pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:12,Issue 10,October-2025 eISSN:2349-5715

THE IDEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF ALISHER NAVOI'S LEGACY IN SOVIET-ERA RUSSIAN ORIENTALISM: SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

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Abstract (in English): This article presents a scholarly analysis of the ideological interpretation of Alisher Navoi's legacy in Soviet-era Russian Orientalism. It demonstrates how Soviet Orientalists exalted Navoi as a positive national hero while simultaneously constraining the religious-mystical aspects of his work to fit the doctrine of atheist ideology. Navoi's works were promoted as a national cultural treasure, and the great poet was portrayed as the "father of Uzbek literature" and a bearer of progressive ideas. Drawing on historical sources and research literature, the study examines how Soviet political context and ideology influenced the study and portrayal of Navoi's heritage.

Keywords: Alisher Navoi, Soviet Orientalism, ideological interpretation, scientific analysis, political context, Soviet ideology, national revival, atheism, Navoi studies, national heritage.

Аннотация (на русском языке): В данной статье проводится научный анализ идеологической интерпретации наследия Алишера Навои в советском востоковедении. Показано, что в советский период русские востоковеды одновременно превозносили образ Навои как положительного национального героя и ограничивали религиозно-мистические аспекты его творчества в соответствии с требованиями атеистической идеологии. Творчество Навои продвигалось как национальное культурное достояние, а великий поэт трактовался как "отец узбекской литературы" и носитель прогрессивных идей. На основе исторических источников и научной литературы исследуется влияние политического контекста и идеологии СССР на изучение и трактовку наследия Навои.

Ключевые слова: Алишер Навои, советское востоковедение, идеологическая интерпретация, научный анализ, политический контекст, советская идеология, национальное возрождение, атеизм, навоиведение, национальное наследие.

Annotatsiya : Mazkur maqolada Sovet davri rus sharqshunosligida Alisher Navoiy merosining ideologik talqini ilmiy tahlil qilinadi. Sovet davrida rus sharqshunos olimlar Navoiy siymosini ijobiy va milliy qahramon sifatida gavdalantirish barobarida, uning diniy-mistik jihatlarini ateistik mafkura talablariga mos ravishda cheklaganliklari yoritiladi. Navoiy ijodi sovet davrida milliy madaniy meros sifatida targ'ib qilinib, buyuk shoir "o'zbek adabiyoti otasi" va zamonaviy g'oyalar targ'ibotchisi sifatida talqin etildi. Bunda Sovet mafkurasi va milliy siyosat konteksti Navoiy merosini o'rganishga qanday ta'sir ko'rsatgani tarixiy manbalar va ilmiy adabiyotlar asosida tahlil etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Alisher Navoiy, sovet sharqshunosligi, ideologik talqin, ilmiy tahlil, siyosiy kontekst, sovet mafkurasi, milliy uyg'onish, ateizm, Navoiyshunoslik, milliy meros.

INTRODUCTION. Alisher Navoi (1441–1501) is revered as the greatest classical poet of the Uzbek people and a central figure in Turkic literature. His literary legacy, written in the Chagatai Turkic language, has been studied for centuries by scholars in the East and West. The twentieth century, however, marked the most intensive period of Navoi studies within Russian and Soviet Orientalism, as numerous works were dedicated to analyzing his life and oeuvre during the Soviet era [1, c. 106]. This surge of interest was not coincidental; it occurred in a context where Navoi's legacy was co-opted into the Soviet nation-building project. Soviet scholars and officials elevated Navoi as a national icon of the Uzbek SSR, celebrating his 500th birth anniversary with state-sponsored jubilees and prolific

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:12,Issue 10,October-2025 eISSN:2349-5715

publications. In 1948, a grand Soviet commemoration canonized Navoi as a symbol of Uzbek "national-exceptionalism," distinguishing the Uzbek nation's cultural achievements from those of other Central Asian peoples [2, p. 117]. As a result, aspects of Navoi's legacy that had once been viewed as part of a shared regional heritage were repackaged as the exclusive national heritage of Uzbekistan within the USSR's "family of nations."

Crucially, the Soviet embrace of Navoi was carried out under ideological constraints. Soviet Orientalists approached Navoi's legacy through the lens of Marxist-Leninist doctrine: literature and history were to be interpreted in class terms and aligned with socialist principles. It was asserted, for example, that in Navoi's time "the dominant ideology was religious, with class struggle unfolding under a religious veil," and that this class conflict inevitably found reflection in Navoi's works [3, c. 110–111]. Such interpretations framed the poet's writings as containing proto-socialist elements or social critiques, even if expressed in Islamic idioms. At the same time, Soviet scholars had to reconcile Navoi's profound Islamic and Sufi influences with the officially atheistic Soviet ideology. The result was an **ideologically filtered** image of Navoi: a great classical writer and humanist whose contributions to literature were celebrated, while his religious worldview was downplayed or reinterpreted to fit secular Soviet narratives.
Research question: How did Soviet-era Russian Orientalists ideologically interpret Alisher Navoi's literary heritage, and in what ways did the political context of the Soviet Union shape this scholarly interpretation? By examining Soviet scholarly works, commemorative publications, and contemporary analyses, this article explores the methods used by Soviet Orientalists to study Navoi and the extent to which ideological and political considerations influenced their conclusions.

METHODOLOGY. This study employs a historical-literary analysis within the IMRAD framework. The materials consist of published Soviet research on Navoi (monographs, journal articles, conference proceedings), Soviet policy documents related to culture, and relevant correspondence or speeches by Orientalists of the era. Key sources include Soviet academic writings (in Russian and Uzbek) from the 1920s to 1980s and modern critical studies that review that period. Notably, works by leading Soviet Orientalists such as A. K. Borovkov, E. E. Bertels, and N. I. Konrad are analyzed alongside contemporary examinations by scholars like Boram Shin and Marc Toutant. Archival records of Soviet literary congresses and jubilee committees (where available in published form) have also been consulted to contextualize political influences.

The **approach** is comparative and contextual. First, we identify dominant themes and statements in Soviet interpretations of Navoi's life and works. Then, we examine these findings against the broader political and ideological environment in which they emerged. For instance, how did shifts in Soviet policy (e.g. the indigenization policies of the 1920s, Stalinist nationality policy of the 1930s–40s, and later Soviet cultural policies) correspond to changes in Navoi scholarship? By correlating scholarly content with historical context, we can discern patterns of ideological influence. Furthermore, a comparative element is introduced by contrasting Soviet-era interpretations with pre-Soviet and post-Soviet perspectives, highlighting what was unique to the Soviet approach.
Data collection was qualitative: sources were read in the original languages (Russian, Uzbek, and English) and key ideological narratives were noted. The analysis focuses on several indicators of ideological interpretation – for example, **secularization of Navoi's image** (treating him as a humanist rather than a religious figure), **nationalization** of his legacy (portraying him as an Uzbek national hero), and **class interpretation** (reading his works in terms of social struggle). These indicators form the basis of the Results section. Given the qualitative nature of the

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:12,Issue 10,October-2025 eISSN:2349-5715

research, the **results** are presented as a synthesized narrative supported by citations from the sources.

RESULTS. *Navoi as a National Hero and "Father of Uzbek Literature".* One of the most prominent outcomes of Soviet scholarship was the recasting of Alisher Navoi as the quintessential national poet of the Uzbek people. Soviet Orientalists and literary historians frequently emphasized that Navoi "established the Old Uzbek language and literature" [4, p. 34]. For instance, scholar A. K. Borovkov, writing on the eve of Navoi's 500-year jubilee, highlighted that Navoi wrote in the Chagatai Turkic tongue at a time when Persian was dominant, thereby crediting him with elevating the status of the Turkic language in Central Asia [3, c. 110–111]. In Soviet narratives, this was not a mere linguistic observation but an ideologically charged point: Navoi was depicted as a pioneer of an Uzbek national literature, aligning with Soviet efforts to foster pride in each republic's cultural heritage. Publications from the jubilee celebrations underscore this portrayal. An important collection of essays published in 1948 (following the delayed 500th anniversary celebrations due to World War II) contained studies in which four out of six articles focused on literary and historical aspects of Navoi's work, and notably **none** dealt with religion or Sufism [5, p. 35]. In this volume, E. E. Bertels and A. K. Borovkov set the tone by presenting Navoi purely as a secular poet and national literary figure. Borovkov's contribution explicitly described Navoi as the *founder of Uzbek literary art*, using the term "Old Uzbek writer" to firmly link Navoi to the Uzbek nation rather than to a broader Turkic or Islamic context [5, p. 34–35]. By implying that "Old Uzbek" was essentially the same as Chagatai Turkic, Soviet scholars reinforced the idea that Navoi belonged to the Uzbek nation's lineage, an interpretation convenient for Soviet nationality policy.

These efforts reflect the Soviet doctrine of "national in form, socialist in content." Navoi's image was tailored to be national in form – he was celebrated as an Uzbek national hero, comparable to figures like Amir Timur or Ulugbek for Uzbeks – while the interpretation of his works was aligned with socialist content by highlighting themes acceptable to Marxist historiography. During the wartime and immediate post-war period, this narrative of Navoi as a national hero was politically expedient. In 1941, with the Nazi invasion, Soviet authorities relaxed their earlier stringent internationalism and encouraged national pride to rally the populace. In the Uzbek SSR, this translated into organizing a grand jubilee for Navoi (planned for 1941, although the full union-wide celebration took place in 1948 after the war) [6, p. 34]. The war created an opening for Central Asians to rediscover and take pride in their pre-revolutionary historical figures as part of the collective Soviet war effort. Indeed, as historians note, World War II provided the opportunity and justification for Uzbek intellectuals to more boldly reclaim their "national heritage," with Navoi at the forefront [2, p. 119]. The Soviet regime encouraged such moves as a way to strengthen the loyalty of Uzbek citizens: promoting Navoi as a national icon was a means to show respect for Uzbek culture within the officially multinational USSR, thereby binding Uzbek patriotism to Soviet patriotism.

The result of these policies was that by the late 1940s, Alisher Navoi had been firmly enshrined in Soviet Uzbekistan's historical narrative as a progressive national figure. In 1948, Soviet Uzbekistan's newspapers and scholarly forums praised Navoi as "the great Uzbek poet, thinker, and scholar" who stood for the enlightenment of his people [7, c. 1]. Monuments were erected and the Navoi name was given to institutions (e.g., the Navoi Opera House in Tashkent, Navoi district, and eventually the city of Karmana was renamed **Navoi** in 1958). Since 1959, Navoi's birthday (9 February) has been officially celebrated annually in Uzbekistan as a day honoring national culture [5, p. 35]. These facts underscore how successfully the Soviet ideological project turned Navoi into a cornerstone of Uzbek national identity.

Secularization and "Humanist" Reinterpretation of Navoi's Thought

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:12,Issue 10,October-2025 eISSN:2349-5715

While elevating Navoi as a national icon, Soviet Orientalists simultaneously took great care to secularize his image to fit the state's atheistic ideology. Navoi was a devout Muslim and a disciple of the Naqshbandi Sufi order – elements that did not sit comfortably with the Marxist worldview. The Soviet solution was twofold: **emphasize Navoi's humanist and materialist aspects** and **obscure or reframe his religious influences**.

Soviet scholars consistently highlighted what they termed the "progressive" ideas in Navoi's works. This included interpretations of his poetry as advocating social justice, knowledge, and humanistic values. For example, Navoi's emphasis on just rulers and the plight of the poor in works like *Mahbub ul-Qulub* ("Beloved of Hearts") was underscored as evidence of his *proto-socialist* thinking or at least as reflecting class consciousness ahead of its time. In the literary analysis provided by E. E. Bertels, A. Safarov and others, Navoi was praised as a *great humanist (gumaanist)* and a scholar, while **"nothing is said about any religious ideology or idea."** All religious references in his works were either passed over in silence or explained in a purely metaphorical way [8, p. 29]. Soviet-era handbooks and encyclopedias on literature presented Navoi as a rational thinker concerned with earthly justice, often avoiding mention of his Sufi metaphysical ideas.

A striking example of this secularizing tendency is how Soviet authors dealt with Navoi's relationship to Sufism and his spiritual mentor, Khoja Ahror (a prominent Naqshbandi Sufi sheikh). Under official doctrine of "scientific atheism," Islam and Sufism were regarded as feudal or medieval remnants that had no positive role in history [6, p. 33–34]. Thus, an awkward question arose: what to do with Navoi's clear admiration for Sufi figures like Khoja Ahror and his close friendship with the poet Jami, who was a famed Sufi mystic? Soviet Orientalists responded by rewriting these relationships in secular terms. They commonly portrayed Khoja Ahror not as a spiritual guide to Navoi, but rather as a social or political figure – for example, Soviet literature describes Ahror as a wealthy feudal lord who exerted political influence, thereby shifting focus to his economic role and implying Navoi's ties to him were more pragmatic than spiritual [6, p. 32–33]. Even more creatively, some Uzbek Soviet scholars began to depict both Navoi and figures like Bahāʾ-ud-Dīn Naqshband (the 14th-century founder of the Naqshbandi order) as **"pre-communist" characters** – meaning their teachings were interpreted as harbingers of equality and social welfare. In other words, they tried to extract a materialistic or rational "core" from these religious figures' teachings. As one researcher quipped, in the Soviet narrative "even Bahā ud-Dīn Naqshband became some kind of pre-communist figure" alongside Navoi [8, p. 29–30]. This illustrates the lengths to which Soviet scholars went to align Navoi's legacy with socialist ideology: they secularized not only Navoi himself but even his religious milieu.

Another tactic was the **concept of Navoi's "pantheism."** In Soviet writings of the 1940s–1980s, one often encounters the assertion that Navoi's philosophical worldview was characterized by *pantheism* (sometimes labeled "mystical pantheism"). Soviet scholars argued that Navoi believed "God and nature are one," and they presented this as a *neutral or even progressive* philosophical stance, distinct from orthodox Islamic theology. The underlying reason for this characterization was deeply ideological. By defining Navoi's belief system as pantheism, Soviet interpreters could distance him from Islam's orthodox tenets and instead associate his views with a quasi-materialistic outlook (since pantheism could be spun as a poetic view of nature, nearer to materialism than theism). Recent Uzbek scholarship has pointed out that this pantheism thesis was a deliberate invention: "A false idea was concocted and elevated to quasi-scientific truth that Navoi's worldview consisted of pantheism. Had this not been introduced, it would have been impossible to adequately propagate Navoi's works in the Soviet period" [9, b. 270]. In other words, labeling Navoi a pantheist was a compromise—an **ideological maneuver** to make discussion of his spirituality permissible under Soviet atheism. Since outright religiosity was unacceptable, pantheism served as a sanitized proxy that was "close enough" to atheism and materialism to be tolerated. Soviet literary critics therefore frequently described Navoi as *"a*

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:12,Issue 10,October-2025 eISSN:2349-5715

humanist philosopher whose outlook contained elements of pantheism," conveniently ignoring that Navoi himself professed mainstream Islamic beliefs. This narrative endured in Soviet Uzbek literary studies to the extent that even by the late Soviet era, discussions of Navoi's "philosophy" in literature textbooks mentioned his love of nature and humanity, but skirted the depth of his Sufi devotionalism.

By stripping away overt religiosity and underscoring universal human themes in Navoi's poetry, Soviet Orientalists effectively **neutralized** any potential conflict between Navoi's legacy and the state ideology. The outcome was a widely propagated image of Navoi as a wise sage and early enlightenment figure – a sort of Central Asian Voltaire or Dante – who preached tolerance, friendship of peoples, and love of knowledge. This image was repeatedly reinforced in academic conferences and publications. For example, at the 1948 jubilee conference, speakers praised Navoi's *Nasoyim-ul Muhabbat* (a tazkira of Sufi saints) not for its spiritual content, but for the historical information it contained and its demonstration of Navoi's wide intellectual curiosity about poets and scholars of many lands [1, c. 108–109]. Such commentary carefully avoided endorsing Navoi's admiration of Sufi saints as religious devotion; instead it was framed as a scholarly interest or a humane appreciation of culture.

The secularized portrayal of Navoi extended to **educational and reference works** of the Soviet period. The *History of Uzbek Literature* handbook published in 1962 (in Uzbek) devoted a substantial section to Navoi. In that section, Navoi is introduced as "a great humanist, a scholar (donishmand), a man who established the Uzbek classical language, a person of encyclopedic knowledge," but notably *"nothing is said about his religious activity nor ideas."* Religious terms are either absent or mentioned only in passing as archaic background. For instance, while acknowledging that Navoi wrote a devon under the pen-name "Foniy" (which implies Sufi philosophical meaning of "annihilated" in God), Soviet commentators chose to interpret this only aesthetically or ignored the spiritual implication altogether. Similarly, Navoi's famous work *Lison ut-Tayr* ("Language of the Birds"), an allegorical Sufi poem, was reinterpreted during the Soviet times primarily as an allegory about social and moral themes, whereas its explicit Sufi allegory of the seeker's journey to God was glossed over.

Interpreting Navoi's Era in Marxist Historical Terms. **Beyond reshaping Navoi's personal image, Soviet Orientalists also reinterpreted the historical and social context of Navoi's era (the Timurid period in the 15th century) in Marxist terms. They were keen to depict the 15th century Herat society as one undergoing class struggle and progressive evolution, rather than a static feudal-theocratic environment. This Marxist historiographical approach served to further align Navoi's legacy with the Soviet worldview.**

A key example is the framing of Navoi's milieu as an "Eastern Renaissance." Noted Soviet scholar Nikolai I. Konrad advanced the thesis that the Timurid era in Central Asia – which included Navoi and his contemporaries – represented a *"Middle Eastern Renaissance"* analogous to the European Renaissance [10, c. 217]. By doing so, Konrad and others intended to show that Central Asia had its own period of humanistic flourishing, thereby placing Navoi among the ranks of **Renaissance figures** who challenged medieval scholasticism and paved the way for modern thought. This concept was ideologically useful: it countered Eurocentric narratives by asserting that Eastern cultures had similar progressive epochs, and it dovetailed with Soviet pride in the cultural achievements of its Eastern peoples. Describing Navoi's time as a Renaissance allowed Soviet historians to highlight developments in science, art, and literature (for example, Navoi's association with the astronomer Ulugh Beg and artist Behzad) as part of a broader narrative of societal advancement. It also subtly suggested an early challenge to clerical authority and feudalism in the East, which Marxist analysis would view as a precursor to later revolutionary transformations.

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:12,Issue 10,October-2025 eISSN:2349-5715

In Marxist analyses of literature, Navoi's works were examined for their reflection of social forces. Soviet literary critics often argued that **Navoi sided with the oppressed** and criticized injustice in society. They pointed to his depictions of corrupt elites and sympathy for commoners in poems and prose. For instance, Navoi's portrayal of tyrannical rulers or his lament about greed and ignorance in society were interpreted as covert critiques of feudal despotism [7, c. 2–3]. Edward Allworth notes that Soviet-era scholars selectively highlighted such elements to portray Navoi as a poet who *"fought for the people's happiness against tyranny,"* thus reading a class-struggle narrative into his literature [11, p. 37]. While Navoi did express ethical critiques consistent with Islamic moral philosophy, Soviet interpretations explicitly recast these as socio-economic commentary. In doing so, they effectively claimed Navoi as an ideological ally – a precursor who supposedly shared the Soviet disdain for exploitation and oppression.

The class-struggle lens also meant Soviet Orientalists were eager to refute any notion that Navoi's works were merely imitative of Persian literature or devoid of original social value. Earlier orientalist scholars, including some pre-Soviet Russian and Western academics, had sometimes viewed Navoi as an imitator of the great Persian poet Nizami, since Navoi wrote poems on similar themes (e.g., *Farhad and Shirin* and *Layli and Majnun* stories) and extensively used Persian literary models. Soviet scholars strongly rejected this view. Yevgeny E. Bertels, the leading Soviet Iranologist who devoted much of his career to Navoi studies, **"proved convincingly that Navoi was an original poet and not a mere translator from Persian"** [12, c. 111–112]. In his comparative studies (for example, **Navoi and Attar** and a comprehensive monograph *Navoi: An Experience of Creative Biography*), Bertels demonstrated that Navoi's versions of legendary plots were highly innovative, infusing them with local color and personal insight [12, c. 111–112]. By doing so, Bertels not only highlighted Navoi's creative genius but also implicitly supported the idea that Navoi's works carried unique local (Uzbek/Turkic) perspectives, thereby reinforcing national pride. The insistence on Navoi's originality had an ideological undertone: it refuted colonial-era assumptions of Central Asian cultural dependency on Persian civilization and instead positioned Uzbek literature as independently great. As one modern scholar summarizes, previous claims that Navoi was just a Persian copycat were considered a "methodological error" – one that Bertels and his colleagues rectified by showcasing Navoi's distinct voice and contributions [12, c. 140–142]. This scholarly stance, while rooted in genuine literary analysis, aligned neatly with Soviet anti-colonial rhetoric and the celebration of each nation's unique cultural heritage.

Political Context: Soviet Ideology and Navoi Scholarship. **The above patterns of interpretation did not occur in a vacuum; they were directly shaped by Soviet political priorities and ideological doctrines from the 1920s through 1980s. Several key aspects of the political context influenced Navoi studies:**

1. The Nativization (Korenizatsiya) Policy: In the 1920s, the Soviet government implemented korenizatsiya, promoting local languages and elites in the administration of national republics. In Uzbekistan, this encouraged the development of Uzbek-language scholarship and the elevation of Uzbek cultural figures. Early Soviet Uzbek intellectuals, some of whom were former Jadids (reformist modernizers of the late Tsarist era), took advantage of this climate to publish works on Navoi. Although the late 1920s saw a turn toward stricter ideological control, the foundation had been laid to treat Navoi as a national classic. Notably, this period also saw debates among local intellectuals: while most venerated Navoi, a few radicals questioned the relevance of medieval poetry for a modern proletarian society. For example, the educator Munawwar Qari argued in 1927 that schools should teach practical subjects instead of "old poets like Navoi or Fuzuli" [2, p. 135]. However, such extreme positions were sidelined as the Stalinist regime opted to co-opt national culture rather than discard it.

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:12,Issue 10,October-2025 eISSN:2349-5715

2. Stalinist Nationalities Policy: From the mid-1930s, Stalin's regime promoted a paradoxical line often summarized as "Soviet in content, national in form." The state began to actively support the glorification of select national heroes in each Soviet republic, as long as these figures could be integrated into the Soviet narrative. It was in this context that Navoi's star rose officially. The Uzbek Soviet leadership, with Moscow's approval, started to prepare for Navoi's jubilee years in advance. Archival evidence shows that by 1937–1938, a Jubilee Committee was established to plan celebrations and scholarly works on Navoi [7, c. 1]. Importantly, around this time Stalin's purges also eliminated some of the more independent-minded Uzbek scholars (including notable Jadids like Fitrat, who had also written about Navoi). The new generation of Uzbek writers and scholars in the 1940s, who survived the purges, were much more aligned with Party directives. They picked up the Jadids' earlier ideas of elevating national culture but pursued them within the safe limits of Soviet ideology [2, p. 118]. Thus, the Soviet Navoi canonization can be seen as *"not a rootless imposition... but the realization of a nation-building project initiated by native intellectuals before the Soviet state,"* albeit now under Party control [2, p. 118]. Stalin's endorsement of national history during World War II further catalyzed the Navoi scholarship as discussed.

3. World War II and the Great Patriotic War Narrative: The war (1941–1945) was a turning point. Faced with the need to mobilize all Soviet peoples against the Nazi invasion, the regime adopted a more inclusive and patriotic tone. For Central Asians, emphasis on their ancestors' achievements was encouraged to boost morale and loyalty. During the war, many scientific institutes from the European USSR were evacuated to Central Asia. In fact, a number of prominent Russian Orientalists, including E. E. Bertels, were relocated from besieged Leningrad to Tashkent in 1942 [6, p. 34]. This had a direct impact on Navoi studies: Bertels and local scholars worked together in Tashkent during those years, preparing critical texts and studies of Navoi even as the war raged. This collaboration resulted in a spate of publications soon after the war, culminating in the lavish 1948 jubilee events. The war experience thus not only softened the stance on national culture but also physically brought Russian and Uzbek scholars together, fostering an exchange that enriched Navoi scholarship. One concrete outcome was the publication of a compiled volume of Navoi's works and a comprehensive Russian-language book in 1946, which included contributions from scholars of various nationalities but maintained a uniform ideological line (focusing on literature, avoiding religion) [5, p. 35].

4. Post-war Soviet Scholarship and the Cold War Era: After Stalin, under Khrushchev and Brezhnev, the broad outlines of Navoi's ideological interpretation remained, though the intensity of propaganda mellowed. Navoi continued to be venerated in official discourse, and *Navoi studies (Navoiyshunoslik)* became an established field. Scholars were still expected not to stray into "unacceptable" topics – for instance, any in-depth study of Navoi's Sufi philosophy or the theological dimensions of his work remained off-limits or at least unpublished [6, p. 35]. During the Brezhnev era, there was a general trend of **"national communism"** where republics celebrated their culture more openly as long as it was framed within loyalty to the USSR. Navoi's image at this time was used to exemplify the historical genius of the Uzbek people, which, under Lenin's and the Communist Party's guidance, could flourish again. Soviet speeches would often juxtapose Navoi with the achievements of socialism, implying continuity: the idea that Navoi's humanist dreams were being fulfilled in the Soviet epoch. It was not uncommon to hear assertions such as "Alisher Navoi longed for the unity and progress of all peoples – something the friendship of peoples under socialism has realized." This kind of rhetoric, while formulaic, reinforced the Party's ideological narrative linking past and present.

A noteworthy development in later Soviet Navoi scholarship was the compilation of extensive **bibliographies and critical editions**. By the 1960s, Soviet academics like E. D. Svidina compiled bibliographies of Navoi studies (covering 1917–1966) [7, c. 1], and critical textologists such as P. Shamsiev worked on authenticating Navoi's texts (though even these textual studies tread carefully around religious content). Such scholarly work was valuable and often rigorous,

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:12,Issue 10,October-2025 eISSN:2349-5715

demonstrating that within ideological bounds genuine scholarship did occur. However, even the choice of research questions was influenced by ideology: for example, studies highlighting Navoi's contributions to pedagogy, ethics, or linguistics were favored, whereas a proposed study titled "The spiritual (bog'oslavic) views of Navoi" would likely have been rejected in that climate.

Ultimately, Soviet Orientalists succeeded in creating a **"suitable" Navoi for the regime** [5, p. 35]. This Soviet-sanctioned Navoi was a composite of nationalist and socialist virtues: a poet of the people, a pioneer of Uzbek culture, an advocate of enlightenment, and a humanist skeptic of fanaticism. Confronting this reshaped image with Navoi's actual works, however, reveals a tension. Certain aspects—particularly the mystical and devotional elements—were systematically excluded, leading to gaps that even some Soviet scholars privately acknowledged. By the 1980s, a few scholars hinted that the spiritual dimensions of Navoi's poetry had been understudied, although open discussion was still limited until the eve of the Soviet collapse [8, p. 35–36].

DISCUSSION. The ideological interpretation of Alisher Navoi's legacy in Soviet Orientalism was a product of its time – a function of the Soviet Union's broader cultural and political agenda. Several interrelated themes emerge from the results, warranting further discussion:

Alignment of Scholarship with State Ideology: Soviet Orientalists worked in an environment where academic research could not be divorced from politics. As shown, their treatment of Navoi closely followed the tenets of Marxist-Leninist ideology. This was not a straightforward case of crude propaganda, but rather a nuanced alignment. Scholars like Bertels and Borovkov were genuine experts with deep knowledge of Navoi; they contributed significantly to textual analysis, translation, and the preservation of Navoi's works. Yet, they also conscientiously filtered their scholarly output to emphasize what was ideologically palatable – Navoi's material, secular contributions – and to omit or rationalize what was not (his religiosity). In doing so, they exemplified the role of the "Party-minded scholar" in the USSR. It raises a reflective point on how academic work can be steered by prevailing orthodoxies. Many Soviet scholars truly believed in Marxist historiography, so their re-reading of Navoi as a proto-social critic or a Renaissance humanist was not entirely cynical; it was informed by their worldview. The discussion here highlights how this belief system shaped intellectual discourse and even the questions deemed worth asking about a historical figure.

Impact on Navoi's Legacy and Uzbek National Identity: Portraying Navoi as the Uzbek national poet had lasting effects beyond the Soviet era. The Soviet period firmly implanted Navoi in the public consciousness of Uzbeks as the apex of their literary heritage – a largely positive outcome that independent Uzbekistan continues to build upon. Streets, institutions, and the very currency in Uzbekistan bear Navoi's name today, a practice that started under the Soviets. However, the Soviet ideological framing also left gaps and occasionally distortive emphases in how Navoi is understood. For instance, the relative neglect of Navoi's Islamic context meant that multiple generations of students learned about Navoi's poetry primarily as literature with ethical lessons, not as spiritually inspired art. Only after independence (post-1991) did Uzbek scholars begin to openly revisit the Sufi motifs and religious scholarship of Navoi with fresh eyes, effectively picking up threads that Soviet-era academics had dropped. One could argue that the **de-spiritualization** of Navoi during the Soviet era has made it somewhat challenging for the post-Soviet society to reintegrate the full scope of his persona (poet *and* mystic). Nevertheless, Uzbekistan's modern narrative still benefits from the wealth of critical editions and research produced by Soviet scholars – minus the ideological commentary. In essence, the Soviets both illuminated and obscured Navoi: they amplified his importance but also narrowed the lens through which his legacy was viewed.

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:12,Issue 10,October-2025 eISSN:2349-5715

Orientalism, Colonialism, and Soviet Uniqueness: The case of Soviet Orientalists interpreting Navoi also provides an interesting counterpoint to classical (Western) Orientalism. Soviet scholars often positioned themselves against the colonial-era scholarship, claiming a more sympathetic and respectful approach to Eastern cultures. Indeed, by elevating Navoi, the Soviets presented themselves as liberators of Eastern cultural greatness from under the shadow of Tsarist colonial neglect. The irony, however, is that this "liberation" came with its own imperial oversight – Moscow's ideological needs dictating the terms. Unlike traditional Orientalism, which might exoticize or other-ize Eastern figures, Soviet Orientalism domesticated Navoi into the Soviet family, portraying him almost as a proto-socialist compatriot across time. This unique approach served Soviet soft power internally: Uzbeks could feel proud of their heritage while also feeling that socialism validated and continued that heritage. It also served externally as propaganda to the Muslim world (especially during the Cold War) by showcasing how the USSR honored a Muslim poet like Navoi as a national hero, ostensibly refuting Western claims that the USSR suppressed religion and culture. Of course, the reality was more complex, as we have detailed – the USSR honored the cultural shell but emptied or refilled it with its ideological content.

Continuities and Changes in Scholarship: During the discussion, it is worth noting how some aspects persisted throughout the Soviet period while others evolved. The reverence for Navoi as a luminary remained constant from the 1940s onward. However, Stalin-era writings had a more combative tone (refuting "bourgeois" or "pan-Turkist" interpretations, etc.), whereas later era writings (1970s, for example) were more settled and celebratory in tone, with less overt polemics. By the late Soviet period, direct censorship had somewhat eased, and scholars could cautiously mention, say, that Navoi was influenced by Jami or quote a couple of lines with religious content, but still within a secular analysis. The overall interpretive framework did not substantially change until the Gorbachev years, when in the climate of *glasnost* (openness) a few articles appeared acknowledging that Soviet studies had long ignored Navoi's spiritual dimension and calling for a more holistic approach. This admission, in itself, confirms the core argument of our analysis: Soviet Orientalism's interpretation of Navoi was heavily ideologized, to the point that undoing that entailed a conscious shift in the late 1980s and beyond.

Re-assessing Soviet Contributions: It is also important to acknowledge that the Soviet era produced serious scholarly contributions to Navoi studies under its ideological umbrella. Textual criticism, cataloging of manuscripts, translation of Navoi's works into Russian (making them accessible to a broader readership in the USSR), and comparative literary studies were all advanced by Soviet academics. For instance, the first complete Russian translation of Navoi's *Khamsa* (Quintet of poems) was accomplished by 1945, an impressive feat, and academic studies such as Bertels' monograph on Navoi remain reference points. The discussion highlights that these contributions, however, were always presented with a certain *interpretive packaging*. Future scholars, particularly post-Soviet ones, have often had to unwrap the factual research from that packaging. In doing so, they have sometimes found the facts sound but the interpretations debatable. For example, a Soviet edition of Navoi's ghazals might be philologically solid, yet the introduction would insist Navoi's lyrics promote "human love" in an abstract sense rather than divine love – a claim post-Soviet critics might dispute.

In conclusion of this discussion, the ideological interpretation of Navoi's legacy by Soviet Russian Orientalists was a clear case of scholarship being harnessed to state-building objectives. It served the immediate goals of Soviet cultural policy effectively: Navoi became an emblem that helped reconcile Uzbek national pride with Soviet identity. However, this came at the cost of a full understanding of Navoi's work, as certain facets were ignored or distorted. The Soviet period laid a foundation of admiration for Navoi but also built walls around interpretive freedom. Only with the removal of ideological constraints in the 1990s did scholars begin to explore Navoi's legacy in its true depth – a process that continues today, enriched by but also correcting the Soviet scholarly heritage.

pISSN:2349-5707 Volume:12,Issue 10,October-2025 eISSN:2349-5715

CONCLUSION. The Soviet-era Russian Orientalist interpretation of Alisher Navoi's legacy was profoundly shaped by the ideological and political context of its time. Scientifically, Soviet scholars brought rigorous analysis and produced valuable editions of Navoi's works, but their ideological framework guided which aspects of Navoi's rich persona were illuminated and which were obscured. Navoi was enshrined as a secular national hero – the founder of Uzbek literature, a champion of the people, and a humanist intellect – while his identity as a Muslim mystic and the full spiritual scope of his poetry were largely stripped away in official discourse. This ideologically curated image was not arbitrary; it served the political objectives of the Soviet state, reinforcing national pride in a controlled manner and integrating a revered historical figure into the socialist narrative.

We find that Soviet Orientalists achieved a delicate balance: they **praised** Navoi to the heights, thereby validating the cultural heritage of Central Asian Muslims under Soviet rule, but simultaneously they **redefined** his legacy to align with Marxist materialism and atheism. Through selective emphasis on Navoi's "progressive" elements and creative reinterpretation of his worldview (such as branding it pantheism), they ensured that Navoi could be celebrated without challenging Soviet ideology. The political context – from korenizatsiya to World War II to late Soviet nationalities policy – consistently influenced this interpretative strategy.

In retrospect, the Soviet ideological reading of Navoi can be seen as a double-edged sword. On one edge, it undeniably helped preserve and promulgate Navoi's works, investing tremendous scholarly energy into studying a figure who might otherwise have been neglected during a tumultuous century. On the other edge, it imposed limitations that narrowed understanding and left a legacy of scholarly gaps. Post-Soviet scholarship in Uzbekistan has been tasked with bridging those gaps, revisiting Navoi's legacy with greater intellectual freedom – for instance, examining the spiritual and religious aspects that Soviet academics set aside.

Nonetheless, the enduring **positive image** of Navoi as a national poet owes much to the Soviet era's efforts. By presenting Navoi in a positive light – as a wise, benevolent, and forward-thinking figure – Soviet Orientalists ensured that he remained a source of inspiration and pride. This was in line with the instruction that in Uzbekistan Navoi's figure be portrayed in a **favorable manner**, which Soviet scholars certainly did, albeit within their framework. Today's assessments can afford to be more holistic, but they build upon the groundwork laid in the 20th century.

In conclusion, the Soviet case of Navoi's ideological interpretation highlights how scholarship can be molded by the currents of history. It serves as a reminder that while **political regimes pass**, the legacy of a great poet endures – capable of weathering reinterpretation and emerging, eventually, in the full breadth of its truth. Alisher Navoi's genius has outlived the Soviet ideological mold, but understanding that mold is crucial for appreciating the journey of Navoi's legacy through modern times. The Soviet Orientalists, working with both **sincere admiration** and **ideological constraints**, left a complex but ultimately rich heritage of Navoi studies. Their scientific analysis, when stripped of its bias, and their contextual political commentary, when understood critically, together provide a multifaceted view of Navoi that continues to inform and challenge scholars in independent Uzbekistan and beyond.

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