

Contribution

The Role of Samarkand in Perfecting the Worldviews of Alisher Navai and Abdurahman Jami

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This article presents an opinion on the friendship and cooperation of the two major poets and thinkers of Central Asia of the Timurid era, Nūr ad-Dīn ‘Abd ar-Rahmān Jāmī and Nizām-al-Dīn ‘Ali-Shir Nava’i. Through creating works in many genres of Oriental prose and poetry, they contributed to the prospering of philosophical and artistic thought and the formation of a literary atmosphere in the capital of Khorasan, Herat in the second half of the 15th century. The fate of Jami and Navai at their young age was directly connected with another large city in Central Asia and the capital of Maverannahr, Samarkand. Jami visited Samarkand three times over a period of more than 10 years with short breaks. Here he studied at the madrasah (university) of Ulugh Bek, and after receiving a certificate of successful completion, he taught at the same madrasah. Navai visited Samarkand in 1464/1465–69. For five years he was also engaged in training and self-improvement in the field of Sufi sciences. The author reflects on a possible meeting and the beginning of the friendship between these two inquisitive personalities through an analysis of individual facts and sources. This article expresses an opinion on the role of the city of Samarkand in the fate of young people, as by the time of their arrival there was a prospering of secular and religious sciences.

Keywords: Khorasan, philosopher and poet, *Haft avrang*, Joseph the Beautiful, *hujra*, madrasah, Naqshbandiya

Introduction

IN the prime of his youth, the great thinker, poet, and statesman Nizamaddin Emir Alisher Navai spent five long years, the most remarkable years of his life, in the ancient and beautiful city of Samarkand. Recently, a monument dedicated to the friendship of Alisher Navai and Abdurahman Jami, the poet’s friend and mentor, has

been erected in Samarkand. Therefore, a discussion on Navai's life in Samarkand should begin with the friendship and relationship between these two celebrities.

Exploring the Creative Heritage of Jami and Navai

Two brilliant thinkers of medieval Central Asia, Mawlana Nuriddin Abdurahman Jami and Nizamaddin Emir Alisher Navai, were the guiding force in the formation and high development of the spiritual and moral environment of Khorasan. These two outstanding personalities, as wise and farsighted statesmen, great scientists, philosophers, and poets, were drawn to each other by their extraordinary intelligence and curiosity. They were also united by loyalty and selflessness in a friendship that began in their young but precocious adulthood. The power and beauty of their pens testify to their exalted inner selves and the enlightenment and moral force radiating from their hearts. They were attracted to each other not only by literary communications, but also by allegiance to high ideals, mutual understanding, compassion for the common man, love for art in all meanings of the word, and most importantly, their refined and sensitive characters.

A number of scientific studies devoted to the friendship and scientific and literary interactions between Jami and Navai have come out in the field of literary studies in recent years. Among the most significant of such works are the collection of materials that emerged from the 555th anniversary of Alisher Navai under the title of *Abdurahman Jami va Alisher Navai* (Abdurahman Jami and Alisher Navai), a monograph by A. Mirzoev entitled *Alisher Navai va Abdurahman Jami* (Alisher Navai and Abdurahman Jami), a series of studies by A. Afsakhzod, a monograph by Y.E. Bertels under the title *Navoiy va Jomiy* (Navai and Jami), A. Kayumov's *Nazm va tafakkur quyoshi* (The Sun of Poetry and Contemplation), R. Vahidov's *Manaviyat olamining porloq quyoshi* (The Bright Sun of the Spiritual World), and a number of works by scientists B. Valikhodzhaev and M. Mukhiddinov of Samarkand. They highlight the spiritual closeness, true friendship, and cooperation between two outstanding scientists, besides revealing important facets of the life and scientific and artistic activities of Mawlana Jami.

Friendship of Jami and Navai

The study in the 20th century of the creative legacies of Navai and Jami stands out for its academic excellence and fruitfulness in comparison

with previous periods of literary criticism. The main aspects of Alisher Navai's scientific and literary heritage were most thoroughly examined in this century, and critical texts of his works were compiled and published. At the same time, research is being conducted on certain scientific problems in the branch of literary criticism, which until now has received little attention.

Abdurahman Jami and Alisher Navai were the creators and mainstays of the scientific and literary environment in Khorasan, understanding and supporting each other in the transformation of culture, art, and architecture for solving social problems. Navai, immediately upon arrival from Samarkand to Herat by invitation of Husayn Bayqara, was appointed to one of the most responsible positions in the state. During this period of his life, he felt the need for the support and advice of a wise mentor in his charitable activities, who would inspire him in his efforts to raise the cultural standard of life in Herat. The only person of genius in Khorasan, who was capable of playing this role was Abdurahman Jami.

Jami, in turn, compared the talented and enterprising young statesman, Alisher Navai, in wisdom with Prophet Joseph the Beautiful (Peace be upon him) in his poem *Haft avrang* (Seven thrones), where he reflected on the role of the vizier in a government and his foresight and perseverance in dispensing justice and uprooting feudal evil.

In the story of Joseph the Beautiful, the Pharaoh appoints him chief vizier and entrusts him with governance of his state for a 14-year period. So as not to interfere with Joseph, he is removed from the administration of the state during this period. Joseph, as a wise ruler, follows a fair economic policy in the distribution of the wheat crop.

In his *Tasviri Navai dar 'Yusuf va Zulaykho'i Jomi* (*Тасвири Навоӣ дар 'Юсуф ва Зулайҳо'у Чомӣ* [The Image of Navai in Jami's Poem 'Yusuf and Zuleikha']), Mirzoev writes:

If Joseph, being the wise vizier, ruled wisely the government and saved people from seven years of famine and poverty, Alisher Navai as a wise vizier of the fifteenth century contributed to the power of the centralized state and thereby the extent of its capabilities sought peace and tranquility in the country, created ground for the development of science, literature, art and other branches of cultural life.¹

Indeed, as history shows, "Navai's fame as a great cultural figure, patron of poetry and art reached legendary heights in the Middle East."²

In the poem 'Yusuf and Zuleikha', Jami writes about Alisher Navai:

Муборак бар шаҳу аркони давлат,
(May there be many blessings to the ruler and statesmen,)

Ғазанфарҳайбатони шерсавлат!
(With a lion's appearance and a tiger's grip!)

Ба тахсис он жавонмардек-ш аз дер,
(That a young man came to them — a brave man from childhood,)

Насаб чун ном бошад шер бар шер.
(Since by lineage and by name he is a Tiger from the Tiger.)

[In this line, the poet makes a play on words: the name *Alisher* consists of two bases — *Ali* and *Sher*. The famous historical figure 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Peace be upon him) was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), and because of his courage and valiant character he was given an honorary nickname *Sheri Mardon*, which means 'tiger of real men'. Thus, Jami calls Alisher Navai 'Twice Tiger'.]

Яке дар аз дижи давронкананда,
(One of these Tigers was the master of his period)

[Here he also refers to Ali, who ruled the Caliphate after three companions of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), and the father of Alisher Navai, who was the court servant of the Timurid ruler Shah Rukh and after his death became the ruler of the city of Sabzavar in Khorasan.]

Яке сарпанжа бо гўрон зананда.
(Another Tiger threatens the wolves with its mighty paw.)

Ба расми таъмияз-он бурдамаш ном,
(He deserves this name)

Ки монанд дур аз он андешаи ом.
(And let gossip of a group of ignoramuses be farther from him.)

Вагар не, кай тавон з-он фаҳми даррок,
(If not, then how did such an exceptionally capable person come into the world,)

Ба сад ҳуққа нахуфт ин гавҳари пок.
(It stood out like a gem from a hundred pearls.)

Кунад дар шеър табъаш мўшикофӣ,
(If his poetic nature desires to comb the braided hair,)

В-аз он мў нўги килкаш шаръбофӣ.
(Then from every hair his pen will weave the path of truth.)

Ниҳад з-ин шаръи мушкин доми дилҳо
(He enters into the hearts with such fragrant righteousness,)

Диҳад аз шеъри ширин коми дилҳо ...
(With its sweet lyrics gives the desire of hearts.)

Вале, дар боргоҳи одамият,
(However, to the palace of mankind,)

Чуз ў кам ёфт роҳи маҳрамият ...
(Few have found a way to solitude ...)

In Eastern literature, there is a tradition of portraying the hero in the form of legendary historical figures. At the same time, their special positive qualities are displayed in the hero with exaggeration. This poetic technique is called *irsal ul masal*. Jami, using this technique, recreates Yusuf in the image of Navai. According to Mirzoev:

If Abdurahman Jami in the government of the state knew such a person who would personify Joseph the Beautiful, then it can be assumed, and there is no doubt about this, he, first of all, meant the personality of Alisher Navai. And if not, then the great poet would not end his poem with such high notes of praise and pride.³

Thus, Jami compares his gifted and enterprising student with Joseph the Beautiful both in appearance and in moral fiber. Navai, in turn, sees his mentor in the image of Prophet Khidr, the miracle worker revered in all nations. In his poem *Hayrat ul-abror* (The Rapture of the Righteous), Navai writes in praise of his mentor:

Зулмат этиб, жамъ давоти анинг,
Маъни ўлуб оби ҳаёти анинг.

Қатрасидин кимки бўлуб комёб,
Умри муаббад қилибон иқтисоб,

Назми ақолими жаҳонни тутуб,
Насри дағи кишвари жонни тутуб,

Файзи гадову шаҳ аро мунташир,
Хизматига шоҳу гадо муфтахир ...⁴

(His words, like live water, dispel the darkness. Whoever gets even a drop of this live water, will be happy for the rest of his life. His poetry captured the world, and his prose captured the hearts of his fans. The king and the beggar are proud to be his servants.)

Thus, by comparing each other to prophets, Alisher Navai and Abdurahman Jami eternalize their roles in their era — the former's, that of ensuring the growth and development of the state through wise policies and the latter's of educating and nurturing the citizenry into spiritually rich, holistic classes through a progressive and humane *tariqah* (the Sufi doctrine or path of spiritual learning) as the Naqshbandi order.

Jami and Navai in Samarkand

There is another unique point of contact between the worldviews of these two brilliant personalities: undoubtedly, their great love and attachment to Samarkand, the city where fate took them in their younger years. Praising the city, Abdurahman Jami wrote:

If you want to see wealth, go to India,
If you want to see cleanliness, then go to Mecca,
And if you want to find both, stay in Samarkand.

Alisher Navai compares it to Holy Mecca:

Samarkand is the crystal of the earth,
It is a place of worship, close to me as life.

Works on the life and achievements of Jami and Navai have not conclusively indicated the exact date of the two poets' acquaintance. A. Mirzoev makes some assumptions to arrive at the conclusion that

this event occurred during the reign of Sultan Abu Sa'id Mirza in Herat (1457–69).⁵ B. Valikhodzhaev suggests that the first meeting of Jami and Navai occurred during their travels to Samarkand.⁶ According to him, Jami was in Samarkand four times, his first visit in 1436, during the reign of Mirzo Ulugbek.

Here, young Jami, studying at the Ulugh Bek madrasah, listened to lectures by famous scientists such as Qādī Zāda al-Rūmī and Ulugh Bek. He also studied with the famous *faqih* (a Muslim theologian versed in the religious law of Islam) and linguist Khoja Fazlullah Abulaisi. Alisher Navai is known to have lived in Samarkand in 1465–69, in the *hujra* madrasah of the same Khoja Fazlullah Abulaisi, and was granted his love and recognition and addressed as 'son' by him. During these years, Navai often visited the house of the great spiritual mentor Khoja Ahrar and participated in conversations about theology, particularly the spiritual and philosophical doctrine of *tariqah*. He also won the respect of this mentor who was a leader of the Naqshbandi order.

Navai and Jami lived in Herat from 1469 until the end of their lives. B. Valikhodzhaev's assumption that the meeting and the beginning of their friendship took place during the years of study in the madrasahs of Samarkand, namely on the caravan routes, which were not so frequent in the conditions of that time, seems logical. Y.E. Bertels, on the other hand, surmises that the meeting of the poets took place in Herat after 1469: "It is hard to think that such a connoisseur and lover of poetry as Navai could have lived in Herat for a long time without seeking to personally meet his famous poet."⁷ B. Valikhodzhaev's reasoning and opinion seem closer to the truth, however. This is because, before leaving for Samarkand, Navai mainly visited Mashhad under the patronage of the noble Timurid Abul-Qasim Babur Mirza. He studied there in a madrasah, and got acquainted with the celebrities of this city. Jami also visited Samarkand during these years. Five years after the death of his patron, Navai was forced to leave Herat on the instructions of the new ruler of Khorasan Abu Sa'id Mirza, and came to Samarkand in 1464. Therefore, after analyzing the chain of events, the following conclusion seems plausible: while participating in discussions with (and being noticed by) Khoja Ahrar, a major religious mentor of the era, and studying *fiqh* (the theory of the jurisprudence of Islam), literary criticism, and linguistics with the famous scientist Khoja Fazlullah Abulaisi, the two visiting young people from Herat could not help but become friends and interact with each other.

In addition, there is an even more important aspect of the issue. Samarkand was a city where the religious and philosophical worldviews

of the two young people, who were thirsting for knowledge, were finally formed. It is where they clarified their concepts about Sufism. They came to the city in order to obtain knowledge of the sciences (secular and religious), to study in its madrasahs, and to get acquainted with the notable scholars of the time and the teachers of the *tariqah*. They left Samarkand for Herat, one a leading Sufi, a mentor of the Naqshbandi order (Jami), and the other a *mutasavvif*, a connoisseur and companion of the Naqshbandi order (Navai).

Naturally, the question that arises is why Abdurahman Jami formally became a member of the *tariqah* in Samarkand, while Navai made such a decision later, in 1476, seven years after his arrival in Herat.

Let us turn again to the details of the poet's life. According to B. Valikhodzhaev,⁸ Navai comes to Samarkand in order to find a spiritual mentor for himself. Navai, in 1464/1465, heading from Herat to Samarkand, writes a letter to his friend and patron in the *masnavi* genre (a kind of poem written in rhyming couplets, or more specifically 'a poem based on independent, internally rhyming lines'). In it, he sets out the reasons for leaving Herat for Samarkand and his future plans in this ancient and prosperous city. This *masnavi* is included in the collection of poems *Hazoin ul Maoniy* (Treasury of Thoughts). Here he catches the attention of Khoja Ahrar, participates in conversations in his house, is recognized by him as one of his noblest and most well-mannered students, and is addressed as 'son' by him. So, why didn't Navai, like Jami, join the *tariqah* — the Naqshbandi order — under the mentorship of Khoja Ahrar?

The reasons for this may have been the following: first, Jami was 27 years older than Navai, and about 40 years old when he was in Samarkand. By that time, he had already defined his interests, and his worldview had been steadily formed. He had achieved a lot in the study of the secular sciences and later became a scientist-encyclopedist. Second, he was constantly in the company of one of the influential *sheikhs*⁹ of the time, Sheikh Sa'duddin Kashgari (later Jami was married to his daughter). Therefore, it appears that Abdurahman Jami decided to achieve spiritual perfection by joining and following the teachings and rules of the *tariqah*.

Alisher Navai, on the other hand, came to Samarkand at the age of 24–25. At that time, although he was a famous poet in Khorasan, he was not ready to enter the *tariqah*. In Mashhad, in a madrasah, he studied the secular sciences and the foundations of Islam. In Herat, before arriving in Samarkand, the poet wanted to work in the governance of the state at the palace of Abu Sa'id Mirza. But the young man,

being a close friend of Husayn Bayqara who was a political rival of Abu Sa'id Mirza, was not admitted to the palace and was exiled from Herat. In Samarkand, as V. Abdullaev writes, Navai continued to improve his knowledge and studied philosophy, history, astronomy, mathematics, geography, and the works of all prominent scientists of the East.¹⁰ He lived there in the madrasah of the famous *faqih* Khoja Fazlullah Abulaisi. In addition, in Samarkand, he was awarded the rank of *Chikatoy Amiri* (emir of Chagatai, an honorary state rank) and, together with one of his patrons, the city's mayor Akhmad Hadzhibek Vafai, presumably participated in and had influence in the political and social life of the city. Therefore, obviously, he had very little time and opportunity for constant interaction with Khoja Ahrar. For this reason, he could not fully devote himself to the study and application of his spiritual teachings to life. Because, unlike the secular sciences, *tariqah* is practical teaching, and knowledge about the basics of *tariqah* is achieved directly through application of the instructions of the leaders and their attributes in practical life. Navai, as a close friend of Timurid Bayqara, after striving for power in Khorasan and having survived five uneasy years in Samarkand, later, in Herat, enhanced his interest in Sufism. Immediately after Bayqara's victory over Abu Sa'id Mirza, he was appointed as an important statesman and was completely immersed in the political, cultural, and spiritual life of society. And it was at this time that he improved his understanding of the teachings of Sufism in long conversations and close spiritual communication with Jami.

The poet, having arrived in Samarkand, achieved his goal and cherished desire by meeting with the wise mentor Khoja Ahrar, who could satisfy all his spiritual needs. But at the time of his arrival in Samarkand, he could not fully devote himself to the acquisition of knowledge and practice of the science of spirituality — *tariqah*. Further, one of the requirements of the *tariqah* is also the development of intuition, and for this, first of all, it is necessary to acquire a thorough knowledge of the secular sciences. This, Navai found plenty of opportunity to do during his stay in Samarkand.

In 1469, upon his return to Herat, the poet was in a close relationship with Jami and for seven years improved his knowledge of the Malāmatiyya branch of the Naqshbandi *tariqah*. Through the genius of the great Jami and by following his lifestyle, he was tempered spiritually on the way to achieving perfection. Administering the state as vizier while in a close spiritual relationship with his mentor, Navai created his invaluable works. In 1476, after reading the *qasida* (poetic message on a spiritual theme) 'Tuhfat ul-afkor' (Gift to thinkers), Jami

was satisfied with the efforts of his disciple to improve himself as a Sufi and presented him with a headdress and headscarf, as a sign of his induction as a member of the Naqshbandiya *tariqah*. This event was of great importance in the lives of both Jami and Navai. It confirms the idea that the two brilliant poets, who were unique personalities each in their own right, achieved spiritual and intellectual satisfaction only with their introduction to the *tariqah* — a leading spiritual ideology of the era. The *tariqah* was the fundamental pillar of the friendship and relationship between the great poets. Poetry was the means for their outward expression of ideas about the essence of earthly life, the style of the romantic era.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to pay tribute to these two celebrities of the medieval East, two faithful friends as the guiding stars of the Timurid Age. In the contemplation of these stars and the creation of the Milky Way in Khorasan, the city of Samarkand, which, according to Navai, was like a paradise, undoubtedly had a significant role to play. Jami and Navai at one time were welcome guests of Samarkand and, in turn, the arrival in Samarkand was a spiritual need for the future of both celebrities. With their association, they elevated the name of Samarkand, a worthy ground for the formation of the genius of their personalities. The 18th-century French philosopher Sébastien Nicolas de Chamfort stated, “In literature, as well as in politics, a person who is born when a certain fertile ground is prepared can become great, or at least make a real creative revolution.”¹¹ Indeed, the genius of Jami and the genius of Navai were a prerequisite for the Age of the Timurid Renaissance, and their life paths were predetermined — genius was intended by divine destiny.

Notes

¹ Translated from Tajik by author. A. Mirzoev, ‘Tasviri Navoi dar “Yusuf va Zulaykho”i Jomi’ [The image of Navai in Jami’s poem ‘Yusuf and Zuleikha’] *Sadoi Sharq*, no. 5 (1971): 140.

² Translated from Uzbek. H. Arasli, ‘Ahdiiy Bag’dodiy Navoiy haqida’ (Akhdiy Bagdadi o Navai) [Akhdiy Baghdadi about Navai] *Magazine O’TA (O’zbek tili va adabiyoti* [Uzbek Language and Literature]), no. 4 (1977): 43-R.

³ Mirzoev, ‘Tasviri Navoi dar “Yusuf va Zulaykho”i Jomi’, 140.

⁴ Translated from Uzbek. Alisher Navoiy, *Mukammal asarlar to’plami. 20 tomlik. 7-t* (Polnyy sbornik sochineniy. 20 tomov. 7-t) [Collections of writings of 20

volumes. Vol. 7] (Tashkent: Nauka, 1991), 53.

- ⁵ Mirzoev, ‘Tasviri Navoi dar “Yusuf va Zulaykho”i Jomi’, 25.
- ⁶ Translated from Uzbek. B. Valikhodzhaev, ‘Navoiyning Samarqanddagi qadamjolari’ (Mesta poseshcheniya Navai v Samarkande) [Navai’s Shrine in Samarkand] *Muloqot*, no. 2 (1991): 10.
- ⁷ Y.E. Bertels, *Navoiy va Jomiy* (Navai i Dzhami) [Navai and Jami] (Moscow: Nauka, 1957), 28.
- ⁸ Valikhodzhaev, ‘Navoiyning Samarqanddagi qadamjolari’, 10.
- ⁹ In Sufism, the word *sheikh* is used to represent a spiritual guide who initiates a particular tariqah which leads to Muhammad, although many saints have this title added before their names out of respect from their followers.
- ¹⁰ Translated from Uzbek. V. Abdullaev, *Navoiy Samarqandda. Tanlangan asarlar. 11 tomlik. 1-t* (Navai v Samarkande. Izbrannye proizvedeniya. 11 tomov. 1-t) [Navai in Samarkand. Select compositions. 11 volumes. Vol. 1] (Samarkand: 2002), 37.
- ¹¹ Translated from Uzbek. F. Sulaymanova, *Sharq va G‘arb* (Vostok i Zapad) [The East and West] (Tashkent: O‘zbekiston, 1997), 148.

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