

Social stability of a «women» in the epic *Manas* and in Alisher Navoiy's works

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of women as key agents of social stability in Central Asian literary heritage through a comparative analysis of the Kyrgyz epic *Manas* and the works of the great Uzbek poet and thinker Alisher Navoiy. Social stability is understood as the preservation of family continuity, moral values, cultural identity, and national cohesion during periods of social, political, and historical change. The article focuses on the image of the mother-woman and explores how women contribute to social harmony, resilience, and continuity through wisdom, moral authority, intellectual depth, and spiritual strength. In the epic *Manas*, women—particularly the character of Kanykei—are portrayed as realistic and action-oriented figures who play a decisive role in maintaining social order, protecting lineage, and ensuring national survival. Kanykei embodies maternal devotion, political wisdom, and moral responsibility, functioning as a stabilizing force in times of crisis. In contrast, Alisher Navoiy's literary works present women primarily as symbolic and philosophical figures. Through Sufi imagery and lyrical expression, Navoiy depicts women as sources of spiritual balance, ethical guidance, and intellectual refinement, whose influence secures moral stability within society. Despite differences in genre and artistic approach, both traditions emphasize women as central pillars of social stability. The comparative analysis demonstrates that the image of woman in *Manas* and in Navoiy's works reflects a harmonious synthesis of practical strength and spiritual wisdom, underscoring the enduring significance of women in the cultural and social development of Turkic civilization.

Keywords: social stability, image of woman, motherhood, cultural identity, moral values, epic tradition, Sufi literature, national continuity.

Introduction

The history of humanity shows that the cultural level and moral integrity of any society have always been determined by its attitude toward women. The aesthetic ideal associated with the image of women has traditionally presented them as symbols of beauty, grace, and goodness, as well as nurturers and educators of well-rounded individuals.

Throughout human history, the level of cultural development and moral integrity of a society has been closely connected with its attitude toward women. As mothers, wives, educators, and moral guides, women have traditionally served as the foundation of family life and social harmony. Philosophers, writers, and educators across civilizations have emphasized that the moral strength of future generations is shaped primarily within the family, where the woman occupies a central role. As noted by I.A. Karimov, "All noble feelings that exist in the human heart originate from the mother." [4,136].

Literature, as a reflection of social consciousness, plays a crucial role in shaping and transmitting cultural values. In Turkic and Central Asian literary traditions, the image of woman frequently transcends purely domestic boundaries and emerges as a symbol of moral authority, wisdom, and social responsibility. Particularly significant in this regard are the Kyrgyz heroic epic *Manas* and the literary heritage of Alisher Navoiy, both of which offer profound insights into the social and cultural functions of women.

The concept of **social stability** in this study refers to the ability of society to preserve moral norms, cultural identity, family continuity, and national cohesion despite internal and external challenges. Women contribute to this stability not only through biological motherhood but also



through ethical leadership, intellectual guidance, emotional resilience, and cultural transmission. This article argues that in both *Manas* and Navoiy's works, women function as key mechanisms of social stability, ensuring the continuity and harmony of society.

The aim of this study is to analyze and compare the representations of women in the epic *Manas* and the works of Alisher Navoiy, focusing on their roles in maintaining social stability. The research employs comparative literary analysis, cultural interpretation, and textual examination to reveal both shared and distinctive features of female representation in epic and classical literature.

Literature serves not only as a mirror of individual creativity but also as a window into the moral, cultural, and philosophical values of a society. Among the many recurring motifs across world literature, the image of woman as mother, beloved, muse, guide, and symbol—holds a particularly central role. In Turkic and Islamic traditions, two exemplary literary figures emerge to represent the high regard for women: the idealized Mother-Woman in the heroic figure of Kanykey in the Kyrgyz epic *Manas* and in Alisher Navoiy's classical poetry. Though born from different genres—Sufi-influenced lyricism versus epic folklore—both figures elevate the woman beyond her domestic role, presenting her as an essential figure in the continuity and flourishing of cultural, spiritual, and national identity.[3, 36].

We have studied the examples of images in the epic. The following lexical units, which give the image of woman, are widely used in the epic: grandmother, wife, woman, maiden, maid, maiden, bride, bride, queen, swan, beauties, white scarf, "boto koz" like baby camel's eyes, etc.[1,6].

In contrast to Navoiy's symbolic approach, Kanykey, the wife of Manas and mother of Semetei, represents a realistic, heroic, and pragmatic woman. She is not a literary abstraction, but a character forged in the crucible of political intrigue, war, and personal loss. Her life is marked by action, not contemplation; her love is protective, not poetic.

Kanykey's role is crucial in ensuring the survival and continuation of Manas's lineage and, by extension, the Kyrgyz nation. After the death of Manas, she single-handedly ensures the safety of her son, Semetei, smuggling him away from political enemies and raising him in exile with dignity and strength. Her famous monologue before fleeing emphasizes both her grief and her resolute sense of duty.[3]

Unlike Navoiy's women, who speak in metaphors and ghazals, Kanykey speaks in the clear voice of responsibility, maternal love, and moral clarity. She is not idealized through ornamented language but honored through action, resilience, and devotion to family and nation.

Kanykey also plays a diplomatic and advisory role in the epic. Her advice is often heeded by elders and warriors, and she embodies wisdom that is traditionally reserved for male characters in epics. In this way, the *Manas* tradition presents a woman who is not only emotionally strong but intellectually and politically competent.[3,19].

Alisher Navoiy's Literary Construction of the Woman

Alisher Navoiy (1441–1501), the father of Uzbek literature and a great representative of Eastern poetic and philosophical thought, consistently elevated the status of women in his works. In both his lyrical and didactic writings, the woman is not a passive subject but a spiritually rich, intellectually capable, and emotionally deep being. Alisher Navoi, frequently depicted women in his poetry — not only as symbols of love and beauty but also as embodiments of wisdom, piety, and moral strength. His works, especially in *Khamsa* and *Diwan*, offer rich examples for literary and gender studies. Below are a few notable examples with brief analyses that you can incorporate into your thesis or academic publication.[5,13].

Shirin is not only portrayed as beautiful but also wise and articulate. Navoi constructs her as an intellectual equal to Farhod. This reflects his progressive views on the capacities and roles of women. In this narrative, the woman is not just passive or ornamental — she is part of the moral and intellectual discourse.

Woman as a Figure of Emotional Strength and Loyalty. Example (from *Hayrat ul-Abror* in *Khamsa*): "Aql ila ayolni xor qilma, ey firoz, Nargis ichra bo 'lur ko 'zi nihon raz." "Do not disgrace a

woman with intellect, O wise one, In the narcissus lies a hidden gaze of secret wisdom." Navoiy explicitly warns against underestimating women. He values their intellect and inner wisdom, challenging the prevailing patriarchal views of his time. This line could be interpreted as a proto-feminist assertion, where the poet encourages respect for women's intellect and inner world.

Woman as a Source of Inner Conflict and Spiritual Awakening. Example (from *Lison ut-Tayr* "The Language of the Birds"): "Ayollar yo 'li bu yo 'l emas, Ammo ul yolda kashf bor, sir bor." "The path of women is not just a worldly path,

Yet on that path are revelations and mysteries." While at first glance this may seem dismissive, in fact, Navoiy is acknowledging that through the love and understanding of a woman, the lover (or seeker) can find spiritual truths. It echoes Sufi ideas where the beloved leads the lover to God. The woman becomes a vehicle for transformation.[6]

In works such as *Khamsa*, *Mahbub ul-Qulub*, and *Nasayim ul-Muhabbat*, Navoi glorifies women as pillars of the household, symbols of divine beauty, and carriers of moral wisdom. He writes: "A virtuous wife is the fortune of the house. Her pleasant temperament is a balm for the soul, and her wisdom brings harmony."

Navoiy blends the lyrical and the spiritual in his depictions. While many of his ghazals express longing for an unattainable beloved—described with celestial beauty, tulip cheeks, and moon-like faces—this figure often transcends literal femininity and becomes a metaphor for divine love. The beloved in Navoiy's world is both a woman and an embodiment of *ma'shuq*, the spiritually ideal entity.

In *Nasayim ul-Muhabbat*, Navoiy's attention turns to historical saintly women such as Rabia al-Adawiyya, portraying them not only as mystics but as moral exemplars. Rabia's dialogues, such as her disdain for worldly miracles in favor of pure devotion, reflect Navoiy's view that true womanhood is rooted in spiritual discipline and sincerity. Furthermore, Navoiy challenges patriarchal prejudices of his time. He dismisses stereotypes of women as weak or inferior, instead stating.[6]

Materials and methods

The research involved qualitative method of analysis using the research methods of comparative analysis of the role of women in ensuring social stability in the Kyrgyz epic *Manas* and the works of Alisher Navoiy, highlighting both shared functions and genre-specific distinctions. The comparison demonstrates that despite differences in literary form, historical context, and artistic method, women occupy a central and stabilizing position in both traditions.

Table 1 below presents a comparative analysis of the role of women in ensuring social stability in the Kyrgyz epic *Manas* and the works of Alisher Navoiy, highlighting both shared functions and genre-specific distinctions. The comparison demonstrates that despite differences in literary form, historical context, and artistic method, women occupy a central and stabilizing position in both traditions.

Analytical Aspect	Epic "Manas"	Works of Alisher Navoiy
Literary Genre	Oral heroic epic	Classical written literature
Type of Stability	Practical, socio-political	Moral, idealized, spiritualized
Main Female Figure	Kanykei-protector, national heroine	Layli, Shirin – symbolic women
Primary Social Role	Mother, protector of lineage, advisor, national heroine	Moral guide, spiritual ideal, intellectual companion
Key Functions	Protection of family and lineage; political wisdom; crisis management	Moral refinement; spiritual awakening; ethical guidance

Mode of Influence	Action, decision-making, leadership	Symbolism, love, wisdom, spiritual authority
Contribution to Society	Preservation of national continuity and social order	Maintenance of moral harmony and cultural values
Representation of Woman	Realistic, active, historically grounded	Idealized, symbolic, philosophically elevated
Outcome	National survival and social cohesion	Ethical balance and spiritual continuity

Table-1

The first significant contrast lies in the literary genre. The epic *Manas*, as an oral heroic narrative, portrays women within a realistic and action-oriented framework shaped by nomadic life, warfare, and political struggle. In contrast, Navoiy’s works belong to the classical written literary tradition, where women are represented through lyrical, philosophical, and symbolic forms. This generic difference determines the mode through which social stability is articulated.

Regarding the type of stability, *Manas* emphasizes practical and socio-political stability. Female figures, particularly Kanykei, actively protect family lineage, participate in decision-making processes, and contribute to national survival during periods of crisis. Their stability-ensuring role is visible through concrete actions and leadership. Conversely, in Navoiy’s works, women function as guarantors of moral and spiritual stability, influencing society through ethical guidance, intellectual refinement, and spiritual inspiration rather than direct action.

The comparison of primary social roles further reveals complementary dimensions of womanhood. In *Manas*, women are depicted as mothers, protectors, and advisors whose responsibilities extend beyond the household into the public and political sphere. In Navoiy’s literary universe, women appear as moral guides, spiritual ideals, and intellectual companions, shaping human behavior and social harmony from within the ethical and emotional domains.

Differences are also evident in the mode of influence. The epic tradition highlights women’s influence through decisive action, resilience, and leadership, reflecting the social realities of a heroic society. Navoiy’s female figures, however, exert influence through symbolism, wisdom, love, and spiritual authority, consistent with Sufi philosophy and humanistic ideals.

Despite these distinctions, the stabilizing outcomes in both traditions converge. In *Manas*, women ensure national continuity and social cohesion, while in Navoiy’s works they maintain ethical balance and spiritual harmony. Together, these outcomes demonstrate that social stability in Turkic civilization is sustained through both external resilience and internal moral order.

Result and their discussion

Thus, Table 1 confirms that women function as multidimensional agents of social stability. Whether through practical leadership or spiritual guidance, their role remains indispensable in preserving cultural identity, moral values, and social continuity across Central Asian literary traditions.

The following theoretical model explains how women ensure social stability at four interconnected levels, synthesizing the epic (*Manas*) and literary-philosophical (Navoiy) traditions.

Theoretical Model of Women Ensuring Social Stability

(Family – Society – Nation – Spirituality)

SPIRITUALITY

(Moral perfection, divine beauty, ethical harmony, inner balance)

SOCIETY ← WOMAN AS A CORE STABILIZING FORCE → NATION

(Social harmony, ethical guidance, (Cultural identity, continuity, resilience) education, moral authority)

FAMILY

(Motherhood, upbringing, transmission of values)

At the foundational level, woman ensures stability through:

- motherhood and upbringing of future generations,
- preservation of moral values and traditions,
- emotional support and ethical guidance.

In Manas: Kanykei protects her son Semetei and preserves the family lineage.

In Navoiy: the woman maintains harmony, wisdom, and moral order within the household.

At the social level, woman functions as:

- a moral authority,
- a counselor and educator,
- a stabilizer of social relations.

In Manas: women advise leaders and participate in social decision-making.

In Navoiy: women shape ethical behavior through wisdom and intellectual influence.

At the national level, woman contributes to:

- preservation of cultural identity,
- continuity of historical memory,
- resilience during crises.

In Manas: Kanykei's actions ensure national survival and political continuity.

In Navoiy: women symbolize the moral soul of the nation rather than political power.

At the highest level, woman represents:

- spiritual enlightenment,
- divine beauty and moral perfection,
- inner harmony of society.

In Manas: spirituality is implicit, expressed through moral duty and sacrifice.

In Navoiy: woman explicitly embodies divine love and Sufi ideals.

The proposed theoretical model demonstrates that women ensure social stability at four interrelated levels: family, society, nation, and spirituality. In the epic *Manas*, these levels are manifested primarily through practical action, maternal responsibility, and political wisdom, whereas in the works of Alisher Navoiy they are realized through moral authority, intellectual depth, and spiritual symbolism. Despite differences in literary form and artistic method, both traditions present woman as a unifying force whose influence sustains social harmony, cultural continuity, and ethical balance. This multilevel model confirms that social stability in Turkic civilization is inseparable from the moral, cultural, and spiritual roles performed by women.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the Kyrgyz epic *Manas* and the works of Alisher Navoiy demonstrates that women occupy a fundamental position in ensuring social stability within Central Asian literary and cultural traditions. Whether portrayed as heroic mothers and wise counselors or as spiritual guides and moral exemplars, women function as key agents of continuity and harmony.

In *Manas*, women such as Kanykei embody social stability through decisive action, maternal responsibility, and political wisdom. Their role is vital in preserving lineage, national identity, and social order during periods of crisis. In Navoiy's works, women contribute to stability by fostering ethical values, spiritual awareness, and intellectual depth, shaping the moral foundation of society.

Together, these portrayals reveal a rich and complex understanding of womanhood that integrates strength with wisdom, practicality with spirituality. The enduring relevance of these images confirms that the social and cultural stability of Turkic civilization has long depended on the moral authority and resilience of women.

The representations of women in the Kyrgyz epic *Manas* and the poetry of Alisher Navoi offer two distinct yet complementary visions of womanhood shaped by their respective historical, cultural, and literary contexts. Both bodies of work reflect the values of Turkic and Central Asian societies,

yet they express these values through different narrative lenses — the oral heroic epic and the written philosophical-poetic tradition.

So, such a comparison underscores the continuity and diversity of Turkic thought on gender roles, demonstrating that women have long occupied esteemed and complex roles in both oral and written traditions. It also affirms that cultural identity in the region has been shaped not only by heroic deeds but also by the moral and emotional depth women bring to both legend and lyric.

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