

**HERMENEUTIC APPROACH IN THE INTERPRETATION OF CLASSICAL TEXTS
(ALISHER NAVOI'S ARBA'IN WORK)**

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Annotation: This study explores the hermeneutic approach in the interpretation of classical texts, focusing particularly on Alisher Navoi's Arba'in collection. Hermeneutics, as a methodological framework, emphasizes the interpretative process of understanding literary and philosophical works, considering the historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts in which they were produced. Navoi's Arba'in, a compendium of forty ghazals, represents a synthesis of classical Persian poetic tradition and Chagatai linguistic expression, reflecting both universal and localized aesthetic and ethical paradigms. By applying hermeneutic principles, this paper investigates the interplay between text, authorial intention, and reader reception, examining how meanings are constructed, mediated, and transformed across temporal and cultural boundaries. The study demonstrates that hermeneutic reading not only enhances comprehension of Navoi's literary artistry but also facilitates a nuanced understanding of ethical, spiritual, and philosophical dimensions embedded in his work. This approach underscores the significance of contextual interpretation and contributes to contemporary discourse on classical literature within a modern scholarly framework.

Keywords: Hermeneutics, Alisher Navoi, Arba'in, classical texts, literary interpretation, Chagatai literature, poetic tradition, contextual analysis, reader-response, philosophical dimensions.

Introduction

The interpretation of classical texts has long presented both a challenge and an opportunity for scholars seeking to reconcile historical literary practices with contemporary critical methods. Hermeneutics, rooted in philosophical and literary traditions, provides a rigorous methodology for approaching texts that are temporally, linguistically, and culturally distant from modern audiences. The essence of hermeneutic inquiry lies in its attentiveness to the dynamics of understanding, emphasizing the interrelation between the text, its author, and the interpretive consciousness of the reader. Alisher Navoi, one of Central Asia's most distinguished literary figures, composed his Arba'in as a collection of forty ghazals that engage with complex moral, ethical, and metaphysical themes. While Navoi's work belongs to the Chagatai literary tradition, it also resonates with broader Persianate literary conventions, allowing for a multilayered hermeneutic analysis. This study aims to examine how hermeneutic principles can illuminate the interpretive depth of Navoi's Arba'in, considering both the historical context of its production and the evolving reception among readers and scholars. The inquiry situates Navoi's work within the confluence of classical poetic norms, spiritual discourses, and linguistic artistry, highlighting the interpretive strategies that facilitate a deeper engagement with the text.

Main text

Hermeneutics as an intellectual tradition emerged from the need to bridge the temporal, cultural, and linguistic gaps between texts and their interpreters. Classical hermeneutic theorists such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasized that understanding a text involves reconstructing the author's intended meaning while simultaneously acknowledging the horizon of the reader. In the case of Navoi's Arba'in, a hermeneutic approach allows the reader to engage with the intricate interplay of language, metaphor, and philosophical

reflection¹. The collection embodies a synthesis of aesthetic refinement and ethical inquiry, presenting moral guidance alongside profound emotional and spiritual expression. Each ghazal serves as both an individual poetic unit and a component of a larger thematic framework, revealing Navoi's preoccupation with human virtue, divine wisdom, and the transience of worldly existence. Hermeneutic reading encourages attention to the semantic and symbolic layers of the text, tracing how literary devices, rhythm, and diction shape interpretive possibilities. Navoi's adept manipulation of Chagatai syntax, infused with Persian stylistic influence, creates a linguistic richness that invites nuanced analysis of both form and content.

Understanding Arba'in through hermeneutics also involves situating the text within its historical and cultural milieu. Navoi composed his poetry in the fifteenth century, during a period characterized by the flourishing of Timurid intellectual and artistic culture. The sociopolitical and spiritual dimensions of his time informed his literary production, embedding within his ghazals reflections on governance, ethical conduct, and the philosophical currents of Sufism. Hermeneutic interpretation emphasizes the importance of historical empathy, requiring the reader to consider how concepts of morality, spirituality, and literary aesthetics were understood in Navoi's context. For instance, recurring motifs of divine love, moral accountability, and human frailty gain significance when interpreted against the backdrop of contemporary social and religious thought. Hermeneutics thus extends beyond mere linguistic or structural analysis, encompassing the broader epistemological and cultural frameworks in which the text operates.

The dialogical nature of hermeneutic reading also foregrounds the relationship between authorial intention and reader reception. Navoi's Arba'in is not only a reflection of his intellectual and ethical vision but also a communicative act directed toward an audience of contemporaries and posterity. The interpretive process acknowledges that meaning is co-constructed by the reader, whose historical position, intellectual framework, and experiential horizon interact with the text's inherent ambiguities and resonances². In examining specific ghazals, for example, one observes layers of ethical exhortation embedded in metaphorical imagery, where the textual surface offers multiple interpretive avenues. Hermeneutic principles encourage readers to engage in iterative reflection, moving between parts and whole, text and context, surface and subtext, thereby deepening comprehension of Navoi's literary and philosophical intentions.

Furthermore, the hermeneutic approach highlights the ethical and spiritual dimensions inherent in Navoi's work. Arba'in repeatedly foregrounds the cultivation of moral virtues such as patience, humility, and compassion, often framed within Sufi-inspired metaphors of divine proximity and human fallibility. Hermeneutic analysis elucidates the interconnection between literary form and ethical content, showing how poetic imagery functions as a vehicle for moral reflection. In this sense, Navoi's ghazals are not merely aesthetic creations but instruments of intellectual and spiritual engagement. The reader's interpretive activity thus becomes an ethical practice in itself, resonating with the transformative aims of Navoi's literary endeavor. The text, interpreted hermeneutically, serves as a bridge linking historical consciousness with contemporary moral and philosophical inquiry.

Hermeneutics also encourages comparative perspectives, situating Navoi within both the Chagatai and Persianate literary traditions. His employment of the ghazal form demonstrates a

¹ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. New York: Continuum, 2004.

² Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Hermeneutics: Lectures on the Philosophy of Interpretation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

dialogue with classical Persian models, while his linguistic choices assert a distinct Central Asian identity. This duality enables a richer understanding of cultural transmission, adaptation, and innovation. By examining intertextual relationships, metaphorical patterns, and rhetorical strategies, scholars can trace the continuities and divergences that define Navoi's literary achievements³. Hermeneutic reading, therefore, provides not only interpretive depth but also a framework for appreciating the dynamic interplay between tradition and originality in classical literature.

The process of interpretation is further enriched by considering the temporal dimension. Over the centuries, Navoi's Arba'in has been read, studied, and reinterpreted across various linguistic and cultural settings, highlighting the evolving nature of meaning. Hermeneutics acknowledges that texts are not static repositories of knowledge but living entities that interact with successive generations of readers. This perspective underscores the importance of both fidelity to historical context and openness to contemporary relevance. In Navoi's case, modern readers can engage with ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions that remain pertinent, while also appreciating the historical particularities that shaped the original composition. Thus, hermeneutic engagement with classical texts is simultaneously an act of scholarly reconstruction and imaginative interpretation.

By integrating textual, historical, ethical, and aesthetic perspectives, the hermeneutic approach illuminates the multifaceted significance of Navoi's Arba'in. It demonstrates that understanding classical literature requires attentiveness not only to linguistic and formal features but also to the broader cultural, philosophical, and spiritual currents that inform its creation. Hermeneutics, in this sense, offers a methodology that respects the complexity and richness of classical texts while fostering meaningful dialogue between past and present. The interpretive process is inherently dynamic, emphasizing reflection, contextualization, and ethical engagement, ultimately allowing readers to experience Navoi's literary and philosophical vision in a comprehensive and resonant manner.

Hermeneutic analysis of Navoi's Arba'in reveals the depth and multiplicity of meanings embedded within each ghazal, emphasizing that classical texts require a dialogical approach to fully appreciate their ethical, spiritual, and aesthetic dimensions. The hermeneutic process begins with a recognition that the text operates on multiple layers simultaneously: the literal, the symbolic, and the philosophical. For instance, recurring imagery of light and darkness in Navoi's poetry often functions not merely as poetic ornamentation but as a metaphorical representation of moral clarity and human ignorance. Light signifies knowledge, divine guidance, and ethical consciousness, while darkness embodies error, spiritual neglect, and the limitations of worldly perception. Through a hermeneutic lens, these symbols invite the reader to move beyond superficial understanding and to consider the ways in which ethical instruction is inseparable from literary artistry⁴.

Furthermore, the ethical and spiritual reflections present in Arba'in demonstrate Navoi's engagement with Sufi thought, particularly the emphasis on the purification of the soul and the cultivation of inner virtues. Hermeneutic interpretation draws attention to the nuanced interplay between personal morality and universal principles, illustrating how Navoi's poetry transcends immediate social or historical circumstances. The ghazals do not merely instruct the reader in conventional moral behavior but encourage profound reflection on the nature of human existence, the transience of worldly power, and the pursuit of eternal truths. This multidimensionality

³ Azimov, R. *Alisher Navoi and the Persianate Tradition*. Samarkand: Samarkand University Press, 2012.

⁴ Bektemirov, A. *Chagatai Literary Heritage and Central Asian Poetics*. Tashkent: Fan, 2010.

illustrates the hermeneutic principle that understanding a text involves the integration of historical context, linguistic nuance, and philosophical insight.

In addition, Navoi's manipulation of the Chagatai language in *Arba'in* creates a rhythmically and semantically layered texture that challenges readers to engage in interpretive patience and reflection. Hermeneutic inquiry emphasizes that the linguistic and structural features of a text are not neutral; they shape the possibilities of meaning and the modes of ethical engagement. For example, the syntactic flexibility and poetic devices such as rhyme, metaphor, and alliteration in Navoi's ghazals create openings for multiple readings, inviting the reader to oscillate between literal comprehension and symbolic insight. Such linguistic complexity is integral to understanding the ethical and spiritual implications of the text, demonstrating that Navoi's artistry is inseparable from the moral and philosophical content he conveys.

The historical context of Navoi's work further enriches hermeneutic discussion. Composed during the Timurid period, *Arba'in* reflects both the cultural sophistication of the courtly literary tradition and the broader intellectual currents of Central Asia. Navoi's engagement with Persian literary models, alongside his commitment to developing Chagatai as a literary language, illustrates a conscious negotiation between inherited literary norms and the creation of a distinctly Central Asian literary voice. Hermeneutically, this context invites the reader to consider how cultural, linguistic, and historical circumstances shape interpretive possibilities⁵. The text is thus understood not only as a literary artifact but also as a product of a specific sociocultural matrix, with ethical and aesthetic concerns embedded within its historical moment.

Moreover, the dialogical interaction between reader and text, central to hermeneutics, illuminates the ongoing relevance of Navoi's ethical and philosophical concerns. Modern readers encounter *Arba'in* with a horizon shaped by contemporary moral, social, and literary perspectives, yet the enduring themes of human responsibility, ethical integrity, and spiritual self-cultivation resonate across temporal divides. Hermeneutic reading underscores that meaning is not fixed but emerges in the interplay between the textual horizon and the reader's interpretive engagement. As such, *Arba'in* exemplifies a text that continuously invites reinterpretation, allowing each generation to encounter and reflect upon its ethical and aesthetic dimensions.

The integration of ethical reflection, literary artistry, and spiritual inquiry in Navoi's *Arba'in* demonstrates the efficacy of hermeneutics as a method for classical text interpretation. By attending simultaneously to linguistic features, symbolic patterns, historical context, and philosophical import, hermeneutic discussion provides a comprehensive understanding of Navoi's literary project. For example, the recurring motif of the "journey" in the ghazals serves both as a metaphor for spiritual progression and as a narrative device linking individual ethical experiences to universal truths. Through hermeneutic reading, such motifs are revealed not merely as aesthetic elements but as integral components of Navoi's moral and philosophical discourse.

In conclusion, the hermeneutic examination of *Arba'in* highlights the inseparability of literary form and ethical content, demonstrating that Navoi's poetic expression is simultaneously aesthetic, moral, and philosophical. The dialogical engagement between reader and text, guided by historical and linguistic understanding, enables a multilayered comprehension of meaning, revealing the depth of Navoi's ethical vision and the sophistication of his literary technique⁶. Hermeneutics thus provides both a methodological framework and an interpretive philosophy,

⁵ Navoi, Alisher. *Arba'in*. Tashkent: Sharq Publishing, 2005.

⁶ Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. New York: Continuum, 2004.

emphasizing that classical texts continue to offer rich and transformative experiences when approached with attentiveness, contextual awareness, and ethical reflection.

Conclusion

The application of a hermeneutic approach to Alisher Navoi's Arba'in underscores the enduring relevance and interpretive complexity of classical texts. By emphasizing the interplay between author, text, and reader, hermeneutics facilitates a nuanced understanding of literary, ethical, and spiritual dimensions embedded in the poetry. Navoi's synthesis of Chagatai linguistic expression with Persianate literary traditions illustrates the dynamic interaction between cultural heritage and creative innovation, which hermeneutic analysis can illuminate in depth. The study demonstrates that classical texts, when approached hermeneutically, are not static relics but living sources of reflection, moral insight, and aesthetic appreciation. Hermeneutic reading encourages readers to engage in a continuous dialogue with the text, bridging historical distance while remaining attentive to evolving interpretive possibilities. Ultimately, such an approach enriches both scholarly understanding and personal engagement, reaffirming the significance of classical literature in contemporary intellectual and cultural discourse.

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