



THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSLATING SUFI CONCEPTS IN NAVOI'S GHAZALS

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Annotation: *The following paper discusses the problems unique to translating Sufism-related topics from the Ghazals of Alisher Navoi into English. While discussing the subtleties of Sufi terminology in specific phrases or expressions both in Turkic, then English languages, we will mark the problems naturally occurring in the process of translation. The article also suggests some recommendations on how to try and face these challenges and instructs translators, especially on how such complex concepts may be rendered into modern English.*

Key words: *Sufi concepts, Alisher Navoi, Ghazals, translation challenges, fana, ishq, Persian, Turkic, spiritual poetry, linguistic nuances.*

The issues of translating Sufi ideas in the Ghazals of Navoi can be outlined in three categorical groups.

The first and most common source of difficulty is the one that has to do with **Semantic Ambiguity**. This is because many Sufi oriented terms do not have a direct counterpart in modern languages. For instance, Ishq in Turkish does not only mean lovemaking or being in love as most people do but ‘loving’ – in this case mystical love which blurs the line of human and divine tears. Many translators have suffered the loss of this term – Its deep meaning, narrowed down to a simplistic ‘love’ or ‘passion’ which completely rather alters the term.

The second issue is the **Cultural Context**, which is that Navoi’s Ghazals are written in a particular culture and religion. This part is challenging because, for instance, Sufi symbols and metaphors like a nightingale and the rose or the wine of God’s drunkenness have a particular spiritual meaning that does not easily cross over to another culture. However, most of this imagery and picturesque expressions in translation works within the provision of understanding both Islamic mysticism and Persian poetics.

Within this category, Linguistic Structure also has its own challenges in those the Anglo American, Turkish and Persian languages where the source text is presented distills considerable affordance in syntactical creativity, clarity and fluidity which is quite hard to achieve in other languages. These languages also create meaning in layers, where words have to be played with, a significant aspect of Sufi poetry. Due to the reasons such as differences in structure especially with languages like English – east promiscuous and playful languages carry east rich poetry into west

rigid structural language, often the aesthetics of the poetry and the religious undercurrents are lost.

However, the ways of overcoming these difficulties and challenges are quite a few. The main strategy of Contextual translation is the one when the Sufi terms are not translated in a literal sense, but as some emotionally closer and more appropriate synonyms. For instance, *ishq* may be translated as ‘divine love’ or ‘the state of mystical union’ rather than love in one of its simplest forms to save its profundity.

Specially trained individuals, known as translators, employ a variety of methods to solve these problems.

Contextual Approach. Instead of transcribing the Sufi terms as they are found, all the Sufi terminologies available within texts, scriptures, and philosophies can be translated in a way that will give the understanding of the meaning. For example, *ishq* can be expressed in a phrase like divine love or mystical union, rather than being used to jump out as love, explaining its essence as a holy concept.

Footnotes and Explanations. As far as space permits, footnotes or endnotes can also serve the purpose in such a way that they provide the readers with an understanding of the Sufi figurative and conceptual content of the given terms, which helps to overcome their cultural-religious differences. This style makes the text more academic but also ensures the informing of any non-Sufi reader about the spiritual and metaphorical aspects.

Collaborative Translation. Involving such scholars of Sufism, Islamic studies, and linguistics in the process of translation is bound to lead to the most accurate and true presentation of the source text. For example, even in translating Navoi’s Ghazals, poets and mystics join linguists, who enable them to give both spiritual and aesthetic aspects of the work. Dynamic Equivalence: This is where there is no more an emphasis on a word-to-word translation than the concept of dynamic equivalence, where the translator’s aim is to express the meaning and feeling of the original text even when it means departing from a literal translation of that text. This practice helps in preserving the Sufi aspect of the Ghazals.

Translation difficulties may be best presented in the example of the term *fana*, meaning being lost in God’s presence. Most translators, however, will simply refer to the term as self-annihilation, which hardly captures the essence of the spiritual journey. A more careful translation would define the concept of *fana* as the Sufi aim to ‘dissolve’ the ego in God’s conscious, which would help readers understand its full metaphysical meaning.

The same goes for the very practical example when Navoi talks of a rose and a nightingale as manifestations of Divine Love. These images are often preserved by the translators without the cultural context, hence losing the essence. Including a footnote stating that the nightingale symbolizes the Trinity in love, who sings for the love of the rose (the God), the interpretation keeps the ethereal touch intact. In the translations of Navoi’s Ghazals, scholars such as Hamid Algar and Annemarie Schimmel achieved a great deal in exposing the spiritual aspects of his poetry and employed footnotes and dynamic equivalence to conserve the status of the original texts.



One of the notable Uzbek translators Begoyim Kholbekova approaches Navoi's poetry with a deep understanding of both the linguistic and cultural nuances, reflecting the poet's mastery of the Chagatai language, his wit, and his explorations of universal themes like love, spirituality, and morality. In her translations, Kholbekova often strives to preserve the formal structure of Navoi's ghazals, which follow strict rhyme schemes and meters. She also attempts to recreate the musicality inherent in the original text, a challenging task given the dense metaphors and layered meanings typical of Navoi's style. Her approach demonstrates a sensitivity to the cultural and historical context of Navoi's work, capturing not just the literal meaning but also the intended emotional impact. Exploring Sufi concepts in Alisher Navoi's works through Begoyim Kholbekova's translations involves examining how mystical and spiritual themes are rendered for contemporary audiences. Navoi's poetry is deeply rooted in Sufi philosophy, expressing ideas of divine love, the journey of the soul, and self-annihilation to reach spiritual unity. Translating these complex concepts requires sensitivity to both language and cultural connotations, as Sufi terminology often carries nuanced meanings and allegorical layers. To analyze this, consider focusing on how Kholbekova:

1. Interprets key Sufi terms (e.g., "ishq" for divine love or "fana" for self-annihilation).
2. Balances poetic form with meaning preservation.
3. Adapts metaphors that may be obscure or culturally specific.
4. Conveys the emotional and spiritual depth of Navoi's texts for readers unfamiliar with Sufi doctrine.

Below we present one of the translations made by Begoyim Kholbekova:

To see your beautiful face, I've been striving much as due,
What an unfortunate day it was, when I fell in love with you.

Again and again I said to myself to avert my soul from you,
Woe, day by day I've become attached more strongly to you.

When I said to be loyal to me, the evil you've caused,
When you said to devote yourself to me, I applauded.

Because of what fairy you've become so mad, you said,
Hey, fairy, do whatever you like, for you I became mad.

Hey soul, I've rejected all advice, trouble you would face,
Were hundred troubles not enough, mine makes much worse.

Jamshid's goblet and Hizr's water* have become my bestow.
Hey, wine-server, leaving my high rank I've become your slave,

Like a sad tune of Chang* among lovers I haven't found pleasure,
Like that of Navoi, I became an unfortunate captive, no measure.

Water of Hizr*- means water of life.

Chang – musical instrument

Original:

Кўргали хуснунгни зору мубтало бўлдум санга,
Не балолиғ кун эдиким, ошно бўлдум санга.

Ҳар неча дедимки кун-кундин узай сендин кўнгул,
Ваҳки, кун-кундин батаррак мубтало бўлдум санга.

Мен қачон дедим вафо қилғил, манга зулм айладинг,
Сен қачон дединг фидо бўлғил манга, бўлдум санга.

Қай пари пайкарға-дерсен-телба бўлдунг бу сифат,
Эй парийпайкар, не қилсанг қил манга, бўлдум санга.

Эй кўнгул, тарки насиҳат айладим аввора бўл,
Юз бало етмаски, мен ҳам бир бало бўлдум санга.

Жоми Жам бирла Хизр суйи насибимдур мудом,
Соқиё, то тарки жоҳ айлаб гадо бўлдум санга.

Ғусса чангидин навое топмадим ушшоқ аро,
То Навоийдек асиру бенаво бўлдум санга.

Translating the Sufi notions embedded in the Ghazals of Alisher Navoi is quite problematic because of inherent difficulties in semantics, culture and language. The challenge goes beyond the richness in the use of Sufi metaphors, spiritual terminologies and philosophical ideas, which cannot be simply reduced to translation only. Nevertheless, the rich content and aesthetic value of Navoi's Sufi poetry can be sustained for the modern readers through the use of contextual translation, footnotes, teamwork, and dynamic equivalence and so on.

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