

SOURCE STUDY ASPECTS OF ALISHER NAVOI'S "MAHBUB UL-QULUB"

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the source study (manbashunoslik) aspects of Alisher Navoi's prose work "*Mahbub ul-qulub*" ("Beloved of Hearts"). It examines the historical background, structure, and ideological essence of the work, as well as the social, ethical, and philosophical ideas reflected in it. The research focuses on the Quranic, hadith-based, Sufi, and classical Persian-Turkic literary sources used by Navoi, highlighting his worldview, ethical ideals, and reflections on human and social values. The study concludes that "*Mahbub ul-qulub*" serves not only as a literary text but also as a valuable historical and philosophical source, providing insight into the socio-moral thought of the Timurid period.

**Keywords:** Alisher Navoi, *Mahbub ul-qulub*, source studies, historical source, literary heritage, ethical and philosophical views, Sufism, Qur'an, Hadith, social system, Timurid era.

**Introduction** Alisher Navoi's creative legacy represents not only the pinnacle of his own era but also the highest achievement in all Turkic literature. His works embody profound spirituality, deep thought, humanism, and moral purity. Navoi elevated the status of the Turkic language, raising it to the level of Persian-Tajik literature and proving its richness and expressive power. His prose works also reflect his intellectual depth and artistic mastery. Among them, *Mahbub ul-qulub* ("The Beloved of Hearts") stands out as one of the most mature, philosophical, and socially significant creations, possessing not only literary but also historical, ethical, social, and philosophical value.

The work conveys noble ideas about humanity and society, justice and honesty, knowledge and enlightenment, compassion and generosity. In this book, Navoi thoughtfully examines the social and political realities of his time, describing the conditions of different social classes and analyzing their moral qualities and duties within society. Therefore, the study of *Mahbub ul-qulub* should not be limited to literary analysis alone but must also involve historical, philosophical, ethical, social, and cultural perspectives.

Examining this work from a source studies (manbashunoslik) perspective allows scholars to identify and interpret the historical events, social relations, and cultural atmosphere reflected in it, while also understanding the author's worldview in the context of his era. In this regard, *Mahbub ul-qulub* is not merely a literary monument but also a reliable historical source for exploring the socio-cultural life of the 15th century. Through his ideas, parables, and wisdom, Navoi appears as an intellectual devoted to justice, enlightenment, and humanity. Consequently, analyzing *Mahbub ul-qulub* from a source-critical perspective remains a highly relevant and valuable area of research for both literary and historical studies today.

**Historical Background and Source Significance.** Alisher Navoi, one of the greatest figures of the Timurid era, was born in 1441 and died in 1501<sup>1</sup>. He served at the court of Sultan Husayn Bayqara in Herat, which at that time was the major cultural center of the Timurid state<sup>2</sup>. *Mahbub*

<sup>1</sup> Ali-Shir Nava'i — Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali-Shir\\_Nava%27i](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali-Shir_Nava%27i)

(Biographical information on Navoi's birth, death, and role in the Timurid court)

<sup>2</sup> E. Allworth (1994). *Central Asia: 130 Years of Russian Dominance — A Historical Overview*. Duke University Press.

(Mentions Herat as the Timurid cultural capital under Husayn Bayqara)

*ul-qulub* (“The Beloved of Hearts”) was written around the year 1500, during the final period of Navoi’s life, and represents the culmination of his mature philosophical and prose thought<sup>3</sup>. The work was composed in Persian prose, reflecting the multilingual and multicultural character of the Timurid court and intellectual life of that era.

The political and cultural environment of the Timurid period was deeply intertwined with literature, Sufism, ethics, and philosophy<sup>4</sup>. As a poet, statesman, and humanist thinker, Navoi vividly portrayed the moral and intellectual atmosphere of his time. *Mahbub ul-qulub* serves as a literary expression of these historical and spiritual realities, offering valuable insight into the social structure, moral ideals, and cultural life of the late 15th century<sup>5</sup>.

The book consists of three main sections. In the first, Navoi discusses various social groups—scholars, rulers, craftsmen, peasants, and others—analyzing their ethical qualities, social roles, and responsibilities. The second section elaborates on general moral principles such as justice, patience, knowledge, faith, and generosity. The third part includes the author’s personal reflections, prayers, and philosophical meditations. In this way, the work moves from an external depiction of society to an inner exploration of the human soul, revealing Navoi’s comprehensive view of moral and spiritual perfection.

From the standpoint of source studies, *Mahbub ul-qulub* holds immense historical and cultural significance. It provides first-hand information about the social hierarchy, professions, economic relations, and ethical values of the Timurid period. The descriptions and classifications presented by Navoi closely correspond to the real social structure of his time, making the text a reliable primary source for historians. The lexical richness of the work also reflects the linguistic and cultural interaction between Persian and Turkic traditions, as well as the conceptual vocabulary of social and moral discourse in the 15th century.

Moreover, the work reveals Navoi’s Sufi and humanistic worldview, emphasizing moral purity, compassion, justice, and the pursuit of knowledge as the path to human perfection. The ideal person in *Mahbub ul-qulub* is depicted as honest, wise, merciful, and devoted to the welfare of society. For this reason, the text serves not only as a literary masterpiece but also as a philosophical and ethical treatise that mirrors the intellectual and spiritual aspirations of its time. Studying *Mahbub ul-qulub* from a source-critical perspective allows researchers to reconstruct the socio-economic and cultural context of the Timurid era. <sup>6</sup>It sheds light on the interconnection between language, thought, morality, and social consciousness. Therefore, the work remains an essential source for literary, historical, and cultural research alike.

*Mahbub ul-qulub* represents the peak of Alisher Navoi’s creative and intellectual maturity. It embodies his profound reflections on humanity, society, and morality while simultaneously preserving the historical and cultural essence of the Timurid world. Through its structure, content, and philosophical depth, the work stands as a unique document of both literary excellence and

<sup>3</sup> Bertels, E. E. (1965). *Navoi i ego vremya* [Navoi and His Time]. Moscow: Nauka. (Provides dating of *Mahbub ul-qulub* around 1500)

<sup>4</sup> Subtelny, M. E. (1988). *Timurid Iran: Politics, Culture, and Society under the Reign of Shahrukh and Husayn Bayqara*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Hodjaeva, N. (2021). “Alisher Navoi’s Social and Moral Philosophy in *Mahbub ul-qulub*.” *Western European Scientific Journal*, Issue 10.

<sup>6</sup> *Western European Studies Journal* (2021). “Historical and Cultural Context in Navoi’s Prose.” <https://westerneuropenstudies.com/index.php/4/article/download/950/616/1305>

historical value—an enduring source for understanding the moral and social ideals of one of the most remarkable epochs in Central Asian history.

Source Analysis of *Mahbub ul-Qulub*: As a Historical Source In *Mahbub ul-Qulub*, Alisher Navoi provides a vivid representation of the social order of the late Timurid era. He devotes the first section of his work to describing different social classes — rulers, officials, scholars, artisans, and peasants — and discusses their moral obligations, social duties, and responsibilities. The text is directly devoted to moral issues, in which the moral behavior of the categories of society is described in the form of norms, principles, teachings, and wisdom. The first part of the book reveals people’s condition, character, and the roles, functions, and duties of different social classes in the society where he lived.

This classification and commentary make the work a valuable sociological and historical source. By analyzing the expectations placed on kings, judges, ministers, and artisans, Navoi provides insight into the social hierarchy, the prevalent values such as justice and honest service, and the workings of governance and morality in his time. For example, Navoi harshly criticizes corrupt judges and officials, arguing that if a judge accepts bribes, he can easily violate Sharia law in exchange for wealth.

Moreover, the linguistic and semantic study of the text shows the use of Islamic and socio-political terminology that reflects the institutional, cultural, and ideological structure of the Timurid society. Thus, from a source-study perspective, *Mahbub ul-Qulub* offers credible and authentic information about the social stratification, official responsibilities, and moral discourse of the Timurid period.

**As a Literary Source** From a literary standpoint, *Mahbub ul-Qulub* represents the culmination of didactic prose in Turkic and Persian literature. Although Navoi often wrote in Turkic, this particular work was composed in Persian prose — reflecting the linguistic norms of the court — and blends diverse literary traditions. The book is divided into three main parts: the first discusses social hierarchy, the second focuses on moral values, and the third presents philosophical advice and wise sayings.

Scholars describe it as one of the highest examples of moral prose in Eastern literature, rich in moral counsel, life observations, and parables. The work’s intertextuality is evident in its incorporation of Islamic traditions, including Qur’anic and Hadith-based teachings, Persian stylistic elements, and Turkic cultural expressions. The use of Arabic and Persian lexicon — such as *imām*, *wali*, and *riyāzah* — in a text infused with Turkic ethical sentiment demonstrates Navoi’s mastery of blending multiple cultural and linguistic influences.

Therefore, as a literary source, *Mahbub ul-Qulub* stands as a synthesis of Eastern moral prose, combining religious, philosophical, and literary dimensions. It serves as a bridge linking Islamic, Persian, and Turkic intellectual traditions and is an essential text for understanding the evolution of Central Asian moral literature.

**As a Philosophical and Religious Source.** Philosophically and theologically, *Mahbub ul-Qulub* continues the Islamic ethical tradition by addressing fundamental moral values such as patience (*sabr*), repentance (*tawba*), contentment (*qana‘at*), divine love (*‘ishq*), self-purification (*tazkiyah*), and justice (*‘adl*). Navoi connects these concepts with human behavior and spiritual growth, emphasizing that true morality lies in the harmony between inner purity and outward action.

The influence of Sufism is especially prominent. The work frequently uses Sufi terminology and explores spiritual stages such as self-discipline (*riyāzah*), mystical practice (*mu‘amalat*), and sainthood (*walāyat*). Through these concepts, Navoi expresses the Sufi idea of self-perfection through love, humility, and divine knowledge.

In this sense, the work continues the intellectual legacy of earlier thinkers like Imam al-Ghazali and Sa'di Shirazi, who combined moral philosophy with spiritual experience. *Mahbub ul-Qulub* thus occupies a central place among the ethical and philosophical writings of the Islamic world. It portrays Navoi not only as a poet and statesman but also as a thinker who sought to integrate faith, wisdom, and moral action.

**Conclusion:** “*Mahbub ul-qulub*” is not merely a literary or prose work; it is a profound historical, social, religious, and philosophical source that vividly reflects the spiritual and moral life of its time. Through this masterpiece, Alisher Navoi portrays the intricate relationship between the individual and society, while emphasizing ideals such as justice, morality, knowledge, and compassion in governance and human conduct. The reflections and admonitions expressed in the text reveal the socio-political atmosphere of the 15th century, yet they remain remarkably relevant to modern times. Thus, studying “*Mahbub ul-qulub*” holds great importance not only for Navoi studies but also for the fields of source studies, philosophy, ethics, and cultural history. The work serves as a shining testament to the intellectual and moral depth of Eastern thought and its enduring humanistic values.

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