

ALISHER NAVOI IN THE SHARED CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE ECONOMIC COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (ECO)**Ahmet Akalin*****Abstract**

Alisher Navoi, the founder of Chagatai literature and one of the most powerful cultural symbols of the region, has left profound traces in the collective memory of the contemporary Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) geography. His authorship in both the Turkic (Chagatai) and Persian languages makes him not merely a poet, but a guiding figure positioned between two great civilizations—Turkic and Persian literary traditions.

Navoi's influence, especially in Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Türkiye, possesses both historical depth and contemporary cultural functionality within ECO member states. His tomb in the city of Herat, Afghanistan, is considered not just a mausoleum but a symbol of shared historical consciousness and cultural affinity. The architectural monuments he commissioned in Mashhad and Nishapur during his governorship in Khorasan reflect the intensity of his interactions within the Iranian cultural sphere. In Türkiye, his works serve as an important point of reference in strengthening cultural ties with the ECO region. The Republic of Uzbekistan positions Alisher Navoi as a cornerstone of national identity, historical continuity, and cultural diplomacy within the vision of "New Uzbekistan," effectively utilizing his legacy as an instrument of soft power.

In this context, Navoi's literary and cultural heritage offers an essential resource for enhancing cultural diplomacy, strengthening soft power, and deepening regional cultural integration among ECO countries. His multilingual, multicultural, and humanistic works not only provide a cultural foundation that nurtures regional cooperation but also play a strategic role in reinforcing the international image and prestige of the respective states.

This study employs the descriptive analysis method, one of the qualitative research approaches. It conducts an in-depth examination of the reflections of literary heritage and architectural works on cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: Alisher Navoi, Cultural Heritage, Soft Power, ECO, ECO Cultural Institute.

1. The Mission of the ECO Cultural Institute (ECI)

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) has adopted cultural cooperation, alongside economic integration, as one of its primary objectives. In line with this mission, the ECO Cultural Institute (ECI), functioning as the relevant cultural body of the organization, provides an important platform for the preservation of regional cultural heritage, the promotion of intercultural dialogue, and the development of joint cultural projects. Positioned as an instrument of cultural diplomacy, the institute aims to strengthen regional solidarity and deepen cooperation among member countries on the basis of shared cultural values.

1.1. The Unifying Role of Alisher Navoi in the ECO Region

Within the ECO region, Alisher Navoi stands as one of the symbolic figures of shared cultural and historical heritage, assuming a unifying role across member states. Residing in the collective memory of both Turkic and Persian literary traditions, Navoi—with his multilingual and multicultural identity—acts as an important figure fostering cultural proximity among ECO member nations. His works not only reinforce historical bonds among the peoples of the region but also inspire ECO's vision for cultural cooperation.

2. Afghanistan

Alisher Navoi occupies a significant place within the cultural and historical heritage of Afghanistan. Navoi was born in the city of Herat, which lies within the borders of present-day Afghanistan, and he also passed away there. His tomb is located in Herat, in a complex where a mosque¹ bearing his name stands.

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¹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/tika-afganistandaki-tarihi-ali-sir-nevai-camii-ni-yeniledi/2004573>

During Navoi's lifetime, Herat served as the capital of the Timurid Empire. Within the Timurid court, he emerged both as a statesman and as a prominent literary figure. Through his works written in Chagatai Turkic and Persian (Ata, 2023, p. 529), he left profound marks not only on literature but also on the construction of cultural identity. With his writings and the architectural monuments he commissioned, he effectively articulated the ideology and cultural identity of the Timurid State. In subsequent periods, reflecting the region's multilingual and multicultural fabric, Navoi's works functioned as an intellectual bridge between the Turkic and Persian civilizational spheres.

Today, one of the conference halls at Herat University has been renovated and named the Alisher Navoi Conference Hall. Navoi's work *Mahbub-ul Kulub* has been translated from Chagatai into Dari² and published through the Baysungur Cultural Center in Herat. In Kabul, the Amir Ali Shir Navoi Foundation organized a panel/exhibition in 2021 on the occasion of the 580th anniversary of his birth. Activities such as the symposium "*A Tribute to the Master of Turkic Literature, Ali Shir Navoi*" have also been held. In addition, a bust erected in Mazar-i-Sharif commemorates Navoi, reflecting the symbolic acknowledgment of his contribution to Afghanistan's historical depth and cultural diversity.

3. Azerbaijan

Alisher Navoi is regarded as an important figure within the cultural and historical heritage of Azerbaijan. Navoi establishes strong connections with Azerbaijan's rich culture and literary tradition. He always expressed profound respect for Nizami Ganjavi, considering him one of his spiritual guides. While composing one of his most significant works, the *Khamsa*, Navoi took Nizami's *Khamsa*³ as his model. He begins this major work with the following verses:

"Kolay değıldir bu meydanda durmak,

Nizami 'nin pençesine pençe vurmak.

Gerek aslan ile aslan cengi,

Aslan olunamazsa, bari pelengi⁴"

His works have served as a source of inspiration in Azerbaijan, particularly in the fields of language and literature, and several of his texts have been translated into Azerbaijani Turkic. Navoi's multifaceted personality and literary legacy have played an important role in shaping Azerbaijan's historical identity and reinforcing regional cultural integration.

Research on Alisher Navoi has always held a prominent position in Azerbaijan. Among the notable studies in this field are Cennet Nağıyeva's works *Nevai in Azerbaijan* and *Alisher Navoi in Baku Manuscripts*, as well as the extensive scholarly examinations of Elmas Ulvi Binnatova. These studies have made significant contributions to the development of Navoi scholarship and enriched the literature with valuable sources.

Across Azerbaijan, various universities host research centers and cultural institutes named after Navoi, which actively continue academic activities. Moreover, his name is given to schools, streets⁵, avenues, and parks; monuments and busts dedicated to him have been erected. In 2020, the "Center for Literary

² The Persian dialect spoken in Afghanistan

³ Deriving from the feminine form of the Arabic word *khams* meaning 'five,' the term denotes a corpus consisting of five masnavis, (TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi, Tahsin Yazıcı & Cemal Kurnaz).

⁴Tiger.

("It is no easy task to stand in this arena,

To challenge Nizami's powerful grasp.

A battle of lions must it be,

And if one cannot be a lion, let him at least be a leopard. ").

⁵ In Baku, there are streets named "Alisher Navoi Street" located in the Nizami and Nardaran districts.

Studies” named after Alisher Navoi was established within the Nizami Ganjavi Institute of Literature of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences (ANAS). After Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan is considered the country where the most extensive scholarly research on Navoi is conducted.

4. Iran

Alisher Navoi is recognized as a highly significant figure in the formation of cultural and historical heritage in Iran, particularly in the Khorasan region. During his tenure as governor of Khorasan, he commissioned the construction of numerous architectural monuments that today stand as cultural landmarks of the region—most notably the minarets of the Imam Reza Complex in Mashhad and the Mausoleum of Fariduddin Attar in Nishapur. These structures, reflecting the aesthetic and technical features of Timurid architecture, made substantial contributions to the enrichment of the region’s historical and cultural fabric.

Navoi’s Persian divan demonstrates that his literary influence extends not only across Turkic literature but also deeply and enduringly into classical Persian literature. His works have been published in Persian by various publishing houses, securing widespread recognition within Persian literary circles (Izzatillaev, 2023, pp. 491–500). Furthermore, several contemporary scholarly works on Navoi written in other languages continue to be translated into Persian. For example, the Uzbek-language monograph *Mana Ehli Şahib-i Sharirani* by Prof. Dr. Nurboy Jabborov, which explores Navoi’s life and legacy, was translated into Persian in 2025 by Prof. Dr. Husayn Xushbotin of the University of Tabriz and published in Tehran by Uveyhi Mehdis Publishing under the title *Donya-ye Irfani-ye Emir Ali-Shir Nava’i* (The Mystical World of Amir Ali Shir Nava’i).

Navoi’s literary and architectural contributions have played a central role in shaping cultural identity in Iran and in reinforcing the intellectual heritage of Khorasan in particular. His influence has been pivotal in preserving and disseminating the cultural richness of the region. In this regard, Navoi’s legacy—spanning literature and architecture—constitutes an intellectual heritage that warrants comprehensive academic examination within the context of Iranian cultural history.

5. Kazakhstan

Alisher Navoi, one of the major literary and cultural figures whose influence extended from Transoxiana to Khorasan and further into the Kazakh steppe, enjoys great respect in Kazakhstan as well. A notable example is an 1857 text on Navoi written by Çokan Valikhanov (1835–1865), a pioneer of modern Kazakh historiography and a leading figure of the Alash movement.

Navoi’s works attracted considerable interest in Kazakhstan even during the Soviet period, and following Kazakhstan’s independence, his works—particularly the *Khamsa*—were published in Kazakh in 1948 and again in 1968. His writings served as an important source for the development of Kazakh language and literature and contributed to the shaping of regional cultural heritage as a shared civilizational foundation.

Many schools, streets⁶, and roads in Kazakhstan bear the name of Alisher Navoi, reflecting the tangible impact of his legacy on the strengthening of cultural and historical awareness. For example, the Alisher Navoi Center⁷ has been established at the Kazakh National Abai Pedagogical University in Almaty. Likewise, on 27 June 2024, the same university—one of Kazakhstan’s leading pedagogical institutions—hosted the international forum titled “*Navoi and Abai: Continuity of Universal Values.*”

⁶ <https://baribar.kz/101139/almatydaghy-alem-adebiyeti-oekilderininh-aty-berilgen-koesheler/?amp=1>.

⁷ <https://www.kaznpu.kz/ru/35748/press/>.

6. Kyrgyzstan

Alisher Navoi holds a profound influence in Kyrgyzstan as an important literary and cultural figure. His works continue to serve as an inspiration in shaping the Kyrgyz literary tradition. Navoi's artistic and intellectual legacy constitutes a significant point of reference in the formation of Kyrgyzstan's shared cultural heritage and sense of identity. Within Kyrgyz cultural life, Navoi's position is also important in the context of regional cooperation and cultural integration. Today, in various parts of Kyrgyzstan, his name has been given to different places, most notably educational institutions (schools). For example, in the center of Osh, the country's second-largest city, the Alisher Navoi Park is located along the iconic Ak-Buura River, and a bust of the renowned poet stands at the entrance of the park.⁸

7. Pakistan

Compared to other ECO member states, Alisher Navoi is less widely known in Pakistan. However, due to the presence of numerous Chagatai Turkic loanwords in Urdu—the official language⁹ of Pakistan—and the historical influence of the Babur (Mughal/Gurkani) Empire across the region, a certain cultural affinity exists. Navoi's major works, such as his *Divan* and *Muhakemat al-Lughatayn*, have been studied particularly by literary scholars and academics in Pakistan.¹⁰ In recent years, Navoi's *Muhakemetü'l-Lügateyn* was published in Urdu by the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Islamabad.¹¹ At the University of Peshawar, a Research Center for Alisher Navoi has been established.¹² It is believed that expanding the Urdu and English translations of Navoi's works, as well as promoting academic research on his intellectual world, will contribute to increasing interest in Alisher Navoi in Pakistan in the coming years.

8. Tajikistan

Alisher Navoi is regarded as one of the notable figures in the literary and cultural history of Tajikistan, where he is considered a valuable part of the shared cultural heritage. Navoi's famous work *Farhad and Shirin* was translated into Tajik for the first time during the Soviet era. For instance, Uzbek scholar Sultanmurad Alim prepared a comparative doctoral dissertation in 1985 on the Russian, Tajik, and Azerbaijani translations of *Farhad and Shirin*.

Hamsat al-Mutahayyirin,¹³ written by Navoi's teacher and spiritual mentor Abdurrahman Jami, was also translated into Tajik during the Soviet period. After independence, another of Navoi's significant works—*Layli and Majnun*—was translated into Tajik. In Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital, the correspondence between Navoi and his mentor Jami was published in both Uzbek and Tajik. This valuable work was formally presented by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan to President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan on 9 March 2018.

In Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, a statue depicting Alisher Navoi together with his mentor Abdurrahman Molla Jami stands in Friendship Park.¹⁴ Navoi's Persian works, written under the pen name "Fani," are taught within the country's educational system, and in Uzbek schools in Tajikistan, the life and works of Navoi form an important part of the curriculum. Additionally, Khujand State University continues to train specialists in Uzbek language and literature. Alisher Navoi maintains a strong cultural presence in Tajikistan and attracts considerable scholarly attention.

⁸ https://24.kg/obschestvo/335244_vgorodeosh_otkryili_pamyatnik_alisheru_navoi/amp/.

⁹ <https://dnd.com.pk/alisher-navoi/104949/>.

¹⁰ <https://pakistanintheworld.pk/live/alisher-navoi-research-corner-its-role-in-strengthening-of-cultural-relations/>.

¹¹ <https://www.uzdaily.uz/en/presentation-of-alisher-navois-book-muhakamat-ul-lugatayn-in-urdu-takes-place-in-pakistan/>.

¹² <https://dnanews.com.pk/online-inauguration-of-the-alisher-navai-research-center/>.

¹³ "The Five Treatises of the Bewildered".

¹⁴ <https://old.asiaplustj.info/tj/news/tajikistan/society/20180416/paikaraoi-abduramoni-om-va-alisheri-navo-dar-dushanbe>.

In a speech delivered in 2021, President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan stated: *“The rich heritage of our peoples places a significant responsibility upon us politicians: to preserve, develop, and strengthen the friendly relations established by our ancestors. It is our duty to enrich in every respect the atmosphere of friendship and harmony created for future generations by Mawlana Abdurrahman Jami and Mir Alisher Navoi. As the founder of modern Tajik and Uzbek literature, Ustad Sadriddin Ayni said, ‘Jami and Navoi shared the same views on the key issues of their time and succeeded in addressing these matters through mutual support.’”*¹⁵

In 2025, within the framework of a joint project between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, preparations began for a film portraying the lives of Alisher Navoi and his mentor Abdurrahman Molla Jami. Entitled¹⁶ “The Radiance of the Stars: Jami and Navoi,” the film aims to explore the intellectual relationship between the two great thinkers and men of letters within the cultural atmosphere of their era. Filming is being carried out in both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to reflect the shared historical heritage of the two countries.¹⁷

9. Türkiye (Turkey)

Alisher Navoi, who holds a central position in the shared literary and cultural heritage of the Turkic world, is met with profound intellectual interest in Türkiye. Recognized in Türkiye as a foundational figure of the Turkic language, Navoi has been highly esteemed—particularly for his efforts to enhance the expressive power of Turkic—by linguistic and literary circles in the country. His works have served as an important reference point in both the Ottoman and Republican periods, especially within the context of language and literary policies.

Alisher Navoi, who wrote the first *hamse* in Turkic literature within the Chagatai literary sphere (Arslan, 2007), crowned the prestige he enjoyed in Khorasan and Turkestan during his lifetime with an equally strong influence in the Ottoman cultural geography. According to scholar Yusuf Çetindağ (2011), approximately seventy Ottoman poets—particularly Fuzuli—composed *nazire* poems in response to Navoi’s verses. This clearly and concretely demonstrates the decisive role Navoi played in the development of Turkish literature in Anatolia and in the advancement of poetic art within the Ottoman Empire.

Academic research, symposia, and translation activities conducted at Turkish universities indicate the continued vitality of Navoi’s cultural legacy. Various academic units dedicated to the study of Navoi have been established across universities. For example, in 2024, the Alisher Navoi Uzbek Language and Culture Center was inaugurated at Uludağ University in Bursa.¹⁸

A review conducted through the Turkish Council of Higher Education’s National Thesis Center reveals numerous master’s and doctoral dissertations on Alisher Navoi written across different universities and disciplines. A search using the term “Ali Şir” identifies 17 doctoral and 32 master’s theses. Considering alternative spellings such as “Ali Şer” and “Alişir,” a considerable number of academic studies in Türkiye explicitly reference “Alisher Navoi” in their titles.¹⁹

The statue²⁰ of Alisher Navoi erected in Ankara’s Keçiören district in 2024 is among the concrete expressions of Türkiye’s respect for this eminent thinker and poet. Likewise, several schools in

¹⁵ <https://president.tj/event/speeches/23349>.

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKX1CbbbbFE>.

¹⁷ <https://caravan-info.pro/nachinajutsja-sjomki-istoricheskogo-filma-durahshi-ahtaron-om-va-navo-sovmestnyj-proekt-tadzhikistana-i-uzbekistana/>

¹⁸ <https://www.uludag.edu.tr/tudam/ali-sir-nevai-ozbek-dil-ve-kultur-merkezi-acildi-62453>.

¹⁹ A large number of theses can be found using the keywords Nevâyî (6 master’s, 6 doctoral), Nevayî (7 master’s, 7 doctoral), Nevai (2 master’s, 4 doctoral), and Nevâî (3 master’s, 2 doctoral).

²⁰ https://www.kecioren.bel.tr/ali_s%C3%A4r_neva%C3%AE_keciorende_yasayacak-2604-haber.html.

Türkiye—such as those located in the Mamak²¹ district of Ankara and the Çiğli²² district of İzmir—bear his name.

10. Turkmenistan

The city of Herat, where Navoi was born and raised, lies geographically very close to the present-day borders of Turkmenistan. This proximity naturally intensified cultural interaction in the region. Especially among Turkmen communities living in the northern areas of Herat, Navoi has been embraced not only as a literary figure but also as a symbolic personality featured in folk narratives. According to Sultanmurad Alimov, Navoi appears in Turkmen folk literature as a wise and witty figure, much like Nasreddin Hodja in Anatolia. Numerous anecdotes, tales, and legends about him were created by the Turkmen people, preserved in oral tradition for generations. During the Soviet era, many of these oral narratives were compiled, written down, and published.

Not only folk narratives but also academic studies on Navoi intensified during the Soviet period. Turkmen scholars made significant contributions to the scientific literature by systematically examining this major figure of classical Turkic literature. In 1948, the 500th anniversary of Navoi's birth was celebrated across the Soviet Union with large-scale events, leading to the translation of his works into various languages of the Soviet republics. Turkmen also benefitted from these translation initiatives, and several of Navoi's important works were published in the Turkmen language.

The frequent presence of Oghuz elements in Navoi's writings is directly related to the cultural landscape of the region in which he lived. The language and culture of the Turkmen communities around Herat naturally influenced his linguistic preferences and literary style. As a result, Navoi produced works characterized by a multilayered linguistic structure that, while rooted in Chagatai Turkic, also bears evident traces of the Oghuz (Turkmen) dialect.

Following Turkmenistan's independence in 1991, great importance was placed on Alisher Navoi in the fields of language and literature. A statue²³ of Navoi stands in Magtymguly Pyragy Square in the capital, Ashgabat.²⁴ At the Institute of World Languages, a ceremony was held in honor of the 584th anniversary of Ali Shir Navoi's birth and the 542nd anniversary of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur.²⁵

Navoi's connection to Turkmen culture extends far beyond geographical proximity; it manifests through folk narratives, academic scholarship, linguistic influence, and publication activities, forming a rich and multidimensional relationship.

11. Uzbekistan

Alisher Navoi is regarded as one of the most significant figures in the cultural and literary history of Uzbekistan. As the greatest poet and thinker of Chagatai Turkish, Navoi laid the foundational pillars of Uzbek literature and played a decisive role in the development and enrichment of the language. The monuments erected in his honor, the educational institutions bearing his name, and the cultural activities dedicated to him demonstrate Navoi's indispensable place within Uzbekistan's national identity and cultural heritage.

The Alisher Navoi Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature, located in Tashkent, serves as an important center for the study and teaching of the Uzbek language and literature, thus contributing to the preservation of Navoi's intellectual legacy in the academic sphere. Additionally, the Navoi Region, which is named after him, stands as a concrete reflection of his cultural influence at the

²¹ <https://alisirnevaortaokulu.meb.k12.tr/>.

²² <https://alisirnevaioo.meb.k12.tr/>.

²³ On 7 February 2025, a statue of Navoi was inaugurated in Ashgabat.

²⁴ <https://www.newscentralasia.net/2025/02/07/v-ashkhabade-pochtili-pamyat-velikogo-poeta-vostoka-alishera-navoi/>.

²⁵ <https://turkmenistaninfo.gov.tm/news/10127>.

regional level, playing a key role in strengthening local identity and historical consciousness. Specialization in the study of Navoi's works and thought in Uzbekistan is known as *Navoishunoslik* (Navoi Studies) and is recognized as a prestigious field of scholarship.

Navoi's writings and ideas, both in their historical and contemporary contexts, are regarded in Uzbekistan as a crucial spiritual resource and an important instrument of soft power for enhancing cultural awareness and strengthening²⁶ intellectual ties across the ECO region.

Conclusion and Evaluation

Alisher Navoi is a widely recognized and respected historical figure across the member states of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). His literary works and the architectural monuments built during his governorship serve as elements of shared cultural heritage, forming bridges that bring the peoples of the region closer together.

Uzbekistan, in particular, has taken significant steps to preserve and transmit Navoi's rich legacy to future generations. To further globalize this accumulated cultural heritage, establishing "Navoi Institutes"—similar to cultural diplomacy institutions such as the Goethe, Cervantes, Confucius, Dante, Liszt, and Camoes Institutes—would contribute to promoting his legacy internationally. Furthermore, academic and cultural collaborations under the umbrella of the ECO Cultural Institute could enhance regional integration and solidarity.

As Emir Alisher Navoi, who referred to himself as *zullisanayn* (master of two languages), reminds us through his works, his legacy reinforces the historical bonds between the countries of the region and deepens cultural cooperation—offering a remarkable and enduring foundation for shared understanding within the ECO geography.

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²⁶ <https://oyina.uz/uz/article/2532>.

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