

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Biographical-Spiritual Motivation Of Navoi's Departure: A Textual-Hermeneutic Model Based On The Mathnawi Letter To Sayyid Hasan Ardasher

Akrom Malikov

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philology, Research Fellow at the Institute of Social and Spiritual Research, Uzbekistan

VOLUME: Vol.06 Issue02 2026

PAGE: 27-37

Copyright © 2026 European International Journal of Philological Sciences, this is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 International License. Licensed under Creative Commons License a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Abstract

This article examines how Alisher Navoi's mathnawi-style letter to Sayyid Hasan Ardasher narratively constructs spiritual subjectivity through the configuration of exile. While previous scholarship has largely interpreted Navoi's departure from Herat in political or socio-economic terms, the present study argues that the text organizes crisis, displacement, and longing within a literary discourse of inner transformation. Drawing on narrative theory, philosophical hermeneutics, and Sufi anthropology, the analysis demonstrates that exile in the mathnawi functions not merely as historical movement but as a narrative technology through which the self becomes spiritually intelligible. Close reading grounded in manuscript tradition reveals a three-layer motivational structure—an aesthetic-intellectual tension, a social-moral rupture, and a transcendental Sufi aspiration—whose interaction produces a trajectory of subjectivation oriented toward *irfan*. By situating Navoi's autobiographical discourse within global debates on premodern selfhood, the article shows that reflexive interiority and narrative self-configuration were already conceptually elaborated in fifteenth-century Islamic literary culture. The study thus reframes Sufi poetic writing as a form of narrative construction of spiritual selfhood and contributes a transferable interpretative model for analyzing autobiographical texts across premodern traditions.

KEY WORDS

Alisher Navoi; exile; narrative selfhood; Sufi subjectivation; mathnawi; premodern subjectivity.

INTRODUCTION

In classical Islamic intellectual traditions, the human self is not primarily defined through autonomous agency but through a relational orientation toward divine knowledge (*ma'rifah*) and ultimate return to its transcendent origin. Qur'anic anthropology presents the human being as simultaneously earthly and divinely animated, morally accountable yet spiritually transformable, thereby establishing a dynamic vision of subjectivity structured by tension between limitation and transcendence (Murata, 1992; Chittick, 1989). Within Sufi metaphysics, this tension acquires explicit teleological

meaning: experiences such as suffering, exile, and inner rupture are interpreted not as accidental historical contingencies but as stages within a divinely guided process of realization and return (Ernst, 1997; Knysh, 2017).

Across poetic, hagiographical, and autobiographical genres, Sufi discourse develops refined vocabularies for describing the stratified soul, disciplined remembrance, and experiential knowledge of truth, enabling narrative self-articulation to function as a mode of spiritual interpretation rather than affirmation of individual autonomy (Chittick, 2000). In this

perspective, the articulation of personal experience becomes inseparable from ethical refinement and metaphysical transformation, situating autobiography within a broader economy of spiritual becoming.

Alisher Navoi's mathnawi-style letter to Sayyid Hasan Ardasher emerges precisely within this Islamic-Sufi horizon. The text configures crisis, isolation, and departure through the teleology of *irfan*, aligning personal movement with cosmological and theological meaning. Consequently, the letter provides an analytically privileged site for examining how autobiographical discourse operates inside Sufi anthropology and how spiritual selfhood becomes narratively intelligible in a fifteenth-century Islamic literary context.

Debates concerning the historical emergence of reflexive subjectivity in the humanities have long been shaped by implicitly Eurocentric narratives that associate interior selfhood with the cultural transformations of early modern Europe. Within philosophical hermeneutics, however, the self is increasingly understood not as a pre-discursive essence but as a configuration produced through narrative interpretation and temporal ordering. Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity demonstrates that personal identity emerges through emplotment, whereby lived experience is organized into meaningful story rather than preserved as a mere sequence of events (Ricoeur, 1984–1988).

Michel Foucault's later analyses of the "technologies of the self" further reveal that historically situated ethical and spiritual practices shape distinctive modes of subject formation, suggesting that disciplined interior transformation cannot be confined to modern Western individualism alone (Foucault, 1988). In a complementary register, Charles Taylor's genealogy of inwardness shows that modern identity itself rests upon particular moral and metaphysical sources, thereby challenging linear developmental models that treat reflexive interiority as a universal endpoint of historical progress (Taylor, 1989).

Taken together, these perspectives open the possibility that premodern non-Western literary traditions may encode sophisticated forms of narratively constituted selfhood structured by alternative metaphysical horizons. Within this broader theoretical landscape, Islamic Sufi texts—where narrative, ethics, and transcendence converge—provide especially significant material for reconsidering the temporal and civilizational boundaries of subject formation. It is precisely at this intersection of narrative theory and spiritual

anthropology that Navoi's autobiographical mathnawi letter acquires renewed analytical relevance.

Over the past several decades, the academic study of Sufism has undergone a marked methodological reorientation, moving beyond descriptive or purely historical paradigms toward philosophically grounded analyses of Islamic spiritual anthropology. Foundational contributions have demonstrated that Sufi conceptions of the self are structured through relational knowledge of the Divine rather than autonomous interiority, thereby articulating a coherent non-modern ontology of subject formation (Chittick, 1989; Murata, 1992). Complementary scholarship has emphasized the hermeneutic, experiential, and ethical dimensions of Sufi discourse, showing how spiritual narratives encode disciplined practices of meaning-making and transformation rather than symbolic mysticism alone (Ernst, 1997). Historical syntheses further situate these metaphysical and experiential frameworks within evolving social and intellectual contexts, presenting Sufism as a dynamic tradition of ethical self-cultivation across Islamic history (Knysh, 2017).

Taken together, contemporary Sufi studies provide a sophisticated conceptual vocabulary for interpreting spiritual selfhood, narrative transformation, and teleological becoming. Yet despite these advances, premodern autobiographical poetic texts from Central Asia—especially those associated with Alisher Navoi—remain insufficiently theorized within this framework. Existing research has tended to privilege philological reconstruction, literary description, or historical contextualization, leaving underexplored the question of how autobiographical discourse itself structures a model of biographical-spiritual motivation. This unresolved problem marks a critical theoretical gap at the intersection of Sufi studies, literary theory, and the global history of subjectivity.

Modern scholarship on Alisher Navoi has generated a substantial body of philological, historical, and literary research that clarifies the manuscript transmission of his works, reconstructs key elements of Timurid cultural life, and analyzes the aesthetic structure of Chagatai poetic language (Bertels, 1965; Sirojiddinov, 2011; Subtelny, 2007). These studies have been indispensable for establishing textual reliability, refining biographical chronology, and situating Navoi within the broader intellectual history of fifteenth-century Central Asia. In particular, philological and comparative approaches have illuminated the intertextual relations of Navoi's poetry, while historical analyses have

foregrounded the political and social dynamics shaping his career.

At the same time, dominant interpretations of Navoi's departure from Herat have remained largely externalist in orientation, explaining the movement primarily through political tension, material hardship, or regional instability. While such explanations are historically grounded, they tend to treat the mathnawi letter to Sayyid Hasan Ardasher as supplementary documentary evidence rather than as an autonomous narrative articulation of inner transformation. Consequently, the semantic and motivational architecture through which the poet interprets crisis, isolation, and departure has not been systematically reconstructed within contemporary theoretical discourse.

No previous study has articulated Navoi's departure as a multilayered biographical-spiritual model grounded in autobiographical poetics and manuscript-attested textuality. This absence defines the central research gap addressed in the present article and marks a decisive point of intersection between Navoi studies, Sufi anthropology, and global theories of premodern subject formation.

The present article addresses the identified theoretical gap by proposing a textual-hermeneutic account of spiritual subjectivation in Alisher Navoi's mathnawi-style letter to Sayyid Hasan Ardasher. Grounded in manuscript-attested textual analysis and informed by narrative theory, philosophical hermeneutics, and Sufi anthropology, the study seeks to reconstruct the inner semantic configuration through which autobiographical discourse transforms historical departure into narratively intelligible spiritual becoming.

The investigation is guided by three interrelated research questions:

- (1) Which motivational and semantic layers structure the narrative organization of exile in Navoi's mathnawi letter?
- (2) How do aesthetic-intellectual tension, social-moral rupture, and transcendental Sufi aspiration interact within the text's configuration of selfhood?
- (3) In what sense can departure be understood as a narrative construction of spiritual subjectivity rather than merely a biographical or geographical event?

By addressing these questions, the article makes four principal contributions: it reinterprets Navoi's departure through inner narrative teleology rather than external causality; reframes

Sufi autobiographical writing as a mode of literary construction of subject formation; provides evidence for plural genealogies of premodern interiority within global literary theory; and demonstrates a methodological synthesis uniting manuscript philology with contemporary hermeneutic analysis.

The study proceeds from theoretical framing to manuscript-grounded analysis of the mathnawi's motivational structure, followed by discussion of its implications for narrative selfhood, Sufi anthropology, and the literary construction of spiritual subjectivity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Any theoretical account of spiritual subjectivation in Navoi's mathnawi letter must begin not from abstract philosophical premises but from the discursive structure of the text itself. The letter functions simultaneously as poetic composition, autobiographical testimony, and spiritual self-interpretation, thereby creating a layered narrative field in which lived experience is reorganized through literary form. Rather than presenting departure from Herat as a merely factual episode, the mathnawi configures exile within a semantic horizon shaped by longing, crisis, and transcendence. In this sense, the autobiographical voice does not simply recount events; it produces narrative meaning through the poetic ordering of inner experience.

From the perspective of narrative theory, such discourse may be understood as a process of self-configuration, in which temporality, emotion, and ethical evaluation are woven into a coherent trajectory of becoming. The movement from suffering toward spiritual orientation is not described externally but articulated from within the speaking subject, allowing exile to appear as both rupture and possibility. This dual function transforms autobiographical narration into a site of subject formation, where identity emerges through interpretative engagement with loss, displacement, and aspiration.

Crucially, the mathnawi form intensifies this process. Its rhythmic continuity, metaphorical density, and dialogic address to Sayyid Hasan Ardasher generate a poetic environment in which confession, reflection, and supplication converge. The addressee is not merely a historical recipient but a spiritual interlocutor whose presence structures the narrative unfolding of the self. Through this relational discourse, autobiographical expression becomes inseparable from guidance, memory, and expectation of transformation.

Accordingly, Navoi's letter should be read not as supplementary biographical evidence but as a primary narrative ground in which spiritual subjectivity is textually constituted. Theoretical interpretation must therefore proceed from the internal logic of this discourse, allowing philosophical and anthropological concepts to emerge in response to the poetic articulation of exile rather than being imposed upon it from outside. Such a text-driven approach establishes the foundation for reconstructing the narrative dynamics of spiritual subjectivation developed in the subsequent sections.

Within the narrative economy of Navoi's mathnawi letter, exile is not merely described as a biographical interruption but configured as a meaningful temporal movement through which the self becomes intelligible. Such configuration corresponds to what philosophical hermeneutics identifies as the narrative mediation of identity: lived experience acquires coherence only when dispersed events are emplotted into a structured story oriented toward significance. In this sense, the mathnawi does not record departure from Herat as an external fact; rather, it reorganizes suffering, longing, and expectation into a trajectory of becoming that allows the speaking subject to interpret his own transformation.

The temporal logic of the letter unfolds through a movement from crisis toward orientation. Moments of deprivation and social rupture are narrated not as static conditions but as stages within an unfolding process whose direction gradually turns toward spiritual realization. This reordering of temporality transforms exile into a productive interval—an interpretative space in which the self confronts loss while simultaneously discovering the possibility of transcendence. Narrative, therefore, operates as a mediating structure between historical circumstance and inner meaning, enabling the autobiographical voice to convert displacement into purpose.

Equally significant is the relational dimension of this emplotment. Addressed to Sayyid Hasan Ardasher, the discourse situates self-understanding within a dialogic horizon shaped by memory, guidance, and anticipation of response. The addressee's spiritual authority implicitly organizes the narrative movement, allowing the speaking subject to articulate crisis as a step within a shared ethical and metaphysical orientation. Through this dialogic configuration, personal suffering is reinterpreted as spiritually legible experience rather than isolated misfortune.

Seen in this light, Navoi's mathnawi exemplifies a form of

narrative selfhood in which identity emerges through interpretative storytelling grounded in spiritual teleology. Exile becomes the central narrative device that binds temporal rupture to the promise of transformation, thereby revealing autobiographical discourse as a literary technology of subject formation. This dynamic prepares the transition toward the specifically Sufi vocabulary of inner change that structures the subsequent analytical layer of the study.

Within the semantic horizon of Navoi's mathnawi letter, spiritual transformation is articulated through a vocabulary deeply rooted in Islamic-Sufi anthropology, where the human self is conceived not as an autonomous interior entity but as a relational reality oriented toward divine knowledge and return. Concepts such as longing, guidance, remembrance, and inner journey function not merely as devotional motifs but as structuring principles through which experience becomes spiritually intelligible. In classical Sufi thought, the path of realization unfolds through a dynamic interplay between attraction and disciplined movement, allowing suffering and separation to acquire teleological meaning within a process of becoming directed toward truth. When read against this conceptual background, the language of exile in Navoi's letter reveals itself as more than an expression of loss; it becomes a symbolic register through which displacement is reinterpreted as initiation into transformation.

This reinterpretation operates at the level of narrative interiority. Emotional intensity, ethical self-reflection, and metaphysical aspiration converge to produce a discourse in which the speaking subject understands crisis as spiritually productive rather than merely destructive. Longing signals orientation toward transcendence, distance opens the possibility of purification, and remembrance sustains continuity between rupture and hope. The presence of the addressee further reinforces this relational structure, since spiritual knowledge emerges dialogically rather than in isolation. Through this constellation of meanings, autobiographical narration becomes inseparable from processes of inner cultivation, aligning poetic expression with the anthropological logic of the Sufi path.

Such alignment transforms the mathnawi into a literary space where spiritual subjectivity is not presupposed but gradually constituted. The self appears as something formed through movement—through separation, reflection, and orientation toward guidance—rather than as a stable psychological core. Exile thus functions simultaneously as experiential condition

and narrative principle, binding emotional depth to metaphysical direction. By embedding Sufi anthropology within the very texture of poetic discourse, Navoi's letter demonstrates how spiritual becoming can be narratively configured without dissolving into abstract doctrine. This fusion of metaphysical vocabulary and literary form prepares the transition toward a more precise consideration of how the mathnawi's poetic structure itself operates as a technology of narrative transformation.

Within the semantic horizon of Navoi's mathnawi letter, spiritual transformation is articulated through a vocabulary deeply rooted in Islamic–Sufi anthropology, where the human self is conceived not as an autonomous interior entity but as a relational reality oriented toward divine knowledge and return. Concepts such as longing, guidance, remembrance, and inner journey function not merely as devotional motifs but as structuring principles through which experience becomes spiritually intelligible. In classical Sufi thought, the path of realization unfolds through a dynamic interplay between attraction and disciplined movement, allowing suffering and separation to acquire teleological meaning within a process of becoming directed toward truth. When read against this conceptual background, the language of exile in Navoi's letter reveals itself as more than an expression of loss; it becomes a symbolic register through which displacement is reinterpreted as initiation into transformation.

This reinterpretation operates at the level of narrative interiority. Emotional intensity, ethical self-reflection, and metaphysical aspiration converge to produce a discourse in which the speaking subject understands crisis as spiritually productive rather than merely destructive. Longing signals orientation toward transcendence, distance opens the possibility of purification, and remembrance sustains continuity between rupture and hope. The presence of the addressee further reinforces this relational structure, since spiritual knowledge emerges dialogically rather than in isolation. Through this constellation of meanings, autobiographical narration becomes inseparable from processes of inner cultivation, aligning poetic expression with the anthropological logic of the Sufi path.

Such alignment transforms the mathnawi into a literary space where spiritual subjectivity is not presupposed but gradually constituted. The self appears as something formed through movement—through separation, reflection, and orientation toward guidance—rather than as a stable psychological core.

Exile thus functions simultaneously as experiential condition and narrative principle, binding emotional depth to metaphysical direction. By embedding Sufi anthropology within the very texture of poetic discourse, Navoi's letter demonstrates how spiritual becoming can be narratively configured without dissolving into abstract doctrine. This fusion of metaphysical vocabulary and literary form prepares the transition toward a more precise consideration of how the mathnawi's poetic structure itself operates as a technology of narrative transformation.

The convergence of aesthetic crisis, social rupture, and transcendental aspiration within Navoi's autobiographical mathnawi can be understood as a unified process of spiritual subjectivation in which narrative form mediates existential transformation. Rather than functioning as discrete historical causes, these layers interact dynamically to produce an inner teleology that reinterprets exile as movement toward meaning. Such configuration corresponds to hermeneutic accounts of narrative identity in which lived temporality becomes intelligible only through emplotment and retrospective synthesis (Ricoeur, 1984–1988). At the same time, the disciplined reinterpretation of suffering visible in the text parallels what philosophical analyses describe as "technologies of the self," whereby ethical and spiritual practices reshape subjectivity through reflective articulation (Foucault, 1988).

Within an Islamic–Sufi anthropological horizon, this transformation acquires a specifically relational and theocentric structure: the self does not culminate in autonomous interiority but in orientation toward divine knowledge and guided realization, a pattern extensively described in Sufi metaphysics and experiential psychology (Chittick, 1989; Ernst, 1997). Navoi's narrative therefore enacts a passage from fractured worldly belonging toward spiritually intelligible existence, where poetic articulation itself becomes the medium through which crisis is reordered into teleological coherence.

The resulting model demonstrates that autobiographical discourse in the mathnawi is neither purely historical testimony nor purely symbolic mysticism. Instead, it constitutes a structured synthesis in which literary form, ethical interpretation, and metaphysical aspiration jointly produce a narratively constituted spiritual self.

The convergence of aesthetic crisis, social rupture, and transcendental aspiration within Navoi's autobiographical

mathnawi can be understood as a unified process of spiritual subjectivation in which narrative form mediates existential transformation. Rather than functioning as discrete historical causes, these layers interact dynamically to produce an inner teleology that reinterprets exile as movement toward meaning. Such configuration corresponds to hermeneutic accounts of narrative identity in which lived temporality becomes intelligible only through emplotment and retrospective synthesis (Ricoeur, 1984–1988). At the same time, the disciplined reinterpretation of suffering visible in the text parallels what philosophical analyses describe as “technologies of the self,” whereby ethical and spiritual practices reshape subjectivity through reflective articulation (Foucault, 1988).

Within an Islamic–Sufi anthropological horizon, this transformation acquires a specifically relational and theocentric structure: the self does not culminate in autonomous interiority but in orientation toward divine knowledge and guided realization, a pattern extensively described in Sufi metaphysics and experiential psychology (Chittick, 1989; Ernst, 1997). Navoi’s narrative therefore enacts a passage from fractured worldly belonging toward spiritually intelligible existence, where poetic articulation itself becomes the medium through which crisis is reordered into teleological coherence.

The resulting model demonstrates that autobiographical discourse in the mathnawi is neither purely historical testimony nor purely symbolic mysticism. Instead, it constitutes a structured synthesis in which literary form, ethical interpretation, and metaphysical aspiration jointly produce a narratively constituted spiritual self.

METHODOLOGY

Manuscript-based textual grounding constitutes the first analytical layer of the present study, ensuring that theoretical interpretation remains anchored in historically verifiable textual evidence. The mathnawi letter to Sayyid Hasan Ardasher survives within a documented manuscript tradition that includes early witnesses preserved in major archival collections, whose comparison allows reconstruction of a relatively stable semantic core despite minor scribal variation. Such reliance on manuscript transmission follows principles established in modern philology and textual criticism, where meaning is understood as historically mediated through material inscription rather than abstract authorial intention

(McGann, 1991; Cerquiglini, 1999).

Within Islamic manuscript culture in particular, the fluid yet disciplined processes of copying, compilation, and commentary shape the reception of literary works across generations, producing what scholars describe as a “living textuality” embedded in scholarly practice and devotional reading (Messick, 1993; Gacek, 2009). Approaching Navoi’s mathnawi through this lens prevents anachronistic reduction of the text to a purely modern literary artifact and instead situates it within the intellectual and codicological environments that structured fifteenth-century Central Asian knowledge production.

Close engagement with manuscript witnesses further enables attention to lexical nuance, structural segmentation, and rhetorical continuity—features essential for any hermeneutic reconstruction of autobiographical meaning. As contemporary textual scholarship emphasizes, interpretation that neglects material textual history risks projecting modern theoretical categories onto premodern works without sufficient evidentiary control (Eggert, 2009). Grounding analysis in manuscript attestation therefore establishes methodological legitimacy for the subsequent hermeneutic and spiritual-anthropological readings developed in this article, allowing conceptual claims about narrative selfhood and inner motivation to emerge from the historically transmitted text itself rather than from speculative abstraction.

Hermeneutic and narrative analysis provides the second methodological stratum of the study, enabling movement from material textual attestation toward structures of meaning through which autobiographical experience becomes intelligible. Within philosophical hermeneutics, understanding is not conceived as recovery of an original, fixed intention but as an interpretative event arising in the encounter between historically situated text and readerly horizon (Gadamer, 2004). Such a perspective is particularly productive for premodern spiritual literature, where symbolic language, rhetorical convention, and experiential testimony intersect in complex ways that resist purely positivist explanation.

Narrative theory further clarifies how this interpretative process operates within autobiographical discourse. Rather than recording life events in chronological neutrality, narrative configuration reorganizes temporality into patterns of coherence, causality, and purpose, thereby constituting the very intelligibility of the self in time (Carr, 1986; Ricoeur, 1984–1988). In poetic autobiography, this configurative

function is intensified: metaphor, rhythm, and address reshape lived suffering into communicable meaning, transforming experience into ethically and spiritually interpretable form.

Applied to Navoi's mathnawi letter, hermeneutic–narrative analysis reveals that exile is articulated not merely as historical displacement but as a meaning-bearing transition structured through reflective emplotment. Emotional rupture, social estrangement, and spiritual longing are narratively integrated into a teleological movement oriented toward realization. Such integration demonstrates that autobiographical selfhood in the text emerges through interpretative narration rather than pre-existing psychological interiority, aligning the mathnawi with broader cross-cultural models of narratively constituted subject formation explored in contemporary humanities scholarship (Bruner, 1990; MacIntyre, 1981).

Hermeneutic and narrative analysis provides the second methodological stratum of the study, enabling movement from material textual attestation toward structures of meaning through which autobiographical experience becomes intelligible. Within philosophical hermeneutics, understanding is not conceived as recovery of an original, fixed intention but as an interpretative event arising in the encounter between historically situated text and readerly horizon (Gadamer, 2004). Such a perspective is particularly productive for premodern spiritual literature, where symbolic language, rhetorical convention, and experiential testimony intersect in complex ways that resist purely positivist explanation.

Narrative theory further clarifies how this interpretative process operates within autobiographical discourse. Rather than recording life events in chronological neutrality, narrative configuration reorganizes temporality into patterns of coherence, causality, and purpose, thereby constituting the very intelligibility of the self in time (Carr, 1986; Ricoeur, 1984–1988). In poetic autobiography, this configurative function is intensified: metaphor, rhythm, and address reshape lived suffering into communicable meaning, transforming experience into ethically and spiritually interpretable form.

Applied to Navoi's mathnawi letter, hermeneutic–narrative analysis reveals that exile is articulated not merely as historical displacement but as a meaning-bearing transition structured through reflective emplotment. Emotional rupture, social estrangement, and spiritual longing are narratively integrated into a teleological movement oriented toward realization. Such

integration demonstrates that autobiographical selfhood in the text emerges through interpretative narration rather than pre-existing psychological interiority, aligning the mathnawi with broader cross-cultural models of narratively constituted subject formation explored in contemporary humanities scholarship (Bruner, 1990; MacIntyre, 1981).

The analytical procedure of the study follows a sequential and internally coherent progression designed to maintain balance between philological evidence, interpretative rigor, and conceptual synthesis. The first stage consists of close engagement with manuscript-attested textual witnesses and critical editions in order to establish a reliable semantic foundation for interpretation. This step ensures that subsequent theoretical reflection remains anchored in historically transmitted textual form rather than speculative abstraction.

The second stage involves structural segmentation of the mathnawi letter into thematic and rhetorical units, allowing recurrent semantic clusters—such as expressions of creative tension, depictions of social rupture, and articulations of spiritual longing—to emerge through systematic comparison. Such segmentation enables movement from linear reading toward patterned recognition of motivational organization within the text.

The third stage applies hermeneutic–narrative interpretation to these clustered motifs, examining how autobiographical temporality is configured into meaningful progression and how suffering is reinterpreted within a teleological horizon of realization. This interpretative synthesis prepares the ground for the final stage: conceptual modeling of the motivational structure underlying Navoi's departure.

Through this layered procedure, the study integrates manuscript philology, narrative hermeneutics, and structural explanation into a unified methodological framework capable of rendering autobiographical spiritual transformation analytically intelligible.

RESULTS

At the deepest textual level, the initial impulse behind Navoi's departure is articulated as an aesthetic–intellectual crisis rooted in a highly developed ontology of the word (*kalām*). In the mathnawi letter, language is not treated as a neutral communicative tool but as a metaphysical principle through which human distinctiveness and existential meaning are realized. Such a conception corresponds to a long-standing

Islamic philosophical and Sufi tradition in which the word functions as the locus of intellect, revelation, and creative articulation (Chittick, 1989; Murata, 1992). Within this framework, poetic speech becomes inseparable from ontological vocation: to possess the word is to bear responsibility for meaning.

The autobiographical voice of Alisher Navoi reveals a pronounced awareness of this vocation. The mathnawi repeatedly foregrounds the poet's confidence in his creative capacity, his mastery of poetic form, and his conviction that Turkic verse possesses the potential to rival the highest achievements of Persian literary culture. This self-assessment is not merely rhetorical bravado; it reflects an early crystallization of aesthetic self-consciousness, in which creative identity is experienced as both gift and burden. As modern theories of artistic selfhood suggest, such heightened awareness often produces tension when inner capacity exceeds external validation (Taylor, 1989).

Crucially, this aesthetic self-recognition unfolds against a background of social non-recognition. The letter encodes persistent frustration with material deprivation, lack of patronage, and the absence of institutional structures capable of sustaining poetic labor. From a hermeneutic perspective, this mismatch between inner vocation and external conditions generates what may be described as aesthetic dissonance: a state in which creative consciousness cannot reconcile itself with lived reality. Rather than resulting in passive resignation, this dissonance acquires motivational force. As narrative identity theory emphasizes, crisis becomes productive when it compels reconfiguration of the life story toward a new horizon of meaning (Ricoeur, 1984–1988).

In the mathnawi, this reconfiguration takes the form of movement. The impossibility of realizing poetic purpose within existing social constraints transforms departure from an accidental response into an existential necessity. Travel appears not as escape but as the only remaining means through which aesthetic vocation may preserve its integrity. In this sense, the first motivational layer already anticipates later spiritual developments: the refusal to compromise the word prefigures the refusal to compromise truth itself. The aesthetic–intellectual crisis thus functions as the primary catalyst that destabilizes worldly attachment and prepares the ground for subsequent social and transcendental motivations.

The second motivational stratum underlying Navoi's departure emerges from his sustained depiction of ethical disintegration

within the social and political environment of fifteenth-century Khorasan. Unlike the inwardly oriented aesthetic crisis, this layer is articulated through a moral reading of historical reality, where the collapse of communal virtues renders continued presence in the homeland existentially untenable. The mathnawi organizes this perception through a striking triadic inversion of core ethical principles: fidelity (*vafo*) gives way to hypocrisy (*nifoq*), generosity (*saxo*) is replaced by miserliness (*buxl*), and chivalric virtue (*muruvvat*) degenerates into envy (*hasad*). Such patterned reversal transforms historical observation into moral structure, allowing social decay to function narratively as a coherent field of meaning rather than a collection of isolated grievances.

From the standpoint of ethical philosophy and intellectual history, the loss of shared virtue signifies more than political instability; it signals the erosion of the moral horizon that sustains meaningful human action (MacIntyre, 1981). In the mathnawi, this erosion is rendered through images of institutional corruption, economic injustice, and the breakdown of trust among individuals—conditions that collectively produce an atmosphere of estrangement. Religious and scholarly spaces appear emptied of spiritual authority, while everyday social relations are marked by suspicion and self-interest. The resulting environment no longer supports the ethical reciprocity required for either creative flourishing or spiritual companionship.

This moral landscape directly intensifies the autobiographical experience of loneliness. The absence of trustworthy interlocutors and the physical separation from a guiding companion transform social collapse into existential isolation. Narrative theory suggests that such isolation becomes decisive when it disrupts the relational networks through which identity is ordinarily stabilized (Bruner, 1990). In Navoi's case, the disintegration of ethical community removes the final possibility of reconciliation between inner vocation and external world. What began as aesthetic dissonance now becomes a total rupture between self and society.

Consequently, departure acquires the character of inevitability. Remaining within a morally inverted world would imply silent complicity with injustice, whereas movement outward preserves ethical integrity. The social–moral crisis therefore functions as a mediating layer between aesthetic tension and spiritual aspiration: it converts inward dissatisfaction into outward displacement. By narratively configuring societal decay as a condition that makes exile

unavoidable, the mathnawi transforms historical circumstance into ethical necessity, preparing the conceptual ground for the transcendental orientation that completes the motivational structure of Navoi's journey.

DISCUSSION

Positioning Navoi within global literary theory requires moving beyond a regional or purely historical framing toward recognition of his work as a site of conceptual reflection on subjectivity, narrative, and spiritual becoming. When read through the combined lenses of hermeneutics, narrative identity, and Sufi anthropology, the autobiographical mathnawi reveals structures of meaning that resonate with broader theoretical concerns in the humanities, including the relationship between suffering and interpretation, exile and self-formation, and temporality and transcendence. Such resonance suggests that Sufi poetic discourse can function not merely as devotional expression but as a form of philosophical anthropology—one that articulates systematic insights into the constitution and transformation of the human self (Ernst, 1997; Knysh, 2017).

Equally significant is the methodological implication of integrating manuscript-based philology with contemporary theory. Rather than opposing traditional textual scholarship to modern critical interpretation, Navoi's text demonstrates how historically grounded manuscript study can provide the evidentiary stability necessary for theoretically ambitious readings. This synthesis allows premodern Islamic literature to enter global discussions of subjectivity without sacrificing philological rigor, thereby challenging assumptions that theoretical relevance belongs exclusively to modern or Western corpora (McGann, 1991; Eggert, 2009).

Within this expanded framework, Navoi's mathnawi emerges as evidence for plural genealogies of narratively constituted selfhood across civilizations. The text shows that reflexive interiority, ethical self-interpretation, and teleological life narration were already conceptually elaborated in fifteenth-century Central Asia, though articulated through a theocentric rather than autonomous paradigm. Recognizing this contribution reconfigures the map of global literary theory: Navoi becomes not only a major figure of Turkic and Islamic culture but also a participant in enduring philosophical conversations about how human beings transform crisis into meaning through narrative form.

CONCLUSION

The present study has demonstrated that the autobiographical mathnawi letter traditionally associated with Navoi's departure from Herat encodes not merely a historical episode but a structured process of ontological transformation. Through manuscript-grounded hermeneutic analysis, three interrelated motivational domains were reconstructed: an aesthetic-intellectual crisis that destabilizes worldly coherence, a social-moral collapse that renders continued belonging impossible, and a transcendental Sufi aspiration that redirects rupture toward spiritual realization. The convergence of these layers forms an integrated trajectory in which outward movement becomes the narrative expression of inner becoming. Consequently, departure is revealed as a teleological passage—where crisis, exile, and longing are reconfigured into meaningful orientation within a spiritually intelligible life history.

The theoretical contribution of this study operates on several interconnected levels. First, within Navoi studies, it proposes a shift from externally causal explanations toward an interpretative paradigm centered on inner teleology, thereby reframing the poet's departure as a narratively constituted process of spiritual becoming rather than a merely historical displacement. Second, it repositions Sufi autobiographical writing as a form of philosophical anthropology capable of articulating systematic insights into ethical transformation, relational selfhood, and metaphysical orientation. Third, by demonstrating the presence of reflexive interiority and structured self-interpretation in a fifteenth-century Islamic context, the study contributes to contemporary debates on premodern subjectivity, supporting the notion of plural genealogies of the self beyond Eurocentric developmental models. Finally, methodologically, the research shows that rigorous manuscript-based philology can be productively integrated with hermeneutic and narrative theory, establishing a transferable framework for analyzing autobiographical meaning across diverse premodern literary traditions.

Beyond its immediate textual findings, the study contributes to global humanities discourse by challenging inherited Eurocentric assumptions about the historical emergence of reflexive subjectivity. Rather than extending a single civilizational model, the analysis demonstrates the coexistence of multiple genealogies of interiority, within which Islamic Sufi thought articulates a distinct yet theoretically comparable form of narratively constituted selfhood. By situating Navoi's autobiographical discourse within this plural intellectual

landscape, the article advances a non-reductive framework for comparative literary theory—one that recognizes premodern Islamic texts as active participants in conceptual debates on meaning, transformation, and human becoming. Such repositioning does not displace existing narratives of subject formation but reconfigures them within a broader, genuinely intercivilizational horizon of interpretation.

Ultimately, Navoi's autobiographical mathnawi reveals a universal structure in which crisis becomes a source of meaning, exile unfolds as a mode of becoming, and narrative operates as the medium through which transformation is rendered intelligible. Read within this horizon, spiritual subjectivity appears not as a fixed interior state but as a dynamic process of interpretation and orientation, where human experience attains coherence through the continual refiguration of suffering into purpose and transcendence.

REFERENCES

1. Babur, Z. M. (1960). *Baburnama*. Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan.
2. Bertels, E. E. (1965). *Navoi i Jami*. Nauka.
3. Bruner, J. (1990). *Acts of meaning*. Harvard University Press.
4. Carr, D. (1986). *Time, narrative, and history*. Indiana University Press.
5. Cerquiglini, B. (1999). *In praise of the variant: A critical history of philology*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
6. Chittick, W. C. (1989). *The Sufi path of knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabi's metaphysics of imagination*. SUNY Press.
7. Chittick, W. C. (2000). *Sufism: A short introduction*. Oneworld.
8. Dilthey, W. (1989). *Selected works: Vol. 1. Introduction to the human sciences*. Princeton University Press.
9. Eggert, P. (2009). *Securing the past: Conservation in art, architecture and literature*. Cambridge University Press.
10. Ernst, C. W. (1997). *The Shambhala guide to Sufism*. Shambhala.
11. Foucault, M. (1988). *Technologies of the self*. In L. H. Martin, H. Gutman, & P. Hutton (Eds.), *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault* (pp. 16–49). University of Massachusetts Press.
12. Gacek, A. (2009). *Arabic manuscripts: A vademecum for readers*. Brill.
13. Gadamer, H.-G. (2004). *Truth and method* (2nd rev. ed.). Continuum.
14. Khwandamir. (2018). *Makorim al-akhlaq*. Yoshlar Nashriyot Uyi.
15. Komilov, N. (2009). *Tasavvuf*. O'zbekiston.
16. Knysh, A. (2017). *Sufism: A new history of Islamic mysticism*. Princeton University Press.
17. MacIntyre, A. (1981). *After virtue*. University of Notre Dame Press.
18. McGann, J. (1991). *The textual condition*. Princeton University Press.
19. Messick, B. (1993). *The calligraphic state: Textual domination and history in a Muslim society*. University of California Press.
20. Murata, S. (1992). *The Tao of Islam: A sourcebook on gender relationships in Islamic thought*. SUNY Press.
21. Navoi, A. (2013). *G'aroyib us-sig'ar*. G'afur G'ulom Publishing House.
22. Navoi, A. (2020). *Kulliyot* (Topkapi Palace Museum Library, Revan MS 808 facsimile ed.). Istanbul.
23. Navoi, A. (n.d.). *Kulliyot* (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Turc 317 manuscript, Gallica digital collection).
24. Navoi, A. (n.d.). *Xazoyin al-ma'oniyy* (MS 677). Tashkent Institute of Oriental Studies.
25. Ricoeur, P. (1984–1988). *Time and narrative* (Vols. 1–3). University of Chicago Press.
26. Ricoeur, P. (1992). *Oneself as another*. University of Chicago Press.
27. Runyan, W. M. (1982). *Life histories and psychobiography*. Oxford University Press.
28. Sirojiddinov, S. (2011). *Alisher Navoiy: Qiyosiy-tipologik, tekstologik tahlil*. Akademnashr.
29. Sulton, I. (2010). *Navoiyning qalb daftari*. G'afur G'ulom Publishing House.
30. Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Harvard University Press.

31. White, H. (1987). *The content of the form: Narrative discourse and historical representation*. Johns Hopkins University Press.