

ANTHROPOCENTRIC PARADIGMS IN THE “KHAMSA” OF NIZAMI GANJAVI
AND ALISHER NAVOI: A COMPARATIVE-TYPOLOGICAL STUDY

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Abstract

This article comparatively analyzes anthropocentric paradigms in *Makhzan al-Asrar* by Nizami Ganjavi and *Hayrat ul-Abror* by Alisher Navoi. The study examines ideological transformation, structural parallels, and linguistic differentiation between the two works. The findings demonstrate that Navoi does not merely imitate Nizami but reinterprets mystical humanism into a socio-ethical paradigm grounded in civic responsibility.

Beyond structural correspondence, the article explores how the concept of the human being evolves from a predominantly metaphysical construct in Nizami's poetry into a socially engaged and ethically accountable subject in Navoi's interpretation. While Nizami foregrounds inner purification and spiritual ascent as the primary path to human perfection, Navoi expands this vision by emphasizing public duty, justice, and service to society as essential components of human dignity. Particular attention is paid to the transformation of key motifs such as divine wisdom, kingship, moral virtue, and love, demonstrating that Navoi reshapes inherited imagery to reflect historical consciousness and communal responsibility. Consequently, the comparative analysis reveals a dynamic continuity in which tradition becomes a foundation for creative reinterpretation rather than passive repetition.

Keywords

anthropocentrism, comparative literature, Khamsa, Navoi, Nizami, humanism, justice, socio-ethical poetics.

Introduction

The comparative analysis of Nizami Ganjavi and Alisher Navoi occupies a central place in Eastern literary studies. While their structural affinity has been repeatedly noted [3], the anthropocentric dimension of their works requires renewed interpretation. Anthropocentrism here refers not simply to the thematic presence of the human being but to a worldview in which the human becomes the axiological and epistemological center of literary discourse.

Nizami (12th century) laid the foundation of Persian poetic humanism, whereas Navoi (15th century) recontextualized this tradition within Turkic intellectual culture and Timurid political reality [5]. This study argues that Navoi transforms metaphysical anthropocentrism into socio-ethical activism.

In *Makhzan al-Asrar*, Nizami conceptualizes the human being as the metaphysical synthesis of existence and the treasury of divine secrets. He writes: “*O human, if you are such a precious pearl yet degrade yourself, this is not justice*” [1]. The metaphor of the pearl presents the human as a jewel of sacred origin whose value lies in spiritual awareness. Through repeated references to the duality of body and spirit, Nizami portrays the human as a bridge between the material and the transcendent realms [1]. In this framework, anthropocentrism is primarily mystical: human perfection is achieved through inner purification, humility, and proximity to Absolute Truth. The individual's task is not social dominance but spiritual refinement.



Navoi adopts this ontological elevation in *Hayrat ul-Abror*, yet he significantly redirects its emphasis. Referring to the human as the “**crown of the universe,**” he **immediately links dignity with responsibility**. As he states, “*The rank of man is measured by the benefit he brings to people*” [2]. Here, value is determined not by divine origin alone but by ethical action. Navoi repeatedly underlines that nobility is grounded in service, justice, and moral conduct rather than lineage or status [2]. Thus, while Nizami’s paradigm privileges contemplative illumination, Navoi advances an anthropocentrism that demands active participation in social life.

This divergence becomes particularly evident in their treatment of justice and kingship. In Nizami’s parable of “**Anushiravan and the Owl,**” a devastated landscape symbolizes the destructive consequences of injustice; the owl inhabiting ruins stands as an emblem of moral decay [1]. Justice functions as a principle of cosmic equilibrium, and the ruler embodies divine order on earth. Navoi, however, reformulates political legitimacy in conditional terms: “*The Sultan is the shadow, while God is the sun*” [2]. The metaphor implies that authority derives its meaning solely from its reflection of divine justice. Navoi’s tone is more didactic and socially critical, emphasizing accountability and warning rulers against oppression, a perspective shaped by the socio-political realities of his era [4]. Consequently, whereas Nizami frames justice as metaphysical harmony, Navoi reinterprets it as civic responsibility and ethical governance.

Both *Makhzan al-Asrar* and *Hayrat ul-Abror* consist of twenty maqālāt, a structural symmetry that clearly signals deliberate intertextual continuity and conscious engagement with poetic tradition [3]. However, beneath this formal correspondence lies a profound ideological transformation. While Nizami preserves a predominantly mystical orientation, Navoi reshapes inherited themes in accordance with a socially grounded humanism. For example, Nizami’s discussion of repentance centers on spiritual purification and the refinement of the inner self as a prerequisite for approaching divine truth. In contrast, Navoi expands repentance into the sphere of public morality, associating it with generosity, loyalty, courage, and service to the community [2]. Similarly, humility in Nizami functions primarily as an inward spiritual discipline that elevates the soul. In Navoi, humility acquires social resonance, becoming empathy, ethical solidarity, and responsibility toward others. This shift marks a transition from mystical anthropology to civic humanism, where the perfection of the self is inseparable from service to society.

A comparable transformation appears in the poets’ treatment of *Layli and Majnun*, where love operates as a central anthropocentric category. In Nizami’s version, Majnun embodies mystical annihilation in divine love. He withdraws from worldly norms and dissolves into spiritual ecstasy, symbolizing transcendence beyond material existence [1]. Love thus becomes a metaphysical path toward union with the Absolute. Navoi’s Majnun, however, retains psychological individuality and ethical agency. Rather than disappearing into mystical abstraction, he confronts rigid social conventions and defends the authenticity of personal emotion [2]. Love, in this interpretation, affirms moral freedom and the dignity of individual feeling. The divergence reveals a broader ideological shift: for Nizami, human identity culminates in spiritual transcendence, whereas for Navoi, human identity asserts ethical individuality within the lived reality of society.

Discussion

The comparative analysis demonstrates that the transformation of anthropocentric thought from Nizami to Navoi operates simultaneously at ideological, philosophical, and linguistic levels, revealing not rupture but creative reinterpretation.

At the ideological level, Navoi expands mystical anthropocentrism into socio-ethical activism. While Nizami primarily situates the human being within a metaphysical hierarchy, emphasizing spiritual ascent and inner purification, Navoi embeds the human subject within



historical and social reality. The individual is no longer defined solely through proximity to divine truth but through responsibility toward society. Human dignity becomes inseparable from justice, service, and moral accountability. In this sense, Navoi transforms contemplation into engagement, shifting the axis of human centrality from transcendence to participation.

At the philosophical level, the divergence can be expressed through a conceptual contrast: in Nizami, the human is portrayed as the secret of the cosmos, a microcosm reflecting divine wisdom and universal harmony. In Navoi, however, the human becomes the measure of worldly action. Ethical agency, rather than mystical absorption, defines the essence of humanity. This philosophical shift does not deny the sacred dimension but relocates it within lived moral practice.

At the linguistic level, the transformation is equally significant. Nizami's Persian poetic diction frequently employs symbolic abstraction, layered metaphors, and Sufi imagery that privilege contemplative interpretation. Navoi's Turkic expression, while retaining poetic richness, introduces greater semantic clarity and emotional immediacy. Through dynamic imagery and accessible language, anthropocentrism moves closer to collective experience and social consciousness.

Therefore, Navoi does not negate Nizami's paradigm but reinterprets and expands it within a new cultural and historical framework. His *Khamsa* represents a distinct literary stage rather than a simple imitation, demonstrating how tradition becomes a foundation for ideological innovation [3].

Conclusion

The comparative analysis confirms that Navoi transforms inherited metaphysical humanism into a model of socially engaged poetics. While preserving the ontological dignity of the human being emphasized by Nizami, he reorients its meaning toward ethical responsibility, justice, and communal service. In Navoi's interpretation, the human is not only a reflection of divine mystery but also an active participant in shaping moral and social reality. By linking spiritual elevation with historical consciousness and civic duty, he broadens the scope of anthropocentric thought beyond contemplative mysticism.

Thus, Navoi establishes a dynamic synthesis between transcendence and social praxis, demonstrating that human perfection must manifest in lived ethical action. His reinterpretation of anthropocentrism does not reject the earlier tradition but deepens and contextualizes it within a new cultural framework. In doing so, Navoi makes a substantial contribution to the development of Eastern humanism, transforming it into a paradigm that unites spiritual depth with historical and societal engagement.

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