

THE USAGE OF KITOBAT AND ISTIKHROJ – LETTER-BASED POETIC ARTS IN CLASSICAL UZBEK LITERATURE

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Abstract: *This article provides definitions and detailed descriptions of Kitobat and Istikhroj, which are considered complex forms of letter-based poetic arts in classical literature. The study also highlights the role of these artistic devices in Uzbek classical poetry, with particular reference to the works of Alisher Navoi, Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, and their worthy literary successors such as Ogahiy and Komil Khorezmi.*

Keywords: *poetic art, muammo, kitobat, istikhroj, laffva nashr.*

The artistic devices occupy an important place in the literature of the Eastern nations, including Uzbek classical poetry. The system of artistic means applied by classical Uzbek poets has been relatively well studied in literary scholarship, and it is widely recognized that these devices play a significant role in enriching the spiritual and aesthetic worldview of the people. Uzbek classical literature stands out not only for its ideological and philosophical depth, but also for its exceptional aesthetic richness, expressed through diverse poetic devices. Among them, letter-based poetic arts such as muammo (riddles), kitobat, and istikhroj hold special value due to their structural, logical, and intellectual complexity. Through these art forms, poets not only demonstrated their intellectual prowess but also stimulated the reader's thinking, evoked unique aesthetic pleasure, and enhanced the expressive impact of their ideas.

Letter-based poetic devices used in classical poetry showcase the poet's mastery in creating artistic images through spelling patterns and generating new meanings based on the shapes of letters. Kitobat and istikhroj, in particular, are regarded as among the most intricate and intellectually demanding poetic arts, requiring sharp wit, deep intellect, outstanding talent, and mastery.

In classical Eastern poetry, Kitobat refers to the art of artistically portraying an image by likening it to the shapes of Arabic letters. This poetic device, which has been widely used in our literary tradition, involves expressing lyrical or epic imagery by associating elements with the visual forms of Arabic script. The Arabic alphabet, as is known, consists of letters with straight, curved, bow-shaped, and circular outlines. Eastern poets skillfully utilized these shapes through analogy to convey important social, political, educational, and moral ideas [1:103-105].

In some literary sources, *kitobat* is also referred to as *istikhroj*, *harf (letter)*, or *tasmiyah art* [2:36]. However, other sources distinguish between *kitobat* and *istikhroj*. Specifically, *kitobat* involves naming Arabic letters within a verse or likening human features to the shapes of Arabic script. In contrast, *istikhroj* is based on *kitobat* but goes further by arranging these letters to form new words or expressions [3:21].

The earliest examples of this art form in Uzbek poetry date back to the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th centuries, where poets used letter analogies within verses, and the combination of these letters generated new words, which is defined as *istikhroj*. The term *istikhroj* derives from the Arabic language, meaning “extraction”, “derivation” or “selection”. Accordingly, this art form involves composing hidden words from artistically portrayed letters. Among letter-based poetic devices, *istikhroj* is considered one of the most captivating and complex. By applying *istikhroj*, the poet focuses the reader’s attention on the interplay of letters within the text and conveys poetic meaning in a memorable and impactful manner. The poet skillfully hides the intended meaning behind letters, prompting readers to read attentively and discover hidden words, engaging their intellectual curiosity. Moreover, *Istikhroj* enhances both the literary value and emotional intensity of the work. Often, poets present their ideas not directly but in a veiled, symbolic manner, revealing their originality and poetic mastery.

Istikhroj is divided into two types:

1. Simple *istikhroj*: For instance, in one of Babur’s verses:

Qadding alifu, qoshing erur yo,
Desam ne ajab agar seni oy?

The poet compares the beloved’s stature to the letter “alif” and her eyebrows to the letter “yo” combining them to form the word “Oy” (*the moon*), a metaphor for beauty.

2. Complex *istikhroj*: In this case, the letters are not explicitly mentioned, and understanding requires knowledge of the traditional associations of Arabic letters in classical literature. For example:

Og‘ziyu ikki zulfu qadi bo‘lmasa manga,
Rayhonu sarvu g‘uncha ko‘rardin maloldur.

According to literary tradition, the mouth is associated with the letter “mim” curls with “lam” and stature with “alif”. Arranging these letters yields the word “*malol*” (*weariness*). Even literary experts sometimes struggle to immediately recognize this complex *Istikhroj* because the initial metaphorical comparisons divert attention toward other devices like *laff va Nashr* (juxtaposition and elaboration).

In classical poetry, letters with straight, curved, bow-shaped, or circular outlines served as the basis for analogies. For example, the beloved’s straight figure was likened to “alif” bent form to “dol” eyebrows to “yo” or “nun”, long hair to “lam” or “jim”, teeth to “sin”, mouth to “mim”, and eyes to “ayn” or “sod”. These letter-based

analogies enriched the depiction of the beloved, making the imagery vivid and expressive:

Ey, alifdek qomating mayli buzulg'on jon aro,
Ganji husnung javhari bu xotiri vayron aro.

Translation: "O beloved, your alif-shaped stature resides in my ruined soul, and the essence of your beauty lies within my broken heart...". The poet uses the form of "*alif*" to depict the beloved's figure, symbolically placing it within his heart.

Throughout the history of Uzbek classical literature, distinguished poets like Navoi, Babur, Ogahiy, Komil Khorezmi, and others have skillfully employed Kitobat and Istikhroj. Ogahiy, a worthy successor of literary giants such as Navoi and Babur, also demonstrated remarkable use of these artistic devices. For example, in the first couplet of his renowned ghazal with the refrain "*Ustina*" *kitobat* and *istikhroj* are seamlessly intertwined:

Mushkin qoshining hay'ati ul chashmi jallod ustina,
Qatlim uchun na's keltirur nun eltibon sod ustina.

The letters "nun" and "Sod" represent Kitobat, and the word "na's" (Arabic for "judgment" or "verdict") is formed, showcasing *istikhroj*. The poet cleverly creates a visual metaphor by suggesting that placing "sod" above "nun" resembles the shape of an eye, implying the executioner's judgment is conveyed through the beloved's captivating gaze.

Ogahiy further utilized these complex poetic arts in his musaddas and other ghazals, revealing his exceptional talent, profound intellect, and poetic innovation, all while honoring and revitalizing the traditions of his predecessors.

Komil Khorezmi, another distinguished poet, also masterfully employed *istikhroj*, particularly in his sixth ghazal, where each line incorporates this intricate device:

Aynu shinu qofing'a to bo'ldi ko'nglum mubtalo,
Dolu rou dolu hajringdin dami erman judo.

Here, combining the letters "ayn", "shin" and "qof" produces the word "ishq" (love), while "dol", "ro" and "dol" form the word "dard" (pain). Thus, the poet expresses: "My heart is captivated by your love; I am never free from the pain of your absence".

In the concluding couplet (*maqta'*), Komil Khorezmi ingeniously encodes his pen name using *Istikhroj*:

Qofu alifu nun yutar ko'b qofu alifu mimu lom,
Rou hou mim qil holig'a, ey shirin liqo.

Combining "qof", "alif" and "nun" forms "qon"(blood), "qof", "alif", "mim", "lam" produces "Komil" and "ro", "ho", "mim" yields "rahm"(mercy), culminating in: "Komil bleeds abundantly; have mercy on his state, O sweet-faced beloved...". Komil Khorezmi's ghazal is a rare example of consistently applying *istikhroj* throughout

every line, both structurally and semantically, demonstrating unmatched poetic craftsmanship within Uzbek classical literature.

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