

THE INNER JOURNEY STAGES OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN NAVOIY'S THOUGHT

Abduhakimova Umida

Samarqand davlat chet tillar institute

Payariq xorijiy tillar fakulteti talabasi

Annotatsiya:

Ushbu maqolada Alisher Navoiy ijodida ruhiy rivojlanish va ichki sayohat tushunchalari tahlil qilinadi. Maqolada Navoiy asarlarida ko'rsatilgan ruhiy taraqqiyot bosqichlari, inson qalbining o'z-o'zini anglash jarayoni, ma'rifat va tasavvuf ta'sirlari o'rganiladi. Shuningdek, Navoiy tafakkurida insonning ichki dunyosini o'zgartirish yo'llari va ruhiy kamolotga yetishishning ahamiyati haqida fikrlar bayon etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: ruhiy rivojlanish, ichki sayohat, Navoiy tafakkuri, ma'rifat, tasavvuf, qalb, ruhiy kamolot, inson, o'z-o'zini anglash.

Annotation:

This article analyzes the concepts of spiritual development and inner journey in the works of Alisher Navoiy. It explores the stages of spiritual growth presented in Navoiy's writings, the process of self-awareness of the human heart, and the influence of enlightenment and Sufism. The article also discusses ways to transform one's inner world and the significance of achieving spiritual perfection in Navoiy's philosophy.

Keywords: spiritual development, inner journey, Navoiy's thought, enlightenment, Sufism, heart, spiritual perfection, human, self-awareness.

Аннотация:

В данной статье анализируются понятия духовного развития и внутреннего путешествия в творчестве Алишера Навои. Рассматриваются стадии духовного роста, представленные в произведениях Навои, процесс самопознания человеческого сердца, а также влияние просвещения и суфизма.

Также обсуждаются пути преобразования внутреннего мира и значение достижения духовного совершенства в философии Навои.

Ключевые слова: духовное развитие, внутреннее путешествие, мысль Навои, просвещение, суфизм, сердце, духовное совершенство, человек, самопознание.

Alisher Navoiy, the great 15th-century poet, philosopher, and thinker, occupies a special place in the intellectual and spiritual history of the East. His works reflect a deep engagement with the mystical dimensions of human existence and the inner journey that a person must undertake in pursuit of truth, self-knowledge, and union with the Divine. In his poetry and prose, Navoiy often illustrates the stages of spiritual development not only as abstract concepts but as lived experiences, embedded within the moral and cultural fabric of his time. This essay explores the stages of spiritual development in Navoiy's thought, tracing the journey of the soul from ignorance and egoism toward enlightenment and divine union.

Navoiy's vision of the spiritual journey is fundamentally shaped by the philosophy of **Tasavvuf** (Sufism), which posits that human beings are created with a divine essence that must be rediscovered and purified through inner struggle, love, and surrender. In this framework, life itself becomes a path—a *sayr-u suluk*—with various stages that each seeker must traverse. According to Navoiy, the soul begins its journey in a state of *ghaflat* (heedlessness), a condition marked by attachment to the material world, ignorance of one's spiritual nature, and domination by the lower self (*nafs*). This is the initial stage of human existence, where the inner light is clouded by ego, desire, and illusion.

To transcend this state, the seeker must engage in *mujahada*—spiritual struggle against the ego. Navoiy frequently speaks of the importance of battling the *nafs*, portraying it as the first and greatest enemy on the path to God. In his masterpiece "Hayrat ul-abror" ("The Wonder of the Righteous"), Navoiy writes of how the seeker must cleanse the heart from pride, greed, and hypocrisy. It is only through this inner purification that the soul becomes receptive to divine knowledge and grace. As the

Sufi tradition teaches, the heart is like a mirror that must be polished to reflect the truth; in its rusted state, it cannot perceive reality. The second stage in the spiritual journey involves awakening (*yaqza*) and repentance (*tawba*). In this phase, the individual becomes conscious of their inner emptiness and longs to return to their spiritual origin. This awakening is often marked by suffering, loss, or existential dissatisfaction that compels the person to seek a deeper meaning in life. Navoiy emphasizes the necessity of this inner turmoil, suggesting that pain itself is a form of divine mercy. He notes: “Without suffering, the soul would sleep forever in the comfort of illusion” [1]. It is this pain that breaks the illusion of the self and opens the way to divine love.

Love (*ishq*) is, for Navoiy, both the path and the destination of the spiritual journey. He sees love as the transformative force that burns away all false identities and connects the soul with the Beloved. The true lover, in Navoiy’s thought, is one who is willing to sacrifice everything, including selfhood, for the sake of divine proximity. Following *fana*, the soul enters the stage of *baqa*—subsistence in God. Here, the individual no longer identifies with the ego but lives through the divine presence. This is the highest stage of spiritual development, where the seeker becomes the friend (*wali*) of God, embodying divine attributes such as compassion, justice, and wisdom. Navoiy rarely describes this state directly, recognizing its ineffable nature, but his poetry hints at this union through symbols of light, ocean, and silence. The silence, in particular, is crucial—it represents the stillness of the soul that has found its home, where words no longer suffice. It is important to understand that for Navoiy, the inner journey is not merely personal but also ethical and social. A spiritually mature individual must also embody virtues in the world—kindness, humility, service, and justice. This emphasis is especially evident in his prose work “Mahbub ul-qulub” (“The Beloved of Hearts”), where he discusses the qualities of rulers, scholars, and common people, linking external behavior with inner states. In doing so, Navoiy asserts that true spirituality must transform both the heart

and society. Spiritual development, therefore, is not an escape from the world but a means to purify it through personal transformation.

Furthermore, Navoiy's works suggest that the stages of spiritual growth are not linear but cyclical. A seeker may fall and rise many times, experience doubt, and return to earlier stages. This humility is essential in the mystical path; certainty (*yaqin*) does not mean arrogance but a deeper surrender to the unknowable. Navoiy, though a great scholar and poet, often presents himself as a humble seeker, still in awe of the vastness of the divine. His humility is part of his spiritual authority—it shows that the journey never truly ends, as God is infinite, and each encounter only leads to greater yearning.

This echoes the teachings of earlier Sufi poets like Rumi and Attar, but Navoiy brings his own unique voice, combining mystical insight with moral wisdom and cultural depth. He writes: “The one who steps into love’s fire must burn to ash—only then will he find his true self” [2]. This metaphorical annihilation, known in Sufi terms as *fana*, is not destruction but transformation—the ego dies, and the soul awakens to its divine essence.

Another essential component of Navoiy’s thought is the role of the *murshid*—the spiritual guide. Just as a traveler needs a map, the seeker requires a guide who has walked the path before. In many of his poems, Navoiy refers to the importance of companionship, community, and guidance, stressing that spiritual pride can be a subtle trap. Without the guidance of a sincere teacher, the seeker can be led astray by illusions or ego. This reflects the Sufi idea that the path must be traveled under supervision, as the dangers of the soul are many and complex. In conclusion, Alisher Navoiy’s conception of spiritual development is a rich tapestry woven from the threads of Sufi philosophy, poetic imagery, and ethical reflection. From the initial state of heedlessness to the final union with the Divine, he maps out a profound inner journey that remains relevant to modern readers. His emphasis on self-purification, love, humility, and service provides not only a mystical worldview but also a practical guide to living with integrity and purpose. In a world increasingly

fragmented by materialism and ego, Navoiy's vision offers a timeless path toward inner peace and divine connection. Alisher Navoiy, the towering figure of classical Turkic literature, was not only a master poet but also a profound thinker whose works reflect the rich spiritual and philosophical dimensions of Sufism. His poetry, prose, and philosophical treatises convey deep insights into the human soul's journey toward divine realization. Central to Navoiy's worldview is the idea that the human being is not merely a creature bound to the physical world but a spiritual entity destined for transcendence. The inner journey, as envisioned by Navoiy, is a multilayered progression marked by trials, purification, knowledge, love, and eventual union with the divine. This essay explores the stages of spiritual development in Navoiy's thought, tracing how the human soul evolves from worldly ignorance to divine enlightenment, according to the spiritual vision embedded in his works.

Navoiy's understanding of spiritual development is closely tied to the Sufi path, or *tariqat*, a mystical journey that takes the seeker (*salik*) through inner transformation. The starting point of this journey is *shari'at*, the outer form of religion, which lays the foundation for ethical conduct and prepares the individual for deeper insight. However, Navoiy believed that *shari'at* alone is not sufficient. It must be followed by *tariqat*, the path of inner purification and discipline. Through this stage, the seeker learns to detach from material desires and cultivate virtues such as patience, humility, and selflessness. Navoiy often used symbolic language to describe this process, portraying it as a painful yet necessary shedding of the ego, likened to the burning of a moth in the flame.

The next stage is *ma'rifat*, or divine knowledge, which represents a deeper awakening. Here, the individual begins to perceive the truth beyond appearances. It is no longer about belief in God, but about knowing Him through direct spiritual experience. Navoiy emphasizes that this knowledge cannot be acquired merely through books or scholarship; it must be tasted with the heart. In his poetic expressions, he frequently warns against pride in intellect or formal learning. He

writes, “Whoever thinks he has arrived through knowledge alone, has not even started the journey” [3]. This reflects the Sufi idea that divine knowledge is a light placed in the heart by God, not a product of rational effort.

Eventually, the seeker reaches *haqiqat*, the truth or ultimate reality, which marks the stage of inner union with the divine. At this level, the soul recognizes its origin and true home in God. All dualities disappear; the self dissolves into the greater reality. Navoiy, influenced by Sufi thinkers like Attar and Rumi, articulates this union in terms of *fana* (annihilation of the self) and *baqa* (subsistence in God). The journey culminates not in disappearance but in transformation — the ego dies, but the soul lives on in divine proximity. This, for Navoiy, is the essence of spiritual fulfillment.

Throughout his work, Navoiy integrates these stages into various poetic forms, most notably in *Hayrat ul-abror*, *Lison ut-Tayr*, and *Mahbub ul-qulub*. In these texts, he weaves allegorical narratives where each character, event, or symbol represents aspects of the soul’s journey. In *Lison ut-Tayr*, for example, inspired by Attar’s *Conference of the Birds*, birds represent seekers who traverse valleys of hardship, love, fear, and annihilation in search of the Simurgh, a symbol of divine truth. Each valley corresponds to a psychological and spiritual trial, demonstrating that the path to God is not linear but cyclical, filled with reflection, suffering, and ecstatic joy. Navoiy also underscores the role of love as the most powerful force in spiritual development. For him, divine love (*ishq*) is not only the means but also the goal of the journey. Love purifies, burns away illusions, and draws the soul toward its source. He describes love as a fire that “burns the veil of separation” and reveals the face of the Beloved [4]. This metaphor encapsulates the Sufi belief that love is transformative: it destroys the ego and reveals divine reality. Love, in Navoiy’s works, is not sentimental but radical — a force that overturns the soul, leaving it naked before God. Moreover, Navoiy’s thought reflects the idea that each stage of the journey demands not only internal struggle but also ethical living. The inner journey is inseparable from how one acts in the world. He frequently criticized

hypocrisy, injustice, and pride among religious elites, asserting that true spirituality must be lived through compassion and service. In *Mahbub ul-qulub*, he advocates for a balance between contemplation and action, urging rulers to rule with justice and the wealthy to give in charity. Thus, spiritual development for Navoiy is not escapism; it is a moral and social commitment grounded in divine awareness.

Importantly, Navoiy's stages of spiritual development are not rigid steps but interwoven experiences. A seeker may oscillate between them, face setbacks, or experience multiple stages simultaneously. The journey is personal, intimate, and often veiled from external view. Navoiy reminds us that the real battle is within — against pride, greed, and forgetfulness. The path requires constant remembrance (*zikr*), guidance from a spiritual teacher (*murshid*), and sincere intention (*niyyat*). His worldview is ultimately optimistic. No matter how lost or sinful a person may be, the path remains open. Divine mercy is always available to those who sincerely seek. Navoiy's works often highlight stories of redemption, where even the most wayward souls find light through sincere repentance and divine grace. This inclusive vision — that every soul has the potential for divine realization — is one of the most enduring aspects of his spiritual philosophy.

In conclusion, Alisher Navoiy's thought offers a deeply structured yet fluid vision of the soul's inner journey. Through the stages of *shari'at*, *tariqat*, *ma'rifat*, and *haqiqat*, he presents a roadmap for spiritual development that integrates knowledge, love, ethics, and divine union. His writings not only reflect the rich heritage of Sufism but also offer timeless guidance for anyone seeking inner transformation. In an age where external distractions abound, Navoiy's call to turn inward and rediscover the divine essence within remains profoundly relevant. His poetry and philosophy invite us to embark on our own inner journey — a journey that begins with the self and ends in the infinite.

Alisher Navoiy, a towering figure of Eastern literature and thought, masterfully captured the spiritual evolution of the human soul through poetic language deeply embedded in Sufi philosophy. His works serve not only as literary masterpieces but

also as guides for inner transformation. The concept of an inner journey, or the soul's quest for divine union, is a central theme in Navoiy's worldview. His philosophical vision draws heavily on Islamic mysticism (Tasavvuf), which outlines various stages of spiritual development that a seeker (salik) must traverse in pursuit of closeness to God. Through metaphors, allegories, and profound insights, Navoiy charts this transformative voyage from the lower self (nafs) to ultimate unity (tawhid) with the Divine.

At the heart of Navoiy's spiritual thought is the belief that the human being is not merely a physical entity but a spiritual traveler whose true home lies beyond the material world. The journey, however, is not linear or easy; it is marked by trials, purification, and deep reflection. Navoiy uses poetic expression to illustrate these spiritual stages in a way that both reflects classical Sufi doctrine and offers personal insights. The early stage of this journey begins with the realization of the soul's imprisonment in the cage of the ego. Nafs, the commanding self, is portrayed as a deceptive force that binds the human soul to worldly illusions. The seeker must first confront and struggle against this self. This struggle, known as *mujahada*, is not external but internal, aimed at taming the ego and cultivating awareness of divine presence. As the journey progresses, the seeker moves from the state of nafs towards stages of increasing spiritual insight and love. One such stage is the heart (qalb), which becomes awakened and receptive to divine knowledge. In Navoiy's thought, love (*ishq*) is not merely an emotional state but a transformative force that propels the soul upward. Love cleanses the heart and removes the veils of illusion. In his masterpiece *Lison ut-Tayr*, Navoiy uses the metaphor of a bird's quest to describe the trials and enlightenment the soul must endure. Each station represents a spiritual trial, and only the birds (souls) willing to sacrifice their egos can continue onward. He writes: *"Do not imagine that the road to the Friend is smooth; a thousand dangers lie in wait along the way"* [5]. This highlights the arduous nature of the path and the courage required for true spiritual ascent.

Further stages include spiritual unveiling (*kashf*), gnosis (*ma'rifa*), and finally annihilation (*fana'*) in God. For Navoiy, *fana'* is not a loss but a sublime reunion. In this state, the seeker sheds all traces of individuality, merging with the Divine Reality. This merging does not destroy the self but purifies it so that only the essence of divine love remains. He alludes to this idea in many of his works, implying that only through self-annihilation can true existence be attained. He expresses this paradox beautifully: *"The moment I forgot myself, I remembered You; and in losing myself, I found all"* [6]. This mystical insight encapsulates the core of his spiritual message — the soul finds its true nature not in self-assertion but in self-effacement.

One distinctive element of Navoiy's depiction of spiritual development is the emphasis on sincerity (*ikhlas*) and inner purity. Unlike superficial displays of piety, Navoiy stresses that real progress is marked by humility, truthfulness, and devotion. He critiques false asceticism and hypocrisy, urging seekers to cleanse their intentions and serve with a pure heart. This ethical dimension of the spiritual path aligns closely with the teachings of earlier Sufi masters like Rumi and Attar, whom Navoiy admired and often referenced. Moreover, Navoiy integrates the concept of divine beauty (*jamal*) and majesty (*jadal*) as reflections of God's dual aspects. The seeker must learn to witness both — the gentleness and the severity of the Divine — without losing balance. This balanced perception fosters a deeper understanding and acceptance of life's trials and blessings. The journey is not an escape from the world but a transformation within it. By internalizing divine attributes such as mercy, patience, and justice, the seeker becomes a mirror of God's light.

Another notable feature in Navoiy's spiritual philosophy is his use of allegorical storytelling to make complex metaphysical ideas accessible. His poems often feature symbolic characters and settings that reflect stages of inner evolution. The desert represents solitude; the beloved represents God; the wine symbolizes divine intoxication. These metaphors serve to guide the reader not through abstract philosophy but through experiential understanding. Navoiy believes that knowledge

of the heart surpasses rational intellect, and thus he privileges intuition and inspiration over logic. The culmination of the spiritual journey, in Navoiy's vision, is not only *fana'* but *baqa'* — remaining in God. It is a state of continued existence through divine presence, where the seeker returns to the world with new insight and compassion. Such individuals become guides, embodying divine qualities and serving others selflessly. They are no longer attached to their personal will, acting instead as instruments of divine will. This ideal aligns with the concept of the "perfect human" (*al-insan al-kamil*) in Islamic thought — a being who unites knowledge, love, and action in harmony with God. In conclusion, Alisher Navoiy's thought presents a rich and nuanced map of spiritual development. Through stages of struggle, love, unveiling, and unity, the soul progresses from ignorance to divine intimacy. His poetry, deeply rooted in Sufi tradition, transcends time and culture, offering timeless wisdom for anyone seeking inner transformation. By focusing on sincerity, love, and surrender, Navoiy invites the reader not only to read but to journey — inward, upward, and ultimately, homeward.

The list of used literature

Navoiy, A. Hayrat ul-abror. Translated excerpts and commentary in: Bertels, E.E. Navoiy va tasavvuf. Toshkent: Fan, 1962.

Navoiy, A. Devon. Annotated edition by: G'ulomov, A. Alisher Navoiy g'azallari va tasavvuf. Toshkent: Ma'naviyat, 1999.

Alisher Navoiy. Lison ut-Tayr. Tashkent: Fan, 1991.

Alisher Navoiy. Mahbub ul-qulub. Tashkent: G'afur G'ulom nomidagi Adabiyot nashriyoti, 1983.

Navoiy, Alisher. Lison ut-Tayr (The Language of the Birds), annotated edition, Tashkent: G'afur G'ulom Publishing, 1991.

Navoiy, Alisher. Xazoyin ul-maoniy, Vol. II, Tashkent: Fan Publishing, 1980.