiracies, civil wars, quarrels and disputes, and the negative conditions in this society are strongly condemned. For example, in the fourth story, when Jaipur realized that he would lose his job, his successor tortured the innocent Mas'ud, threw him in prison and pronounced him dead. The stories again explain the issue of happiness as one of the main themes, which is accompanied by justice, generosity, truthfulness. This is confirmed by the fact that the names of Saad, Mas'ud, Muqbil, and Farrukh (all of them are happy, mean happiness) are given to the protagonists. These people are happy because they have done good deeds in their lives. Each of the six inner stories has a separate plot, they are independent works with a complete plot. While Nizami's stories are dominated by supernatural forces and have a mythical, lyrical spirit, Khusrav's stories are based on humor, resourcefulness, cheerfulness, light-hearted content, and the plot is created accordingly, Navoi's stories reflect serious human relations and are based on important social issues. In Navoi, too, the stories are rich in adventures, widely used in realistic imagery, as well as provided with realistic content, connected with life events.

Analysis of the Plots of the Internal Stories

Alisher Navoi opens the narrative by describing the great sea and the activities of Jabir, establishing a convenient exposition that prepares the reader for the setting and the pirate's evil intentions. As the plot develops, both protagonists are captured, and although their fathers attempt to rescue them, the antagonist temporarily gains the upper hand. The tension peaks when Jabir falls in love with Mehr, allowing her garden access, which ultimately leads to Suhayl's liberation. Alisher Navoi avoids unnecessarily prolonging the final battle, recognizing that the resolution of the story lies in the rescue of the captives.

The composition of this story is highly structured, featuring a progression from the island setting and the captivity of the protagonists to the destruction of the fleet, Navdar's mistake, and the ultimate salvation of the heroes. The remaining episodes in the epic exhibit a similarly scrupulous composition and a dynamic plot, demonstrating Alisher Navoi's incomparable artistry. Of the inner stories in *Sab'a-i Seyyâre*, only the seventh is directly integrated into the main framing story. Many literary critics view this as a mark of the poet's skill, but the text reveals that this story is not merely appended; rather, it functions as a direct continuation of the main plot, serving as a structural bridge between the inner and outer narratives.

Furthermore, Alisher Navoi draws deliberate parallels between the inner stories and the failures of Bahram Gur. For instance, in the story of Mehr and Suhayl, King Navdar is distracted by the beautiful scenery and a deer hunt, causing him to become separated from his army and captured. This action directly mirrors the negligence and hunting addiction of Bahram Gur, which Alisher Navoi severely criticizes in the framing plot. Similarly, the fourth story illustrates the dangers of intoxication, reflecting the poet's critique of Bahram Gur's hedonism.

Ultimately, the inner stories are not disjointed; rather, they are cohesive and independent narratives that interact with one another, complement the main theme, and ensure that the epic remains a unified masterpiece.

Ideological Content and Artistic-Aesthetic Value of the Epics

It should be noted that the ideological content of a work of fiction cannot be separated from its artistic form; such a separation is made only conditionally to study

it in detail for the convenience of scientific observation. Therefore, since there is a change in the plot, and each poet creates it based on their own goals, aesthetic views, and ideals, the plot must reflect the creative idea and the requirements of the era in which the author lived. This is evident from the study of the plots of the works we have just compared: *Shahnameh*, *Haft Paykar*, *Hasht Bihisht*, and *Sab'a-i Seyyâre*. Whether it is Firdawsi, Nizami, or Alisher Navoi, each of them changed the plot of the story, directed it toward a specific goal, and used it to express and confirm certain ideas. This is reflected not only in the general appearance of the plot line and the main fable but also in every element and ring of the narrative. Firdawsi fills the events of the *Shahnameh* with accounts of hunting and archery in order to create the image of heroism and express the legendary power of a brave guardian and heir to the throne of Iran. He emphasizes Bahram's skill in archery, his physical power, his bravery in defeating enemies, and his capability, thereby forgiving his flaws and glorifying him. He attributes the temporary loss of the throne not to Bahram's negligence, but to the betrayal of the courtiers.

Nizami, on the other hand, expanded the theme of love, which had been relegated to a secondary status in Firdawsi's work as a manifestation of Bahram's heroism, and made it the central theme of the narrative. Unlike Firdawsi, he reduced the episodes devoted to hunting, archery, and wandering in the steppes to fight with wild animals (with the exception of the events at Nooman's palace), focusing instead on Bahram's vivid character and his actions in governance. The hunting elements are subordinated to this main theme. The great poet created not a king of legendary power, but a real ruler, addressing the social problems of his time: the relationship between the ruler and the palace, the king and the people, the personality of the monarch, and the necessity of justice, peace, and the inviolability of the homeland. In his view, no matter how wise, enterprising, or brave a king may be, if he does not understand the plight of the people, neglects state affairs, fails to punish oppressors, and ignores justice, his reign will not last, and he does not deserve to rule. Debauchery, excessive luxury, and ignorance lead to the destruction of the country and the suffering of the people. The seven towers in *Haft Paykar*, the stories of the seven princesses, the tale of the shepherd and the dog, and the episodes of the invasion of the Qing dynasty all served to promote this idea. Amir Khusrau Dehlavi significantly altered Nizami's concept, softening the harsh remarks made against the king and, in a sense, defending Bahram and his negative qualities. This represented a step backward from Nizami's critical stance, though it reflected Amir Khusrau Dehlavi's own political and social views and aesthetic principles. However, it should also be noted that the motives of love and the adventures related to it emerged more strongly in Amir Khusrau Dehlavi than in Nizami.

Alisher Navoi began writing the fourth epic of the *Khamasa*, *Sab'a-i Seyyâre*, with the intention of further strengthening this love motif and making it the primary theme. In this regard, he was ahead of both Nizami and Amir Khusrau Dehlavi: the thematic content of the work, the thought, the idea, and the meaning of the evolving events that connect and unite the narrative are all driven by the conflicts of love. This influence extended not only to the main framing story from beginning to end but also to the other six inner stories.

One might ask what Alisher Navoi's purpose was in making love the main theme, and whether doing so deprived the work of other ideas, especially since he had already addressed love extensively in *Farhad and Shirin* and *Layli and Majnun*. Did he simply want to ensure the originality of his work through this approach? First of

all, it must be noted that the theme of love is highlighted in each of Alisher Navoi's epics, but its specific meaning is resolved artistically in each case. Second, Alisher Navoi did not strip love of its social dimensions by making it the main theme. In *Sab'a-i Seyyâre*, important issues of the era—such as the inviolability of the state, justice and patriotism, the fight against oppression, and the contrast between just and ignorant kings—were boldly and positively addressed. At the same time, unlike his predecessors, Alisher Navoi treated these issues differently. In his work, these socio-political ideas are linked to the theme of love, described in close connection within both the main story and the inner tales. The social motives are particularly strong in the inner stories, complementing the main character and connecting the narrative to the contemporary context through the influence of the main symbol. Alisher Navoi directly addressed Sultan Husayn Bayqara and Badiuzzaman, urging them to follow the virtues of justice and renounce the negative qualities displayed by Bahram.

The primary purpose of making love the central theme in *Sab'a-i Seyyâre* was to consolidate the narrative around a single focal point, providing structural integrity and regularity to the plot to create a perfectly formed work of art. This method allowed Alisher Navoi to eliminate loosely connected, episodic accounts of hunting and archery, resulting in a concise, coherent, and engaging plot. Furthermore, it provided the space for a deeper exploration of the characters' inner psychological states and experiences, thereby expressing advanced philosophical and socio-political ideals more powerfully.

In this work, the protagonist Bahram Gur is given an entirely new interpretation. Rather than being portrayed merely as an arrogant and selfish king indifferent to his people's fate, he is depicted as a pure-hearted, tormented lover caught in the conflict between the demands of kingship and the devotion of love. At the beginning of the epic, Bahram is shown with selfish tendencies, but by the end, he transforms into a compassionate figure completely devoted to his beloved.

The female characters also evolved significantly across the different versions of the epic. Fitna in Nizami's *Haft Paykar* and Dilorom in Alisher Navoi's *Sab'a-i Seyyâre* cannot be equated. Fitna is depicted as a simple lover who cares for Bahram but lacks the deep, devoted, and artistic passion of Dilorom. Alisher Navoi's Dilorom is a gifted artist with a tender heart and unwavering devotion. The poet explores her character through various dimensions, with her trials and sufferings described in warm, poignant verses.

Through this interpretation, Alisher Navoi explores the conflict between kingship and love. He posits that pure love and absolute sovereign power cannot easily coexist—one must either dedicate oneself to love or focus fully on the kingdom. This philosophical conflict resonated deeply with the socio-political realities of the late fifteenth century. Many Timurid princes abandoned their administrative duties for a life of indulgence, which destabilized the state. Consequently, the epic serves as a direct critique of Bahram's arrogance, drunkenness, and self-indulgence. The eventual downfall and tragic end of the king serve as a moral lesson and a warning against such vices. Ultimately, Alisher Navoi fully realized the artistic and ideological program he outlined in the prologue of *Sab'a-i Seyyâre*, blending romantic themes with pressing socio-political concerns:

1. The basis of the epic is the theme of love.
2. Its plot, events have regularity, logical proportions, chain sequence.
3. Bahrom is not a debauchee, a drinker, a lover, a selfish king, he is a steadfast

and faithful lover, in which the positive qualities are described, the negative qualities are condemned.

Alisher Navoi embedded a wide array of virtues into the fabric of *Sab'a-i Seyyâre*, including justice, humanity, generosity, purity, honesty, and patriotism. The epic stands out within the “Khamisa” for its thematic diversity, vibrant imagery, and rich narrative texture. Each individual tale operates as a cohesive, self-contained epic, allowing the poet to explore multiple philosophical ideas and complex character archetypes simultaneously.

In terms of poetic artistry and language, the epic is widely celebrated. The poet detailed the inner psychological struggles of Bahram with deep insight, while sketching the delicate, refined traits of Dilorom and the other female characters with exceptional lyricism. In doing so, Alisher Navoi achieved a synthesis of styles, combining the robust and authoritative language found in Nizami’s work with the sweet, graceful tone of Amir Khusrau Dehlavi’s poetry.

The evolution of the Bahram Gur narrative from Firdawsi through Nizami and Amir Khusrau Dehlavi to Alisher Navoi illustrates a gradual shift in structure and aesthetic philosophy. With the passage of time, the plot and course of events adapted to reflect new socio-political and moral perspectives, with each author responding to the artistic and ideological demands of their own era.

Ultimately, *Sab'a-i Seyyâre* is not only a masterpiece of the khamisa and Uzbek classical literature, but it also represents a major milestone in the development of Eastern epic poetry. The epic elevated the genre to new heights and served as a direct model for subsequent literary works in the tradition, influencing later poets such as Gharibi and Sayqali.

Conclusion

Alisher Navoi’s *Sab'ai Sayyora* represents a significant paradigm shift in the evolution of the traditional Bahram Gur narrative. By placing the theme of love at the center of the narrative, the poet departed from the episodic, hunting-heavy structure of his predecessors and achieved an unprecedented degree of logical integrity and compositional balance. The inner stories serve not only as an allegorical mirror to reflect upon the king’s moral shortcomings and psychological torment but also as a vehicle to promote progressive socio-political ideals, justice, and generosity. Through this sophisticated framework, Alisher Navoi transformed a traditional romance into a profound critique of contemporary Timurid governance, urging rulers to abandon destructive vices and emulate the virtues of righteous leadership.

Ultimately, this masterpiece within the *Khamisa* synthesizes the robust, authoritative style of Nizami with the graceful lyricism of Amir Khusrau Dehlavi to create a unified and distinct artistic vision. The epic not only refined the psychological depth of its characters elevating the portrayal of its female figures and transforming the protagonist from a reckless ruler into a devoted lover but also established a new aesthetic standard for Eastern epic poetry. Its legacy and profound impact resonated across subsequent centuries, inspiring many other works in the tradition and solidifying its place as a monumental achievement in classical literature.

References

- Aliev, R. *About Saiqali and his work Bahrom and Gulandom*. Tashkent: Science, 1960a,.
- Aliev, R. *About Saiqali's epic Bahrom and Gulandom*. Issues of Uzbek Language and Literature, 1960b, no. 1.
- Aliev, R. *Saiqali and his epic Bahrom and Gulandom* (Candidate thesis). Tashkent, 1964. Inventory no. R.D. 943.
- Alisher Navoi. *Khamsa*. Critical text. Prepared for publication by P. Shamsiyev. Tashkent: Fan, 1960.
- Amir Khusrau Dehlavi. *Matla'ul-Anvar*. Critical text compiled and preface by Takhir Ahmed ogly Magerramov. Introductory article by G. Yu. Aliev. Moscow: Nauka, 1975, pp. 167–168.
- Eraslan, K. *Mizânu'l Evzân*. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 1993.
- Gwahariya, A. *Persian and Georgian versions of Bakhram and Gulandam*. Journal of the Peoples of Asia and Africa, 1967, no. 2, p. 114.
- Levend, A. S. *Ali Şîr Nevâî: Hayatı, Sanatı ve Kişiliği* (Cilt 1). Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yay., 1965.
- Nizami Ganjavi. *Kulliyat* (5. cilt). Dushanbe: Irfan, 1984.
- Sobranie vostochnykh rukopisei*. Tashkent: Science, vol. II, p. 233.
- Yılmaz, E. “Alisher Navoiy İjodidagi Metaforik Tafakkur”, *Alisher Navoiy Ilmiy-Adabiy Merosining Umumbashariyat Ma'naviy va Ma'rifiy Taraqqiyotidagi O'rni (V. Xalqaro İlmi Konferans Bildirileri)*. Navoiy: Murruvatli-Dil Press”, 2025, pp. 301-313.
- Zhirmunsky, V. I., & Zarifov, H. *Uzbek National Heroic Epic*. Moscow, 1947, pp. 50–51.

