

**THE ARTISTIC AND AESTHETICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE
IMAGES OF BELOVED WOMAN AND THEIR SYMBOLS REPRESENTED
IN ALI-SHER NAVAI'S "SADD-I ISKANDARI"**

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ABSTRACT

Sadd-iIskandari("Alexander's Wall") is the largest epic-poem among the works of AlisherNavai. All great Khamsa (a set of five long narrative poems) writers such as NizamiGanjavi, HisravDehlavi, Abdurahman Jami and AlisherNavai wrote an epic about Alexander the Great and included it in their Quintet.

KEYWORDS: *Woman, Symbol, Khamsa, Sadd-Iiskandari, Aleksander.*

INTRODUCTION

Primarily, in the Muslim world, people believed that the king Zulqarnayn(the owner of two horns) whose name appeared in the Qur'an, Surah Al-Kahf (18), Ayahs 83-98 and the king of Ancient Greek kingdom and statesman Alexander were one and the same person, who was known as Alexander the Great in the Eastern world. All the works devoted to Alexander the Great were united under the same subject related to the activities of the famous ruler. However, in the works, the image of Alexander wandered from the historical subject and turned into more an artistic image. Each *Khamsa* writer tried to interpret his ideals in the prototype of Alexander. (A number of sheikhs and preachers claimed that Alexander Zulqarnayn and Alexander the Great were different people because Alexander the Great was a *giaour*. Alexander Zulqarnayn, on the contrary, several times expressed his beliefs to the uniqueness of Allah). Unlike his predecessors, AlisherNavai relied more on history and historical books. In this regard, Navai in the chapters of his work about Alexander tried to imply the consistency of the ayahs of the Qur'an about Zulqarnayn and the activities of the historical figure Alexander. The naming of the epic-poem as *Sadd-iIskandari* also suggested that the Qur'an was the primary source for AlisherNavai in its creation. [1]

In the interpretation of the poet, Alexander the Great was a fair king who conquered the nations to cleanse the world of profanity and vandalism, secure justice throughout the world, and harmonize humanistic discipline with the discipline of the larger world. This interpretation is considered to be Sufistic because the predominance of AlisherNavai's mystical views can be noticed in the introductory chapters of the epic, in the chapters describing the events related to Alexander, and the chapters supplemented to them. For instance, Alexander built a glass chest for himself with the help of which he dived under the water, saw a lot of wonders there and returned to his land of birth. On the way home, he asked to leave him open handed as he could take nothing with himself after his death. AlisherNavai urges the humanity not to indulge in the lusts and luxuries of this mortal and material world and presents Alexander the Great as an example of well-known conqueror who

occupied the whole world and passed away without anything. [2]

Sadd-iIskandari is not a love story. Navai who always glorified pure love and described the feeling of amour in a unique way, decided to portray wisdom and philosophy in his epic rather than his favourite topic. Therefore, the ladies-love presented in the epic-poem especially the wives of the protagonist were not risen to the level of the main character. [3]

The first character in the epic is called Ravshanak (Roxana, Rukhsana), who was the first wife of Alexander the Great. In the epic she is Darius' daughter, and Alexander marries her according to Darius' will. If we look at the origins of the image of that woman, we confront with some historical facts. Roxana (342–309 BC) was a Sogdian or Bactrian princess, the daughter of a Bactrian nobleman named Oxyartes (Vaxuvadarda), and the wife of Alexander the Great. Bactria was an ancient region in Central Asia, the eastern part of the Persian Empire covering modern-day northern Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and northern provinces of Kyrgyzstan. When Oxyartes knew about the approaching Alexander, he placed his wife and children in a sturdy fortress called the Sogdian Rock. However, in 327 BC, the fortress and all its inhabitants, as well as Oxyartes' children and wife, surrendered to the Macedonians and were taken prisoners. The Greek writer Arrian narrated the following about that event: "One of the daughters' names was Roxana who reached her teen age. According to the warriors she was the most beautiful woman in Asia (except for Darius' wife). Alexander the Great fell in love with her at first sight, but he did not want to take advantage of her captivity, instead he married her out of respect by organizing a big wedding ceremony". That marriage brought Alexander closer to the local people who were very rebellious after his defeat. They began to trust Alexander, appreciate his marriage, and like him. Roxana accompanied Alexander when he made an expedition into India in 326-324 BC and his return to Babylon. According to the historical evidences, Roxana and Alexander's newborn son died in his infancy during the expedition to India. In 323 BC, Alexander also suddenly died. A month after Alexander's death, Roxana gave birth to another son and gave him the name of his father. After some years a 15-year-old Alexander Jr. and his mother Roxana were secretly killed by the rivals of Alexander the Great. [4]

The inclusion of the image of Roxana into *Khamsa* was also interesting. It became a tradition to portray Roxana as the daughter of the king of Iran in historical works. The first such mistake was made by the Persian historian Tabari. Still nobody knows whether he did it by chance or intentionally. Under the influence of Tabari, Abul-Qâsem Ferdowsi in his *Shahnameh* ("Book of Kings") also interpreted Roxana as the beloved wife of Alexander the Great and the daughter of King Darius. As the matter of fact, according to Darius' will, Alexander married to his daughter Stateira, and she became his second wife [5].

In Nizami's and Navai's *Khamsas*, Roxana was described as the daughter of the Persian King Darius III. Alexander the Great married that beautiful girl according to Darius' will before his death on the battlefield:

Yana Ravshanakkim, qizimdurmening,

Bukundinnarimensizimdurmening.

Kelibsaltanat bakhridindurripok,

Sharafavjidinaxtaritobnok.

Bisotingniul sham' birlayorut,

Aningshug'lidinkhotiringniiovut.

Kivurmehrbirlashabistoniga,

Qilibaqd, o'turtaniyoninga [Navai, 1993: 197]. [2]

The above-given verses are interpreted as follows: “I have a daughter named Ravshanak (Roxana). Starting from today she is yours. Roxana is a pure pearl of the royal sea, and a bright star of the sky of glory. Lit your kingdom with her rays, and spend your time with lots of joy and fun. Welcome her with great love and embrace my daughter with marriage” [Navai. 1991: 612]”. [3]

The image of Roxana is almost invisible in the epic. She can be noticed only in the scene of her wedding which was celebrated in the Indian village called Nigor where Alexander was described as having been married to her and treated her with the highest respect:

Hamul Ravshanak mahdiulyobo ‘lub,

Shabistonidamajlisorobo ‘lub.

Boripardaahlig ‘abomuedi

Ki, shah birlazonu-bazonuedi [Alisher Navai. 1993:385]. [2]

Interpretation: Roxana, as the eldest wife, was an organizer of the king’s various feasts in his bed of state. She was a person who all the time sat close to the king on the throne, and was the chief and princess of all the maidens in the harem.

In *Sadd-i Iskandari* Mehrnoz (Nozmehr) was the second wife of Alexander who was interpreted as the daughter of Mallu, the king of Kashmir. According to the epic, Mallu escaped from Alexander the Great, built a magical fortress and hid inside it. When Alexander, by the wisdom of the judges, revealed the secret of the fortress, he married Mallu’s daughter Mehrnoz according to his last will. Mehrnoz was a very beautiful girl and Alexander the Great fell in love with her. However, Alexander felt high respect to the royal family of Roxana and paid special attention to her because of her relevance to the Kayanian dynasty. Having known about that, Mehrnoz became jealous of Alexander and scolded him. As a result, she decided to keep distance from the king that made him furious and even led to forget his love to Roxana.

Chu shah ko ‘rdikim, toqati toq o ‘lur,

Junun ichra rasvoyi ofoq o ‘lur.

Angaishqamrijununaylamish,

Jununaqlufahminzabunaylamish [Alisher Navai. 1993:385]. [2]

The verses are interpreted in the following way: Stubbornness of Mehrnoz was increasing and Alexander’s anxiety was intensifying too. Seemingly, the king became very impatient, and his state made him mad and embarrassed.

When Alexander asked the reason for her dalliance, Mehrnoz said that beauty and love had nothing to do with her, and she claimed that she was far more superior to all that.

There is no historical prototype for the image of Mehrnoz. In his epic Alisher Navai emphasized her beauty, joy and wisdom more than Roxana’s. In general, that image served as a symbol of Kashmir’s intrigue, harmonized with splendor.

Bu ishtinmalolattopib Nozmehr

Ki, shoho ‘zga yon qildiog ‘ozmehr [Alisher Navai. 1993:387]. [2]

Among the other lovers of Alexander the Great we can also mention the image of Lu’bati Chin, (a playful Chinese beauty), who was presented to Alexander as a concubine by a Chinese khan. As it was depicted in the epic, Alexander, at first, didn’t care much about her. However, according to Navai that “Chinese deer” showed great heroism when hunting dragons like a lioness in a battle with ants.

Bu holatdabirchobukaylabshitob,

Yopiboraziuzrachiniyniqob.

Nechukkimquyoshko 'kdapo to bafarq,

Quyoshdekbo 'lubko 'ktemurichrag 'arq [Alisher Navai.1993:409]. [2]

Interpretation: One agile woman with a Chinese mask on the face suddenly appeared in the battle field. She was dressed in blue steel clothes, like the bright sun in the sky, and shone like a big star, seething as mercury in the sky.

Alexander the Great was completely captivated and fascinated by the concubine when she showed her heroism in battles and her delicacy and beauty at fiestas:

Xitoyi hasab, sho 'xi chiniynajod,

Jamolig 'a huru pari xonazod [Alisher Navai.1993:354]. [2]

Being amazed with the perfection of Lu'bati Chin, Alexander totally forgot about the two other princesses and fell in love with her.

In Eastern literature, the tradition of symbolism developed to such an extent that the names of countries and cities as well as the names of objects and human parts of the body were filled with certain symbols depending on their meanings in various texts. In particular, Jalal ad-Din Rumi in his first book of *MatnawīyeMa'nawī* ("Spiritual Couplets") described Samarkand as a city of dreams, and India as a homeland of free souls (spirits) and freedom in general, while Navai described Greece as a land of knowledge and wisdom in his *Farhad and Shirin* [Alisher Navai, 1989; Jalal ad-Din Rumi, 2010]. [1,6]

Alexander the Great marched on the Indian and Greek lands, but when the rulers of the countries heard of the conquest of the famous conqueror, they surrendered to him voluntarily. That is, he strived so hard for his own perfection that as a result, knowledge he got opened the doors to him. The presents such as the cup of Jamshid and the mirror of China given to Alexander by the representatives of Chinese dynasty were believed to have hidden meanings.

The cup of Jamshid was a mythological object made by the legendary figure of Greater Iranian culture and tradition Jamshid. The cup had two unusual features: the first was never-ending elixir (wine) inside the cup (*jam*). This was because of the cup that had a tendency to attract wine from the outside. Second, the cup's exterior had the feature to reflect all the events that were taking place all over the world. Later, the image of the cup was symbolized in mystical literature with a special meaning. The cup of Jamshid was a symbol of heroism and at the same time a sign of soul vigilance. The awakened soul referred only to a perfect man, and it reflected not only the seven worlds, but the whole universe.

The mirror of China (Alisher Navai used the *art of iyham* to mean the mirror of China and the mirror of truth) was a bright mirror on both sides, and Alexander used it during his receptions for knowing people closer. It was also a symbol of a pure heart which was based on the philosophical and psychological ideas of the identity of the speaker in the heart of a person with a pure heart as a mirror.

Alexander was amazed by the beauty of those gifts presented by the art of sapience and ordered to make such miraculous objects as *usturlob* (the object used for measuring the location of stars and the sun) and mirrors. The conqueror of the seven worlds wanted to observe and study the celestial bodies, that is, the perfect man wished to deepen his knowledge. To achieve the perfection, Alexander began to observe the movement of the stars with the *usturlob*. The magic mirror, like the cup of Jamshid helped to reflect all the events happening in the world. The symbolic meaning

of those inventions was purifying a perfect man's soul by deepening his knowledge, but the perfection couldn't be achieved only by mastering the superficial knowledge. To succeed in perfection, a person also needed to master deep inner knowledge. We can easily see this tradition in the epic *Sadd-i-Iskandari*. It should be noted that Navai described only the royal blood of Roxana and high respect of Alexander to her not paying so much attention to the description of her appearance, but when it came to Mehrnoz, the poet spent too many words for depicting her beauty. Describing the magnificence, tenderness and wisdom of Mehrnoz, Alisher Navai created the image of a perfect woman with the help of Lu'batu Chin who combined absolute beauty and the qualities of the Creator such as *ajamal* (appearance) and *kamal* (perfection).

If we consider all the above-mentioned features presented by the author the images of Roxana, Mehrnoz and Lu'batu Chin were the prototypes of a single beloved woman. The images developed gradually in line with Alexander's perfection. For example, the image of Roxana was initially recognized as a woman with her noble ancestors, Mehrnoz became the owner of unrepeatable beauty and love, but the image of Lu'batu Chin was described as the owner of both physical and spiritual beauty which rose to the level of real perfection. In addition, the image did not only evolve gradually in the epic, but also had a symbolic character, which can be seen in the following cases.

If we pay special attention to the original meanings of the symbolic words, we can find out the following in the Dictionary of Literary Studies: *nadir* (rare), *rutmi* (eye) - *ok* (eye) - *lov* (love) - *mis* (eye) - *h* (eye) - *salmi* (eye) - *arohsi* (eye) - *omi* (eye) - *ra* (eye) (- ZMAR, a word or phrase which is used only conditionally and within this context, a type of imagery) [7]. So, the image denotes the following meanings in the epic *Sadd-i-Iskandari*:

1) Roxana was a noble woman of the Persian king. She was unique in wisdom, courtesy and high respect. When Alexander conquered Persian land, at first, he was busy only with the earthly needs, and then the unique qualities of Roxana made him closer to her.

2) Kashmir was described as a land of magicians and a symbol of enchantment for a long time in classical literature even before Navai's period. Alisher Navai described the scenes of the conquest of Kashmir with special talent. The land of Kashmir was surrounded by the range of mountains; a special fortress built for emergencies on the top of the mountain spoke to the sky as an example of the incomparable tricks and magic of Kashmir magicians. Alexander occupied both Kashmir and the fortress built by the magicians on the top of the mountain by the wisdom of sages who were under the leadership of Aristotle. This means that Alexander, the man who aspired to perfection, could conquer the world's magic with the help of knowledge. Mehrnoz, a beautiful, charming and wise girl of Kashmir, was also a symbol of Kashmir's enchantment. Alexander, the king who conquered Kashmir and advanced the ladder of perfection, was a symbol of the above-mentioned qualities.

3) *Chin* (China) in the epic was interpreted as a land of enlightenment and art. (Navai reiterated that in his epic poem *Lisonut-Tayr* where the legendary bird Simurg flew over China, and fell one of its feathers during the flight, and then Moni, a famous artist, who got that feather, finally, founded the art of monism) [Alisher Navai, 1996]. [4] Lu'batu Chin, a symbol of absolute beauty, *ajamal* and *kamal*, accompanied the king Alexander as a symbol of Chinese art, enlightenment and perfection who was rising from the level of Chinese perfection and reaching a certain achievement. In the epic, it is important to note that Alexander first fell in love with Roxana, then with Mehrnoz, and at the end with Lu'batu Chin. Although Navai's form of writing did not go beyond the tradition, we see that he always thought ahead of the content.

In short, the images of Roxana, Mehrnoz and Lu'batu Chin in the epic *Sadd-i-Iskandari* were the different versions of the image of a beloved woman. That image had several symbolic features and was also one of the gradually improved images in the epic.

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