

THE POETIC EXPRESSION OF THE ROSE AND NIGHTINGALE SYMBOLS IN CLASSICAL UZBEK LITERATURE

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Abstract: This study examines the poetic symbolism of the rose and nightingale in classical Uzbek literature, focusing on their role in expressing themes of love, beauty, and spiritual growth. Through qualitative analysis of works by Alisher Navoi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Jami, and Lutfi, the research explores how these motifs deepen the artistic imagery and convey moral and philosophical values. The rose often symbolizes divine beauty and the beloved, while the nightingale represents the lover's passionate longing and spiritual aspiration. The integration of additional natural symbols, such as stars and trees, further enriches the literary expression of human emotions and ethical ideals. The findings demonstrate the enduring significance of these symbols in shaping the philosophical and aesthetic foundations of Uzbek classical poetry and highlight their contribution to the cultural and spiritual heritage.

Keywords: Uzbek classical literature, rose and nightingale symbolism, poetic imagery, spiritual growth, Alisher Navoi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Jami, Lutfi, love and devotion, moral values, literary motifs

Introduction

Symbols and motifs are vital components in classical Uzbek literature, enriching the artistic imagery and conveying deep moral and spiritual values. Among these, the rose and nightingale hold a particularly significant place, serving as metaphors for love, beauty, and the human soul's spiritual development. Prominent poets such as Alisher Navoi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Jami, and Lutfi utilized these symbols extensively to reflect social, religious, philosophical, and ethical ideas of their time. This study aims to analyze the poetic usage and symbolic meanings of the rose and nightingale in classical Uzbek literature, exploring their role in expressing emotional and spiritual experiences.

Methods

This research is based on a qualitative literary analysis of classical Uzbek poetic texts. Primary sources include the works of Alisher Navoi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Jami, and Lutfi. The study involves a detailed examination of symbolic imagery and metaphors related to the rose and nightingale, their contextual meanings, and their variations across different authors. Comparative analysis was conducted to identify similarities and differences in the use of these motifs and their philosophical and aesthetic functions. Secondary literature on Uzbek classical poetry and symbolism was reviewed to support the interpretations.

Results

The analysis revealed that the rose and nightingale symbolism is consistently employed to represent love, beauty, spiritual longing, and the human soul's refinement. In Navoi's poetry, the rose symbolizes divine beauty and love, while the nightingale embodies the lover's heart yearning for that beauty. The nightingale's passionate singing during springtime, when roses bloom, metaphorically illustrates the lover's devotion and desire for perfection. Similarly, Babur's use of these symbols in Baburnama reflects deep emotional and spiritual states, portraying the beloved as the rose and the poet as the humble nightingale. Jami integrates celestial symbols alongside the rose and nightingale, associating stars and the sun with the lover and beloved, respectively, thereby expanding the motif's spiritual significance. Lutfi's works also feature these images to convey the struggles and hopes inherent in human love and life.

Discussion

In classical Uzbek literature, symbols and motifs play a crucial role in deepening the meaning of literary works, enriching artistic imagery, and expressing moral and spiritual values. Prominent representatives of the classical period such as Alisher Navoi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Lutfi, Jami, and Mashrab encouraged their readers to gain a deeper understanding of the social, religious, philosophical, and ethical views of their time, while also leaving profound reflections on the human psyche, social roles, and the meaning of life. In their works, symbols and motifs were essential for artistically conveying the subtle aspects of the human soul, the striving toward spiritual perfection, and high values such as love, loyalty, patience, and devotion.

Classical poetry extensively employs symbolic images such as love, mirror, pomegranate, candle, and journey, which convey figurative meanings beyond their literal sense. Over several centuries, these symbols have been central themes in songs and poems and later found a place in Sufi literature. For example, the images of the rose and the nightingale appear in the verses of Hafez Shirazi in Iran and in the works of Jami, Lutfi, and Navoi among Turkic peoples. Although the structural use of the rose and nightingale symbolism in classical literature is similar, their expressive nuances differ. In Navoi's verses, the rose symbolizes love and beauty, while the nightingale represents the human heart longing for that beauty. Just as the nightingale yearns for the rose, the lover strives for perfection and love. These images symbolically reflect the spiritual maturation of the human soul through love in Navoi's works. For instance, Navoi's verse associates the "nightingale" with the "lover":

Bu chamanda tortibon bulbul tong otquncha fig'on,

Ishq darsin go'yoyi gul daftaridin o'rganur. [1.183]

("The longing nightingale laments until dawn,

As if learning love's lesson from the rose's book.")

It is known that the nightingale sings more passionately during spring when roses bloom, hence it is portrayed as the lover of the rose. The nightingale, infatuated with the rose, is described with qualities such as "lamenting" and "madness":

Sahob aftoli jola toshlarin yog'urg'ali, ey gul

Pariy yanglig‘ zuhur aylab, junun bulbulg‘a fan qildin. [4.10]

(“Dew and rainstorms pour stones, O rose,

A fairy’s song has driven the nightingale to madness.”)

In this context, the rose and nightingale symbolism, often confined to a particular genre of ghazals, reflects the rose as a mirror manifesting divine beauty, while the nightingale is its enamored admirer. [4.10]

Another influential poet in Uzbek classical literature is Abdurahman Jami, who skillfully used symbols and motifs in his works. Jami often employed celestial imagery such as the sky, stars, and sun to represent human life, love, and divine truths. The sun and stars frequently symbolize the beloved and the lover, respectively, where the star’s yearning for the sun metaphorically expresses the lover’s desire to reach the beloved. These symbols in Jami’s poetry depict the spiritual path of human perfection, the aspiration toward a goal, and the arduous search for truth.

Jami’s works also utilize natural symbols such as a solitary tree and fallen leaves, where the lone tree represents loneliness and spiritual anguish, while the fallen leaves symbolize the transience of life and the fleeting nature of existence. In his verses, Jami uses the rose and nightingale symbolism to portray the lover’s heart, bleeding from separation, compared to the layered buds of a rose, revealing the lyrical hero’s emotional state. The subsequent lines depict the lover shedding blood-like tears in this sorrow:

Seningsiz g‘unchadek dil g‘arqi xundir,

Ko‘zum yoshini ko‘rgil, lolagundir. [3.152]

(“Without you, my heart is like a bud torn apart,

See my eyes, they are filled with bloody tears.”)

Lutfi, another major representative of classical Uzbek literature, also masterfully employed symbols and motifs in his poetry. His works frequently feature the rose and nightingale, candle and moth, ancient garden, and buds, which symbolically reflect human sufferings of love, life’s hopes and contradictions. Particularly, the rose and nightingale motif is uniquely glorified:

Yuzung sifoti Lutfi so‘zin nozuk ayladi,

Gul sadqasi durur, neki bulbul navo qilur!

(“Your face and features made Lutfi’s words delicate,
The rose offers devotion, the nightingale sings beautifully!”)

Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur’s works likewise give significant place to nature symbols. In his autobiographical “Baburnama,” he not only recounts historical events but also symbolically expresses

his inner experiences. Babur's detailed attention to nature imagery, infused with profound spiritual and philosophical meanings, highlights his creative skill. For example, he aligns the image of the river with the flow of life, interpreting the flowing water as a symbol of life's continuity and endless movement. Gardens and flowers symbolize joy, freedom, and inner spiritual peace. Babur's nature imagery conveys philosophical reflections on his life and the human soul, imbuing every element with deep meaning.

Moreover, Babur symbolically uses the image of the mountain, which in his works represents determination, strength, and stability. Through this image, he expresses his personal virtues and striving toward goals. The mountains symbolize human resilience and willpower in overcoming hardships. Babur also skillfully uses the rose and nightingale symbolism in his poetry. For instance, in the following lines:

Sen gulsenu men haqir bulbuldurmen,

Sen shu'lasen, ul shu'lag'a men quldurmen.

Nisbat yo'qdur, deb ijtinob aylamakim,

Shahmen elga, vale senga quldurmen

("You are the rose, and I am the humble nightingale,
You are the flame, and I am the smoke in that flame.
There is no comparison, lest I offend,
I am a king to the people, but a servant to you.")

According to scholar Abduqodir Hayitmetov, Babur, speaking through his lyrical persona, humbles himself before his beloved by calling her the rose and himself the unfortunate nightingale, the flame and the smoke. Babur esteems this "humble nightingale" status even above kingship because the rose represents his deity. [2.21] Thus, the rose and nightingale remained among Babur's most cherished and repeatedly invoked symbols. He directly addresses his beloved as "rose," bestowing upon her all the qualities of the flower:

"The east wind has disheveled the rose's curls,
I have given my soul, intellect, and heart to the wind."

In classical Uzbek literature, the symbols of the rose and nightingale are not merely artistic devices that enrich imagery but carry profound meanings expressing the human spirit, love, loyalty, and spiritual perfection. Great poets like Alisher Navoi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, Jami, and Lutfi widely employed these symbols as poetic means to articulate the delicate feelings of the human heart, the intensity of love, spiritual suffering, and hope. Through the imagery of the rose and nightingale, they unveiled philosophical and ethical reflections on spiritual growth, devotion in love, and the beauty of life. Simultaneously, other natural symbols such as trees, leaves, the sun, and stars became profound metaphorical tools reflecting human life and spiritual states. These symbols and motifs played an essential role in shaping not only the artistic but also the philosophical and aesthetic foundations of

Uzbek classical literature. Consequently, the symbolism of the rose and nightingale remains a rich and enduring source of meaning, integral to the cultural and spiritual heritage of Uzbek literary tradition.

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