

# EDUCATION BASED JUSTICE IN NIZAMI GENCEVI'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: THE STATE AND THE HEAD OF STATE

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## ABSTRACT

Nizami Gencevi (pronounced as “ganjavî), whose real name was İlyas was born in Gence (Ganja), Azerbaijan in 1141, he also died in this city in 1209. As a result of his strong interest in science, art and his knowledge of many languages, he dealt with different scientific fields, (philosophy, literature, astronomy, medicine, geometry, ...) world civilization, basically Greek, Arabic, Persian and also the history of Caucasian public at the same time. His work called Hamse (five books) is very famous. It is possible to see a great number of references to Nizami and his works in Mevlana Celalettin Rumi's works. Starting from the works of Nizami Gencevi, first of all, I shall try to unify the head of state model with justice in my education based report. Nizami compares the cruel emperor in power to 'a donkey that got into hayloft' and says, 'it is a pity for the straw not for the donkey.' Nizami Gencevi points out that the main principle in a society that is awake is the social harmony and justice. Secondly, I shall try to explain justice, by examples and concerning the current aspects again starting from the works of Nizami. Government is in power not to leave the community that it represents to the ferocity of the enemy groups, fighting each other. Its most important mission – the reason of its existence – is to maintain public security and to spread justice. Justice is an ideal that Nizami blessed, like he worshiped God. Idealizing the state established on justice, Gencevi finds this ideal in Turkish State type. Thus, in his didactic work *Mahzan al-Asrar* he talks from the mouth of an old persecuted woman, addressing Senjer (written as Sencer in Turkish), the Sultan of the Great Seljuks; 'If you can put up with injustice, then you are not a Turk.' Nizami, in his work *Husrev and Shirin* talks about the Sassanid Emperor Hormuz, who punished his most beloved son Hüsrev fiercely, for a comparatively trivial crime to bring justice and as a warning to the others. Reminding this event, Nizami, as if unexpectedly, directs his word from the situation of Zoroastrianism in history to the reality of Islam in his time; the poet is remorseful for 'a thief did not have a nosebleed whereas a thousand innocent people were being hurt'. Thirdly, Nizami, the artist, as if modelling the state by examples, wrote a great refined poem 'Heft-Peyker' in order to suggest that the state is an institution in power to bring justice. An emperor or a head of a state is not a shepherd responsible from the herd, much more than this, he is a dog responsible from the security of the herd. There is no difference between the ruler who leaves his mission to barbarians, forgetting his duty and his work, and 'the dog paring with the teacherous wolf' in the story. To Behram, enlightened, as he saw the shepherd punishing the dog that neglected its duty on the desert, Nizami immediately 'by making the seven climate beauties that were given to them on the seven weekdays leave, he makes him jump on 'beauty of justice's' lap. The philosopher and poet Nizami Gencevi expresses justice with these lines shortly, and to the point: "Oppression, disgrace are not conquerors of the Earth, Justice is the only Victor of the Earth!"

**Keywords:** Nizami Gencevi, justice, state, ruler, education

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## I. THE POET AND PHILOSOPHER NIZAMI GENCEVI

Nizami Gencevi was born in one of the ancient cities of Azerbaijan, Gence, he lived with his poems that he created in this city and died in this city again in 1209. Poet and thinker, Nizami's real name is Ilyas. As a result of his strong interest in science and art, he dealt with various scientific fields (philosophy, astronomy, medicine, geometry,...) world civilization, basically the history of Greek, Arabic, Persian and also Caucasion public at the same time.

First of all, it is necessary to point out that, poet and philosopher Nizami is not of Persian origin. It is wrong to accept Nizami as 'an Iranian poet' due to his poems in Persian language. According to Azerbaijani writer and statesman, (the first president of Azerbaijan) Mehmet Emin Resulzade's book and similar sources,<sup>1</sup> it is a doubtless fact that Nizami is absolutely a Turkish and Azerbaijani poet. It is a big mistake of Turkish Literature and History writers in Turkey to show Nizami as 'Iranian'. There is no basis in showing Nizami as an Iranian poet.

Contrary to Iranian Firdevsi, Nizami brought to literature an Islamic based tolerant point of view, that is open to the love of human and justice. Nizami could characterize the types and the world that he idealized, with people turning towards the society by criticizing the wrong sides of that society. He could see man as a social, psychological being, and evaluated it in this way. Let us quote a stanza from Nizami Gencevi:

Cellar I designed previously,  
In this duty I was not flabby.  
Accordingly, I collected greasy, sweet.  
I started Husrev-Shirin epic.  
Later on I drew another curtain,  
I reached the love of Layla-Mecnun.  
Completing this story, immediately  
Seven Beauties palace I went  
Entered I now to the square of poem,  
Drummed in the name of Iskender.<sup>2</sup>

1 M. Emin Resulzade. *Azərbaycan Şairi Nizami* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1951).

2 Nizami Gencevi. *Mahzen al-Asrâr*, trans. M. N. Gençosman (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1993).

Nizami, idealizing a state established on justice, finds his ideal in Turkish State type. Thus, in his didactic work "Mahsenül-Esrar" he talks from the mouth of an old persecuted woman, addressing Sultan Sencer of the Great Seljuks: "If you can put up with injustice then you are not a Turk." she says. "İskendername" was written on behalf of one of the Azerbaijani tutors to Seljuk Prince, Nusreddin Ebu-Bekir Muhammed.<sup>3</sup> In "İskendername", Nizami used his art, for instance he took Alexander to a visit to "Kabetullah" like a muslim. Although it is an epic about an imperialist and reformer hero, in "İskendername", the lyrical side is more dominant than the epic side. Even Alexander's any military or political victory is completed somehow with a victory of love from a heart, a marriage ceremony. Alexander is a lover as much as he is a ruler, an emperor, a judge.

Wanted to find Alexander, the fountain of vitality  
Death to prevent.  
Travelled all around searched all the universe,  
Though a journey to Zulmat, all in vain.  
Not finding the water of eternity, he passed away...  
Hardly hustled now his will!<sup>4</sup>

## II. STATE

Establishing a state is a need to social life and it is a natural necessity for the people.<sup>5</sup> There is almost no difference between states in which nation conscience is not dominant and invaders. Perhaps, because of this reason Montesquieu said, "underdeveloped countries are under the invasion of armies."<sup>6</sup> Because the states of underdeveloped nations feels the necessity to take shelter under the wings of powerful countries, they also take the control of the nation that cannot tolerate this situation, with military forces. One of the most important aspects that forms the state is strength.

It is mentioned in the great ancient wisdom of Turkish book *Kutadgu Bilig* that the strength of the state with idioms like: "In order to defeat the onager, it is necessary to be a lion."

3 Nizami Gencevi. *Hüsrev ve Şirin*, trans. Sabri Sevsevil (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1994).

4 Nizami Gencevi. *Leyla ile Mecnun*, trans. Ali Nihat Tarlan (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1989).

5 Ibn Khaldun. *Mukaddime*, Şark İslam Klasikleri, trans. Z. Kadiri Ugan (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990), 1: 129.

6 Bertrand Jouvenel. *İktidarın Temelleri*, trans. N. Muallimoğlu (Istanbul: Birleşik Yayınları, 1997).

If this strength is damaged, chaos and anarchy are unavoidable. The force that forms the focus of the state gets legitimacy with the sovereignty of law. "States are destroyed by tyranny not by cursing." One should not forget that the greatest cruelty is benignity without justice because then, while treating one affectionately, the other oppressed will be cheated.<sup>7</sup>

Philosopher Kant points out that "state is a union embodied by the people living under the regulations of law." According to Gazali; political order comes just after the social order. It is impossible for a man to maintain his financial and spiritual happiness, staying away from the religion and society.<sup>8</sup>

Ibn Khaldun recorded the existence of states as, 120 years, similar to the life-span of human beings, whereas Gazali based it on the continuity of the moral and humanitarian virtues. The corruption of the intellectuals leads to the corruption of the ruler, the corruption of the ruler leads to the corruption of the public.<sup>9</sup>

Gazali points out that one of the four elements that keeps the world alive is politics, he declares that politics comes out as a compulsory extension of religion and morality: it is an art of attitude adapted to the concrete conditions of life.<sup>10</sup> Poet and philosopher Nizami Gencevi studied the subject closely owing to the importance of state. Nizami suggested that with just rulers, treating justly, the state will be continuous.

### III. THE THINKER THAT GUIDES THE RULER

Nizami is a guide to the rulers that he addresses. For instance, by stating that there was a vizier like Aristotle next to İskender, he examined the emperors that were successful around the world generally and pointed out that there was an intellectual vizier by one of each of these, such as Melikshah from the Seljuks, Mahmut Ghaznevi, Sasani Anushirvan.

According to Nizami, a ruler has no right to be mistaken, and with the moral meaning of the word, no right to be jolted. For this reason, he needs a vizier having intellect, cautiousness, opinion and conscience. Everyone can slip but the ruler should not: or else the state will shake.

Sassanid Emperor Hormuz, punished his most beloved son Husrev fiercely, for a

<sup>7</sup> "Kutadgu Bilig", *Tarih Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 1 (1947).

<sup>8</sup> Orhan Münir Çağıl. "Immanuel Kant'a göre Devletin ve Devletler Arası Münasebetlerin Felsefi Esasları", *İstanbul Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Mecmuası* 17 (1951), 6.

<sup>9</sup> M. Niyazi Özdemir. *Devlet* (İstanbul: Marifet Yayınları, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Fahrettin Korkmaz. *Gazali'de Devlet* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1995).

comperatively trivial crime to bring justice and as a warning to the others. Reminding this event, Nizami, as if unexpectedly, directs his word from the situation of non-muslim in history to the reality of Islamin his time; the poet is remorseful for 'a thief did not have a nosebleed whereas a thousand innocent people were being hurt' the injustice during his period, he envies 'non-muslims' in old times: Saying 'They were non-muslims; we are muslims. If he is non-muslim, which one is Islam?' he throws the frightful stone of consent to the face of his age swerved from justice.<sup>11</sup>

### IV. CRUELTY IN THE STATE IS ILLEGITIMATE

Nizami Gencevi prays and asks for God's blessing to keep justice as an ideal. He wants this ideal to come true. He believes that it would come true one day. He turned "the example of this past idea" in which he believed, into poetry. "The management of Iskender" is an example of this poetisation of the past. Nizami describes his ideal for justice as "Turkish State" and says "if someone is not just, then he is not a Turk."

In religion cruelty of government is illegitimate,

Government is enemy to barbarians.

Pity for hayloft that donkey fallen,

No pity for donkey, alas straw!<sup>12</sup>

According to Nizami, the main principle of the conscious society is the social harmony and justice. Government is in power not to leave the community that it represents to the ferocity of the enemy groups fighting each other. Its most important mission – the reason of its existence – is to maintain public security and to spread justice. In Nizami's point of view, the meaning of state and the meaning of justice never comes together. He compares the cruel emperor in power to a "a donkey that got into hayloft" and says, 'it is a pity for the straw not for the donkey.'

In an ideal state, the cautious ruler charges the experienced scholars with all the duties; İskender did it like that: the scholar functioning with the help of the assistant, state with the experience of the elderly, the youth by getting together. The head of the state functions

<sup>11</sup> Mehmet Emin Resulzade. *Azerbaycan Şairi Nizami* (Ankara: Türk Dünyası Araştırmaları Vakfı Yayınları, 1951).

<sup>12</sup> Nizami Gencevi. *Hüsrev ile Şirin*, op. cit.

as a brain in a skull managing all the parts of the body. "If hand is not satisfied with the performance of foot, head is responsible for it."

The individual is in charge with various duties in response to the state. However, the individual is not only in charge of duties but he also possesses some rights. The poet addressing the rulers says, "Do not tyrannically overlook any of the individuals, they are also marvellous in their point of view!", "The main enemies of the ruler are the unjust civil servants that commit cruelty; the public turns away from the ones permitting these cruelties."

According to Nizami, the cultivation of a country is closely related with the good intentions of the ruler. "If the ruler has good intentions, instead of rose-thorn, jewellery blossoms in the sufferings an emperor with good intentions spreads abundance to his environment. The abundant and the rich will talk about the kindness of the emperor!"

The artist wrote a great refined poem "Heft-Peyker" in order to suggest that the mission of the state is to bring justice. An emperor or a head of state is not a shepherd responsible from the herd, much more than this, he is a dog responsible from the security of the herd. There is no difference between the ruler who leaves his mission to barbarians, forgetting his duty and his work, and 'the dog paring with the teacherous wolf' in the story.

The state should be fair. Nizami advised and guided the emperors in his time, so that his ideas would be applied not only in theory but also in practice. He advised to the emperor of his century, "the world is not left to any of the emperors, you also will not have it. In order to be eternal all around the universe, be useful to it." Nizami offers the emperor to be "wide awake", and warns him saying, "Do not believe in an enemy with an excuse, kick him out of the door".

In Nizami's point of view, the political power and being cautious complete each other. In administration of a country Nizami is in favour of consultation: He said; "Although it is known that you have an opinion and idea by the emperor, do not even neglect your right of opinion for the others. Do not indulge anybody before testing, do not rely on anybody who does not have a place in your heart. Send the answers to the ones seeking for justice only by honest men, keep your promise so that everybody trusts you. Not underestimating the enemy, being deadly towards the enemy, and being loyal to the friends are virtues that especially the statesmen should beware of. Shoot from the root, do not drop the thing you hold."

## V. THE IDEAL STATESMAN

The importance of statesmen in the existence of the nations is big. Sometimes it is more useful to bring up one or two statesmen instead of feeding a million of armies all the time. Persians say, "Let Turks feed a million of armies, we will bring up two statesmen in a century." This saying is not a Persian lie. The social structure of Iran resembles the Tower of Babel. Even their population is not one third of the population of the country. One of the qualifications of statesman is not saying "anything can happen after me", and to give a chance to talented and honest people and bring them up.

The ideal ruler who suits Nizami's interpretation is Alexander. Nizami sees an intellectual ruler who is attached to knowledge, wisdom, art and idea. This ruler, who is surrounded by philosophers, intellectuals and scholars, is famous for his wise character, bravery, heroism with his wisdom, judgement and his cautiousness. The emperor makes consultations with this council for basic state issues.

Alexander is a good organizer. He founded a wonderful army with a new order and he instructed this new army with a special method, and equipped it with new weapons. He conducted the army himself. He is a successful commander. According to Nizami, Iskender strongly refuses the principle of fighting for the war. In his opinion, Alexander never fought to attack.

Nizami describes the successful foundations of Alexander's diplomacy. The main line for this diplomacy, is to win the hearts of the nations he dominated. Because he knew that the nations do not always give in easily to the strength. It is possible to conquer countries with great strength, but the faithfulness of the nation whose hearts are not conquered cannot be obtained by force.<sup>13</sup>

Nizami makes this distinction: "When you understand the languages of all nations without an interpreter, the nations will also understand your Greek without any means!" Fulfilling his ideal Alexander, travelled all around the world again, and conquered the places that he travelled more easily in this way. Nizami, made a big picture: The picture of Alexander!... This is a marvellous masterpiece all embroidered in Nizami's mighty hands. He, in this masterpiece, accounted for justice and social ideas of his main aim in his art. According to this vision: Nations should not be treated with algebra and tyranny, they should be approached with a

<sup>13</sup> M. Niyazi Özdemir, *Devlet*, op. cit.

moral authority and the only interpreter of their hearts should be understood without any means!

Nizami had a deep and continuous influence on the literatures of Turkish clans up today. Hamse consists of these mesnevis (poetry composed in rhymed couplets each couplets being of a different rhyme but the whole of one meter) in order: *Mahzen al-Asrâr*, Husrev u Shirin, *Layla wu Majnun*, *Heft Peyker*, *Iskendername*.<sup>14</sup>

*Mahzen al-Asrâr* is one of the most beautiful examples of didactic-philosophy poetry that is seen in Oriental literature. In this work, the human values, that are exalted by the ethics of Islam, such as justice, honesty, courage, gallantry, humbleness, etc; are discussed. In this work, which consists of twenty articles, there are examples from history and stories in verse.

*Iskendername* is formed of two separate books: *Sharafname*, *Iqbalname*. In his first work, the historical figure in the battle field, Macedonian Alexander's education and his politeness are described. The personality of Alexander is united with Zülkarneyn in *Iqbalname*; Alexander the Great comes out. Nizami explains his ideal order of state, just emperor, moral understanding; making use of this historical event. This is accepted as poet's maturest work. The second part of the work is almost a political written document. Alexander lived with great desires such as abolishing tyranny, to bringing happiness to humanity. He joined heroism with moral power, and sword with science. Nizami imagines his hero as his ideal ruler.

In *Iqbalname*, Alexander meets calm and happy people living in a just order with equal rights in his expedition to the North. This is a utopian state order that we see the example in the world literature. Lie, deceit are not known, there is no animosity, people are not addicted to money and fame, they live long and they do not mourn for the dead here... This is the world that Nizami idealized.

## VI. GENCEVI'S WORK MAHZEN AL-ASRÂR

"Peñç Genç" that Nizami wrote at the age of twenty, forming the first treasure of *Mahzen al-Asrâr* is completely different in form, from the four "treasured" works that came after it. This work is an inspirational production. He reached the secrets of the divine wisdom and left

<sup>14</sup> Yavuz Akpınar. *Azeri Edebiyatı Araştırmaları* (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1994), 467.

them to the care of "saints" as a "treasure". Because of this, experts draw a similarity between the *Mahzen* which means "treasure" and Mawlana Rumi's *Mesnevi*.

*Mahzen al-Asrâr* consists of twenty articles. The first article is about "mature human" and "one who forsakes the world". If we turn to God, according to the poet, we are always with God's mercy and benefaction. The second article is about "Justice and fairness". "Justice is a guide that makes the wit content. The duties of country are only done by justice. The country can only be prosperous with it. The fourth article is about "the post of emperor to the citizens". Although the principle of the world is grounded on injustice, the necessity to rule the world is justice. Whoever does justice in this "house" a night, he has built the "house" for his tomorrow.

In the fourteenth article "the love of justice" and "honesty" rights are mentioned. Nizami encourages a person for the love of justice. The duty of the citizenship is to stand against tyranny and injustice and to tell the truth with courage. The real weapon of a person is the honesty. "Frustration comes out of falsehood, security and benovelence come out of truthfulness." This story was added to the article about the responsibility of the emperor for his citizens: He puts a persecuted old woman in front of Sultan Sencer from The Great Seljuks and she says:

Ascended the states of Turks since,  
Cities adorned with justice;  
As tyranny caused by you  
Not a Turk, you looter Hindu.<sup>15</sup>

## VII. GENCEVI'S LAYLA AND MAJNÛN

The introduction of poem "Leyla and Mecnun" gives some advice, for example, Şirvanşah addressing Ahsitan requests "to listen to some advice from him" saying, "be powerful and cautious! Drink wine but do not get drunk! Do not let hypocrites come closer! Keep your promise to gain public confidence. Do not believe in people who do not have a place in your heart! Do not underestimate the enemy! Shoot from the root, do not drop what you hold!"

Nizami resembles the sultan to the sea, the one who reaches him compares himself to a river. If the sultan's bond is "paradise", he is a "bird of paradise." If one is the sultan of universe, the other is the sultan of word. If he is the wrestler of the battle field, the other is the hero of the meaning and the word.

<sup>15</sup> Nizami, *Mahzen*, op. cit.

An example of a justice story from Nizami: A sultan had violent dogs. He threw the guilty that he wanted to punish to these, and had them smashed into pieces. Young and bold Nedim thought about the possibility of being a victim, so he acted cautiously and became friends with the officer taking care of the dogs, and with his permission, he fed the dogs with dog food every day.

One day, at an unexpected time, without any reason, the sultan got angry with Nedim, and ordered him to be thrown to the dogs immediately. When his anger faded away, the sultan called the officer, and asked how poor Nedim was, regretting what he had done. The officer took the sultan to the place where Nedim was; to the emperor's surprise, Nedim was sitting among the violent dogs safe and sound, playing with them. Sultan immediately called Nedim to his presence.

- What a miracle!?

- My sultan why should it be a miracle? There is nothing to be surprised. Animals are more sensitive and faithful than human beings. I served you faithfully for years. For a trivial matter, you forgot everything, and immediately decided to execute me. However, these violent dogs did not forget the goodness I did for them, and as you see, they did not dare to kill me.<sup>16</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is understood from all of these that if the ruler is just, there will be peace and security in the country. If there is discrimination and favouritism, the peace and quietness will be destroyed. Chaos will control the world. Then, the public will be confused about who to support. For this reason, justice is essential for the administration of the state. The poets and the writers close to the ruler sometimes gave the utmost importance to this subject and did everything they could for the rulers to be fair. Apart from this, there were also philosophers and poets who only favoured the ruler. In this study, I tried to present some of the characteristics of this measure based on literature sources.

Successful rulers, statemen worked very hard for the piece and security of their country. They did not hesitate to sacrifice for the happiness and prosperity of their public. These rulers are not only a sample figure for their country, but also a model for the other societies. Taking measures for the future, by reading the history, culture and literature, is a ruler's duty.

<sup>16</sup> Nizami, *Leyla ile Mecnun*, op. cit.

Today it is one of our important duties to explain the leading rulers that shaped our history to our secondary school aged children. It is our obligation to introduce our culture, literature and past to the youth preparing for the future. If the nations understand and learn their genuine values well, they will not repeat the same mistakes in the past.

Nizami Gencevi clearly presented the portraits of justice in education and learning, state and just stateman in his works. If important concepts such as justice in education and learning, state and stateman are taught correctly to the students, the future generations will have a right point of view for the new constituted world. For this reason, Nizami Gencevi's works should be in the curriculum and studied by the students. In this study, by analysing Nizami Gecevi's education based works, I tried to emphasize the model of justice, state and statesman by giving examples from his works. It is clearly seen that Nizami's educational doctrine keeps its validity and freshness, as his works are analyzed.