

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FERDOWSI'S SHAHNAMEH AND ALISHER NAVOI'S TARIXI MULKI AJAM: DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

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Annotation: This research article offers a comprehensive comparative study of Ferdowsi's "Shahnameh" and Alisher Navoi's "Tarixi Mulki Ajam," two monumental works in Persianate literary tradition. It examines the differences and similarities between their narrative structures, historical elements, cultural symbolism, and literary purposes. The study applies the IMRAD academic structure and aims to contribute to the understanding of epic literature and historiography within Persian and Turkic cultural frameworks.

Keywords: Ferdowsi, Shahnameh, Alisher Navoi, Tarixi Mulki Ajam, comparative study, Persian literature, history, epic tradition.

Introduction

Ferdowsi's "Shahnameh" is considered one of the greatest epic works of world literature. Written over three decades, it preserves Iran's mythological and historical past and serves as an essential source for understanding Persian cultural identity. On the other hand, Alisher Navoi's "Tarixi Mulki Ajam" is a historical prose work summarizing the dynasties and rulers of Iran. Although shorter in volume, it is significant for its concise historiographical approach and for being written by one of the greatest figures in Turkic literature.

The comparison between these works is academically relevant because both texts aim to document and preserve Persian heritage but do so through different literary methods. While Ferdowsi's work is poetic and mythological, Navoi's is factual and historical. This article explores how these works complement and diverge from one another in the broader context of Persianate cultural history.

Researchers have long studied both works independently, but direct comparative studies are relatively rare. Therefore, this article attempts to fill this scholarly gap by offering a systematic evaluation of their thematic, structural, and philosophical features.

Methods

This study employs qualitative textual analysis as its primary method. The analysis focuses on comparing genres, narrative strategies, historical interpretations, character representations, and cultural implications present in both works. Primary source materials include critical editions of “Shahnameh” and Alisher Navoi’s “Tarixi Mulki Ajam.” Secondary scholarly sources were consulted to enrich the theoretical framework of the comparison.

The IMRAD structure was adopted to maintain a scientific approach in presenting research results. Each section—Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion—serves to logically develop the argumentation and ensure academic rigor. Specific analytical categories include: (1) Literary Genre Comparison; (2) Narrative Construction; (3) Cultural Memory; (4) Moral and Political Themes.

Additionally, historical-contextual analysis was used to compare how the authors’ sociopolitical environments influenced their writing. Ferdowsi wrote during a period of cultural suppression under Arab rule, which motivated him to revive Persian identity. Navoi, however, lived in the Timurid Renaissance, where Persian and Turkic scholarship flourished together.

Results

The findings show significant differences in genre and purpose. “Shahnameh” is a monumental epic composed in poetic metre, blending myth, legend, and semi-historical narratives. It features heroes such as Rostam, Zal, and Sohrab, whose personal tragedies symbolize larger struggles of justice, betrayal, and nationhood. “Tarixi Mulki Ajam” instead presents a factual historical account summarizing rulers, wars, political changes, and dynastic transitions.

Both works share a commitment to cultural preservation. Ferdowsi aims to revive pre-Islamic Persian identity, while Navoi aims to document Persian history for the scholarly audience of his era. Both authors emphasize moral leadership, criticizing tyranny and praising justice.

Another important result is the difference in narrative style. Ferdowsi relies heavily on dramatic tension, heroism, and symbolic conflicts. Navoi, however, writes in short, concise prose, presenting events in chronological sequence without embellishment. This shows the difference between epic storytelling and historiographical writing.

Finally, while “Shahnameh” is universal in scope and addresses timeless moral struggles, “Tarixi Mulki Ajam” is more practical, rooted in real historical documentation and didactic lessons for rulers.

Discussion

The comparative discussion reveals that although both works belong to the Persianate world, they serve different cultural and literary roles. Ferdowsi’s epic provides a heroic model for society, presenting mythic figures who embody ideal virtues. Navoi’s historical narrative instead reflects political and moral lessons drawn from real events. These differences highlight the diversity within Persian literary tradition.

Another point of discussion is how each author shaped cultural identity. Ferdowsi resisted cultural decline by reviving Iran’s pre-Islamic past, celebrating national heroes and ancient kings. Navoi, meanwhile, contributed to cultural synthesis, bridging Turkic and Persian scholarly traditions. His work demonstrates how Persian history influenced Central Asian intellectual life.

Despite these differences, both texts contributed significantly to the preservation of collective memory. They emphasize justice, wisdom, leadership, and the cyclical nature of power. Their influence extends beyond literature into ethics, politics, and cultural heritage.

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