CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION IN SUFI ALLEGORY: STRUCTURAL DYNAMICS OF FARID AL-DIN ATTAR'S "MANTIQ UT-TAYR" AND ALISHER NAVOI'S "LISON UT-TAYR

Akramova Umida Tokhirovna
Teacher of Bukhara State University
Department of English Literature and Translation Studies
u.a.tohirova@buxdu.uz
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ABSTRACT: This comparative study examines the structural synthesis, thematic continuity, and narrative innovations between Farid al-Din Attar's twelfth-century Persian masterpiece Mantiq ut-tayr and Alisher Navoi's 1499 Turkic adaptation Lison ut-tayr. Rather than treating Navoi's work as a passive translation, this paper contextualizes it within the Eastern tradition of creative emulation (nazira). Through textual and structural analysis, the study explores how Navoi restructured Attar's allegory, refining character dynamics, altering didactic parables, and reshaping the progression of the seven mystical valleys (vādī). Navoi's architectural changes reflect a distinct fifteenth-century Timurid intellectual framework, blending Naqshbandi spiritual principles with humanistic pedagogy. By evaluating the mechanics of character archetypes, spatial narrative progression, and ideological shifts, this paper demonstrates how Navoi preserved the core Sufi ethos of Attar while asserting the linguistic and artistic sovereignty of the Chagatai language.
Keywords: Farid al-Din Attar, Alisher Navoi, Mantiq ut-tayr, Lison ut-tayr, Sufi allegory, comparative literature, nazira tradition, Chagatai literature, structural analysis.

ANNOTATSIYA: Ushbu qiyosiy tadqiqotda Fariduddin Attorning XII asrga oid "Mantiq ut-tayr" asari hamda Alisher Navoiyning 1499-yilda yaratilgan "Lison ut-tayr" dostonidagi syujet va struktura vorisiyligi, shuningdek, o'ziga xos badiiy novatorlik tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda Navoiy asari shunchaki tarjima emas, balki Sharq mumtoz adabiyotining nazira yaratish an'anasi doirasidagi mustaqil va mukammal badiiy obida sifatida baholanadi. Matniy hamda tarkibiy tahlil orqali Navoiyning Attor syujetini qayta ishlash mahorati qushlar obrazlaridagi va voqealar rivojidagi o'zgarishlar, kiritilgan masallar hamda yetti vadiy tasviri misolida yoritib beriladi. Navoiy tomonidan kiritilgan struktural yangiliklar XV asr Temuriylar davri ilmiy-falsafiy muhiti va Naqshbandiylik ta'limoti tamoyillari bilan asoslanadi. Maqolada har ikki dostonning kompozitsion qurilishi va g'oyaviy yo'nalishi chog'ishtirilib, Navoiyning turkiy tildagi badiiy tafakkur imkoniyatlarini namoyon etishdagi o'rni ko'rsatib berilgan.
Kalit so'zlar: Fariduddin Attor, Alisher Navoiy, "Mantiq ut-tayr", "Lison ut-tayr", tasavvufiy allegoriya, qiyosiy adabiyotshunoslik, nazira an'anasi, chig'atoy adabiyoti, syujet tahlili.

АННОТАЦИЯ: В данной сравнительной статье исследуются вопросы сюжетной преемственности и поэтического новаторства между поэмой Фарид ад-Дина Аттара «Мантик ут-тайр» (XII в.) и ее староузбекской адаптацией Алишера Навои «Лисон ут-тайр» (1499 г.). Работа рассматривает произведение Навои не как механический перевод, а как самостоятельное художественное переосмысление в рамках восточной традиции «назира» (поэтического ответа). Путем композиционного и текстологического анализа раскрываются особенности трансформации сюжетной структуры: переработка образов птиц, введение новых притч и переосмысление

концепции семи духовных долин (vādī). Инновации Навои отражают интеллектуальную атмосферу эпохи Тимуридов и духовные ориентиры суфийского ордена Накшбандия. Сравнительный анализ позволяет продемонстрировать, как Навои, сохраняя суфийскую концепцию оригинала, утвердил художественные возможности чагатайского языка.

Ключевые слова: Фарид ад-Дин Аттар, Алишер Навои, «Мантик ут-тайр», «Лисон ут-тайр», суфийская аллегория, сравнительное литературоведение, традиция назира, чагатайская литература, анализ сюжета.

Introduction

In the history of Islamic mystical literature, the quest of the birds for the mythical Simurgh stands as one of the most enduring allegories of spiritual transformation. Originating in early Sufi treatises by Ibn Sina and Ahmad Ghazali, the narrative reached its classical maturity in Farid al-Din Attar's twelfth-century Persian masterpiece Mantiq ut-tayr (The Conference of the Birds). Three centuries later, the paramount Chagatai poet Alisher Navoi (1441–1501) revisited Attar's text to compose Lison ut-tayr (The Language of the Birds, 1499). Rather than serving as a literal translation, Navoi's work represents a sophisticated instance of nazira—a traditional literary emulation wherein a poet directly engages with a predecessor's framework to offer a fresh philosophical and stylistic synthesis.

While both works map the soul's journey across seven perilous valleys toward divine union (fana and baqa), the architectural differences between Mantiq ut-tayr and Lison ut-tayr illuminate an evolution in Sufi pedagogy, literary craftsmanship, and socio-cultural vision. Attar wrote during a period of mystical fervor, employing an intense, ecstatic style rich with paradox. Navoi, writing in the refined atmosphere of late Timurid Herat, introduced structural symmetry, logical clarity, and a distinctly humanistic approach to Sufi doctrine. This paper analyzes the structural mechanics of both texts, identifying how Navoi maintained thematic continuity with Attar while transforming narrative dynamics, character archetypes, and parable integration to create a distinct Chagatai masterpiece.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative-historical and structural analysis to evaluate the narrative framework of Mantiq ut-tayr and Lison ut-tayr. By contrasting the sequence of chapters, character traits, and insertion of embedded parables (hikayat), the analysis demonstrates how narrative alterations correspond to distinct philosophical objectives. Textual evidence is evaluated alongside classical commentary traditions and modern comparative scholarship to contextualize Navoi's structural innovations within Chagatai literary history.

Structural Continuities: The Shared Allegorical Foundation

At their core, both Mantiq ut-tayr and Lison ut-tayr share a identical macro-structure rooted in Sufi cosmology. The narrative setup establishes a crisis: a flock of birds, representing humanity in search of truth, gathers to select a sovereign king. The Hoopoe (Hudhud), acting as the spiritual guide (pir or shaykh), reveals that their true king is the Simurgh, who lives beyond the formidable Mount Qaf. To reach the monarch, the birds must cross seven mystical valleys (vādī):

1. Talab (Search / Yearning)
2) Ishq (Love)
3. Ma'rifat (Gnosis / Knowledge)
4) Istighna (Detachment / Independence)
5. Tawhid (Unity)
6) Hayrat (Astonishment / Bewilderment)

7. Faqr va Fana (Poverty and Annihilation)

In both poems, the journey is disastrously demanding. Thousands of birds forfeit their lives due to weakness, attachment, or fear, until only thirty (si murgh) survive. Upon reaching the hall of the Simurgh, the travelers realize through a profound pun on their own numbers (si murgh meaning "thirty birds" in Persian) that the divine entity they sought was reflection of their own purified inner selves.

Navoi rigorously preserved this overarching framework, recognizing that its narrative logic perfectly mirrored the Naqshbandi path of spiritual self-realization. However, beneath this external structural alignment lies a profound reconfiguration of narrative pacing, internal proportions, and character interactions.

Architectural Variations and Narrative Innovation

Navoi's structural alterations in Lison ut-tayr reflect a conscious desire to streamline Attar's sprawling narrative and heighten its pedagogical clarity. Where Attar operates with free-flowing, ecstatic digressions, Navoi imposes deliberate architectural balance.

Pacing and Proportions: Attar's Mantiq ut-tayr consists of approximately 4,600 couplets (bayts), whereas Navoi's Lison ut-tayr is around 3,500 couplets. Navoi reduced narrative redundancy, condensing lengthy dialogues between the Hoopoe and individual birds while expanding the poetic focus on key transitional stages, particularly the descriptions of the Valleys.

Character Archetypes and Dialogue: In Attar's original, the birds' excuses for refusing the journey—such as the Nightingale's obsession with the rose or the Duck's attachment to water—are met with stern, uncompromising rebukes from the Hoopoe. Navoi humanizes this exchange. His Hoopoe displays greater empathy, treating the birds' earthly attachments not merely as sins, but as cognitive misunderstandings that require patient instruction. Navoi adjusts the symbolic traits of birds (such as the Parrot, Falcon, and Peacock) to resonate directly with the socio-spiritual context of Timurid society.

Reconfiguration of Parables (Hikayat): Embedded stories form the primary vehicle for moral and mystical instruction in both works. While Navoi retains iconic stories—such as the tragic tale of Shaykh San'an—he replaces several of Attar's secondary anecdotes with original or significantly adapted narratives. Navoi's parables emphasize justice, ruler-subject relationships, and social responsibility alongside personal detachment, reflecting his experience as a statesman and patron of the arts.

The Seven Valleys: In the portrayal of the final stages, Navoi introduces distinct spatial and poetic descriptions for each vādī. While Attar's valleys serve as abstract, overwhelming states of mind, Navoi constructs them as vivid allegorical landscapes. Furthermore, Navoi places greater emphasis on the stage of Baqa (abiding in God after annihilation), offering a more hopeful, constructive climax for the spiritual seeker.

Conclusion

Alisher Navoi's Lison ut-tayr stands as a monumental achievement in Chagatai literature, demonstrating that creative emulation (nazira) can yield a work of distinct architectural and artistic autonomy. By adopting the structural foundation of Farid al-Din Attar's Mantiq ut-tayr, Navoi preserved the core metaphysical truths of Sufi allegory while revitalizing its delivery. Through structural streamlining, narrative empathy, and refined parable selection, Navoi transformed Attar's ecstatic Persian poem into a clear, balanced, and deeply humanistic masterpiece tailored for his time and language. This comparative synthesis highlights the fluid dialogue between Persian and Turkic literary traditions, where continuity of spirit served as the foundation for innovation in form.

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