

# The Poem “Farhad and Shirin” by Alishir Navai: Sufistic Interpretation

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**Abstract---** *This article is dedicated to the sufistic interpretation of the poem “Farhad and Shirin” by Alishir Navai. The followings are investigated in the article: the sufistic sense of such images as the mirror of Iskandar, dragon, giant and tilsim (magic castle) that the main character of the poem Farhad meets en rout to the country of Yunon (Greece); the treasure of Afridun, the ring of Solomon, and the cup of Jamshid, which Farhad obtains after killing the dragon and the giant and how he breaks tilsim of Iskander; and also such concepts as sorrow, wine, singularity, plurality.*

**Keywords---** *Navai, “Farhad and Shirin”, Dragon, Giant, Tilsim, Mirror of Iskander, Treasure of Afridun, Ring of Solomon, Cup of Jamshid, Sorrow, Wine, Singularity, Plurality, Treasure, Soul.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The work of Uzbek poet Alishir Navai is considered to be one of the most vivid pages of all Turkic literature. He created in Turkic first the great masterpiece “Khamsa” (Quintuple), which is composed of five epic poems: “Hayrat-ul-abrar” (“Wonders of Good People”), “Farhad and Shirin”, “Layli and Majnun”, “Sab'ai Sayyar” (“Seven Travellers”), “Sadd-i-Iskandari” (“Alexander's Wall”). As it is known, the first “Khamsa” was written by Nizami Ganjavi, a great Persian poet, whose heroic-romantic poetry during the several centuries inspired many poets that tried to imitate him. Moreover, “Khamsa” of Nizami Ganjavi was always accepted as the summit of poetry, recognized as the highest standard and therefore established a tradition of creating “Khamsa” by other poets with the aim of checking their talent and skills. It was very complex task, sometimes even impossible to perform due to several reasons. Firstly, the poet should follow the same line of traditions almost in all: in the subject matter, in treatments of images, in metres, in naming poems. Secondly, in spite of strict following of the traditions established by Nizami, the newly created poems should be sufficiently original. For these reasons, despite the abundance of tries, only few authors can be ranked with great Nizami. These are Amir Khusraw Dekhlavi, Abdurakhman Jami and Alishir Navai.

Originality of “Khamsa” of Alishir Navai can be seen in all: in idea content, in the plot, in treatments of images, in poetry. These features are notably distinguished in the poem “Farhad and Shirin”. The analogical dastans of Navai’s forerunners are named “Khusraw and Shirin” (Nizami) or “Shirin and Khusraw” (Dekhlavi). Navai, differently from them, named his second dastan as “Farhad and Shirin.”

It was not only the change of the name, first of all it was related with how Navai understood the purport of

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human life. He states in his poem that human happiness in this world, the same as life, is transitory. A man may live a thousand years like the prophet Noah, or rule the whole world as Iskandar (Alexander the Great), anyway, early or late, he leaves this world. Consequently, one should not enjoy life, get charmed by its beauty and pleasures, only Allah is worthy of love:

Chu makhbubi khakikiy uldurur, ul,  
Aning vasli sari kat' aylamak yul [1. 180]<sup>1</sup>

(Meaning: *He is the Real Beloved, that's why one should keep his way to His presence.*)

Connection with Him is eternal happiness, - exclaims the poet, - one, who removes thoughts of earthly blessings and human shortcomings from his soul and heart, reaches this happiness:

Kishi uzlikni koymay, oni topmas,  
Tengiz kesmay duri yaktoni topmas.

(Meaning: *Like impossibility of getting a pearl without diving into sea, a man does not find Him without leaving himself, that is, his self-identity.*)

Self-identity of a man is everything in his mind related with this world. When a man forgets about his self-identity in his mind here appears the shine of divine beauty.

Proceeding from this literary-philosophical view, Navai confirms that the hero of the art of words should be a man in real love as Farhad, not a shah as Khusraw, whose aim is the throne and not love. The whole structure of artistry: the plot, and the system of images represents the embodiment of this idea: *forgetting own identity and to find Him*. This belief is hidden in such elements like the mirror of Iskandar, dragon and the treasure of Afridun, giant and the ring of Solomon, tilsim (magic castle) and the cup of Jamshid.

Famous Russian orientalists S.E.Malov [2], E.S.Bertel's [3], I.S.Braginskiy [4], V.M.Jirmundskiy [5], N.I.Konrad [6], G.Y.Aliev [7], and Uzbek scientists like I.Sulton [8], V.Zahidov [9], A.Qayumov [10], A.Hayitmetov [11], S.Erkinov [12], S.G'anieva [13] and others made great contributions towards investigating the idea content and poetry of "Khamsa", particularly "Farhad and Shirin". At the same time there has appeared a tendency to interpret "Farhad and Shirin" from sufistic spirit in researching works of Navai. A famous Uzbek specialist in literary studies N.Komilov in his article "Socrates is the symbol of a ideal man" for the first time in literature studies mentioned that the love described in the poem is not a earthly love as it was considered, but a divine love [14. p. 182-192]. He explains hidden meaning of the whole plot of the poem and some its elements. B.Erali in his book, dedicated to the sufistic interpretation of the poem, strengthens the ideas of N.Komilov to the particular level [15. p. 31-76]. However, these works are investigations in the general direction. They did not have intention of thorough and deep studying of semantic system of images, therefore they were limited to cursory notes through one or two phrases, that sometimes did not match the real sufistic sense.

The aim of our article is to bring out the sufistic point of two pairs of images: *dragon and the treasure of Afridun, giant and the ring of Solomon*. It should be stated that for the solution of the problem above it is impossible

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<sup>1</sup> Other fragments are also taken from this publication.

to completely rely on meanings of these images in sufistic dictionaries, as their sense in the poem mostly differs from traditional interpretation. This will lead to wrong conclusion or to the confusion of meanings as happened in the previous researches, especially that of B.Erali. Here first of all it is necessary to proceed from what was said about this in the poems by Navai himself. Gathering and comparing the information that is spread through the lines of the poet can help to make particular conclusion.

As it told by the poet, from his childhood Farhad was different from other children, he regularly suffered from sadness and illness. With time, as he grew up, his illness and sadness increased. Hakan, father of Farhad was filled with groom as he looked his son. In order to brighten him up, he brought his son to the treasure house. There Farhad saw a trunk that had an inscription on the cover: one that can open this trunk and watch in the mirror will become aware of his own destiny. However, the mirror does not share its secret with everyone. Who wants to undertake this, as it is written on the reverse side of the mirror, must go the country of Yunon, that is Greece, and find there the sage Socrates, that lives in a dark cave located in the side of the mountain. However the way is notably dangerous. There are three misfortunes en route: at the first stop *ajdarho* (dragon), at the second *dev* (giant), and at the third *tilsim* (magic castle). One who can manage to overcome these barriers, finds Socrates. Only he knows the secret of the mirror.

Thus, the first evil that Farhad should defeat en route to Socrates is dragon. As defined by N.Komilov [14. p. 182] and after him B.Erali [15. p. 51], “Dragon is the symbol of *nafs*” (carnal desires – author). The interpretation is correct, but the word *nafs* has very general meaning, that’s why it necessitates some concretization. From this point, “sokiyname”, that is included to the content of each chapter, has special significance, in it the poet addresses a “sokiy”, that is a cup-bearer. In the end of the chapter, where described the fight of Farhad with the dragon, the poet writes the following:

Ketur sokiy, mayu, bul gamgusorim,  
Demayki gamgusorim, yoru gorim.

(Meaning: *Cup-bearer, bring me wine, and be my sorrow-sharer, a sorrow-sharer is not right word, be my friend in the cave.*)

Ki bulgay anda ajdar koniday rang,  
Sochay ganj, ichmagiga kilsam ohang.

(Meaning: *it might be red as the blood of the dragon, I am ready to spend treasure in order to drink it.*)

These two beits (lines) are structured through to the poetic figure *tamsil*. According to its rules, the poet sets in the beit such images that are related with each other in some way. And thanks to these relations the first image becomes another expression of the second. If to consider from this point, in the beits above we can see two pairs of images: *wine* and *treasure*, *sorrow* and *dragon*. *Treasure* in the second beit is the different expression of *wine*, and *dragon* of *sorrow*. The relations between these images give the following meaning: *wine* is the *treasure*, *sorrow* – *dragon*.

On the face of it, the poet is asking from the cup-bearer wine, and with drinking it, he wants to forget his sorrow. However his real intention is not this. Wine and sorrow, together with their precise meanings, have another, sufistic

sense. The poet writes about this in one of his ghazels:

Jahon gamiyu, uzum bodasi gumon kilmang,  
Ki, zohir ahliga bu ma'ni atti buyla zuhr.  
Va lek ahli hakikatga may erur vahdat,  
Gam ushbu kasrat erurki, kilur kungilga hutur. [16. p. 56]

(Meaning: *if I say wine and sorrow, do not understand them, like people of this transitory life, as the wine of grapes and sadness of life. For the people of the Truth wine is vahdat, and sorrow is kasrat, that comes to the mind.*)

The dictionary definition of *kasrat* is plurality, of *vahdat* – singularity. According to sufistic interpretation, *kasrat* is the world with its diversity; *vahdat* is the singularity, which is also called the Truth or Allah. As the poet instils, there is nothing in the world but Allah and Allah created the world to let us to know His presence. The world is the display of the Sole, and plurality. However this plurality is transitory that does not have independence, it disappears in a moment when Allah wants. Therefore, the world has been set two different meanings: from one side, it is the display of God, and from the other side, it is the curtain that hides God behind its diverse displays. That's why, one who enjoys this world, gets lost: *kasrat*, that is, desire for earthly pleasures will definitely gets reflected in the mirror of the heart and like the dust, prevents from the display of *vahdat*, that is, God. In order to see the shine of God's beauty, one should remove dusts of earthly pleasures from the mirror of his heart.

From this point, it becomes clear, what the poet means while addressing the cup-bearer in "sokiynama": *Oh, Allah, remove from my heart love to earthly desires and beauty, and make it light from the shine and brightness of Your divine light.* It can be also concluded about the sufistic interpretation of the image *dragon*. If *sorrow* is the world and its plurality, *dragon* is also has the same meaning: *reflection of earthly pleasures and desires in the heart*, as in a metaphorical sense, *dragon* is the sorrow.

The second barrier on the way of Farhad is *dev* (giant.) N.Komilov defines giant "as the symbol of reign" [14. p. 182]. However, the poetic explanation of the poet is partly different. In the end of the chapter where the death of this fantastic creature is described, the poet says:

Kel, ey soki, manga may kil havola,  
Etibon Ahraman boshin piyola.  
(Meaning: *Oh, cup-bearer, pour me wine in the cup made of head of Ahraman*<sup>2</sup>)

Ki kilgay ul kadahdin ruhi mastim,  
Zamone nafs devin zeri dastim.  
(Meaning: *My mind will get drunk with this cup of wine, and nafs (carnal desires) would be defeated for a time.*)

As it seen, the metaphorical pair of *wine* here is *mind*, and that of *giant* (Ahraman) is *nafs*. Consequently, *giant* is not symbol of reign, as defined by N.Komilov, it is the symbol of *nafs*, that is *carnal desires*.

After defeating an evil at each stop, Farhad finds treasure or a miraculous item. When he kills the dragon at first stop, he possesses the treasure-house of Afridun, the legendary shah. Treasures, according to imagination of people,

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<sup>2</sup> The name of the giant from "Avesto", the saint book of Zoroastrianism

are usually hidden in ruins and guarded by dragons<sup>3</sup>. Such imaginations were successfully expressed by the poet in the following beit:

Zulfu ruhsoring gami ne tong buzug kunglim aro,  
Ajdaho gar bursa, vayron ichra mahzan ham bulur.

(Meaning: *For a long time in the ruins of my heart there is grief because of being apart from your face and curl, but if there is a dragon, there should surely be treasure.*)

This beit also structured through to the poetic figure *tamsil*. There are metaphorical expressions of the following images: *curl – dragon, face – treasure*. As it known from the analyses of “sokiynama”, *dragon* is the metaphorical expression of *grief*, *treasure – that of wine*. In this beit this images are expressed notably different: *dragon* was equated to *curl*, *treasure* to *face*. The reasons for this lie in sufistic character of it, as in sufistic terminology sense of *grief* and *curl*, *wine* and *face* are almost same: *face* is the place where shines divine beauty, and *curl* is the curtain that hides this beauty, in order words, it is the world, with its plurality. Like curl on the face that closes the beauty of beloved, the world with its plurality hides from eyes the face of God. [17. p. 113-114]

Now we explain the allegorical meaning of the word *treasure*: if wine is vahdat, then its metaphorical expression treasure is also vahdat, that is, the shine of beauty of the Truth<sup>4</sup>. After killing the dragon Farhad also possesses the treasure-house of Afridun. The poet emphasizes with his: *after defeating the dragon, that is, love to the earthly desires, the treasure divine beauty shines in the Farhad’s heart.*

The magic thing that Farhad obtained at the second stop is the ring of Solomon. Together with other images of the poem such as lion, iron statue, etc, N.Komilov gives the sufistic sense of this image: “Lion is the symbol of anger. And anger belongs to rulers and shahs. A dervish should not have anger. That’s why Farhad gets inside the mouth of the lion with the ring of Solomon that he took from Ahraman and defeats it [14. p. 183]. Despite the fact that the ring was really the symbol of reign of Solomon, we can not agree on the above mentioned sufistic definition of it, as the ring is not such negative image as lion and iron statue. Its sufistic sense should be searched among the literary treatments in the works of Navai and other poets. In the literature of the past Solomon was described as the image that was contrary to giants. Uzbek poet Atai in one of his beits says the following about this:

Siz rakiblar mazhabin tutmang, begimkim, hush emas,  
Ahramanalar millati birla Sulaymon mazhabi.

(Meaning: *oh, my lady, do not be in the branch of the enemies, the nation of Ahramans can not equated to the assembly of Solomon.*)

In the content of the following beit where names of Solomon, Ahraman and Surush<sup>5</sup> are mentioned, inner feelings of Farhad can be noticed:

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<sup>3</sup> Here can be drawn analogy with “The jungle book” by R.Kipling

<sup>4</sup> N.Komilov and B.Erali do not have the definition of this image

<sup>5</sup> Under the name of Surush usually meant Khidr, the religious saint in Islam, or angel Gabriel. However he is, possibly inner divine voice that exclaims in the heart of a human, who is in the higher level of spiritual purity.

Gar Sulaymon majmaida bulmagay juz Ahraman,  
Kimga ul majma' aro yo Rab, nido kilgay Surush. [18. p. 220]

(Meaning: *If in the meeting of Solomon there is no one but Ahraman, oh, God, whom there should exclaim Shurur.*)

It means, if one does not kill Ahraman in his heart, Surush will not address him. Meeting of Farhad with Khidr in a life-giving spring after killing Ahraman, and listening to his vital advice how to seize the castle of Iskander, and to find there the cup of Jamshid, is the brilliant example of such condition.

If the image of Ahraman, or the giant, expresses nafs, as we mentioned above, Solomon, the contrary of Ahraman, is a treasure without doubts, – the shine of the God's beauty in the heart of a man in love. And contrasting between them in the beit brings to this conclusion. Therefore, the ring of Solomon, like Solomon himself, is the heart of Farhad, cleaned from earthly desires and filled with shine and bright of God's beauty.

The last barrier that Farhad should overcome is *tilsim of Iskander*. Lexical meaning of the word "tilsim" (actually – "tilism") is "spell, magic". To magic something miraculous, to hide it in a particular place, and to set barriers on the way to it with strange things and fantastic creatures was usually called *tilsim*. Without knowing the secrets of *tilsim* it is impossible to break it. Otherwise the death of the person is inevitable. There is no sufistic interpretation of this image in sufistic dictionaries, and neither in the works of Navai. That's why in order to explain it, the research should be done from reverse side, from the image the cup of Jamshid. As treasure contrasts to dragon, ring of Solomon to giant, cup of Jamshid is also contrast to *tilsim*.

In his book "Tarixi muluki Ajam" (The history of Persian rulers) Navai writes about Jamshid as followed: "In his years of reign he improved his land with fairness and justice. He invented amazing things." One of such things was his cup. Amazement of the cup was that if it was filled with wine, all happenings and secrets of the world were reflected in it like in mirror. And one who looked in it, in a moment become aware of all this secrets and happenings. This magical cup was called *jomi Jamshid* – cup of Jamshid. In the works of Navai *Jomi Jamshid* was named as *Jomi getinamo* or *Jomi jahonbin* – the cup that shows the world.

The image of cup in the sufistic dictionaries defined as such: "Cup is a place where shines God's beauty." *Cup is soul*, makes the phrase *a place where shines God's beauty* clear Navai, – *that's why it should be simple, not adorned*.

Kungul vahdat mayining jomi ermish,  
Bu sogar soda yakshi, yuk munakkash. [19. p. 186].

(Meaning: *Soul is cup of wine of singularity, that's why it should be simple, not adorned.*)

If we say *cup*, – writes the poet in the beit, – the aim of this reflection of Beloved in the wine:

Jomdin bizga garaz may ichra dilbar aksidur,  
Yuksa uz aksi ham aylar jilva jomdin holi. [19. p. 336].

(Meaning: *What we want from the cup is the reflection of Beloved in the wine, otherwise the Beloved's reflection is not seen*)

If to generalize these ideas, it becomes obvious that cup is the soul, that reflects beauty of real Beloved, that is, of God. Therefore, we can say that cup of Jamshid is also soul, as it is a cup too. Navai expresses this idea in the following way:

Kungul – Jomi jahonbindur, tulo kil sof may birla,  
Ki solgay aks nekim bursa, ahvoli jahon anda. [19. p. 25].

(Meaning: *Soul is the cup of Jamshid that reflects the world and in order to have everything reflected in it, fill it with pure wine*)

Thus, cup of Jamshid is soul that is filled with pure wine, that is, with shine of divine beauty. Such soul, as described in the *beit*, change into the mirror that reflects the deepest secrets of the universe and all happenings that took place, are happening, and will happen in it. Now, the sense of the image *tilsim* can be expressed as such: if cup of Jamshid is soul that is free from diverse imprints of the world, and filled with shine of divine beauty, then *tilsim* is those imprints of the world that covered the mirror of soul like rust. The means to annihilate *tilsim* that hid soul into the impregnable castle, and guarded it with such dangerous creatures as lion and iron statue, as described in one *beit* of the poet, is *mayi vahdat*, that is, wine of singularity:

Gayr mayidin kungil jomida bursa gam,  
Yoktur, ey, sokiy, mayi vahdat masallik gamzudo. [19. p. 25].

(Meaning: *If there is rust of grief in the cup of soul from the imprints of strange body, then, oh, cup-bearer, there is no means to remove it but wine of singularity.*)

When due to wine of singularity the rust of grief gets removed from the cup of soul, the face of God shines in it with bright:

Toki uk maydin kungil jomida bulgach jilvagar,  
Chehrai Maksud, mahv olgay hamul dam moado. [19. p. 25].

(Meaning: *When due to wine of singularity the rust of grief gets removed from the cup of soul, the face of God shines in it with bright.*)

Indeed, in the moment, when the arrow, to be more exact, the arrow of singularity shot from the bow of Farhad, pierced the mirror on the chest of the iron statue, not only it, but together with it hundreds of bowmen, targeted the chest of Farhad also were defeated:

Chu tegdi ul hadangi barkosor,  
Yikildi bu hadang afkan nigunsor.

(Meaning: *When the arrow hit the target like a thunder, the shot fell down.*)

Yikilgach bu hamul yuz ruyi tanvash,  
Ki boru uzra erdilar kamonkash.

(Meaning: *as he fell, the hundred iron shots that were on the wall of the castle also fell down.*)

Alar ham borcha yerga buldilar past,  
Kuyigi novak afkan birla hamdast.

(Meaning: *They all fall on the ground and met the same fate with the shot lay under.*)

Consequently, after reaching all three stops Farhad fulfilled three conditions. Then, having in his hand cup of Jamshid, he should overcome the forth: tilsim, magic of mountain of Socrates. The cup shined in darkness as the sun. With the help of its shine, Farhad first finds the cave, where Socrates lived. What he heard from Socrates opened the secret of magic of the trunk in which the mirror of Iskander was kept. Socrates says to Farhad: the reason that led you here was tilsim of mirror of Iskander. Earlier you killed the iron statue with shooting at the mirror on his chest. By that arrow you discovered not only the tilsim of Iskander, but also tilsim of mirror of Iskander:

Burungi kozgukim ashkingni sochti,  
Bu ok oning tilismin dogi ochti.

(Meaning: *By that arrow you discovered the secret of the tilsim of first mirror that shed tears from your eyes.*)

The words of Socrates can be understood as the instruction for discovering the hidden sense of the image of the mirror of Iskander. “The mirror of Iskander is what Farhad found when he shot an arrow from his bow at the chest of the statue, that is, cup of Jamshid. Cup of Jamshid is nothing but soul that reflects the shine of divine beauty,” says Socrates.

At first site it seems that the images are repeated: both cup of Jamshid and mirror of Iskander are soul. However, this is not a repeat, but consequence of images. The poet instils: While the man in love for the Truth moves from one stop to another and gets free from the rust of grief, the mirror of his soul becomes brighter. The shine of the beauty depends on brightness of the mirror:

Kozgu ravshanrok necha kilsa zuhur,  
Zohir ulgay aks anda bekusur. [19. p. 84].

(Meaning: *the reflection in the mirror becomes more irreproachable if its display gets brighter.*)

From this point, not only cup of Jamshid or mirror of Iskander, but also treasure of Afridun, ring of Solomon, even Socrates, each of all is soul. At the first stop Farhad killed dragon of sorrow, obtained treasure of Afridun and first sheens of divine beauty appeared in his soul. At the second stop he defeated the giant nafs with the shield and sword that he found in the treasure of Afridun and he gained ring of Solomon. Together with shine of God’s beauty, the voice of Khidr was heard in his soul. Thanks to ring of Solomon and vital advice of Khidr, he broke the secret of tilsim of Iskander and became owner of cup of Jamshid, his soul was filled with brightness of divine beauty. At the forth stop under the shines of the cup of Jamshid he broke tilsim of mountain of Socrates, found him and was possessed of secret of mirror of Iskander. And finally, he followed words of Socrates and looked in the mirror of Iskander and saw divine beauty of Shirin. This became, as predicted Socrates, beginning of Farhad’s love for Shirin:

Ani kurgach yetib ishk ibtilosi,  
Bulib oshikligingning ibtidosi.

(Meaning: *When you see her, you will get grief at love and this will become beginning of your love.*)

From all mentioned we can infer that: 1) dragon expresses *kasrat* – reflection of earthly desires and pleasures in the heart; giant nafs – carnal desires, *tilsim of Iskander* – diverse images of the world in the soul of a human that



covers it like rust; 2) *treasure of Afridun* means shine of divine beauty in the heart of Farhad; *ring of Solomon* – *soul of Farhad*, cleaned from earthly vices and listening to divine voice – to *Surush*; *cup of Jamshid* is also *soul of Farhad* filled with shine and brightness of divine beauty; 3) defeating of dragon, giant and tilsim by Farhad and obtaining treasure of Afridun, ring of Solomon, cup of Jamshid, and finally finding out the secret of mirror of Iskander are short and exact expression of the main idea of the poem: *to leave oneself and find Him*. Dragon, giant and tilsim are self-identity of a person, treasure, ring, cup and mirror are – He, that is, the shine of God.

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