



Article

Folkloric Motifs in the Lyric Poetry of Alisher Navoiy

Ozoda Tojiboyeva*¹

1. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in philological sciences, Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navo'i

*Correspondence: ozoda@navoiy-uni.uz

Abstract: In the lyrical poetry of Alisher Navoiy, folkloric motifs are employed extensively. As a keen observer of oral folk creativity, the great poet skillfully incorporated elements of folk applied arts and traditional customs into his verse. Concepts derived from oral folklore are utilized in lyrical works to convey the emotional and psychological state of the lover. This article examines the scholarly activity of the Navoi scholar Natan Mallaev, particularly his studies on the manifestation of national elements in Navoiy's lyrics. It further analyzes the concepts of folk rituals and customs reflected in Navoiy's ghazals and discusses their interpretation in Mallaev's research.

Keywords: Lyrics, folklore, folk songs, ghazal.

Introduction

In Literary studies, relatively few scholars have addressed the issue of the influence of folklore on written literature. Most researchers engaged with both domains tend to specialize more deeply in one of them and remain within a single disciplinary trajectory [1].

Natan Murodovich Mallaev – Doctor of Philology and Professor – was a scholar who possessed a comprehensive command of both the history of classical literature and oral folk creativity. He authored a fundamental textbook on the history of Uzbek literature and provided an in-depth analysis of the popular (folk-based) foundations of Alisher Navoiy's oeuvre. Throughout his scholarly career, he conducted wide-ranging research encompassing lyrical works, the theory of literary genres, the epics of the Khamsa, and comparative analyses of related literatures. Nevertheless, the interrelation between Alisher Navoiy and oral folk creativity constituted the core of his academic inquiry [2].

Before proceeding to a characterization of the scholar's research, it is appropriate to note several qualities distinctive of his scholarly method.

First, clarity and accessibility in textual expression. In the work of some scholars, the full scope of their intellectual conception is not adequately realized in the written text.

Second, adherence to sound principles of scholarly inquiry. This is largely contingent upon the scholar's knowledge and intellectual capacity: a strong researcher is able to delineate with precision the focal point of investigation and, in the course of analysis, to identify striking and memorable insights.

It would not be an exaggeration to state that both of these qualities are fully evident in the research of Natan Mallaev.

Citation: Tojiboyeva O. Folkloric Motifs in the Lyric Poetry of Alisher Navoiy. Central Asian Journal of Literature, Philosophy, and Culture 2026, 7(2), 424-430.

Received: 10th Jan 2026

Revised: 11th Feb 2026

Accepted: 19th Mar 2026

Published: 29th Apr 2026



Copyright: © 2026 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Your translation is already strong in content and structure, but it contains a stylistic inconsistency and can be refined for a more consistent academic tone. Here is a polished version:

In literary studies, research devoted to the analysis of the lyric poetry of Alisher Navoiy and to the classification of his divans has also been extended to the study of other poets' works. In other words, just as Navoiy's oeuvre – having elevated all genres to a high level of artistic perfection – has served as a model and exemplar for poets, these analytical approaches likewise function as methodological templates for scholars [3].

In this regard, the studies of Natan Mallaev, who comprehensively examined the interrelation between Navoiy's oeuvre and oral folk tradition, may serve as a foundation for investigating the presence of folk elements in the works of Uzbek writers. Moreover, they provide a basis upon which researchers can develop and refine their own methodologies of scholarly inquiry.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative literary analysis methodology based on the principles of text hermeneutics and comparative literary studies. The research focuses on the analysis of primary sources, including the lyrical works of Alisher Navoi, particularly his ghazals from various divans, as well as secondary sources such as the scholarly works of Natan Mallaev. Methods such as textual analysis, semantic interpretation, and comparative analysis are applied to identify and examine folkloric motifs within the poetic texts. The hermeneutic approach is used to interpret the relationship between folkloric elements and their artistic functions, emphasizing the interaction between the text, the author, and the cultural context [4]. Content analysis is employed to classify different types of folkloric motifs, including customs, rituals, traditional beliefs, and elements of folk art. Comparative analysis is conducted to evaluate Mallaev's interpretations and to identify similarities and differences in methodological approaches. The study also incorporates elements of stylistic and symbolic analysis to examine how folkloric motifs contribute to the emotional and psychological expression in poetry. The reliability of the research is ensured through cross-referencing sources and maintaining consistency in analytical methods. This methodological framework enables a comprehensive and systematic understanding of folkloric motifs in Navoi's lyrical poetry [5].

Research Results

As noted above, the issue of Alisher Navoiy's literary legacy and its relationship with oral folk tradition constitutes the core of the scholarly activity of Natan Mallaev. His monographs, including "Alisher Navoiy and Oral Folk Creativity" and "The Folk Foundations of Navoiy's Oeuvre," are the product of these sustained investigations. In exploring the popular (folk-based) elements in Navoiy's works, the scholar draws on nearly the entire corpus of the poet's writings.

"The Folk Foundations of Navoiy's Oeuvre" represents an organic continuation of Mallaev's large-scale study "Alisher Navoiy and Oral Folk Creativity," in which particular attention is devoted to the analysis of lyrical works, narrative poems, and, for purposes of substantiation, prose texts as well. The scholar identifies passages and elements in Navoiy's works that reflect the folk customs, traditions, and practices of the period. He seeks to demonstrate that these concepts indeed existed in the life of the people and to elucidate the specific poetic functions for which Navoiy employed them [6].

Naturally, the scholar himself did not live in Herat. However, owing to his strong command of the Persian-Tajik language, he derives his evidence from reliable primary sources – namely, the works of Navoiy's contemporaries that provide insight into the life of the fifteenth century. In this regard, he makes extensive use of the writings of Zayniddin Vosifiy and Husayn Voiz Koshifiy.

It is well known that, over time, interpretations have evolved in accordance with the intellectual and ideological demands of particular historical periods. During the years in which Natan Mallaev lived and worked, literature was largely subordinated to notions of class and social determinism; correspondingly, in literary studies, issues of “folk character,” the representation of ordinary people’s lives, and socially relevant themes were often interpreted in an exaggerated, and at times utopian, manner [7].

In his analyses, however, Mallaev does not, in most cases, proceed from such overly elevated ideological premises. Rather, within the scope of his research, the concept of folk character is grounded in the lived realities of fifteenth-century society – its customs, traditions, and culturally embedded notions. This approach remains methodologically valuable today, as it allows contemporary scholars to examine the presence of folk elements in poets’ works on the basis of historically grounded and empirically verifiable criteria.

As Natan Mallaev observes, “Alisher Navoiy was an artist deeply attuned to the heart, language, and customs of his people, and closely connected with them. He was not a poet who merely awaited the ‘muse of inspiration’ in the solitude of his study; rather, he was a genius who matured in the crucible of a complex and turbulent life” (4, 48). Proceeding from these considerations, the scholar seeks to identify, within the ghazals, those passages in which the life of the people is artistically represented [8].

Clothes:

O‘zbaki gulnori to‘ndin kuydum, ammo o‘lturur,

Lemui terlik aning ostidakim jonon kiyar (“Navodir ush-shabob”).

Sarvig‘a tortib qabo, cho‘kkon quyoshqa soyabon,

Chobukim bo‘yida shirdog‘, boshida qalpog‘idur (“Favoyid ul-kibar”).

Alocha hoshiyalik to‘n kiyib ul rashki pari,

Ol etuk birla xiom etsa, erur kabki dari (“Badoe‘ ul-vasat”).

Although the various types of garments encountered in the lyric poetry of Alisher Navoiy serve, through their diversity of colors, to reveal the image and inner state of the lyrical persona, they are also significant as representations of the national attire of their time. Natan Mallaev emphasizes that Navoiy’s ghazals provide extensive information on the “seasonal varieties, materials, colors, cuts, and other features” of clothing, and notes that some of these elements have, in fact, persisted into the present day [9].

Family rituals.

It is well known that customs and rituals related to weddings and mourning ceremonies are well represented in the epics of Alisher Navoiy. In particular, at Iskandar’s wedding, expressions such as “jon qardoshim yor-yor,” “munglug‘ boshim yor-yor,” and in the mourning of the Kashmiri king Mallu, phrases like “Berib do‘stlardek aduvsiga osh” are cited as illustrative examples.

It is also noted that, as a rule, a person visiting a cemetery places small stones on the graves of relatives and lights candles. Drawing on this tradition, Navoiy employs it in his love lyrics, likening the “ahl-i nujum” (the stars) to small stones and the moon to a candle, thereby creating a remarkably expressive artistic image:

Yuzida ter fitnasidin bo‘lsam ajab emasdurki, marqadida

Ushoq tosh o‘rnida xayli nujum, oy anda sham‘i mazor bo‘lg‘ay.

(Favoyid ul-kibar)” (4, 59).

Rituals performed in the daily life of the people are transferred into lyrical poetry primarily in order to fulfil a specific artistic function; nevertheless, they remain significant

because they also provide the modern reader with insight into the customs and way of life of the people during the time of Alisher Navoiy.

As it is noted: "When a close person arrives in person or brings news, or when a child is born, there is a custom of expressing joy and giving congratulations. Navoiy, making use of this tradition, writes:"

Vah, ne kun bo'lg'ayki, ul g'oyib safardin keldi deb,

Istabon mendin sevinch, otsa har yondin xabar. (Badoe' ul-vasat)" (60).

Among the Uzbek people, this custom has been preserved to the present day. When a long-awaited person arrives, when a child is born, or when highly joyful news is delivered, a *suyunchi* (a reward or gift) is given to the bearer of such glad tidings (for example, in childhood, when our elder brothers returned from official trips, a *suyunchi* would be given to the person who brought the news) [10].

Treatment.

In Uzbek folk customs and traditional beliefs preserved since ancient times, the mirror (*oyna*) carries a distinctive symbolic meaning. Practices such as covering a mirror or including a mirror in a bride's dowry reflect this cultural significance. In such cases, the natural properties of the mirror are metaphorically employed. For instance, in folk tradition there exists a practice of holding a mirror near the mouth of a person to distinguish the living from the dead: if the mirror becomes fogged by breath, the person is considered alive; if it remains clear, the person is considered deceased. As an illustration, an example is cited from Farhod va Shirin:

Ikisin og'zig'a tutqonda mir'ot,

Nafasdin hech asar yo'q erdi, hayhot (4, 61).

The people themselves are healers and sages; the knowledge they have created has been preserved across centuries and has become an integral part of national everyday life [11].

It is well known that Alisher Navoiy, in his lyrical poetry, employs various colors in accordance with types of illness and humoral temperament, and consistently uses natural objects such as quince (*behi*), lemon (*limu*), autumn leaves (*khazon*), and saffron (*za'faron*) in relation to bodily constitution and psychological state. The colors inherent in these objects help to artistically visualize the lover's and beloved's emotional condition, the sufferings of love, and the torments of separation in vivid and expressive imagery.

The scholar Natan Mallaev has carefully identified such ghazals in which these concepts are embodied. He analyzes poetic examples in which, due to the beloved's cruelty, the lover turns pale and falls victim to jaundice-like illness, while the beloved herself appears in yellow attire as a symbolic reflection of this condition. In lines such as "Yaraqon kasali soriq jins qilur, turfa ko'run" and "Sud emish ko'z tushsa asfar jinsi sori, vah, qani / Sarvi nozimkim, sariq gul bargidin kiymish qabo...", he identifies ghazals centered on the motif of "yellow illness," that is, the debilitated state of the lover suffering from the pain of love, and isolates the folk-based concepts embedded within them for scholarly analysis [12].

It is further noted that substances such as amber (*qahraabo*) and the keeping of fish near the patient were traditionally considered remedies against jaundice. According to folk belief, the yellowness of the patient – the illness itself – was thought to transfer to amber or fish, thereby curing the sufferer. Navoiy, emphasizing the "healing" qualities attributed to amber and fish, addresses Christ (*Masih*) in the following manner:

Ey Masiho, urma dam ul ko'zda sufrat daf'ig'a,

Kahrabo keltur quyoshtin, hut burjidan balig'. (Navodir ush-shabob) (4, 63).

In the works of Alisher Navoiy, as analyzed by Natan Mallaev, *qahraabo* (amber), also referred to in Uzbek as *qahraabo*, is a rare yellow-coloured substance. According to

historical accounts, it originated as a resinous secretion from pine trees in antiquity, which, over centuries, became fossilized under soil or water. Due to its electrostatic properties of attracting light particles, the ancient Greeks called it *electron*, and the term “electricity” is etymologically derived from the name of amber. Amber occurs in yellowish and whitish tones; it has traditionally been worn as an ornament and regarded as a remedy for various illnesses. Even in contemporary medicine, it retains certain therapeutic applications. In Navoiy’s period, such beliefs regarding amber were widely prevalent, and their cultural function is reflected in the poetic context of his ghazals [13].

In this regard, Mallaev’s interpretation reveals, in connection with the figure of Masih (Christ), a distinctive mode of symbolic expression in Navoiy’s poetry involving amber and fish. According to religious narratives, the Prophet Isa (Masih) possessed miraculous power through which he could heal the sick and restore life to the dead by the breath of his word. Addressing Masih, Navoiy suggests that even he is incapable of curing the yellowness of the eyes – that is, the disease – whereas amber and fish may serve as potential remedies. However, ordinary amber and ordinary fish are not sufficient; rather, he metaphorically demands that amber be brought from the sun and fish from the constellation of Pisces (*Hüt burji*) (4, 63).

In this passage, the scholar notes that the condition implied in the verse presupposes the ascension of Masih (Christ) to the heavens, and therefore only he is capable of fulfilling such a requirement. In the appendix, Mallaev further explains that in the term *qahraabo* (“amber”), the element *qah* is associated with straw or a yellowish substance, while the suffix *-raabo* conveys the meaning of “attracting” or “drawing toward itself,” thus implying an object that draws away the symptoms of jaundice. He also notes that the constellation of Pisces (*Hüt burji*), according to ancient astronomy, is the twelfth of the twelve zodiac signs, and corresponds to the sign of the Fish.

As a result, the medical thematic layer of the ghazal, together with Navoiy’s poetic ingenuity, is gradually revealed, offering aesthetic pleasure to the reader: jaundice manifests in the eye, the eye turns yellow; amber is yellow, resembling the colour of the sun; and *Hüt* is associated with the fish. The figure of Masih functions as the one who brings amber and fish as remedies to heal the lover’s afflicted body. The details and images within the verse form such a refined semantic composition that, through analyses of this kind, the scholar uncovers and elucidates multiple dimensions of Alisher Navoiy’s artistic world. In the process, the reader is vividly presented with cultural elements characteristic of the medieval worldview.

Practical art.

The scientist looks for examples of folk practical art related to this art form - *painting, embroidery, goldsmithing, etc.*, and cites the following ghazal in full from “Favoyid ul-kibar” as an example:

*Yog 'lig'in, eykim, tikarsen, igna mujgonimni qil,
Naqsh etarda tori oning rishtai jonimni qil.
Istasang torin qizil yoxud qaro qilmoqqa rang,
Ko'z qarosin hal qilib, ko'zdin oqar qonimni qil.
Gar desang har yon qizil gullar qilay nusxat anga,
Ko'ksim ochib, toza qonlig' dog'i hijronimni qil.*

In the ghazal, the processes of placing flowers beside buds, depicting fairy-like forms, and embroidering poetic inscriptions as if they were ornamental patterns are vividly expressed. The concluding *maqta'* ends with the following lines: “O Navoiy, whoever stitches a garment for the beloved, let the reward be the jewel of my life and the substance of my faith.”

Among the Uzbek people, the tradition of sewing handkerchiefs dedicated to a beloved, embroidering waistbands (*belbog'*), or producing decorative textiles such as *palak* and *suzana*, adorned with colourful patterns like pepper motifs or almond-shaped designs, has been preserved as an ancient cultural heritage. In this ghazal, Alisher Navoiy metaphorically transfers the act of embroidery into the emotional sphere of the heart. Sewing tools and actions are likened to aspects of the lover's psychological state, with each detail assigned a symbolic counterpart according to its function: the needle corresponds to eyelashes, the thread used for embroidery represents the thread of life, black and red threads symbolize the black of the eye and the blood flowing from it, the red floral motif reflects a blood-stained heart, the fairy-like image signifies the beloved, and writing words on a cloth is equated with embroidering poetry itself [14].

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the importance of integrating folkloric analysis into literary studies, particularly in the context of classical literature. The presence of folkloric motifs in Navoi's poetry reflects a deep connection between the poet and the cultural traditions of his time. This connection enhances the authenticity and emotional depth of his works, making them more accessible and meaningful to readers.

The analysis demonstrates that folkloric elements function on multiple levels within the text. On one level, they serve as representations of everyday life, providing insights into the customs and traditions of the period. On another level, they operate as symbolic devices that convey complex emotional and psychological meanings. This dual function underscores the richness of Navoi's poetic language and the sophistication of his artistic method.

The study also emphasizes the methodological significance of Mallaev's research. His approach, which combines historical, cultural, and textual analysis, provides a comprehensive framework for studying the interaction between folklore and literature. However, the research also reveals the need for further methodological development, particularly in integrating modern theoretical approaches such as hermeneutics and semiotics [15].

The use of folkloric motifs also reflects broader literary trends in Eastern classical literature, where oral traditions play a significant role in shaping written texts. This highlights the importance of interdisciplinary research that combines literary studies, folklore studies, and cultural analysis.

Despite these findings, the study acknowledges certain limitations, including the focus on selected texts and the reliance on existing interpretations. Future research should expand the scope of analysis and explore the application of digital tools in literary studies.

Conclusion

Overall, the observations conducted by Natan Mallaev in order to reveal the folkloric character of Alisher Navoiy's творчество are extensive and wide-ranging. He vividly demonstrated, with concrete examples, various manifestations of folk performance art and its reflection in Navoiy's works. He also undertook a special study of the folk sources of the *Khamsa* epics, as well as the transformation of narrative epics into prose *qissa* forms in the periods before and after Navoiy.

His article published in the journal *Adabiy meros*, in which he examined the prose retellings of "Farhod va Shirin" and "Layli va Majnun" created by Umar Boqiy, is also of significant scholarly value due to its strong evidential basis and academic rigor.

The scholarly "stream" initiated by Mallaev – like a drop drawn from the eye of a spring – has been further developed by his academic followers. Although his research reflects certain concepts and interpretative approaches characteristic of his time, it has not lost its significance due to the density of information, the solidity of analysis, and the

richness of new discoveries. It is our duty to properly acknowledge and fairly evaluate the work of such highly productive scholars, whom fate has bestowed upon the Uzbek people.

REFERENCES

- [1] N. Mallyayev, "A folk book version of the epic 'Farhad and Shirin'," *Literary Heritage*, no. 3, pp. 135–147, 1973.
- [2] N. Mallyayev, *Alisher Navoi and Folk Art*, Tashkent, 1974.
- [3] N. Mallyayev, *History of Uzbek Literature*, vol. 1, Tashkent, 1976.
- [4] N. Mallyayev, *The Folkloric Basis of Navoi's Art*, Tashkent, 1980.
- [5] I. A. Ismoilov, "Literary influence in 'Saddi Iskandari'," *Foreign Languages in Uzbekistan*, no. 3, pp. 220–226, 2020.
- [6] H. Hamidi and O. Tojiboyeva, "Natan Mallyayev – orientalist scholar," 2020.
- [7] O. Tojiboyeva, "Semantic variety in prose exposition," *Philology Matters*, no. 2, pp. 28–35, 2019.
- [8] A. Navoi, *Khazoyin ul-Maoniy*, Tashkent, 1990.
- [9] A. Navoi, *Favoyid ul-kibar*, Tashkent, 1991.
- [10] A. Navoi, *Badoe' ul-vasat*, Tashkent, 1992.
- [11] A. Navoi, *Navodir ush-shabob*, Tashkent, 1993.
- [12] Sh. Sirojiddinov, *Navoi Studies*, Tashkent, 2010.
- [13] I. Haqqul, *Tasavvuf va adabiyot*, Tashkent, 2002.
- [14] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London, 2004.
- [15] P. Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, Texas, 1976.