



REPRESENTATION OF HISTORICAL TRUTH IN 20TH-CENTURY UZBEK LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article explores Oybek's historical novel *Navoi*, which portrays the figure of Alisher Navoi not merely as an individual but as a symbolic representation of the Uzbek people's cultural and spiritual renaissance in the 15th century. The study analyzes the artistic principles employed by the author in combining historical truth with fictional elements, thereby creating a realistic yet ideologically significant image of Navoi. Special attention is paid to the influence of Soviet-era ideological constraints, which shaped the depiction of Navoi as a humanist poet, a patron of the people, and a proponent of social harmony. The article also highlights scholarly views that emphasize the humanistic essence of Oybek's conception of Navoi, underscoring the novel's role in both reflecting and shaping national consciousness.

Keywords: Oybek, Alisher Navoi, historical novel, Uzbek literature, humanism, ideology, historical truth, fictional image, national consciousness.

Introduction

The 20th-century Uzbek historical novel possesses a number of distinctive features that set it apart from the historical prose of other literatures. In particular, writers often turned to the "Golden Age," recreating the Timurid period (14th–15th centuries), when Samarkand and Herat flourished as centers of science, art, and literature. This era was perceived as a symbol of the greatness of Uzbek culture. Prominent historical figures of the past—Alisher Navoi, Amir Temur, Ulughbek, Ibn Sina, and Beruni—became central protagonists. Their images were idealized and presented as embodiments of the wisdom of the people.



A writer who undertakes the creation of a historical novel must first and foremost rely on the solid foundation of actual history. His task is not merely to recount past events, but to reconstruct, upon the historical ground, his own artistic vision of the world and of humanity. Undoubtedly, when the idea of the work requires it, fictional characters or events may be interwoven into the historical fabric. Although there is no strict measure or fixed standard for such additions, their balance determines the artistic value of the work. Therefore, a truly skillful novelist is always in search of the “golden bridge” between historical truth and artistic imagination.

The moment a writer takes up the pen, he immerses himself in the pages of history: he studies historical sources, gathers facts, events, and information about their participants. His next task is to rework what he has studied into an artistic form: in the realm of artistic reality, facts must come alive, events must unfold, and historical figures must breathe again [1;55]. Yet his duty does not end there — the collected material is not a lifeless weapon; it must be animated with the breath of artistry. Only then do historical events take place upon the stage, historical figures begin to act as if newly alive, and their inner world — their feelings and emotions — unfold vividly before the reader’s eyes. This very process, naturally, imposes certain limits on the writer’s creative possibilities in a historical work.

In certain cases, there are also ideological factors that restrict the writer’s creative possibilities, forcing authors who turn to historical themes to work under significant socio-political pressure. If the novel is devoted to great figures of the nation, the writer’s creative responsibility increases manifold, and the process of writing a historical work becomes an even more arduous endeavor.

Oybek’s “Navoi” is a classic historical novel dedicated to depicting the profound image of the life of the Uzbek people in the 15th century. The strength of this work lies in its ability to convey the truth of the era, the clashes of socio-political forces, and the turning points in the destiny of the people with heartfelt depth, bringing them vividly onto the artistic stage. In realizing his ideological purpose, the author not only revives the authentic images of historical figures but also breathes spirit and vitality into the work through fictional characters.



Figures who left a mark in history—such as Navoi, Majididdin, Husayn Bayqaro, Nizamulmuluk, Khadicha Begim, Badiuzzamon, Mu'min Mirzo, Muzaffar Mirzo, and Jami—breathe once more on the pages of the novel, speaking in their own voices. Alongside them, fictional characters like Sultanmurod, Zayniddin, Arslonqul, Dildor, and Tog'onbek stand shoulder to shoulder, enriching the artistic color of events and reflecting the hopes, pains, and aspirations of the people on the historical stage of our land. The harmony of historical and fictional characters endows the work with such power that the reader feels as though they are walking through the arenas of the 15th century—amid the courts of rulers, in the circles of poets, and within the life of the common folk. Oybek transforms his novel not into a historical document, but into a spiritual and moral mirror, where the people's past, their sorrows and dreams, and their grand spiritual image come alive in vivid artistic form.

In Oybek's depiction, every event and every fact is presented in harmony with the historical reality of its time. The fictional episodes, too, are not detached from the historical panorama, but are portrayed in close interconnection with it. In creating both historical figures and fictional characters, the author relies on the same realist principles. As a result, their artistic pathos emerges as deeply intertwined with the life of the era, the fate of the people, and the historical reality itself.

In the novel, events drawn from the lives of ancestors are interwoven with the author's imaginative inventions, complementing one another and forming an inseparable unity within the artistic fabric of the work. For this reason, the pages of the novel embody not only the strict truth of history but also the events born of creative imagination — both serving a single purpose: not merely to revive historical reality, but to express it with spiritual and emotional allure.

The characters of the work live and breathe within the atmosphere of their historical environment. Each of them is depicted in close connection with the destiny of the Uzbek people of the 15th century and the era of the Timurid state. Among them, the most vivid figure is the image of Navoi. The author reveals the true essence of the historical process through Navoi's spiritual world and activity. His personality is portrayed in dynamic development, increasingly radiant in his heroic qualities and unwavering devotion to humanism.



In the novel, Navoi is not portrayed as an ordinary individual, but as the symbol of an entire epoch, embodying the spirit of national awakening and the patriotic sentiment of the Uzbek people in the 15th century. His personal life, spiritual world, aspirations and dreams, actions and moral image are revealed in harmony with the progressive traditions of his time.

In this figure are reflected the heroic endeavors of the people in their striving to comprehend their own destiny. Through the personality of Navoi, the writer embodies the nation's aspiration for advancement and the spirit of national revival at a time when the fate of the state was at stake. Indeed, the essential purpose of the historical novel is to depict the people as the leading force of history.

In Oybek's "Navoi" novel, the development of the central character—Navoi—symbolizes the growth of the collective consciousness of the Uzbek people and their striving for spiritual maturity. The writer harmonizes the hero's biography and personal destiny with the history of the nation, thereby embodying the past and fate of the entire people in his image.

The historical events depicted in the novel are not presented merely as a backdrop to the characters' lives, but as decisive factors that shape their character, aspirations, and actions. Through the inner transformations of the protagonists, the history of an entire era and the essence of social development are revealed.

In the image of Navoi, Oybek created a progressive figure of his own time: a great intellectual who dedicated himself to alleviating the hardships of the people and leading them toward spiritual and social advancement. In this character, the author not only embodied the national ideal but also preserved his personal and individual traits. Therefore, Navoi's image is not merely a typified ideal, but one that lives with his own destiny, spiritual struggles, and lofty moral qualities, appearing in a truly human form.

In this image are embodied the people's aspirations, dreams, hopes, and their yearning for freedom and spiritual enlightenment. Navoi is portrayed not only as a progressive thinker of his time but also as a symbol who carried the lofty aspirations of the nation in his heart and embodied the heroic spirit of the people in his persona.

Navoi was a son of his own era. In his heart, there was empathy for the people's suffering and compassion for ordinary folk; however, he did not set as his direct



goal the eradication of oppression and exploitation. To interpret him in such a way would mean to idealize Navoi's image groundlessly and to distance it from historical truth.

Undoubtedly, as a genius poet, Navoi stood above the majority of his contemporaries. He distanced himself from the narrow interests and selfish circle of aristocratic feudal lords and moved closer to the broad masses of the people. Through his literary creativity and practical activity in state affairs, he expressed the interests of the people and passionately, time and again, emphasized his closeness to them.

However, he was not a rebel. Navoi did not call for an uprising against the existing system. No matter how progressive his activity was, he still could not transcend the socio-historical boundaries of his own era. In this sense, Oybek interpreted the image of Navoi correctly and justifiably.

The Navoi depicted by Oybek is always closely intertwined with the environment of his time: his life is revealed in inseparable connection with the Herat court, the state system, and the cultural traditions. The great poet's sorrow and search also grew out of this very soil: at a time when the Timurid state had reached the brink of decline and collapse, Navoi suffered for the fate of the people and the state, seeking a path to survival.

When speaking about Oybek's novel *Navoi*, one must first take into account the period in which the writer created it — the difficult circumstances of that time, marked by censorship and ideological pressures. For it was precisely under the influence of these factors that Oybek could not portray the image of Navoi fully in accordance with his own ideal.

During the Soviet era, historical novels had to conform to the official ideology. That is, in historical novels it was required to emphasize a progressive interpretation of history — highlighting social struggle, criticizing feudalism, seeking out progressive tendencies in the past, as well as stressing the friendship of peoples, and criticizing nationalism and religious fanaticism. For this reason, in his novel Oybek placed greater emphasis on Navoi's devotion to the people, his compassion for the poor, his kindness and sympathy for the masses, and he elevated Navoi's socially engaged and harmonious image in relation to the common people.



As the literary scholar M.Qoshjonov rightly pointed out that Oybek's main purpose was to reveal the humanistic ideas characteristic of the great poet Alisher Navoi's vast and multifaceted creative work [2; 20]. Another literary scholar O.Sharafiddinov likewise supported this view, stressing that in shaping Navoi's character, Oybek gave special importance, above all, to portraying him as a great humanist [3; 3].

Indeed, in Oybek's novel, Navoi comes to life as a devoted, selfless, and humanistic poet, dedicated to the prosperity, well-being, and peace of the people. Through his image, the figure of a tireless devotee emerges — a great personality who carried the dream of national revival. Of course, historical truth shows that such qualities were truly present in Navoi's character. Yet what deserves our particular attention is that Oybek, in shaping Navoi's image, placed these very humanistic and people-oriented traits at the forefront, constructing his entire concept around this spirit of humanism.

Literary scholar, Naim Karimov, draws special attention to certain aspects of Oybek's concept of the historical figure: "The writer artistically interpreted such issues as the just ruler and the people, Navoi and the people, Navoi and war, Navoi and the fate of culture, Navoi and the friendship of peoples, and through the image of the poet, he put forward socio-philosophical views that were important for his contemporaries and exemplary for future generations" [4; 65]. His image is embodied as an image set against medieval feudalism.

In conclusion, it can be said that the ideological demands of his time compelled Oybek to take this path. Accordingly, he exaggerated the cruel and oppressive image of feudalism as much as possible and, by doing so, sought to convey historical truth to the reader with artistic power, thereby ensuring the ideological and artistic greatness of the work.

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