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Navoiy (1944)

Oybek (Muso Toshmuhammad o‘g‘li) (1905-1968)

OVERVIEW

Author Muso Toshmuhammad o‘g‘li Oybek is one of the most prominent figures in 20th-century Uzbek literature and a leading representative of modern Uzbek writers during the Soviet era. While influenced by pioneers of realistic literature and national independence activists such as Abdullah Qodiriy and Abdulhamid Cho‘lpon, he also had to navigate and conform to Soviet ideological constraints. Oybek began his literary career as a poet. His first poetry collection, *Feelings* (1926), is considered a prime example of “soul poetry,” marked by deeply emotional and heartfelt verses. He later established himself as a gifted prose writer. Although some of his works were weakened by Soviet ideological influence, novels such as *Sacred Blood* (1940) and *Navoiy* (1944) have had a lasting impact on Uzbek literature. These works are valued for their artistic depth, commitment to realism, and truthful depiction of historical and human experience.

Novel Oybek began writing *Navoiy* in 1940, immediately after completing *Sacred Blood.* Unlike Oybek’s earlier novel, which depicted a dark chapter of recent history, *Navoiy* is set in the Middle Ages—the golden age of the Timurids (also known as the Timurid Renaissance, a historical period in Asian and Islamic history spanning the late 14th and 15th centuries).

The novel tells the story of the great Uzbek poet-statesman Alisher Navoiy—so named in the title—who left an indelible mark on Uzbekistan’s cultural and political history. Shortly after Oybek began work on the novel, World War II broke out. During this time, literature that emphasized the patriotism of great historical figures took on renewed significance. Oybek worked especially hard on the novel in 1942. Upon its publication, *Navoiy* received wide acclaim and remains one of the most celebrated historical novels in Uzbek literature.

Background In 1936–1937, Oybek wrote a short poem titled *Navoiy,* which he described as merely a preliminary sketch. Before undertaking a major literary work, he deeply studied Navoiy’s writings, the historical context of his era, the social structure of the time, and the character, customs, and moral values of that society. In his novel through multiple intersecting storylines, the lives of Navoiy, the scholar Sultonmurod, the commoners Arslonqul and Dildor, and the warrior To‘g‘onbek, he presents a broad panorama of the cultural and socio-political life of the Timurid era.

CHARACTERS

Alisher Navoiy Renowned poet, writer, and statesman
Sulton Husayn Boyqaro Timurid ruler of Herat
|*Majididdin* Head of royal decrees
Sultonmurod Talented scholar and teacher at the *madrasa*
To‘g‘onbek Military serviceman, Majididdin’s associate
Dildor Village girl and servant to Queen Hadicha Begim
Arslonqul Dildor’s lover

SYNOPSIS

The story begins in 1469 in Herat (modern-day Afghanistan). *Madrasa* (a college for Islamic instruction) students Sultanmurod, Zayniddin, and the visitor To‘g‘onbek learn of the poet-statesman Alisher Navoiy’s return. Later, it is revealed that Navoiy has been appointed *muhrdor* (keeper of the royal seal).

Meanwhile, To‘g‘onbek joins the ambitious noble Majididdin. Majididdin sends him to collect taxes. In a poor village, To‘g‘onbek cold-bloodedly seizes the villagers’ livestock as payment for unpaid taxes. Here he stoles girl named Dildor.

Prince Yodgor Muhammad rises to seize Herat. Husayn wins the first battle. A tax riot breaks out. Navoiy suppresses the unrest, exposing corruption, and joins Husayn. Returning, Husayn's army finds that Herat has fallen to Yodgor and the local beys have deserted. Husayn retreats to Sortak, then launches a surprise attack on Herat. Navoiy captures the drunken Yodgor, who is executed. To‘g‘onbek gives Dildor to Majididdin, who presents her to Husayn and is subsequently promoted to royal secretary. Jealous Queen Hadicha Begim hides Dildor as a servant. After a failed escape, Dildor faces execution, but her lover Arslonqul seeks Navoiy's help, who secures her release.

As state funds decline, Majididdin blames Navoiy and convinces Husayn to replace him. Navoiy is sent to govern Astarabad, while Majididdin takes his post. Though loyal, Navoiy longs for Herat. After surviving a poisoning plot by Majididdin, he returns and retires from politics.

Husayn begins a campaign against Sultan Mahmud. After a two-and-a-half-month siege of the enemy fortress, he ends the conflict with a truce. In recognition of their military service, he appoints Prince Badiuzzamon as governor of Balkh and grants Astarabad to Prince Muzaffar. Furious, Badiuzzamon orders his son Mo‘min to resist. Mo‘min is captured and executed through a trick orchestrated by Hadicha Begim and the vizier Nizomulmulk. Badiuzzamon revolts. As conflict grows, Navoiy's intervention restores a peace through wisdom and diplomacy. On a frosty winter day, Navoiy fell seriously ill. He died the next day, mourned by all of Herat.

SCENES

Student Days in Herat It is spring at the Gawhar Shad Madrasa**.** Students gather in the courtyard—some study, others debate. In one room, a group of students is pondering what to eat for dinner. Alouddin Meshahdi, a longtime student, is joined by cheerful Zayniddin, gifted Sultonmurod, and their guest To‘g‘onbek, a nobleman's son whose family has fallen from power.

Good News Low on money, the students often worry about food. A servant announces that Kamol Turobiy, a *halva* baker and poetry lover, has invited them. Zayniddin, Sultonmurod, and To‘g‘onbek set off, but To‘g‘onbek slips away. The others laugh, saying he avoided poetry talk. At Turobiy's, they hear Navoiy has returned.

Exile and Return: The Journey of Alisher Navoiy During the conversation, it is revealed that Alisher Navoiy is a gifted poet and scholar from a noble family. He studied alongside Prince Husayn Boyqaro, his lifelong friend and patron. Navoiy served King Abul-Qosim Babur but left for Samarkand when Abusaid Mirzo rose to power. He returned to Herat after Husayn claimed the throne.

An Unexpected Proposal Hungry and penniless, To‘g‘onbek wanders the city—a warrior by nature, unwilling to work and unaccustomed to labor. He pawns his beloved dagger for food and drinks in a tavern. There, he meets an old comrade who now serves at the fortress. Hearing of a nobleman seeking strong men, the friend offers to recommend him, and To‘g‘onbek hesitantly agrees.

To‘g‘onbek's New Path A friend brings To‘g‘onbek to a house where they're received by an old servant and led to Majididdin Muhammad—a sharp-eyed, arrogant noble from a prestigious family. Majididdin quickly sizes up To‘g‘onbek as strong but simple and offers him a vague job with pay, food, clothing, and a horse. Tempted by the offer, To‘g‘onbek accepts.

Visit to Navoiy One morning, Sultonmurod finds his teacher preparing to visit Navoiy, who has just been appointed *muhrdor* (keeper of the seal). As Navoiy was once his teacher, the visit is out of respect. Sultonmurod eagerly asks to join him on the journey, and, impressed by his dedication, the teacher agrees. They head to Navoiy's house together.

Meeting with Navoiy The Herat elite gather for a festive reception at Navoiy's. Sultonmurod, attending with his teacher, immediately recognizes Navoiy by his serene presence. Introduced by his teacher as a gifted student, he is warmly received. Navoiy invites him to visit. Although some were surprised, Sultonmurod was deeply flattered and pleased by the unexpected attention.

Remembering the Bygone Navoiy sits alone, playing the *tor*, a traditional stringed instrument. His thoughts drift back to Herat and his early childhood. He remembers reciting Anvari's poetry at the age of four, his father's joy, and their move to Mesopotamia (in what is now Iraq) after King Shahrukh's death. He recalls meeting the historian Sharaf al-Din Ali Yazdi, returning to Herat, and studying alongside Prince Husayn Boyqaro. At eight, he was so deeply moved by Attar's *Mantiq al-Tayr* that his parents hid the book—but he had already memorized it. He recalls composing his first poem, adopting the pen names Foniy and Navoiy, and studying through hardship in Mashhad and Samarkand.

A Morning at the Palace The next morning, Navoiy meets with King Husayn, a strong, courageous, and somewhat cunning man. They discuss affairs of state. Navoiy advises showing respect to Sulton Mahmud, the former king's son—unless he demands control of Khorasan region, in which case he should be firmly refused. Husayn asks about appointing Majididdin as *parvonachi* (royal secretary). Navoiy agrees, but only if his loyalty can be trusted. Husayn then presents his new verse, which Navoiy admires.

A Deal Behind Doors Majididdin returns home. A guest—a wealthy man from Herat—arrives, proposing a deal: since the new king, Husayn, enjoys entertainment and lavish gatherings, the treasury is short of funds. The man offers a large contribution in exchange for the right to collect taxes. Majididdin must persuade Husayn. Majididdin asks for a share; the rich man agrees and leaves behind a bag of gold.

The Collector's Path To‘g‘onbek serves Majididdin for three months, enjoying a comfortable life with little work. One day, Majididdin informs him that a new tax collector has been appointed—the same wealthy man from the earlier deal. To‘g‘onbek is tasked with collecting taxes in the villages and immediately sets off on horseback.

In the village To‘g‘onbek arrives at the village in the sweltering heat and enters a house where a spinning wheel hums. He asks for *ayran* (a cold, salty yogurt drink), and an old woman calls her granddaughter, Dildor, a beautiful sixteen-year-old. He finds her "very suitable for amorous pleasures". When an apple falls from a tree, he picks it up and asks Dildor to take it from his hands. Without a word, she runs away. The old woman apologizes, explaining Dildor's shyness. To‘g‘onbek, now seething with anger, orders the village chief to be called.

To‘g‘onbek Begins his Work The headman arrives, explaining the villagers can't pay taxes yet, fearing unrest. To‘g‘onbek insists the order be enforced and goes with the headman to collect taxes. Meanwhile, the old woman urges Dildor to stay out of To‘g‘onbek's sight, take the goat, and leave immediately to avoid trouble.

By the Ditch Dildor ties her goat near a ditch, dipping her foot in cool water. Arslonqul, her fiancé, approaches, and they embrace joyfully. He shares plans to buy clothes for them in Herat after receiving his salary. As they return, Arslonqul grows angry—To‘g‘onbek is seizing cattle for unpaid taxes. The collection is done. To‘g‘onbek mounts his horse and rides off toward the next village.

Husayn and Yodgor: A Timurid Confrontation Soldiers gather at the palace gates—veterans and young recruits alike. Husayn Boyqaro, famed for his swordsmanship, appears on a magnificent horse. The army marches to battle Prince Yodgor. Students from the Gawhar Shad Madrasa bow as they pass. Among them, Sultonmurod sees Navoiy, who returns their respectful gazes with a calm smile.

Fifteen Days in the Lab Sultonmurod avoids his room and visits Mavlono Abdulahad, a half-deaf, half-blind chemist obsessed with experiments. At first irritated, Abdulahad softens when Sultonmurod expresses admiration and thirst for knowledge. Impressed by his intellect, Abdulahad shares his theory on turning copper into gold. Though skeptical, Sultonmurod stays fifteen days learning chemistry. They part warmly, like father and son.

The Rebellion Sultonmurod returns to find the city in revolt. In Husayn's absence, three officials have imposed heavy taxes, sparking protests. Angry voices accuse To‘g‘onbek of complicity. A furious crowd storms the palace, hurling stones. One official escapes, wounded. By evening, the unrest begins to subside, and the crowd slowly disperses.

Yodgor Muhammad's Ambition Husayn Boyqaro pitches his tents between Janushon and Isfahan. Nearby, the young prince Yodgor Muhammad, who has risen in rebellion, also camps. Unlike other Timurid princes trained for war, Yodgor prefers luxury and pleasure, lacking personal ambition. However, his *bek*s (local leaders or chieftains), tutors, and clever aunt, Poyanda Sulton Begim, urge him to claim the Khorasan throne. With support from the Turkmen Sulton, Yodgor recaptures Gorgan (in modern-day Iran). Buoyed by success and encouragement, he begins dreaming of seizing Herat and ruling as sovereign.

Victory Against Doubt Husayn prepares for battle while Navoiy, troubled by ongoing bloodshed, urges swift action. When Husayn suggests consulting fortune-tellers, Navoiy objects, warning against delay and false predictions. A seasoned defender agrees. Husayn attacks. In fierce combat, he leads bravely, sword in hand. His forces achieve a hard-fought, decisive victory.

Call for Justice Navoiy enters Husayn Boyqaro's tent amid rising unrest in Herat. Majididdin demands harsh punishment for rebels, but Navoiy urges justice—punish corrupt tax officials, not the people. He warns of the danger of provoking the masses and calls for honest leadership. Husayn agrees and sends Navoiy to restore order and justice.

Herat Lost Navoiy restores peace in Herat, and the people rejoice. He returns to Husayn. Husayn's army rushes toward Herat, but the king grows alarmed—no one comes out to greet him. Messengers return with grim news: Herat has fallen. Yodgor, with support from the locals, has captured the fortress, and Husayn's path to the city is blocked.

Waiting for the Right Moment Husayn, deeply saddened and confused, listens as Navoiy advises the army to retreat and wait for the right moment to reclaim Herat. Husayn agrees and settles in Sortak. Soon after, bad news arrives: Sulton Mahmud Mirzo, son of the former king of Herat, is expanding his influence around Balkh (in present-day Afghanistan).

Treason in Herat Husayn's rivals act quickly, declaring Yodgor king of Khorasan with support from Poyanda Sulton Begim. While Yodgor seizes Herat in Husayn's absence, traitorous officials welcome him. But Yodgor lacks leadership, focusing on feasts and women from Herat. True power rests with Poyanda Sulton Begim, who uses the moment to expand her authority and influence.

A Mind in Turmoil Troubled by the shift in power, Sultonmurod retreats into scientific books. Alauddin suggests visiting To'g'onbek. Though hesitant, Sultonmurod agrees. To'g'onbek isn't home at first but later returns, warmly hosting them with food and wine while avoiding politics. Alauddin drinks heavily and sleeps. Before leaving, To'g'onbek offers to show something "interesting."

Dildor's Captivity To'g'onbek leads Sultonmurod into a separate room, revealing a captive—Dildor, a beautiful village girl he and his men had kidnapped. Distressed, she longs for freedom. After leaving the room, Sultonmurod condemns To'g'onbek's actions. To'g'onbek defends himself, claiming he won't touch her without consent.

Husayn Boyqaro's Secret Strategy: A Bold Move Against Yodgor Husayn Boyqaro shares a bold plan with Navoiy: a surprise attack on Yodgor. Navoiy agrees and urges secrecy, fearing traitors. Husayn consents then hosts a feast where he reveals the plan. Inspired, prominent locals join him. With growing support, Husayn confidently advances toward his goal, preparing his army for action.

The Approach Before the night assault, Husayn is tense. Sensing this, Navoiy offers to scout the city. Finding no signs of suspicion, he returns with reassurance. Under cover of darkness, Husayn leads his men into silent Herat. At the fortress, they halt—none dare ascend to the pavilion where Yodgor is hiding.

The Confrontation Navoiy draws his sword and climbs a separate staircase, using it as a cane. His courage inspires the others to follow. As the guards rush out, Navoiy calmly orders them to drop their weapons and announces his name: Alisher Navoiy. They freeze, then obey. Inside the tent, they find drunken nobles and a woman. Prince Yodgor is captured. Husayn orders his execution.

To‘g‘onbek’s Confession and Gift To‘g‘onbek fears that by serving Yodgor, he is now in danger. He confesses to Majididdin, who mildly scolds him for poor tax collection and questions how he avoided Navoiy’s punishment. To‘g‘onbek claims he was just following orders and praises Navoiy’s concern for the people. Majididdin dismisses it as politics. To‘g‘onbek offers Dildor as a gift, which Majididdin accepts.

A Gift for Favor Majididdin arrives at the palace and bows to Husayn, who invites him to join the nobles. After visiting the dovecote, they enjoy a lavish feast. When the moment is right, Majididdin offers his loyalty and presents Dildor as a gift. Pleased, Husayn rewards him with the position of *parvonachi,* the official responsible for writing royal decrees.

The Appointment of Navoiy Navoiy, composing a poem, dreams of creating a great work in Turkic. A slave informs him that the king calls. Reluctantly, he goes to the palace, where Husayn listens to his advice on supporting agriculture, crafts, science, and the provinces. Husayn then appoints him *emir* (supreme councilor), despite Navoiy’s initial refusal.

Sultonmurod’s Longing Sultonmurod, lost in thoughts of Dildor—whom he loves but knows belongs to the king—writes her a letter he’ll never send. His friend Zayniddin invites him to an evening gathering of artists and poets. The highlight of the night is a chess match, a dance, and a poetry recital.

The News at the Madrasa Gate Sultonmurod sits at the *madrasa* gate when a village boy, Arslonqul, asks for To‘g‘onbek. He explains that To‘g‘onbek took Dildor and plans to take her away. Shocked, Sultonmurod reminds him that Dildor belongs to the king. Arslonqul, in despair, leaves without hope of reclaiming her.

A Gathering of Minds: The Debate of Languages Sultonmurod is invited to Navoiy’s home, where Herat’s renowned poets have gathered. The discussion spans science, philosophy, and poetry, touching on Socrates, Aristotle, Avicenna, and Ulugbek. As the poets debate in Persian, Turkic, and Arabic, Navoiy passionately defends Turkic for its richness, while many favor Persian for poetry.

Merit and Lineage in the Court of Husayn Navoiy advises Husayn to appoint an honest, capable *qazi* (judge of a *sharia* court) and suggests Hodja Afzal as vizier. Husayn then proposes Nizomulmulk, and both are appointed. After Navoiy departs, Majididdin recommends the unqualified Shahobiddin for *qazi,* praising his lineage. Husayn approves, revealing his preference for noble birth.

Dildor now serves Queen Hadicha Begim Though gifted to the king, Dildor has not spent a night with him—he was either drunk or away. Intimidated by her beauty, Hadicha Begim kept Dildor close as a servant. Though resigned, Dildor still longs for her beloved, Arslonqul. That day, she serves wine at a women’s feast.

Shadows Around the Throne Navoiy invites scholars and artists to an evening of wine, Khayyam’s poetry, and laughter. After they leave, Vizier Khadja Afzal and Navoiy’s younger brother, Darveshali, arrive with warnings: Majididdin is plotting to appoint the gambler Amir Mo‘g‘ul as governor of Astarabad; Nizomulmulk is scheming; and Shahobiddin is corrupt. Darveshali adds that they envy Navoiy. Navoiy reflects with a heavy heart.

The Deal with Hadicha Begim Majididdin visits Queen Hadicha Begim, praises her, and listens as she reveals her wish for her son Muzaffar to be king, bypassing the rightful heir, Badiuzzamon. She asks for his help. Majididdin agrees, hinting he’ll need more power. The queen promises to secure his promotion in return.

Whispers of Betrayal Majididdin and his allies seek ways to undermine Navoiy's influence over the king. He proposes writing an anonymous denunciation, and the others agree. Majididdin drafts the letter and, through his agents, discreetly delivers it to Husayn.

Husayn's Fury and the Hidden Letter After spending the night with a beautiful noblewoman, Husayn gives gold to an elderly female servant. Among the coins, he finds a hidden letter accusing Navoiy of calling him a tyrant and plotting to crown Badiuzzamon. Furious, Husayn orders a trusted man to follow Navoiy and report his every move.

The Departure and New Beginnings In autumn, Navoiy prepares to leave for Merv, and his friends gather to bid him farewell. Meanwhile, Sultonmurod begins teaching as the new *mudarris* (scholar and teacher at the *madrasa*). Zayniddin brings news that Dildor now serves Hadicha Begim, giving Sultonmurod hope, though his conscience reminds him of Arslonqul's bond with her.

Dildor's Escape Arslonqul visits Sultonmurod, who tells him how to contact Dildor through a fortune-teller. The fortune-teller relays Arslonqul's dangerous message, and Dildor, alarmed, decides to escape. She stabs a eunuch, slips through a fence, and runs, but is caught before she can flee to safety.

To'g'onbek's Secret at Risk To'g'onbek enjoys breakfast with Prince Muzaffar, now living comfortably with land and a noble wife. Suddenly, a servant brings news that Dildor, Hadicha Begim's servant, has escaped—but has been caught. To'g'onbek, who had stolen her, grows worried, knowing the consequences. He begins searching for ways to control Dildor.

In Hope of Salvation Zayniddin arrives at the madrasa with troubling news: Dildor, caught after attempting to escape, is imprisoned and faces punishment. Arslonqul and Sultonmurod are desperate. Arslonqul proposes attacking the prison, but Zayniddin warns against it. Instead, they plan to seek Navoiy's help, and Arslonqul heads for Merv.

From Despair to Deliverance Sultonmurod pleads with To'g'onbek to spare Dildor, who initially refuses but quietly promises help. Later, as Dildor faces execution, that promise proves false. Just as the execution begins, Arslonqul arrives with Navoiy's order for her release. Sultonmurod, heartbroken yet relieved, watches Dildor leave with Arslonqul.

The Poet-Creator Navoiy returns to Herat, overseeing the completion of the Unsiya Madrasa, which includes student housing and accommodation for Navoiy, as well as a hospital and library, staffed with top scholars and doctors. Inspired by Firdausi's *Shahnameh* and the Persian literary tradition of the *Khamsa,* he composes his own *Khamsa* in Turkic, aiming to make refined poetry accessible to his people. He completes it within a few years.

Crisis at the Treasury Husayn Boyqaro storms into the chancellery, weary and irritable, demanding 20,000 dinars. The viziers hesitate—the treasury is empty after lavish spending. Enraged, Husayn listens as Majididdin blames Navoiy's building projects. He offers to refill the treasury if granted more power. Feeling cornered, Husayn assents.

Forced Exile Husayn tells Navoiy he will be sent to Astarabad (in modern-day Iran) as governor. Navoiy understands the true intent and pleads to stay, offering to resign and focus on his writing. Husayn refuses to listen. With a heavy heart, Navoiy accepts his fate and departs for Astarabad, leaving behind court and country**.**

In Astrabad Navoiy arrives in Astarabad to cheers and warm welcomes. Placing his hand on his chest, he nods with gratitude. The next day, he begins work—meeting officials, restoring order, and serving with integrity. In parallel, he starts writing *Khazain al-Ma'ani,* his celebrated Turkic *divan* (a collection of poems).

Exile and Corruption Vizier Khwaja Afzal arrives in Astrabad with a heavy heart. He has been driven out of Herat by Majididdin's supporters, who not only removed him from power but also attempted to kill him. He now plans to travel to Mecca. Khwaja Afzal tells Navoiy that the government in Herat has fallen into the hands of corrupt officials.

Whispers of Poison Worried by Navoiy's growing influence, Majididdin meets with his allies. Navoiy has written the king, exposing injustices and requesting to return to Herat. Fearing his return, Majididdin proposes a deadly plan: send a new cook to Astrabad—one who will poison Navoiy and silence him forever.

The Poisoned Meal A smiling new cook arrives at Navoiy's home. Sensing danger, Navoiy quietly warns his servants. The cook, uneasy, lets the old chef continue. Months pass. One day, the cook feigns illness and leaves. That evening's meal is tested—poisoned. Three days later, his headless body is found in a ditch.

A Letter of Reassurance On the day of Muzaffar Mirzo's lavish wedding, Navoiy's cousin Haydar arrives in Herat. The next day, he delivers a letter from Navoiy revealing a plot to poison him in Astarabad. An enraged Husayn dismisses the warning as slander and orders Haydar to leave. Alone, he admits Majididdin's guilt but responds to Navoiy with denial, hiding the truth.

Return to Herat At Navoiy's house, Haydar broods over his talk with Husayn. Suddenly, shouts ring out—Navoiy has returned! A joyful crowd welcomes him. After resting, Navoiy visits the palace. Husayn greets him warmly. Navoiy requests to be excused from duties and stay in Herat. After some hesitation, Husayn agrees.

To'g'onbek's Warning To'g'onbek meets Prince Muzaffar, who boasts of a romantic adventure. Laughing, To'g'onbek promises him another. Then his tone shifts—he recounts Mog'ulbek's failed governorship and warns that Badiuzzamon now rules Astrabad. He urges Muzaffar to prepare for succession. Muzaffar listens closely, eager to claim the throne. Later, To'g'onbek meets Majididdin, who fears Navoiy's influence. They plan to recruit Nizomulmulk. Majididdin agrees, and Nizomulmulk is reinstated as vizier.

The Uprising of Darveshali During a council meeting, Husayn Boyqaro receives urgent news from Balkh: Navoiy's brother, Mayor Darveshali, has rebelled and seeks alliance with Sulton Mahmud. He demands Majididdin's dismissal, blaming him for Navoiy's fate. To restore peace, Husayn removes Majididdin from office and negotiates a settlement with Darveshali.

Marching in Winter Husayn marches against Sulton Mahmud and asks Navoiy to join him. Near the Marghab River, they pause. News arrives: Darveshali is captured. Husayn forgives him, and peace is made. Wintering in Merv, Navoiy reflects on its past. Come spring, Husayn resumes battle, appointing Navoiy governor in his absence.

The Arrest While serving as governor in Merv (in present-day Turkmenistan), Navoiy is interrupted by a guard reporting Darveshali's capture. Two soldiers escort his brother in. A message from Husayn demands an official arrest order. Torn and sorrowful, Navoiy complies, forced to authorize the imprisonment of his own brother despite deep personal anguish.

The Siege of Hissar Fortress Four years after a fragile peace, Husayn wages war on Sulton Mahmud, besieging Hissar for over two months. A truce is reached through marriage alliance—Husayn's son marries Sulton Mahmud's daughter. Husayn assigns Balkh to Badiuzzamon and Astrabad to Muzaffar. Badiuzzamon, angered, had planned Astrabad for his own son, Mo'min Mirzo.

Navoiy Between Father and Son Offended by the loss of Astrabad, Badiuzzamon considers rebelling. At Husayn's request, Navoiy persuades him to stay loyal. But a letter arrives threatening imprisonment if he leaves Balkh. Enraged, Badiuzzamon prepares for war. Navoiy is caught in a painful conflict between king and son.

A Son's Revolt Badiuzzamon prepares for war and selects the battleground, but panic sets in when he hears that Husayn has already advanced. Lacking experience, he hesitates and regrets his rebellion—but it's too late. The battle begins, and Husayn, commanding a superior army, wins. Defeated, Badiuzzamon flees to the province of Kunduz.

The Fall of Mo'min Mirzo In Astrabad, 12-year-old Mo'min Mirzo defends the city on his father Badiuzzamon's orders but is defeated by his uncle Muzaffar Mirzo and imprisoned. Seeing him as a threat, Hadicha Begim and Vizier Nizomulmulk obtain a drunken Husayn's order to execute him. When Husayn sobers up, he revokes the order—too late.

The Wrath of Badiuzzamon Badiuzzamon rebelled against his father. Meanwhile, Navoiy witnessed Husayn mourning the death of his grandson. Navoiy demanded justice, proposing the conspirators' expulsion. Husayn agreed but found it too mild, ordering the vizier's brutal execution: first, the beheading of Nizomulmulk's sons before his eyes, followed by piercing Nizomulmulk with a straw. Despite this, Badiuzzamon sought revenge. As the conflict escalates, Navoiy takes it upon himself to defend Herat from the impending threat.

Truce Before the War War looms, and both sides prepare, though the main battle has yet to begin. Daily skirmishes continue to claim lives, and townspeople rise to defend the city. In one such clash, Zayniddin is killed. Arslonqul displays remarkable bravery and, by chance, encounters and kills his old enemy, To'g'onbek. At Navoiy's suggestion, he is appointed a centurion. Navoiy then persuades Husayn to seek peace, and he agrees. Navoiy offers Badiuzzamon the province of Balkh and the lands between the Amu Darya and the Murghab River in exchange for ending the bloodshed. Badiuzzamon accepts.

The Final Days of Navoiy Morning. Sultonmurod arrives at Unsiya with a completed scientific manuscript, hoping to share it with Navoiy. He is met with somber faces—Navoiy is gravely ill. The elite of Herat, including artists, scholars, and scientists, have gathered in concern. The young historian Khondamir recounts how Navoiy fell ill: he had just returned from a campaign to meet Husayn when he suddenly lost consciousness. He was brought to Unsiya, where doctors struggled to revive him, but without success. The following day, Navoiy passes away.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

NAVOIY Navoiy, as portrayed by the author, emerges as a deeply complex and influential figure—an embodiment of the Timurid Renaissance in Central Asia. He possesses a rare poetic talent that earns recognition in both the Turkic- and Persian-speaking worlds. Navoiy's character reflects the defining attributes of a Renaissance man: enlightened, creative, morally driven, and intellectually engaged. He is depicted as a principled advocate for justice and peace, a devoted patriot, and a fearless defender of the Turkic language. His commitment to cultural and linguistic identity is not merely symbolic; through deliberate action, he succeeds in elevating the political and cultural status of the Turkic language, asserting its rightful place in the elite spheres of his time.

Ethical Navoiy consistently defends justice, even when it clashes with the interests of the elite circles he belongs to. During a tax rebellion, he urges the king to punish corrupt collectors, unlike Majididdin, who targets the rebels. He demands justice for a murdered girl, despite the culprits' noble status. He also protects Dildor, the queen's servant, from punishment, despite her being kidnapped and given to the ruler, thereby countermanding the orders of the officials.

Brave Despite his kind and conciliatory nature, Navoiy is remarkably brave. Though he lacks military training, he demonstrates courage by taking control of Herat from Yodgor when even the soldiers hesitate, fearing the reaction of the elders. He is also unafraid to openly criticize the actions of the king and princes.

Prudent Navoiy relies on reason in his decisions, always considering the long-term consequences. He often provides sound counsel to Husayn Boyqaro, guiding him with foresight. Navoiy's advice is consistently justified and well-measured, contributing greatly to the king's and the nation's successes. When Husayn loses control, the results are often severe, but it is Navoiy who steps in to remedy the situation.

Humanitarian Navoiy never seeks personal gain or profit. Despite holding a high position and receiving a generous salary, he devotes all his wealth to supporting talented young scholars, artists, and writers. Until the end of his life, his thoughts remain focused on peace and the well-being of the people.

HUSAYN BOYQARO Husayn Boyqaro is a complex and often contradictory figure. As a Timurid king, he spent his life defending his claim to the throne and securing control of his territories, ultimately succeeding in maintaining his rule. From his legendary ancestors, he inherited a warrior's spirit and a sense of honor. Yet he also has a strong taste for luxury and entertainment, which at times clouds his judgment and overshadows his common sense.

Daring Husayn is a brave and proactive leader who never waits for the enemy to strike first. When danger arises, he takes the initiative and attacks. Upon learning of Yodgor Muhammad's rebellion, he sets out to suppress it. Likewise, when Sulton Mahmud—the son of a former king of Herat—poses a threat by claiming the throne, Husayn moves swiftly to confront him. On the battlefield, he displays courage and skill, wielding his sword expertly and participating in combat personally.

Trusting Husayn is naturally trusting and often places faith in those around him too easily. When he receives an anonymous letter slandering Navoiy, he becomes instantly enraged. Majididdin seizes the opportunity to manipulate him, exploiting this vulnerability by accusing Navoiy of extravagance and excessive spending on construction. Meanwhile, Nizomulmulk, in collusion with Hadicha Begim persuades him, even while he is drunk, that the young Mo'min Mirzo poses a serious threat and must be executed. These actions frequently lead to serious consequences and lasting regret.

Life-loving Husayn loves to enjoy life he has a deep appreciation for art and poetry and writes poems himself. He enjoys entertainment and pastimes like pigeon flying. Fascinated by love in both the spiritual and physical sense, he has a weakness for beautiful women. His lavish parties filled with wine, music, and dancing often cross the line, causing discomfort and revealing contradictions in his character.

MAJIDIDDIN Majididdin is the central figure leading the dark forces opposing Navoiy's enlightened vision. He is surrounded by dishonest, ignorant, and self-serving individuals. The author sees in him the vices of bribery, greed, and intrigue, which, alongside the wars between princes for the throne, contributed to the collapse of the Timurid Empire

Cunning Majididdin cleverly exploits the weaknesses of Husayn Boyqaro, who is inexperienced in financial matters. After convincing the king of his ability to replenish the treasury, he simultaneously enriches himself through dishonest means. Using similar tactics, he plots to remove Navoiy and take his place. He secures the appointment of the incompetent Shahobiddin as judge, slyly emphasizing his noble lineage, knowing that Husayn values pedigree.

Envious Majididdin, lacking natural talent, envied the gifted and intelligent Navoiy. Even his loyal servant To'g'onbek acknowledged Navoiy's respect among the people. In response, Majididdin sarcastically dismissed him as a populist, someone who defended the people only to win sympathy. His

words revealed his own inability to earn authority, which Navoiy had gained effortlessly through his rare talent and genuine dedication.

TO‘G‘ONBEK As the author notes, To‘g‘onbek symbolizes brute force. With a military background, he shows little appreciation for everyday life or creative pursuits. He craves battle and plunder, reveling in bloody victories. Yet he also embodies the spirit of a conqueror—the courage and tenacity of ancestors who built a great empire. Despite his many flaws, the author does not strip him of humanity. To‘g‘onbek emerges as a vivid and convincing example of a medieval warrior.

Ruthless To‘g‘onbek shows no compassion, whether toward enemies or the weak and defenseless. When Majididdin sends him to collect taxes, he remains cold and unmoved by the villagers’ suffering. The desperate tears and pleas of the abducted Dildor leave him untouched. And when Dildor is later captured after her escape, he hastens to arrange her execution without a shred of guilt—eager to silence her before the truth of her abduction is revealed.

Brave To‘g‘onbek is a strong and seasoned warrior. Though he frequently shifts allegiances, sometimes siding with the enemy, other times serving his king, he always fights with courage and dedication. In battle, he stands out for his authority and determination, earning the respect of high-ranking nobles. He is even entrusted with training Husayn’s favored son, Muzaffar, in the art of war.

Ambivalent Ruthless and furious, To‘g‘onbek sometimes shows unexpected humanity. As promised, he does not touch Dildor, respecting her refusal. Although To‘g‘onbek himself was involved, he acknowledges Navoiy’s fairness when justice is enforced against corrupt tax collectors. He generously rewards Alouddin, who once sheltered him at the madrasa, and when he delivers Husayn’s order to execute young Prince Mo‘min Mirzo, almost still a child, his heart tightens with pity. These moments reveal To‘g‘onbek’s complex and contradictory nature.

THEMES

SOCIETY

The Timurid Renaissance The novel brings to life a bright chapter of history—the era of the Timurid Renaissance. In the mid-15th century, the empire moved its capital to Herat, which became the center of Timurid culture and art. The most prominent figure of this time was the poet and writer Alisher Navoiy. Through Navoiy’s story, the author celebrates a glorious past marked by the revival of rare artistic talent and the advancement of science. The novel features many notable historical figures, including the poet Jami, the artist Kamoliddin Behzod, and the historian Khwandamir. It portrays a time when ignorance receded, rulers supported gifted individuals, and scholars were deeply valued. However, this period was also marred by corruption, factionalism, and political instability. The empire’s grandeur was often undermined by internal conflicts and external pressures, leading to a complex legacy.

Illustrative moment: Mirak Naqqosh, the finest engraver in Herat, visits Navoiy and tells him about his orphaned apprentice, Kamoliddin Behzod, a boy of rare artistic talent. Intrigued, Navoiy asks to meet him. That evening, the 15-year-old Behzod arrives with his teacher, who shows Navoiy the boy’s paintings. Navoiy studies them carefully, examining the landscape and the hunting scene, sensing the young artist’s genius. After dinner, he looks at the paintings again and, being well-versed in art, offers guidance. Before they leave, Mirak quietly pulls the teacher aside, urging him to return. He promises to provide everything necessary to support Behzod’s education and growth as a gifted painter. This scene illustrates a broader shift in Timurid patronage: artistic expression moves away from rigid religious conservatism toward a cultivated environment were rulers nurture individual talent.

Class Unlike the author’s first novel, *Sacred Blood*, where the he appears overly biased against the propertied class, portraying it in a consistently negative light, this work takes a more balanced and objective approach. Navoiy, himself an aristocrat, is surrounded by both virtuous and flawed characters, portrayed with ethical nuance rather than caricature. The incompetence of Prince Yodgor, the cunning of

Queen Hadicha Begim, the arrogance of Prince Muzaffar, and the envy of Majididdin reflect its darker side. In contrast, Prince Badiuzzamon, his son Mo‘min Mirzo, and several honest officials are portrayed more favorably. Commoners like Dildor and Arslonqul are depicted with warmth, marked by simplicity, hard work, and sincerity. After many hardships, the couple ultimately attains a stable and dignified life.

Illustrative moment: Majididdin returns from the palace and encounters a young servant girl named Bo’ston, who is only sixteen. She tells him that his wife has gone to visit the king’s eldest wife. Majididdin looks at the girl with desire and orders her to sit beside him. Bo’ston, once captured by steppe bandits at the age of twelve and sold into his household after two years of hardship, is deeply afraid of him. Sensing his intentions, she lowers her gaze, unsure of what to do. Majididdin waves his handkerchief playfully, but this only increases her fear. He promises her fine clothes, less work, and a group of maidservants to lead. Bo’ston remains silent. He presses her again. A sudden knock at the door breaks the tension, and she rushes to open it. This scene conveys the stark social divide of Timurid society, where the powerless are vulnerable to exploitation by the elite, and violence and domination over the weak are normalized in cases such as the abduction and sale of Bo’ston.

Gender In Navoiy’s court, upper-class women wield significant political influence. Queen Poyanda Sulton Begim sends her nephew into conflict with Husayn to strengthen her own position, while Husayn’s favored wife, Hadicha Begim, skillfully maneuvers to secure the throne for her son. In contrast, lower-class women are often portrayed as victims—kidnapped, abused, or sold, as in the cases of Majididdin’s servant and Dildor, who is abducted by To‘g‘onbek. Yet even among commoners, women sometimes exercise agency, for instance, Dildor disguises herself as a man to help defend the city.

Illustrative moment To‘g‘onbek enters the room where Dildor is being held. Grabbing her by the wrist, he drags her toward the door. Terrified, Dildor resists and begins to scold him. An elderly servant rebukes To‘g‘onbek for his roughness and gently assures the girl that there is nothing to fear. To‘g‘onbek brings her to the door of the chamber where Majididdin waits and warns her to behave politely, if she offends the guest, he threatens, he will tear off her head. Trembling, Dildor approaches. In the candlelight, Majididdin studies her like a piece of art, admiring her beauty. He mildly scolds To‘g‘onbek, saying such behavior, kidnapping girls, must end. Dildor clings to this glimmer of hope and pleads to be released, to return to her family in the village. But Majididdin, yawning, replies that her fate lies in her master’s hands. He then orders the servant to prepare her for departure. In despair, the girl silently follows To‘g‘onbek. As shown here, in high society, women’s roles are diminished; they are treated as objects of entertainment, commodified and sold for profit.

POLITICS

Dynastic Conflict Although the Timurid Renaissance reached its peak in the 15th century, this period also saw the continued fragmentation and decline of the empire after Timur’s death. Among the reasons for the empire’s collapse were the struggles among Timurid princes for the throne and their lack of unity. The novel focuses on the reign of Husayn Boyqaro, who held power through ongoing wars—complicated further by conflicts with his own sons. The pursuit of power often crossed the boundaries of morality and humanity, resulting in devastating consequences: senseless bloodshed and the suffering of ordinary people.

Illustrative moment: Young Mo‘min Mirzo, no more than a child, is playfully practicing with a bow and arrow when he receives a letter from his father instructing him to prevent his uncle Muzaffar from entering the city of Astarabad—a city originally intended for Mo‘min but given to Muzaffar by Husayn. receives a letter from his father instructing him not to let his uncle Muzaffar into the city of Astarbad (Husayn had given Astarbad, originally intended for Mo‘min, to Muzaffar.) Mo‘min gathers a small force and awaits attack. Rejecting a surrender offer, he bravely leads his men into battle but is defeated and captured. Even Muzaffar’s soldiers are moved by his courage. Imprisoned, Mo‘min is later condemned by Husayn. To‘g‘onbek arrives with the execution order. Mo‘min, unaware, reads the Quran. Realizing his fate, he bitterly condemns his grandfather. The executioner proceeds. To‘g‘onbek, disturbed by the scene, leaves with a heavy heart. This episode exemplifies one of the vices that contributed to the collapse of the Timurid Empire—the erosion of moral and ethical standards.

Linguistic Rivalry The novel's central conflict centers on the rivalry between Navoiy and Majididdin. Fearing the rise of the Turkic elite, Majididdin uses corruption to secure power. This political tension is echoed in the struggle for the status of the Turkic language in the socio-political sphere. Navoiy, portrayed as a passionate champion of Turkic. He composed most of his works in Turkic, gaining widespread recognition across the Turkic-speaking world. Majididdin and his allies view the language as crude and unfit for poetry, and attempt to suppress its development and cultural significance. This conflict symbolizes the broader struggle between the forces of enlightenment, led by Navoiy, and the forces of oppression, embodied by Majididdin.

Illustrative moment: In his newly built house, Majididdin hosts a gathering. Judge Shahobiddin complains that Navoiy silenced him for his rudeness. Majididdin sarcastically warns him not to provoke Navoiy, citing the fate of the poet Bioni, who mocked Navoiy despite receiving his support. Their conflict stemmed from Bioniy's contempt for the Turkic language. Shahobiddin criticizes Turkic poetry, claiming Persian is superior and Iran the cradle of poetry and science. Someone counters, noting Navoiy's fame spans from Kazan to Kashgar. At this point, Amir Mo'g'ul intervenes, expressing concern that Navoiy has assumed control over the government of Khorasan, appointing officials at his own discretion and requiring the *bek*s of the provinces to obey him. Here language becomes a powerful tool, revealing the privilege and authority of those in power. In the Timurid court, Turkic is elevated not only for its literary richness but also as an assertion of cultural identity and political authority within a Persianate world.

APPEARANCE

Dishonesty In the novel, several characters resort to dishonest methods to achieve their goals. Majididdin, after promising to replenish the treasury, plots to remove Navoiy from office and exile him to Astrabad. Nizomulmulk, conspiring with Hadicha Begim to secure the throne for Prince Muzaffar and thereby strengthen his own position, manipulates the drunken king into ordering the execution of his grandson. The head of the tax department and the judge also gain their positions through deception. Even the talented scholar Sultonmurod does not escape the consequences of dishonesty. Such corruption often leads to grave consequences and causes significant harm to both individuals and society.

Illustrative moment: After an unpleasant conversation with Majididdin—who, according to rumors, had accused him of paying too much attention to the works of ancient pagan scholars—Sultonmurod leaves the palace. On the way, he unexpectedly runs into Judge Shahobiddin. He greets him politely and says he wants to speak to him about one matter. Shahobiddin complains that he is too busy and not naturally gifted in scholarly work and asks Sultonmurod to write a scientific book on his behalf to present to the king as his own. He assures Sultonmurod that the arrangement will remain confidential and offers generous payment in return. Deeply offended, Sultonmurod firmly refuses, stating that he will not sell his knowledge, and walks away. The next day, upon arriving at the madrasa, he learns that he has been dismissed from his position as a *mudarris.* This scene reveals how dishonesty by the authorities invades the realm of knowledge, where officials pursue personal gain, obstructing scientific and scholarly development.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why does the author introduce characters such as Dildor and Arslonqul who have no direct relation to the main character?
2. How did Oybek embody his attitude towards scientists in the image of Sultonmurod?
3. How do you evaluate the character of To'g'onbek? What elements make him more human than a simple villain?
4. How are women portrayed in the novel? Are they more complex than gender stereotypes would suggest?
5. What idea did you get from the character of Navoiy?