



THE HUMANISTIC AND MORAL VALUES IN SAADI SHIRAZI'S
“GULISTAN”

Sharapova Gulshan Sharafovna,

Senior teacher of Bukhara state university,

Faculty of foreign languages

gulshansharapova56@gmail.com

Abstract

This thesis examines the humanistic and moral values reflected in Saadi Shirazi's *Gulistan*, one of the most influential works of classical Persian literature. Saadi addresses such fundamental human values as justice, compassion, generosity, humility, knowledge, honesty, and social responsibility through short narratives, reflections, and poetic expressions. The moral significance of *Gulistan* is not limited to the historical context in which it was written. Many of its ideas concern universal aspects of human behaviour and interpersonal relationships. Saadi frequently presents moral principles through concrete situations and encounters between different social groups, which makes his work both literary and educational. The thesis focuses on the humanistic dimension of Saadi's worldview and considers how the moral lessons of *Gulistan* can contribute to contemporary discussions of ethical education, personal development, and human relationships.

Keywords: Saadi Shirazi, *Gulistan*, humanism, moral values, justice, compassion, generosity, humility, moral education, Persian literature.

Saadi Shirazi occupies a distinguished position in the history of classical Persian literature. His literary heritage is characterized by philosophical reflection, ethical instruction, social observation, and a deep interest in human nature. Among his most influential works, *Gulistan* holds a special place because it combines artistic expression with moral and educational ideas.



Written in the thirteenth century, the work consists of stories, anecdotes, reflections, and poetic passages that explore different aspects of human behaviour and social relations. One of the central characteristics of *Gulistan* is its humanistic orientation. Saadi does not consider human beings only according to their social position, wealth, or political power. Instead, he repeatedly draws attention to qualities such as kindness, wisdom, justice, generosity, and moral responsibility. His stories frequently demonstrate that external status does not necessarily determine a person's true value. A ruler may possess authority but lack wisdom, while an apparently insignificant individual may demonstrate exceptional moral strength. Through such contrasts, Saadi encourages readers to evaluate people according to their behaviour and ethical qualities. The concept of human dignity is therefore closely connected with Saadi's understanding of morality. His narratives emphasize the consequences of treating other people with respect or disrespect. Human relationships in *Gulistan* are often presented as a reflection of one's inner character. A person's attitude toward the poor, the weak, the uneducated, or socially disadvantaged individuals becomes an important indication of his or her moral character. In this sense, Saadi's humanism is expressed through practical relationships rather than abstract philosophical statements.

Another important moral value in *Gulistan* is justice. Saadi pays considerable attention to the responsibilities of rulers and people who possess authority. In his narratives, political power is presented not simply as a privilege but as a responsibility toward society. A ruler who acts unjustly can create suffering, while a ruler who demonstrates fairness can contribute to social stability. This idea gives Saadi's work a significant social dimension. Justice is not understood only as a legal principle; it is also associated with compassion, responsibility, and awareness of the consequences of one's decisions. The relationship between power and morality is particularly significant in Saadi's literary worldview. Authority without ethical

responsibility can become destructive. Therefore, those who occupy positions of power are expected to control their personal desires and consider the interests of others. Such ideas remain relevant to discussions of leadership and ethical responsibility because they emphasize that social position should be accompanied by moral accountability.

Compassion and kindness constitute another important group of values in *Gulistan*. Saadi repeatedly demonstrates that human beings are interconnected and that individual actions influence other members of society. Compassion requires the ability to recognize another person's suffering and respond to it with understanding. This idea transforms morality from an individual quality into a social principle. Saadi's emphasis on compassion is closely related to his broader understanding of human interconnectedness. People may differ in wealth, occupation, education, or social status, but they share fundamental human experiences. Therefore, suffering, happiness, loss, friendship, and hope can become points of connection between individuals. This perspective gives Saadi's moral teachings a universal character.

Generosity is also frequently associated with moral excellence in *Gulistan*. However, Saadi's concept of generosity is broader than the simple act of giving material possessions. True generosity involves an individual's willingness to help others, share knowledge, forgive mistakes, and behave benevolently. In this sense, generosity is connected with inner richness rather than financial wealth. A person who possesses material resources but refuses to help others may be presented as morally poor, whereas a person with limited resources can demonstrate genuine generosity through kindness and assistance. The value of humility is similarly important. Saadi warns against excessive pride and emphasizes that knowledge, wealth, beauty, and social status are temporary or insufficient foundations for personal superiority. Humility does not mean weakness. Rather, it represents an awareness of one's limitations and respect for other people. Through various characters and situations, Saadi

demonstrates how arrogance can lead to poor decisions, while modesty can contribute to wisdom and social harmony. Another significant theme is the relationship between knowledge and moral character. In *Gulistan*, education is not simply the acquisition of information. Knowledge becomes meaningful when it influences behaviour. A knowledgeable individual who lacks ethical qualities cannot be considered truly wise. Consequently, Saadi connects intellectual development with moral responsibility. This idea is particularly important from the perspective of contemporary education. Modern educational systems increasingly emphasize not only academic achievement but also communication, social responsibility, empathy, critical thinking, and ethical awareness. Saadi's understanding of education demonstrates that intellectual development and personal development should not be separated. Knowledge should help individuals make responsible decisions and contribute positively to society. Honesty and truthful communication represent another important dimension of Saadi's moral thought. *Gulistan* contains numerous observations about speech, silence, and the consequences of words. Saadi recognizes that language has social power: words can create friendship, resolve conflict, cause misunderstanding, or harm another person. Consequently, the ability to speak appropriately is connected with wisdom and self-control. The theme of silence is especially meaningful in this context. Saadi does not simply glorify speaking or silence; rather, he encourages readers to understand when speech is appropriate and when restraint is wiser. Such an approach presents communication as an ethical activity. A person should consider the consequences of his or her words before speaking. This principle can also be connected with modern intercultural communication, where appropriate language use depends not only on grammatical correctness but also on context, relationship, purpose, and cultural expectations. The humanistic values of *Gulistan* are also reflected in Saadi's treatment of friendship and interpersonal relationships. Friendship requires trust, loyalty, respect, and mutual support.

Saadi's narratives demonstrate that relationships based solely on personal advantage are unstable, whereas relationships based on sincerity and moral responsibility have greater value. Through these observations, the author presents social relationships as an important part of personal development.

Conclusion. Saadi Shirazi's *Gulistan* represents an important synthesis of literary creativity and moral reflection. Through concise narratives, memorable characters, and poetic observations, Saadi explores fundamental human values including justice, compassion, generosity, humility, honesty, knowledge, friendship, and social responsibility. His humanistic worldview places ethical behaviour at the centre of individual and social life. The enduring importance of *Gulistan* lies in its ability to connect particular historical experiences with broader questions of human morality. Its stories encourage readers to examine the consequences of their actions, understand the perspectives of others, and recognize the importance of ethical responsibility. For contemporary education, the work can therefore serve not only as an example of classical Persian literature but also as a valuable source for discussions of moral education, cultural awareness, communication, and personal development.

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