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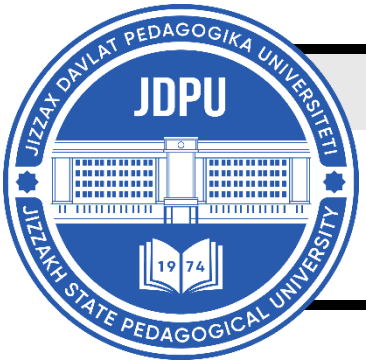

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TRADITIONAL SYMBOLS IN EASTERN AND WESTERN CLASSICAL LITERATURE

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article examines the symbolic functions of the "journey" and the "mirror" in Eastern and Western classical literature. Using major examples from Eastern authors such as Attar and Navoi, as well as medieval Western writers like Chaucer and Shakespeare, the study analyzes how journey and mirror imagery reflect spiritual, moral, and psychological processes. In Eastern literature, the journey often serves as a metaphor for spiritual perfection and the Sufi path, while the mirror symbolizes the heart's purity, spiritual insight, and divine manifestation. In Western literature, the journey represents moral exploration, social characterization, or emotional experience, whereas the mirror functions as a tool for introspection, self-awareness, and aesthetic reflection. Despite cultural differences, both the journey and mirror motifs consistently convey universal themes of human self-discovery, inner transformation, and the pursuit of truth, whether spiritual, moral, or psychological.

Introduction. Journey symbolism is one of the oldest archetypal motifs in world literature, reflecting universal human experiences such as the search for meaning, spiritual growth, moral struggle, and inner transformation. In different historical and cultural contexts, the symbols of "road," "journey," and "travel" have been employed to convey these experiences. In Eastern classical literature, particularly within Sufi philosophical traditions, the journey

motif embodies the soul's progression toward divine truth and spiritual perfection. In contrast, in medieval Western literature, journey imagery often serves as a moral or social allegory, while also retaining spiritual or psychological dimensions. This study comparatively analyzes the literary functions of journey symbolism in Uzbek and English classical literature, focusing on major works such as Attar's Mantıq ut-Tayr, Navoi's Lison ut-Tayr, Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, and Shakespearean sonnets. Similarly, mirror holds a central place in both Eastern and Western classical traditions. In Eastern literature, particularly in the works of Navoi, Mashrab, and Yassavi, the mirror represents the human heart, spiritual purity, and divine manifestation, serving as a metaphor for inner clarity and self-realization. In Western literature, including Shakespeare and John Donne, the mirror functions as a tool for self-reflection, ethical evaluation, and the exploration of human emotions. This study further examines the mirror as a symbolic image across cultural contexts, comparing its spiritual, psychological, and moral connotations in Eastern and Western literary traditions

Materials and methods. This study employs qualitative textual analysis using the following methodological approaches. This study employs a qualitative textual analysis grounded in comparative, symbolic, and hermeneutic approaches. Eastern and Western literary texts are analyzed comparatively to identify similarities and differences in their symbolic representations of the journey and mirror motif, including shared metaphorical functions, culturally shaped interpretations, and distinct narrative structures. The analysis incorporates symbolic and allegorical interpretation, drawing on Sufi symbolic frameworks for Eastern texts and medieval Christian allegory for Western works, while also considering psychological and emotional symbolism found in poetry. A hermeneutic method is applied through close reading to uncover deeper layers of meaning, such as character symbolism, metaphorical structures, and underlying ideological or philosophical concepts. The primary dataset for this study consists of selected works by Attar, Navoi, Chaucer, and Shakespeare, whose texts provide rich material for cross-cultural symbolic comparison and interpretive exploration.

Results and discussion. The symbol of "travel".

The images of "road," "journey," and "travel", and "mirror" are among the oldest symbols in world literature, carrying diverse philosophical and artistic meanings across different periods and cultural traditions. In Eastern classical literature, particularly in the Uzbek literary heritage, these symbols represent spiritual perfection and the human striving toward the Divine Truth. In Western literature, however, they often express moral, social, or religious meanings. Nevertheless, in both traditions, the symbol retains a shared allegorical essence that

reflects the universal human experience of internal and external searching, self-discovery, and spiritual growth.

In ancient Uzbek classical literature—especially in Sufi writings—the symbol of the "road" signifies the human soul's spiritual journey toward God. Along this path, a person must overcome the ego (nafs), purify the soul, and undertake the steps leading to union with the Divine. In this sense, one of the most perfect literary embodiments of the journey symbol in Eastern literature is Fariduddin Attar's "Mantıq ut-tayr" (The Conference of the Birds). In the work, the birds set out in search of the Simurgh, and through this quest the various stages of the soul's progress toward perfection are depicted allegorically. Their traversal of the Valleys of Quest, Love, Knowledge, Detachment, Unity, Wonder, and Annihilation represents the Sufi concept of sulūk—the spiritual path. [1.15] Each bird symbolizes a particular human psychological state: for example, the hoopoe (hudhud) represents the wise person or spiritual guide, while the nightingale symbolizes people of art (poets, singers). In this narrative, "journey" serves as the symbol of inner transformation; Attar portrays travel as the process of "finding one's true self," with each valley representing a spiritual test and a stage of purification. [2.125]

Inspired by Attar and continuing his tradition, Alisher Navoi wrote his "Lison ut-tayr". In this work, Navoi interprets the journey symbol even more broadly, extending it into social and ethical dimensions. In Navoi's allegory, the birds' journey is not only a metaphor for Sufi sulūk but also for human moral responsibility and the pursuit of ethical refinement in society. The hoopoe is the murshid (spiritual guide), the Simurgh symbolizes God or the Perfect Man, and the birds represent different human virtues and flaws. According to Navoi, the Simurgh is "the king of all birds," aware of everything, unrivaled in the world, and absolutely unique. [3.18] The parrot (tuti), as in the oral and written traditions of the East, symbolizes wisdom and eloquence, while the owl represents greed and attachment to worldly possessions, as well as ruin. [4.3] In the poem, this image allegorically represents a person enslaved by greed. Thus, the journey symbol in Navoi's work forms a complex allegorical system that unites mystical and social layers of meaning.

The motif of journey is also found in Navoi's "Farhad and Shirin," part of his Khamsa. The sea voyage symbolizes Farhad's entry into the realm of love; the dangers, hardships, and trials he encounters express the difficulties of the path of love. The storm at sea and the treatments prescribed by physicians signify that the pain of love cannot be cured by worldly remedies. [5.141]

In contrast to Eastern literature, the journey motif in Western literature often takes the form of moral and social allegory. Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales" is a prime example. Built around the tales told by pilgrims from various social backgrounds on their way to Canterbury, the work depicts the inner spiritual journey of humanity through an outward pilgrimage. Some literary critics interpret this work as an allegory of humankind's journey toward God and heavenly salvation. [6.26] In the narrative, the road to Canterbury symbolizes the path of life, the destination represents salvation and spiritual purification, and the twelve pilgrims serve as allegorical embodiments of particular human traits. For instance, the Knight represents courage, the Pardoner hypocrisy, the Wife of Bath independence and experience, and the Parson purity and piety. Thus, in Chaucer's work, "journey" functions as an allegorical mirror reflecting the moral landscape of human society. [7.199.] The concept of travel in Western medieval literature is closely connected to religious experience and pilgrimage traditions; accordingly, in The Canterbury Tales, the journey does not merely represent an external ritual but the inner process of spiritual cleansing. Through each tale, the human being undergoes self-examination, acknowledges personal flaws, and proceeds along the path to salvation. In this respect, Chaucer's work can be interpreted as parallel to the Sufi journey symbolism in Eastern literature.

In Uzbek and English poetry alike, the symbols of "road," "journey," and "travel" are among the frequently used motifs. In the works of Navoi, Lutfiy, and other classical authors, the road often symbolizes the world itself and the human journey through life. In Navoi's poetry, the road appears repeatedly, representing not only physical travel but also the path of spiritual and moral refinement. For the poet, the road signifies the human struggle to reach a goal, the internal search for truth, patience, and determination. The difficulties encountered along the way symbolize, in Sufi interpretation, worldly and spiritual obstacles—ego, trials, temptations, and challenges. In classical literature, the hero who traverses the path draws closer to Truth—that is, to God—which reflects the soul's spiritual elevation. For example, in Navoi's ghazals, the lover's hardships on the path toward the Beloved and eventual arrival at the divine presence are often depicted:

"Having renounced the road, I seek the Beloved's vision;

At each stop on the path, I lay bare my sorrow." [8.233].

Here, "the road" symbolizes the path toward the divine beloved, "renouncing the road" signifies abandoning worldly pleasures, and "the Beloved's vision" symbolizes attaining the vision of God.

The journey motif also appears in Western classical poetry, especially in Shakespeare's sonnets. In his lyric verse, travel expresses the lover's imaginative journey toward the beloved (sonnets 27, 50, 51) as well as reflections on time and human life (sonnets 60, 116). [9. 131].

In Sonnet 50, which begins:

"How heavy do I journey on the way,

When what I seek, my weary travel's end—" [10. 103]

the journey symbolizes the emotional and psychological state of the lover as he travels—physically and spiritually—toward the beloved.

The Symbol of the Mirror

The mirror is one of the widely used symbols in classical literature, representing human thought, spiritual experiences, and conceptions of existence. In both Eastern and Western classical traditions, it serves as a means to reflect truth, signify self-awareness, and express spiritual purity.

In Uzbek classical literature, the symbol of the mirror (or looking glass) is significant as a representation of the human psyche, purity of the heart, and spiritual perfection. In particular, in Eastern philosophy and Sufi literature, the mirror is interpreted as "the mirror reflecting the truth of the soul." [11. 112] Accordingly, the mirror is not merely an external form but a symbolic expression of the inner world and the clarity of the heart. Therefore, in classical literature, the mirror is often used as a means to understand divine truth. Unlike Eastern literature, in Western literature, it primarily conveys psychological introspection and the process of self-understanding.

In Uzbek classical poetry, figures such as Navoi, Mashrab, and Yassavi employed the symbol of the mirror to express ideas of spiritual perfection, purity, and the perception of truth. [12. 65] For instance, in Alisher Navoi's treatise Lison ut-Tayr, the line:

"Ko'ngul oyna bo'lg'il toza, ta nuri Haq tushg'ay senga"[13.192]

conveys the Sufi idea that through the purity of the mirror of the heart, one can perceive the divine light.

In the following verses from Lison ut-Tayr, it is emphasized that God created the world to manifest His beauty and perfection, and that humans were made as mirrors to observe this creation. The essence of this mirror lies in the human heart; through the heart, a person can comprehend the Creator symbolically. [14.155]

"Qasr – tan, onda ko`ngulni ko`zgu bil

Ko`zguda shoh husnini nazzora qil

Bermayin bu ko`zguga avval jilo,

Aks onda solmag`ay ul podsho.”[15. 192]

In Navoi’s Sab’ai Sayyor, the mirror symbolizes honesty and integrity. According to the story of a traveler from the Fourth Climate, the traveler gives a mirror to King Juna. The mirror reflects the human face clearly if one speaks the truth, but darkens if one lies. When King Juna initially lies, his face appears dark in the mirror, revealing his falsehood. After speaking the truth, his face is reflected in its original, bright state. This demonstrates that in this context, the mirror symbolizes truthfulness and integrity rather than purely Sufi spiritual concepts.

In Saddi Iskandariy, the final work of the Khamsa, the mirror remains a central motif, similar to Sab’ai Sayyor, representing honesty, sincerity, and revealing the true nature of individuals. In this masnavi, the mirror also symbolizes Alexander’s wisdom and his attitude towards knowledge and scholars. Thus, the mirror attains a fully developed symbolic status in Eastern ghazal traditions, particularly in Navoi’s lyricism and in works like Farhod and Shirin and Sab’ai Sayyor. According to Sufi interpretation, the mirror is a carefully polished object, representing the perfect human heart, the locus of divine manifestation. [16.45]

In Babur’s lyrics, the mirror (or looking glass) represents the heart, truth, love, and spiritual suffering. Unlike Navoi and Mashrab, in Babur’s work, the mirror does not hold Sufi significance but rather functions as a figurative image reflecting personal identity and the anguish of love. For example, in the couplet:

"Koʻngul oynasin toza tut, zohir boʻlur surati yoru,

Dogʻ olsa, andin koʻrinmas, bu sirrni bil, ey gʻamxor"[17. 112]

the mirror symbolizes the heart; if it is stained, the image of the beloved and the truth of love cannot be reflected.

In another quatrain:

"Koʻzguda zohir boʻlur husni jamoling har nafas,

Ammo bu zebu ziynatlar koʻp yashamas, oʻtkinchidir"[18.203]

the mirror reflects outward beauty and worldly existence, emphasizing the transience of physical beauty.

In yet another verse:

"Koʻnglum koʻzgusini sindurdi firoq toshlari,

Endi unda aks etmas jamoling, ey diloro"[19.224]

the mirror metaphorically expresses the emotional pain of separation, a symbolic representation that continues in the works of 19th-century Sufi poets.

In Mashrab’s works, the mirror is described as “the mirror of truth,” reflecting both the external and internal self. In his lines:

"Ko‘ngil oynasini tozalagil, ey do‘st,

Haq surati unda ravshan bo‘lur"[2o.96]

he conveys that the heart is the space for the manifestation of divine truth, with the mirror serving as its symbol.

These interpretations show that in Sufism, the mirror is closely linked to the heart. Only when the heart is purified does the “divine light” reflect in it. Therefore, in Uzbek classical literature, the mirror is one of the central artistic images representing enlightenment, divine manifestation, and the harmony of the inner and outer self.

In Western literature, the mirror is a literary device for self-reflection and analyzing inner experiences. Unlike the divine-spiritual interpretation in the East, it is used more in moral and aesthetic contexts.

In Shakespeare’s Hamlet, the mirror holds both theatrical and philosophical significance. Hamlet addresses the actors:

"Hold as ’twere the mirror up to nature" (Act III, Scene II, lines 19–23)

Here, the mirror is likened to art, reflecting social reality, human character, and emotions. Shakespeare interprets the mirror as a reflection of art, morality, and truth.

Metaphysical poets like John Donne use the mirror to express self-awareness and spiritual illumination. For instance, in The Holy Sonnet XIV, the human heart is compared to a “broken mirror,” representing a soul wounded by sin but purified by divine light.

Thus, mirror imagery in medieval Turkic and English literature conveys the heart and inner states, whether in a spiritual or psychological sense.

Conclusion. The journey and mirror motifs in Eastern and Western classical literature demonstrate remarkable symbolic richness and universality. In Sufi-inspired Eastern texts, the journey symbolizes the soul’s mystical ascent, spiritual growth, and purification, while the mirror embodies the human heart, inner clarity, and divine truth, reflecting moral integrity and spiritual insight. In Western medieval and Renaissance literature, the journey represents moral development, social characterization, emotional struggle, and existential reflection, whereas the mirror functions as a tool for introspection, self-awareness, and the reflection of ethical and aesthetic values. Despite differing cultural and philosophical contexts, both motifs consistently serve as powerful literary devices that convey truth—whether spiritual, moral, or psychological. Together, the journey and mirror bridge human experiences across time and traditions, emphasizing the universal quest for self-understanding, inner transformation, and comprehension of the world.

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