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Exalting Virtue: Etiquette, Humility, Loyalty, And Contentment In "Hayrat ul-Abror"

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Abstract: This article offers a comprehensive analysis of Alisher Navoi's Hayrat ul-Abror, the foundational poem of his Khamsa cycle, with a specific focus on its ethical philosophy and literary structure. Composed in 1483, Hayrat ul-Abror transcends its historical context to serve as a timeless moral treatise. Through poetic allegory, Navoi explores and exalts the virtues of adab (etiquette), tavoze (humility), vafo (loyalty), and qanoat (contentment), presenting them not only as personal ideals but also as foundational principles for just governance and societal harmony. The article examines how these virtues are dramatized through emblematic characters and narrative episodes, including dialogues between kings and sages, and how Navoi uses literary devices such as symbolism and allegory to encode philosophical meaning. Special attention is given to the poem's didactic structure, which weaves together spiritual reflection, political critique, and cultural values to instruct both rulers and the general public. Ultimately, the article argues that Hayrat ul-Abror offers a poetic blueprint for ethical life, promoting a model of integrated personal and civic virtue that remains strikingly relevant in the modern world.

Keywords: Alisher Navoi, Hayrat ul-Abror, classical literature, Islamic ethics, Turkic poetry, adab, humility, loyalty, contentment, moral philosophy, political thought, allegory, didactic poetry, Timurid culture, kings and sages, symbolic narrative.

Introduction: Alisher Navoi's Hayrat ul-Abror ("Wonder of the Righteous"), the introductory masnavi of his celebrated Khamsa, stands as a masterful confluence of literary brilliance, moral philosophy, and pedagogical

intent. Composed in 1483 at the height of Timurid intellectual flourishing, this work encapsulates Navoi's vision of a just and virtuous society rooted in spiritual ethics and personal discipline. Far more than a mere poetic introduction, Hayrat ul-Abror establishes a foundational ethical framework that reverberates through the remaining works of the Khamsa. Structured around didactic narratives, allegorical reflections, and rhetorical wisdom, the poem elaborates on essential human virtues such as adab (etiquette), tavoze (humility), vafo (loyalty), and qanoat (contentment)–values seen by Navoi as critical to the integrity of both individual character and political governance.

Through parables involving kings and sages, lovers and mystics, Navoi articulates a moral order in which spiritual insight triumphs over material ambition and where inner refinement supersedes social status. Each story functions as a microcosm of ethical deliberation, embedding divine wisdom in accessible, human-centered tales. The poem's subtle critique of arrogance, injustice, greed, and hypocrisy reflects Navoi's profound engagement with Sufi metaphysics and Islamic ethical thought, blending Eastern philosophical ideals with Turkic poetic sensibilities. Particularly notable is Navoi's use of literary artistry not only to entertain but also to instruct, positioning the poet as a spiritual guide in the public sphere.

Hayrat ul-Abror thus emerges not simply as a mirror for princes, but as a universal guidebook for ethical living–relevant as much to the rulers of courts as to the seekers of the soul. The virtues exalted in this work speak across time and cultural boundaries, offering a timeless code of conduct grounded in modesty, faithfulness, dignity, and restraint. By situating moral values within poetic beauty and narrative complexity, Navoi ensures that ethical instruction is not imposed but inspired. This article investigates these key virtues as developed throughout the poem and reflects on their philosophical depth, societal resonance, and enduring relevance in the modern world [1].

Alisher Navoi's Hayrat ul-Abror is an exemplar of the didactic literary tradition in classical Eastern literature, embodying a hybrid structure that seamlessly integrates philosophical reflection (dībācha), social critique, and a series of morally instructive allegorical narratives. From its outset, the work reveals a deliberate pedagogical intent: not merely to delight the reader with elegant verse, but to guide them through a moral landscape where virtue is both the theme and the method of poetic expression. The poem begins with a lofty dībācha–a prologue rooted in metaphysical musings on divine wisdom, the responsibilities of humanity, and the order of the cosmos. This section establishes the poem's ontological framework, asserting that ethical behavior is a reflection of divine order and that poetry, as a divine gift, should serve a higher educational purpose.

From the philosophical prelude, the text transitions into a more socially grounded critique, wherein Navoi turns his attention to the maladies of his time: unjust governance, spiritual decay, moral ignorance, and the corruption of both courtly and religious institutions. Yet, rather than issue direct rebuke or political polemic, Navoi employs the allegorical tale as a subtle but potent tool of instruction. The poem thus becomes a moral mirror (ayina-i ibrat)–a reflection of society's ills and an invitation to personal and collective reform. Kings, viziers, dervishes, lovers, and sages populate the poem's narrative universe, each figure offering an embodiment of either moral failure or exemplary virtue. Through their actions and fates, the reader is led to internalize principles of adab (etiquette), tavoze (humility), vafo (loyalty), and qanoat (contentment) [2].

One of the distinctive features of Hayrat ul-Abror's structure is its interweaving of narrative episodes with concise maxims, proverbial wisdom, and moral commentary. This oscillation between story and reflection encourages not only passive reception but active contemplation. The stories themselves are often archetypal, echoing Qur'anic parables, Persian romantic traditions, and Sufi didacticism, yet Navoi renders them uniquely his own through vivid imagery, psychological insight, and linguistic sophistication. The poetic form serves a dual function: its aesthetic beauty draws the reader in, while its semantic depth unveils layers of ethical instruction that require reflective engagement.

The intended audience of Hayrat ul-Abror is broad. While Navoi addresses rulers explicitly–urging them toward justice, humility, and responsibility–he also speaks to the learned and the lay alike. The masnavi form, with its rhythmic accessibility and moral resonance, allows the text to circulate among diverse strata of society, thereby becoming a tool of ethical elevation not confined to the elite. In this sense, Hayrat ul-Abror serves a dual didactic purpose: it functions as a mirrors-for-princes text offering political advice grounded in spiritual ethics, and simultaneously as a popular manual of virtuous conduct for everyday individuals [3].

Navoi's use of poetic devices–metaphor, simile, allusion, and hyperbole–is not decorative but instrumental in conveying complex moral truths. The structure of the poem allows for transitions between themes with seamless fluidity, guiding the reader from the individual to the universal, from the temporal to the eternal. In doing so, Navoi affirms the poet's role as a

moral architect, a guide of souls, and a reformer of societies. His verse becomes a vehicle through which divine guidance and ethical wisdom are transmitted in a form both memorable and moving.

In the moral and aesthetic universe constructed by Alisher Navoi in Hayrat ul-Abror, adab transcends its superficial understanding as refined behavior or courtly decorum. It is conceptualized as the outward manifestation of a deeply internalized ethical and spiritual state – a visible sign of a person's alignment with both divine order and societal harmony. Far from being ornamental, adab is portrayed as the essence of civilization itself, the very axis upon which both personal dignity and public justice revolve. Navoi repeatedly suggests that in the absence of adab, even the most powerful of rulers or the most eloquent of scholars fall into moral decay and spiritual blindness [4].

The characters who embody adab in the poem–be they wise counselors, righteous ascetics, or even enlightened monarchs–demonstrate a delicate balance between personal restraint and social responsibility. Through their comportment, speech, decision-making, and relationships, they model the integration of ethical principles into everyday life. Such figures are not only respected by their peers but serve as moral catalysts, uplifting the societies around them by the sheer force of their virtuous conduct. Navoi draws a direct correlation between a ruler's adherence to adab and the justice of his reign; the sovereign who listens to wise counsel, acts with humility, and treats his subjects with fairness is blessed with peace and prosperity, whereas the tyrant who lacks adab invites chaos and rebellion.

In the philosophical backdrop of the poem, adab is also presented as a form of intellectual and emotional discipline. It encompasses not only politeness or external behavior but also knowledge of one's place in the cosmological order, self-restraint in the face of provocation, and the ability to act in accordance with ethical norms under all circumstances. This makes adab both a personal virtue and a public necessity–essential for leaders, scholars, and common citizens alike. Through rich metaphor and illustrative anecdotes, Navoi exalts adab as a civilizational imperative: a practice that cultivates the soul, dignifies the individual, and preserves the moral architecture of society [5].

In Hayrat ul-Abror, Alisher Navoi elevates tavoze (humility) to the rank of spiritual enlightenment, treating it not as a sign of weakness or inferiority but as a mark of genuine wisdom and inner strength. The humble individual in Navoi's ethical framework is the one who has recognized the limits of worldly power, renounced egotism, and placed themselves in submission to a higher divine order. This form of humility is not performative or strategic; it is existential. It arises from a deep awareness of the fleeting nature of status, wealth, and authority–and the eternal significance of spiritual integrity [6].

Navoi contrasts tavoze with kibr (arrogance), particularly the arrogance of rulers who rely solely on their armies, material opulence, or flattery of courtiers. These kings are often portrayed as morally bankrupt, their downfall hastened by their detachment from ethical counsel and their overconfidence in temporal power. By contrast, the humble figures in the poem–most notably dervishes, sages, or self-effacing advisors–possess an inner clarity and foresight that elevate them above their seemingly lowly social position. Through their humility, they access divine insight and are often the ones whose wisdom reforms corrupted leaders or transforms tragic circumstances [7].

Navoi's treatment of humility is also deeply Sufi in tone. The dervish figure, recurrent throughout the poem, serves as a spiritual archetype whose outward poverty masks an inward richness of faith and wisdom. Tavoze becomes, in this light, a form of mystical consciousness–an ongoing process of self-effacement (fana) in the presence of divine truth. It is through this humility that the soul becomes receptive to knowledge, love, and grace. Furthermore, Navoi portrays humility as a prerequisite for other virtues: one cannot be truly just, compassionate, or loyal unless one first overcomes the tyranny of the ego.

Importantly, Navoi's call to humility is not limited to spiritual figures. He extends this virtue as a universal ethical principle relevant to all members of society, especially those in power. For Navoi, a ruler who practices humility is better equipped to serve his people, enact fair laws, and maintain social harmony. Tavoze thus becomes both a personal moral ideal and a civic necessity, binding the soul to the divine and the individual to the collective. Through poetic allegory and narrative symbolism, Navoi urges readers to abandon pride and embrace modesty as the truest path to wisdom, justice, and human dignity [8].

Among the cardinal virtues extolled in Hayrat ul-Abror, vafo–commonly translated as loyalty or fidelity–emerges as a deeply revered moral value and a pivotal pillar of ethical life. Alisher Navoi portrays vafo not merely as an emotional bond but as a moral covenant, binding individuals to their promises, relationships, and duties in both the personal and public realms. In a socio-political context where betrayal, opportunism, and shifting allegiances often undermined the foundations

of trust, Navoi's poetic emphasis on loyalty functions as both a critique of moral decay and a prescription for social cohesion.

Loyalty, in Navoi's vision, is a multi-dimensional virtue. It encompasses the steadfastness of a lover who suffers in silence rather than betray their beloved, the constancy of a friend who remains true in times of hardship, and the devotion of a servant or advisor who fulfills their duty even at personal cost. These archetypes populate Navoi's stories as luminous counterpoints to those who are swayed by fear, greed, or ambition. Their endurance and moral clarity serve as models for readers navigating a complex and often treacherous world. Through their actions, Navoi communicates that true loyalty is neither self-serving nor blind–it is rooted in sincerity (ikhloṣ), responsibility, and moral courage [9].

Navoi's treatment of vafo is not limited to interpersonal relationships but extends into the domain of statecraft and governance. The righteous ruler is one who remains loyal to the principles of justice, to his promises made to the people, and to the ethical legacy of his predecessors. Conversely, the ruler who breaks oaths, forsakes allies, or betrays public trust is inevitably condemned–either through poetic downfall or through explicit moral commentary. Thus, loyalty is not only the glue that binds private affections; it is the ethical foundation of political legitimacy. Without vafo, institutions collapse, alliances disintegrate, and societies descend into suspicion and violence.

In a Sufi-inflected layer of interpretation, Navoi also alludes to divine loyalty–the unbreakable bond between the Creator and the sincere seeker. In this mystical reading, human loyalty becomes a reflection of divine fidelity: just as God is loyal to those who approach Him with purity and devotion, so too must humans embody vafo in their relationships with one another and with the divine law (sharī'a). The reward for loyalty in Navoi's moral universe is not only worldly respect but eternal recognition–a place among the truly righteous (abror).

In sum, vafo in Hayrat ul-Abror is more than a social virtue; it is an ethical imperative. It fosters trust, stabilizes relationships, and undergirds the moral fabric of society. By embedding this virtue in emotionally resonant stories and elevated poetic diction, Navoi teaches that loyalty is not simply to be admired–it must be lived, practiced, and honored even under duress [10].

Qanoat, or contentment, is one of the most distinctive and philosophically nuanced virtues championed in Hayrat ul-Abror. Far from being a passive acceptance of one's fate, Navoi presents qanoat as an active, conscious discipline of the heart and mind. It is the ability to restrain desires, moderate ambitions, and find inner peace through sufficiency rather than accumulation. In a world driven by the pursuit of power, wealth, and fame, qanoat stands as a form of quiet resistance–a spiritual and ethical refusal to be enslaved by insatiable craving.

Navoi's narratives feature several characters–often wise ascetics, just rulers, or enlightened commoners–who embody contentment through their modest lifestyles and principled choices. These individuals are portrayed as happier, more virtuous, and more spiritually aware than the kings or merchants who are consumed by greed. In one tale, a man who lives with little yet offers hospitality to a stranger is praised not for his material wealth, but for the richness of his soul. Such portrayals challenge the prevailing social norms that equate worth with status and demonstrate that true nobility resides in the heart, not the treasury.

Contentment, for Navoi, is also a political principle. A ruler who embodies qanoat governs with justice and temperance; he does not exploit his subjects for the sake of grandeur or expansion. In contrast, the tyrant driven by tama' (greed) imposes heavy taxes, wages unnecessary wars, and hoards resources at the expense of public welfare. In this context, qanoat is not simply an individual virtue but a safeguard against systemic injustice. It encourages rulers to focus on stewardship rather than domination, and subjects to cultivate gratitude and discipline rather than envy and resentment.

The virtue of contentment is also deeply interwoven with Navoi's Sufi influences. In the mystical path, qanoat is a sign of ridā–satisfaction with the divine decree. The seeker who has qanoat is not disturbed by fluctuations in fortune because he sees all things as emanations of divine wisdom. This spiritual tranquility allows him to focus on the inner journey, free from the distractions of worldly competition. In this sense, qanoat becomes a path to both inner liberation and closeness to the divine.

Navoi's elevation of qanoat thus challenges both materialist values and unbridled political ambition. It promotes a culture of moderation, justice, and moral clarity in both personal conduct and governance. In a literary tradition where heroic conquest and romantic yearning often dominate, Navoi's celebration of contentment stands out as a bold ethical stance–a call to redefine success not by what one possesses, but by what one can do without.

A distinctive narrative strategy employed by Alisher Navoi in Hayrat ul-Abror is the dramatization of ethical discourse through the interactions between kings and

sages. These episodes serve as allegorical tableaux that explore the relationship between power and morality, knowledge and authority, governance and spiritual responsibility. The figures of the king and the sage are not simply characters; they are archetypes representing temporal rule and divine wisdom respectively. Through their dialogues, Navoi constructs a vision of ideal kingship grounded in ethical reflection, humility, and a constant openness to moral counsel.

In these vignettes, kings are portrayed not as omniscient figures, but as fallible humans in need of guidance. The sages they consult are often spiritual figures–dervishes, hermits, or anonymous ascetics–who speak truth to power, sometimes at great personal risk. Their words are not flattering but truthful, drawing upon religious, philosophical, and moral principles to illuminate the responsibilities that come with sovereignty. Navoi's literary technique here is subtle but effective: by embedding political critique within poetic allegory, he avoids overt confrontation while still addressing the ethical lapses and shortcomings of his era's ruling elites.

These exchanges emphasize that rulership is not a license for indulgence or oppression but a sacred trust (amanat) entrusted by God. A just king, in Navoi's view, is one who cultivates adab, practices tavoze, remains vafo to his duties and people, and governs with qanoat–moderation and restraint. The legitimacy of political authority is thus tied not to lineage or conquest, but to the ruler's moral character and willingness to serve the public good. In this framework, justice ('adl) becomes the highest form of governance, and the king's ethical compass must be constantly realigned through the advice of the wise.

Through these moral dialogues, Navoi provides a model of enlightened kingship that draws from both Islamic political philosophy and Persian literary tradition. His ideal ruler is an embodiment of ethical intelligence–one who listens more than he speaks, who fears God more than he desires glory, and who understands that power without wisdom is both fragile and dangerous. The king-sage paradigm in Hayrat ul-Abror is not a relic of medieval didacticism, but a continuing call for moral accountability in leadership–relevant in any age or polity.

Rather than delivering his ethical message through dry moral prescriptions, Alisher Navoi relies on rich symbolic and allegorical constructions to invite reflection and internalization. Every character, setting, and event in Hayrat ul-Abror serves as a vessel of meaning–layered, evocative, and open to interpretation. This artistic choice not only enhances the aesthetic appeal of the poem but also enables Navoi to communicate complex spiritual and moral truths in a form that is accessible, memorable, and transformative.

Symbols in the poem are not arbitrary; they are drawn from a shared cultural and religious lexicon familiar to Navoi's audience. A blind beggar, for instance, may symbolize not deprivation but divine insight–suggesting that spiritual vision often exists where physical sight fails. A king adorned in gold may represent not power but inner emptiness–an illusion of greatness masking moral bankruptcy. Rivers, gardens, palaces, and deserts function not just as backdrops but as metaphors for states of the soul or stages of moral development.

Allegory allows Navoi to layer meaning without didactic rigidity. Stories that appear simple on the surface–tales of love, betrayal, loyalty, or suffering–are in fact ethical dramas that reflect the human condition. Readers are encouraged to look beyond the literal and engage in a process of interpretation, thereby internalizing the lessons on a personal level. This participatory aspect of the text transforms it from a passive experience into an active moral dialogue between poet and reader.

Navoi's symbolic style serves a protective function. In a political context where open criticism of rulers or clergy might be dangerous, allegory becomes a safe and effective means of social critique. It empowers the poet to raise ethical questions about injustice, hypocrisy, and corruption without direct confrontation. In doing so, Navoi exemplifies the intellectual courage and moral creativity of the classical Islamic literary tradition, where metaphor becomes a shield and a sword–protecting the poet while piercing the reader's conscience.

Although deeply embedded in the cultural, religious, and philosophical milieu of the 15th-century Timurid world, Hayrat ul-Abror transcends its historical moment. The core virtues it promotes–etiquette, humility, loyalty, and contentment–resonate across time, geography, and civilization. These are not merely Islamic or Turkic values; they are foundational principles of ethical humanism that speak to the moral aspirations of all societies. In an age marked by material excess, political volatility, and moral relativism, Navoi's call for principled living and ethical governance feels strikingly contemporary.

Navoi's poem continues to be studied not only for its literary beauty but for its moral clarity. It has inspired generations of readers in Central Asia, the wider Turkic world, and beyond. Its influence can be seen in educational curricula, political thought, and spiritual literature throughout the region. The universality of its message lies in its rootedness: by articulating timeless values through local language, form, and symbolism, Navoi constructs a bridge between the particular and

the universal.

The endurance of Hayrat ul-Abror is a testament to Navoi's genius as both a poet and a moral philosopher. He understood that the human soul yearns for more than pleasure or power–it seeks meaning, coherence, and moral anchorage. His poetry provides that anchorage, offering a compass for navigating ethical challenges in both private and public life.

In today's world–where leaders often lack humility, societies are fractured by mistrust, and individuals are alienated from spiritual traditions–Navoi's vision remains a beacon. He invites us to revisit the meaning of dignity, the necessity of moderation, the beauty of faithfulness, and the transformative power of self-restraint. Hayrat ul-Abror thus lives on, not as a relic of literary history, but as a living guide for the conscience.

CONCLUSION

Alisher Navoi's Hayrat ul-Abror stands as an enduring testament to the power of literature as a vehicle for ethical reflection and moral transformation. It is far more than a poetic exercise or a cultural artifact of the Timurid Renaissance; it is a deeply human document, a repository of timeless virtues presented with lyrical brilliance and philosophical depth. Navoi does not merely write to please or entertain–he writes to educate, to awaken the conscience, and to inspire righteous conduct in every domain of life.

By exalting the core virtues of adab (etiquette), tavoze (humility), vafo (loyalty), and qanoat (contentment), Navoi articulates a comprehensive moral framework that remains as relevant today as it was in the 15th century. These virtues are not presented as abstract ideals but as living principles embodied by characters, dramatized through parables, and reinforced through philosophical reflection. In doing so, Navoi creates a blueprint for ethical life that addresses both the inner development of the soul and the outer responsibilities of leadership and citizenship.

His portrayal of the ethical king, the humble sage, the faithful lover, and the contented ascetic offers readers models of excellence that transcend social status, historical context, and religious affiliation. Whether speaking to rulers in need of moral restraint, scholars in search of deeper insight, or ordinary individuals grappling with daily temptations, Navoi's poetic voice carries a universal resonance. He bridges the gap between the sacred and the secular, the political and the personal, offering a vision of life governed not by ego or ambition, but by self-discipline, compassion, and spiritual awareness.

The literary form of Hayrat ul-Abror–rich in allegory, symbolism, and narrative variety–ensures that its ethical teachings are not only accessible but profoundly engaging. By embedding morality in beauty, Navoi ensures that virtue is not imposed but discovered; not preached, but evoked through reflection and emotional resonance. His work encourages readers not only to admire goodness but to practice it–to become participants in the moral drama he so eloquently stages.

In an age increasingly defined by moral ambiguity, political corruption, and spiritual emptiness, Hayrat ul-Abror reminds us that the pursuit of virtue is not a relic of the past, but a living necessity. Its lessons remain vital for educators, leaders, philosophers, and all who seek a principled existence. Navoi's ethical universe, constructed in verse, invites every reader to reflect deeply, live intentionally, and contribute to a more just and harmonious world. As such, Hayrat ul-Abror is not only a jewel of classical literature but a timeless guidebook–a poetic blueprint–for ethical life.

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