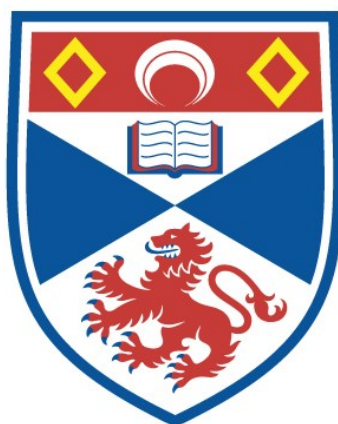


Ideology and resistance in Persian classical poetry: the case of Naser-e Khosrow

Salour Evaz Malayeri

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Abstract

This research is an attempt to redefine the concepts of ideology and resistance for an Iranian context and analyse their reflections in the *Divan* of Nāser-e Khosrow (Ca. 1004- 1076). Ideology in Persian studies has usually been treated as a belief system promoted by a group of people with political ambitions, and resistance as conscious political protests organised to confront a political system. Such general definitions, however, have failed to give rise to an applicable methodology for analysing the relationship between the text and the dominant power, particularly because the mutual impacts of ideology and resistance have rarely been considered.

Using the premises of the theory of 'ideology critique' and the method of 'discourse analysis', I define ideology as the totality of the undisputed and naturalised statements that justify a form of domination and hegemony, and resistance as the statements and practices that disturb the symbolic order by challenging the common sense that has been established by ideology. To contextualise my study of ideology and resistance, I also employ the concept of *the political* to analyse the construction of orthodoxy and political identity during the eleventh century Iran. I then analyse the literary and theological themes of Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* and argue that though he stood against the Baghdad Caliphs and their Turkic allies in Khorāsān and dedicated his life to promoting Ismailism as a new conception of truth, his poetry merged the contradictory aspects of Ismaili ideas and the deterministic statements of Persian literary tradition in ways that he ultimately failed to break away from the dominant epistemes of the time and reproduced the arbitrary and tyrannical structure of power.

General acknowledgements

I dedicate this thesis to my wife, Mahtab Saadatmandi, for all her love, sacrifice, and support. She stood beside me in my darkest moments throughout this journey. She took my hands and helped me stand up again. Her presence has been the source of hope and kindness, and I wouldn't have been able to do this research without her.

I'd like to remember my father, Fariborz Evaz Malayeri, and my uncle, Mohsen Ghane Bassiri, who sadly left us in the middle of this journey in 2018. My father believed in my work, and while I was disappointed about the financial hardships of my PhD course, he told me not to give up and supported me till the very last day of his life. His determination in life and appreciation of knowledge, culture and art continued to help me in finishing this thesis. My uncle, the mentor of my life, gave me the vision for imagination and the courage for thinking. This thesis is the result of our endless talks and gatherings. He taught me the critique of ideology by showing how to find the invisible connections between things and being able to walk on the borders without falling into the trap of closed and exclusive discourses.

I'd like to thank my mother, Maliheh Ghane Basiri, and my brother, Sam Malayeri, for all the encouragements, supports and love they sent from home during my studies in St Andrews.

I would also like to show my gratitude to Dr Saeed Talajooy for his friendship, patience, openness, and thought-provoking comments. I realised the immeasurable value of the work he did for me when I first compared the early drafts of this thesis with the final version. Nowhere I could have learned the art of argumentation and academic writing in the way I did with Saeed.

I also thank Dr Parmis Mozaffari for her hospitality and friendship, and that she made St. Andrews like home for us.

A Note on Transliteration

This research follows the *Iranian Studies* transliteration scheme. For more details

See:

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Introduction

Introduction

This research aims to critically interrogate the relationship between ideology and resistance in the *Divan* of Nāser-e Khosrow (Ca. 1004–1076).¹ It seeks to investigate how Nāser-e Khosrow's Ismailism worked as a force of discursive resistance against those common statements in the literary tradition that functioned to sustain the arbitrary and tyrannical structure of power. To achieve this aim, I will first examine Nāser-e Khosrow's controversial life, his views on poetry and the relationship between wisdom (*hekmat*) and poetry in his poems. This investigation will be followed by a thorough historical study of the cultural and political conditions of the time in which Nāser-e Khosrow lived and produced his philosophical and literary works. In the second stage, I will examine Nāser-e Khosrow's poems in order to demonstrate the extent to which Nāser-e Khosrow's socio-political criticism and his Ismaili ideas influenced the function of ideology in his poetry. In this research, ideology refers to those statements in the literary tradition that are naturalised and taken for granted, and they function to sustain the political order. Resistance, on the other hand, is the excluded and unorthodox discursive practice which challenges the hegemonic discourse and threatens the political order. I will examine the deterministic statements in the *Divan* of Nāser-e Khosrow as ideology, and consider his Ismaili interventions and socio-ethical criticism as instances of resistance. In the final stage, I will analyse the contradiction which occurs between Nāser-e Khosrow's theological/political resistance, and the deterministic ideas in his *Divan*. I will conclude my discussion by arguing that Nāser-e Khosrow's bold criticism of the rule of the Turks and their religious policies is not forceful enough to break away from the ideological realm which legitimises the political order in the form of deterministic and ahistorical statements.

By analysing the relationship between resistance and ideology in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, this research aspires to open a new theoretical field of discussion in which ideology and resistance are not two separate fields but part and parcel of the same dialectical system. This

¹ The date of Nāser-e Khosrow's death is still debated and there has been no convincing historical evidence to prove the validity of one or other of the proposed dates. The most common and referenced date is 1088, which was first suggested by Hassan Taqi Zāde, albeit with doubts. See:

Hassan Taqi Zade, 'Moqaddame (introduction)', in *Divān-e Ash'ār-e Nāser-e Khosrow Qobādiyāni*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi (Tehran: Mo'in, 2002), p. 54.

Professor Fatollāh-e Mojtabāi has recently published a short article, which has not yet been examined by major Nāser-e Khosrow scholars. In this article, Professor Mojtabāi analyses all the dates given for Nāser-e Khosrow's death in different biography compilations and histories, including some new sources which have been apparently neglected so far by Nāser-e Khosrow scholars. He then concludes that the year 1076 should be the right date of Nāser-e Khosrow's death, and not 1088. See:

Fatollāh Mojtabāi, 'Nehāhi Digar be Tārikh-e Vafāt-e Nāser-e Khosrow (Exploring the Date of Nāser-e Khosrow's death)', *Nāmeh-ye Farhangestān*, 56 (2016), pp.14-19.

study strives to be a pioneer in applying the critique of ideology and discourse analysis approach in Persian classical literature, while seeking also to contribute to critical socio-political studies in medieval culture from a broader perspective. It further aspires to show the significance of resistance as a term in discourse analysis that can oppose reductionist interpretations in socio-political studies of literature by uncovering the discursive dynamics and emancipative effects of the text in each period.

Statement of the Problem and Identifying the Gaps

When I was a master's student in Persian Literature and Language in Tehran, I decided to write my dissertation on ideology in Persian classical poetry. In order to find an appropriate case study, I arranged a meeting with my supervisor, who was a distinguished professor in Persian literature and Islamic philosophy. He suggested that if I wanted to study ideology, Nāser-e Khosrow was probably my only choice. I welcomed his suggestion, but then I asked myself: why would Nāser-e Khosrow be my only option? As our conversation continued, I found out that my supervisor had a different understanding of ideology in mind. To him, ideology was a systematic worldview, a belief system belonging to a particular group of people with political ambitions. In contrast, for me, ideology was specific statements or ideas related to power, state and domination across all systems of thought and everyday practices. For my supervisor, Nāser-e Khosrow was an appropriate case for the study of ideology since he had dedicated his poems to the Ismaili discourse and the Ismaili state propaganda. For me, however, Nāser-e Khosrow was ideological not so much because he was an Ismaili, but because his *Divan* was replete with common themes and statements of Persian literary tradition that remained unchallenged in his *Divan*. I then asked myself 'why was it that Ismailism was considered as a reason for seeing Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* as ideological?' With that question in mind, I gradually realised that this assumption was grounded in a widespread, yet reductive understanding of ideology. The systematic structure of the Ismaili beliefs along with its political purpose which was to stand against the Baghdad caliphs and their political allies, the Ghaznavids and the Saljuqs, made Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry ideological for many modern readers. After starting my PhD research and with more analysis, however, I gradually realised that the main question was how the Ismaili doctrine in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* reinforced the presence and function of ideological themes that had been part of the dominant cultural, and literary, discourse of his society for more than two centuries. This thesis, therefore, shares the above experience with my readers.

Using perspectives and methods of contemporary literary theory is becoming more relevant in modern studies. However, it is not yet a common trend in Persian literary studies. The majority of studies in Persian classical literature are still focusing on explaining the ‘content’ or the ‘meaning’ of the text, or analysing the rhetoric and stylistic issues, or, reviewing the historical background of literary works. The meaning, in this context, is usually seen as something absolute and authentic, which explains the ‘truth’ about the text. At the same time, explanations about the stylistic features and rhetorical devices used in the text are generally descriptive and detached from other elements of literary criticism. They are merely to explain the primary meaning of the text, and the way poets understood and employed these techniques has been less discussed. Historical discussions, on the other hand, are mostly dominated by political history or the history of religions, science or philosophy. The impact of the text as an independent literary work on the territories mentioned above usually stands outside the literary historiography. In Nāser-e Khosrow’s case, as I will show in my literature review, we are surrounded by numerous literary commentaries which are trying to reveal the meaning of each qasida in an encyclopaedic way. Their main task is to explain the complicated and archaic words and expressions for students, just like a dictionary. Each explanation is usually followed by mentioning the figures of speech, and the references to the Quran and Hadith. When it comes to historical analysis, Nāser-e Khosrow and his poetry become dominated by the history of Ismailism, or the political history of the Sāmānids, Ghaznavids and Saljuqs. As a result, Nāser-e Khosrow’s contribution to Ismailism or Persian literature, or the impact of his works on the political order and his environment, remain unnoticed and un-historicised.

Due to the absence of theory and theorisation, we are witnessing a severe lack of argumentation and problematisation in Nāser-e Khosrow studies. The current studies, as valuable as they are, cannot provide readers with a critical perspective so that they can find a relationship between the text and contemporary socio-political issues. This research hopes to pave the way for using modern literary theory in Persian literary studies, while it is well aware that any arbitrary and mechanical use of Western literary theory in Persian literature might bring artificial and unrealistic results. Therefore, instead of imposing the theory, this research starts with a problematic, a question posed by the author, and then it uses theory to develop and articulate the problem further, and more importantly, to establish a method to investigate Nāser-e Khosrow’s poems according to the research questions.

In line with such an attitude, I found that ideology by itself cannot shed light on all socio-political aspects of Nāser-e Khosrow’s poetry. Ideology can only give us a tool for analysing

the ways which Nāser-e Khosrow's poems have reproduced the dominant political regime, whereas there are strong elements of protest and distancing from public beliefs in Nāser-e Khosrow's poems. In some cases, Nāser-e Khosrow has reformulated the traditional literary themes and motifs in favour of a new religious discourse. More importantly, Ismaili ideas in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* work as an alternative to the dominant religious discourse which he resents so boldly. To explain this latter aspect of Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry, I use the term resistance as an essential component which must be included in the critique of ideology theory, since it can show the dynamics of the text and the points where the text widens the current cultural sphere and brings in new interpretations and fresh voices.

The significance of Nāser-e Khosrow in Persian literature is usually identified with two distinctive features. The first is that he is among the first of the Persian poets to use poetry to explain complicated theological ideas and to engage directly with the task of promoting moral virtues. The second is that he used poetry as a means for socio-political protest.² These two aspects have hitherto been studied by different scholars as separate packages, with no specific critical methodology or thought-provoking argument. In most cases, scholars have used a descriptive and informative method of discussion, focusing either on the political history of the Turkic rulers, or the representation of the Ismaili terminology in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*.³ As a result, the impact of the cultural and religious policies of the Turkic rulers on Nāser-e Khosrow's unorthodox way of life has not been properly discussed. Moreover, there are no well-argued analyses of the influence that Ismaili discourse had on Nāser-e Khosrow's appropriation of Persian literary tradition.

In the absence of such in-depth critical analysis, Nāser-e Khosrow's radicalism and his unorthodox views, have been reduced to a mere religious worldview; a set of dogmatic beliefs to which he dedicated his works. Furthermore, the ways he perceived, continued or reformulated the literary tradition have not been taken into account.⁴ In line with such clichéd

² Zabihollāh Safā, *History of Persian Literature*, 5 vols (Tehran: Ferdows, 1990), II, pp. 454-55. Also, see: Mohammad Ali Eslāmi Nedowshan, 'Peyvand-e Fekr-o She'r Nazd-e Nāser-e Khosrow (the relationship between thought and poetry in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*)' in *Yādnāmeḥ-ye Nāser-e Khosrow (Memorial of Nāser-e Khosrow)* (Mashhad: Ferdowsi University Press: 1976), pp.34-51(34).

³ Mehdi Mohaqeq, a well-known Nāser-e Khosrow scholar, is among the researchers whose works are focused only on explaining the philosophical and theological background of Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* in a non-argumentative and encyclopaedic way. For instance, see his commentary on Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*: Mehdi Mohaqeq, *Sharḥ-e Bozorg-e Divān-e Nāser-e Khosrow (A Comprehensive Commentary on Nāser-e Khosrow's Divan)*, 2 Vols (Tehran: Society for Appreciation of Cultural Works and Dignitaries, 2015).

⁴ For instance, Taqi Binesh, in his article, criticises Nāser-e Khosrow's Ismaili character, while praising him as a poet who has reflected the general moral values and literary aesthetics of Persian literature. See: Taqi Binesh, 'Do Nāser-e Khosrow (Two Faces of Nāser-e Khosrow)' in *Yādnāmeḥ-ye Nāser-e Khosrow (A Memorial of Nāser-e Khosrow)* (Mashhad: Ferdowsi University Press: 1976), pp.122-133.

perceptions, ideology in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* is often associated simplistically with Ismailism, while his less Ismaili poems have been considered non-ideological.⁵ The problem with this view is that it does not explain why those aspects of Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry which belong to the Khorāsāni literary tradition are not considered ideological. It also does not make it clear why Nāser-e Khosrow's non-Ismaili literary themes and imageries cannot be counted as possible strategies of a more covert, and therefore, more powerful ideology. Moreover, regarding Ismailism as *ideology* simply because it is a systematic worldview with specific political aim, means that there is no room for further investigations into how Ismailism became an ideological discourse in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. Was it due to some *ideological* elements inherent within the Ismaili discourse? Was it because of Nāser-e Khosrow's approach to interpretation? Was it because of the socio-political condition during the eleventh century? By referring to Ismailism as an ideology, do we mean that all aspects of Ismailism are ideological or just some specific sets of statements within the Ismaili doctrine? Due to the absence of a critical standpoint or a theoretical framework, these questions have remained unnoticed. Apart from a few exceptions, discussed in my literature review below, most of the studies on Nāser-e Khosrow are devoid of any central argument. That is, they have been unable to pose critical questions or formulate a certain number of precise problems to open a debate about a specific aspect of Nāser-e Khosrow's works.

Research Aims and Objectives

By using the terms *ideology* and *resistance*, this research seeks to contextualise Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry according to the political and cultural situation of Khorāsān during the eleventh century. It also aims to analyse the discursive dynamism that the Ismaili discourse provided in the poetry of Nāser-e Khosrow. By discursive dynamism I mean the effect and power which an external and unorthodox discourse provides in the text by merging with the pre-existing and traditional discourse which is taken for granted and considered as natural.

⁵ Mohammad Dehqāni has used the phrase *māyeh-hāye ide'ologik* (ideological features) as the factor which separates Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry from that of his contemporary court poets. He does not, however, give any further explanation as to the meaning of ideology, nor does he explain why the poems of those court poets are not ideological. See: Mohammad Dehqāni, *Nāser-e Khosrow-o Adabiyāt-e Irān (Nāser-e Khosrow and Persian Literature)*, (Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 2018), p.71. Regarding the common belief among the scholars of Nāser-e Khosrow that Ismaili discourse is an 'ideology' see, for instance, the usage of the word 'ideology' among the speakers in the book launch event in Tehran of Dr Alice C Hunsberger's *Nāser-e Khosrow, The Ruby of Badakhshan: 'Neshast-e Naqd-o Barrasi-yeh Ketāb-e Nāser-e Khosrow La'l-e Badakhshān'* in *Ketāb-e Māh*, 61 (2003), pp. 51-67 (58-64).

This research uses *ideology* as a negative concept, and not as a neutral and descriptive term. It seeks to change the simplistic and clichéd view of Nāser-e Khosrow in the current literature. I will argue that what makes the *Divan* of Nāser-e Khosrow ideological is the continuation of the literary tradition and the way Nāser-e Khosrow reformulates the literary heritage of Khorāsān according to his Ismaili standpoint. I will demonstrate that ideology in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* reveals itself in the contradiction between the radicalism of the Ismaili discourse and the conservatism of the literary tradition. This view does not imply that the Ismaili discourse is empty of ideology. On the contrary, it suggests that if the Ismaili discourse becomes ideological in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, it is because of its inability to affect the literary tradition and its rhetorical strategies.

To study the points of consistency within the literary tradition, I will focus on the concepts *falak* (firmament), *zamān*, *zamāneh* (time) and *jahān* (world). I will analyse the deterministic meaning of these concepts and categorise them under the title of 'the condition of temporality'. I will argue that these concepts, in Nāser-e Khosrow's literary articulation, retain their ideological function by naturalising the current socio-political situation. As for the elements of resistance, I will study 'aql (intellect), *sohkan* (speech), *ta'vil* (esoteric interpretation), *sabr* (patience) and *dānesh* (knowledge). I will argue that these concepts, which mainly belong to the Ismaili discourse, work as alternative forces in response to the elements of determinism. I will suggest that these terms serve to emphasise human agency and consciousness, thereby opening up space to criticise common sense understandings, and both orthodox and formal religious rituals. I categorise these concepts under the 'condition of endurance', since within Nāser-e Khosrow's systematic thought, these ideas work in response to the condition of temporality and provide a religious and ethical solution for spiritual emancipation. My discussion on resistance in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* will also include two theological subjects, *towhid* (Divine Oneness) and *jabr-o ekhtiyār* (free will and predestination). For the first, I aim to show that Nāser-e Khosrow's view on the unknowability of God gives an ontologically broader and more inclusive conception of God. It offers an intellectually more developed articulation of the idea of the Divine, while it defends the using of philosophical methods and contemplative perspectives for examining the religious subjects. For the latter (free will and predestination), I seek to demonstrate Nāser-e Khosrow's resistance to fatalism, passivity and superstitious astrological beliefs. In order to identify and analyse the ideological function of the notions of firmament and time, as well as the resistant nature of Nāser-e Khosrow's Ismaili ideas, I will use the concept of *the political* in my historical analysis to

examine the construction of religious orthodoxy during the Ghaznavids (977-1118) and early Saljuqs.⁶ The concept of *the political* enables me to establish a criterion for identifying and contextualising ideology and resistance in the poems of Nāser-e Khosrow. It will help me to examine the cultural battlefield in which two antagonistic discourses formed themselves by opposing and excluding each other during the time of Nāser-e Khosrow: one was relying on the apparent meaning of the holy text, and stood against rational methodology and individual thought, the other promoted rationalism, criticised the conventional and ritualised understanding of religion, and believed in hermeneutic methodology. By using the concept of *the political*, I will analyse the process through which the first discourse hegemonized itself and formed a discursive block, an orthodoxy strengthening the dominant political power and its executive institutions.

In discussing the historical background and theological topics, this research tries to avoid unrelated explanations and descriptive and general philosophical arguments. Both of these sections will follow the main critical argument of the research, and they are structured within the research's theoretical framework. Therefore, this research does not claim that it has broken away fully from the traditional strategies of literary analysis. This is partly due to the fact that Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry is devoted to expressing and promoting some specific religious and philosophical concepts, and he does this intellectual practice as a form of political activism. Therefore, in discussing Nāser-e Khosrow's theological resistance, this research found it necessary to explain the history and background of some major theological and philosophical debates during the early Islamic centuries. However, this research tries to contextualise Nāser-e Khosrow's religious and philosophical ideas by focusing on their socio-political effect and the way they responded to the hegemonic discourses of the time. Also, in the historical analysis section, it was essential to depict a historical picture in which one can situate Nāser-e Khosrow and locate his position in the ongoing struggle between major religious discourses of his time. The rhetorical analysis in this research no longer follows the traditional method of explaining different types of similes or metaphors that are used in the text. Instead, it takes the form of discourse analysis. In this modern method, figures of speech are the strategies of constructing the meaning in favour of a specific discourse and power-relation.

⁶ From the fall of the Ghaznavids in 1118 till the end of the reign of Malek-shāh I in 1092.

Works of Nāser-e Khosrow

Works of Nāser- Khosrow are usually divided into his poems, and his prose works. He has mentioned on numerous occasions that he has written in both Arabic and Persian. However, those that have survived today are all in Persian. In his prose works, Nāser-e Khosrow explains major topics and aspects of the Ismaili theology. These theoretical works are among the primary sources of studying the early Ismaili theology today. In these works, Nāser-e Khosrow uses a dialectical method with a didactic tone to educate his readers, answer the questions he receives from his followers, and win over his opponents with his arguments. These theoretical books follow the principles and style of what we today recognise as the *scientific* way of writing. Nāser-e Khosrow uses logical techniques such as argumentation, reasoning and syllogism to structure his discussions. Where he finds it necessary, he quotes the Quran and Hadith, the holy books of other religions, and the words of well-known philosophers. These techniques have given outstanding quality to his theological and philosophical writings. Nāser-e Khosrow demonstrates his power in writing a coherent, clear, and persuasive text, and his prose works played an important role in the development of Persian language. These works also reveal the influence of Greek philosophy, Neoplatonic ideas in particular, on Nāser-e Khosrow and the Ismaili theological system.

In his *Goshāyesh-o Rahāyesh*⁷, Nāser-e Khosrow responds to 30 questions on different religious and theological subjects such as cosmology and creation in time, intellect and soul, physical and spiritual world, the createdness of the Quran, the Unity of God, salvation through knowledge, and human free will. Many of these topics, as we shall see in this research, are reflected and mentioned in Nāser-e Khosrow’s poems as well.

Khān al-Akhavān (The Feast of the Brethren) is believed to be one of the earliest works of Nāser-e Khosrow.⁸ Ehsān Raisi, in his valuable research, rejects any doubt on the book’s

⁷ The book has been translated into English as ‘Knowledge and Liberation’, which does not correspond fully with the Persian title. ‘Knowledge’, in the context of Nāser-e Khosrow’s discourse, stands for the Persian word *Dānesh*, which has no connection with neither *Goshāyesh* nor *Rahāyesh* in the title. In my view, Alice C. Hunsberger’s translation of the title, ‘Breaking the Bonds and Setting Free’, is more accurate and faithful to the Persian title. For the English translation of the book, see:

Nāser-e Khosrow, *Knowledge and Liberation: A Treatise on Philosophical Theology*, ed. and trans. by F.M. Hunzai (London: I.B Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1998).

For Hunsberger’s note on the book, see:

Alice C. Hunsberger (ed.), *Pearls of Persia: The Philosophical Poetry of Nāsir-i Khusraw* (London: I.B Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012), p. xiii.

⁸ Fortunately, *Khān al-Akhavān* has been re-edited based on a recently found manuscript of the book and it has been published in Iran:

Nāser-e Khosrow, *Khān al-Akhavān* (The Feast of the Brethren), ed. by Ali Asghar Mirbagheri and Ehsan Raisi, (Tehran: Shahid Beheshti University Press, 2019).

authenticity, and with a thorough linguistic and comparative analysis, he proves that the book is written by Nāser-e Khosrow. Moreover, he gives a detailed account of the similarities between this book and Abu Ya'qub Sejestāni's *Yanābi'* (The Sources).⁹ He shows that almost 38 pages of the book are a Persian translation of Sejestāni's book'.¹⁰

Khān al-Akhavān demonstrates Nāser-e Khosrow's brilliant work in translating an Arabic philosophical text into a clear and fluent Persian. Nāser-e Khosrow's translation of Sejestāni's book belongs to the philosophical movement during the early Islamic centuries which contributed immensely to the development of Persian Language. The book deals with subjects such as:

[...] the difference between spirit (*ruh*) and soul (*nafs*), the essence (*jān*) of the rational soul (*nafs-i naṭīqa*), the necessity of carrying out the precepts and recommendations of religious law, and how the one command of creation (Ar., *kun!*, Be!) resulted in the many of the world.¹¹

In *Vajh-e Din* (The Face of Religion), Nāser-e Khosrow focuses specifically on the Ismaili method of hermeneutics known as *ta'vil* (revealing the inner meaning of the holy text). Nāser-e Khosrow interprets famous verses of the Quran as well as different aspects of religious rituals and the Islamic Sharia according to the Fatimid propaganda.¹² Although the art of *ta'vil* is an inseparable part of most of Nāser-e Khosrow's works, especially when it comes to punishment and the concepts of heaven and hell, it is in this book that he defines the esoteric interpretation as a necessity for the religious knowledge and applies the method of *ta'vil* on a wide range of religious topics.

Zād al-Mosāfer (The Pilgrim's Provision), 'lays out the purpose of, and the path and provisions necessary for, the soul's journey through this physical world to illumination and contentment in the spiritual world.'¹³ The focus of Nāser-e Khosrow in this book is on the aspects and

⁹ Abu Ja'qub-e Sejestāni is one of the prominent Ismaili thinkers who lived during the mid-tenth century and did his missionary activities in different regions of the Islamic territory. As I will show in this chapter, he had a huge influence on Nāser-e Khosrow's theological ideas such as the Oneness of God, predestination, intellect and soul. For a short biography of Sajestāni, see:

Paul E. Walker, 'Abū Ya'qūb Sejestāni' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, <<https://iranicaonline.org/articles/abo-yqub-sejestani>> [accessed 25 July 2020]

¹⁰ See: Ehsan Raisi, 'Barresi-ye Sehat-e Entesāb-e Khān al-Akhavān beh Nāser-e Khosrow Qobādiyāni (Examining the Authenticity of Nāser-e Khosrow's *The Feast of the Brethren*)', *Adab-e Fārsi* (22) 2018, pp. 121-138.

¹¹ Alice C. Hunberger (ed.), *Pearls of Persia: The Philosophical Poetry of Nāsir-i Khusraw*, p. xiv.

¹² Nāser-e Khosrow, *Vajh-e Din* (The Face of Religion), ed. by Taqī Arāni (Tehran: Asātir, 2005).

¹³ Alice C. Hunberger (ed.), *Pearls of Persia: The Philosophical Poetry of Nāsir-i Khusraw*, p. xiv.

qualities of the physical world, the creation of the universe and the relationship between the body and soul.¹⁴

Shesh Fasl (Six Chapters), also known as *Rowshanāināmeḥ* (The Book of Illumination), focuses on the ontological part of the Ismaili theology as Nāser-e Khosrow perceives it. The topics discussed in this treatise include the Oneness of God, the universal intellect, the universal soul, and the human soul. The book continues by explaining the Fatimids' organisational titles and their religious importance in the hierarchical structure of the Ismaili movement. The book ends with a discussion on the subject of divine punishment and reward (*savāb-o eqāb*).¹⁵

Safarnāmeḥ (The Book of Travels) is the most famous work of Nāser-e Khosrow, and indeed, exceptional work in medieval world literature.¹⁶ It is the first prose work of Nāser-e Khosrow that we know today, and its subject is no longer philosophy and religion. It is a travelogue in which Nāser-e Khosrow tells the details of the places he visited during his seven-year journey. The importance of *Safarnāmeḥ* lies in three factors: it gives valuable information about communities, places, buildings and towns of the early medieval period that covers a vast area from Marv to Jerusalem, and from Mecca to Egypt. Second, its personal and realist narrative along with its fluent and engaging language made it a unique text in the history of Persian literature. Third, it gives some clues as to Nāser-e Khosrow's conversion to Ismailism. There is a famous biographical note in the opening section of the book, which is quoted by many scholars. In this introduction, Nāser-e Khosrow tells the story of his discontent with the routine life and expresses his desire for change and spiritual wisdom by narrating a dream in which a sage appears and shows him the path toward Mecca. Although *Safarnāmeḥ* is not Ismaili propaganda, the chapter on Cairo stands out in the book as it shows Nāser-e Khosrow's admiration of the city and its authorities.

Ketāb-e Jāme' al-Hekmatayn (The Book of Twin Wisdoms Reconciled) is another important work of Nāser-e Khosrow, in which he answers to the questions raised by an Ismaili teacher, Abol-Heysam Ahmad-ebn-e-Hasan-e Jorjāni.¹⁷ The subjects discussed by Nāser-e Khosrow

¹⁴ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Zād al-Mosāfer* (the Pilgrim's Provision), ed. by Mohammad Emādi Tāheri (Tehran: Mirās-e Maktub, 2005).

¹⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Rowshanāināmeḥ* (the Book of Illumination), ed. by Tahsin Yaziji and Bahman Hamidi (Tehran: Tus, 1994).

¹⁶ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Safarnāme (Book of Travels)*, ed. by Rashid Yasemi (Tehran: Ketab Forushi-ye Zavvar, 1956). *Safarnāmeḥ* has been translated by W. M. Thackston. See: Nāser-e Khosrow, *Book of Travels*, transl. by W. M. Thackston, Jr. (New York: The Persian Heritage Foundation, 1986)

¹⁷ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Jāme' al-Hekmatayn* (Twin Wisdoms Reconciled), (Tehran: Tahuri, 1984). For an English translation, see:

includes a wide range of topics from the Oneness of God to the physical world, and from angels and demons to human's happiness and education. It is believed that this book is Nāser-e Khosrow's last prose work among a series of treatises that he wrote during his long exile in Yomgân, and he died few years after he finished it in 1070. The importance of the book, apart from its powerful and coherent language, lies in the idea of 'uniting the two wisdoms'. This idea is a fundamental doctrine of Nāser-e Khosrow which is also reflected in his poems. As Eric Ormsby, the English translator of the book argues:

Nāṣir strives to reconcile – or to reunite – the 'wisdom' of philosophy – by which he means the largely Aristotelian *falsafa* tradition of the metaphysicians (or 'divinising' philosophers, the *ḥukamā-yi muta'āllihān*, as he calls them) with the esoteric 'wisdom' of Ismaili doctrine, and especially the tradition of symbolic exegesis or *ta'wīl*. [...] the endeavour to construct a system in which the philosophical and scientific methods and insights of the *falsafa* tradition are shown to be ultimately in accord with Islamic doctrine, broadly understood, and here specifically, with Fatimid Ismaili teachings.¹⁸

Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* (collected poems), consists 'primarily of his odes (qasidas), as well as very few quatrains, couplets and fragments.'¹⁹ There are two critical editions of the *Divan*. The first was published by four Iranian scholars during 1925-1928: Mojtabā Minovi (1903-1977) and Nasr Allāh Taqavi (1871-1947) edited the text, Hassan Taqizādeh (1878-1970) wrote a comprehensive biography of Nāser-e Khosrow and added to the book as an introduction, and Allāmeḥ Dehkhodā (1897-1956) added his notes in which he explained the meaning of some complicated words and expressions in the *Divan*. Along with the qasidas, quatrains and couplets, there are two short *masnavis* attached to the *Divan*. One is *Rowshanāi-nāmeḥ* (The Book of Illumination) which should not be mistaken with the other *Rowshanāi-nāmeḥ* in prose (*rowshanāi-nāmeḥ-ye mansur*) that refers to the book *Shesh Fasl* (Six Chapters) that I mentioned earlier. The other is *Sa'ādat-nāmeḥ* (The Book of Happiness). The fact that these two *masnavis* are written by Nāser-e Khosrow has been challenged by some

Nāser-e Khosrow, *Between Reason and Revelation; Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, transl. by Eric Ormsby (London: I.B.Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012)

¹⁸ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Between Reason and Revelation; Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, transl. by Eric Ormsby, p. 7.

¹⁹ Alice C. Hunberger (ed.), *Pearls of Persia: The Philosophical Poetry of Nāsir-I Khusraw*, p. xiv.

scholars²⁰ as the literary quality, language and ways of expression are far away from Nāser-e Khosrow's tone and his developed and powerful literary style.²¹

The second critical edition of the *Divan* is edited by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi and was published in 1978. This edition is based on the oldest known manuscript of the *Divan* dating back to the year 736 Hijri²². The interesting point about this manuscript is that the qasidas do not follow the alphabetical order and the editors decided to keep this non-alphabetical arrangement in their edition. The non-alphabetical order might suggest that the qasidas in this manuscript are arranged according to the date they have been composed by the poet. If this is the case, then one can claim that the qasidas in Minovi-Mohaqqueq edition are following the events and changes that occurred in the life of the poet and therefore, each qasida has its own context. Of course, this is merely a probability, and we cannot be sure whether the Minovi-Mohaqqueq edition shows the chronological order of the qasidas. But even if it did represent the chronological order, this does not help us much since the whole *Divan* is dedicated to the Ismaili mission and it reflects the theological and religious doctrine that Nāser-e Khosrow has established in his prose works. All the qasidas are written after Nāser-e Khosrow's conversion to Ismailism and while he was in exile and away from his home.

Apart from using the 736/1336 manuscript, this edition benefits from updated corrections and some suggestions for the unintelligible sections of the *Divan*. Unlike the previous edition, the editors decided not to include *Sa'ādat-nāmeḥ* and *Rowshanāi-nāmeḥ* in the *Divan*.

This research will use the second edition (the Minovi-Mohaqqueq edition) as its primary source. It sees Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* as a literary work and places it in the context of Persian literary tradition that formed during the early Islamic centuries in Khorāsān. However, when it comes to clarifying the theological and philosophical ideas that are mentioned in the *Divan*, this research will use Nāser-e Khosrow's prose works, especially the *Twin Wisdoms Reconciled* as supporting material to explain Nāser-e Khosrow's theological beliefs. Occasional references to Nāser-e Khosrow's prose works are because of the fact that there is a close relationship between these works and Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry. Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* stands in line

²⁰ See: Mojtabā Minovi, 'Rowshanāi-nāmeḥ-ye Nāser-e Khosrow-o Rowshanāi-nāmeḥ-ye Manzum-e Mansub be ū (Nāser-e Khosrow's Rowshanāi-nāmeḥ and the Prose Rowshanāi-nāmeḥ Which is Attributed to Him)' in *Yādnāmeḥ-ye Nāser-e Khosrow (A Memorial of Nāser-e Khosrow)*, (Mashhad: Ferdowsi University Press: 1976), pp. 574-580.

²¹ Alice C. Hunberger (ed.), *Pearls of Persia: The Philosophical Poetry of Nāsir-I Khusraw*, p. xiv.

²² Equal to the year 1336 in the Gregorian calendar.

with Nāser-e Khosrow's theological and philosophical works as he sees poetry not as something dissociated from philosophy²³.

Literature Review

Modern studies on Nāser-e Khosrow start with Edward G. Browne, one of the forefathers of modern Persian studies. His article 'Nasir-i-Khusraw, Poet, Traveller, and Propagandist' was first published in 1905 in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*.²⁴ With some minor changes, he used the same article for his chapter on Nāser-e Khosrow in his major book, *A literary history of Persia*. Browne's approach to studying Nāser-e Khosrow's life and works, surprisingly enough, has not changed much. Most monographs and chapters that have been written on Nāser-e Khosrow are developed on the same structure established by Browne.

Browne regards Nāser-e Khosrow as 'one of the most remarkable men of this epoch [early Saljuqs],'²⁵ and argues that his *Divan* is 'a combination of originality, learning, sincerity, enthusiastic faith, fearlessness, contempt for time-servers and flatterers, and courage hardly to be found, so far as I know, in any other Persian poet.'²⁶ Browne starts with 'fables' and 'fictions' about Nāser-e Khosrow's life in medieval books. He refers to a 'pseudo-autobiography' of Nāser-e Khosrow, which appeared in some literary biographies during the medieval centuries. Browne reports the story narrated in the autobiography and adds that this story is 'mingled, apparently, with details drawn from the lives of other eminent persons.'²⁷ He then introduces some of Nāser-e Khosrow's works, especially *Safarnāmeḥ* (Book of Travels). He focuses on Nāser-e Khosrow's journey to Egypt, where 'he became acquainted with the splendour, justice and wise administration of the Fātimid Caliph, al-Mustansir bi'llāh, and here it was that he was initiated into the esoteric doctrines of the Isma'ili creed, and received the commission to carry on their propaganda and to be their "Proof" (*Hujjat*) in Khurasan.'²⁸ After his account of the Book of Travels, he examines the *Divan*. He explains that 'the language and

²³ See chapter 1 of this research.

²⁴ Edward G. Browne, 'Nasir-i-Khusraw, Poet, Traveller, and Propagandist' in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1905), pp. 313-352. <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/25208764>> [accessed 25 January 2020]

²⁵ Edward G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia, Volume II: From Firdawsi to Sa'di* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), p. 218.

²⁶ Browne, p. 241.

²⁷ Browne, p. 218. See Chapter 1 of this research for a detailed account about the story and my thorough analysis of this pseudo-autobiography.

²⁸ Browne, p. 222.

grammatical peculiarities are thoroughly archaic, and bear an extraordinary resemblance to those of the old Persian Commentary [...] which [...] was written in Khurasan during the Samanid period'.²⁹ He gives a list of the names of places, people, and references to other religions in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. He also gives a brief explanation about some major topics of the *Divan*, including:

1. *Ta'vil*, or 'allegorical interpretation'.³⁰
2. *Imam* 'as the sole custodian of Revelation'.³¹
3. *Knowledge* which is a 'great honour', however, it is 'the handmaid of Religion'.³²
4. God, 'who can neither be called Eternal nor Temporal', and 'phenomena are but an illusory reflection of Him'.³³
5. Man as 'microcosm'.³⁴
6. The doctrine of Free will which is 'supported against that of Fatalism'.³⁵

He also discusses some autobiographical parts in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, where Nāser-e Khosrow narrates his conversion to Ismailism. He refers to Nāser-e Khosrow's 'profound contempt for Royal Courts, courtiers, panegyrists, elegant writers and literary triflers, and writers of *ghazal* and erotic poetry'.

Although Browne's account is among the earliest modern studies on Nāser-e Khosrow, it brilliantly covers the essential aspects of the poet's life and works within a few pages. Browne was well aware of the importance of the *self* in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. Many scholars have recognised his point on the stylistic similarities between Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry and later Persian poetry during the Sāmānids. He intelligently sees Nāser-e Khosrow's doctrine of free will as a critique of fatalism and not predestination,³⁶ and although he sees Ismailism as propaganda which has limited Nāser-e Khosrow's thinking, he does not see Ismailism as something negative since he is aware of the productive role of Ismailism in Nāser-e Khosrow's discourse.

²⁹ Browne, p. 227.

³⁰ Browne, p. 231.

³¹ Browne, p. 231.

³² Browne, p. 232.

³³ Browne, p. 232.

³⁴ Browne, p. 232.

³⁵ Browne, p. 232.

³⁶ See chapter 4 of this research.

Other subsequent introductory accounts of Nāser-e Khosrow followed the same structure as Browne, albeit sometimes with less clarity and depth. Zabihollāh Safā's report on Nāser-e Khosrow in his outstanding work, *Tārikh-e Adabiyāt-e Irān* (History of Persian Literature), has only focused on biographical issues.³⁷ The same is true of Badi'oz-Zamān Foruzānfar's chapter on Nāser-e Khosrow in *Sokhan-o Sokhanvarān* (Speech and the Masters of Speech).³⁸ General adjectives and lengthy quotations from the *Divan* have made Foruzānfar's assessment of Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry vague and lacking any clear argument. Among the early studies of the life of Nāser-e Khosrow, the most reliable is Hassan Taqizādeh's introductory monograph on Nāser-e Khosrow which was first published as a preface in a critical edition of Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*.³⁹

Another good, and more contemporary, introductory account of Nāser-e Khosrow in Persian, in my view, is Mohammad Dehqāni's preface to his anthology of Nāser-e Khosrow's poems.⁴⁰ Dehqāni covers nearly all the major themes and aspects of Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, followed by appropriate samples for each subject. He offers a short description of the history of the Ghaznavids, the Saljuqs and the early Ismailis in order to address the main issues regarding the historical background of Nāser-e Khosrow. Dehqāni's introduction, however, although good in categorisation, lacks analytical argumentation and critical assessment. As for introductory studies in English, Annemarie Schimmel's monograph, *Make a Shield from Wisdom* (1993), is still the best option for those who are looking for a reliable translation and commentary of Nāser-e Khosrow's poems.⁴¹ There is no sign of any historical discussion or socio-political analysis of the text in Schimmel's monograph, however. Moreover, Schimmel's book is full of quotations from the *Divan* but only dedicates a very short and preliminary argument in respect to each sample. As a writer, Schimmel stands in a neutral position and does not argue for any particular perspective.

Alice C. Hunsberger's book, which was commissioned by the Institute of Ismaili Studies, unfortunately did not add anything particular to the current literature.⁴² The book is mainly a

³⁷ Zabihollāh Safā, *History of Persian Literature*, 5 vols (Tehran: Ferdows, 1990), II, pp. 443-469.

³⁸ Badi'oz-Zamān Foruzānfar, *Sokhan-o Sokhanvarān* (Speech and the Masters of Speech) (Mashhad: Zavvār, 2006), pp. 148-154.

³⁹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi (Tehran: Mo'in, 2002), pp.16-74.

⁴⁰ Dehqāni, pp. 9-157.

⁴¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Make a Shield from Wisdom* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, Revised Edition 2001).

⁴² Alice C Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller and Philosopher* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 2000).

biography of Nāser-e Khosrow, designed for non-specialist readers, with more focus on the Book of Travels and less discussion of Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry or his theosophical ideas. Her arguments on notions such as free will, the Divine Oneness, esoteric interpretation, etc. are descriptive and preliminary, with little discussion of the socio-political functions of these concepts. In explaining Nāser-e Khosrow's thoughts, she has paid less attention to the *Divan* and refers mostly to Nāser-e Khosrow's prose works. Hunsberger used Nāser-e Khosrow's route in his Book of Travels for the structure of her book, following Nāser-e Khosrow's journeys and describing places and events that Nāser-e Khosrow recorded in his travelogue, while, in between, she inserts her interpretations of Nāser-e Khosrow's philosophical thoughts. This narrative strategy has affected the quality of her arguments, however, and has decreased the book's clarity and originality. Moreover, there are some serious mistakes in references, translations and interpretations which have damaged the credibility of the book.⁴³ The book also suffers from an overtly ideological stance in which the author attempts to depict Nāser-e Khosrow positively in line with modern liberal values. In the absence of a socio-political approach, Hunsberger seems to interpret the progressive aspects of Nāser-e Khosrow's theology in the light of contemporary liberal discourses. In the preface of her book she writes:

[Nāser-e Khosrow's] philosophical ethics and the way he lived his life bear witness to how highly he valued the search for knowledge and an active public life for the betterment of individuals and society – values which he found amply expressed in the Ismaili Islam that he espoused. Nasir Khusraw's sincerity, courage and steadfastness of purpose make him an appealing character for people of all faiths.⁴⁴

Such an ideological tendency has prevented Hunsberger from criticising the role of Ismailism in Nāser-e Khosrow's interpretation of seemingly progressive ideas such as free will, rationalism and independent thought. Nonetheless, Hunsberger's admiration of Nāser-e Khosrow helps the reader trace some covert aspects of resistance in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. Henry Corbin's article 'Nāser-e Khosrow and Iranian Ismailism' is in many ways superior to the other biographical and introductory studies on Nāser-e Khosrow. It is thought-provoking and benefits from the author's contemplative argumentation, original ideas and philosophical knowledge. In his phenomenological analysis of the history of the Ismailism, Corbin speaks of

⁴³ Some of these mistakes were mentioned in the book launch event of the Persian translation of the book, held at Tehran. See: 'Neshast-e Naqd-o Barrasi-yeh Ketāb-e Nāser-e Khosrow La'l-e Badakhshān' in *Ketāb-e Māh*, 61 (2003), pp. 51-67.

⁴⁴ Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw*, p.xv.

an ‘*a priori* sacral image’ which acts as a form of pre-existing knowledge in the Ismaili discourse:

[...] In the Fatimid and post-Fatimid texts the picture produced by Isma’ilism of its own history does not extend to a past in the sense understood by our own scientific history; what emerges may be conveniently called a hierohistory, that is to say the representation of matters resulting not from empirical statements, but from an *a priori* sacral image which is at one and the same time the organ both of perception and of interpretation of reality.⁴⁵

He then poses a critical question regarding the contradiction that might appear between the Ismaili gnostic discourse and its political representation in the form of the Fatimid Caliphate, i.e. between subjectivity and the historical manifestation of that subjectivity:

Would it be true to say that out of political opportunism the Fatimids had shown themselves ready to sacrifice the theosophical system for the benefit of the positive religion? By doing so, they would have destroyed the balance between the *zāhir* (exoteric) and the *bātin* (esoteric), between the *tanzīl* (revelation descending in the letter) and the *ta’wīl* (interpretation leading back to the hidden meaning); they would indeed have sacrificed the essentials - the hidden meaning (*bātin*) and the esoteric exegesis (*ta’wīl*). What would then have remained of the Isma’ili religion? [...] is it possible for an esoteric brotherhood (that is to say one founded upon the *bātin* and the *ta’wīl*) at a given time to take possession, publicly and officially, of the historical scene (*zāhir*) - a scene which at that time extended from the shores of the Atlantic to the easternmost limits of the Islamic world? Could it do so without ceasing to be itself?⁴⁶

In search for an answer, Corbin refers to the eschatological aspect of Ismaili discourse:

When a doctrine contains an eschatology as an integral part and when an incident of visible, physical history comes to be proclaimed as demonstrating this eschatology, then either history must be fulfilled, or the doctrine must be abandoned. [...] Political victory constitutes the failure of the doctrine; if the latter survives this, it will be thanks to a failure which makes amends for that victory and will have restored the spiritual vision to its freedom.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Henry Corbin, ‘Nasir-i Khusrau and Iranian Ismā’īlism’ in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. by R. N. Frye, 7 vols (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1975), IV, p. 521.

⁴⁶ Corbin, p. 524.

⁴⁷ Corbin, p. 525.

Corbin then concludes that the political failure of Ismailism must be put aside, since it is the Ismaili doctrine which holds its value and originality regardless of its political or historical experience:

History does not stand still and the works of a Nasir-i Khusrau or a Hamid Kirmani preserve their philosophical value and maintain their spiritual gesture independently of each political reign and of all the visible royalty of the imams.

Nevertheless, following the contradiction he has identified in the Ismaili history, he suggests that the second phase of Ismaili discourse, the Iranian Nizari movement in Alamut, can be considered as a political revision, a meaningful response to the Fatimid experience. To support his argument, Corbin refers to Hassan Sabbāh's proclamation of *Qiyāmat* (resurrection) in 1164 in Alamut. As Corbin explains:

The Event of the “Resurrection of Resurrections” (*qiyāmat-i hama qiyāmāt*) or the “Great Resurrection” was solemnly proclaimed at Alamut on 17 Ramadan 559/8 August 1164, in an impressive setting. The sermon preached on that day by the man who was in fact the leading *Khudāvand*, the first grand master of Alamut, Maulana Hasan ‘*alā dhikri-hi’l-salām* is an anthology piece. “Rise up, for the Day of Resurrection has dawned. The awaited Signal is now made manifest. Behold the dawn of the Resurrection which is the culmination of all Resurrections. Today there is no longer need to seek for proofs and tokens; today Knowledge no longer depends on the Signs [the verses of a Book] nor on speeches, nor on allusions, nor on bending the body in acts of devotion . . .”⁴⁸

By referring to Hassan-e Sabbāh's proclamation of *Qiyāmat* and his revolutionary speech at Alamut, Corbin hints at what the political experience of Ismailism could have been. On the level of theology, the exoteric meaning of the Quran and Sharia must be decoded in favour of a hidden emancipative meaning. On the political level, the Imam or the *Hojjat* (proof) of the Imam must command the revocation of Sharia law and call for a new order and different system of sovereignty. Corbin decides not to follow this line of debate, however. He does not go any further than saying that the political experience of Ismailis is at odds with their esoteric theology. Instead of investigating the political experience of Ismailism, he focuses on the ‘theosophical’ heritage of Ismailism, since for him, it is this heritage that is worth studying today. For Corbin, the real value of Ismailism lies in its gnostic ‘theosophy’, and the fact that

⁴⁸ Corbin, p. 530.

it finally dissolved into Sufism supports this claim that any political experience of Ismailism will inevitably destroy its emancipative theosophy:

In this respect, the reformed Iranian Ismā'ilism is found to be of particular interest. The proclamation of the "Great Resurrection" at Alamut was to invert the problem raised by the political reign of the Fatimids: if the latter had been tempted to sacrifice the batin, was not Alamut sacrificing the zahir? In any case, the reign of pure religion in spirit and in truth appears paradoxical in the known conditions of our humanity. It is the survival of Isma'ilism under the mantle of Sufism which comes nearer perhaps to revealing its true grandeur and the inspiration of its distant origins, rather than in the brilliant setting of the Fatimid court.⁴⁹

While Corbin's argument on the contradiction between the religious discourse and the political experience of the Fatimids opened a new chapter in the critical studies on Shiism and Ismailism, he did not investigate this contradiction any further as he was interested mainly in the gnostic and theosophical dimensions of Ismailism. Nonetheless, the contradiction he addresses raises some questions. If there were emancipative aspects in the Ismaili theology or *theosophy*, as Corbin puts it, why were these aspects not reflected in the historical experience of Ismailism? Or, if the political experience of Ismailism made a historical impact, how was this impact related to its doctrine and discursive principles? Why should the failure of the political experience not lead us to a criticism of the discourse that has caused such failure? Relying on Corbin's argument, I will discuss that while Ismaili discourse provided the intellectual privilege allowing Nāser-e Khosrow to oppose the dominant power relations and recognise the ideological strategies of his society, it did not result in an actual change or epistemological break within the realm of ideology. Such failure was due to both the Ismaili discourse itself and the dominant ideological discourse of the literary tradition in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. While the ideological statements of the literary tradition naturalised the existing contradictions and regarded politics as something worthless and decedent, the Ismaili discourse did not challenge this ideological strategy, since liberation in Ismailism was Metacosmic and spiritual. I will argue that by referring to the transcendent and divine realm, in the final analysis, the Ismaili discourse in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* reproduces the arbitrary and despotic power.

⁴⁹ Corbin, p. 525.

Another aspect of Corbin's article which is important for this research is his insightful examination of Nāser-e Khosrow's dream in the opening section of *The Book of Travels*, where Nāser-e Khosrow gives a narrative of his spiritual awakening that resulted in his conversion to Ismailism:

Over too long a period a very trite "cliché" has been accepted as adequate to explain the conversion of Nasir. It was imagined that until Nasir reached the age of forty-two his adherence to Islam was somewhat modified by a life of pleasure. One fine morning, however, as the result of a dream, he decided to change his way of life and undertook the pilgrimage to Mecca. The road to Mecca brought him close to Egypt, where he was converted to the Isma'ili doctrine of the Fatimids and he returned to his native country invested with the rank of *hujjat*. If this interpretation is accepted as it stands, in conformity with the law of least resistance, no questions are even asked about the inner motives which could have guided Nasir to his encounter with the Isma'ili doctrine. It is not even debated whether the event may not have been the goal of a spiritual quest.⁵⁰

He then suggests that Nāser-e Khosrow's dream can be considered as an encoded Ismaili text which needs to be interpreted according to the Ismaili hermeneutics (*ta'vil*): 'Herein are to be found archetypal themes, and the whole significance of this dream becomes apparent when the method is discovered of deciphering the symbolic narrative.'⁵¹

Most scholars have taken Nāser-e Khosrow's autobiographical account and the story of his dream in the Book of Travel as a reliable historical evidence that gives some facts about Nāser-e Khosrow's life.⁵² Corbin's argument, however, opens a new perspective from which to study Nāser-e Khosrow's autobiographic account as a literary text with a narrative strategy that seeks to convey an encoded meaning. Corbin's hermeneutic approach towards Nāser-e Khosrow's dream helped me to analyse Nāser-e Khosrow's dream as a cultural text consciously reformulated to project a desired narrative of *selfhood*.⁵³

Mohammad Ali Eslāmi Nedowshan's Article, *Peyvand-e Fekr-o She'r Dar Nazd-e Nāser-e Khosrow* (the relationship between thought and poetry in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*) has considered some socio-political factors and offers some hints and ideas for analysing the

⁵⁰ Corbin, p. 533.

⁵¹ Corbin, p. 540.

⁵² Among the scholars who have built their account on Nāser-e Khosrow's short autobiography, I can name Zabihollāh Safā in his *History of Persian Literature*, Rashid Yāsemi in his introduction to *Book of Travels*, and Farhad Dafatri in *The Ismā'ilis; Their History and Doctrines*.

⁵³ See chapter 1 of this research.

political context of Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry. As in Browne's case, Nedowshan's chapter elaborates the key factors which make Nāser-e Khosrow a unique figure in the history of Persian literature. The article still suffers from the lack of a focused and well-structured analysis of the *Divan*, however. He emphasises the following topics regarding Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry, but does not offer any argument to clarify their functions and significance:

1. The didactic nature of Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry.
2. The religious nature of Intellect in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*.
3. Spiritual awakening as a key theme in the *Divan*.⁵⁴

As to his socio-political analysis, he discusses the following points:

4. The political coalition between the Baghdad Caliphate and the Turks in Khorāsān.
5. The cultural and moral decline during the time of Nāser-e Khosrow as the result of religious bigotry. Nedowshan sees a connection between the moral and cultural decline of the age and the rise of esoteric discourses such as Ismailism. He argues that religious hypocrisy (*riyākāri*) and submissive religious obedience (*ta'abbod*) during the time of Nāser-e Khosrow had brought about pretentious behaviours and the dominance of the fake (*qalb*) over the real (*asl*), and the appearance (*zāher*) over the real/internal self (*bāten*).⁵⁵

Nedowshan points at Beyhaqi's *Tārikh-e Beyhaqi* (Beyhaqi's History, date) and Nezām al-Molk's *Siasatnameh* or *Siyar al-moluk* (The Book of Government or The Lives of Kings, ca. 1079) as two sources that can shed light upon the socio-political situation during Nāser-e Khosrow life. He also notes two contradictions in Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry:

6. Nāser-e Khosrow criticises certain types of pious people for their obsession with heaven and God's rewards, while he also gives credit to the ideas of heaven and hell, and otherworldly salvation.
7. Nāser-e Khosrow is against panegyric poetry. He condemns those courtly poets who waste their poetic power and the beauty of the Persian language for praising corrupt and illegitimate kings. He also criticises those who degrade themselves by bowing in front of oppressive sultans. He praises the Fatimid Caliph, al-Mustansir, however, with words and ideas similar to those of court poets, and he adores the Fatimid court and its majestic and courtly grandeur.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Mohammad Ali Eslāmi Nedowshan, 'Peyvand-e Fekr-o She'r Nazd-e Nāser-e Khosrow (the relationship between thought and poetry in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*)' in *Yādnāmeḥ-ye Nāser-e Khosrow (Memorial of Nāser-e Khosrow)*, pp. 31-33.

⁵⁵ Nedowshan, p. 33-35.

⁵⁶ Nedowshan, pp. 38-39.

Nedowshan's points in his article helped me identify some of the key factors regarding the formation of the orthodoxy and the political order during the rule of the Ghaznavids and the early Saljuqs.

Research Theory and Method

a) Ideology in Marxist Tradition

Ideology, as a negative and critical concept, started with Karl Marx. In *German Ideology*, through using the term *ideology*, Marx criticised those ideas that are the result of 'the material activity', 'the material intercourse of men',⁵⁷ but appear as *ethereal* and *ahistorical*, as things in themselves, dissociated from the material practice of men and the 'actual life-process'.⁵⁸ Later in *The Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, he identified this 'actual life-process'⁵⁹ as the economic *Base* which *determines* and *conditions* all productions of consciousness such as religion, politics and aesthetics, to be identified as *Superstructure*.⁶⁰ Another significant development occurs when Marx focuses on the critique of political economy of the Capitalist system in his *Grundrisse* and later in his ground-breaking work, *Capital*. At this stage, he argues that commodities which are created and produced by men and within a specific historical stage of material production are *mystified* and *fetishised* as an autonomous noumenon or essence; what is the result of human labour and social relations becomes *objectified* and shows itself as *inevitable* and *natural*.⁶¹ Not only commodities but other aspects of the capitalist economic system, such as wage relation become natural and inevitable. If the wage relation in the capitalist system is unequal and exploitive, in everyday life, it presents itself as natural and sensible.⁶² Marx's discovery of some ideological strategies such as '*naturalisation*' or '*etherealisation*' is of great importance in this research.

Marx criticism of capitalist economy is a good sample of the critique of ideology since it shows how some statements or routine interactions are mystified so to *conceal* their real function, which is to reproduce the dominant economic, political and social structure. In other words,

⁵⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Part I (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), p. 47.

⁵⁸ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 47.

⁵⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. I (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1962), p. 362.

⁶⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works*, vol. I, p. 182.

⁶¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p.831.

⁶² Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 84-87.

Marx has identified two significant aspects of ideology. One is that ideology has some specific strategies by which it (*miss*)represents, *mystifies* or *distorts* the real social relations, and two is that ideology has a function, and that is to justify the dominant socioeconomic relations and serves the interests of the dominant class.⁶³ Jorge Larrain, in his extensive and most valuable study on Marxism and ideology, argues that this concealment is due to the contradictions that emerge in a specific economic, political and social system. Therefore, ideas or forms of consciousness are not fundamentally ideological; rather, some ideas *become* ideological in a particular historical moment, and that is when the dominant socioeconomic structure starts to show its limits. As a result of the emerging limitations, different social contradictions occur, and that is when the dominant system tries to cover or solve those contradictions by mystifying some statements and ideas. In other words, the dominant system uses some strategies such as naturalisation or universalisation because of its need to present itself as legitimate and rightful:

Ideology is a particular form of consciousness which gives an inadequate and distorted picture of contradictions, either by ignoring them, or by misrepresenting them. This specific manner of relating to contradictions is the distinctive and typical character of ideological ideas. [...] For Marx, therefore, ideology does not arise as a gratuitous invention of consciousness which purposefully misrepresents reality, nor is it the result of a conspiracy of the ruling class to deceive the dominated classes. The distortion which ideology entails is not the exclusive patrimony of any class in particular, though ideology serves only the interests of the ruling class. That all classes can produce ideology is the consequence of the universality of the 'limited material mode of activity'. That ideology can only serve the interests of the dominant class is the objective result of the fact that the negation or concealment of contradictions plays a major role in the reproduction of those contradictions: it is only through the reproduction of contradictions that the ruling class can reproduce itself as the ruling class. To this extent, the reproduction of contradictions can only serve the interests of the ruling class. So the role of ideology is not defined by its class origin but by the objective concealment of contradictions. This is achieved by trying to reconstitute in consciousness a world of unity and cohesion.⁶⁴

⁶³ Mich  le Barret has focused on the concept of mystification in his study of ideology. See: Mich  le Barret, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

⁶⁴ Jorge Larrain, *Marxism and Ideology* (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp.27-28

Through clarifying Marx's ideas on ideology and focusing on the concept of *practice*, Larrain seeks to give a non-positivist and a non-determinist account of ideology in Marx as it might seem in phrases such as 'false consciousness' or 'inversion and distortion'. He also opens a perspective for analysing resistance as a counter-ideological practice, a subject which is barely discussed by the structuralist Marxists:

In so far as men and women in their daily practice reproduce this objective power and its contradictions, and so long as they do not set about destroying them by means of a revolutionary practice, their conscious account of these contradictions is bound to be distorted. The close relationship between consciousness and practice determines that men and women can only solve in consciousness what they can solve in practice. As long as individuals, because of their limited material mode of activity, are unable to solve these contradictions in practice, they will project them in ideological forms of consciousness. Ideology, therefore, is a solution at the level of social consciousness to contradictions which have not been solved in practice. The specific effect of these distorted solutions is the concealment or misrepresentation of the very existence or character of these contradictions.⁶⁵

Larrain tries so hard to save and hold the negative meaning of ideology and not to fall into the post-modernist trap of saying 'everything is ideological'. He also makes so much effort to fight with those structuralist perceptions which see ideology as an inevitable and essential part of society. However, his emphasis on ideology as a set of ideas which conceal the real contradictions in a particular moment of the development of material forces remains vague and inapplicable as a method of analysis. How can we identify the moment in which the ideas become ideological? What sort of theoretical device do we have to assess the emergence of contradictions in a particular historical moment? How can we assess and identify a non-ideological practice from ideological? Is there any moment where there is no contradiction and therefore, no ideology in society?

Louis Althusser's theory of ideology is a crucial turning point in the history of Marxism. He argued that ideology no longer deals with beliefs and statements; it is about human actions, social relations, rituals, social places and institutions. It is the 'lived relation between men and their world.' 'This relations', As Mich  le Barret explains:

⁶⁵ Larrain, 28.

[...] is both real, in the sense that it describes real social historical relations and how people are positioned in them, and imaginary, in the sense that it is in ideology that conservative or revolutionary *will* is expressed. So ideology is not restricted to conscious level, it operates as images, concepts, and above all, as *structures* that impose themselves upon us. As a general system of representation, ideology for Althusser was an ‘organic’ or ‘indispensable’ part of the social totality.⁶⁶

Another critical aspect of Althusser’s theory of ideology is the concept of *subject* and *interpellation*. Ideology is about the way people willingly identify themselves as subjects such as ‘teacher’ or ‘mother’ and follow specific actions and rituals within specific institutions such as school, church and workplace. Althusser’s theory of subject and *interpellation* continued to be an essential part of critical analysis in Discourse Analysis approach:

Individuals are interpellated or placed in certain positions by particular ways of talking. If a child says ‘mum’ and the adult responds, then the adult has become interpellated with a particular identity – a ‘mother’ – to which particular expectations about her behaviour are attached. In discourse theoretical terms, the subjects become positions in discourses.⁶⁷

However, by positioning ideology as opposed to *science*, not only Althusser eternalises ideology and represents it as something indispensable and essential for any social order, he ascribes a totalised and ahistorical nature to *science* and reproduces the positivist opposition between truth and non-truth. Science, in this context, is the Marxist political economy, by which we ‘know’ the real relations and mechanisms of reproduction. Therefore, concepts such as practice, social classes, social contradictions and historical materialist understanding of society no longer have any place as they had in Larrain’s study of ideology.

b) Laclau’s Criticism of Ideology in Marxist Tradition

Ideology in the Marxist tradition has been enormously influential in terms of formulating a useful critical term for analysing the ways of ‘sustaining the forms of dominations’ as John B. Thompson has discussed.⁶⁸ However, in its positivist and structuralist articulations, the

⁶⁶ Barret, p. 37.

⁶⁷ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* (London: SAGE publication, 2002), p. 40.

⁶⁸ John B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), pp. 130-131.

‘critique of ideology’ still suffers from the metaphysical and positivist view. In most Marxist interpretations of ideology, we have a non-ideological and purified realm which stands above any discursive practice and represents ‘science’, or ‘the reality’; an undisputed and meta-discursive field to which ideology refers. Ideology in the Marxist tradition is always about misrepresenting *something* other than itself which stands above any discursive struggle and remains as a fixed field of knowledge. As Ernesto Laclau argues:

Categories such as ‘distortion’ and ‘false representation’ made sense as long as something ‘true’ or ‘undistorted’ was considered to be within human reach. [...] The bedrock of such a critique is to postulate access to a point from which – at least tendentially – reality would speak without discursive mediations. The full positivity and graspability of such a point gives a rationale to the whole critical operation.⁶⁹

Laclau believes that the new perception of ideology must start with criticising the ‘critique of ideology’ in the classical Marxism: ‘the rhetorico-discursive devices of a text are irreducible and that, as a result, there is no extra-discursive ground from which a critique of ideology could proceed.’⁷⁰ However, he is aware that such negation might result in the cancellation of any negative approach towards the term ideology:

Are we supposed to put aside entirely notions such as ‘distortion’, ‘false consciousness’, and so on? The difficulty is that if we simply do so, we enter into a vicious circle whereby the conclusions of our analysis negate its premises.⁷¹

He then states that ‘all the critiques will be necessarily ideological’, and he agrees with Althusser in this regard:

Ideology is, for Althusser, eternal. The mechanisms producing the subject through misrecognition are inscribed in the very essence of social reproduction. We have no hope of escaping the mirroring game involved in ideological interpellation.⁷²

However, he disagrees with Althusser’s notion of *science* or *knowledge* and the assumption that we can ‘go scientifically beyond subjective alienation’:

Everything depends on what is being misrecognised – or, rather, on the nature and extent of the misrecognition. If what is misrecognised is a particular type of social

⁶⁹ Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), p. 25.

⁷⁰ Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, p. 25.

⁷¹ Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, p. 25.

⁷² Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, p. 26.

relation, we could easily imagine a different one in which no misrecognition at all occurs.⁷³

The work of Laclau on ideology, which is a part of his theory of discourse, is based on criticising the classical critique of ideology from a post-Saussurian and post-Structuralist point of view. He believes that ideology is a necessary dimension of any representation, but at the same time, it is impossible. It is necessary since any discourse as a particular object needs to refer itself to something sublime and different from itself to gain hegemony. At the same time, it is impossible since the sublime realm, to which a particular and non-ideological discourse refers, needs to appear as a coherent and unified whole, and in order to keep its wholistic and sublime nature, it necessarily needs to *incarnate* itself into a particular discourse. But as a result of such discursive incarnation, it loses its sublimity and unity and becomes *deformed*. Laclau calls this process ‘the dialectics of incarnation/deformation.’ He gives an example of a ‘third world country’ to better show such dialectics:

Let us suppose that, at some point in a Third World country, nationalisation of the basic industries is proposed as an economic panacea. Now, this is just a technical way of running the economy, and if it remains so it will never become an ideology. How does the transformation into the latter take place? Only if the particularity of the economic measure starts to incarnate something more and different from itself – for instance, the emancipation from foreign domination, the elimination of capitalist waste, the possibility of social justice for excluded sections of the population, and so on; in short, the possibility of constituting the community as a coherent whole. That impossible object – the fullness of the community – appears here as depending on a particular set of transformations at the economic level. This is the ideological effect *strictu sensu*: the belief that there is a particular social arrangement that can bring about the closure and transparency of the community.⁷⁴

Here, it seems Laclau solves the problem we identified in Larrain’s argument earlier without falling into the trap of positivism or structuralism, and that is articulating a theoretical mechanism which shows how a discourse *becomes* ideological. He also manages to save ideology as a critical term without generalising it or mingling it with the concept of *discourse*.

⁷³ Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, p. 31.

In this research, I use Laclau's argument to explain how the wholistic and sublime realm in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* which deals with the concepts of the unknowable God, the Universal Intellect, the Divine Knowledge and the Speaking Soul, necessarily incarnates itself into a human and objective discourse, which is the political Ismailism (the Fatimid propaganda). At the same time, the political Ismailism has to refer to a spiritual and otherworldly realm in order to justify itself as the truth.

c) Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory

This research seeks to analyse the struggle between two antagonistic discourses and the reproduction of the tradition in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. I have already stated that Nāser-e Khosrow opposes the orthodoxy by using the Ismaili discourse as an alternative regime of truth. However, in his poetry, this heterodoxy is merged with some aspects of the literary tradition. Therefore, the main problem is to show how the pre-existing tradition remains unchallenged in the new discursive formation. To analyse and address this problem, I will use the discourse analysis method set by Ernesto Laclau and his colleague Chantal Mouffe in their seminal book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.⁷⁵ However, I will also use Laclau's *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society* for a more in depth analysis of ideology in the context of discourse analysis.

There are three reasons why this research chose this theoretical framework. One is that – as Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips have mentioned – Laclau and Mouffe's main focus in their theory is the *discursive struggle*:

Different discourses – each of them representing particular ways of talking about and understanding the social world – are engaged in a constant struggle with one other to achieve hegemony, that is, to fix the meanings of language in their own way.

This aspect of their theory can help us to analyse the discursive antagonism between Nāser-e Khosrow's Ismailism and the religious orthodoxy in Khorāsān.

Two is that Laclau and Mouffe's theory provides the space for analysing resistance in discourse. One of the theoretical deficiencies in the Marxist theory of ideology, especially in the structuralist approach, is that the whole cultural sphere is a dominated and determined field, with no dynamism or politics of its own. This deficiency is mainly due to the 'dominant ideology' thesis in Marxist theory, in which the cultural sphere contains the dominant ideas which are serving the ruling class. The economic Base simply determines the Superstructure.

⁷⁵ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

Larrain tried to ease this reductionism by focusing on the concept of practice. However, we are not talking about resistance as a conscious and deliberate physical action which is organised by a group people and takes place in the form of political protest against the rulers, state or oppressive powers. Resistance in the context of this research happens within the realm of discourse, and it seeks to weaken the relations of domination by *disturbing* or *posing a delay* in the process of the ideological signification and construction of hegemony. Resistance in the realm of discourse seeks to provide a counter-ideological space to disturb the totality, certainty and stability of the ideological meaning. In Laclau and Mouffe's theory, each discursive closure produces the forces of resistance at the same time, since each process of closure involves constructing *the other* and *excluding* other possibilities of meaning. Therefore, resistance in Laclau and Mouffe's can be identified as those intrusions and disruptions which threatens the discursive *articulation* and the fixation of meaning. It is the activation of those excluded meanings and suppressed possibilities which lead to the articulation of an alternative discourse.

The third aspect which makes the Laclau and Mouffe's theory an appropriate analytical framework for this research is the fact that their theory offers an applicable method for discourse analysis. It is a methodological framework for analysing discourses, and it is not necessarily designed for modern literature or modern societies only. Therefore, their theory is suitable for textual examination and analysing the relationship between ideology and resistance in a premodern text.

Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse analysis is mostly based on specific terms which are mainly connected to their post-structuralist and constructionist approach towards language and reality. Therefore, without explaining in detail the Laclau and Mouffe's arguments and making constant references to their theoretical discussions, I explain the major terms in their theory which I use in my own discussion in the concluding section of this research. My primary references here are Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips's book, *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, and Laclau's *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*.

Discourse, Discourse Analysis, Contingency:

- 'Underlying the word "discourse" is the general idea that language is structured according to different patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life, familiar examples being "medical discourse" and "political discourse". "Discourse analysis" is the analysis of these patterns. [...]

(Discourse is) a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world).⁷⁶

- ‘The creation of meaning as a social process is about the fixation of meaning. [...] We constantly strive to fix the meaning of signs by placing them in particular relations to other signs. [...] However, this fixation of meaning can never completely succeed, as it is *contingent*, it is possible but not necessary. Meaning can never be ultimately fixed and this opens up the way for constant social struggles about definitions of society and identity, with resulting social effects. The discourse analyst’s task is to plot the course of these struggles. [...] The aim of discourse analysis is to map out the process in which we struggle about the way in which the meaning of signs is to be fixed, and the processes by which some fixations of meaning become so conventionalised that we think of them as natural.’⁷⁷

Moments

- ‘A discourse is understood as the fixation of the meaning within a particular domain. All signs in a discourse are *moments*. They are the knots in the fishing-net, their meaning being fixed through their differences from one another (differential positions). All signs are *moments* in a system and the meaning of each sign is determined by its relations to the other signs.’⁷⁸

Nodal Points

- ‘A discourse is formed by the partial fixation of meaning around certain *nodal points*. A nodal point is a privileged sign around which the other signs are ordered; the other signs acquire their meaning from their relationship to the nodal point.’⁷⁹

Exclusion

- ‘A discourse is established as a totality in which each sign is fixed as a moment through its relations to other signs. This is done by *exclusion* of all other possible meanings that the signs could have had: that is, all other possible ways in which the signs could have been related to one another.’⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, p. 1.

⁷⁷ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, pp. 24-25.

⁷⁸ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, p. 26.

⁷⁹ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, p. 26.

⁸⁰ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, pp. 26-27.

Field of Discursivity and Element

- ‘A discourse is a reduction of possibilities. It is an attempt to stop the sliding of the signs in relation to one another and hence to create a unified system of meaning. These possibilities are called the *field of discursivity*. The *field of discursivity* is a reservoir for the ‘surplus of meaning’ produced by the articulatory practice - that is, the meanings that each sign has, or has had, in other discourses, but which are excluded by the specific discourse in order to create a unity of meaning. A discourse is always constituted in relation to what it excludes, that is, in relation to the field of discursivity. It is always constituted in relation to an outside, therefore, it is always in danger of being disrupted by other ways of fixing the meaning of the signs. Here, the concept of *element* becomes relevant. *Elements* are the signs whose meanings have not yet been fixed; signs that have multiple, potential meanings.’⁸¹

Closure and Articulation

- ‘A discourse attempts to transform elements into moments by reducing their polysemy to a fully fixed meaning. The discourse established a *closure*, a temporary stop to the fluctuations in the meaning of the signs. But the closure is never definitive: “the transition from the “elements” to the “moments” is never entirely fulfilled”.’ The sign, then, ‘does not say much in itself, it has to be positioned in relation to other signs in order to give meaning. And this happens through *articulation*. [...] *Articulation* is a practice that establishes a relation between elements such that the identity of the elements is modified.’⁸²

Floating Signifier

- ‘Those elements which are particularly open to different ascriptions of meaning are called *floating signifiers*. *Floating signifiers* are the signs that different discourses struggle to invest with meaning in their own particular way. Nodal points are floating signifiers, but whereas the term ‘nodal point’ refers to a point of crystallisation within a specific discourse, the term ‘floating signifier’ belongs to the *ongoing struggle between different discourses* to fix the meaning of important signs. Therefore, floating

⁸¹ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, p. 27.

⁸² Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, p. 28.

signifiers are the signs that *different discourses struggle to invest* with meaning in their own particular way.’⁸³

Objective (ideology)

- ‘When a struggle takes place between particular discourses, it sometimes becomes clear that different actors are trying to promote different ways of organising society. At other times, our social practices can appear so natural we can hardly see that there could be alternatives. [...] Those discourses that are so firmly established that their contingency is forgotten are called *objective* in discourse theory. [...] Objectivity is the historical outcome of political processes and struggles; it is *sedimented* discourse. The boundary between objectivity and the political, or between what seems natural and what is contested, is thus a fluid and historical boundary, and earlier sedimented discourses can, at any time, enter the play of politics and be problematised in new articulations. [...] Objectivity may, therefore, be said to be the term for what appears as given and unchangeable, for what *seemingly* does not derive its meaning from something else. But this is ‘seemingly’ only, and that is the reason why discourse theory equates objectivity and ideology. [...] *Objectivity* is sedimented power where the traces of power have become effaced, where it has been forgotten that the world is politically constructed. [...] Objectivity, therefore, refers to the world we take for granted, a world which we *forgotten* is always constituted by power and politics. [...] A society without ideology is unthinkable in discourse theory since ideology is defined as objectivity. We are always dependent on taking large areas of the social world for granted in our practices – it would be impossible always to question everything. In order not to be confused with a more traditional ideology critique, [...] Laclau and Mouffe hardly ever use the concept of ideology, preferring instead the concept of objectivity.’⁸⁴

The Logic of Equivalence

- ‘[...] For the floating to be possible, the relationship between signifier and signified has already to be a loose one – if the signifier was strictly attached to one and only one signified, no floating could take place. So, the floating requires a tendential emptiness. But, in the second place, the pattern of the floating requires, first, that the floating term be differently articulated to discursive chains that oppose each other (otherwise there

⁸³ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, p. 28. Italics are made by the author of this research.

⁸⁴ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, pp. 36-39.

would be no floating at all), and, second, that, within these discursive chains, the floating term function not only as a differential component but as an equivalential one in relation to all the other components of the chain. If “democracy” is presented as an essential component of the “free world”, the fixing of the meaning of the term will not occur purely by constructing for it a differential position, but by making of it one of the names of the fullness of society that the “free world” attempts to achieve – and this involves establishing an equivalential relation with all the other terms within that discourse. “Democracy” is not synonymous with “freedom of the press”, “defence of private property” or “affirmation of family values”. [...] What gives its specific ideological dimension to a discourse on the ‘free world’ is that each of these discursive components is not closed within its own differential particularity, but functions also as an alternative name for the equivalential totality that its relations constitute.’⁸⁵

Subject Position

- ‘Subjects occupy their positions within a discourse, where there are some expectations as to how to act, what to say and not say, etc. But the subject is also *fragmented*: It is not positioned in only one way and by only one discourse.’⁸⁶

Group Formation

- ‘*Group formation* is to be understood as reductions of possibilities. People are constituted as groups through a process by which some possibilities of identification are put forward as relevant while others are ignored. [...] In discursive group formations, ‘the other’ - that which one identifies oneself is excluded, and the differences within the group are ignored. Thereby all the other ways in which one could have formed groups are also ignored. In this sense, the group formation is political.’⁸⁷ ‘The construction of subject positions and hence identities, is a battlefield where different constellations of elements struggle to prevail. The *struggle* over the creation of meaning.’⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Ernesto Laclau, *The Rhetorical Foundations of Society*, pp. 37-8.

⁸⁶ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, pp. 40-41.

⁸⁷ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, p. 44.

⁸⁸ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, p. 47.

Social Antagonism

- ‘A *social antagonism* occurs when different identities mutually exclude each other. Although a subject has different identities, these do not have to relate antagonistically to one another. [...] The two identities make contrasting demands in relation to the same actions within a common terrain, and inevitably, one blocks the other.’⁸⁹

Hegemonic Interventions

- ‘Antagonisms may be dissolved through *hegemonic interventions*. A hegemonic intervention is an articulation which, by means of force, reconstitutes unambiguity. [...] Hegemony is similar to *discourse* because both terms denote a fixation of elements in moments. But hegemonic intervention achieves this fixation across discourses that collide antagonistically: one discourse is undermined from the discursive field from which another discourse overpowers it, or rather dissolves it, by re-articulating its elements. The hegemonic intervention has succeeded if one discourse comes to dominate alone, where before there was conflict, and the antagonism is dissolved. [...] The hegemonic intervention is a process that takes place in an antagonistic terrain, and the ‘discourse’ is the result - the new fixation of meaning. The establishment of hegemonic discourses as objectivity and their dissolution in new political battlefields.’⁹⁰

Based on the framework that Laclau and Mouffe has introduced in their discourse analysis theory, my textual analysis will follow these steps:

- a) Identifying the *nodal points* in Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan*.
- b) Situating these nodal points within their *discursive structure*.
- c) Explaining *the political and the discursive struggle* during the time of Nāser-e Khosrow.
- d) Studying the process of *hegemonic intervention* during the formation of the political.
- e) Identifying those signs that are defined by different antagonistic discourses (*floating signifiers*).
- f) Identifying and analysing those statements that are taken for granted in the *Divan* and remain unchangeable and undisputed (*objective or ideology*).

⁸⁹ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, p. 47.

⁹⁰ Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips, p. 47-48.

- g) Analysing how the *logic of equivalence* works in ideological statements.
- h) Finding different *subject positions* that each discourse depicts in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*.
- i) Analysing different group formations according to the antagonism which is reflected in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*.

d) Literary Tradition

By the term 'literary tradition', I specify the culture of Persian literature and language which Nāser-e Khosrow inherited and used to provide the grounds for the literary representation of Ismaili discourse. Emerging from the oral and folk traditions of Khorāsān, and practised in the courts of the Saffārids, Sāmānids and later Ghaznavids, the Persian literary tradition gradually established formal structures, poetic images and genres and aesthetic and narrative strategies which, due to recurrent use, formed the literary 'conventions and codes' of the time.⁹¹ These codes and conventions in the literary tradition existed prior to the act of writing poetry by a specific poet. As J.T.P. Bruijn explains:

Writers and poets who participate in a tradition of this kind create their works, either consciously or unconsciously, according to a set of artistic norms. These rules, governing matters of form as well as content, were laid down by preceding generations and are passed on to future generations as long as the tradition remains in force. The structure of literary conventions is safeguarded by certain standards of criticism that help to establish artistic values and by a canon of the most eminent representatives of tradition. [...] If the term 'normative system' is a valid characterisation, this implies that the Persian literary tradition is not just a construct of modern scholarship but that it was already an entity in the minds of its participations.⁹²

During its formation, the literary tradition was exposed to and surrounded by influential philosophical and religious traditions, the impact of which went beyond their disciplinary realm. Different elements from various cultural traditions were absorbed into the literary

⁹¹ In literary criticism, literary tradition is usually identified under the term 'convention'. See: Simā Dād, *Farhang-e Estelāhāt-e Adabi (A Glossary of Literary Terms)*, (Tehran: Morvārid, 2006, 3rd edition), p. 373. Also see: Stein Haugom Olsen, 'Conventions and Rules in Literature', *Metaphilosophy*, 31 (2000), pp.25-42.

For a thorough introduction on the subject of convention in Western philosophy, see: 'Convention' in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/convention/>> [accessed 30 April 2019]

⁹² J.T.P. de Bruijn, 'Classical Persian Literature as a Tradition', in *A History of Persian Literature I: General Introduction to Persian Literature*, ed. By J.T.P. de Bruijn (I.B Tauris: London and New York, 2009), pp. 1-38 (p. 1-2).

tradition and made a general platform for composing poetry. The political establishment also played a central role in the formation and institutionalisation of literary tradition in the form of patronage, or what de Bruijn calls the ‘extra-literary’ context of the literary tradition.⁹³ The court provided a vital space for the practice of poetry by hosting scholars, philologists, scientists, priests and poets. Poets were needed in the court for ceremonial performances and political prestige rather than for popularising a particular discourse.

The *general moralities* and *courtly ceremonies*, however, could have gained a political significance, depending on the court’s religious policies. The construction of orthodoxy and heterodoxy during the Ghaznavids and Saljuqs politicised specific religious sects and in turn restricted the distribution of certain ideas and expressions. Recurrently expressing the *sayable*, therefore, was partly because authors attempted to avoid the ‘unsayable’. If someone was to announce that he was an Ash’arite, it was more an affirmation of his not being Mu’tazilite, and vice versa. Having a particular religious belief or belonging to a specific theological school was similar to taking sides in politics and may have had serious consequences for the speaker’s social status or even life. The formation of the political in the late tenth and eleventh century polarised the religious life of people during the Ghaznavids and early Saljuqs. This, in turn, affected the function of expressing general moralities and addressing common wisdom in the literary tradition. This is where religious orthodoxy in politics finds shared interests with the orthodoxy in literary tradition. The politicised literary tradition patronised in the court started to serve as a means for generalising and justifying what was the result of a specific set of power relations and religious discourse. Nelson Goodman explains the contradiction inherent in the conventional:

On the one hand, the conventional is the ordinary, the usual, the traditional, the orthodox as against the novel, the deviant, the unexpected, the heterodox. On the other hand, the conventional is the artificial, the invented, the optional, as against the natural, the fundamental, the mandatory.⁹⁴

Based on Goodman’s observation, we can argue that in the politicised condition during the early Saljuqs, the state of *unconventionality*, *unfamiliarity* or *being unexpected* was a disturbing force against the political order. It was the need for being *usual*, *ordinary* and *mandatory* that revived the relationship between the court and the literary tradition. The logic of naturalisation

⁹³ J.T.P. de Bruijn, pp.1-38 (13-30).

⁹⁴ Nelson Goodman, ‘Just the Facts Ma’m!’, in *Relativism, Interpretation and Confrontation*, ed. by Michael Krausz (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 80-85 (p.80).

and familiarisation in the literary tradition, apart from maintaining the state of *familiarity* and *the usual*, guaranteed a secure, yet restricted, space for people that discouraged them from any real engagement with the political. This, indeed, could have helped the court in securing the political order. By becoming an ideological apparatus, part of the literary tradition turned into a symbolic performative ritual that served to *confirm* what was apprehended as the *indisputable truth*. The ‘literary tradition’ in this research is in close connection with the ‘objective’ or ‘ideology’ in Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of discourse. I will argue that the *objective* in Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan* is the field where aspects of literary tradition, such as aesthetics, moral virtues and philosophical worldview are reproduced and re-contextualised.

e) The Political

In order to analyse the historical process of the formation of orthodoxy during the tenth and eleventh centuries, I work with Carl Schmitt’s concept of *the Political* and *the political order* as revived and revisited in the critical discourse of the new left. The bulk of my discussion of Carl Schmitt and the Political, occurs in chapter 2 of this research, where I examine the historical background of Nāser-e Khosrow. In this study, I apply Schmitt’s concepts to the medieval Perso-Islamic history. I examine the formation of orthodoxy as a friend–enemy conflict that (re)politicised religion and literature during the late Ghaznavids and early Saljuqs. I will argue that, during the construction of orthodoxy in the eleventh century, ideological strategies were activated to justify and naturalise the growing antagonism of friend–enemy relations, so to transform politicised discourses into a sublime depoliticised realm.

Research Outline

This research has two introductory chapters. Chapter One starts with an analysis of the life of Nāser-e Khosrow as it has been narrated by himself followed by a discussion on his view on poetry and the way he criticised the court-poets and the dominant aesthetic regime of his time. This chapter aims to give some basic remarks as to the unorthodox and oppositional character of Nāser-e Khosrow. Chapter Two uses the concept of *The Political* to investigate the context in which such unconventional and challenging character shaped. The concept of *the political* sees politics as a domain of struggle and antagonism; therefore, it can give us the analytical tool for explaining the relationship between politics and *discursive struggles* during the time of Nāser-e Khosrow. I will examine the role of Abbasids, Ghaznavids and Saljuqs, and the Ismailis in the formation of the political during the time Nāser-e Khosrow. Nāser-e

Khosrow has criticised the Abbasid caliphs and their Turkic allies in Khorāsān with bold and harsh rhetoric on many occasions, while he praised the Ismaili Imam and prayed for the victory of the Fatimid state as the only legitimate and just political establishment that can bring justice and wisdom to people. Such a close engagement with the political necessitates a comprehensive analysis of the political during the time of Nāser-e Khosrow.

In chapters 3 and 4, I will discuss the theological resistance in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. In chapter 3, I will analyse Nāser-e Khosrow's view on the Oneness of God. By focusing on the unknowability God, Nāser-e Khosrow releases the ontological capacities of the theory of *Towhid* (Divine Oneness) and sets the proper discursive realm for introducing other radical and unorthodox doctrines. In chapter 4, I will focus on the notions of practice and free will, and Nāser-e Khosrow's resistance towards fatalism. While these two chapters analyse the intellectual and religious resistance of Nāser-e Khosrow in a conservative society, they indicate the significant components of Nāser-e Khosrow's theological thought which will help us to continue our critical investigation with regards to *the condition of temporality* and *the condition of endurance* in the next chapter. In chapter 5, my discussion is divided into two sections. First, I will focus on those common themes in the *Divan* which work to *sustain* the dominant order. I have categorised these themes under the term 'the condition of temporality', and they are as follows: *falak* (firmament), *zamāneh* (time) and *jahān* (the world). Then I will examine those religious and theosophical ideas that challenge the ruling power and threaten the stability and certainty of the ideological themes. These concepts represent 'the condition of endurance', and they are as follows: *kherad* (intellect), *dānesh* (knowledge), *sokhan* (speech) and *ta'vil* (esoteric interpretation).

At the end of the chapter, I will analyse these two aspects of Nāser-e Khosrow (temporality and endurance) as two different discourses. I will explain how they *position* two kinds of *subjects* and shape different *group formations*, while each of these discourses has its own function with regards to the political order. I will argue that ideology (*objective*) is reflected in Nāser-e Khosrow's formulation of the condition of temporality, while resistance occurs in the way he articulated the condition of endurance. I will study ideology as the undisputed field in the *Divan* which its content has been taken for granted by the poet, and its function is to solve the social contradictions by *postponing* the human emancipation to the metaphysical world. It works through a *chain of equivalence* between firmament, time and the material world. Such a chain of equivalence extends the idea of natural determinism and naturalises the socio-political contradictions some of which has been addressed by Nāser-e Khosrow himself. I will also

examine resistance as the process of re-defining the *floating signifiers* such as God, intellect, poetry and speech. I will argue that such redefinition and re-articulation of the floating signifiers helps Nāser-e Khosrow to threaten the stability and totality of the hegemonic discourse and the political order. I will conclude that the contradiction between the condition of temporality and the condition of endurance results in a kind of metaphysical solution in which the real contradictions are considered as the inevitable part of natural life and that the true liberation will take place in a metaphysical and otherworldly domain.

Research Contribution

This research hopes to be a pioneer in using modern discourse analysis for studying Persian classical poetry. It is one of the first studies of ideology in Persian classical literature that uses a specific research method and breaks away from the usual clichés and grand narratives in studying the premodern literary figures. It opens the field for discussing those topics that has been less studied in medieval literature, such as the representation of self, the dialogue between the literary tradition and philosophy in literature, and the political protest in premodern literature. This research contributes to the genealogy of major literary themes in Persian literature. The poetic themes identified and analysed in this research have been reformulated in the works of other poets. By articulating the concepts of *temporality* and *endurance* as two major literary subjects, this research offers an analytical model for historicising the way Iranian poets used different approaches to interpret the meaning of life, natural determinism, human's will, ethical responsibility, religion, and spiritual liberation.

Apart from contributions in theory and method, this research contributes to the ongoing debates on political Shiism from a broader perspective. By focusing on the history of the Fatimids and the poems of Nāser-e Khosrow, this research addresses the fundamental contradiction in Shiism, which occurs between its theological idealism and its historical and political experience. In this sense, this research will not give a depoliticised analysis of Ismaili theology. It does not see the Ismaili theological doctrine as a 'valuable cultural heritage' which must be analysed only within the history of religion and gnostic thoughts, dissociated from its political agenda. By discussing some of the contradictions that appear in Nāser-e Khosrow's ethical, political and religious ideas, this research hopes to pay his share in understanding the early political Shiism and its failure in changing the religious, aesthetic and political episteme of its time.

Chapter One:

The Narrative of Rejection: Discovering Nāser-e Khosrow

Introduction

The general aim of this chapter is to introduce and explain the unusual and distinctive character of Nāser-e Khosrow as a philosopher-poet. To this end, I will examine two subjects: 1) The life of Nāser-e Khosrow as it is represented through his self-narrative, 2) his views on poetry and literary aesthetics. My examination will take the form of narrative and discourse analysis, and it will focus on two critical texts, one is the introduction of *safarnāmeḥ* (Book of travels), and the other is *qasida* no. 242 of the *Divan*. I aim to show that the modern narrative of Nāser-e Khosrow's life is based on his desired narrative of himself. In this narrative, Nāser-e Khosrow depicts a symbolic picture of himself which works in line with other discursive aspects of his *Divan*. I will argue that Nāser-e Khosrow's autobiographical narrative must be seen not as a piece of historical evidence, but as a cultural text with different layers of meaning. In the second part of the chapter, I investigate the meaning of poetry in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* and the way he challenged the dominant literary and aesthetic discourse. My purpose in this section is to explain the relationship between knowledge and poetry in Nāser-e Khosrow's literary discourse, and the way he re-defines poetry through criticising the court poets and the common literary norms of his time.

The Life of Nāser-e Khosrow as a Cultural Text

The life of Persian literary figures has always been a dark area of study. Books known as *tazkereḥ* (Arabic: *tadhkira*),⁹⁵ as well as those about religious sects and creeds, are our primary sources for studying the life of medieval figures today. These texts are in many cases imprecise and unreliable, however, especially when it comes to those controversial figures who confronted the religious orthodoxy and disturbed the dominant cultural order of their time. These seemingly biographical reports, throughout history, developed as *cultural texts*. They have specific narrative structures and cultural codes that correspond with the discursive regime and power-relations of their time.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ "Tazkirah" is the term used in Persian and Turkish literature for a collection of lives, most frequently those of poets, but also of saints, sheikhs or calligraphers. A Tazkirah of poets gives a brief biography and examples of each author's work. Tazkirahs are one of the most important and widely expanded biographical works of literature. Tazkirahs as a considerable and inseparable part of manuscripts are of great interest and value in Persian Literature and they seem to be the only means of preserving and disseminating poetry and literary books over time and space.' See: Hossein Mottaghi-far, 'The Traditions of Persian "Tazkirah" Writing in the 18th & 19th Centuries and Some Special Hints' in *Advanced in Information Sciences and Service Sciences*, 2. 3 (2010), 111-17 (p. 111) <10.4156/ass.vol2.issue3.15>

⁹⁶ For a brief report on the different narratives written about the life of Nāser-e Khosrow in Persian *tazekereḥs*, see: Alice C Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw, The Ruby of Badakhshan: A Portrait of the Persian Poet, Traveller*

Two aspects of Nāser-e Khosrow's life played a significant role in making him an ideal case for *discursive appropriation* in different cultural texts. The first is his controversial religious ideas and his life as an Ismaili missionary, and the second is his being a poet, famous for his powerful religious and philosophical *qasidas*. But apart from his controversial life and the cultural impact of his works, Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative of himself has played a key role in such cultural presence. Narrating the self is an important aspect of Nāser-e Khosrow's literary works. His *Divan*, as Daniel Rafinejād has demonstrated, is highly 'self-referential'. Nāser-e Khosrow 'reveals a depth of emotion and an awareness of "self" in his *qasidas*.'⁹⁷

a) *Book of Travels*

One of the manifestations of such self-awareness is the narrative of his conversion to Ismailism. The story of Naser-e Khosrow's dream in the opening of his Book of Travels (*Safarnāmeḥ*) is an essential text and reveals some aspects of Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative of the self. The opening section of the Book of Travels implies that the intention behind Nāser-e Khosrow's journey was to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. He opens the book by giving the details of his name, family name, place of birth and place of residence. He then begins to narrate the story of his spiritual *awakening* by sharing some aspects of his life with his readers:

I was a clerk by profession and one of those in charge of the sultan's revenue service. In my administrative position I had applied myself for a period of time and acquired no small reputation among my peers. In the month of Rabi' II in the year 437 [October 1045], when the prince of Khorāsān was Abu Soleymān Chaghri Beg Dāud, son of Mikhā'il son of Saljuq, I set out from Marv on official business to the district of Panj Deh in Marv Rud, where I stopped off on the very day there happened to be a conjunction of Jupiter and the lunar node. As it is said that on that day God will grant any request made of him, I therefore withdrew into a corner and prayed two *rak'ats*, asking God to grant me true wealth. When I re-joined my friends and companions, one of them was reciting a poem in Persian. A particular line of poetry came into my head,

and Philosopher, pp. 17-32. And: Mohammad Dehqāni, *Nāser-e Khosrow-o Adabiyāt-e Irān (Nāser-e Khosrow and Persian Literature)*, pp. 20-28. Unfortunately, Hunsberger's chapter on the life of Nāser-e Khosrow in medieval biographies suffers from serious mistakes. For instance, she refers in the whole story of Nāser-e Khosrow's meeting with Kharāqāni to Beyzāvi's *Nezām ot-Tavārikh*, whereas there is no mention of Nāser-e Khosrow in that book. Mohammad-e Dehqāni has reported some of Hunsberger's mistakes in the introduction of his book. See: Dehqāni, 21-22.

⁹⁷ Daniel Rafinejad, "I Am a Mine of Golden Speech': Poetic Language and Self-Reference in Nasir-i Khusraw's Qasidas", in *Pearls of Persia; The Philosophical Poetry of Nasir-i Khusraw*, ed. by Alice C. Hunsberger (London: I.B. Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012), pp. 39-53 (p. 40).

and I wrote it down on a piece of paper for him to recite. I had not yet handed him the paper when he began to recite that very line! I took this to be a good omen and said to myself that God had granted my behest. From there I went to Juzjānān, where I stayed nearly a month and was constantly drunk on wine (the Prophet says, “tell the truth even if on your own selves”). One night in a dream I saw someone saying to me, “how long will you continue to drink of this wine, which destroys man’s intellect? If you were to stay sober, it would be better for you.” In reply I said, “the wise have not been able to come up with anything other than this to lessen the sorrow of this world.” “To be without one’s senses is nor repose,” he answered me. “he cannot be called wise who leads men to senselessness. Rather, one should seek out that which increases reason and wisdom.” “where can I find such a thing?” I asked. “Seek and ye shall find,” he said, and then he pointed toward *qebla* and said nothing more. When I woke, I remembered everything, which had truly made great impression on me. “You have waked from last night sleep,” I said to myself. “when are you going to wake from that of forty years?” And I reflected that until I changed all my ways, I would never find happiness.⁹⁸

Some scholars are not convinced as to the validity of Nāser-e Khosrow’s account of sudden awakening in the introduction of *Safarnāmeḥ*. Still, others, including Alice C. Hunsberger and Farhād Daftari, seem to have accepted the report. Given the philosophical character of Nāser-e Khosrow, it is rather strange that such a phenomenal scholar went through such a bold turning point so suddenly. To refine this somewhat unrealistic narrative, some scholars have argued that Nāser-e Khosrow may have been a Twelver Shi’ite before becoming an Ismaili.⁹⁹ Others have suggested that Nāser-e Khosrow was probably an Ismaili believer long before starting his journey.¹⁰⁰ As Henry Corbin states, it takes many years for a thinker such as Nāser-e Khosrow to know about Ismailism and study its sources and accept its doctrine. For Corbin, who had a distinctive gnostic and phenomenological understanding of Shi’ism, the controversial story of Nāser-e Khosrow’s dream must be seen through the symbols and codes inside the Ismaili

⁹⁸ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Book of Travels*, transl. by W. M. Thackston, Jr. (New York: The Persian Heritage Foundation, 1986), pp. 1-2.

⁹⁹ Among them is Vladimir Ivanov, who argues that Naser-e Khosrow was converted to Ismailism long before starting his journey, and he was probably a Twelver Shiite before being converted to Ismailism. The full account of his dream and the dramatic spiritual change, therefore, is nothing but a made-up story. Ivanov does not provide any convincing evidence to support his verdicts. See: Vladimir Ivanov, ‘Nāser Khosrow-o Esmā’iliyān (Nāser-e Khosrow and the Ismailis)’, in *Esmā’iliyān (The Ismailis)*, transl. by Ya’qub Ājand (Tehran: Mowla, 1984), pp. 416-20.

¹⁰⁰ Y. E. Bertels, *Nāser-e Khosrow-o Esmā’iliyān (Nāser-e Khosrow and the Ismailis)*, transl. by Yahyā Ārianpur, p. 176.

doctrine, that is the text of the dream must be read by means of a hermeneutical method, like the one Ismailis used to interpret religious texts to reveal their inner meaning. For instance, the drunk man can be the picture of the one who does not know the esoteric knowledge of religion. The Wise man can either be the Ismaili Imam or the Ismaili teacher who possesses esoteric knowledge, and the Qibla may very well be the capital of the Ismaili state in Cairo, or, the spiritual and Divine knowledge that must be found through the power of intellect.¹⁰¹

The above passage has been a key text for contemporary scholars to historicise Nāser-e Khosrow's life, presenting it as the beginning of his conversion to Ismailism. The fact is, however, that the entire process of Naser-e Khosrow's conversion to Ismailism remains unknown. Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* is structured and developed based on Ismaili concepts and didactic themes. His prose books are Ismaili in their approach to theological subjects. We can therefore be sure of the fact that nearly all of Naser-e Khosrow's works, including his poems, were written after his conversion to Ismailism. The existing historical evidence, however, is not enough to certify the year in which the Book of Travels was written. It might have been the case that Naser-e Khosrow's plan to visit Cairo and the Fatimid *dā'is* was made before starting his journey and that he kept the plan to himself since it was too risky to get into any contact with the Fatimids. It is also not known whether Naser-e Khosrow wrote any major work or poem before his conversion to the Ismaili faith. The famous introduction to *Safarnāme* (Book of Travels) might therefore be a literary narrative for specific didactic intentions, rather than a historical fact.

As Rashid Yāsemi has examined, Nāser-e Khosrow had his notes from his journey by the time he returned to Marv. He then decided to edit them and put them in the form of a book. These notes do not show any bold Ismaili theme. Although Nāser-e Khosrow's description of Cairo is quite captivating and reveals his enthusiasm about the city, the Book of Travels remains the most descriptive and discursively neutral work of Nāser-e Khosrow.¹⁰² The introduction, in particular, does not seem neutral, however, but has significant literary and discursive aspects. Nāser-e Khosrow probably added the introductory part while he was editing his notes. If we accept Rashid Yāsemi's argument that Nāser-e Khosrow wrote the introduction after his return

¹⁰¹ Henry Corbin, 'Nāser-e Khosrow and The Iranian Ismailism', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968-90), IV (1975), pp. 533-35.

¹⁰² See Rashid Yāsemi's preface to the Book of Travels in: Nāser-e Khosrow, *Safarname (Book of Travels)*, ed. by Rashid Yāsemi, pp. 27-31.

from Cairo,¹⁰³ then there had been a long interval between the time that the author began his journey and the time of editing the book. In other words, there is a considerable gap between the event (the author's dream) and narrating the event (the opening passage of the book). What remains certain beyond speculation, is that our access to reality, as the readers, is only through the author's narrative. The author is therefore controlling our perception of the event, and our knowledge is formed and mediated through the author's interpretation, his consciousness and his narrative strategies. Based on such discursive consciousness, the story of spiritual awakening at the beginning of the book represents Nāser-e Khosrow's desired narrative of himself. He tries to depict a picture of himself that serves his discursive intentions. One must therefore look at the introduction of the Book of Travels as a literary piece, which is open to different interpretations, and not as a historical record.

Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative of self follows six stages: 1) being part of the symbolic order, 2) the condition of senselessness and alienation, 3) seeking for prosperity and guidance, 4) experiencing the extraordinary, 5) receiving advice, 6) self-consciousness and redemption.

In the first stage, the subject has an ordinary life. He is an active part of the establishment (being a government official) and receives benefits from such privilege. He is living inside the symbolic order and within the ideological realm forced and exerted by the political power. In the second stage, the subject feels dissatisfied as a result of being in the prison of the routine and the symbolic order. He has not yet received guidance, however, and therefore begins to feel nihilistic about his existence and the world surrounding him (this provokes his resort to alcohol). In the next stage, the subject asks for real prosperity (*tavāngari-ye haqiqi*) so as to fight the condition of senselessness and discontent. In stage four, an unusual experience disturbs the routine and affects the condition of discontent and senselessness. Nāser-e Khosrow sees a minstrel (*rāvi*). He wants to give the minstrel a piece of poetry to sing, but suddenly the minstrel starts to recite the very poem before he receives it from Nāser-e Khosrow. Nāser-e Khosrow takes this miraculous coincidence as a divine sign that promises change. In the fifth stage, the subject receives guidance in a dream from the man of light. He advises Nāser-e Khosrow to seek the kind of truth which lasts forever, and engage his intellect instead of ruining it. In the final stage, the subject shows his determination to seek the truth. He is now conscious as to his state of ignorance and attempts to gain knowledge. He is no longer part of the establishment, nor desperate and dissatisfied. He sees a path before himself, with a promising

¹⁰³ Book of Travels in: Nāser-e Khosrow, *Safarname (Book of Travels)*, ed. by Rashid Yāsemi, p. 16

destination at its end. He is now determined, has self-discipline, and is committed to his moral and intellectual cause.

b) *Divan*

The same narrative structure appears in Nāser-e Khosrow's poems as well. In *qasida* no. 242, which is one of the most powerful *qasidas* in the *Divan*, Nāser-e Khosrow narrates the story of his conversion to Ismailism, but in the context of the moral and religious discourse of his *Divan*. This *qasida* has been one of the primary sources for studying Nāser-e Khosrow's life, and it gives some vital information such as the author's date of birth (AH 394 – CE 1004), and his age when he converted to Ismailism (42). The *qasida* has an introduction followed by narrative sections in which the poet tells the story of his quest for finding answers to his questions.

The introductory section in Nāser-e Khosrow's *qasidas* no longer begins with describing the beauties of nature or praising the king or the poet's patron as we often see in the Persian literary tradition. Nāser-e Khosrow chooses to change the formal and dominant narrative structure of *qasida* by beginning his *qasidas* with ethical and philosophical statements. These statements shape the central theme of the *Divan*, and they are usually about the transient and temporary nature of physical life and the worthlessness of worldly pleasures.¹⁰⁴ In this *qasida*, Nāser-e Khosrow places his autobiographical narrative in the context of this ethical and religious discourse. Such displacement gives a symbolic religious meaning to Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative of his life. In other words, Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative of himself turns into a discursive act in favour of his Ismaili ideas.

In the introduction of the *qasida* no. 242, Nāser-e Khosrow calls his addressee as the one who has searched around the world and learned from different sources of knowledge, but he is still bound to his natural existence:

ای خوانده بسی علم و جهان گشته سراسر
تو بر زمی و از برت این چرخ مدور¹⁰⁵

O you who has widely read and travelled around the world,
yet still living on this earth, and underneath this circling firmament,

¹⁰⁴ I will discuss these statements thoroughly in chapter 4 and 5 of this research.

¹⁰⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqeq and Mojtabā Minovi (Tehran: McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies in Cooperation with Tehran University, 1978), p. 505.

Then the poet invites his addressee to seek the ‘hidden knowledge’, since by possessing this knowledge, one would no longer suffer from the ‘circling firmament’:

این چرخ مُدَوّر چه خطر دارد زی تو
چون بهره‌ی خود یافتی از دانش مُضمّر؟

What harm this circling firmament would pose on you,
when you receive your share from the hidden knowledge?

تاکی تو به تن برخورداری از نعمت دنیا؟
یک چند به جان از نعم دانش برخوردار¹⁰⁶

Till when you will luxuriate your body of worldly pleasures?
Feed your soul, instead, from the blessings of knowledge.

Emphasising on the role of knowledge and enlightenment, Nāser-e Khosrow depicts two different subjects or characters: the one who is awake (*bidār*), and the one who is asleep (*khofteh*). The awoken one, for Nāser-e Khosrow, is the one who is not dependant on worldly and material pleasures, and the limitations of his natural existence (living in this world and within a physical body) will not affect his enlightened soul. On the other hand, the one who is asleep regards his natural existence as something eternal and sees material pleasures as ultimate entities. He is ignorant, and he degrades his soul by relying on worldly affairs:

بی‌سود بود هرچه خورد مردم در خواب
بیدار شناسد مزه‌ی منفعت و ضرر

The one who is asleep, only sees profit in eating and drinking,
it is the awoken one who can taste the real profit and recognise the true loss.

خفته چه خیر دارد از چرخ و کواکب؟
دادار چه رانده‌ست بر این گوی مُغَبَّر

What does the sleeping one know about stars and firmament,
or things the Almighty have brought upon this dusty sphere?

... با تشنگی و گرسنگی دارد محنت
سیری شمرد خیر و همه گرسنگی شر

[...] Being in need of food and drink: that is the only reason behind your pain,
Hunger is evil and satiation is good: that is all you understand of what’s good and what’s evil!

¹⁰⁶ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqeq and Mojtabā Minovi, pp. 505-06.

بیدار شو از خواب خوش، ای خفته‌ی چهل سال
بنگر که ز یارانت نماندند کس ایدر¹⁰⁷

Wake up from your forty-years sleep!
and see that of all the friends of your youth not one remains.

After setting the discursive framework of the narrative in the introduction, Nāser-e Khosrow starts his autobiographical narrative by giving his date of birth, and the process of growing up from infancy to adult age, when he could learn and speak through the power of his Speaking Soul. By the age of 42, his conscious soul begins to seek out wisdom. But the more he asks, the less he is satisfied. He is looking for a kind of knowledge which goes beyond the routine and enlightens the soul, the kind of knowledge which stands out as the unique and chosen one:

رسم فلک و گردش ایام و موالید
از دانا بشنیدیم و برخواند ز دفتر
چون یافتیم از هرکس بهتر تن خود را
گفتم: «ز همه خلق کسی باید بهتر:
چون باز ز مرغان و چو اشتر ز بهائم
چون نخل ز اشجار و چون یاقوت ز جوهر
چون فرقان از کتب و چو کعبه ز بناها
چون دل ز تن مردم و خورشید ز اختر»
ز اندیشه غمی گشت مرا جان به تفکر
ترسنده شد این نفس مفکر ز مفکر¹⁰⁸

‘[...] From the mouths of sages, or the pages of ancient books,
I heard of the Cosmos, of the whirl of Time.

[...] But I found myself superior to all around me, and

‘among all creatures’ (so I mused) ‘there must be one superior to others, like the falcon amongst all birds, a camel amongst all beasts of burden, the palm amongst the trees, the Quran among all books, the Kaaba amongst all houses, heart in the body, sun amongst stars.’

I wondered, and my soul was filled with grief, my meditations blasted with fear of all the objects of thought.’¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 506.

¹⁰⁸ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 508.

¹⁰⁹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson (Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy, 2015, reprinted), p. 5.

In search of such ideal and ultimate knowledge, Nāser-e Khosrow's starts his journey. Now he knows what he is looking for. He has recognised the gap by asking questions and reading the major sources of knowledge, but he finds the answers too common and uninspiring. He feels a deep sense of dissatisfaction as if he is bored with the normality of the cultural and religious sphere of his society. It is this sense of dissatisfaction and recognising the absence of an inspiring knowledge which motivate Nāser-e Khosrow to resent the normality and search for an alternative:

برخاستم از جای و سفر پیش گرفتم
 نز خانم یاد آمد و نز گلشن و منظر
 از پارسی و تازی و ز هندی و ز ترک
 وز سندی و رومی و ز عبری همه یکسر
 وز فلسفی و مانوی و صابی و دهری
 درخواستم این حاجت و پرسیدم بی مَر¹¹⁰

'... Then I arose
 and set out on my way, remembering
 neither my home nor past nor garden of roses.
 From Persian, Arab, Hindu, Turk and Jew,
 from the folk of Sind, from the Romans, from everyone
 I asked, I questioned, I pestered.'¹¹¹

The interesting point here is that Nāser-e Khosrow depicts himself as someone who had already developed a background or a mindset regarding an esoteric and gnostic approach towards religion, before setting out his journey to Cairo, the capital of the Ismaili state. In the narrative of this *qasida*, Nāser-e Khosrow searches into the dominant religious schools of his time. He particularly names the Shafi'i, Maliki, and Hanafi schools, to which he reached out and sought guidance and asked about the path of God and the one who is chosen by Him.¹¹² These are the major schools of the Sunni jurisprudence which, from Nāser-e Khosrow's point of view, have based their argument on the apparent and exoteric interpretations of the Quran and Hadith, with no attention to philosophical arguments or reasoning and rationalism. On many occasions in his *Divan*, Nāser-e Khosrow attacks these three schools in particular, and Sunni *faqih*s

¹¹⁰ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, pp. 510-11.

¹¹¹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson, pp. 6-7.

¹¹² See: Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 508.

(religious jurists) in general, accusing them of corruption and hypocrisy.¹¹³ For instance, in *qasida* no. 213, Nāser-e Khosrow regards the *faqihis* as ‘hypocrites’ (*zarq-forushān*) and ‘tricksters’ (*tazvir-garān*) who managed to take their position not because of their religious merits, but because of ‘bribe’ (*reshveh*). Therefore, Nāser-e Khosrow claims that when it comes to religious knowledge, there is no difference between the *faqihis* and the common people. According to Nāser-e Khosrow, these *faqihis* lack any knowledge or intellect (*bikherad*), and in fact, they deserve to be punished (*andar khor-e haddand*). He believes that these *faqihis* are deceiving the common people, and they are the reason behind the moral and intellectual decadence and degradation.¹¹⁴ In his autobiographical *qasida* that we are examining here (*qasida* No. 242), Nāser-e Khosrow mentions the scientific and intellectual incompetence of the *faqihis* as well:

هر یک به یکی راه دگر کرد اشارت
این سوی خُتن خواند مرا، آن سوی بربر
چون چون و چرا خواستم و آیت محکم
در عجز بیچیدند، این کور شد آن کر¹¹⁵

‘... and each one pointed me a different way, one to china, one to Africa.

When I asked for a reason, or for corroboration from the Quran,
they recoiled in helplessness, like blind men, like deaf men.’¹¹⁶

Later, he refers to the *faqihis* again, this time he particularly criticises them for their sharia-oriented approach and disregarding the importance of intellect (*‘aql*) in religion:

پرسنده همی رفتم از این شهر بدان شهر
جوینده همی گشتم از این بحر بدان برّ

I travelled from one city to another,
I crossed the lands and seas, seeking for an answer,

گفتند که «موضوع شریعت نه به عقل است،
زیرا که به شمشیر شد اسلام مُقَرَّر»

but all they could say was: ‘the Sharia has nothing to do with intellect, since Islam conquered by the power of sword’.

¹¹³ Mohammad Dehqāni has done a thorough examination regarding the position of the *faqihis* in Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan*. See: Mohammad Dehqāni, *Nāser-e Khosrow-o Adabiyāt-e Irān (Nāser-e Khosrow and Persian Literature)*, pp. 98-105.

¹¹⁴ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 447.

¹¹⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 508.

¹¹⁶ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson, p.5.

گفتم که «نماز از چه بر اطفال و مجانین
واجب نشود تا نشود عقل، مُجَبَّر»

I challenged their argument by saying: ‘In Islam, praying is not mandatory for children and insane people, till their intellect becomes mature’.

تقلید نپذیرفتم و حجت ننهفتم
زیرا که نشد حق به تقلید مُشَهَّر¹¹⁷

I decided not to imitate, I did not hide my proof,
Since God cannot be known by imitation.

So far, Nāser-e Khosrow has established the proper context for the next stage of the narrative. He has identified the kind of knowledge which stands out among other discourses. The knowledge which is based on intellect and reasoning; it revives the religious wisdom, and elevates the soul above the daily routine. It is Cairo, the capital of the Fatimids, where he finally finds his lost wisdom. The utopian description of Cairo in this *qasida* resembles the one in *Safarnāmeḥ*. Nāser-e Khosrow does not name the city, which adds to the symbolic meaning of his autobiographic narrative:

روزی برسیدم به در شهری کان را
اجرام فلک بنده بد، افلاک مُسَخَّر
شهری که همه باغ پر از سرو و پر از گل
دیوار زمرد همه و خاک مشجر
صحراش منقش همه مانندهی دیبا
آبش عسل صافی مانندهی کوثر
شهری که در او نیست جز از فضل منالی
باغی که در او نیست جز از عقل صنوبر
شهری که درو دیبا پوشند حکیمان
نه تافتهی ماده و نه بافتهی نر
شهری که من آنجا برسیدم خردم گفت
«اینجا بطلب حاجت و زین منزل مگذر»¹¹⁸

‘Then one day I reached those city gates
Where angles are servants, where planets and stars are slaves,
A garden of roses and pines girded round with wall
of emerald and jasper trees, set

¹¹⁷ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 510.

¹¹⁸ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, pp. 510-11.

in a desert of gold-embroidered silk, its springs
 sweet as honey, the river of paradise.
 (A city which its gardens are all of virtue,
 and its trees are all of intellect)
 [...] A city whose sages
 wear brocaded robes woven of silk (that is made not by human) ...
 And here, before these gates, my reason spoke:
 'here, within these walls, find what you seek
 and do not leave without it.'¹¹⁹

The utopian city represents wealth and excessive material beauty, things that Nāser-e Khosrow usually rejects in his *Divan*. The beauty of the city is compared to that of paradise described in the Quran. But again, we must remember that the descriptions of paradise in the Quran have been the subject of esoteric interpretations among the Ismaili intellectuals. However, as if Nāser-e Khosrow is aware of such contradiction, he adds that these beautiful gardens represent virtue (*fazl*) and intellect (‘*aql*’). In other words, we are not dealing with real gardens and trees. The beauty of this city is not about colourful gardens and houses, although these things may very well be the case. The ‘true’ beauty and grandeur of the city is due to its virtuous and wise people. As we will see in this research, this is a common rhetorical strategy in Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan*. On many occasions, Nāser-e Khosrow uses a kind of simile in which the objective and natural phenomenon is compared to a subjective concept or vice versa. Such comparison aims to emphasise on the subjective rather than the objective. Sometimes natural elements such as the four seasons, or animals such as birds or beasts metaphorically refer to philosophical subjects or moral characteristics. In other cases, philosophical concepts and ethical virtues are compared with a natural phenomenon; a path from the tangible and sensual, which is *gardens* and *trees* in our case, to sublime ethical and religious concepts, like *virtue* and *intellect* in this case. One of the reasons Nāser-e Khosrow employs this rhetorical strategy is to persuade his readers since by comparing the subjective and idealistic concepts with the objective and natural world, those concepts become more comprehensible and realistic for public readers. Moreover, comparing the aspects of the natural world with metaphysical concepts reminds us of the Ismaili esoteric approach and the idea of *bāten* (the

¹¹⁹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson, pp. 6-7. The sections added in the brackets are translated by the author.

esoteric meaning). Based on this doctrine, the Ismailis interpreted the natural and physical signs in the Quran as manifestations of esoteric wisdom or knowledge.¹²⁰

In line with such rhetorical strategy, the city which represents the Ismaili utopia becomes the home of highly admired and well-respected intellectuals and scholars. Even in describing these ‘sages’, Nāser-e Khosrow is fully aware of holding on with his transcendental approach to rhetorical devices. The brocaded robes that these sages are wearing are not woven by human as Nāser-e Khosrow emphasises. Therefore, we learn that the silk robe mentioned in the poem is different from those we see in courts and among the elites. *Diba* or the precious silk, while it can refer to the high and well-respected position of these sages, it can also be a metaphor for their intellect and knowledge. In other words, Nāser-e Khosrow suggests that in this city, the criterion for being noble and virtuous is knowledge and spiritual wisdom, not wealth or power.

One of these sages who guides Nāser-e Khosrow is symbolically regarded as ‘the guardian of the city gates.’ He is believed to be the prominent Ismaili scholar, missionary and poet, al-Mo’ayyad fed-Din al-Shirāzi (1000 CE/390 AH – 1078 CE/470 AH) who happened to be at Cairo by the time Nāser-e Khosrow reached there.¹²¹ The characteristics of this ‘guardian’ remind us of the spiritual man in *Safarnāmeḥ* who appeared in Nāser-e Khosrow’s dream and showed him the right path. Now, it is as if this time Nāser-e Khosrow has met the wiseman in reality. He appears as a physician (*tabīb*) who has the right medicine (*darū*) for Nāser-e Khosrow’s disease (*ellat*). *Physician* here can be a metaphor for the Ismaili theologian, and *medicine* for the Ismaili knowledge, which is considered as divine. *Disease* can refer to Nāser-e Khosrow’s religious and philosophical questions. Most of these questions are addressed in Nāser-e Khosrow’s works, and we will discuss some of them in this research; questions about God and creation, cause and effect, the meaning of sharia laws, sufferings and injustices, the reason for sending prophets, and free will and predestination.

Then the guide promises he will answer all the questions with poof and proper reasoning, but first, he should promise that he will stay silent while he is receiving the knowledge, and Nāser-e Khosrow accepts the guide’s request. By the end of his meetings, Nāser-e Khosrow is reborn and enlightened. These powerful lines explain the degree of the impression he received from his meetings with the Ismaili guide:

چون علت ز ایل شد، بگشاد ز بانم

¹²⁰ *Ta’vil* or the esoteric interpretation has been discussed in chapter 5 of this research.

¹²¹ Dehqāni, pp. 38-42.

مانند مُعصفر شد رخسار مُز عفر
 چون سنگ بدم، هستم امروز چو یاقوت
 چون خاک بدم، هستم امروز چو عنبر
 دریا بشنیدی که برون آید از آتش؟
 روبه بشنیدی که شود هم‌چون غضنفر؟
 خورشید تواند که یاقوت کند از سنگ
 کز دست طبایع نشود نیز مُغیر
 یاقوت منم اینک و خورشید من آن‌کس
 کز نور وی این عالم تاری شود انور¹²²

‘[...] my ailment disappeared, my tongue became
 imbued with eloquent speech; my face, which had
 been pale as saffron now grew rosy with joy;
 I who had been a stone was now a ruby;
 I had been dust - now I was ambergris.
 He put my hand into the Prophets hand,
 I spoke the Oath beneath that exalted Tree
 so heavy with fruit, so sweet with cooling shade.
 Have you ever heard of a sea which flows from fire?
 Have you ever seen a fox become a lion?
 The sun can transmute a pebble, which even the hand
 of Nature can never change, into a gem.
 I am that precious stone, my Sun is he
 by whose rays this tenebrous world is filled with light.’¹²³

These lines demonstrate that for Nāser-e Khosrow, the matter goes beyond finding answers or learning a knowledge. It is about freedom and breaking away from the alienated routine life he had back at home. It is more do to with experiencing a different state of being, a different way of life which involves intellectual engagement and political dedication. In the lines that follow, Nāser-e Khosrow uses these similes for the guide’s knowledge and his words:

- Shining like the sun and stars
- The source of life like the circling firmaments
- Like dew drops on daffodils and Buxus

¹²² Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, pp. 514.

¹²³ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson, p. 8.

- Like a wind that blows on lilies
- Like the union of lovers
- Fruitful like the clouds during the spring
- Holy and miraculous like the breath of Jesus Christ¹²⁴

These similes are following the discourse of healing, redemption, enlightenment and rebirth. In these discourses, we have a journey from ignorance to wisdom with the help from a spiritual and religious source. This spiritual source is unique but hidden. Only those who seek emancipation and enlightenment can find it. The Ismaili sage in this qasida is depicted as the saviour of Nāser-e Khosrow's soul. The peace and spiritual revival accompany the wisdom that the guide offers. In other words, the experience of visiting Cairo and meeting with the Ismaili scholar, for Nāser-e Khosrow, was not limited to religion or knowledge. Nāser-e Khosrow probably had a kind of preliminary knowledge about the Ismaili movement before setting out his journey. Here, it is the spiritual experience which turned Nāser-e Khosrow's visit into a life-changing event. This rhetoric is in contrast with the rhetoric of seeking and searching that we saw earlier in the narrative. In the previous stage, Nāser-e Khosrow was a scholar who refused to 'imitate' the dominant discourse. He condemned those who blindly accept what the religious authorities tell them. He also condemned those scholars who give their opinion without listening to the arguments of their opponents. Throughout the qasida and up to this point, he depicted himself as the one who would not be convinced easily, someone who does a thorough investigation before accepting an argument. However, at this stage, we see a sudden shift from the discourse of 'searching and investigation' to the discourse of 'redemption, enlightenment and liberation'. The meeting between Nāser-e Khosrow and the Ismaili scholar does not take the form of a dialogue in which both sides are active in developing an argument. The Ismaili guide asks Nāser-e Khosrow to remain silent, and by the end of the meetings, Nāser-e Khosrow regards himself as a liberated man.

The *qasida* ends with Nāser-e Khosrow's admiration of the Ismaili guide and his payers for him.

c) The Modern Narrative

Our knowledge of Nāser-e Khosrow's life is based on his desired narrative of himself. This desired narrative has formed after Nāser-e Khosrow's conversion to Ismailism and in the

¹²⁴ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, pp. 513-14.

context of his missionary and didactic works. In other words, he used his narrative in favour of the Ismaili discourse for his missionary purposes. That is why the autobiographic pieces, especially in *Safarnāmeḥ* and *Divan*, are encoded with the Ismaili cultural codes, as I tried to discuss in this chapter. However, from these autobiographic pieces, we can articulate a modern and seemingly ‘scientific’ narrative which is supposed to be ‘neutral’ and ‘objective’. The narrative that we usually observe in modern studies on Nāser-e Khosrow follows these three parts: 1) Nāser-e Khosrow was born in 1004 in the town of Qobādiyān, in the province of Khorāsān, from a notable family. He was a well-respected member of his community and had an administrative position at the court of the Ghaznavids and then the Saljuqs. 2) When he was around 40, as a result of a spiritual awakening, he started a quest to find spiritual and religious wisdom, which led him to his conversion to the Ismaili Shiism, the most powerful oppositional movement at that time. 3) After he came back to Marv as the head of the missionaries in Khorāsān, he started to advertise the Ismaili doctrine and attract followers. But he met with strong resistance from the zealous Sunnis. He was forced to leave his home and family and had to spend the rest of his life in exile.

The modern narrative of the ‘life of Nāser-e Khosrow’ can be informative, and it gives us a general background as to his character, but it does not reveal its dependency on Nāser-e Khosrow’s narrative of himself. It forgets the fact that Nāser-e Khosrow’s narrative, based on which the modern biographical account forms itself, is highly biased and working in favour of a specific discourse. But if we take Nāser-e Khosrow’s self-narrative as a cultural text, by analysing its narrative and rhetorical strategies, we would be able to identify those aspects of Nāser-e Khosrow’s life which made him an important figure in Persian literature. In my discussion of Nāser-e Khosrow’s narrative of himself, I tried to open up the field for such critical analysis.

d) The Political Significance of Nāser-e Khosrow’s Narrative of the Self

Now, what we can learn from Nāser-e Khosrow’s narrative of himself with regards to the subject of ideology and resistance? First, the narrative starts with rejecting the existing normality. This rejection contains not only the religious discourse but the political order and social relations as well. Nāser-e Khosrow depicts a picture of alienated social life and a community which suffers from moral and intellectual decadence. Through expressing his hopelessness and dissatisfaction with current religious debates, Nāser-e Khosrow shows the deficiency he has identified in the knowledge of religious authorities, especially the Sunni

jurisprudence. I discussed that for Nāser-e Khosrow, this deficiency goes beyond religious knowledge, and it connects with corruption in the political establishment. For Nāser-e Khosrow, the religious knowledge has been reduced to mere formalities, ritualised gestures, and hypocritical statements, so that the corrupted *faqih*s can hold their illegitimate positions in the political establishment. According to Nāser-e Khosrow, this has resulted in the degradation of the ‘human soul’ and ethical decadence among the people of Khorāsān. In the next step, seeking the real wisdom is a search for an alternative not only for the religious discourse but for the political establishment as well. Nāser-e Khosrow is not looking for a mystical, depoliticised enlightenment or a kind of ascetic life as we may find among the Sufis at that time. His search for an alternative goes far beyond personal needs, and it considers the political order and public culture.

Any search for an alternative regime of truth is a political act since it identifies itself as opposed to its otherness. That is why Nāser-e Khosrow’s narrative of himself is not about psychological redemption or spiritual peace only; it is a political protest as well since it depicts a subject who rejects the dominant discourse and relocates himself as an outsider. Here, Nāser-e Khosrow identifies himself as the privileged subject who owns a hidden knowledge, and therefore, he stands above the common-sense and dominant norms. It is through claiming such privilege that Nāser-e Khosrow distinguishes himself from the *avām* (common people). On so many occasions in his *Divan*, Nāser-e Khosrow accuses the common people of being obsessed with worldly desires and not caring for wisdom or a virtuous life.¹²⁵ In one *qasida*, Nāser-e Khosrow calls the common people as ‘deaf and blind herds of sheep’ (*rameh-ye kur-o kar*), because they do not have a consciousness of their own and see their short-term benefits only. According to Nāser-e Khosrow, these people resemble their rulers, whom he calls ‘demons’, since like their rulers they are obsessed with wealth; they are corrupted, and they refuse to elevate their soul with knowledge.¹²⁶ Such harsh literature against ordinary people is part of the negation of the current situation in Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan*. In the dark picture that Nāser-e Khosrow depicts, people, religious authorities, and rulers are all sharing an equal part in bringing degradation and decadence to Khorāsān.

¹²⁵ Dehqāni, pp. 76-80

¹²⁶ See *qasida* No. 201: Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 425.

The Poetics of Commitment: Poetry and Knowledge in Nāser-e Khosrow's Literary Criticism

In the introduction chapter, I mentioned the relationship between the literary tradition and poetry in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. Here, my focus is to discuss those aspects which separate Nāser-e Khosrow from his predecessors. I aim to show how Nāser-e Khosrow redefined poetry through criticising the court poets of his time, and what political implications such redefinition might have in the context of political antagonisms of his time.

One of the important subjects in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, is poetry and literary practice. On many occasions, Nāser-e Khosrow criticises the way poetry has been understood and practiced among court poets and the literati. Such criticism forms in the context of his political negation of the current situation. This criticism mainly aims at the court poets, but on some occasions, it considers other poetic subjects including lyrical poetry and literary genres such as *ghazal* and *qasida*. In *qasida* no. 64, known as 'The Blue Firmament' (*qasideh-ye charkh-e nilufari*), Nāser-e Khosrow reveals some of his views on poetry, including the relationship between poetry and knowledge:

نگر نشمری ای برادر گزاره به دانش دبیری و، نه شاعری را
که این پیشه‌هاست نیکو نهاده مرالفغن نعمت ایدری را
دگرگونه راهی و علمیست دیگر مرالفغن راحت آن سری را¹²⁷

Be aware not to count poetry and secretarial skills as knowledge,
as these professions are suitable for worldly needs only.
There is a different way, a different kind of knowledge,
for achieving the otherworldly comfort

Here, Nāser-e Khosrow approaches the subject of poetry from his theoretical and 'scientific' point of view. He classifies the sciences of his time as it was common among Muslim scholars. However, in this seemingly 'scientific' approach, discursive biases are highly at work to reposition the poetry according to the poet's Ismaili ideas. In his classification, Nāser-e Khosrow puts the dichotomy of worldly/otherworldly as the main criterion for evaluating the sciences of his time. In this framework, poetry is considered as a secondary profession which is designed for worldly life and its pleasures.

¹²⁷ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 142-43.

Nāser-e Khosrow's scientific approach towards poetry and *dabiri* (secretarial skills) very much resembles the classification of sciences in the *Rasā'el-e Ekhvān al-Safā* (Epistles of the Brethren of Purity). *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* is one of the most important encyclopaedic texts in the history of Islamic culture which is written in the 10th century. The authors of the *Epistles* are believed to be Shi'ite scholars and scientists, and since there are strong elements of Gnosticism and Neoplatonism in the articles of *Rasā'el*, it is highly probable that the authors were under the influence of the Ismailis. As Jan Richard Netton argues:

Strangely enough, in their two lists of sects and their chapter on doctrines and religions, the Ikhwan do not mention the Isma'ilis though many other diverse sects such as the Qadariyya and the Sabaeans of Harran do appear. Yet it was the Isma'ili sect, perhaps more than any other, which had the most profound effect on the structure and vocabulary of the Ikhwan.¹²⁸

In *Rasā'el*'s classification of sciences, poetry and linguistic sciences such as prosody and grammar are identified as *adab* (the sciences of education), and they are categorised under the propaedeutic or training sciences (*'ilm al-riyazat*). However, what distinguishes the *Rasā'el*'s approach compared with other classifications in the Islamic philosophy, is that the propaedeutic sciences is regarded as a set of secondary sciences 'which have been set up mainly for the quest of subsistence and the goodness of the living in this world'.¹²⁹ Therefore, according to *Rasā'el*, these training sciences must be distinguished from those which are about the salvation of the Soul, such as religion and philosophy. However, this does not mean that poetry and literature do not have any benefits for human or they must be avoided. They are rather regarded as 'prerequisite sciences.'¹³⁰ But being prerequisite implies that poetry as knowledge has a marginal and secondary position when it comes to religion and philosophy.

In Nāser-e Khosrow's discourse we are observing the same approach, although it seems he is emphasising on poetry and secretarial skills as professions rather than branches of knowledge. He mentions *shā'eri* (being a poet, practicing poetry) rather than *she'r* (poetry). This might imply that Nāser-e Khosrow is aiming at the official representatives of the art of poetry rather than poetry itself. However, through such criticism, Nāser-e Khosrow challenges the dominant

¹²⁸ Ian Richard Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the thought of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhvān al-Safā')*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 96.

¹²⁹ Godefroid de Callataÿ, *The Classification of the Sciences according to the Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa* <<https://www.iis.ac.uk/classification-sciences-according-rasa-il-ikhwan-al-safa>> [accessed 4 August 2020]

¹³⁰ Godefroid de Callataÿ, *The Classification of the Sciences according to the Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa* <<https://www.iis.ac.uk/classification-sciences-according-rasa-il-ikhwan-al-safa>> [accessed 4 August 2020]

literary discourse of his time, which included the way the art of poetry has been understood and practiced.

If we put the above lines from the *qasida* no. 64 in the context of Nāser-e Khosrow's criticism of the court poets, then we can argue that these lines are more about the professional and official poets during the time of Nāser-e Khosrow and the way these poets defined the nature and function of poetry. In the following lines from *qasida* no. 26, Nāser-e Khosrow criticises the professional poets who regard their work as *honar* (accomplishment, art) and *elm* (knowledge):

فخر چه داری به غزل‌های نغز	در صفت روی بتِ سَعْتَری
این نئود فضل و، نیابی بدین	جز که فرومایگی و چاکری
فخر بدانت بدانی که چیست	علت این گنبد نیلوفری
مدح و دبیری و غزل را نگر	علم نخوانی و هنر نشمری
دفتربفگن که سوی مرد علم	بی‌خطر است آن سخن دفتری ¹³¹

What's the pride in writing elegant ghazals about the beauty of your beloved?

What's the virtue in writing romantic poems? nothing but humiliation and embarrassment.

The true virtue is the knowledge you gain about the cause of this blue firmament.

Panegyrics, secretaryship and ghazals: Be aware not to take these things as knowledge nor accomplishment.

Throw away your office works and your book of poems,
since for the man of science, these writings are worthless.

And in the *Blue Firmament Qasida* (*qasida* no. 64), he repeats the same topic:

صفت چند گویی به شمشاد و لاله	رخ چون مه و زلفک عنبری را؟
به علم و به گوهر کنی مدحت آن را	که مایه‌ست مر جهل و بدگوهری را
پسند است با زهد عمار و بوذر	کند مدح محمود، مر عنصری را؟
من آنم که در پای خوکان نریزم	مر این قیمتی دُر لفظ دری را ¹³²

[O you Poet!] For how long will you continue attributing to Buxus or the tulip,

a face like the moon and curly ambergris-scented locks?

With knowledge and jewels of words you praise someone,
who is the essence of ignorance and evil.

Is it laudable when Unsuri praises Mahmud of Ghazni,
instead of praising Ammar and Abuzar for their devotion?

I am the one who will not cast,

¹³¹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 56.

¹³² Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, pp. 143.

beneath the hooves of swine, this invaluable pearl of the Persian language.

Based on the above samples, we can argue that Nāser-e Khosrow is challenging the whole concept of poetry and the dominant aesthetic discourse of his time. In both samples, the addressee is a court poet or an official literato. They are reminded of the ‘fact’ that poetry cannot be regarded as a branch of knowledge; therefore, it cannot be considered as the criterion for intellectual and artistic achievement. Here, Nāser-e Khosrow ties ethical criticism with literary criticism brilliantly.

One ethical aspect of his criticism deals with the hypocrisy of the official poets. According to Nāser-e Khosrow, this group of people do not contribute to any branch of knowledge, nor do they elevate the moralities of their communities, yet, they overstate their accomplishment and misrepresent their achievements. What they do in their works, does not go anywhere beyond exhibiting rhetorical and linguistic techniques. And when it comes to content or meaning, describing material manifestations such as beautiful beloveds or natural phenomenon is all these official poets can offer. In Nāser-e Khosrow’s view, not only these subjects are devoid of any knowledge or wisdom, they provoke the obsession with worldly pleasures. That is why in Nāser-e Khosrow’s criticism of the current situation, poets too share a part in bringing moral and intellectual degradation to Khorāsān, along with the rulers and *faqih*s.

Another ethical aspect of Nāser-e Khosrow’s criticism is when he aims at the court poets because of their panegyrics for the Turkic kings. For Nāser-e Khosrow, praising amirs and sultans are unethical due to three reasons. One is that these panegyrics are written for the sake of money, power and wealth. They reveal the corrupted competition among poets, and they have nothing to do with moral virtues or wisdom. Two is that kings and sultans are not morally and intellectually qualified to be celebrated, and praising someone who has no ethical or religious merit is unethical. Three is that the rule of Turks is illegitimate and unjust. For Nāser-e Khosrow, the Ghaznavid and Saljuq kings are the usurpers of power. They have brought misery and poverty, and they have degraded the position of religion in Khorāsān. Therefore, to praise these kings in the form of panegyric is morally wrong and against the religion, and the one who celebrates and flatters these illegitimate rulers is part of the corrupted, illegitimate and tyrannical system. Here, Nāser-e Khosrow mentions the name of the famous court poet, Unsuri (Onsori) (died 1039-1040) and his patron, the Ghaznavid king, Mahmud (971-1030), which makes his criticism more radical and concrete. Unsuri was probably the most famous poet of his time, known for his panegyrics and *qasidas*. He can be regarded as the representative of the

literary and aesthetic standards of his time. Even Nāser-e Khosrow takes Unsuri poems as a criterion for literary assessment when he boasts about his poetic and literary skills.¹³³ On the other hand, Mahmud was famous for his anti-Ismaili and pro-Caliphate policies in Khorāsān. By mentioning these two names alongside each other, Nāser-e Khosrow gives a political meaning to his literary criticism. He puts the literary norms and poetic aesthetics of his time alongside the political establishment and recognises the ideological function of poetry, especially the romantic and court poetry in his society. In my view, such recognition is one of the unique achievements of Nāser-e Khosrow which can be regarded as a new chapter in the history of medieval literary criticism in Persian literature.

But if Nāser-e Khosrow is against poetry, how he justifies his own work as a poet? To find this answer, we must look for the literary alternative that Nāser-e Khosrow articulates in his *Divan*. One way to find this alternative is to read the above samples in reverse. That is, instead of focusing on its negative side, we must look for the positive side of his argument. The result of such interpretation can be summarised as follows: Poetry, by itself, cannot be regarded as knowledge. It remains as a hobby; a secondary practice for worldly pleasures unless it becomes a medium for transferring the knowledge. It is the knowledge which stands above the poetry and not vice versa. Therefore, poetry for the one who seeks knowledge and wisdom must be didactic and it must contain some intellectual value. It must elevate and enlighten one's soul and activate one's power of intellect. Here, poetry becomes philosophy or *hekmat* (wisdom). It serves moral virtues and reflects major philosophical and theological discourses. The substance of poetry, therefore, is the meaning (*ma'ni*) and form or utterance (*lafz*) is merely a cover. Poetry (*she'r*) no longer stands on its own, nor being a poet (*shā'er*) as a profession has any credit of its own. Poetry must become knowledge, and the poet must turn into a *hakim* (philosopher). Therefore, a philosopher can choose poetry as a tool for educating his readers, just as he might explain his arguments in a book in prose. For Nāser-e Khosrow, there is no difference between poetry and prose, as far as knowledge is concerned.

As a result of this didactic approach, *hekmat* (wisdom- philosophy) and *hakim* (wiseman- philosopher) become the main *nodal points* in Nāser-e Khosrow's poetics. On so many occasions, he has regarded his poetry as *hekmat*,¹³⁴ and defined *hakim* as someone opposed to the court-poet:

¹³³ See my argument under the section 'Literary Tradition' in the Introduction chapter.

¹³⁴ See qasida No. 19 of the *Divan*: Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, pp. 39-40.

حکیم آن است کاو از شاه نندیشد، نه آن نادان
که شه را شعر گوید تا مگر چیزیش فرماید¹³⁵

Hakim is the one who is not afraid of any king, contrary to that ignorant poet, who flatters the king for the sake of a reward.

It can be argued that Nāser-e Khosrow tries to turn poetry from a mere linguistic and rhetorical practice to a philosophical and religious tool. In other words, he is not against poetry as a craft or art, as long as it is in the service of religious and ethical wisdom. It is poetry devoid of wisdom and knowledge which stands as the subject of his literary criticism, not poetry as a whole.

Conclusion

Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative of his conversion to Ismailism and his views on poetry are two important factors for understanding his unorthodox and controversial character. Nāser-e Khosrow narrates the story of his life within the discourse of redemption and enlightenment. The main nodal points in this discourse are based on the concepts of illness and healing, seeking and finding, and darkness and light. In this narrative, he rejects the routine and normalised way of life, the religious orthodoxy and its authorities, the 'corrupted' and 'illegitimate' political establishment, and even the common people whom he believes have lost their intellect, their sense of agency, and their moral responsibility. This rejection is followed by the search for an alternative. This alternative contains a new discourse which offers a new perspective and a new regime of truth. It stands against the pre-existing and dominant regime. As a result of receiving the new 'knowledge', Nāser-e Khosrow gains a new vision which illuminates his path and releases his power of speech. As a result of such enlightenment, Nāser-e Khosrow depicts a new subjective position for himself. He is now a privileged scholar, with an enlightened soul who stands above the ordinary people and against the dominant regime in Khorāsān. He is now recognised as an outsider, a figure who represents the other, but in his own view, he is now the saviour of lost souls, a man whose speech is full of knowledge and wisdom.

This new knowledge affects Nāser-e Khosrow's perception of poetry and the poet. Court poetry, lyricism and romantic poetry are all considered worthless as they are devoid of knowledge. In his reformulation of poetry, Nāser-e Khosrow argues that poetry, in itself,

¹³⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqeq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 40

cannot be regarded as knowledge, and in order to become knowledge, it must transform itself from its routine use in society to becoming part of wisdom. Wisdom or *hekmat* refers to those sciences that illuminate the soul, that is, religion and philosophy. For Nāser-e Khosrow, poetry must be the carrier of *hekmat* (wisdom) and the poet, first and foremost, must be a *hakim* (philosopher). The political significance of Nāser-e Khosrow's literary discourse lies in his criticism of romance and court poetry, in which he challenges the dominant aesthetic discourse and the dominant mode of literary production (producing poetry under the patronage of the king). For Nāser-e Khosrow, producing poetry inside the court of the kings in the form of panegyrics or love poetry is unethical and unlawful for three reasons. One is that it is for the sake of money and position; therefore, it is involved with worldly affairs. Two is that its subject is not religion, philosophy, or moralities, but mundane and decadent issues. Three is that it justifies the illegitimate rule of the Turkic kings and their corruption and tyranny.

In the next chapter, I will explain the historical context of the political antagonism which we have observed its manifestation in Nāser-e Khosrow's literary criticism and his symbolic narrative of himself.

Chapter Two:

The Formation of the Political: Situating Nāser-e Khosrow

Introduction

Nāser-e Khosrow was born in 1004 when the Ghaznavids were at the peak of their power and stability under Mahmoud of Ghazni (971-1030), the first Turkic *sultan* who established the Ghaznavid rule from Transoxiana to central parts of Iran and the northwest regions of the Indian subcontinent. Taking power from the Sāmānid *amirs*, who were of Persian ancestry and had a troubled relationship with Baghdad, Mahmoud renewed the political–religious coalition with Baghdad to secure his kingship over the Iranian lands. He projected himself as a devout Sunni Muslim and demonstrated a tendency towards the Karrāmiyyeh, a Sunni religious sect in Khorāsān, known for believing in literalism (accepting the apparent meaning of verses of the Quran, without question) as well as anthropomorphism (attributing human traits to God), two major principles against which Nāser-e Khosrow radically argued and wrote extensively.¹³⁶

When Nāser-e Khosrow was 32 (year 1036), Imam Al-Mostanser (1029-1094), the caliph of the Fatimids, the first Ismaili state in Cairo, commenced his reign. During Al-Mostanser's sixty years of Imamate, the Ismaili state flourished and became very powerful, posing a major threat to Baghdad as the symbol of orthodox Islam. The Fatimids organised an extensive underground network of Ismaili missionaries from the Levant to the Greater Khorāsān. A year later, Toghrol, the Saljuq general, invaded Marv and declared himself the king, putting an end to the reign of the Ghaznavids in Khorāsān. In 1063, when Naser-e Khosrow had already started his missionary life after coming back from his long and seemingly life-changing journey, Alp Arslan (1029-1072), one of the founding kings of the Saljuq Empire came to the throne. During his reign, the Saljuqs' political, religious and economic order was shaped under the supervision of his capable *Vazir*, Khājah Nezām al-Molk-e Tusi (1018-1092). The final years that Nāser-e Khosrow spent in Yamgān coincided with the early years of Soltān Malekshāh's reign (1072-1092), another key figure of the Saljuqs, under whose kingship the Saljuq Empire continued to expand, becoming at the same time more controlling in its religious policies.

Nāser-e Khosrow was the inheritor of the cultural heritage of the Sāmānids, and at the same time, he observed the gradual change in cultural and religious policies which began under the rule of the Ghaznavids. From the cultural point of view, he was attached to the Persian tradition which was established during the time of the Sāmānid amirs and paved the way for the emergence of epoch-making works in literature, philosophy, science and religion. Moreover,

¹³⁶ See chapter 3 of this research.

Nāser-e Khosrow became a vital contributor to the religious–political movement, which, at the time, was the most powerful opposition to orthodoxy and its political manifestation, the Baghdad Caliphate. It was at this time that both the Turks and the Fatimids exhibited an increasing interest in Iranian lands.

Three important factors therefore determine Nāser-e Khosrow’s historical position. The first is the Persian literary tradition, the second is the transformation of religious and cultural policies during the Ghaznavids, and the third is the Ismaili movement. In this chapter, I will focus on the last two factors, namely the Ismaili movement, and the transformation of politics in the period between the fall of Sāmānids and the rise of Saljuqs. Analysing the aspects and outcomes of this transformation is a crucial step in distinguishing *the ideological* and *resistance* in Nāser-e Khosrow’s poetry. To discuss this transformation, I will use Carl Schmitt’s concepts of *the political* and *the political order*. These concepts, in my view, can explain the relationship between power and stability during the above-mentioned period. By applying Schmitt’s concepts, I aim to show how the dominant political authority made intense efforts to establish firm religious dogmas to homogenise the inevitable differences and diversities. This process of homogenisation, I will argue, helped the ruling government to secure its power and maintain social order and stability. However, by the end of the chapter, I will argue that the Caliphs and the Turkic rulers never succeed to establish a full-fledged homogenised *political order* with a totalised *political identity*, and that they were always in a state of *negotiation* and *struggle* with their political others, including different Sunni law schools, theological schools such as Ash’arites and Mu’tazilites, the Ismailis and other Shiite groups.

The Political: Growing Conflict and Identifying Self and Other

Carl Schmitt’s¹³⁷ support of National Socialism in Germany and his ideological affiliation with Nazis have been addressed by many scholars.¹³⁸ Undoubtedly, his criticism of political liberalism and parliamentary democracy served the fascist ideology but, in spite of his moral flaws and his support for National Socialism, Schmitt’s analysis of political presuppositions in the liberal constitutional system, particularly the concepts of *the political* and *sovereignty*, have a significant critical value. In recent decades, some of Schmitt’s ideas have been revisited by

¹³⁷ 1888-1985.

¹³⁸ See: Vinx Lars, ‘Carl Schmitt’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2019 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/schmitt/>> [accessed 15 January 2020]

leftist thinkers to criticise the modern ‘post-political’ society.¹³⁹ In this chapter, however, I apply Schmitt’s concepts to medieval Perso-Islamic history. I examine the formation of orthodoxy as a friend–enemy conflict that (re)politicised religion and literature during the late Ghaznavids and early Saljuqs. In its application of Schmitt’s concepts, this research follows the approach taken by the new left scholars in re-interpreting Schmitt’s ideas.

The main issue which concerned Carl Schmitt in his political writings is the question of *order* in human communities: how it is achieved, by which circumstances it is formed, how it is sustained, and what kind of human relations it underlies. The concept of the political seeks to criticise the categorised, clichéd and *depoliticised* understanding of politics in the liberalist discourse, where politics is reduced to institutions like state or political parties. Schmitt uses the concept of the political to analyse the function of those disciplines or social institutions which *obscure* the nature of their political action by naturalising their interests and *hiding* the ‘traps, tactics, skills and intrigues and manipulations’ by which these institutions and disciplines present themselves as non-political and neutral.¹⁴⁰ In the following passage, Schmitt criticises the state = politics equation. He tries to draw our attention to those realms which appear to be non-political, but, in fact, are the subjects of politics:

One seldom finds a clear definition of the political. The word is most frequently used negatively, in contrast to various other ideas, for example in such antitheses as politics and economy, politics and morality, politics and law; and within law there is again politics and civil law, and so forth. [...] In one way or another “political” is generally juxtaposed to “state” or at least is brought into relation with it. The state thus appears as something political, the political as something pertaining to the state – obviously an unsatisfactory circle. [...] The equation state = politics becomes erroneous and deceptive at exactly the moment when state and society penetrate each other. What had been up to that point affairs of state become thereby social matters, and, vice versa, what had been purely social matters become affairs of state. [...] Heretofore ostensibly neutral domains—religion, culture, education, the economy—then cease to be neutral in the sense that they do not pertain to state and to politics. As a polemical concept against such neutralisations and de-politicisations of important domains appears the total state, which potentially embraces every domain. This results in the identity of state

¹³⁹ For the revival of Schmitt thoughts in the contemporary leftist discourse, see: Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt* (London and New York: Verso, 1999).

¹⁴⁰ Montserrat Herrero, *The Political Discourse of Carl Schmitt; A Mystic of Order* (London and New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015), p. 98.

and society. In such a state, therefore, everything is at least potentially political, and in referring to the state it is no longer possible to assert for it a specifically political characteristic.¹⁴¹

Here, further to the de-politicisation and neutralisation of what is political, Schmitt emphasises the negative outcomes of the common *categorisation* in contemporary thought which defines *politics* as an independent discipline to be differentiated from economics, religion, law and aesthetics. Such a *scientific* form of categorisation implies that other realms of human science have nothing to do with politics, and politics has its own independent ground and material.¹⁴² Another problem of this *liberal* way of defining politics, according to Schmitt, is that politics does not define itself based on a concrete historical situation. The particularity of each political situation, as well as changes in the formation of political discourse in a given historical period are among Schmitt's main concerns when discussing the concept of the political. He looks for a definition of politics which is valid for every political situation, while it can refer to a concrete historical situation.¹⁴³ Schmitt, therefore, suggests a criterion for investigating what he calls *the political*, and not *the politics*:

The political must therefore rest on its own ultimate distinctions, to which all action with a specifically political meaning can be traced. Let us assume that in the realm of morality the final distinctions are between good and evil, in aesthetics beautiful and ugly, in economics profitable and unprofitable. The question then is whether there is also a special distinction which can serve as a simple criterion of the political and of what it consists. The nature of such a political distinction is surely different from that of those others. It is independent of them and as such can speak clearly for itself. The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy.¹⁴⁴

Schmitt distinguishes *the friend–enemy relationship* as the criterion through which to identify and explain the political. The concept of the political, therefore, finds three aspects. The first is that it is a societal activity. It concerns a group of people living within a specific social order. The second is that it deals with a certain *politics of relating* in which ‘an extremely intense

¹⁴¹ Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 20-22.

¹⁴² Schmitt, p. 23.

¹⁴³ Herrero, pp. 97-99.

¹⁴⁴ Schmitt, p. 26.

union or separation between human groups' occurs.¹⁴⁵ The third is that 'the friend–enemy relationship is a principle that is independent of others and characterises action by pointing to a quality that is different from what the other distinctions allude to'.¹⁴⁶

Having articulated the friend–enemy relationship as the main factor of the political, Schmitt then explains how those areas that seem non-political, due to their contribution to the friend–enemy relationship, can be very well political. According to Schmitt, the degree to which religious, ethical and aesthetic discourses construct the other and intensify the friend–enemy relationship, determines their political nature:

Every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other antithesis transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy. [...] A religious community which wages wars against members of other religious communities or engages in other wars is already more than a religious community; it is a political entity.¹⁴⁷

One might challenge Schmitt's theory by saying that religion or culture are political by nature and they do not *become* political at some point. It seems that, for Schmitt, however, it is the process of politicisation that matters most, and how in a specific historical circumstance, religion, aesthetics or ethics, can be (re)politicised. We must not forget that Schmitt originally articulated the concept of the political in order to contest a discourse that seeks to depoliticise what is political, and present as neutral what is biased. On the other hand, saying that religions, or any cultural production, are political by nature is an over-generalised and non-historical statement, devoid of any analytical function. In my view, Schmitt's theory provides a coherent analytical framework in which one can examine how, and under what circumstances, discursive practices can become political.

A politicised community, according to Schmitt, is a community of increasing and intensifying conflict, a community in which *the politics of relating* based on unity and enmity is highly at work, always seeking boundaries where the division between *us and them* or *self and other* become apparent. If any of the distinctions between good and evil, beautiful and ugly, truth and not-truth, or heresy and belief lead to grouping people into friend–enemy, then that discourse is political further to being ethical, aesthetic, philosophical or religious.

¹⁴⁵ Herrero, p. 98.

¹⁴⁶ Herrero, p. 100.

¹⁴⁷ Schmitt, p. 37.

a) The Political and the Ideological

In a politicised condition, that is, in a condition in which defining the legitimate self / friend is highly dependent on defining the illegitimate other / enemy, seemingly neutral and general terms and concepts can become ‘political weapons, for those who know how to use them, for those who know who the enemy is’.¹⁴⁸ Concepts such as righteous life, purity, redemption, faith, God’s will, true religion, peace and stability, can therefore all be employed to nourish the friend–enemy antagonism.¹⁴⁹ This is where the theory of ideology and the concept of the political find a common ground, since ideology is also about naturalising and neutralising what is not natural or neutral. The critique of ideology is therefore indispensably connected to the analysis of the political, as what activates ideological strategies depends on the state of the friend–enemy relation in society. As the friend–enemy antagonism grows, ideology activates itself to justify and legitimise the growing conflict. Ideology conceals the formation of the friend–enemy antagonism, it depoliticises what is political, and therefore it intensifies the friend–enemy antagonism. Thus, there is a mutual relationship between the function of ideology (or ‘the ideological’) and the political. The political needs to eternalise its definition of friend and enemy, so as to represent itself as something either rational or divine. Grouping people into friend or enemy, which is the attempt of the political power (sovereignty) to establish itself, is, with the help of ideological strategies, represented as something metaphysical or inevitable. The need of the political to seem convincing and justifying, necessitates the work of ideology.

b) The Political Order: Managing the Conflict and Institutionalising the Self

The political order occurs when the friend–enemy relation reaches its most extreme stage, and that is when the danger of war and physical annihilation is at hand, the critical point which Schmitt calls *exception*. This is the point that requires the *decision* of the *sovereign* to solve the crisis of the friend–enemy antagonism and form a *political unit* based on the concordance between *identity* and *representation*.

¹⁴⁸ Herrero, p. 103.

¹⁴⁹ I am using the word ‘antagonism’ here, following the leftist interpretation of Schmitt’s concept of the political. According to Slavoj Žižek, the friend–enemy dichotomy is not about external enemies or inner social antagonisms; rather, it is about ‘the unconditional primacy of the inherent antagonism as constitutive of the political’. See: Slavoj Žižek, ‘Carl Schmitt in the Age of Post-Politics’ in *The Challenges of Carl Schmitt*, ed. by Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1999), pp. 18-37, p. 29.

The words that I have emphasised in italic font above define the main factors of *the political order* and can be used to explain how ‘in passing from disorder and conflict to order’¹⁵⁰ instability and unity appear politically. These key words are widely discussed, not in the *Concept of the Political*, but in Schmitt’s other works, such as *The Political Theology* and *Constitutional Theory*. Although these subjects are mostly presented with regards to modern constitutional states and on the basis of modern nation-state relations, I argue that, with some modification, they can be used to analyse the formation of the political and political order during early medieval Iran so as to respond to the research questions of this study. Whilst, one must not disregard the fact that the above-mentioned concepts have been produced in the context of politics and politics of culture in the twentieth century, it is possible to argue that most of them display qualities that, with some modification, remain valid in different historical and geographical contexts. This is also reflected in the fact that Schmitt himself often referred to classical states and medieval European societies in order to expand on his theoretical concepts.

Exception, according to Schmitt, is a situation in which the current legal norms and regulations meet an unforeseen circumstance which they fail to explain or solve, thus making them *ineffective*. *Exception* is the moment of suspension of the ‘entire legal order’ when the normality and ordinariness of discourse is ‘interrupted,’ which can lead to a total destruction of political establishment and society if it is not ‘restored’ with the sovereign’s decision.¹⁵¹

The emergence of exception calls for the ‘reinstatement of norm’,¹⁵² a new legal order by which the current political regime can manage and resolve the conflict between friend and enemy. This is the point when the *sovereign* emerges. ‘The sovereign is he who decides on exception and who, with his decision, restores normality’.¹⁵³ The sovereign’s decision ends the suspension of the ‘existing legal order’ and re-establishes a ‘concrete order’.¹⁵⁴ The value and legitimacy of the sovereign comes from the ‘realization of that action and his figure does not exist apart from it; therefore, it is closely related to the concrete order that it aims to create’.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Herrero, p. 119.

¹⁵¹ Herrero, pp. 88-89.

¹⁵² Herrero, p. 89.

¹⁵³ Herrero, p. 90.

¹⁵⁴ Herrero, p. 119.

¹⁵⁵ Herrero, p. 120.

The sovereign's decision 'frames all statute,'¹⁵⁶ as Herrero puts it, 'ultimately, whoever can ensure peace and security is sovereign, that is, whoever can impose himself is sovereign'.¹⁵⁷

Another important term which is associated with the concept of the political order is *political unity*. Political unity appears when the dialectic or contradiction between *identity* and *representation* ends. In modern society, 'the subject of identity is a people and the subject of representation a state'.¹⁵⁸ Identity and representation are the basis for any political establishment, and no political unity can be achieved without the presence of both.

There are different political unities which might have different subjects of identity and representation, as Schmitt himself gives the example of the Catholic church:

The church represents Christ himself and takes his place in the historical presence through the sacraments. This assumes a real representation to the extent that access to Christ, once he left this realm, is only possible through the church.¹⁵⁹

Representation, therefore, is about the 'personification' and 'visibility' of the political unit.¹⁶⁰ Identity is the constructive core of every political establishment that achieves enough power to establish a political order; however, this power cannot become concrete and practical unless it is represented by a representative, which is the sovereign. It is the representative who forms the political unit by materialising and activating the political identity.

A political unit is the result of the unity of identity and representation, of managing to institutionalise and establish a specific and well-defined political identity which can be formed under the name of a specific social group, figure or religion. Representing a political identity is possible only through a public sphere, since every 'exercise of power' has to be public, not private.¹⁶¹ It is also made possible through a representative, a sovereign, someone who is able to act in an exceptional situation, above the existing legal norms. The sovereign has the power to enforce the political identity, making it visible through new and restored legal and discursive norms as well as social institutions, since it is the identity that matters not the constitution.

The political order occurs with the emergence of a sovereign who can make a group of people, or a religious sect, politically powerful, bringing it out from the darkness of negativity and

¹⁵⁶ Herrero, p. 120.

¹⁵⁷ Herrero, p. 120.

¹⁵⁸ Herrero, p. 80.

¹⁵⁹ Herrero, p. 81.

¹⁶⁰ Herrero, p. 80.

¹⁶¹ Herrero, p. 81.

invisibility to the light of positivity and visibility.¹⁶² This is the ‘exceptional activity’ of the sovereign that occurs at the time of intensified conflict between friend and enemy. By representing a homogenised political identity of a people, the sovereign identifies the enemy, and in case of conflict, makes the decision as to whether to confront the enemy by force. To maintain the political order, the sovereign has to maintain a relationship based on ‘protection’ and ‘obedience’ with his subjects.¹⁶³ This relationship is at the core of any political order, so that when homogenous political identity is threatened by an enemy, the sovereign can count on the lives of his subjects. As Herrero has put it, ‘a religious community, for example, may require its members to die for faith, but not for the religious community itself’.¹⁶⁴

The political order is the sovereign’s ability to govern and secure normality by putting an end to that increasing conflict between the self and the other which has caused the suspense and interruption of social and political norms. The political order occurs when the established political system gains hegemony and political influence over its people and its territory. The political order seeks to overcome disorder and instability, ending the uncertainty in the representation of the political identity. Within a political order, politicised signs and discourses find a fixed domain and manifest themselves through different institutions such as religious schools and mosques, as well as literary productions in court.

c) Political Order and Ideology

I have already discussed that during the stage of the formation of the political, ideological strategies are activated to justify and naturalise the growing antagonism of friend–enemy relations so as to transform politicised discourses into a sublime depoliticised realm. With the formation of the political, ideology is no longer limited to some discursive strategies. At this stage, ideological categories become embedded in all major realms of cultural production and define the limits and condition of every cultural activity. The representation of identity brings ideology into social institutions, social rituals and cultural discourses. The formation of political order forms the ‘general ideology’, the fundamental ideological category that defines major values and beliefs. From general ideology, aesthetic, religious and political ideologies emerge and become materialised in certain apparatuses.¹⁶⁵ This produces an ideological

¹⁶² Herrero, pp. 84-85.

¹⁶³ Herrero, p. 123.

¹⁶⁴ Herrero, p. 123.

¹⁶⁵ Terry Eagleton used the term General Ideology (GI) in his book *Criticism and Ideology*, to distinguish those major ideological statements which act as a source for the formation of other ideological categories, such as Aesthetic Ideology (AI) and Authorial Ideology (AuI). See: Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology; A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London and New York: Verso, 2006), p. 54.

superstructure that works to preserve the state of normality and stability. The political order is the order of the ideological as well. With stability and visibility in the ideological strata of the established sovereignty, resistance finds less space to manoeuvre freely and thus seeks to function in less politically perilous realms.

The Political and Political Order in Iran: From the Ghaznavids to the Saljuqs

a) The Abbasid Caliphate

When the Abbasids came to power in 750 as an oppositional political force after the Umayyads, their succession first brought hopes of more liberal and tolerant policies, as well as a fairer attitude towards *Mavāli*.¹⁶⁶ They promised that they would bring back the golden age of the Caliphate in Medina, known as the period of *Kholafā-ye Rāshedin (Rashidun)*, which was considered the ideal Islamic governance based on the Quran and the Prophet's tradition (*sonnat*). The reference to this ideal age was even directly included in the inauguration speech of the first Abbasid caliph, al-Saffāh.¹⁶⁷ As Hugh Kennedy demonstrates, the historical facts suggest that, before coming to power, the Abbasids relied on radical ideas coming from the *Imamate* doctrine, in which realising the Islamic values stated in the Quran and *Sonnat* had become a political demand in the context of a perception that what had been practised by the Omayyad caliphs was not representative of Islamic ideals.¹⁶⁸ The adherents of the *Imamate* branch of political Islam argued that Islamic values and principles can only be established

¹⁶⁶ *Mavāli* (Arabic: *mawālī*) is the plural form of 'mowla' in Arabic, which can mean both client (*bandeh*) and patron (*mālek*). In the Arabic tradition, it signifies a specific form of clientage, or patronage between a client and his patron in a tribal unit. In the historical context of our discussion, however, *mavāli* refers to those non-Arab people who converted to Islam, including Persians, Indians, Turks, Kurds and Egyptians. It was used to explain the relationship between the non-Arab converts and their new Arab patrons as the result of the Islamic conquests, so that the non-Arab converts can be distinguished from the Arabs with a tribal background. *Mavāli* in Islamic historiography also testifies to those non-Arab Muslims who contributed to Islamic civilisation in philosophy, science and art. In the early Islamic centuries, *mavāli* gained a political significance that became important in both the Abbasid and Shi'ite movements, as both groups tried to gain a social foothold by showing pro-*mavāli* affections. On many occasions, Persian and Iraqi *mavāli* joined one or other of these movements, seeking for justice, social and economic reforms as well as more share in political power. This was mostly the result of the pro-Arab and anti-*mavāli* policies of the caliphate that reached their most discriminative stage during the Umayyads. For a thorough and comprehensive study on *mavāli*, see Monique Bernards and John Nawas (ed.), *Patronage and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005). A useful study on the continuation of tribalism in the Islamic era and the change in the meaning and function of *mavāli* from the pre-Islamic Arab tribal society to the Islamic caliphate can be found in: Jamal Jawdah, *The Socio-Economic Situation of Mavāli in the Early Islamic Period (Owza-e Ejtema'i Siyāsi-ye Mavāli dar Sadr-e Eslām)*, Persian trans. By Mostafā Jabbāri and Moslem Zamāni (Tehran: Ney, 2003), pp. 19-92.

For the situation of *mavāli* at the dawn of the Abbasid Caliphate see Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 35-37.

¹⁶⁷ Roy Mottahede, 'The Abbasid Caliphate in Iran', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968-91), IV (1975).

¹⁶⁸ Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 40.

through a member of the Prophet's family. Since such a task was only possible through *interpreting* the Quran, the Imam was supposed to have a divine knowledge which enabled him to have access to the true meaning of the Quran. The idea of *giving back* the power (*dowlat*) from usurpers to the lawful rulers (descendants of the Prophet Mohammad) was therefore the central political motto of those who believed in the Imamate after the prophet's death.

It was not long after its establishment that the Islamic territory under the Abbasids came to be divided into local emirates and states.¹⁶⁹ The fact is that the Islamic Empire continued to face issues in maintaining its political and religious (= ideological) hegemony over the conquered lands. Facing rebellions in every corner of the Islamic Empire,¹⁷⁰ the constant discontent of various communities and the growing threat of oppressed unorthodox religious groups, particularly the Shiites, led to recurrent crisis of political unity and ideological order, until the caliphate degenerated into a corrupt institution and 'a mere formality'.¹⁷¹

The history of the Abbasids, as far as the formation of the political and ideology are concerned, can be divided into two historical stages. The first stage started with the establishment of the caliphate in 749 and finished with the unsolved crisis of political power, ideological hegemony and disintegration towards the end of the tenth century. During this period, the Abbasid Caliphs had a powerful political force and administration, but were unsuccessful in setting up an orthodoxy, or a religious propaganda. Although the main tendency was towards Sunni and the Ash'arite doctrine, this preference did not lead to the establishment of a *political identity* and its institutionalisation.

This was mainly due to the nature of the Abbasid's claim to political power and the way they fought for it. Unlike their Umayyad predecessors, the Abbasids did not build their empire by relying on tribal or regional ties. Being a subterranean oppositional organisation, just like their future Ismaili nemesis, the Abbasids sought to gain the trust and the sympathies of the *mavāli*

¹⁶⁹ Ann K. S. Lambton, *State and Government in Islam; An Introduction to the Study of the Islamic Political Theory: The Jurists (Dowlat-o Hokumat dar Eslam)*, Persian trans. by Mohammad Mehdi Faqih (Tehran: Shafi'i, 2010), pp. 147-8.

¹⁷⁰ Among these rebellions, the revolts of Behāfarid, Ostād Sis and Sandbād were of Persian and anti-Arab backgrounds. Gholāmhossein Sadiqi has done a well-researched study on each of these revolts. See: Gholāmhossein Sadiqi, *Iranian Religious Movements during 8th and 9th centuries (Jonbesh-hāy-e Dini-ye Irani dar Qarn-e Dovom-o Sevom-e Hejri)*, (Tehran: Pājang, 1991). Also, for a historical and geographical reports of revolt and instability in Iranian lands during the Abbasids, see Richard Frye, *The Golden Age of Persia (Asr-e Zarrin-e Farhang-e Iran)*, Persian trans. by Masoud Rajabnia (Tehran: Soroush, 1984), pp. 131-137.

¹⁷¹ Amir Hasan Sadiqi, *Caliphate and Kingship in Medieval Persia* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1942), p.1.

and the Arabs of southern Iraq who were dissatisfied with the Umayyads' exploitative and racial policies:

The Abbasid revolution had been conducted on behalf of an imam whose name remained hidden until its final stages, and it therefore raised hopes even among non-Muslim peoples, who were affected by the expectation of a universal savior which had become widespread at the end of the Umayyad period. Forces which had despaired of a change of regimes during the seventy years of Umayyad rule were encouraged by the revolution to come into the open.¹⁷²

Unlike the Umayyads, who relied on Syrian Arabs, the Abbasids shaped their political agency upon the claim of upholding Islamic values and ideals. This purported united Islamic society based on justice, piety and virtuous deeds was to gather both the Sunnis and Shi'is under a tolerant Islamic state that promised to uphold the wellbeing of the Muslims, regardless of their denominations. This was definitely promising, especially for those oppressed *mavāli* for whom these promises were a pleasant reminder of the liberating ideas of Islam. Such an idealist and revolutionary discourse met with contradictions and conflicts inside the Empire as soon as the Abbasids came to power, however. As Roy Mottahedeh puts it:

The Abbasids were less successful ideologically during their first empire, when they ruled a larger territory and were much more formidable to their enemies, than they were in the revived empire of the 3rd/9th century. There had been an internal contradiction in the ideology of the Abbasid state from the beginning: the empire was to be based on the unity of all Muslims, not an extension of power by a relatively homogeneous group like the Syrian Arabs... From the beginning, circumstances forced the Abbasids to make choices which caused parts of the Islamic community to feel excluded from participation in their rule. They had to choose between the religious groups which had brought them to power: the Hashimiyya, the Shi'is and the anti-Umayyad Sunnis. They chose the Sunnis but were never completely successful in convincing the Sunnis that their interest and that of the Abbasids was the same.¹⁷³

The case of the Abbasids, in my opinion, explains the necessity during the formation of the political order of shifting from general and inclusive values to a focus on the particular benefits that can be offered to specific groups of people. Discursive exclusion, constructing the other

¹⁷² Roy Mottahedeh, 'The Abbasid Caliphate in Iran', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, IV, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968-91), IV (1975), p. 63.

¹⁷³ Roy Mottahedeh, pp. 87-88.

and dividing social groups into antagonistic categories are some of the inevitable results of maintaining political power. Representing a specific identity upon which the political power can activate and materialise itself depends on the social hegemony of each of the active social/religious groups rather than the idealistic and revolutionary discourse with which a political establishment has introduced itself. The transition from inclusive and revolutionary ideals to the particular interests of the dominant ruling class was first discussed by Karl Marx in the context of his class analysis:

for each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to present its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones. The class making a revolution comes forward from the very start, if only because it is opposed to a class, not as a class but as the representative of the whole of society, as the whole mass of society confronting the one ruling class. It can do this because initially its interest really is as yet mostly connected with the common interest of all other non-ruling classes, because under the pressure of hitherto existing conditions its interest has not yet been able to develop as the particular interest of a particular class. Its victory, therefore, benefits also many individuals of other classes which are not winning a dominant position, but only insofar as it now enables these individuals to raise themselves into the ruling class.¹⁷⁴

The struggle for a homogenised political identity, therefore, is what identifies the early stage of the Abbasids. Their revolutionary ideals to which the mavāli, Shi'ites, 'Alids and non-Muslims had been attracted, soon turned to a totalised political identity under the Sunni discourse which cared only for the survival of the Abbasid family. A short glance at the history of the early Abbasid caliphs clearly shows the outcomes of such a struggle for political security and order: al-Mansour, the second Abbasid caliph ordered the killing of Abu Moslem of Khorāsān, the key military figure and the Abbasids' ally whose role in bringing the Abbasids into power was undeniable. As Mottahedeh argues:

Abu Muslim's importance as the living link between the emerging central government and the province from which it drew its military manpower and its most fervent

¹⁷⁴ Karl Marx and Frederik Engels, 'The German Ideology', in *Marx and Engels Collected works, volume 5* (Lawrence & Wishart Electric Book, 2010), pp. 60-61.

adherents was now made apparent by the long series of revolts in Khurasan which followed his execution.¹⁷⁵

The Persian religious revolts of Sanbād and Ostād Sis were among the revolts caused by the execution of Abu Moslem. It is obvious that the caliph made this decision due to Abu Moslem's increasing power, both in the Iranian provinces and in Iraq, a power which made Abu Moslem a potential rival, threatening the caliph's power and influence.¹⁷⁶ The same is the case for the execution and imprisonment of the Barmakids during the caliphate of Haroun ar-Rashid, who was in fact raised under their tutelage. Coming from a *Dehqan* background from Balkh, the Barmakids shaped the administrative and bureaucratic system of the Abbasid empire based on the Sassanid system of ministry.¹⁷⁷ Like Abu Moslem, the Barmakids represented the importance of Khorāsān and its people to the Abbasids' claim to legitimacy and political power.

The Khorasanians and Alids (including the Shi'ite groups) continued to pose problems for the political stability of the Abbasids. During their early period, the Abbasids tried all kinds of policies regarding the Alids and Shi'ite groups whom they feared as their 'would-be' masters, as Hugh Kennedy has pointed out.¹⁷⁸ The question of the legitimate ruler from the prophet's family remained in the political sphere thanks to the Alids and Shi'ites. This was considered a constant threat for the Abbasids, involving them in a continual struggle to remain legitimate according to their revolutionary political discourse. The influence of Iranian / Khorasanian parties, such as the Barmakids, also added to the Abbasids fear of losing power; therefore, they always had to seek a political balance between these two groups, while keeping the Iraqis and the Syrians satisfied.

The second stage of the Abbasid Caliphate began with the rise of the Ghaznavids to power in Khorāsān and reached its pinnacle during the Saljuqs. This is the period of the caliphate's revival, albeit mostly in the ideological and symbolic realm, since the power of the caliph remained dependent on the Turkish sultans. Due to the Turks' urgent need for political legitimacy after they had established their military superiority, the Sunni doctrine, as opposed to Shi'ism, along with Ash'arism, as opposed to Mu'tazilism, became the defining poles of identity in shaping the political. Once Sunni Islam became the means for achieving political

¹⁷⁵ Roy Mottahedeh, p. 64.

¹⁷⁶ Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 51.

¹⁷⁷ Roy Mottahedeh, pp. 70-71. Also: Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, pp. 115-129.

¹⁷⁸ Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate*, p. 50.

hegemony, a process of discursive *exclusion* started in which the narratives of the Sunni doctrine were accepted as representing the *true* Islamic faith.

This arrangement was beneficial to both sides as the Abbasid caliphs had been longing for such an opportunity to guarantee their security given the decades of internal battles and corruption, as well as being threatened by the Shi'ite movements. Moreover, being subordinate to Turkish generals and Buyid Amirs had endangered the spiritual significance of the institution of the caliphate. This urgent need from both sides led to a new phase in the relationship between the kingship and the caliphate in Iran. The new relationship, which was more like a bond or coalition, had important outcomes for the formation of the political and the symbolic cultural order of the Turkic rule in Iran. In this second stage, the Abbasids finally reached the position of ruling a distinct religious orthodoxy with the help of Turkic kings whose relationship with Islam was more do to with accepting the major principles of Islam, obeying the Sharia and spreading the Islamic faith across the neighbouring lands rather than seeing Islam as an intellectual source of spiritually significant and liberating ideas. The fact is, one cannot be sure whether their religious zeal and anti-Mu'tazili tendencies had religious grounds or was merely for political intentions. As Edmond Bosworth argues, most of Mahmud's and Mas'oud's claims for protecting or promoting the Islamic faith were merely excuses to cover their financial or political and imperialist intentions.¹⁷⁹

In understanding this stage of the Abbasid Caliphate, it is important to highlight the differences between the Sāmānids, the Ghaznavids and the Saljuqs in their approach to Sunni Islam and their relationships with Baghdad.

b) The Local Governments in Iran

Coming from the middle class of *Dehqāns* (landlords) in Khorāsān, the Sāmānids were also faithful Sunni Muslims. They were among those *Dehqāns* who achieved the trust of the new Arab governors after the invasion of Iran by helping them on numerous occasions against rebels until they became the rulers of the Northern part of Khorāsān and of Transoxiana.¹⁸⁰ Such close ties with the Caliphate remained intact during their reign over the eastern part of Iran. In one instance, Amir Esmā'il-e Sāmāni helped the caliph al-Mo'tamed against the Saffārids of

¹⁷⁹ Clifford Edmond Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids* (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh Press, 1963), pp. 52-54.

¹⁸⁰ Richard Frye, 'The Sāmānids', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968-91), IV (1975), pp. 136-137. Also see A.C.S Peacock, *Medieval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Bal'amī's Tārikhnāma* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 15.

Sistān.¹⁸¹ It is interesting to compare the battles of the Sāmānid Amirs against the Saffārids with those of the Ghaznavids against the Buyids, since both the Saffārids and the Buyids were the Caliphate's enemies, fighting against the Caliphs in their territories. It was therefore not surprising that both the Sāmānids and the Ghaznavids received the political support of Baghdad, nor that they welcomed this support, since it gave their rule religious legitimacy. In both cases, the Sāmānids' and the Ghaznavids' battles against the enemies of the caliphate and their conquering of new territories entailed grand territorial and financial gains for them which were hidden behind religious excuses. Compared with the Ghaznavids, however, the Sāmānids did not have major imperialist plans for territorial extension, since most of their energy was spent securing their borders against the raids of the Turks of Central Asia. They made huge efforts to protect the Muslim missionaries who travelled through the steppes, calling people to convert to Islam.¹⁸² This policy later helped the easy penetration of Turks into the Sāmānid territories and accelerated the fall of the Sāmānids, since, according to Sharia law, they were no longer considered the enemy once they became Muslim and accordingly people did not support the Sāmānid amirs in their fighting against the now Muslim Turks.¹⁸³ Richard Frye argues that the increasing influence of the Turks in the Samanian state was mainly due to their practical function as slaves in the army and that they were more trustworthy than the Persian *dehqāns* for the Sāmānid amirs.¹⁸⁴

The Sāmānids' establishment of Persian as the official language of their court was perhaps the most important cultural event in the period, a development which became possible due to the wisdom and hard work of their *vazirs*, Bal'ami and Jeyhāni.¹⁸⁵ The thriving of Persian culture and literature during the reign of the Sāmānids reveals the social power and the influential presence of Persian in Khorāsān and Transoxiana as the cultural pre-condition in which the Sāmānids found themselves establishing their rule. The promotion of the Persian language and its use as the official language of the court shows how such a powerful presence inevitably became a means for political hegemony, just as its support by the Sāmānid kings paved the way for Persian to become more developed and capable through artistic and scientific production. The significance of the promotion of the Persian language by the Sāmānid amirs becomes more apparent if one notices that Persian kept its cultural and political importance in

¹⁸¹ Richard Frye, 'The Sāmānids', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, IV, pp. 137-138.

¹⁸² Richard Frye, 'The Sāmānids', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, IV, pp. 147-148.

¹⁸³ Amir Hasan Sadiqi argues that this can prove the absence of any nationalist discourse or movement at that time in Iran. See: Sadiqi, pp. 86-87.

¹⁸⁴ Richard Frye, 'The Sāmānids', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, IV, pp. 149-151.

¹⁸⁵ Richard Frye, 'The Sāmānids', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, IV, pp. 145-146, 153-154.

the Ghaznavid and the Saljuq courts and became an immovable foundation in shaping Iranian history.

In principle, the Sāmānids regarded themselves not as kings but as the faithful governors of the Caliph.¹⁸⁶ Their belief in Islam and the caliphate of Islam seems to have religious and moral rather than political grounds.¹⁸⁷ The control of the Buyids over the caliphate in Baghdad made that relationship uneasy for the Sāmānid kings, however, since, by the mid-tenth century, the caliphs were mere figureheads following the interests of the Buyids.¹⁸⁸ Soon, therefore, recognising the caliph meant giving way to Buyid domination. Such a complicated situation, at some points led to the Sāmānid kings not officially recognising those caliphs which were chosen by the Buyids.¹⁸⁹ One must also consider the fact that the Caliphate had little influence on the political status of the provincial governments. As Sadiqi puts it, ‘This formal recognition [of Esmā’il-e Sāmāni], in the form of documents, presents and a robe of honour, meant only a recognition of the actual situation, since the power of the caliphate had long since ceased to extend to the east.’¹⁹⁰

The same fact is restated by Anne Lambton for the case of the Saljuqs:

By the time of the rise of the Saljuqs, the classical theory of the caliphate no longer corresponded – if it ever had – with practice. The caliphate had become merely a symbolic office maintaining links with the past; and the conception of the sultanate as a simple delegation of the authority by the caliph to the temporal ruler could hardly be maintained in the political circumstances which prevailed. For some governors had seized their provinces by force, while others, though they were not rebels, were not subject to the appointment of the caliph.¹⁹¹

The emergent rulers who seized power, mostly by force, therefore played a major role in the formation of the political. As Lambton has discussed, the role of the caliphate in giving

¹⁸⁶ Sadiqi, p. 44.

¹⁸⁷ Sadiqi, p. 45.

¹⁸⁸ The Persian Buyids (934-1062) were the first established Shi’ite regime to rule over the central parts of Iran. Given the future political coalition between the Turks and Caliphate, the Buyid conquest of Baghdad, and their control over the house of Caliphs, marked an important chapter in the history of the Abbasids. For the domination of the Shi’ite Buyids over the Caliphate see: Amir Hasan Sadiqi, *Caliphate and Kingship in Medieval Persia*, pp. 49-61.

¹⁸⁹ Sadiqi, pp. 74-75.

¹⁹⁰ Sadiqi, p. 138.

¹⁹¹ Ann K. S. Lambton, ‘The Internal Structure of the Saljuq Empire’ in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), V, p. 206.

religious legitimacy to the prevailing government had no actual impact on regulating or defining the limits of power.

The social and ethnic background of new dynasties and the level of their political hegemony determined the nature of their relationship with the caliphate. The individual characteristics, as well as the authority of the *establisher king*, were the key factors in defining their political power. In most cases, it was the symbolic significance of the caliphate that provided important cover for rulers and their political and military plans. As Edmond Bosworth states in relation to the Ghaznavid kings, they ‘regarded the religious orthodoxy as a cement for the fabric of their empire; and even though the Caliphate could provide no physical or material aid to the Sultans, they were very conscious of the moral benefits accruing from Caliphal support’.¹⁹²

The political during the Sāmānids was based on the Sunni doctrine, but this was not the only determining factor. It is also important to notice that Sunnism itself was still in the process of becoming an orthodoxy within the political establishment of Baghdad, not becoming a fully developed political identity until the Ghaznavids came to power. The Ghaznavids made use of the chaotic situation in Baghdad to impose their new religious policy so that they could have a proper justifying device for their despoliations, invasions and tyrannies. When Mahmud took the throne from the Sāmānids, it was obvious that he had already made up his mind about pursuing new policies with Baghdad. As Amir H. Siddiqi writes:

After his victory over the Samanids, Mahmud of Ghazne required a legal mandate to maintain the country which he had already conquered. He required the delegated authority from the caliphate to be able to carry on the administration of justice in accordance with the sharia law. Hence it follows that Mahmud in his relations with the caliphate was guided by political as well as religious motives. The very fact that he recognised Qader instead of the deposed Caliph Tai who was recognised by the Samanids and whom Mahmud himself had recognised while serving them, shows his motive. It was not because he considered the Caliph Qader as the rightly elected Caliph, but because otherwise he could have obtained neither the legal title to rule the country nor the delegated authority to administer justice in accordance with the Sharia laws.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Clifford Edmond Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, p. 54.

¹⁹³ Amir Hasan Sadiqi, pp. 88-89

But this was not a one-way political relationship; the Caliphate longed for such a situation as well:

Besides serving his own political ends, by recognising the Abbasid Caliphate, Mahmud helped its cause a great deal, raised its prestige in the eyes of the Muslim world and revived its authority in Persia. The acceptance of a deed of investiture by Mahmud in 999 and another in 1026 confirming him in possessing the newly conquered re-established not only the religious but also the political supremacy of the Caliphate, which had broken down at the end of the Samanid period.¹⁹⁴

Mahmud manifested his religious zeal in his conquest letters (*fath-nāmeḥ*), where he ascribes his attacks and invasions as merely religious efforts for spreading the true Islam and fighting against the heretics and enemies of Islam. Depicting himself as a ‘warrior of the faith’ and ‘the defender of the orthodoxy’, Mahmud justified his rule through a set of ideologies deriving from both the Persian and Islamic discourse of sovereignty; specifying that he was chosen by God, and that God acts through his sword, to ‘sweep away’ the hands of ‘infidel Bāteniyyeh¹⁹⁵ and evil-doing innovators’.¹⁹⁶ There is a famous statement by Mahmud, quoted in Beyhaqi’s famous account of the ‘Execution of Hasanak’, in which he replies angrily to those trying to provoke him to order the execution of his vazir, Hasanak. These people attempted to convince the Sultan that the Caliph in Baghdad believed Hasanak to be a *Qarmati* (Ismaili), and that he should therefore be hanged, but Mahmud replied:

A letter must be written to this dotard of a Caliph that, in order to show my esteem for the Abbasids, I have exerted my power throughout the whole world, seeking out Qarmatis, and if found and proven, I have them stretched out on the gallows.¹⁹⁷

These words by Mahmud interestingly shows that his anti-Ismaili activities were more a political strategy than the results of his religious belief.

The Ghaznavids took the initiative in homogenising the political and religious sphere in Khorāsān, imposing certain religious doctrines which secured their political ambitions and

¹⁹⁴ Amir Hasan Sadiqi, p.91.

¹⁹⁵ *Bāteniyyeh* used to refer to the Ismailis. Bāten literally means ‘inside’ or ‘inner’, and *bāteniyyeh* are those who believe that the Quran has two meanings, the apparent and the hidden, and one must interpret the text to reach the hidden or the esoteric meaning. See chapter 6 of this research.

¹⁹⁶ Clifford Edmond Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁹⁷ Beyhaqi, *The History of Beyhaqi (Tārikh-e Beyhaqi)*, trans. by C. E. Bosworth (Boston, Massachusetts and Washington, D.C: Ilex Foundation and Centre for Hellenistic Studies, 2011), p. 275.

brought back the religious prestige of the caliphate, a doctrine which was to be *pure* and *clean* of any *heresy*:

Amir Mahmoud and his successor Masoud did not tolerate any deviation from belief in the orthodox Sunni sect; and they protected the faith by rooting out all the heretical elements from their territories. A censorship of the religious beliefs of the Muslim subjects was instituted, and there was an officer appointed to punish heretics, Qarmatians, Batenis and Mu'tazelis, and all their literature dealing with heresy was ordered to be destroyed wherever found. This policy must have encouraged the faith to which they as well as the Caliph belonged.¹⁹⁸

Taking the lead from their Ghaznavid predecessors, the Saljuqs turned this religious–political momentum into a fully-fledged political institution by putting an end to the rule of the now weakened Shi'ite Buyids in central Persia and spreading their Empire towards the west. Now, what had been the political and religious situation for Khorāsān extended from Transoxiana to Anatolia, and the sovereigns were not those of local dynasties, but an Empire. What had remained a struggle for the Ghaznavid rulers, became the fixed ideology of the *sultanate*. If the Mahmoud of Ghazne received the title 'Yamin al-Dawlah wa Amin al-Millah' (the right hand of the government and the nation's trustee) from the Caliph,¹⁹⁹ Toghrol, the Saljuq king, received the meaningful title of 'Rukn al-Din' (the pillar of the religion),²⁰⁰ to which was added 'Rukn al-Dowlah' (the pillar of the government). The latter was granted when Toghrol saved the Caliphate at least twice from definite fall due to the Fatimids' invasions. He also put an end to the rule of the Buyids of central Iran.

The Saljuqs came to power when the Caliphate was in its most miserable political situation. The caliph's power had been disastrously diminished by the Buyid amirs, whose leadership had also started failing leading to numerous protests, and the Caliph had little power to be able to take back control. By the time the Saljuqs came, therefore, neither the caliphate nor the amirate had any real power in 'managing the affairs of state'.²⁰¹ Relying on the Ghaznavids, at first, seemed like the only way to regain some political power and prestige, but this in fact weakened the position of the caliph even more and made him more reliant with no agency whatsoever. The same is the case for the Saljuqs since the coalition of the Turks and the

¹⁹⁸ Amir Hasan Sadiqi, p. 103.

¹⁹⁹ Amir Hasan Sadiqi, p. 90.

²⁰⁰ Amir Hasan Sadiqi, p. 114.

²⁰¹ Amir Hasan Sadiqi, p. 106.

Abbasid caliphs did not change the fragile and temporal position of the Caliphate. Nonetheless, the shift in who had power over the Caliphate, from the Buyids to the Turkic rulers of eastern Iran, had symbolic and ideological consequences which were politically important for the caliphs. The political unity of the Turks and the Abbasids enabled the religious orthodoxy to be imposed on Muslim lands, and this, at least, guaranteed the position of the caliphs as religious authorities.

During the Saljuqs, the title *sultan* was no longer an ‘usurped authority’ as it had been for the Buyids or even the Ghaznavids. Sultan became an officially recognised designation by the Caliph, bestowed to the Saljuq kings.²⁰²

During the formation of the political at the time of the Ghaznavids, being *rāfezi*, *bāteni* and *qarmati* were taken to be similar to being *Majus* or *Zoroastrian*. These tags were used by zealous jurists to signify the irreligious and heretic *other*. As Jalāl Khāleqi Motlaq states, ‘in that period many adherents of Shiism took pride in the ancient culture of Iran, which led opponents to describe them as Qarmatis and Sho‘ubis and to rank them among the *Majus* (Zoroastrians) and *Zandiqs* (Manicheans).’^{203,204} It can be concluded that some of those who had Shi’ite tendencies were the promoters of ancient Iranian culture. Moreover, it also reveals that Sunni scholars assumed that Ismailism and esotericism were influenced by the religions of ancient Persians, and that was why they thought they deserved to be called heretics. But the fact is that, in many cases, terms such as being *Zandiq*, *Majus* or *Qarmati* were used for the *enemy* who did not follow the religious orthodoxy, rather than addressing someone who actually believed in Zoroastrianism or Ismailism.

The socio-political background of the Persian elites of Khorāsān was a significant factor as well. In most cases, these intellectuals were *dehqāns*, the local landowners from the villages and rural areas of Khorāsān who had important roles in managing the local affairs. *Dehqāns*,

²⁰² Amir Hasan Sadiqi, pp. 107-108.

²⁰³ *Sho‘ubiyyeh* was a pro-*mavali* cultural movement that arose as a reaction to the ethnic humiliations visited by the Arabs (Umayyads and Abbasids). The basic belief of *Sho‘ubiyyeh* was grounded on the Islamic principle, emphasised in the Quran, which was the equality between men regardless of their ethnicity or race. They were of the view that Islam does not belong to the Arabs only, nor does it give them any credit or privilege. There were some *Sho‘ubis* in Iran who went further by believing in the superiority of the Persians over the Arabs in terms of culture, history and civilisation. *Sho‘ubiyyeh* had some influence on those *mavāli* who had Shi’ite or Mu’tazilite inclinations, serving to provoke their enmity against the Arab rulers; however, *Sho‘ubis* were from different kinds of beliefs and backgrounds, and there was no direct relationship between Mu’tazilites, or Shi’ites and *Sho‘ubis*. See: Hossein Ali Momtāhen, *The Sho‘ubiyye Movement: The National Movement of Iranians Against Umayyads and Abbasids (Nehzat-e Sho‘ubiyye: Jonbesh-e Melli-ye Irāniān dar Barābar-e Khelāfat-e abbasi-o Omavi)*, (Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahāmi-ye Ketābhāye Jibi, 1989), pp. 187-296.

²⁰⁴ Jalāl Khāleqi Motlaq, ‘Daqiqi, Abu Mansur Ahmad’ in *encyclopaedia Iranica* <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/daqiqi-abu-mansur-ahmad-b>> [accessed 7 May 2018]

by tradition, were the preservers of the ancient culture and literature of Iran. The great poets, such as Ferdowsi, were themselves *dehqān*. In the text of Persian stories of ancient kings, such as *Shāhnāme* (Book of Kings), the persona of the *dehqān* is that of narrator, storyteller, the one who knows the stories of ancestors.²⁰⁵ In addition to their zeal for Persian language and culture, by the time of the Ghaznavids, anti-Turk and pro-Sāmānid sentiments gradually propagated among some of them. Moreover, many of these Persian elites had been either Imami Shi'ites or Ismailis, or had tendency towards them. For instance, Kasāi Marvazi (953-1002), was a Shi'ite Khorāsāni poet during the time of the Ghaznavid. To criticise the rule of the Ghaznavids, he remembers the time of the Sāmānids as a time of stability and order:

به وقت دولت سامانیان و بلعمیان
چنین نبود جهان، با نهاد و سامان بود

During the time of the Sāmānids and the Bal'amids,
The world was not as it is now; it was in order and harmony.²⁰⁶

It is interesting to note that the name 'Bal'amids', the viziers of Sāmānid amirs, is mentioned alongside the 'Sāmānids' in the above line. This shows that the praise directed towards the Sāmānids was more cultural than political. The Bal'amids put much effort into encouraging and supporting Persian writers and scholars to the extent that admiring them became a tradition in Persian literary and historical works, even in Khājeh Nezām al-Molk's *the Book of Government* (*Siyāsat-nāme*).²⁰⁷

Nostalgia for the time of the Sāmānids can also be observed in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. Given the fact that the Sāmānids were Sunnis, one can speculate that it was their tolerance and their cultural policies that made Nāser-e Khosrow and Kasāi favour them decades after their demise:

²⁰⁵ See: Mojtabā Minovi, *Naqd-e Hāl* (Tehran: Khārazmi, 1972), p. 193.

²⁰⁶ Mohammad Amin Riyāhi, *Kasāi Marvazi, Zendegi, Andishe o She'r-e u* (*Kasai Marvzi: His life, His Thoughts and His Poetry*), (Tehran: 'Elmi, 1996), p.77.

²⁰⁷ C. E. Bosworth, 'Bal'ami, Abolfazl Mohammad' in *encyclopaedia Iranica* <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/balami-abul-fazl-mohammad-b>> [accessed 28 May 2018]

For the position and significance of the Bal'amid in the court of the Sāmānid amirs, see A.C.S. Peacock, *Medieval Islamic Historiography and Political Legitimacy: Bal'amī's Tārikhnāma*, pp. 29-33.

خراسان ز آل سامان چون تهی شد
همه دیگر شده ست احوال و سامان²⁰⁸

Circumstances are now changed, the order is now different,
Since the Sāmānids left the government in Khorāsān.

In the following lines, we see Nāser-e Khosrow boldly renounce the Turks and regard them as the reason for the cultural decadence in Khorāsān:

خاک خراسان چو بود جای ادب
معدن دیوان ناکس اکنون شد
حکمت را خانه بود بلخ و، کنون
خانهش ویران و بخت وارون شد
ملک سلیمان اگر خراسان بود
چونکه کنون ملک دیو ملعون شد؟²⁰⁹

As for the province of Khorāsān, once
the Abode of Learning, it has become
a cavern of sordid and effeminate demons.

Balkh!

The House of Wisdom –

And now

fit for the axe, its fortune topsy-turvy

turned upon its head. Khorāsān

once the kingdom of Solomon – how

has it become the domain of Satan?²¹⁰

The word *divan* (demons) and *div-e mal'un* (the cursed demon) in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* is a metaphor for the Abbasid Caliphs and the Turkic Sultans. In the above lines, the demons (the Ghaznavids and Saljuqs) stands in contrast with *adab* (morals), *hekmat* (wisdom – philosophy) and *molk-e Soleymān* (the kingdom of Solomon). This suggests that for Nāser-e

²⁰⁸ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi (Tehran: McGill University's Institute of Islamic Studies in Cooperation with Tehran University, 1979) p. 108.

²⁰⁹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 79.

²¹⁰ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, pp. 104-105.

Khosrow, unlike the Sāmānids, the rule of the Turks have brought about a decline in moralities and knowledge, and it does not represent a just and legitimate state.

With the change in political situation in Khorāsān, the Sāmānid period gradually became an ideal past, glorified by the cultural elites of Khorāsān. *Dehqāns* were among the inheritors of the Sāmānid cultural policies and found themselves suffocating under the Ghaznavids. They considered themselves the speakers of the ancient Persian culture and literature, and politically supported the local Persian governments due to their independence from the Caliphate and its tendency towards the Persian tradition of kingship. The Iranian intellectuals and scholars with *dehqāni* background found the religious heterodox doctrines, mainly Shiism, to be more in accordance with their political and philosophical views.

c) Political Order and Political Discourse: Nezām al-Molk's *Rules for Kings*

There are two seminal works which represent the development of political order during the Saljuqs. Each of these works characterises an aspect of that process of development in its own right. While Khāje Nezām al-Molk's *Siyar al-Muluk* (Rules for Kings), also known as *Siyāsat-Nāmeḥ* (The Book of Government) formulates the political discourse, Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, along with his other works in Kalām (Islamic scholastic theology) formulates the religious discourse in which the limits of orthodoxy and heterodoxy are defined. The main concern of both of these figures was the problem of order and stability and how it can be preserved in the long term.

Rules for Kings, or the *Book of Government*, is perhaps the most important book in the genre of mirrors for princes. It was written over a period of thirty years from 1063 to 1092 when Nezām al-Molk was the chief minister of Alp Arslan, and then his son, Malekshāh. The book contains 50 chapters, each of which was dedicated to a subject relevant to ruling and kingship. The author added sections on numerous occasions based on his experience and the events that he observed and managed in the court of the Saljuqs, so that he could address the king on appropriate conduct in a more real and concrete manner.

Texts written in the genre of mirrors for princes presuppose kingship and the absolute power of the king as already existing beyond any determining law or social force. The Persian mirrors for princes therefore do not investigate the concept of kingship and the conditions of succession from a theoretical or philosophical point of view: the fundamental division between the king (*Pādshāh*) and people (*ra'īyyat*) is already taken for granted. The book is only about *advising* the king about what is better to be held and done, rather than discussing the limits and

conditions of power. It is, therefore, about formulating and preserving the *tradition* by reminding the king about what is *right* and advised by wise men, or what can be learned from past events. That is why Persian mirrors for princes, particularly Nezām al-Molk’s *Rules for Kings*, are full of quotations, historical references and short moral stories (*Hekāyat*). They are put forward by a number of referencing and narrative techniques, which work to naturalise and justify the established system. Relying on literary canons and narrating historical accounts of kings and major events functions at two levels. One level is literary, that is making the text more approachable and appealing so as to persuade the reader (the king). The second level is political, that is to emphasise the structural, regulatory and authorial nature of the *tradition*, or what the past can teach about the present, or the right path of governing. By referring to moral or religious authorities, or narrating stories of great kings, the political content of the text appears as regulation, as something that ‘must be done’ in order to achieve stability and security. That is why, on many occasions, Nezām al-Molk changed the historical facts or narrative structure in his own favour, in accordance with the context of his writing or his political intentions. In addition to advising the king, Nezām al-Molk found it politically necessary to present the administrative, military, economic, religious and judicial structure of the Saljuqs as the *tradition*. The important introductory passage of the book clearly shows the nature of Nezām al Molk’s mirror for the prince:

... In the year 479 [of the Hijra / 1086 A.D.] Abul-Fath Malek Shah ebn-e Mohammad, Glorifier of the World and the Faith, Right Hand of the Commander of the Faithful, issued a sublime, imperial command to his servant and to several others, instructing each one of them to give thought to the condition of the country, and to consider – ‘whether there is in our age and time anything out of order either in *Divan*, the court, the royal palace or audience hall – anything whose principles are not being observed by us or are unknown to us; whether there are any functions which kings before us have performed and we are not fulfilling: consider further what have been the laws and customs of kings and kingship, followed in past time by the Saljuq sultans, make a digest of them and present them for our judgement; we shall then reflect upon them and give order that hereafter affairs religious and worldly should proceed in accordance with their proper rules; what is remediable we shall remedy; we shall see that every duty is discharged correctly and according to God’s commands, and that all wrong practices are discontinued; for since God (be He exalted) has given us His consummate grace and bestowed the world and the kingship of the world upon us and subdued all

our enemies, henceforward nothing in our empire must exist or happen that is deficient or disordered or contrary to the religious law.’ [...] No king or emperor can afford not to possess and know this book, *especially in these days*, for the more he reads it, the more he will be enlightened upon spiritual and temporal matters, the better he will appreciate *the qualities of friends and foes*,²¹¹ the way of right conduct and the path of good government will be open to him.²¹²

The central concept of this opening chapter is the necessity of having laws and principles on the conditions of governing, of kings and kingship. It highlights not just the appropriate manners of kingship, but the *necessity* of formulating those manners and principles.

In the above paragraph I have italicised two expressions in which Nezām al-Molk emphasises the political significance of articulating rules and laws of kingship and governing. The first, ‘especially in these days’, emphasises the historical urgency of the matter in the context of the second, which is knowing ‘the qualities of friends and foes’. The word ‘enemy’ is also mentioned by Malekshāh earlier, where he links the necessity of ruling in the ‘right’ manner with overcoming the ‘enemy’. This shows that the necessity of (re)regulating the kingship and sovereignty arises from a particularly sensitive time, in which knowing the enemy and the sovereignty are closely tied together. It is not a coincidence that the tradition of mirrors for princes in Persian literature was revived during the emergence of Turkic governments in Persia, just as the problem of order and stability turned out to be the main driving force for that literary genre in this period. Threats against social stability gave legitimacy to a powerful ruler, however, managing the chaos and practising the political power needs a rich political discourse or tradition to rely on, since the political power needs rituals and costumes to objectify itself and becomes visible. This is why the critical ‘time’, the time of fragile stability and security, demands the writing of the *Rules for Kings*, to ‘educate’ the king to avoid any blatant representation of power.

Nezām al-Molk, from this point of view, is indeed the great engineer of the political in the eleventh century. He constructed the passage as a progression from the blatant and uncivilised enforcement of power to a ritualised, regulated and customised power enforced through military, economic, religious and administrative establishments. He saw the first as a threat to the country and religion, and the main cause of chaos and turmoil.

²¹¹ The italicised sections are done by the author of this research.

²¹² Khāje Nezām al-Molk Tusi, *The Book of Government or Rules for Kings*, transl. by Hubert Darke (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 1-2.

Nezām al-Molk does not reject the arbitrary and unrestrained form of power, since an unrestrained power, for Nezām al-Molk, is a vital and inevitable condition for order and customisation. Thus, the traditional and moral principles that Nezām al-Molk articulates do not determine or limit the nature of the power of the king in any way. The principles of kingship come after the triumph by sword, not as a legal mechanism of legitimacy or succession. The question that Persian mirrors for princes address is therefore *what comes next*, not *what comes before* seizing the power. This is because of what Nezām al-Molk's fears most throughout his book, the unrest of rebels and opposition groups raised against the religious orthodoxy. The fear of the enemy and the need to overcome their threats justified the necessity of having a powerful king who could suppress those threats, and being successful in this task gives legitimacy to the victorious ruler. This is why instructing and educating the king becomes vital since the successful king guarantees order and stability once control is achieved. It also precludes the return of rebels and anti-orthodoxy groups:

Now in the days of some of the caliphs, if ever their empire became extended it was never free from unrest and the insurrections of rebels; but in this blessed age (praise and thanks be to Allah) there is nobody in all the world who in his heart mediates opposition to our lord and master, or ventures his head outside the collar of obedience to him – may God perpetuate this empire until the resurrection and keep the evil eye far from the perfectness of this kingdom, so that His creatures may pass their days under the equity and authority of The Master of the World and be even intent on blessing him. Such is the happy state of this great empire; and in proportion to its greatness it is blessed an abundance of wise and good institutions. The wisdom of The Master of the World is like a taper from which many lamps have been lighted, by its light men find their way and emerge from the darkness.²¹³

The threats of religious opposition groups helped Nezām al-Molk to reformulate the Persian theory of kingship, such that kingship and religion are twin brothers, with failure in one causing failure in the other:

The most important thing which a king needs is sound faith, because kingship and religion are like two brothers; whenever disturbance breaks out in the country religion suffers too; heretics and evil-doers appear; and whenever religious affairs are in

²¹³ Nezām al-Molk Tusi, p.11.

disorder, there is confusion in the country; evil-doers gain power and render the king impotent and despondent; heresy grows rife and rebels make themselves felt.²¹⁴

It is important to notice that the concept of religion here is almost equal to orthodoxy, something that must be propagated through government. Since politics is about keeping order, then no order can be preserved without traditionalising religion and turning it into what Louise Althusser calls ‘Ideological State Apparatus (ISA)’.²¹⁵ The major task of religion from Nezām al-Molk’s political point of view is not enlightenment or spiritual emancipation, as it might be for Nāser-e Khosrow; it is performing certain principles. That is why for Nezām al-Molk, religion has more to do with institutions (mosques, madrasas and judiciary) and rites than intellectual speculations. The political power exerts itself through these institutions and customs, and it is through such apparatuses that political power defines social subjects and uses religious discourse to distinguish friend from enemy.

d) Political Order and Religious Orthodoxy: An Ongoing Struggle

The case of the Saljuq empire and Nezām al-Molk’s mirror for the prince proves that any process of *regulating* and *customising* the political power necessarily needs the construction of an ‘enemy’. The enemy is the agent who disturbs order and threatens stability. It is anti-regulation and anti-jurisdiction.

The need to maintain law and order and to face the threats of those who had ‘exited’ (*khoriy*) from the *right religion*, made the concept of enemy almost equivalent to the Ismailis, or Esoterists (*Bāteniyyeh*) as Nezām al-Molk and Ghazālī called them. Consequently, the need to keep and propagate the *right religion* (*pākdini*), or in another words, orthodoxy, became the most fundamental aim of Nezām al-Molk’s emphasis on practical kingship. Fighting with heretics, innovators and apostates, for Nezām al-Molk, was not merely for the sake of the Sunni’s Shāfe’i or Hanafī schools; it was an absolute necessity for maintaining the political order, and thus for growth and prosperity. Orthodoxy, in the context of Rules for Kings, is more about the need for tradition, the need for a totalised, enclosed and static religious discourse upon which the *political identity* forms and institutionalises itself. Traditionalising the absolute and arbitrary system was essential for the process of establishing a *political unit* and executing

²¹⁴ Nezām al-Molk Tusi, p.60.

²¹⁵ Althusser’s theory of ideology, through the concept of ISA, focuses on the materiality of ideology as a set of social rituals within specific social institutions, in which social subjects are unconsciously engaged with ideological practice. Ideology, therefore, no longer deals with some epistemological or discursive statements, formerly known as ‘false consciousness’. See: Louis Althusser, *on Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), pp. 1-60.

the power of state. As Schmitt states, in transferring from the political to the political order, the political power needs to normalise or legalise itself in order to manage confrontation with the enemy and to secure peace and stability. *Legalisation* and *normalisation* through a political discourse is therefore a vital condition of materialising the political power. The *materialisation* or *institutionalisation* of political identity can be observed in Nezām al-Molk's initiative in founding *Madrasas* or colleges in major cities of Iran and in Baghdad, along with a fully-fledged support of the Baghdad Caliphate.

George Makdisi has discussed religious traditionalism by challenging the idea of 'the Sunni revival', emphasising that the revival reflected the need for 'traditionalism' rather than a dominating specific religious school or doctrine. Traditionalism, according to Makdisi, was against the rationalism of the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites, as well as Shi'ite doctrines, and its purpose was to act as a law or 'creed', and not a specifically pro-Ash'arite project led by a vizier or a theologian (referring to Nezām al-Molk and Ghazālī):

A new orthodoxy therefore could not have been imported into Baghdad and forced upon Caliph and intellectuals alike. The 'revival' could not have been the work of sultans, or viziers, working at cross purposes. It could not have been the result of a few unconnected episodes, stretching across a long span of years with long uneventful intervals. What happened in the 11th century was not, strictly speaking, a 'revival'; that is, it was not a Sunni awakening; Sunnism was far from having slumbered. It was not a renewal of interest in Sunnism; interest in Sunnism had never waned; the bulk of Sunni literature in this period is ample proof of this. Rather Sunnism advanced by successive surges, until at the beginning of the 11th century, a breakthrough was made when the Caliph al-Qāder's name was affixed to the Qāderi Creed, making it the law of the land in the realm of the Eastern Caliphate, implemented by the Sunni Ghaznavids. It was a Sunni Creed, because it opposed Shi'i doctrines; but it also opposed rationalist Mu'tazeli and Ash'ari doctrines; and for this it may rightly be called a Traditionalist Creed, and the religious triumph it symbolised, a Traditionalist triumph.²¹⁶

It is true that Sunnism was already a dominant unifying religious system. It is also true that the (re)construction of orthodoxy during the eleventh century did not lead to the dominance of Ash'arism or Sufism, since there were numerous juristic and religious tendencies and currents living alongside each other. In fact, a fully homogenised political identity and a stabilised

²¹⁶ George Makdisi, 'The Sunni Revival' in *Islamic Civilisation 950 - 1150*, ed. by D. S. Richards (Oxford: Bruno Cassirer, 1973), pp. 155-168 (167-168).

political order never occurred. A *hegemonic intervention* did happen during the time the early Saljuqs, which resulted in the formation of orthodoxy based on the Sunni doctrine. But at the same time, the dominant political order was in constant negotiation with its political and religious *others* in order to keep the political stability and control the threats. A.C.S Peacock has shown that the religious beliefs of the early Saljuq sultans such as Alp Arslan and Tughril were quite contradictory, and their theological and religious policies changed from time to time more because of their political needs and advantages and less because of their religious or legal considerations such as promoting Sunnism.²¹⁷ What is neglected in Makdisi and Peacock's argument, however, is the degree of discursive and epistemic contrast between those theological and religious trends officially active and those that were considered as innovation (*bed'at*) or apostasy (*ertedād*) or the state of being *irreligious* (*bad-dini*). The contrasts between theological sects such as Ash'arism and Mu'tazilism, or between Ash'arism and the Philosophers (*falāsefeh*), were more intense and significant than the differences between the Shāfe'i's school of law and those of Hanafi or Hanbali. From another angle, the contrast between the philosophers and both the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites became harsher, while the philosophers and Ismailis had more in common. It is true that both the Ghaznavids and Saljuqs saw religion as a means for political power. It is also true that their struggle to establish a homogenised political order never took place in its full capacity. But these facts do not reject the *struggle* that took place for establishing a political order, the struggle which brought forward the necessity of identifying the heretics from the true believers. One can, therefore, state that the Sunni revival must be seen as a historical process, not as a result of some separated events or developments, or one single development such as the announcement of the Qāderi Creed. In doing so, one must be able to find the connections between the political and cultural developments that happened in the Iranian lands and in Baghdad and shaped the orthodoxy. In other words, the question is not when and by whom the Sunni orthodoxy established; rather, the question is how the Sunni orthodoxy can be *historicised* according to numerous events and developments during the early Islamic centuries.

There are in fact some major events that affected the construction of orthodoxy that were left unnoticed by Makdisi. One is definitely the rule of the Shi'ite Buyids in Central Iran, an Iranian dynasty who controlled and humiliated the Caliphate for a period of time, before being brought down by the Saljuqs. The other one, which I will discuss in the following section, is the

²¹⁷ A.C.S. Peacock, *Early Seljūq History: A New Interpretation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 99-127.

establishment of the Fatimid Caliphate in Cairo as the political capital of the Ismailis. The Fatimids were at the peak of their power during the tenth and eleventh centuries. Both of these Shi'ite establishments posed constant threats to the Abbasid Caliphate. Furthermore, from a wider point of view, the emergence of local governments in Iran caused significant changes in the development of political and religious discourses. Another power, coexisting with the Caliphate, was the Sāmānid emirate and the Turks' sultanate that relied on the Persian pre-Islamic theory of Kingship. It is therefore essential to study developments in Baghdad in relation to developments in the central parts of the Iranian plateau (the Shia region: Fars, Rey, Qazvin, Tabarestān) as well as its eastern part (the Sunni region: Khorāsān); there, connections can be easily found between the religious policies of the Turkic sultans in Khorāsān, the theological works of Ghazāli, and the role of Nezām al-Molk. From the 1040s onward, as the Saljuqs managed to expand their territory, the necessity of traditionalising Sunnism, protecting the Baghdad caliphate and fighting with the Ismailis, together determined the shared political ground between Iran and the Caliphate. The Turkic rulers of Khorāsān and Transoxiana had coveted the conquest of the central provinces such as Rey, Qom, Kāshān, Qazvin and Tabarestān, which had been ruled by either the Shi'ite Buyids or Dailamites. That is why the Turks began to call themselves the true Muslims and servants of the religion. They promoted the idea that God had chosen them, and given them power to defeat the irreligious Persians of central Iran (*Arāq-e Ajam*); a gesture that was supported and even made by the Caliphs on many occasions, since they too had suffered under the Buyids and the local governments of Central and Northern Iran. Showing themselves as the *clean* and *pure* Muslims by *tradition* was an ideological means to cover and justify their brutal military conflict against their enemy (the Persians of central Iran). On one occasion, Nezām al-Molk deliberately highlights a story in which Sultan Alp Arslan reproaches one of his courtiers for employing a Shi'ite secretary:

I have told you over and over again that you the Turks are the army of Khorāsān and Transoxiana and you are foreigners in this region; we conquered this country by the sword. We are all pure Muslims, but Dailamites and people of Iraq are mostly infidels and heretics. Enmity and opposition between the Turks and the Dailamites is not something recent, it is ancient. Today God (to Him be power and glory) has favoured the Turks and given them dominion because they are orthodox Muslims and do not tolerate vanity and heresy. We Turks hate the Dailamites for their heresy and bad religion; as long as they are weak they will remain in submission and obedience but if

ever they gained power and the fortunes of the Turks declined, both for religious and for political reasons they would not leave one of us Turks alive.²¹⁸

It was with the dominion of the Saljuqs that neo-Platonic approaches in Islamic theology, Aristotelian metaphysics and hermeneutical or speculative approaches towards the Quran and Islam began to be considered threats to the symbolic religious order, while Sharia law, juristic approaches and traditional understandings of religion became the main factors for religion. This is where one can detect and situate Nāser-e Khosrow's position. He supported the anti-establishment idea of the saviour Imam, and was an Ismaili missionary with strong philosophical tendencies, characterised by the Neo-Platonism of the Ismailis.

Ismailism and the Political

a) Shi'ism Between Conservatism and Radicalism

The political derivation of Ismailism goes back to the time of Imam Ja'far-e Sādeq (700 or 702–765), a prominent figure in Shiism who lived under the reign of the Caliph al-Mansur. During the Imamate of Ja'far-e Sādeq, Shi'ism was placed at a crucial crossroads between radical politics and conservatism. The Ismaili movement, in fact, was the result of a division between these two approaches when Imam Sādeq, after facing the risks and threats coming from a group of Shi'ites known as *Gholāt* (the exaggerators), reformulated the theory of the Imamate to reject those of his partisans who had been promoting radical Shia activities. These radical movements depicted the Imam as a divine being and promoted military and revolutionary ways to depose the Abbasids, activities that endangered the Shia and could have led to the elimination of Sādeq and his followers.

As specified above, after the Rashidun period, the Caliphate was turned into a mere monarchy by the Umayyads, whose leadership led to many protests and disappointments in different parts of the Islamic territory and in different layers of society. As the situation became intensified, the political ideals of Islamic society, which were shaped mainly in reference to the golden period of the Prophet and the early Caliphs, gave political meanings to religious movements. The development of the Shi'ite and Alid movements emerged from these circumstances, since both groups had gained their political significance and social legitimacy by associations with *a member of the Prophet's Family (Ahl al-Bayt)*, a feature that had been brought sympathy and

²¹⁸ Nezām al-Molk Tusi, pp.160-161.

support from dissatisfied parts of society, particularly Iranians. The so-called *Abbasid Revolution* brought hopes for change, but these soon disappeared as the Abbasid *empire* turned out to be a continuation of its predecessors. This failure strengthened the Shi'ite movements and evoked the political foundations of Shi'ism more than ever. Numerous Shi'ite rebellions occurred, in reaction to which harsh oppressive policies were enforced by the Abbasid side. Gradually, most of the Alid, Zeydi and Hashemite leaders were either killed or executed, while a trend of Shi'ism, known as *Gholāt* (the exaggerators) became more active in the political scene. Instead of focusing on the political position of the Imam as the representative of people's protest, the group saw him as a God with supernatural powers and extraordinary qualifications without whom the whole universe would fall into pieces. This was, in most part, due to the amount of oppression, which evoked the idea of a saviour Imam among the dissatisfied people, especially during the time of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mansour.²¹⁹

By the time of Imam Sādeq, the existence of radical military Shia endangered the only remaining branch of the Shi'ite movements (the Fatimid Imams). The *Gholāt's* extremist ideas seemed to undermine the fundamental principles of Islamic belief, such as Prophecy (*Nabovat*) and the Oneness of God (*Towhid*). As the anti-Shi'ite oppressions increased, the political origins of Shi'ism merged with the mystical-metaphysical aspects, a problematic combination in the Shi'ite concept of Imamate, which, as I try to elaborate in this research, caused major problems in different branches of Shi'ism, both in epistemology and in political doctrine. Positioning himself in the middle of these two extremes, Imam Sādeq reformulated the theory of Imamate by defining three major factors:

The first principle was that of imamate by *nass*, defined as a prerogative bestowed by God upon a chosen person from the *ahl al-bayt*, who before his death and with divine guidance, transfers the imamate to his successor by an explicit designation or *nass* [...] on the authority of the *nass*, the imamate remained located in a specific individual, whether or not he claimed the caliphate. Thus, Ja'far-e Sādeq maintained that there was always in existence a true imam, designated by the *nass* of the previous imam, who possessed all the authority of the sole legitimate imam of the time, whether or not he was at the time ruling over the community. The second fundamental principle embodied in the doctrine of the imamate, closely related to the *nass* principle, [...] was that of an

²¹⁹ For further discussion of the *Gholāt* and their views on the Imam as a divine being see Hossein Modarresi Tabatabai, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shi'ite Islam (Maktab dar Farāyand-e Takāmol)*, Persian Transl. by Hashem Izadpanāh (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1995), pp. 27-45.

imamate based on *'ilm* or special religious knowledge. In the light of this *'ilm*, which is divinely inspired and transmitted through the *nass* of the preceding imam, the rightful imam becomes the exclusively authorized source of the knowledge on how to decide points of conscience for the Muslims and lead them along the right path. Consequently, the imam will acquire the all-important functions of providing spiritual guidance for his adherents and explaining the inner meaning and significance of the Quran and the religious injunctions, even when he is not occupied with the temporal function of ruling over the community.²²⁰

The third factor, which is again attributed to Imam Sādeq in many early Shi'ite *Hadiths* is that of the Imam's *'Esmat*:

This conception is founded on the permanent need of mankind for a divinely guided, sinless and infallible (*ma'sūm*) imam who acts as the authoritative teacher and guide of men in all their religious and spiritual affairs.²²¹

By articulating these three principles which formed the major aspects of the Imami and Ismaili Shi'ism, Imam Sādeq managed to avoid the negative and hazardous aspects of the two extremes of Shi'ite Imamate (Imam as the revolutionary leader / Imam as a supernatural being), while keeping some vital parts of both:

[...] (Imam) does not receive divine revelation (*wahy*), nor does he bring a new message and *sharia* as did a messenger prophet. Although the imam is entitled to temporal leadership as much as to religious authority, his mandate does not depend on his actual rule or any attempt at gaining it [...] This interpretation, which concerned itself with a non-ruling Imam who, until such time as God desired it, would solely act as spiritual guide and religious teacher, proved invaluable also in preventing the absorption of Shi'ism into the Sunni synthesis of Islam that was simultaneously being worked out by the representative groups of the *Jamā'a*. At the same time, by underlining the hereditary and the divinely-bestowed attributes of both *nass* and *'ilm*, Imam Ja'far had now restricted the sanctity of the *ahl al-bayt* not only to the 'Alids and especially the Fatimids amongst them, to the exclusion of the Abbasids and all other non-'Alid Hāshimids, but more specifically to his own Husaynid line of imams. [...] This Imam, who is also the inheritor of Muhammad's secret knowledge, is endowed by God with

²²⁰ Farhad Daftari, *The Ismailis, Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 81-82.

²²¹ Daftari, p. 83.

special *'ilm*, and has perfect understanding of the outward or exoteric (*zāher*) and the inward or esoteric (*bāten*) aspects and meanings of the Quran and the sacred law of Islam. Indeed, the world cannot exist for a moment without an imam, the proof (*hujjah*) of God on earth. Even if only two men were left upon the face of the earth, one of them would be the imam. And there can only be a single imam at one and the same time, though there may be a silent one (*Sāmit*), his successor, beside him. In sum, the imam's existence in the terrestrial world is so essential that his recognition and obedience is made the absolute duty of every believer, hence the famous *hadith* reported from the Imam Sādiq that 'whoever dies without having acknowledged the true imam of his time dies as an unbeliever (*kāfir*).'²²²

The life and manner of Imam Sādeq confirms his moderate approach. He did not show any commitment to the Alid revolts of his time, while on many occasions, he rejected those of his partisans with radical intentions. This is where the name of Ismail, from which the name *Ismailiyah* (Persian: *Esmā'iliyeh*) has been derived, finds its significance during the Imamate of Ja'far-e Sādeq. Ismail was Imam Sādeq's eldest son and had the *nass* from his father to become the next Imam. His sudden death while his father was alive, however, provoked many controversies as to his state of Imamate. The name Ismail is associated with a radical body of Imam Sādeq's companions and 'those Shi'is who were not satisfied with their Imam's conservatism and passivity'.²²³ Ab al-Khattāb, perhaps the most famous figure of this group of Imam Sādeq's followers, was the one with whose extremist views Ismail became associated. Following his radical activities, Ab al-Khattāb, was finally accused of misbehaviour and was cursed in public by Imam Sādeq. Nevertheless, he remained loyal to the Imam until he and his revolutionary supporters were massacred at a mosque in Kufa on the order of the city governor. He was also famous for having *Bāteni* (esoteric) and gnostic ideas.²²⁴ As Daftari has pointed out: 'Some of the ideas or terminologies introduced by, or attributed to, Ab al-Khattāb were also adopted by the early Ismailis who, like the Khattābis, were preoccupied with esotericism, cyclicism, hierarchism and symbolical exegesis'.²²⁵ In some major sources regarding the history of the Shia, Ab al-Khattāb and his supporters, known as Khattābiyyeh, identified as the 'nascent Ismāiliyah'.²²⁶ In respect to the relationship between Ismail and the extremist wing of

²²² Daftari, pp.82-83.

²²³ Daftari, p.92.

²²⁴ Daftari, p.85.

²²⁵ Daftari, p.86.

²²⁶ Daftari, p.86.

the followers of Imam Sādeq, there are some accounts regarding how Ismail acted on behalf of his father to protest against the killing of al-Mo'alla ebn-e Khonays, one of Sādeq's extremist followers.²²⁷ Another interesting account reveals more of Ismail's engagement with radical Shi'ite activities and his differences with his father:

Ismail was evidently involved in an anti-Abbasid plot in collaboration with several others, including Bassam ibn 'Abd Allah al-Sayrafi, another extremist Shi'i engaged in moneylending in Kufa. The caliph al-Mansur summoned Ismail along with the Imam al-Sādeq, as well as Bassām, to his administrative capital at al-Hira near Kufa. The suspected plotters were taken before the caliph, who had Bassam executed but spared Ismail.²²⁸

It seems that the radical and revolutionary figure of Ismail gained the attention and sympathies of the Shias and other discontented people. The crisis of succession after the death of Imam Sādeq, the increasing oppression from the Abbasids, as well as the attraction of Bāteni and gnostic ideas, gave more momentum to those Shi'ite radical movements (Khattābiyyeh, Mobārakiyyeh, Qarmatis, etc.), which used the name of Ismail or referred to him to redefine the Imami Shia for more powerful revolutionary causes, both in theology and politics.

Besides the political derivation of the Ismaili movement, it was the cultural and philosophical aspect of Ismailism which helped it to spread rapidly in Syria and through the Iranian lands. The contribution of Iranians in this case is indeed considerable as some of the key theoreticians of Ismailism turned out to be Persian, such as Abu Hātam-e Rāzi, Abu Ya'qub-e Sejestāni, Nasafi, Kermāni, al-Mo'ayyad fed-Din-e Shirāzi and indeed, Nāser-e Khosrow. As Ismailism spread throughout central Iran, Khorāsān and Transoxiana, it became more culturally productive and developed. It can be said that the repression of the cultural and philosophical potentials of these regions during the reign of the Turks with their oppressive imposition of the Sunni orthodoxy, caused reactions among the literate that nourished the Ismaili movement as both a religious alternative and a political opposition. Mohammad-e Ahmad-e Nakhshabi (Arabic: al-Nasafi) for instance, was a great philosopher as well as an Ismaili *da'i* (missionary) in Bokhara and Nakhshab, who introduced Neoplatonist thoughts to the Ismaili doctrine.²²⁹ According to Daftari, he succeeded to influence the Sāmānid court and to attract Amir Nasr II and his *Vazir*, Abu Ali Mohammad-e Jeyhāni, to the Ismaili faith, which

²²⁷ Daftari, p.91.

²²⁸ Daftari, p.92.

²²⁹ Daftari, p.113.

[...] displeased the Sunni religious leaders of the state and their military allies, the Turkish guards of the Sāmānid rulers. They conspired together and finally deposed Nasr II, under whose son and successor, Nuh I (331–343/943–954), the Ismailis of Khorāsān and Transoxiana were severely persecuted.²³⁰

It is obvious that Nāser-e Khosrow, as an intellectual with scientific and rational training, came across the Theo-philosophical writings of the Ismaili *Da'vat* (movement) and found them inspiring. By the time of Nāser-e Khosrow, the Shi'ite movement and the Ismaili *Da'vat* in particular, was at the peak of its influence, extending from Syria to Central Asia and India. The Fatimid caliphate managed to establish its theological doctrine and networks of *Dā'is* were already shaped across the Iranian lands. The Ismaili movement now became the main avenue of 'protest against the oppressive rule of the Abbasids, the privileged urban classes and the centralized administration'.²³¹

b) The Fatimid State: Managing the Conflict Between the Esoteric and the Exoteric

With the death of Imam Sādeq, a complicated crisis of succession began which put the Shi'ite movement at the risk of annihilation. Ismail, the oldest son of Sādeq, who was designated as the successor by his father, had already passed away. While the debates about the successor of the Imam was still going, other sons of Imam Sādeq began to claim the Imamate, and this resulted in multiple divisions and the emergence of numerous Shi'ite groups:

‘[...] one that supported ‘Abd Allah (Isma'il's full brother), and two that supported either Musa or Muhammad (Isma'il's half-brothers). In the event, many Shi'a recognized ‘Abd Allah as his father's successor after Isma'il, but he died soon after Ja'far al-Sadiq. Musa then received support from most of the community and was recognized as their imam. From him descended the line of imams of the Twelver branch of Shi'ism.²³²

Some Shi'ites also had messianic beliefs, claiming that the Imam is hidden and will return someday as *mahdi* (the one who is guided by God); the saviour who will bring justice and liberation. Some followers of Ismail claimed that he is not dead and recognised him as the living Imam who is absent. Later, another esoteric group, called the *Qarmatis*, who had close connections with the Ismailis, believed in the Imamate of Ismail's son, Mohammad, and

²³⁰ Farhad Daftari, p.113.

²³¹ Farhad Daftari, p.115.

²³² Sumaiya A. Hamdani, *Between Revolution and State: The Path to Fatimid Statehood* (London and New York: I. B. Turis in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006), p. 2.

claimed that is he had gone to concealment (*gheybat*) and he will reappear (*zohur*) as the promised messiah (*mahdi-ye mow'ud*). The idea of the concealed Imam was the result of socio-political dissatisfaction and the sign of rejecting the existing order. At the same time, it provoked the esoteric and metaphysical ideas about Imam and human liberation. However, as the messianic idea of the saviour Imam grew among the revolutionary Shi'ites, the political and spiritual expectations of the living Imam increased, and this caused some problems for the Ismailis as we shall see later.

The History of the Fatimids starts with Abdollāh II, who claimed the Imamate in 899 as Abdollāh 'al-Mahdi', and no longer regarded himself as the *hojjat* (proof) of the concealed Imam.²³³ Abdollāh was a son of Muhammad ibn Ismail ibn Ja'far al-Sādeq. He was running the Ismaili *da'vat* in Salamiyya in Syria in secret, but soon he had to leave Salamiyya to protect his life from the Abbasids as well as the Qarmatis, since after declaring himself as the Imam, the Qarmatis started to oppose his decision. Abdollāh al-Mahdi headed towards North Africa, where his place was secured by Abu Abdollāh al-Shi'i, the well-known Ismaili missionary who made huge progress in spreading the Ismaili religion among the Kutama Berbers and establishing an Ismaili state in North Africa. Abdollāh's *sanctuary* (*dar al-hijra*) in Tazroute in Morocco can be regarded as an Ismaili revolutionary state before the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate in Egypt. As the leader of the state, Abdollāh had the chance to build a society according to his Ismaili ideas. He created and organised an army and a missionary network consisting of different tribal groups, each based in a different location. He prioritised the public needs and wealth when it came to distributing the booties or tax revenues, while he directly supervised tax farming in order to prevent corruption. He assigned those who committed a crime as a labour force for social and public needs. He set out daily gatherings for educating people. Both men and women were free to attend these sessions. These sessions helped Abdollāh to educate Ismaili *dā'is* (missionaries), some of these missionaries were women.

Sumaiya Hamdani, in his valuable study, *Between Revolution and State*, has mentioned that the Ismaili religion could have attracted both the common people and the intellectuals. The Ismaili missionaries had designed different levels of knowledge for different groups of people. Their missionary activities were carefully structured within a hierarchical missionary system. Therefore, the Ismaili discourse was a severe threat to the Islamic empire. It was intellectually

²³³ Hamdani, p. 3. For a more detailed account on the history of the Ismailis before the establishment of the Fatimid state see Heinz Halm, *The Fatimids and Their Traditions of Learning* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1997), pp. 3-30

powerful enough to gain the attention of religious scholars and philosophers in large cities. At the same time, it was flexible enough to use the common beliefs among ordinary people or appropriate the public discontent in rural places in favour of its cause. Hamdani also mentions that the idea of an Imam who is physically alive and present was another important factor for Ismailis success. If we remember Nāser-e Khosrow's self-narrative that I discussed earlier in chapter one, we can see the importance of these two features of the Ismaili movement. In Nāser-e Khosrow's self-narrative, one of the reasons that he chooses the Ismaili religion is the fact that the presence of an Imam from the descendent of Prophet Mohammad is like the presence of the Prophet Mohammad among his followers. Therefore, to follow the Imam of the time and receiving his guidance is equal to having the advantage of living during the time of Prophet Mohammad and swearing allegiance to him. In *qasida* 242, Nāser-e Khosrow refers to a verse in the Quran²³⁴, which is about the oath of allegiance that took place between the Prophet Mohammad and his followers under a tree. He then regrets that the Prophet is gone, so the assembly of the followers and devotees:

یک روز بخواندم ز قرآن آیت بیعت
 کایزد به قرآن گفت که «بُذ دست من از بر»
 آن قوم که در زیر شجر بیعت کردند
 چون جعفر و مقداد و چو سلمان و چو بوذر
 گفتم که «کنون آن شجر و دست چگونه است،
 آن دست کجا جویم و آن بیعت و محضر؟»
 گفتند که «آنجا نه شجر ماند و نه آن دست،
 کان جمع پراکنده شد آن دست مستر
 آنها همه یاران رسولند و بهشتی
 مخصوص بدان بیعت و از خلق مُخیر»
 گفتم که «به قرآن در پیداست که احمد
 بشیر و نذیر است و سراج است و منور،
 و خواهد کشتن به دهن کافر او را
 روشن کندش ایزد بر کامه کافر
 چون است که امروز نمانده است از آن قوم؟
 جز حق نبود قول جهان داور اکبر

²³⁴ Verse (48:10): 'Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you, [O Muhammad] - they are actually pledging allegiance to Allah. The hand of Allah is over their hands. So he who breaks his word only breaks it to the detriment of himself. And he who fulfils that which he has promised Allah - He will give him a great reward.' (Sahih International)

ما دست که گیریم و کجا بیعت یزدان
تا همچون مقّم نبود دادِ مؤخّر؟
ما جرم چه کردیم نژادیم بدان وقت؟
محروم چرائیم ز پیغمبر و مضطر؟²³⁵

‘Then one day, as I read in the Book the Verse
of the Oath, in which God proclaims His Hand
is above all hands, and pondered on that group
who swore allegiance beneath the Tree (like Jafar,
Miqdad, Salman, Budhar) I asked myself
How is it now with that Tree and with that Hand?
Where shall I see that Hand, that group, that Oath?
I asked, but was rebuffed. They are no more
-so I was told- The Tree, the Hand are gone,
the Assembly dispersed, the Hand concealed and veiled
in secrecy. Those men were the Companions,
favoured by that allegiance and chosen to be
with the Prophet in Paradise.
But I said to myself
In the Book it is clear that Ahmad is the Messenger
of Good News, and the Warner, luminous as light.
If the unbelievers wished to blow it out
God would light it again in spite of them.
How is it today that no one is left
of that Community? Surely the word
of the Universal Judge cannot be false!
Whose hand should we grasp, where should we take an oath
that even we men of latter times might enjoy
the justice of heaven? Why should it be our fault
not to be born in that era? Why should we
be deprived of the Prophet, afflicted and distressed?’²³⁶

²³⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 509.

²³⁶ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson, pp. 5-6.

In the above lines, by referring to the Quran, Nāser-e Khosrow regards the allegiance with the Prophet Mohammad as divine and unique, to be differentiated from other allegiances. This divine allegiance, for Nāser-e Khosrow, is meaningful and symbolic. The prophet here is the source of wisdom and guidance, as he is chosen by God, and those who made the oath of allegiance to him, are doing their duty toward their prophet. This is in contrast with the situation in which the poet has found himself: the prophet, the only legitimate source of knowledge is gone, and the authority of the religious knowledge is in the hands of incompetent and corrupted *faqihs*, and those who are following the *faqihs* are imitators with no consciousness or awareness. The poet finds himself lost and in search of genuine religious authority. This argument was the central part of the rationale of the Ismaili missionaries, particularly in their debates with the Sunni scholars during the establishment of the Fatimid caliphate.²³⁷ The fact that Nāser-e Khosrow used the same argument in his poetic narrative of his conversion suggests that he was under the influence of the Ismaili teachings he received in Cairo while he was writing this *qasida*. Later in the same *qasida*, when Nāser-e Khosrow receives the enlightening knowledge from the Ismaili guide, he compares the event with the holy allegiance ceremony that took place between the Prophet Mohammad and his followers:

دستم به کف دست نبی داد به بیعت
زیر شجر عالی پر سایه مثمر²³⁸

He put my hand into the Prophets hand,
I spoke the Oath beneath that exalted Tree²³⁹

This line might suggest that Nāser-e Khosrow was allowed to meet the Fatimid Imam, al-Mustansir after he received the knowledge from the guide, although we do not have enough evidence to support this claim. In any case, it is clear that by comparing the Fatimid Imam and Ismaili movement with the Prophet and the story of making an oath of allegiance, Nāser-e Khosrow justifies the Ismaili doctrine Imamate. According to this doctrine, a living Imam in each period is a necessity since he is the one who has the legitimate religious authority and possesses the esoteric knowledge, the inner meaning of the holy text.

Now let us return to the formation of the Fatimid state. Abu Abdollāh Shi'i's experience in running society based on Ismaili religion was an exception as it took place in a small rural society which already had Shi'ite tendencies. In other words, Abdollāh was already governing

²³⁷ Hamdani, pp. 10-11, 40-44.

²³⁸ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 513.

²³⁹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson, p. 8.

a homogenised society with a low level of diversity; therefore, he was free and comfortable enough to manage the necessities of governing the society according to his own ideas. However, this was not the case for the Ismaili Imams once the Fatimid state was established. The Fatimid state during the Imamate of Abdollāh al-Mahdi and his son al-Qā'em was more like a revolutionary state which was facing numerous problems as a result of gaining the power. Once the Ismaili Imams turned from oppositional figures to the head of state, they found themselves in the situation of constant negotiation with different hostile groups and they faced with numerous threats and rebels. They had to deal with different Sunni groups as they had the majority in Fatimids territory. Moreover, there were tribal protests, especially from the Kutama Berbers. Each of these tribal and religious groups demanded their share in the government structure. On the other hand, the Ismailis had to deal with issues such as security and stability, managing financial resources, distributing power among followers, managing the internal struggles between different Ismaili factions, and controlling the radicalism of some revolutionary missionaries. This was the same situation in which the Abbasids found themselves once they reached the political power. The situation in which the radical and revolutionary ideas were overshadowed by the necessities of governance and the need for a stable and well-organised political structure:

As in the case of the Abbasids, the transition from revolution to state prompted some necessary and critical changes to Fatimid policy and politics. In addition to the unremitting hostility of the Sunni, especially the Maliki, *'ulama'* and the rebellious Khariji Berbers of the western Mahgrib, the early Fatimids had to contend with internal dissent and opposition within their *da'wa*.²⁴⁰

The execution of Abu Abdollāh al-Shi'i and his brother Abol Abbās reminds of the execution of major military and administrative figures of the Abbasids, such as Abu Moslem of Khorāsān and the Barmakids. However, despite the emergence of tensions and disputes, al-Mahdi and his son al-Qā'im did their best not to lose the revolutionary radicalism of Ismailism as an oppositional and messianic organisation:

Despite these problems, al-Mahdi's religious policy remained in many ways that of the revolutionary period, the era of Abu 'Abd Allah's *dar al-hijra*. While he did not abstain from appointing Sunnis to administrative positions, he continued to rely exclusively on Shi'is for religious offices, including not only the imams (that is to say, the prayer

²⁴⁰ Hamdani, p. 58.

leaders) of mosques, but also *qadis*, *muftis* (those who delivered religious opinions), public witnesses, and those who were allowed to draw up legal contracts and documents. At the same time, instruction in Sunni *madhahib* was officially prohibited, presumably to encourage conversion to Ismaili Shi'ism. Subjecting the Sunni '*ulama*' to these restrictions (similar to those previously imposed by the Aghlabids on the Shi'is) resulted in growing resentment towards the Fatimid state.²⁴¹

It did take some time for the Fatimids to realise that the political legitimacy, order and stability demand a degree of stepping back from Gnosticism and esotericism and that they have to recognise the importance of politics as a secular and worldly entity. In other words, regarding political relations and governance as secondary issues which belong to the realm of *manifestations* or the *exoteric* (*zāher*) could not help the Ismaili Imams with managing the tensions among different groups of people, while establishing a legal system in order to secure the social order and stability seemed more practical in the post-revolutionary situation of the Ismailis. It was during the time of al-Mansur and al-Mu'izz when they realised that a more inclusive and tolerant approach needed for securing their power:

Mansur actively pursued the support of his Sunni subjects. This he did in a number of ways, such as leading the prayer on major occasions in Qayrawan and otherwise engaging the population in festivals of his own devising. [...] More importantly, he initiated a radical departure in policy, allowing for the appointment of Maliki judges in predominantly Maliki towns, while jurisdiction in Ismaili towns such as Mansuriyya and Mahdiyya went to Ismaili judges like al-Qadi al-Nu'man. Al-Mu'izz continued his father's policy of inclusive religious administration and actively engaging the public, both Sunni and Shi'i, when he came to power in 341/953. In addition to leading the prayer on main feast days and every Friday during Ramadan, he held public banquets on important holidays. [...] The policy of conciliation and accommodation was obviously designed to make allowance for the establishment of a *modus vivendi* with the Sunni population. So long as certain legal and ritual guidelines, such as the call to prayer, were performed in the Shi'i manner, the Sunnis were allowed to go their own ritual and legal way.²⁴²

If for the Abbasids and Seljuqs the political and political order were about distinguishing the other, the enemy, for the Fatimids, however, the political was about tolerance and being

²⁴¹ Hamdani, p.50.

²⁴² Hamdani, pp. 60-61.

inclusive; it was about finding the point of balance between esotericism and exotericism. In both cases (Abbasids and Fatimids), normalisation and standardisation were the ultimate goals. In the case of the Fatimids, diversity, and the necessity for being inclusive and tolerant were the consequence of the expansion of the Fatimids territory in North Africa. Normalisation demanded *fiqh* or a legal system. However, for the Fatimids, organising a legal system was a response to the diversity which was dictated from the society, and it had less to do with identifying the *enemy* or *the other*.

Conclusion

The concept of the political explains the process of conflict and struggle where the self /friend identifies itself as opposed to its other / enemy. By identifying the other, the political power articulates a political identity through which it can justify its presence and exert its power. The formation of the friend-enemy relationship will lead to a political order when the political power managed to hegemonise its identity, stabilise tensions and hostilities, and normalise the social relations by imposing regulations. However, this stage is always temporary. The political power cannot fully hegemonise its political discourse or its identity on a diverse and versatile society, and the excluded *other* remains as a threat, and it delays the process of closure, fixation and normalisation.

The political and the formation of the political order during the time of Nāser-e Khosrow was in its most intense and vibrant level. Both the Abbasids and the Turkic rulers of Khorāsān sought legitimacy and needed to secure their power. Social stability was another critical factor which necessitated the recognition of *the other* and regulating the politics, religion and literature according to standards and norms. This regulation and normalisation took place based on the Sunni Islam and paved the way for a symbolic coalition between the Caliphs and the Turkic Sultans. Within this religious orthodoxy, the Sunni *fiqh* or legal system was the primary tool of political power, and the Sunni *faqih*s found a particular position in educational institutions. Conventional interpretations of the Quran and Hadith based on the apparent and literal meaning of the text became the only acceptable approach, while rational, philosophical, esoteric and gnostic approaches were regarded as heresy and religious innovation.

At a time when the term enemy had become synonymous with ‘heretic’, ‘philosopher’ or ‘esoteric’ (*bāteni*), being an Ismaili intellectual at the heart of the Turkic powerhouse made Nāser-e Khosrow an *inconvenient subject*, mainly because he was a poet and thus possessed

the most potent instrument to *disturb* the political order. Persian literature and language had been already turned into a firm cultural institution during the Sāmānids, and later it was confiscated by the Turkic rulers. Nevertheless, it was now being appropriated by Nāser-e Khosrow to become a medium for representing political protest, as well as manifesting controversial and unorthodox Theo-philosophical subjects. Such intellectual privilege was the result of Nāser-e Khosrow's conversion to Ismailism. Ismailism emerged from the radical wing of Shi'ism, and it combined the religious doctrines with gnostic and Neo-platonic philosophy. At the same time, it was a political movement that tied philosophical and religious intellectualism with political protest and activism. However, the political experience of the Ismailis in the form of Fatimid caliphate in Egypt proved that the gnostic and esoteric aspect of the Ismaili discourse contradicts with the logic of governance which demanded a set of fixed regulations and conventions. Such contradiction, as we are going to discuss in the chapters that follow, forms the main problematic aspect of Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry.

Chapter Three:

Resisting the Anthropomorphic God

Introduction

This chapter studies Nāser-e Khosrow's account on the concept of Divine Oneness as a theological problem. Being a philosopher, theologian and Ismaili missionary, Nāser-e Khosrow reflected some of the most-debated theological issues of his time in his *Divan*. The questions of *towhid* (Divine Oneness) and *jabr-o ekhtiyār* (determinism and freewill) are prevalent among these. This chapter will focus on Nāser-e Khosrow's contribution to the theory of the Divine Oneness. In order to investigate elements of resistance in Nāser-e Khosrow's theological positions, I will examine Nāser-e Khosrow's prose works along with his poems, highlighting the anti-orthodox and emancipative aspects of his theology and situating them in the political and cultural milieu of his time.

The Divine Oneness and the Political

The theory of *Towhid* (Divine Oneness) has been one of the most controversial subjects of Islamic theology. As the formation of the political developed during the Abbasids, arguments about Divine Oneness became a politicised area of Islamic theology. The question of *zāt-o sefāt-e khodā* (God's essence and attributes) was at the core of the theory of Divine Oneness. Affirming God's attributes either as anthropomorphic qualities or as indistinguishable from and intrinsic in God's essence may have resulted in significant political consequences. Depending on which side of the debate had political hegemony, confirming or denying God's attributes may have made the speaker a heretic or a true believer. As Nader El-Bizri observes:

The essence–attributes question reflected the variant dimensions of scriptural interpretation and its grounding theories of meaning. According to heresiographic accounts, it was the distinction claimed between the exoteric, apparent (*zāhir*) meaning of scripture, and its esoteric, hidden (*bātin*) sense which generated extremist doctrinal positions, most emblematically the anthropomorphists (*mushabbiha*) and corporealists (*mujassima*) at one extreme, ranged against various esotericists (*bātinīyya*) on the other.²⁴³

The consequences of being for or against God's attributes went beyond the political realm. Supporting or denying God's attributes, in fact, represented two fundamentally different approaches towards the Quran and other religious texts. The followers of the apparent meaning

²⁴³ Nader El-Bizri, 'God: Essence and Attributes', in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. by Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.121-140 (121).

of the Quran were against the radical negation of anthropomorphic attributes or any philosophical contemplation on the holy text in general. Conversely, those who denied divine attributes believed in the power of human intellect, logical methodology and esoteric interpretation of the religious text. Depending on who had political hegemony, therefore, rationalist and philosophical approaches may have been either propagated or prohibited.

There were three major groups who had leading roles in setting the scene for this cultural and political confrontation: *mohaddesān* (traditionalists), *motakallemān* (theologians) and *filṣufān* (philosophers). The traditionalists, among whom the three major Sunni jurists, Abu Hanifa, Mālik and Shāfi’I were the most renowned, considered the Quran, Hadith (the statements of the prophet) and the Prophet’s Tradition (his practices and decrees in particular situations) the only authentic and substantive sources of religious knowledge. They ‘sought to minimise the use of reason and to seek religious unity by applying literalist explanations.’²⁴⁴ Being interested in educating jurists rather than confrontational debates, the traditionalists’ were concerned with reciting and referring to the Quran and Hadith rather than expanding the field by reasoning. As Ahmed al-Shamsy has pointed out,

The emerging corpus of agreed-upon *hadith* and the conclusions drawn from these regarding correct belief and action formed the theological core of the traditionalists’ discourse. This core was articulated in the form of succinct credos (‘aqâ’id, sing. ‘aqida), which were designed for easy memorisation by students and served as important pedagogical tools.²⁴⁵

Motakallemān (theologians) adopted the dialectical method of Greek philosophy to propose and explain major theological issues such as: God’s essence and attributes, Quranic createdness, creation, the day of judgement, and determinism and free will. Theologians applied the dialectical form and logical techniques of Greek philosophy but disregarded the very core of philosophical discourse, which was posing questions without allowing fixed presuppositions to affect the process of philosophical contemplation. Nonetheless, the theologians’ use of the philosophical methodology provided a more contemplative space and dynamism in Islamic pedagogy than the discourse of the traditionalists:

²⁴⁴ Khalid Blankinship, ‘The Early Creed’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. by Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 33-55 (51).

²⁴⁵ Ahmed El Shamsy, ‘The Social Construction of Orthodoxy’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. by Tim Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 97-120 (105).

The discourse of the early dialectic theologians, and particularly those who adhered to Mu'tazilism, was in many ways diametrically opposed to that of the traditionists. The theologians focused not on a substantive set of materials but rather on a formal methodology of reasoning and debate. As a consequence, a student of *kalām* who attached himself to a teacher could not simply adopt and internalise authoritative statements regarding belief from his teacher in the way that students of traditions, who would memorise their teachers' credos, could. Instead, the aspiring theologian would be introduced to and trained in the theoretical paradigm developed by his master and the rational arguments that underpinned that paradigm. If he was intellectually capable, he could disagree with his master and eventually develop his own theory.²⁴⁶

The Mu'tazilite theologians had strong rationalist tendency towards faith. They believed that human intellect is the main criterion for understanding the Quran. They also argued for *hodus-e qor'āni* (the qur'anic createdness), denying that the Quran is an eternal, uncreated thing. Moreover, they supported the idea of the human realm of power and free will, known as *qadar* or *ekhtiyār*. It is interesting to note that, unlike during the period under investigation in this chapter, Mu'tazilism and the rational approach was once encouraged by the caliph Ma'mun (re. 813-833). At that time, Mu'tazilism became the official state doctrine, to the extent that an inquisition (known as *mihna*) was established, requiring every religious scholar to follow the Mu'tazilite principles. The formalisation of the Mu'tazilite discourse by the caliphate gradually provoked the hostility of the Sunnis and traditionalists towards Mu'tazilism. Among the traditionalists, Ahmad ibn Hanbal started a fully-fledged confrontation with Mu'tazilism.²⁴⁷ As Majid Fakhry puts it,

Mu'tazilite theological ascendancy continued during the reign of al-Ma'mun and his two immediate successors; but with the accession of al-Mutawakkil in 847, the official policy of the state was completely reversed. Ibn Hanbal was released from prison and amends made to him; a new policy of repression aimed at the Mu'tazilah, the Shi'ah and others was inaugurated. From that time on, the star of the Mu'tazilah began to set. The theological arena was now seized by traditionalists of every stripe, until a somewhat moderate post-Mu'tazilite school led by Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 935) appeared on the scene. In a sense, this school was destined to salvage the spirit of

²⁴⁶ El Shamsy, pp. 105-106.

²⁴⁷ Khalid Blankinship, pp. 51-54.

rational enquiry unleashed by the Mu'tazilah, despite the fact that on substantive issues the Ash'arite school remained committed to the traditionalist viewpoint.²⁴⁸

By having a close look at the history of the Abbasids and their mixed religious policies, one can argue that tensions between these three groups were more the result of the formation of the political than discursive and doctrinal differences. The political, through foregrounding differences and ignoring similarities, changed the differences between theological schools and religious discourses from something natural to something problematic and unnatural. As a result, the multiplicity of interpretations and perspectives became polarised into two extreme sides. While Ash'arites stood at the right side of the debate, securing the religious policies of the political power, the Mu'tazilites stood on the left, challenging the orthodoxy. There were also Hanbalites, anthropomorphists (*Moshabbaheh*) and Corporealists (*Mojassameh*) from the far right, arguing that the divine attributes are independent of the essence, and they are as anthropomorphic as they seem in the Qur'an. They believed that God has a face and hand and that He is sitting on a throne in heaven.²⁴⁹

Apart from the issue of human reason, accepting the idea of Divine attributes was tantamount to acknowledging the Quran as an uncreated thing. Rejecting God's attributes, however, would have opened a discursive space through which to see the Qur'an as a created entity, limited to time and place. To say that the Quran is an uncreated thing, for the Mu'tazilites, was to deny the unity and oneness of God's essence:

If the Qur'an is the God's speech, then it is either coeternal with God, and thus uncreated, or it is not coeternal with God. To maintain pure monotheism, one must concede that it is created. On this inference, if the Qur'an is coeternal with God, then in order to eschew plurality in the divine oneness, one has to say that the scripture, as God's speech, is one with God. To avoid affirming contraries (unity and multiplicity), a Mu'tazilite would assert it is not coeternal with God and must therefore be created. This argument is seconded by Qur'anic proof-texts that point to place and time, as to its accessibility to finite human apprehension.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism; A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000), p.20.

²⁴⁹ On the role of Ash'arism in making the orthodox theological system, see Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, Third Edition, 2004), pp. 209-223.

²⁵⁰ El-Bizri, p. 123.

By arguing that the divine attributes are ‘revealed in a worldly language for the convenience of human comprehension,’²⁵¹ the Mu’tazilite discourse paved the way for applying a historical view to theological issues, while it saved the ontological essence of Divine Oneness from reductionist explanations and exoteric interpretations.

The Mu’tazilites also emphasised the role of the human intellect. Valuing human intelligence encouraged intellectual approaches to theological debates and broadened the scope of the religious discourse beyond the traditionalists’ dogmatic approach. As Ignaz Goldziher explains, the Mu’tazilites foremost concern was

[...] to wipe out the anthropomorphic conceptions of traditional orthodoxy, which they saw as incompatible with a dignified conception of God. Orthodoxy would not agree to any but a literal understanding of the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic expressions in the Qur’an and the traditional texts. God sees, hears, is moved to anger; He smiles, sits and stands; He even has friends, feet, ears. Such matters, to which there are frequent references in the Qur’an and other texts, must be understood according to the letter. The Hanbalite school in particular fought for this crude conception of God, which they considered *sunna*. At best, these most conservative believers were willing to admit that while they demanded literal understanding of the words of the text, they could not precisely say how one was to envision the reality to which such conceptions corresponded. They demanded unquestioning belief in the literal meaning of the text, *bilâ kayfa*, ‘without how’. A closer definition of that *how*, they argued, passes human understanding, and man ought not meddle with things that have not been rendered subject to his thought. [...] but in their view, one could not think of anything as really existing that was not substance. The conception of God as a purely spiritual being was for these people tantamount to atheism.²⁵²

During Naser-e Khosrow’s time, the anthropomorphist views were becoming popular in Khorāsān. These included the Karrāmiyyeh denomination who had already found considerable adherents among the commoners and the ruling elite. Mahmoud of Ghazneh, likewise his father Sebüktegin, is reported to have an intensifying tendency towards the Karrāmiyyeh:

Under Sebüktegin’s son, Sultan Mahmoud, the Karrāmi leader Abu Bakr Mohammad b. Eshaq b. Mahmashaz was appointed *ra’is* (chief) of Nishapur, a position he used to

²⁵¹ El-Bizri, p. 123.

²⁵² Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, transl. by Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 92.

bolster the standing of the Karrāmiya as staunch Sunnis by the adoption of a policy aimed at suppressing a variety of alleged heresies. These included Shi'ites, Mo'tazelites, and Ash'arites, as well as the kind of Sufism represented by Abu Sa'eed-e Abol-Kheir.²⁵³

According to Aron Zysow, Karrāmiyyeh was an 'intellectually aggressive form of traditionalism' evolving 'in the strongly Hanafi anti-Jahmi milieu of the Eastern Islamic world'. Influenced by the teachings of Mohammad-e Karrām (d. 896), the Karrāmiyyeh, 'formed a community distinguished by its impressive dedication to an ascetic lifestyle'. 'For most of their history', Zysow adds, 'their intellectual centre was Nishapur, and it was in Nishapur under the early Ghaznavids (late fourth/tenth century) that the Karrāmiyyeh gained their greatest social acceptance and political influence'.²⁵⁴

Nāser-e Khosrow and the Ontological Dimension of the Divine Oneness

In *Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, Nāser-e Khosrow dedicated a chapter to the beliefs of Karrāmiyyeh on the Divine Oneness. He gives a rattling refutation of their arguments:

We counter that this doctrine of theirs, according to which God is a body unlike other bodies, is a meaningless utterance and quite invalid. Their statement that He is knowing not like other knowers, powerful not like other powerful, and living but not like other forms of life, is absurd. On this point, the *towhid* of this group is no *towhid*. Quite the opposite: it is polytheism (*sherk*). In proof, know that the discourse of anyone who says, 'He is a body unlike other bodies', is fallacious. The reason is that a body is defined as something of substance which is both divisible and extended; it has three dimensions: length, breadth, and depth. A body is not defined [solely] by colour, weight, or moistness. Just so, fire, though it is hot and dry, bright and mobile, is a body. And water, fire's opposite – cool and wet, dark and still – is distinct from fire in all its qualities, but it too is a body. Corporeality (*jismiyyat*) encompasses them both because both occupy space, both are compound, and each of them, opposed as they are, possesses length, breadth, and depth. Anyone who says, 'It is a body not like bodies', is necessarily saying, 'It is a body not a body', and such a statement is contradictory and

²⁵³ Aron Zysow, 'Karrāmiya', *Encyclopaedia Iranica* <<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/karramiya>> [accessed 18 May 2019]

²⁵⁴ Aron Zysow, 'Karrāmiyya', *Oxford Handbooks Online*, 2014, 1-13 <[10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199696703.013.29](https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199696703.013.29)>

nonsensical. Just so, if someone says, ‘He’s a man not like a man’ or ‘It is a fire not like a fire’, he is speaking fallaciously.²⁵⁵

Here, Nāser-e Khosrow argues that anthropomorphic attributes of God are fundamentally based on similarity – *moshābehāt* – with the material world. He states that one cannot disregard the corporeality that is inherent in these attributes, even in the most subjective and abstract interpretations. The statement ‘He is a body unlike other bodies’, which was also used by the Ash’arites, according to Nāser-e Khosrow, is a fallacy since it still perceives God based on *tashbih* (comparison) with material objects and human sensual experience.

Nāser-e Khosrow displays some of his views on the Divine Oneness in a philosophical qasideh, which is known as ‘The First Poem,’²⁵⁶ because it is the opening piece in the oldest manuscript of his work discovered so far.²⁵⁷ The poem functions as a polemical and non-literary speech, revealing the poet’s intellectual position concerning primary theological debates of his time.

Beginning a *Divan* with words in praise of God’s Oneness and His transcendence, was an already established literary convention at the time of Nāser-e Khosrow. From the political and religious point of view, it gave poets a chance to announce their theological opinions. Every praise of God was like a code or statement, showing the poet’s take on controversial issues such as God’s attributes or the ability of human intellect to know the Divine essence.

In this Poem, Nāser-e Khosrow puts forward complicated theological and philosophical questions, demanding from his reader an appropriate response. The significant aspects of Nāser-e Khosrow’s thought are all put together in this qasideh: his views about God’s Oneness (theology – *khodāshenāsi*), the creation of the universe (cosmology – *jahān-shenāsi*) and the position of human beings as the privileged being (anthropology- *ensān-shenāsi*). Here, our focus is Nāser-e Khosrow’s approach to the theory of Oneness, which one can find in the opening lines of the First Poem:²⁵⁸

خداوندی که در وحدت قدیم است از همه اشیا
نه اندر وحدتش کثرت، نه مُحدَث زین همه تنها

God is pre-eternal in his unity of all things.

There is no multiplicity in his unity, He transcends all creations.

²⁵⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Between Reason and Revelation; Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, transl. by Eric Ormsby, p. 52.

²⁵⁶ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson, p. 31.

²⁵⁷ See Mehdi Mohaqeq and Mojtabā Minovi’s introduction (*pishgoftār*) in Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqeq.

²⁵⁸ All the translations are by the author, in collaboration with Dr Saeed Talajooy, unless otherwise stated.

چه گویی از چه او عالم پدید آورد از لؤلؤ
که نه مادت بُد نه صورت، نه بالا بود نه پهنا

Why do you ask from what He made the universe or say from pearl?

[Don't you know that] there was no matter, nor form, height or breadth?

همی گویی بر معلول خود علت بود سابق
چونان چون بر عدد واحد، و یا بر کل خود اجزا

You too agree that cause precedes effect,

Just as ONE is prior to numbers, or part to the whole

به معلولی چو یک حکم است و یک وصف آن دو عالم را
چرا چون علت سابق، توانا باشد و دانا؟

And since both worlds (heaven and earth) are effects,

How can they be conscious and effective – like their own antecedent cause?

هر آنچه امروز نتواند به فعل آوردن از قوت
نیاز و عجز اگر نبود ورا، چه دئی و چه فردا

Why is it that it does not have the power to bring things into being now?

If an entity has no needs and no limits in power, yesterday and tomorrow make no difference.

همی گویی زمانی بود از معلول تا علت
پس از ناچیز محض آورد موجودات را پیدا

You claim there was a time intervening between cause and effect,

and then He created beings from absolute nothingness.

زمانی کز فلک زاید، فلک نابوده چون باشد؟
زمان و چیز ناموجود و ناموجود بی مبدا

But Time itself is created by the circling firmament; how can it then exist before the firmament was created?

Time and firmament would then be a non-existent entity, and a non-existing entity with no beginning.

گر هیچیز را چیزی نهی قائم به ذات خود
پس آمد نفس وحدت را مضاد و مثل در الّا

And if you take this non-existent entity as an entity whose being is only dependent on itself, then God's unity is faced with a contradiction and partnership,

تقدم هست یزدان را چو بر اعداد و حدان را
زمان حاصل، مکان باطل، حدت لازم، قدم برجا

God is prior to [and above] all, as one is prior to several:

Thus, time is a product, place is meaningless, the fact of their being as created is a clear must, and the pre-existence of God remains undisputed.

مکن هرگز بدو فعلی اضافه گر خرد داری
به جز ابداع یک مُبدَع کلمح العین أو أدنا

Do not attribute to Him any deed, if you are wise,
Except for the Innovation (out of nothing) of one creator [Universal Intellect] (as) that occurs
at once, in the blink of an eye.

مگو فعلش بدانگونه که ذاتش منفعل گردد
چنان کز کمترین قصدی به گاه فعل، ذات ما

Do not speak of His deed in such a way that His essence is suggested to be passive
like our own, moulded in time by act, by the least of intentions.²⁵⁹

مجوی از وحدت محضش برون از ذات او چیزی
که او عام است و ماهیات خاص اندر همه احیا

Do not seek for His Absolute Unity outside His Essence,
for He is all-comprehensive, while the essences of things are particular, determined.²⁶⁰

گر از هر بینشش بیرون کنی وصفی برو مفزا
دو باشد بی خلاف آنکه نه فرد و واحد و یکتا²⁶¹

If you claim He transcends all vision, do not attribute qualities to Him
for this would make Him dual in essence, no longer singular, unique and ONE.²⁶²

There is a second piece, which also reveals Nāser-e Khosrow's view on the Divine Oneness. Unlike the First Poem, this one has a proper structure of a qasida with the brilliant level of eloquence that we associate with Nāser-e Khosrow. The well-structured rhymestering (*qāfiyeh-pardāzi*) and artistic brevity (*ijāz*) correctly serve the liturgical function of the qasida:

ای ذات تو ناشده مصوّر
اثبات تو عقل کرده باور

You, whose essence has not been contained in form,
and the Intellect has acknowledged the proof of your existence.

اسم تو ز حدّ و رسم بیزار
ذات تو ز نوع و جنس برتر

²⁵⁹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson, p. 32.

²⁶⁰ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson, p. 32.

²⁶¹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, pp. 1-2.

²⁶² Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson, p.32.

Your name does not accept any limits and shapes.

Your essence transcends species and gender.

فعلت نه به قصد امر خير

قولت نه به لفظ ناهي شر

Your act is not like the one who orders for good
nor is your speech like the one who interdicts the evil.

هم بر قدمت حدوث شاهد

هم با ازلت ابد مجاور²⁶³

Creation testifies that you were here before it,
and in your Essence, pre-eternity and permanence are adjoined.

In the First Poem, the poetic language used to address the complicated theological subjects has affected the clarity of Naser-e Khosrow's views. Reading the above lines in the light of Ismaili theology can clarify their meaning, however. In the second poem, Nāser-e Khosrow directly addresses his theological views on God. He states that God cannot be named, nor be the subject of human discourse. Human intellect cannot comprehend Him. He is the absolute Essence which transcends all beings, therefore any effort to define Him, *inevitably* cannot be without a form of anthropomorphism.

To understand the above lines better, it would be appropriate to start by reviewing the Mu'tazilites' views on the subject of the Divine Oneness. According to the Mu'tazilite theology,

God is unique, nothing is like him; he is neither body, nor individual, nor substance, nor accident. He is beyond time. He cannot dwell in a place or within a being; he is not the object of any creatural attribute or qualification. He is neither conditioned nor determined, neither engendered nor engendering. He is beyond the perception of the senses. The eyes cannot see him, observation cannot attain him, the imagination cannot comprehend him. He is a thing, but he is not like other things; he is omniscient, all-powerful, but his omniscience and his all-mightiness cannot be compared to anything created. He created the world without any pre-established archetype and without an auxiliary.²⁶⁴

²⁶³ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqeq, pp. 244-245

²⁶⁴ Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, transl. by Liadain Sherrard (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 2001), pp. 109-110.

Ismailism, being influenced by Neoplatonism, emphasised the concept of the Absolute Essence, according to which God is transcendent and beyond existence, and therefore unknowable and beyond the power of human comprehension. God transcends the Universal Intellect. He is not the First Cause (*illat-al-ilal*), as Aristotelian philosophers used to argue. ‘The first cause of the world was rather his order or word which became united with the Universal Intellect. God could only be called *causator causae causarum* (*mu’lil ‘illat al-ilal*)’.²⁶⁵ Therefore, God even transcends the First Cause. The First Cause was God’s word or decree that originated the Universal Reason. By putting the Absolute Essence above the First Cause, the Ismailis released the idea of God’s Essence from the logical structure of cause and effect. God, thus, became an ontological essence inherently standing beyond and above the process of origination.

From the Ismaili perspective, the Mu’tazilites were not radical enough to articulate a transcendental perception of the Divine essence, since they still recognised some fundamental attributes for God. Nāser-e Khosrow explains this inadequacy in his *Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*. He points out that the attributes that the Mu’tazilites are acknowledging, are human and from the physical world:

The knowledgeable, the powerful, and the living do not all stand at the same level (*martabat*). Knowledge, power, and life may be big and small, and yet, all share in knowledge, power, and life, by definition. For example, a gnat (*pashah*) is living and so, too, is a dog; but a dog has the power to run, the gnat the power to fly. So, too, a scholar who has great knowledge is knowing, but even he who has only a little knowledge is also knowing. It is as God says, ‘*And above every man of knowledge is one who knows.*’ And so, God does not exclude a man of lesser knowledge from the definition of knowledge because of the greater knowledge of a more learned man; indeed, He calls both ‘knowing’ (*‘alim*). In this way, we make it clear (*durust kardīm*) that the *towhid* of anyone who ascribes to God the attributes by which human beings may be described, is in fact polytheism.²⁶⁶

He then argues that by imagining attributes as essence, one has to identify them as accidents to an essence, as no attribute can have any effect nor existence on its own, and that it has to receive

²⁶⁵ Wilfred Madelung, ‘Aspects of Ismaili Theology: The Prophetic Chain and the God beyond Being’, in *Ismaili Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), pp. 51-63 (57).

²⁶⁶ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Between Reason and Revelation; Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, transl. by Eric Ormsby, p. 53.

a form of originating force from an essence. Naser-e Khosrow therefore concludes that the only way not to commit polytheism is to consider God's attributes and essence as the same thing:

We say with regards to the oneness professed by this group (the Mu'tazilites) – namely their saying that God is knowing not by a knowledge, powerful not by a power, living not by a life, hearing and seeing not by audition or sight, but rather, by His very essence – this is generally agreed by intelligent people that an attribute does not subsist through its own nature (*dhāt*) but rather, through what it qualifies, and that that which is qualified subsists through its own nature. According to this argument, which is beyond doubt, it is not right to qualify God by an attribute, for God's attribute is His very ipseity (*huwiya*), nor may that attribute subsist in Him. If His attribute were other than His very ipseity, it would be an accident ('*araz*) in him; however, His ipseity is not a substrate of accidents (*mahall-e a'rāz*). Hence, no attribute whatsoever should be ascribed to him. [...] Since, according to the doctrine of this group (Mu'tazilites), there is an essence to which six different qualities pertain – first, knowledge, then power, thirdly, life, fourthly, hearing, fifthly, seeing, and sixthly, eternity – this has to be an essence divided into six parts. For it is obvious that there can be knowledge without power and power without knowledge, and both of these can be without life as well. Each of these three is possible without hearing, four of these without sight, and five of them without eternity, though all six are attributes. Now if the Creator's essence were in six different parts, this would be a substance (*jawhar*) divided into six. This is not oneness but multiplicity. To say that one essence is knowledge and the same essence is power is a nonsensical statement. If both knowledge and power are one, it follows necessarily that anyone who is knowing is powerful too. Thus, whoever says that God is knowing has also said that He is powerful. But if such is the case, it would be more economical to describe Him by one attribute rather than all six, since when you have pronounced one attribute you have implied the others as well.²⁶⁷

In the First Poem, Nāser-e Khosrow refers to the absolute essence in the concept of 'unity' (*Vahdat*). He unites all the subjective oppositions such as essence/ attributes and essence/ action to emphasise the ontological aspect of the Divine Oneness. He explains this unification with the notions of 'unique', 'singular' and ONE (*vāhed, yektā, yak*).

²⁶⁷ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Between Reason and Revelation; Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, transl. by Eric Ormsby, pp. 65- 66.

The idea of God as the ONE (= essence and attributes unified), the unknowability of God, as well as the divine nature of the human soul is, in some respects, similar to Plotinus's theory of the 'One':

Our knowledge of everything else comes by way of intelligence; but this Entity [The One] transcends all of the intellectual nature; by what direct institution, then, can It be brought within our grasp? The answer is that we can know It only in the degree of human faculty; we indicate It by virtue of what in ourselves is like It. For in us also there is something of that being. [...] This Absolute is none of the things of the which It is the source; Its nature is that nothing can be affirmed of It – not existence, not essence, not life – It transcends all these.²⁶⁸

In the passage below, we see how, for Plotinus, Transcendence and Unity are two essential principles for understanding the nature of the One:

The One is, in truth, beyond all statement; whatever you say would limit It; the All-Transcending, transcending even the most august Mind, which alone of all things has true being, has no name. We can but try to indicate, if possible, something concerning It. If we do not grasp It by knowledge, that does not mean that we do not seize It at all. We can state what It is not while we are silent as to what It is. [...] The All-Transcendent, utterly void of multiplicity, is unity's self, independent of all else, That from which all the rest take their degree of unity in their standing, near or far, towards It. It is the great Beginning and the Beginning must be a really Existent One, wholly and truly One.²⁶⁹

In his *Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, Nāser-e Khosrow also gives a well-elaborated argument in a section titled 'A Commentary on One':

In reply to the questions 'What is the absolute One?' and 'What is the multiple one?', the *ahl-e ta'yid* (those who are aided with the divine knowledge) – upon whom be peace – reply that the One from which the order of numbers comes, and which is multiple, is composite, formed of oneness and of that substance which is receptive to oneness. In other words, the 'One' which is termed *wahdah* in Arabic is prior to the 'one' which is called *wahid*, just as 'blackness' is prior to 'black' or 'sweetness' prior to 'sweet'. And

²⁶⁸ Grace H. Turnbull, *The Essence of Plotinus; Extracts from the Six Enneads and Porphyry's Life of Plotinus* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1948), pp. 114-115.

²⁶⁹ Turnbull, pp. 162-163

they hold that just as the black exists by virtue of blackness and the sweet is characterised by sweetness, the ‘multiple one’ – which is the starting-point for numbers – exists also by virtue of the One. The One was prior to it in every sense and unites with its essence to become the leaven of both numbers and of quantifiable things. In fact, if that multiple one were not to exist, the multiple – and, in fact, most things – would not come into existence through it; so, whatever lacks sweetness would not become sweet, or whatever did not have blackness would not exist as black.²⁷⁰

Plotinus believes that we can possess a kind of knowledge of the One, ‘for in us also there is something of that being’. This view reminds us of Nāser-e Khosrow’s doctrine on the human Soul, in which the Soul has a divine nature and receives the divine knowledge.²⁷¹ There is a slight difference between Plotinus’ account and that of Nāser-e Khosrow, however. While Nāser-e Khosrow admits that humans, by the power of Intellect, can perceive the divine Knowledge, he does not state that this knowledge contains a perception of God’s essence. On the other hand, like Plotinus, he agrees that human knowledge necessarily develops within worldly limits, and therefore any knowledge of God is bound to such limitation. While, for Plotinus, it seems that this limited human knowledge of God has a degree of value, for Nāser-e Khosrow such knowledge is reductive and basically detached from the Divine’s realm.

In explaining the concept of ONE, Nāser-e Khosrow makes a distinction between the universal essence and the manifestations of that essence. The first transcends all forms of being, while the latter is particular and limited. To support this distinction, he compares the difference between sweetness as a general concept and a sweet thing as a specific manifestation of that sweetness. The universal essence stands before the latter, since it contains all forms of existence, just as sweetness (or being sweet) contains all kinds of sweet things in advance. Moreover, the universal essence unites in itself the multiplicity of manifestations, as sweetness unites all the things that are sweet. The universal essence belongs to the ontological realm that gives existence to temporal manifestations, while itself transcending all those manifestations.

²⁷⁰ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Between Reason and Revelation; Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, transl. by Eric Ormsby, p. 136.

²⁷¹ See chapter 5 of this research.

The Ismaili Context of Nāser-e Khosrow's Discourse on the Divine Oneness

Two primary doctrines in Ismaili theology enable Nāser-e Khosrow to come up with a negative, essence-centric approach towards the Divine oneness. One is the theory of Ebdā' (origination or existentiatio), and the other is Double Negation.

Ebdā' (Arabic: *ibda'*) is the Ismaili theory of creation in which the philosophical division between the intelligible and sensible merges with the religious division between the Creator and His creation. The primary aim of Ismaili theologians, including Abu Ya'qub-e Sejestāni (d. after 971), Hamid al-Din-e Kermāni (d. after 1020-21) and Nāser-e Khosrow, is to challenge the anthropomorphic interpretation of the Quranic narrative of creation, in which God directly creates the universe like a magician. Such a simplistic view, according to Ismailis, like that of the division between the Divine attributes and essence, is, in fact, an act of *shirk* (idolatry), for it implicitly sees God as a created thing that already exists in time and place. For Ismailis, such anthropomorphic and mundane perception of creation was against God's *tanzih* (transcendence) and his incomparability.

Ismaili scholars relied on the Greek metaphysical division (the intelligible / the sensible) to theorise a non-anthropomorphic theory of creation. It seems they found the Neoplatonic threefold pattern more appropriate than the Peripatetic metaphysics in positioning the Divine essence within their religious-metaphysical thought. They installed the One, the Universal Intellect (*'aql*), and the Soul (*nafs*), in their hierarchical model of creation.²⁷² They formed a *metaphysics of creation* in which the intelligible creations (the Intellect and the Soul) stand above the sensible creations (firmaments, time and the material world), with God, or more accurately, 'the Originator' (*mobde'*), transcending both worlds. God is the 'Originator' of the first being, rather than being the first being or cause itself. The first *mobde'* (Arabic: *mubdi'*) is Intellect. Apart from these three elements, another Neoplatonic concept appears in the Ismaili narrative of creation, and that is Emanation. God does not *create* the Intellect, rather, the Intellect is the result of *fayazān*, the Emanation of the Divine essence. It is 'originated' from the ebullient source of being, that is the One. The Ismaili theologians interpreted The Divine Order (*amr*) or Word (*kalemeh*) in the Quranic verse 'kun fa-yakunu' (*be, and it is*) as the primordial, extratemporal origination of the Intellect. As Wilfred Madelung explains:

²⁷² A brief account on the Neoplatonic entities (One, Intellect and Soul), as far as they have influenced the Ismaili theology, can be found here: Paul E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism; The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū al-Ya'qūb Sajistāni* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 38.

The Order was, however, addressed to the whole universe, and the Intellect contained the forms of all things in the spiritual and physical worlds which were thus originated all at once (*daf'atan wāhidatan*) in the *ibdā'*. They were all directly related to God in their origination, though they were manifested only gradually in the process of emanation and causation proceeding from the Intellect in accordance with the divine ordination (*taqdir*). The intellect was called the First Originated Being (*al-mubda' al-awwal*), since the Order, though logically prior to it, became united with it in existence.²⁷³

If the Intellect contains the ideal forms of all beings, the Soul is to conceive them and manifest them. The world of Nature is the result of the Soul's perception of the ideal forms that were engendered by the Intellect. It is through such perception that materiality, generation and corruption (*kown-o fesād*), increase and decrease (*ziyādat-o noqsān*), transportation and transformation (*enteqāl-o estehāleh*), and time and durability all appear.²⁷⁴

The most significant outcome of the Ismaili metaphysics of creation is that, through the idea of God as the Originator, the thingness (*shay'iyat*) and he-ness (*hoviyyat*) of God are being negated. As Aydogan Kars has shown, negating God's thingness is a radical form of apophaticism (theological negation), since it negates not only the he-ness but any discursive application to God:

The term *shay'* that the Ismailis negated meant grammatically much more than what 'thing' signifies in modern Language. The Arabic term indicated the entire field of *logos* in its widest sense possible. The influential Basran grammarian Abu al-Abbās al-Mubarrad (d. 898), for example, declared that *shay'* was the most universal noun. The doyen of Arabic grammar, Sibawayh (d. 796), is reported to have said that it is 'the most universal of universals' [*a'amm al-a'amm*]. The negation of thingness, from a grammatical perspective, was radical enough to cancel *any* mental and linguistic, hence discursive, possibility.²⁷⁵

²⁷³ Wilfred Madelung, 'Aspects of Ismaili Theology: The Prophetic Chain and the God beyond Being', in *Ismaili Contributions to Islamic Culture*, p. 56.

²⁷⁴ Paul E. Walker, 'The Ismaili Vocabulary of Creation' in *Studia Islamica*, pp. 78-9.

²⁷⁵ Aydogan Kars, *Unsayng God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 27-28.

This is where the Ismaili radical apophatic theory, known as ‘double negation’, comes in to explain such discursive cancellation. Abu Ya’qub-e Sejestāni, one of the chief contributors of the Ismaili theology argues that:

[...] the imagination or the ability to create conceptions is consequent to sensation and is produced by it. Even a thing with spiritual substance can be comprehended only as the result of direct inspiration from outside the human perceptual system. Man’s power to perceive and to understand is limited and he is beholden to something beyond him for direction in matters outside the scope of his powers. Ultimately it is God who will do the guiding. The point, therefore, is that all notions and names, either as language or thought, are defective unless certified valid in respect to any realm beyond that for which, and in which, they were created. Human language is valid when talking about the human realm, but only God can tell humans how to talk about Himself since their language is insufficient.²⁷⁶

Here, Sejestāni echoes the key position of the Ismailis on God, which is His unknowability. He does not stop here, however. To establish this position, he comes up with a more radical statement, in response to those of his opponents who accused the Ismaili negative theology of *ta’til* (ineffectuality):

Whoever removes from his Creator descriptions, definitions, and characteristics falls into a hidden anthropomorphism just as one who describes Him, defines Him, and characterises Him falls into obvious anthropomorphism.²⁷⁷

Ta’til or ineffectuality was an accusation raised by the Ash’arites and Traditionalists, claiming that negating the divine attributes in fear of committing *tashbih* (anthropomorphism), eventually and inevitably will lead to denying the certainty of God, and therefore, the very existence of God. The philosophical effort in respect to God’s unknowability through negation (via negativa), according to the disputant groups such as Ash’arites, is an act of denial, rather than negation. Those who apply the negation method fail to maintain the existence and certainty of God. Sejestāni was aware of such criticism. In fact, he too was against any form of denial or ineffectuality, but he came up with an even more radical solution. Instead of stepping

²⁷⁶ Sejestāni’s passages in this chapter are translated by Paul E. Walker. See: Paul E. Walker, ‘An Ismaili Answer to the Problem of Worshipping the Unknowable Neoplatonic God’, in *American Journal of Arabic Studies*, II (1974), pp.7-21 (15).

²⁷⁷ Paul E. Walker, ‘An Ismaili Answer to the Problem of Worshipping the Unknowable Neoplatonic God’, in *American Journal of Arabic Studies*, p. 13.

back from negating God's attributes, he argued that one must negate the very process of negating the attributes.

What Sejestāni suggested was what is known in theology today as *double negation* (*via negative duplex*). For Sejestāni, negating the attributes is not the cause of the problem. The problem is rather any discursive effort that seeks to define God. He brilliantly argues that anthropomorphism occurs not in the realm of the material world only, but also in the field of subjective and intellectual. If the *obvious anthropomorphism* is making comparison with material things, the *hidden anthropomorphism* is associating the Divine essence with mental conceptions. For Sejestāni, the negation of the attributes (God is not A) does not solve the problem of anthropomorphism. To him, both positive (+) and negative (-), affirmation and negation, are the result of human intellectual cognition, and therefore, limited and bound to the material condition. As Aydogan Kars explains, Sejestāni argues that:

A major difficulty of this method of constant negation of attributes is that it can also be applied to heavenly sublime entities, not just God. But even more importantly, such perpetual negation indirectly affirms the presence, thingness, or existence of its object. The statements 'G is not X', 'G is not Y', or 'G is not Z', all assume cognitive access to G.²⁷⁸

That is why, for Sejestāni, negating the attributes, as the Mu'tazilites did, was incomplete. He believed that a second phase was needed for *de-anthropomorphising* the Divine essence. If in the first phase, we are developing the 'God is not A' logic, now we must add the second phase: 'God is *not not* A'. In the first phase, all positive attributes must be negated due to their similarity with human qualities (*tashbih*). So far, this is an essential point of departure for Sejestāni. At this stage, we can argue that God is not a thing, nor a matter, nor a spirit, nor a body, nor a form, nor a substance, nor an accident, nor a taste, nor a breadth, length or width, time does not pass on him, he does not transform, etc.²⁷⁹ In this first stage of negation, all attributes are to be negated in favour of the Divine transcendence and oneness, as they are inevitably the result of the material condition of human life. 'What God is' has to be turned into 'what God is not'. We can acknowledge God not by affirmation, but through negation. Sejestāni goes on to argue, however, that principles of transcendence and oneness demand a second stage, and that is the negation of 'what God is not itself'. These two stages are

²⁷⁸ Aydogan Kars, *Unsayings God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam*, p. 32.

²⁷⁹ Quoted from 'the credo of Mu'tazilism' in Aydogan Kars, *Unsayings God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam*, p. 10.

accompanied together, being essential parts of the same process. As Aydogan Kars has shown, the second stage is not any longer about attributes, but about *any* discursive effort that seeks to define God:

Al-Sijistānī's first negation cancels any positive discourse on God by removing all attributes. The second negation cancels the negative discourse of the first step itself, by cancelling all, including negative, discursive possibilities. Al-Sijistānī carefully emphasizes that the second move is directed toward the entire act of the discursive negation of the first step, not just towards its content.²⁸⁰

Paul E. Walker explains that the first phase of negation, according to Sejestānī, 'strips God from the physical' while the second 'removes Him from any association with the spiritual'.²⁸¹ Aydogan Kars gives a more insightful interpretation, however, arguing that the second stage is about negating 'the entire negative discourse':

If the double negations were in the form of 'G is not not X', 'G is not not Y', 'G is not not Z', then they would be still operating on the same discursive ground. This would still presume the comparability between G and the attributes X, Y, Z that are negated. Instead, the second step of the double negation should negate the entire negative discourse, such as 'not (G is not X)', 'not (G is not Y)', 'not (G is not Z)', or not (G is not Z)'. Only in this way God will be removed from the space of both positive and negative discourse.²⁸²

Negation is not Sejestānī's primary focus therefore; instead, it is the discursive cancellation that he is looking at. For him, negation is a means to condemn the pretended positivity that lies within any discourse on the ipseity of God. According to the Ismailis such as Nāser-e Khosrow and Sejestānī, any discourse on God *inevitably* depicts Him like a created, not the Creator. Since the Creator is in constant transcendence and dissociation from His created beings, He cannot be the subject of human discourse. In other words, due to His transcendence and oneness, God resists any discursive closure and totality.

²⁸⁰ Aydogan Kars, *Unsayings God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam*, p.31.

²⁸¹ Paul E. Walker, 'An Ismaili Answer to the Problem of Worshipping the Unknowable Neoplatonic God', in *American Journal of Arabic Studies*, p. 12.

²⁸² Aydogan Kars, *Unsayings God: Negative Theology in Medieval Islam*, p. 32.

Conclusion

Nāser-e Khosrow relies on the negative approach to address his view on the Divine Oneness. Like his fellow Ismailis, he focuses on the unknowability of God, and to this end, he rejects any form of anthropomorphism. There is no specific reference to Sejestāni's double negation theory; however, Nāser-e Khosrow shares the same conclusions. One might argue that he found the double negation theory too radical and bold for his followers, since Sejestāni's ideas were different from the mainstream Ismaili discourse. It could also be the case that Nāser-e Khosrow did not find it necessary to make any reference to Sejestāni. It is probable that during his unwanted residence in Yomgān, he did not have access to Sejestāni's later Arabic works, in which he articulated his double-negation theory. Paul E. Walker believes that Nāser-e Khosrow willingly decided not to endorse the problematic parts of Sejestāni's discourse, due to the controversy they had caused among the Ismaili missionaries.²⁸³ Instead of the double-negation method, Nāser-e Khosrow focuses on the theory of Origination—*Ebdā'*—to explain God's unknowability through the concepts of Transcendence and Oneness. He provides a convincing refutation of the anthropomorphist groups, such as Karrāmiyyeh and Ash'arites. He emphasises the idea of unification (*Vahdat*) to explain the Divine Oneness. He seeks to dissolve the distinctions between attributes and Essence, substance and accident, and Essence and act in favour of a unified and absolute ontological concept. He believes that any effort in acknowledging God in the realm of human discourse fails at the very beginning. The Absolute Essence, due to Its oneness and transcendence obtains an ontological inclusiveness. This inclusiveness provides a surplus which makes the absolute essence transcend any form of speech or system of representation.

The significant cultural outcome of such an approach is that it confronts the reductive perceptions of the oneness of God. The reductive anthropomorphic approach to the divine oneness followed the exoteric and Sharia-based discourse on religion and could not offer a contemplative space for the ontological perception of God. Given the new political formation of Khorāsān during the time of Nāser-e Khosrow, such criticism of anthropomorphism had political significance. It contested the normalisation of the divine in religious discourse and the way the concept of God was reduced to simplified apprehensions for symbolic and conventional use in the political discourse.

²⁸³ Paul E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism; The Ismaili Neoplatonism of Abū al-Ya'qūb Sajistāni*, pp. 21-2

The Ismaili theory of oneness seeks to identify God as an ontological, inclusive and transcendent being, instead of depicting Him as an anthropomorphic or intellectual idol. By emphasising that God is the Absolute Essence which cannot be fully comprehended by the human intellect, the Ismaili theory breaks the discursive limits and conventions of the orthodox theological discourse. It confronts the ritualised dogmas and clichéd statements in the orthodox Islamic theology by developing gnostic and hermeneutical approaches to understanding the Divine and the Holy text.

Chapter Four

Resisting Fatalism and Predestination

Introduction

This chapter studies the subject of free will and determinism in the *Divan* of Nāser-e Khosrow. I will argue that Nāser-e Khosrow's view on free will and determinism emerges from his third-position approach, where he tries to reconcile philosophy and religion. In his cultural and political criticism, however, he places more emphasis on practice and human agency, while in his theological poems he focuses more on natural determinism and the limitations of material life. My aim is to show that Nāser-e Khosrow's admiration of free will and human power derives from real socio-political problems, but that it mostly reflects a desire for spiritual emancipation rather than social change.

Free will, Determinism and the Political

Similar to the theory of *Towhid* (Divine oneness), *jabr-o ekhtiyār* (determinism and free will) became the subject of the political during the early Islamic centuries. Indeed, it found far more political significance than that of the Divine Oneness, due to its concrete and more direct impact on the formation of the political. Unlike the subject of the Divine Oneness, the question of free will versus determinism had political origins from the beginning. The *Qadarites* (*Qadariyyeh* – *Qadariyān*) who preceded the *Mu'tazilite* in their defence of free will, found their voice through standing against the Umayyads' deterministic justifications for their unjust and tyrannical rule. Az Maria De Cillis explains:

The official view of the Umayyad caliphs argued that all actions, including wrongdoings, were determined by God's will. This belief was held because it allowed the caliphs' corrupted behaviour to be left unpunished, evil actions becoming justified because they were believed to have been established by divine decree. Condemning the Umayyads' position, the Qadarites of Damascus and Basra – amongst them Ma'bad al-Juhanī (d. 83/703) and Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (d. 105/723) – questioned whether a new perspective could be adopted with regards to the question of divine predestination.²⁸⁴

Mo'āviyyeh (Arabic: Mu'awiya), the Umayyad caliph, used deterministic justifications to establish his power and justify his policies, a strategy which was then employed by other

²⁸⁴ Maria De Cillis, *Freewill and Predestination in Islamic Thought* (Routledge: London & New York, 2014), p. 6. The major leaders of the Qadarites, including those mentioned by Cillis, were killed by the Umayyads, See Ali Rabbāni Golpayegāni, 'kalām-e eslāmi dar asr-e omaviyān' (Islamic Theology during the Umayyads), *Keyhān-e Andisheh*, 58 (1994) < <http://ensani.ir/fa/article/105321/عصر-امویان-کلام-اسلامی-در-عصر-امویان> > [accessed 21 November 2019]

caliphs.²⁸⁵ The Umayyads, in response to public protests, referred to those parts of the Quran that emphasised the absolute power of God, such as:²⁸⁶

- ‘But you cannot will, unless God wills—The Lord of the Worlds.’²⁸⁷
- ‘Those who disbelieve say, “If only a miracle was sent down to him from his Lord.” Say, “God leads astray whomever He wills, and He guides to Himself whoever repents.”’²⁸⁸
- ‘What about someone who has deserved the sentence of punishment? Is it you who can save those in the Fire?’²⁸⁹

They misused these Quranic references as an excuse for their contemporary situation and the widespread corruption and poverty in the Islamic lands under their rule.²⁹⁰ The *Qadarites* were among the earliest theologians who argued against predestination by bringing together those parts of the Quran that specifically speak of human action and one’s power in determining one’s fate, in passages like:

- ‘[...] do as you please, He is seeing of everything you do’.²⁹¹
- ‘And say, “The truth is from your Lord. Whoever wills—let him believe. And whoever wills—let him disbelieve”’.²⁹²

The Qadarites laid the foundations of the *Qadari* views (belief in human power and free will), as opposed to *jabri* views (belief in determinism and predestination). Their ideas were later developed by the Mu’tazilites, although with a less radical tone.²⁹³ From the Qadarite point of view, punishment and reward in the Quran, as well as the act of sending prophets and holy books (*ersāl-e rosol, enzāl-e kotob-e āsemāni*) would be pointless should we accept predestination. Qadarites and Mu’tazilites were of the view that God cannot make humans commit sins. Punishing people because of the sins they were destined to do is against God’s

²⁸⁵ Ali Rabbani Golpayegani, ‘kalām-e eslāmi dar asr-e omaviyān’ (Islamic Theology during the Umayyads) *Keyhān-e Andisheh*, 58 (1994) < <http://ensani.ir/fa/article/105321/عصر-امویان> > [accessed 21 November 2019]

²⁸⁶ Mohsen Jahangiri, ‘Qadariyān-e Nokhostin’ (The Early Qadarites), *Ma’āref*, 1 (1988), 3-26 (pp. 6-7).

²⁸⁷ at-Takwir, 29.

²⁸⁸ ar-Ra’d, 27.

²⁸⁹ az-Zumar, 19.

²⁹⁰ Mohsen Jahangiri, ‘Qadariyān-e Nokhostin’ (The Early Qadarites), in *Ma’āref*, 1 (1988), 3-26 (pp. 6-7).

²⁹¹ Fussilat, 40.

²⁹² Al-Kahf, 29.

²⁹³ Asghar Dādbeh, ‘Determinism and Freewill’, in *Encyclopaedia of Shi’a*, Vol. 5 (Tehran: Saeed Mohebbi, 2007), p. 301.

omnibenevolence (*kheir-e motlaq*). The core of Qadarite discourse is the emphasis on the power (*qadar, qodrat*) of men in their deeds (*af'āl-e erādi*).²⁹⁴

The Qadarite movement was a political response to the doctrine of determinism and predestination which had been created as an ideological argument to rationalise the deeds of the Umayyad caliphs. Believing in free will implied that the current political situation is the result of the actions and decisions of the ruler, not God, and it is the ruler who must answer for his deeds. The idea of free will, therefore, sees political change as a possibility that can take place by the will of humans and their conscious actions. More importantly, any political decision or act of the ruler will be subject to ethical and religious judgment. One can, therefore, question the ruler for ignoring religious principles, or admire him for being just and virtuous.

Although the subject of free will and determinism was more political in origins than Divine Oneness, it did not result in the kind of theological radicalism observed in the works of Ismaili theologians regarding the theory of Divine Oneness. This conservatism, in my view, was mainly due to the issue of God's omnipotence and omniscience. These two attributes were determining elements in religious discourse, and therefore, the proponents of the idea of free will, such as the Mu'tazilites and Philosophers, found it necessary to address them. Believing in free will at one level entailed that God does not have power over human actions, nor does He possess any prior knowledge of those actions.

Free will, in medieval literature, even in its most radical articulation, is formed within the discursive space of religion, based on references to the holy text. The concept of free will was more about pre-existing choices. It was defined under the ultimate presence of God and with regard to the concept of Divine punishment and reward. The articulation of free will as a humanist idea, separate from the actions of God, is particular to modern discourse in which the

²⁹⁴ The word *qadar* here should not be mistaken with its terminological meaning which became dominant later in Islamic theology; that is 'fate' and 'destiny'. *Qadar*, in this latter sense, is the fixed 'measure' of fate for each created being that operates in time. It is followed by *qazā*, 'the Divine universal decree' that has 'pre-determined all things and occurrences' (see Maria De Cillis, *Free will and Predestination in Islamic Thought*, p.10). In contrast, *qadar* in the *qadari* movement signifies the power and capability of humans in either doing or leaving a voluntary action. It is this meaning of *qadar* (human power and his/her free will) which has been widely criticised by determinist (*jabri*) theologians. They even regarded those with *qadari* ideas as Zoroastrians (*majus*), and therefore heretics (see: Asghar Dādbeh, 'Determinism and Free will', in *The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 17, p. 301). It seems, *qadar* in *jabri* discourse refers to the 'measure' (*mizān*), which is one of the many meanings of the word, while in *qadari* discourse, the word *qadar* refers to 'power'. If we take the literal meaning of *qadar*, which derives from the root Q – D – R (power), then it can be argued that *Qadar* as predestination refers to the power of God, while as free will it refers to the power of humans.

concepts of autonomous reason and autonomous morality define human as a free and self-determinate subject.²⁹⁵

A quick look at the terms used for the concept of free will explains this fact. *Ekhtiyār*, which stands for free will in both Persian and Arabic, comes from the noun ‘*Khair*’, meaning ‘to seek good’ (*talab-e kheir kardan*). For medieval scholars, the idea of free will was mostly about the ability to *choose* between two options. *Tafviz* (Arabic: *tafwidh*: delegation) was another term for free will that the Mu’tazilites used, meaning that God has delegated or entrusted the power of voluntary actions to humans. The idea of *Tafviz* was an effort to combine the notions of God as the creator of human activities and humans as having power and agency over their deeds.²⁹⁶ The term also suggests that mankind’s ability to either do or not do a particular deed comes from God’s power and not from human capability. One can observe the same effort in the Ash’arites’ theory of *kasb* (acquisition), according to which humans do not have power over their deeds. God is the creator of actions, and men have the ability only to act what has been determined by God. In Ash’arite discourse, humans have a degree of authority and responsibility, but they cannot either do or leave a voluntary action as Qadarites and Mu’tazilites believe. Both sides of the debate therefore articulated a moderate *in-between* position in which the belief in free will or determinism is not absolute and unfettered by exceptions. There were two reasons for this: one was God’s power and pre-knowledge, and the other was God’s punishment and reward. While the first necessitated a degree of determinism, the latter required a degree of free will and self-determination in human life. Even in the philosophical discourse, a peripatetic philosopher such as Avicenna argued for a middle position in which free will, natural determinism and predestination are all put alongside each other to compromise with religious principles.²⁹⁷

Predestination, in the philosophical discourse, is no longer the ‘direct intervention of God’; rather it manifests itself through natural determinism, as the result of which free will and determination become paired associates. As Maria Cillis has described:

Avicenna generally conceives the divine decree (*qadā’*) and determinism (*qadar*) as, respectively, the necessitating primary act of God, corresponding to the first stage of His emanatory process, and as the causal unleashing of beings following God’s first

²⁹⁵ See: O’Connor, Timothy and Franklin, Christopher, ‘Free Will’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/freewill/>> [accessed 18 January 2020]

²⁹⁶ Asghar Dādbeh, ‘Determinism and Freewill’, in *Encyclopaedia of Shi’a*, Vol. 5, p. 295.

²⁹⁷ See: Cillis, p.76.

causative act. [...] Determination is identified with ‘the existence of reasons (*‘illal*) and causes (*asbāb*), and their harmonization according to their arrangement (*tartīb*) and order (*nizām*), leading to the effects and caused beings’. The latter are said to constitute ‘what is made necessary by the decree and what follows from it’. In this context, determinism is not seen as the direct divine intervention in things (pertaining to strict occasionalistic *kalām*), but as an indirect determination occurring through causes necessarily arranged by God, whose order implicitly subordinates them to the divine decree.²⁹⁸

The cause and effect theory in the philosophical discourse²⁹⁹ is the key theoretical device that helps philosophers such as Avicenna ‘to harmonize human voluntarism and worldly naturalism with divine determination without accepting the Islamic “mainstream” notion of divine predestination and its “creationist” dictates.’³⁰⁰ As I will argue, Nāser-e Khosrow’s conciliatory approach to free will and determinism is close to Avicenna’s view as stated above.

Although both sides of the theological debate (Mu’tazilites and Ash’arites) ended up in an intermediate position, there are significant differences between them. While the Ash’arites’ intermediate solution emphasises *jabr* more than *ekhtiyār*, the Mu’tazilites’ gives more credit to the latter. The human subject in the Mu’tazilite and philosophical discourse is more capable and can show more agency than that of the Ash’arite. While determinism in the Ash’arite view is God’s constant intervention, among philosophers it is represented as natural determinism, enforced by God.

In the next section, I will analyse Nāser-e Khosrow’s position by explicating some of his poems in the context of his systematic theological thought. I examine his ideas on determinism and free will from two angles: one is his cultural criticism, and the other is his theological arguments. While the first focuses on issues such as practical ethics, political practice, education and knowledge, the latter covers debates on the subject of predestination (*qazā-o qadar*), determinism (*jabr*) and free will (*ekhtiyār*) among philosophers and theologians. I argue that, in his theological poems, Nāser-e Khosrow stands for a more moderate position, while in his cultural criticism, free will and *qadari* views are more dominant. As to his theological position, I will argue that Nāser-e Khosrow stands for a *rāh-e miyāneh* (the middle-

²⁹⁸ De Cillis, p. 37.

²⁹⁹ By ‘philosophical discourse’ I mean the philosophical discourses that were influenced by the Greek philosophy in general, and Aristotelian and/or neoplatonic discourses in particular.

³⁰⁰ De Cillis, p. 39.

way), which is a reformulation of the Imami Shia's doctrine, known as *amr bayn al-amrayn* (the thing between the two).

Free will and Determinism in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*: The Cultural Approach

The free will and responsibility of human beings (*ekhtiyār – qadar*) in determining their fate is one of the critical elements of resistance in Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry. Along with his admiration of intellect and knowledge, Nāser-e Khosrow's emphasis on free will and human action (*konesh*) played a vital role in his reception in the modern era, giving him a permanent place in the literary canon. The following *qasida* (*qasida* no.64), mostly known as the 'Blue Firmament' (*qasideh-ye charkh-e nilufari*) is among the most studied texts in the Persian literary canon:

نکوهش مکن چرخ نیلوفری را
برون کن ز سر باد و خیرسری را

1) Reproach not the blue firmament,
Stop being foolish and arrogant!

بری دان از أفعال چرخ برین را
نشاید ز دانا نکوهش بری را

2) Do not assign actions to firmament,

It is not appropriate that a knowing man blames one that is innocent and without consciousness

همی تا کند پیشه، عادت همی کن
جهان مر جفا را، تو مر صابری را

3) When the world makes it its job to torture you,
get accustomed to being patient.

هم امروز از پشت بارت بیفگن
میفگن به فردا مر این داوری را

4) Take your heavy burden off your back today;
Do not postpone this judgement until tomorrow!

چو تو خود کنی اختر خویش را بد
مدار از فلک چشم نیک اختری را

5) When you are the one making your star ominous,
do not expect the Heaven to give you a lucky star.

به چهره شدن چون پری کی توانی؟
به أفعال مانده شو مر پری را

6) How can you [It is not possible to] make your face like an angel's?

[so] By [good] deeds make yourself like angels.

بدیدی به نوروز گشته به صحرا
به عیوق مانده لاله طری را

7) Have you seen the fresh tulips of the spring,
shining like Capella in the fields,

اگر لاله پر نور شد چون ستاره
چرا زو نپذیرفت صورت گری را؟

8) If the tulip becomes brimming with light like a star,
why shouldn't it learn from the star to be a painter and make beautiful shapes?

تو با هوش و رای از نکومحضران چون
همی برنگیری نکومحضری را؟

9) 'You are bright and capable,
why don't you take up the good features of the wise?'³⁰¹

اگر تو از آموختن سر بنابی
نجوید سر تو همی سروری را

10) If you refuse to engage in learning,
your head will not aspire to stand above the other head.

بسوزند چوب درختان بی‌بر
سزا خود همین است مر بی‌بری را

11) They burn the trees that give no fruits:
This is appropriate for the minds with no knowledge.

درخت تو گر بار دانش بگیرد
به زیر آوری چرخ نیلوفری را

12) If your tree is loaded with fruits of knowledge,
you will rein and ride the blue firmament.

صفت چند گویی به شمشاد و لاله
رخ چون مه و زلفک عنبری را؟

13) [O you Poet!] For how long will you continue attributing to Buxus or the tulip
A face like the moon and curly ambergris-scented locks?

به علم و به گوهر کنی مدحت آن را

³⁰¹ Alice C. Hunsberger, *Nasir Khusraw: The Ruby of Badakhshan*, p. 40.

که مایه است مر جهل و بد گوهری را

14) With knowledge and jewels of words you praise someone,
who is the essence of ignorance and evil.

به نظم اندر آری دروغی طمع را
دروغ است سرمایه مر کافری را

15) You versify lies out of greed,
Falsehood is the capital and the source of unbelief.

من آنم که در پای خوگان نریزم
مر این قیمتی دُرّ لفظ دری را

16) I am the one who will not cast,
beneath the hooves of swine, this invaluable pearl of the Persian language.

تو را ره نمایم که چنبر کرا کن
به سجده مر این قامت عرعری را

17) I will show you to whom you should prostrate yourself
like a tall juniper in the morning breeze:

کسی را برد سجده دانا که یزدان
گزیدهستش از خلق مر رهبری را

18) The wise man prostrate himself before the one whom God has chosen
from among all creatures for leadership.

کسی را که بسترد آثار عدلش
ز روی زمین صورت جائری را

19) The one, the vestiges of whose justice have erased
from the world's face every smudge of oppression.

امام زمانه که هرگز نرانده است
بر شیعتش سامری ساحری را³⁰²

20) The Imam of the Time, before whose loving followers,
the Sorcerer of Samaria [Samiri] has not dared to show off [his magic].

Before investigating this poem, it is essential to bear in mind that subjects such as human free will, knowledge and intellect in medieval literature might find secular and humanistic significations in modern perceptions of the text. These words have acquired new meanings in contemporary literature and no longer have the exact meanings they had in medieval literature.

³⁰² Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, pp. 142-43.

For instance, in Persian, *kherad*, which denotes intellect in classical Persian poetry, is also used today but more for what we know as ‘*aql* (reason). The same is true of the word *dānesh*, which denotes knowledge, but is nowadays used to refer to science. In their premodern context, therefore, these seemingly humanistic and secular terms had different discursive functions. In Nāser-e Khosrow’s poetry, for instance, it is quite possible that one interprets his admiration of knowledge as admiration for science instead of the Ismaili discourse. The same is true in the case of intellect (‘*aql*, *kherad*), which one might misinterpret as a secular faculty that is independent of religion or any supernatural power. Nāser-e Khosrow’s defence of human potential and free will, therefore, needs to be seen within the context of the primary religious and theological debates of his time.

Below, I will analyse some sections of the *Blue Firmament qasida* in order to highlight his *qadari* ideas. The central ideas expressed are criticism of ancient astrology, criticism of fatalistic perception of Time, ethical practice, political practice and literary practice. In addition to the *Blue Firmament qasida*, I will use some supplementary examples from Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan* to support my argument.

a) Astrology as Ideology

Firmament and time in Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan* are assumed to be arbitrary forces behind the temporary condition of human life. The literary representation of firmament and time in Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan* focuses on the vainness of any social or worldly engagement.

The idea of *falak* (firmament) as a vicious trickster that determines the condition of human life is one of the most significant themes in Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan*.³⁰³ It comes from the astrological assumption that the earth is the stagnant centre of the universe with stars and planets circling around it. *Falak* (firmament), according to Biruni (973-1048): ‘[...] is an orb shape body rotating in its place, and there are things in the middle of it which have their own movements, including us. They call it *falak* because of its circular movement, like whorl in spindle’.³⁰⁴ In his *Zād al-Mosāferin* (The Pilgrim’s Provision), Nāser-e Khosrow likewise stresses the movements of firmaments according to the distance they have from the centre of the universe. He focuses on the effect that circling firmaments have on the natural elements and the formation of natural life, from plants to animals. He concludes that firmaments, which gain their own movement from the universal soul (*nafs*), are, by their very movement, the

³⁰³ See chapter five of this research.

³⁰⁴ Abolfazl Mosafā, *Farhang-e Estelāhāt-e Nojumi* (Dictionary of astronomical terms), (Tabriz: Moassese-ye Tārikh-o Farhang-e Irān, 1979), p. 563.

driving force for the creation of material life on earth, whereas the natural elements are in fact passive (*fā'el budan-e aflāk-o monfa'el budan-e anāsor*).³⁰⁵

In its cultural and literary representation, however, firmament turns into a restless spinning wheel that interferes with the comfort of people. Mas'ud-e Sa'd-e Salmān (1046-1121), a major Khorāsāni poet, and a contemporary of Nāser-e Khosrow, whose famous 'prison poems' (*habsiyyeh*) have significant similarities in language, tone and aesthetics with Nāser-e Khosrow's *Yamgān* poems, depicts firmament as the main cause of his imprisonment by the king's order; a misfortune which was seemingly the result of a plot by his enemies in the court. He uses the imagery of 'dragon' and 'whale', blaming the firmament for his captivity in the *Nāy* prison:

همی هر زمان ازدهای سپهر
ز دورم به دم درکشد چو نهنگ³⁰⁶

Every time and constantly, the dragon of the firmament
Hunts me from my upturns and swallows me like a whale

And elsewhere he says:

ای فلک نیک دانمت آری
کس ندیده است چون تو غداری

I know you well O firmament!

No one has ever seen anyone as devious and vicious as you

جامه‌ای بافیم همی روز و شب
از بلا بود و از عنا تاری

We are waving an attire day and night

of catastrophe is its weft and of agony its warp

گر دری یابیم، زنی سدی
ور گلی بینیم کنی خاری³⁰⁷

If we find a door, you will block it,

and if we see a red rose, you will turn it into a thorn.

³⁰⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Zād al-Mosāferin (The Pilgrim's Provision)*, ed. by Mohammad Bazl al-Rahmān (Berlin: Kāviāni, 1923), pp. 54,132.

³⁰⁶ *Bar Kuhsār-e Bi Faryād: Bargozideh-ye Qasāyed-e Masud-e Sa'd-e Salmān (On Top of the Silent Mountain: A Selection of Mas'ud-e Sa'd-e Salman's Qasidehs)*, Ed. by Mehdi Nurian (Tehran: jāmi, 1999), p. 21.

³⁰⁷ *Bar Kuhsār-e Bi Faryād: Bargozideh-ye Qasāyed-e Masud-e Sa'd-e Salmān (On Top of the Silent Mountain: A Selection of Mas'ud-e Sa'd-e Salman's Qasidehs)*, Ed. by Mehdi Nurian, p. 23.

What connects Mas'ud's representation of firmament to that of Nāser-e Khosrow is that firmament is considered the main cause behind the poet's personal sufferings and misfortunes. It is part of the general condition of living in this world which is disastrous and tragic by nature. This approach towards firmament and time in literature has a bold fatalistic dimension. Facing the force of firmament and the frustrating nature of existence is an inevitable part of human life in this world, which explains why our life is full of sufferings and misfortunes. This is where unjust relations and unpleasant incidents are naturalised and generalised, regarded as something which naturally and basically exists. This is in fact the literary representation of the medieval cosmological view in which the movement of firmaments create time, and with time comes frustration and death

In Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, *falak* (firmament) is a cruel and vengeful tyrant that causes pain and misery, since it brings corruption and frustration to our worldly life. Firmament is the major force of natural determinism that aims for the deterioration of our body, the aspect of our existence which attaches us to the worldly life and worldly needs. On the other hand, our Soul and Intellect, as two divine substances confined in the body, are eternal, and immune from the firmament's vengeance. Firmament, in the *Divan*, is represented as a windowless prison (*hesār*) that has imprisoned human subjects. This serves to present the worldly life as something transient and worthless. The function of Firmament in the *Divan*, therefore, is to depict temporality and corruption as fundamental aspects of human life that are unchangeable and beyond the control of humans:

زیر کیود چرخ بی آسایش
هرگز گمان مبر که بیاسایی³⁰⁸

1) Beneath the restless blue wheel,
do not think you can find any comfort. (*qasida* no.3)

* * *

زین فلک بیرون تو کی دانی که چیست؟
کین حصاری بس بلند و بی در است³⁰⁹

1) When will you know what is beyond this firmament? This high up, doorless castle? (*qasida* no.16)

And elsewhere:

³⁰⁸ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 6.

³⁰⁹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 34.

ای ستمگر فلک ای خواهر آهرمن
چون نگویی که چه افتاد ترا با من؟

1) O you tyrant! The devil's sister!
Please tell me! What is wrong with you?

نرم کرده‌ستیم و زرد چو زردآلو
قصد کردی که بخوایم همی خوردن

2) You made me soft and yellow like an apricot,
The you decided to devour me.

این که شد زرد و کهن پیرهن جان است
پیرهن باشد جان را و خرد را تن³¹⁰

3)[But you should know] what you see as yellow and old,
is my body, which covers like a shirt my Soul and my Intellect. (*qasida* no.17)

* * *

یکی بی‌جان و بی‌تن ابلق اسبی کو نفرساید
به کوه و دشت و دریا بر همی‌تازد که ناساید

1) A piebald horse, restless and invisible,
it gallops across the seas, plains and mountains without repose.

سواران گر بفرسایند اسبان را به رنج اندر
یکی اسبیست این کو مر سواران را بفرساید³¹¹

2) Riders normally make horses weary and broken,
but this is a horse which makes the riders weary and broken! (*qasida* no.19)

In another sample, Nāser-e Khosrow begins his *qasida* with firmament:

ای قبه‌ی گردنده‌ی بی‌روزن خضرا
با قامت فرتوتی و با قوت برنا

1)You, the circling windowless jasper firmament,
with a hump of an old wife, power of youth!³¹²

³¹⁰ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 35.

³¹¹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 38.

³¹² Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholām Reza A'vāni, p. 34.

2) We are your children, O firmament, the unkind mother!

O mother! Why you are so vengeful?³¹⁴ (*qasida* no.2)

Although firmament is one of the forces of determinism, in the *Blue Firmament qasida*, Nāser-e Khosrow condemns those who reproach firmaments for the purpose of shunning their ethical responsibility as human beings. He even goes further by stating that one can control the firmament by being armed with intellect and knowledge. This is apparently a contradiction in Nāser-e Khosrow's systematic thought. On the one hand, firmament and time make everything temporary and worthless; on the other hand, they do not have any role in determining human actions. To answer this problem, I begin by examining Nāser-e Khosrow's criticism of those who reproach the firmament and time for human misfortune.

*Charkh-e nilufari*³¹⁵ or *falak* (firmament) in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Blue Firmament qasida* has two contexts. One is literary, which is firmament as the ruthless force that determines the natural conditions of human life. The blue firmament that comes in the last line of the *qasida* (line 12), in my view, refers to this meaning. The other is astrological/mythological, which refers to this ancient belief that heavens and stars determine the fate of people. This latter meaning is the context in which Nāser-e Khosrow advises those who are 'reproaching the blue firmament' (lines 1-2).³¹⁶

Nāser-e Khosrow is aware of the *superstitious* nature of the astrological–mythological meaning of firmament and how it is reinforced by and reinforces the *ideology* of accepting the political system. It is this *consciousness of the ideological function* of the concept that enables him to provide a robust cultural and social criticism of political passivity and absence of ethical commitment. By targeting those who blame firmaments for their misfortunes, Nāser-e Khosrow seeks to emphasise mankind's role in determining the quality of their lives. The

³¹³ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqeq, p. 4.

³¹⁴ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam Reza A'vāni, p. 34.

³¹⁵ The 'blue wheel', a metaphor for the circling sky.

³¹⁶ Peter Lamborn Wilson, in his literary translation of the *Blue Firmament*, reflects this mythological/astrological meaning of firmaments:

“... something in my horoscope... stars are against me...”

Good heavens- drive these vapours away! It ill befits
the wise to rebuke the sublime and distant spheres.’

Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholām Reza A'vāni, p.84.

astrological meaning of firmament, for him, is ideological because it justifies men's cruel actions as part of the predetermined fate that firmaments have written. In this ideological framework, men are never to be blamed for their actions. Moreover, all injustices and wrongdoings find a supernatural source. He also specifies that obsession with firmaments as the agent of human's fate is a sign of intellectual degradation and worldly attachments. In the *Blue Firmament qasida*, Nāser-e Khosrow puts those who escape from learning and intellectual accomplishments into the same category as those who blame firmaments and stars. He concludes that by achieving knowledge and wisdom, one will become aware of the impact of accepting the ideology of firmament and look for his/her own potential. This is where the philosophical meaning of the firmament comes in, and firmament, along with time, represent elements of natural determinism.

b) Against the Fatalistic Perception of Time: From Predestination to Determinism

As in the case of Firmament, Time also has a scientific-philosophical meaning, which finds its own cultural function in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. Time in Nāser-e Khosrow's prose works derives its usage from two major metaphysical meanings. One is the eternal-essential time (*zamān-e sarmadi-o jowhari*), and the other is the temporal and transient time. In his *Jāme' al-Hekmatayn* (Twin Wisdoms Reconciled), he writes:

Thus, eternity (*dahr*) is the unqualified continuance (*baqā-ye motlaq*) of pure disembodied spirits whom neither corruption nor cessation touches. They [philosophers] say too that 'eternity is the continuance of an entity living in its own essence', that is, that which is living out of its own essential nature and which does not die; and eternity is a deathless continuance. They hold that time (*zamān*) is a segmented eternity; it is the continuance of bodies. The meaning of 'life passing day by day' – in the view of the intelligent – is time itself.³¹⁷

And elsewhere he explains:

Regarding the eternity [*dahr*], they [philosophers] say that it is the continuance of the eternal substance. The first eternal substance is the Universal Intellect whose continuance is forever. Just as eternity lies within the bound of the intellect, so does time lie within the bound of the universal soul; that is to say, the cause of eternity is the Intellect, just as the cause of time is the Soul. We [Ismailis] say that the cause of time

³¹⁷ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Between Reason and Revelation: Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, transl. by Eric Ormsby (London and New York: I.B.Tauris in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, London, 2012), p. 109.

is the Soul since time consists of the number of movements of the sphere. [...] Transient life is time. [...] if the continuance of the living-mortal creatures is transient time, the continuance of what is living and immortal – which is the Soul and the Intellect – must necessarily be eternal, not temporal; and the name for that is ‘eternity’ (*dahr*).³¹⁸

Thus, Nāser-e Khosrow makes a clear distinction between *dahr* and *zamān*. *Dahr* signifies the boundless and eternal time (eternity). *Zamān*, on the other hand, is the time which makes the temporal and material life possible for creatures. In his *Zād al-Mosāferin* (The Pilgrim’s Provision), Nāser-e Khosrow makes a distinction between eternal time (*dahr*), time (*zamān*) and the period (*moddat*). He emphasises that time is the constant change in the condition of things (*gashtan-e hāl-e chizhā as pas-e yekdigar*); therefore, time does not pass in respect to a thing which does not see any change. ‘Period’ is the time that passes between two different conditions or situations, e.g. ‘day’, which consists of the change that a thing observes from light to darkness and back again.³¹⁹

In his poetry, however, we do not see such scientific distinctions. Although both *dahr* and *zamān* are mentioned in numerous cases, they are merged together in favour of suggesting the transient time. Change and evolution which was the core of the transient time in Nāser-e Khosrow’s theoretical works, is translated into frustration, temporality and ephemerality in his poems. The same is true of the concept of firmament, which was, in the scientific accounts, a simple ‘orb shaped rotating body’, but is transformed into a tyrant or hunter that seeks for people’s life. Both time and firmament are visualised with negative imagery and in a tragic tone, for they are to blame for the deficiencies and misfortunes of human life. In the *Divan*, Time is the main force which brings frustration into nature and makes life on earth unstable, unreliable, unsettled and unforeseeable. As a result, all sufferings and failures, as well as prosperity and triumphs, are part of the game that Time plays. We, as the subjects who experience the condition of temporality, must learn the rules and tricks of Time, but most of us will keep ignoring the fact that nothing in this world lasts and continue to wish for temporal and transient desires. In its literary representation, Time is depicted as a horrifying dominant force, watching over humans. On the other hand, humans are depicted as ignorant subjects who cannot see that they are nothing but prey for ‘the falcon of time’:

³¹⁸ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Between Reason and Revelation: Twin Wisdoms Reconciled*, transl. by Eric Ormsby, p. 113.

³¹⁹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Zād al-mosāferin (Provisions for Travellers)*, ed. Mohammad Bazl al-Rahmān, p. 110.

شاهین زمانه قصد تو کرد
بربایدت این نفایه شاهین

1) The falcon of time is out to catch you
It will catch you, this vile falcon

تئین جهان دهان گشادست
پر هیز کن از دهان تئین³²⁰

2) The dragon of the world has opened his mouth wide
Keep yourself away from the dragon's mouth (*qasida* no.24)

* * *

پیش تو در می رود او کینه ور
تو ز پس او چه دوی شادمان؟

1) It [this world] is going vengefully ahead of you,
So why are you cheerfully running after him,

هیچ نترسی که ترا این نهنگ
ناگه یک روز کشد در دهان؟³²¹

2) Don't you know that this crocodile,
will one day suddenly swallow you

دشمن توست ای پسر این روزگار
نیست به تو در طمعش جز به جان³²²

Time is your foe my son,
Nothing can satisfy him but your life (*qasida* no.7)

* * *

ایا گشته غره به مکر زمانه
ز مکرش به دل گشتی آگاه یا نه؟

1) O you! Deceived by the guile of time
Have you now become fully aware of its deceit or still not?

یگانه‌ی زمانه شدی تو ولیکن
نشد هیچکس را زمانه یگانه

2) You have become unique in time, but
Time has never become one with (dedicated itself to) anyone.

³²⁰ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 50.

³²¹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 13.

³²² Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 14.

زمانه بسی پند دادت، ولیکن
تو می‌درنیابی زبان زمانه³²³

3) Time has advised you many times

yet, you do not understand the language of time (*qasida*, no.20)

The condemnation of time and the description of its characteristics are not to be mistaken for fatalism, however. Complaining about time's cruelty does not imply that our deeds and decisions are predestined by a supreme force. In the *qasida* no.4, which I have quoted below, Nāser-e Khosrow focuses on the relationship between time and human responsibility:

چند بنالی که بد شدست زمانه؟
عیب تنتت بر زمانه برفگنی چون؟

1) Why do you regularly complain that Time has become bad?

Why do you blame Time for the deficiencies of your body?

هرگز کی گفت این زمانه که بد کن؟
مفتون چونی به قول عامه مفتون؟

2) When did Time ever tell you to do evil?

Why are you spellbound by the beliefs of spellbound commoners/vulgar people?

تو شده ای دیگر این زمانه همان است
کی شود بی خرد زمانه دگرگون؟³²⁴

3) Time is as it has always been, it's you who has become someone else!

You fool! How can Time change? (*qasida* no.4)

Earlier, I expounded that Nāser-e Khosrow depicts Time as the trickster who acts against men's desires and makes every happiness or peace unstable and transient. Such a literary representation of Time, I discussed, emerges from its philosophical significance, in which Time is the result of the movements of firmaments. It causes growth and development, but decay and corruption at the same time. It seems that in Nāser-e Khosrow's criticism of passivity and submission, Time, along with firmament, remain the leading cause of natural corruption and, consequently, the temporary condition of life. This does not cancel out the power of human actions, however. Time does not determine human fate and should not be blamed for our deficiencies and misfortunes. Nāser-e Khosrow is against the fatalistic idea of Time which leads to predestination (*qazā-o qadar*), but he is not against the philosophical notion of Time. Time, in this latter context, is the inevitable part of the physical life that causes Generation and

³²³ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqeq, p. 41.

³²⁴ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqeq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 9.

Corruption (*kown-o fesād*). It is therefore beyond human power. For Nāser-e Khosrow, accepting the determining effect of Time is a precondition for agency and practice. In the first line of the above example, Nāser-e Khosrow advises his reader not to blame the ‘deficiencies of the body’ (*eib-e tan*) on Time.

The deficiencies of one’s body can also be seen as a metonymy for the physical condition of life in general. A contradiction might appear here: If, according to Nāser-e Khosrow, Time causes the physical and material state of human life, why should someone not blame it for the deficiencies of his body? Is this not the very thing that Nāser-e Khosrow himself does in his *qasidas*? To solve this contradiction, one should first make a distinction between *acknowledging* the role of Time and firmament in determining the physical condition of life and *blaming* Time and firmament for the deficiencies of such state. In the logic of acknowledging, Nāser-e Khosrow articulates the position of firmament and Time within the context of the theory of creation, or *origination*. Here, his focus is on the material condition of life as an inevitable, pre-given and natural state. The logic of blaming, on the other hand, justifies passivity and ignorance by reducing our existence to the physical one. The inevitability of the physical life, for Nāser-e Khosrow, is a real fact. That is why blaming Time becomes an illogical and pointless thing. For Nāser-e Khosrow, such a pre-given condition should be a source of knowledge and practice instead of passivity and despair. The following *qasida* by Nāser-e Khosrow explains this more fully:

بر تو این خوردن و این رفتن و این خفتن و خواست
نیک بنگر که، که افگند، وز این کار چه خواست

1) Watch carefully to see who threw upon you this eating and going around and sleeping and waking up, and what did he intend in doing so?

گر به ناکام تو بود این همه تقدیر، چرا
به همه عمر چنین خواب و خورت کام و هواست؟

2) If this fate doesn’t tickle your palate,
why have you been able to spend your life eating and sleeping to your heart’s desire?

چون شدی فتنه‌ی ناخواسته‌ی خویش؟ بگوی
راست می‌گوی، که هشیار نگوید جز راست³²⁵

3) How did you become such an unwanted disaster to yourself?

Tell the truth, conscious people never tell anything but the truth'³²⁶ (*qasida* no.10)

Here, Nāser-e Khosrow tries to make a transition from acknowledging the material condition to ethical responsibility and practice. Physical existence is a God-given reality, and because it is God-given, there is wisdom (*hekmat*) or reason behind it that one must search for.

'Blaming Time for the deficiencies of the body' (*qasida* no.4, line 1) initiates a question: if the material condition of your life concerns you, why don't you act against it? Why do you use the deficiencies of your body as an excuse for your decadence and ignorance? By focusing merely on Time and Firmament as the agents of natural determinism, Nāser-e Khosrow argues that one would ignore one's spiritual capability. Blaming Time is the result of an obsession with material life and worldly desires rather than a sign of consciousness and enlightenment. This is where the distinction between determinism and predestination can clarify Nāser-e Khosrow's position. Predestination, as Maria De Cillis has mentioned, 'refers to instances in which the discourse emphasises God's direct intervention in the creation of existents, particularly in conjunction with the topics of creation *ex nihilo* and perpetual divine creation.' Determinism, on the other hand, 'is used with reference to cases which stress the Aristotelian idea that destiny (*qadar*) and the determination of all existents are basically due to their inherent natures rather than being dependent on the occasionalistic inference of the deity.'³²⁷ Based on this distinction, accepting determinism may not necessarily entail an acceptance of predestination. On the contrary, it may justify free will and human power as a natural phenomenon.

In the *Blue Firmament qasida*, Nāser-e Khosrow is conscious of the natural condition of human existence; meanwhile, he addresses the astrological meaning of firmament as an ideology. Nāser-e Khosrow, still, regards time as *jafā pisheh* (*qasida* no.64, line 3).³²⁸ This means that cruelty and persecuting people (*jafā kardan*) is Time's unchangeable task/profession (*pisheh*). Such a deterministic account of time is followed, however, by the introduction of the virtue of patience (*sabr-modārā*) as the only way to overcome the natural determinism of Time and

³²⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 19.

³²⁶ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam Reza A'vani, p. 39.

³²⁷ Maria De Cillis, *Free will and Predestination in Islamic Thought*, p. 2.

³²⁸ See my quotation of the *Blue Firmament qasida*, line 3.

Firmament. Thus, according to Nāser-e Khosrow's *Blue Firmament*, patience helps us to 'get used to' (*ādat kardan*) Time's cruelty.

This *acceptance* (*paziroftan*) and *acclimation* (*khu kardan*) happen while Nāser-e Khosrow stands firmly against the idea of assigning agency to Time and Firmament. In the second example (*qasida* no.4), Nāser-e Khosrow advises his readers to *remember* how Time and Firmament work, implying that nothing lasts, and everything is subject to corruption. This is not the reason for human failures, however. For Nāser-e Khosrow, being subject to natural corruption is an indisputable fact of our material life that cannot be changed ('Time is as it has always been, it's you who has become someone else!' *qasida* no.4, line 3). The inevitability of our physical existence does not limit our free will, nor does it release us from our moral responsibilities.

As far as the material condition of life is concerned, patience is the only solution. In Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, knowledge and intellect, as elements of free will, are relevant to the transcendental realm rather than the real world. Patience, as a cultural sign represented in the *Divan* of Nāser-e Khosrow, enables us to *accept* material deficiencies and *acclimatise* ourselves to this pre-given condition (*qasida* no.64, line 3). The ideological problem of this thesis of Nāser-e Khosrow comes from the fact that the domain of material deficiencies goes further than natural corruption and includes any form of *worldly attachments*. Therefore, patience enables us to acclimatise not only to the limits of our physical condition (natural determinism) but also to politics, history and human social relations and affairs. These affairs are worldly engagements, determined by the forces of nature, and therefore do not have any credibility of their own. The fundamental dichotomy between the body and soul on the one hand, and the emphasis on the temporal and transient condition of human life on the other, re-situate the concepts of hope, enlightenment and emancipation as ideals totally related to the spiritual realm, rather than the material world.

The problem that Nāser-e Khosrow identifies in blaming Time and Firmament does not concern the nature or scope of the effects these two agents have on the social life of humans. He advises people not to blame Time and Firmament, not because the determinist function of these two elements is false, but because blaming something which is beyond our reach is pointless and only deepens our engagement with worldly affairs.

c) Ethical Practice

Line 6 of the *Blue Firmament qasida* focuses on ethical practice by introducing the concept of beauty (*zibāie*). At first sight, it seems that the quoted line goes no further than the usual moral motto: that beauty is in one's behaviour, not appearance. There is more to it than meets the eye, however. In the first half-line, Nāser-e Khosrow warns his readers that material or apparent beauty (*zibāie-ye zāheri*) is a fake ideal (*be chehreh shodan chon pari key tavāni*). The problem is not that physical beauty brings degradation and decline, or that it provokes greed. The problem is, in fact, epistemological: the nature of physical beauty is artificial and made of our imagination. The first half-line is also a rhetorical question (*estefhām-e enkāri*): is it possible to gain the beauty of a fairy? The answer, of course, denies such a possibility, implying that the apparent beauty is unachievable since it is based on fantasy rather than reality.

If apparent beauty is founded on imagination, however, how can ethical beauty, the beauty of one's deeds, be justified with regards to the illusion/reality dichotomy? In other words, if becoming like a fairy in appearance is impossible, how then is it possible to be like a fairy – or angel – by our deeds? For Nāser-e Khosrow, the possibility of beautiful acts lies within the nature of the practice itself. The ethical practice actualises the beauty and relocates it from fantasy to reality. He recognises such actualisation through the impact that the moral subject can have on society. Ethical practice brings social prestige to the subject and makes him a role-model (lines 5-11, *qasida* no.64, *The Blue Firmament qasida*), and it therefore has real consequences: people can recognise it and change their deeds as a result.

The role of *amukhtan* (learning) and *dānesh* (knowledge) is significant in this process. I will discuss the subject of knowledge thoroughly in the next chapter, as it has numerous aspects and different functions in the *Divan*. As far as ethical practice is concerned, however, knowledge refers to the subjective nature of virtues. Moral virtues in the Persian educational literature are subjective and separated from the practical situation. They are ideal and absolute entities that represent excellence and perfection in what is right. In the Ismaili enlightenment tradition, this subjective approach towards virtue ethics continues as virtues become subjects of *Knowledge*. The elites or 'the wise men' as Nāser-e Khosrow puts it, teach the virtues to ordinary people in order to educate them in appropriate social and religious conduct. Three factors therefore determine the relationship between ethical practice and Knowledge. The first is that by acting according to the virtues, one can be the real representative of those virtues, showing people how a virtuous human being must behave. The second is that practical commitment to moral virtues brings social recognition and prestige (*sarvari*) for the possessor

of the virtues. The third is that ethical practice becomes an essential part of the wisdom that the seeker of truth must achieve. That is, being able to act according to virtues in any given circumstance is a sign of one's accomplishment in Knowledge; conversely deficiency in ethical practice would be a sign of ignorance and lack of wisdom.

Another aspect of ethical practice is Nāser-e Khosrow's criticism of the division between utterance/knowledge on the one hand, and action/practice on the other. Alongside criticising fatalism and astrology, Nāser-e Khosrow criticises the duplicity of those who claim to be virtuous and religious, but whose actions prove the opposite. It seems that Naser-e Khosrow is referring here to the frequent theme in Persian didactic literature which stands against the dissociation between Knowledge and action. According to this ethical principle, the real moral subjects are those who prove their ethical commitments through actual deeds, not useless claims and declarations. There is a famous line that has been turned into a proverb among Persian speakers today. A version of this line can be found in *Garshāsb Nāmeh* (The Book of Garshasb) by Asadi Tusi, a prominent epic poet in Khorāsān during the eleventh century, who followed the style of Ferdowsi and was a contemporary of Nāser-e Khosrow:

هنرها سراسر به گفتار نیست
دو صد گفت چون نیم کردار نیست³²⁹

Virtues and skills cannot be accomplished only in utterance
Two hundred statements are not as worthy as a half-completed deed.

There is another proverb addressing the same issue, which has been taken from the second hemistich of a line by Sa'di:

سعدیا گرچه سخندان و مصالح گویی
به عمل کار برآید، به سخندانی نیست³³⁰

S'adi! Although you are the master of speech and sermons,
The task is accomplished by action, not being skilled in good speech!

The emphasis on action rather than utterance in Persian classical literature serves two meanings. One is ethical, and the other is psychological. The ethical aspect focuses on the virtue of honesty and the contradiction between utterance and action (*yeki nabudan-e harf-o*

³²⁹ Asadi Tusi, *Garshāsb Nāmeh (The Book of Garshāsb)*, ed. by Habib Yaghmāie (Tehran: Tahuri, 1975), p. 371.

³³⁰ Sa'di, *Kolliyāt (Complete Works)*, ed. by Mohammad Ali Foroghi (Tehran: Hermes (reprinted), 2006), p. 947.

'amal) as an unethical issue. It also emphasises the practical nature of ethical virtues; that a real virtuous man is one who acts according to virtues in every given situation.³³¹ The psychological meaning, on the other hand, seeks to encourage people's will and determination in respect to fulfilling a task. It addresses the readers as subjects able to accomplish what they desire through perseverance and faith. Here, instead of honesty and virtuous deeds, determination and fulfilment are the subjects.

In Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, it is the ethical sense that is central in most cases. The following *qasida* accurately reflects this aspect:

ای خوانده کتاب زند و پازند
زین خواندن زند تا کی و چند؟

1) O you who has read books of Zoroaster!
For how long will you keep reading these sermons?

دل پر ز فضول و زند برلب
زردشت چنین نیشست در زند؟

2) Your mouth is chanting words of Avesta, while your mind is filled with lust,
Is this what Zoroaster advised in his Avesta?

از فعل منافقی و بی‌باک
وز قول حکیمی و خردمند

3) In deeds, you are a hypocrite, an impudent person,
In words, you are wise and a man of knowledge!

از فعل به فضل شو بیفزای
وز قول رو اندکی فرو رند

4) Improve your wisdom through your deeds,
and talk less [about wisdom and virtues!]

پندم چه دهی؟ نخست خود را
محکم کمری ز پند بر بند

5) Why do you advise me? First
prepare a tight belt of advice and buckle up for your own deeds.

³³¹ This should not be mistaken with 'practical wisdom' or *phronesis* in Ancient Greek philosophy, in which virtue or a virtuous act is dependent on the actual circumstance of the possessor of the virtue. It seems that, in Persian educational literature, the focus was on *arête* or virtues, regardless of the particular situation in which a virtuous act is identified. Even when it comes to ethical practice, as is the case with Nāser-e Khosrow, the nature of virtues remains independent from the practical situation. For virtue ethics in Ancient Greek See 'Virtue Ethics' in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* < <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-virtue/> > [accessed 27 November 2019]

چون خود نکنی چنانکه گوئی
پند تو بود دروغ و ترفند

6) Why you do not act as you say?

That's why nobody believes in your fake and devious sermons.

پند از حکما پذیر، ازیراک
حکمت پدر است و پند فرزند³³²

7) Listen to hakims for advice,

for *hekmat* (philosophy) is like father, and advice as his child. (*qasida* no.11)

This *qasida* (no. 11) is about the contradiction between utterance and action as a socio-political problem. Nāser-e Khosrow recognises the obsession with pretentious ethical gestures as a symptom of the current situation. The ethical contradiction between utterance and deed, in the context of Nāser-e Khosrow's social criticism, finds a political significance: moral virtues turn into a device for deceit and domination. Here, another instance of the critique of ideology can be traced: moral values that are part of the literary tradition can be appropriated by the dominant regime to justify its power. Within this ideology, the act of preaching turns into one of justification.

On many occasions in his *Divan*, Nāser-e Khosrow criticises the duplicity of those who cloak their vicious deeds with fake religious figures. He shows how religious and moral values and beliefs are reduced to hollow rituals and symbols for the *worldly benefits* of some people. In other words, Nāser-e Khosrow tries to show that in the time he is living, religion has turned into anti-religion as it serves only material and worldly desires instead of self-enlightenment and otherworldly emancipation:

ای عورت کفر و عیب نادانی
پوشیده به جامه‌ی مسلمانی

1) O you! who clothed your disbelief and ignorance in a garment of a Muslim,

ترسم که نه مردمی به جان، هر چند
از شخص همی به مردمان مانی

2) I doubt that you are humane in your Soul, although you appear like a human in your body.

چندین مفشان ردا، چرا جان را
یکبار ز گرد جهل نفشانی؟³³³

3) You are moving your cloak [in front of people to show off]

³³² Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 24.

³³³ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 58.

Why don't you – for once – wipe the dust of ignorance from your soul? (*qasida* no.28)

* * *

در سپه سامری از بهر چیست
بر تن تو جوشن پیغمبری؟

4) You are in the army of Samiri, why, then, have you worn the armour of the Prophet?

جوشن پیغمبری اسلام توست
زنده بدین جوشن و این مغفری

5) The only sign that shows you are a Muslim is this armour of the Prophet that you have worn. Indeed, this helmet and armour are all from the religion that you are looking for.

فایده زین جوشن و زین مغفر تو را
نیست مگر خواب و خور ایدری³³⁴

6) The only advantage that you have gained from this armour and helmet, is worldly pleasures and comfort. (*qasida* no.26)

In the above lines from *qasida* no.26, Nāser-e Khosrow stands against the symbolic and material signs of religion (armour, helmet, cloak). Those who wear armour and helmets to fight for Islam are, in fact, heretics. Although appearing as zealous believers, they are really seeking power and wealth. Moreover, those who wear a cloak and appear as men of religion, in fact, have no knowledge to guide people. They merely chose this occupation (priest, cleric) only to serve the corrupt rulers and receive material benefits from them. It is quite probable that this description of men with armour and helmets alludes to the Turkic rulers, while those who wear cloaks refers to the *faqih*s who served the Caliphate and its Turkic allies. The reference to sorcery and magicians is also significant in Nāser-e Khosrow's socio-political criticism of moralities and religion. In line 4 of *qasida* no. 26, those who appear as religious are compared with Samiri, the famous Quranic character who deceived the followers of Moses by creating a golden calf.³³⁵ Samiri, in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, in most of cases, is a metaphor for those who misguide people by spreading a distorted and false religious knowledge. The act of magic or deception, here, is a metaphor for the act of distorting the truth. That is why, in the *Blue Firmament qasida* (*qasida* no.64), when Nāser-e Khosrow speaks of the Ismaili Imam (*emāme zamāneh*, line 20, *qasida* no.64), he states that the Fatimid Imam is the only authority who can fight against this act of deception and misrepresentation, as he possesses the true legitimate religious knowledge.

³³⁴ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 54.

³³⁵ See: The Quran [20:84-89]

Nāser-e Khosrow recognises the politics of preaching as an ideological strategy. In chapter one, I discussed how Nāser-e Khosrow's criticism of court poetry could be regarded as a kind of critique of ideology in medieval literature. I argued that by recognising the political function of poetry, Nāser-e Khosrow criticises the court poetry as an ideological institution which justifies the illegitimate rule of the Turks. Later in this chapter, I discussed Nāser-e Khosrow's criticism of astrology in public culture can be viewed as another aspect of Nāser-e Khosrow's critique of ideology. According to Nāser-e Khosrow, astrological beliefs give an excuse to people by which they can justify their wrong deeds and evade their ethical responsibility (see *qasida* no.64). Here, a third example of the premodern form of ideology critique can be observed. Nāser-e Khosrow criticises the ethical discourse of his time, which, in his view, is manifested in pretentious and fake religious and ethical gestures of the elites. He is well aware that the need of the Turkic rulers in presenting themselves as a moral force has resulted in reducing ethical virtues to mere sermons and rhetorical gestures. Such political exploitation of ethics, according to Nāser-e Khosrow's criticism, has caused division between knowledge and action, and such division has brought religious and ethical duplicity in society; moral virtues are reduced to fake manifestations and gestures by those who seek power and position, and ethical practice as the necessary part of ethics is now forgotten.³³⁶

Nāser-e Khosrow believes that two steps must be taken to resist such an ideological function. One is to reveal this ethical contradiction and argue for the practical nature of those virtues (lines 1-3, *qasida* no.11). The other is to recognise the *hakims*, the philosophers, as the only independent source of ethical knowledge and practice (line 7, *qasida* no. 11). In respect to the first, it is no accident that Nāser-e Khosrow refers to Zoroastrian literature, since Zoroastrian ethics is based on free will and human practice, and it emphasises on the unity between utterance and action. The well-known Zoroastrian tripartite principles, good thoughts, good words and good deeds (*pendār-e nik, goftār-e nik, kerdār-e nik*) tries to show that, for an ethical subject, thoughts, deeds and words must be in concord with each other. It also shows Nāser-e Khosrow's respect and toleration for Zoroastrian faith, as he calls his addressee, who is apparently a Zoroastrian priest, to act according to the values that are stated in *Avesta*, the holy

³³⁶ In this paragraph, I am using the classical critique of ideology in the Marxist tradition, which I have already discussed in the introduction chapter of this research. This traditional meaning should not be confused and mistaken with the concept of ideology that I am using in this research to criticise Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry, which is based on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory. Here, by referring to the traditional theory of critique of ideology, I aim to show that Nāser-e Khosrow's criticism of poetry, astrology and ethical sermons can be regarded as a premodern and preliminary form of the critique of ideology, which later formulated and developed in Marxism. See the introduction chapter for more details.

book of Zoroastrians. However, in my view, the Zoroastrian signs in the *qasida* no.11 are metaphors in favour of the major theme of the *qasida* which is the relationship between ethical virtues and practice. In the first line, the one ‘who has read the books of Zoroaster’ can be a metaphor of those who just read and pretend that they are knowledgeable, but they do not act accordingly. *Hakims* in line 7 might also refer to the Ismaili intellectuals. That is, those who possess both rational and religious knowledge (both esoteric and exoteric) and are reluctant towards worldly engagements. Such people are qualified to be guides for ethical knowledge and practice.

Addressing contradictions in Nāser-e Khosrow’s criticism is not limited to ethical virtues. It also addresses a more general division, that is the division between theory and practice. Here, the lack of practice concerns both philosophical and religious knowledge. The cause for such a division, as Nāser-e Khosrow clearly announces below, is the dominant political regime in which the Turks (regarded as ‘the demon’) are the rulers:

علم کانباز عمل بود و جدا کردش دیو
بازگردند سرانجام و بباشند انباز³³⁷

Knowledge, which was once the associate of practice, was separated by demons.

Soon the day will come these two will join together again as partners. (*qasida* no.50)

Just as ethics without its practical representation is unethical and politically problematic, knowledge or ‘*elm*, without relevant practice, would be incomplete and insufficient, and therefore, politically stands with the rule of ‘demons’. Just as ethical preaching must be the subject of criticism, one must also criticise the theory-oriented knowledge. In both cases, the necessity of practice for true enlightenment and emancipation is at the centre of Nāser-e Khosrow’s discourse.

For Nāser-e Khosrow, the official religious discourse of the Turks is populist in that it evokes *taqlid* (imitation) and exoteric perceptions of the religious discourse.³³⁸ It is this political

³³⁷ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqueq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 114.

³³⁸ In *qasida* No.26 of the *Divan*, Nāser-e Khosrow criticises the *Nāsebis*, those zealous Sunnis who have hatred towards Shiites. There, he states that the Nāsebi’s beliefs are based on imitation, rather than individual consciousness and contemplation, and therefore their religious knowledge is without any depth or enlightenment:

دین تو به تقلید پذیرفته‌ای
دین به تقلید بود سر سری

You have accepted your religion by imitation,
An imitated religion is nothing but facile

criticism that connects the ethical contradiction between utterance and action to the division between knowledge and practice. What Nāser-e Khosrow observes is that religious ethics and knowledge have lost their practical function and turned into means of deception and oppression. The reason for such alienation, according to Nāser-e Khosrow, is the religious propaganda which uses the Quran, hadith and ethical virtues to represent as righteous and legitimate what is unjust and illegitimate. By recognising the political factor as the cause for the moral and intellectual decline, Nāser-e Khosrow adds a political significance to his desired ethical/intellectual practice. In the line above from *qasida* no.50, the reunion of knowledge and practice is imagined as something that will happen in future (*bāz gardand saranjām*), in a form of a promise. This promise might refer to the poet's wish as to the Fatimids conquest of Khorāsān and the change of the political regime. Here, Nāser-e Khosrow implies that in his ideal revolutionary government which is going to be run by legitimate Ismaili rulers, one would no longer see the decline of knowledge and moralities in society as knowledge will be measured by one's practice not one's pretentious claims.

d) Political and Literary Practice

The political practice in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* emerges where he refers to the Fatimid caliphate as an alternative for the Baghdad caliphate and their Turkic ally in Khorāsān. This political statement usually comes in the concluding part of his *qasidas*, where, instead of praising the sultan and praying for his health (*shariteh-o doā*), Nāser-e Khosrow refers to either the Ismaili Imam (*emām-e zamāneh*) or the Ismaili government in Cairo. This political conclusion is usually followed by Nāser-e Khosrow's ethical and intellectual criticism, in which moral virtues and religious Knowledge have turned into means of subjugation and deception because of the illegitimate rulers. By arranging such a narrative structure in his *qasidas*, Nāser-e Khosrow presents his support for the Ismaili movement as a political, ethical and intellectual alternative. The Ismaili movement, within this narrative, functions as the alternative to the current spiritual and socio-political degeneration, delivering emancipation for the imprisoned soul and justice in the worldly life. Nāser-e Khosrow's mention of the Ismaili establishment usually has two aspects. One is praising and admiring the glory of the Ismaili government and its religious legitimacy, and the other is announcing the poet's dedication to the Ismaili cause. In the latter, the poet regards himself as a soldier and defender of the Ismaili

See: Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqqeq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 55. See also chapter one of this research for more details.

government. He intentionally declares his political activity so to make a bold distinction between himself as the privileged intellectual and others, whom he argues are deceived by the rule of demons.

In ‘the blue firmament’ *qasida* (*qasida* no.64), Nāser-e Khosrow’s mention of the Ismaili leader, the Imam of the Time (*emām-e zamāneh*) (lines 17-20) is followed by his criticism of the court poets. He blames them mainly because of their panegyric poems that, in his view, are made only for the sake of money and position, and are, therefore, full of lies and exaggerations (lines 13-16). Such political criticism of the official literary production gives him an appropriate excuse to mention the Ismaili Imam as the true legitimate patron who deserves to be praised.³³⁹ By turning the panegyric into a political/religious device, he gives a new voice to this literary genre. Panegyric poetry, for him, must not be a means for obtaining worldly needs and desires. It must no longer be a courtly ritual that deals with specific literary clichés, neutral and passive descriptions of nature, and pictures of courtly life. Panegyric is part of Nāser-e Khosrow’s literary, religious, ethical and intellectual practice. The poet praises the Ismaili Imam for three reasons: 1) it is a virtuous deed, 2) it is a religious necessity, and 3) it assists the spread of true Knowledge among ignorant communities. For all these reasons, praising the Ismaili Imam should be part of the literary/poetic act, since poetry is about ethical commitments, and the Knowledge of true religion. For Nāser-e Khosrow, what is ethical is political, and vice versa. The ethical, political and literary practice unite together to justify a political mission (the Ismaili movement). This unification is backed up by a theological doctrine that seeks to identify a middle-way position between free will and predestination. In the following section, I will focus on the theological view of Nāser-e Khosrow in respect to the subjects of free will, determinism and predestination. I will try to show that his theological position serves as a religious platform, allowing him to argue for the significance of the ethical, political and literary practice, while also enabling him to criticise astrology and fatalism.

Free will and Determinism in Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan*: The Theological Approach

a) From Predestination to Determinism

I have already discussed the difference between determinism and predestination in Nāser-e Khosrow’s criticism of astrology and fatalism. In this criticism, firmaments are the agents of determinism, but not in the sense that they control human actions or determine the fate of all

³³⁹ See chapter one of this research.

people. Instead, as natural forces, they determine the material condition of human life. Natural determinism does not cancel human power; rather, it triggers it. Being able to ‘bring down the blue Firmament under the feet’ (*be zir āvardan-e charkh-e nilufari*), is not the result of rejecting the Time and Firmament’s rules, but of accepting them. It is through this acceptance that one can come to see oneself as attached to / originated from the same natural forces. By recognising oneself as being part of nature, one can look back and realise one’s agency in determining one’s fate. Time and Firmament, therefore, might determine the natural conditions of our life, but they cannot determine our actions and decisions.

In the following *qasida*, Nāser-e Khosrow articulates his view on the relationship between Time and Firmament as the agents of the Divine Decree (*qazā*) and predestination (*qadar*), with regards to human responsibility and practice:

این رقیبان که بر این گنبد پیروزه درند
گرچه زیرند گهی، جمله همیشه زبرند

1) These onlookers who reside in this turquoise dome,
though they are down, below us sometimes, are, in fact, always high above us.

گر رقیبان به بصر تیز بوند از بر ما
این رقیبان سماوی همه یکسر بصرند

2) If the watchers around us have keen eyes,
these watchers of heaven are all and entirely eyes!

نامشان زی تو ستاره است ولیکن سوی من
پیشکاران و رقیبان قضا و قدرند

3) You simply call them ‘stars’, but for me,
they are the operators and watchers of *qazā* and *qadar*.

چون گریزم ز قضا، یا ز قدر، من چو همی
به هزاران بصر ایشان به سوی من نگرند؟

4) How, then, can I escape from *qazā* or *qadar*,
when they are looking at me with thousands of eyes?

سوی ما زان نگرند ایشان کز جوهرشان
خرد و جان سخن گوی به ما در اثرند

5) They are watching us because the Intellect and Speaking Soul,
which are at work within us, are from their essence.

خرد و جان سخن گوی که از طاعت و علم
پریانند بر این گنبد پیروزه پرند

6) The Intellect and Speaking Soul which are like angles by the virtue of obedience and knowledge,
will fly to [and settle over] this turquoise dome.

این چراگاه دل و جان سخن گوی تو است
جهد کن تا به جز از طاعت و دانش نچرند³⁴⁰

7) This world is like a pasture for your Speaking Heart and Soul,
try hard that they graze nothing but obedience and knowledge (*qasida* no.31)

In this *qasida*, Nāser-e Khosrow recognises the movements of stars and firmaments as agents (*pishkār*) who carry out the Divine decree and execute the fate of each being (line 3). For Nāser-e Khosrow, God's decree and His determining power represent themselves in the movements of firmaments and Time. Human beings are, therefore, bound to be trapped in predestination as far as material attachments and natural forces condition our existence. The idea of free will, for Nāser-e Khosrow, emerges from the will of the Soul, urging for spiritual emancipation and unification with the absolute essence. It is this urge that gives meaning to the third part of Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative, which is knowledge and intellect (lines 6-7).

Such an interpretation of predestination and the Divine decree, like that of the Divine Oneness, contains elements of both religious and philosophical discourse. This, in my view, comes from Nāser-e Khosrow's primarily intellectual approach, in which religion and philosophy are both essential disciplines for esoteric knowledge. They are 'twin wisdoms' (*hekmatayn*), reconciled with each other. In Nāser-e Khosrow's perspective, it is through such reconciliation that one can grapple with the epistemological and methodological deficiencies of both disciplines. Thus, Nāser-e Khosrow uses a philosophical methodology to explain the material and physical life and relies on religious discourse to set a noble cause for human life and justify human ethical responsibility and free will.

By reconciling philosophy and religion, the rational approach commits itself to an ultimate metaphysical source and consequently finds a moral purpose. In the *qasida* no.31 which I quoted above, forces of nature cause generation and corruption (*kown-o fesād*) and establish the conditions for human natural existence. These forces are beyond human control, so it is impossible for man to challenge them. Since Nāser-e Khosrow uses the terms *qazā* and *qadar*, this natural determinism is reconciled with religious determinism. In this new structure, natural

³⁴⁰ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqeq and Mojtabā Minovi, p. 64.

causality originates from the Universal Intellect as the first originated being. In consequence, the result of natural causality finds a Divine origin. This structure explains Nāser-e Khosrow's Ismaili theory of determinism and free will. In this theory, firmaments and Time originate from the Universal Soul and work as the leading causes for the natural existence. At the same time, they engender the Speaking Soul and Intellect, the two fundamental factors of human free will. Free will, in this narrative, no longer stands against God's will and His Divine decree; rather, it represents His power and knowledge.

b) Intellect and Soul, from Universal to Particular

In the following *qasida*, one can observe Nāser Khosrow's understanding of the divine background of free will and of the concepts of intellect and the speaking soul:

روزی به پرّ طاعت از این گنبد بلند
بیرون پریده گیر چون مرغِ پیر مرا

1) One day flown away from this high-raised dome,
with the wing of Obedience, see me escaped, like a bird.

هرکس همی حذر ز قضا و قدر کند
وین هردو رهبرند قضا و قدر مرا

2) People are cautious about *qazā* and *qadar*,
while these two are my guide, my *qazā* and *qadar*.

نام قضا خرد کن و نام قدر سخن
یاد است این سخن ز یکی نامور مرا

3) An eminent wise man once said to me:
'Name *qazā* the Intellect, and *qadar* the Speech'.

واکنون که عقل و نفس سخنگوی خود منم
از خویشتن چه باید کردن حذر مرا؟

4) And now that I myself am the Intellect and Speaking Soul,
why should I, then, be cautious about myself?

ای گشته خوش دلت ز قضا و قدر به نام
چون خویشتن ستور گمانی مبر مرا³⁴¹

5) O you! who seem satisfied with your superficial understanding of *qazā* and *qadar*,
don't assume that I am a quadruped like you are! (*qasida* no.5)

³⁴¹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mehdi Mohaqeq and Mojtabā Minovi, pp.11-13.

This is one of the significant pieces in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* regarding the question of predestination and free will. Here, Nāser-e Khosrow claims that the Divine decree, *qazā* 'should be called' *kherad* (intellect), and *qadar* (predestination) should be named *sokhan* (speech). This act of naming can be seen either metaphorically or epistemologically. From the metaphorical point of view, Nāser-e Khosrow makes a comparison between the Divine decree and intellect on the one hand, and between predestination and speech on the other, thereby emphasising his belief in free will and human power. Intellect, since it leads us to the ultimate knowledge, is *like* the universal decree of God that contains the eternal knowledge of all beings. Speech, since it is a particular manifestation of knowledge, is *like* predestination, since predestination is the specific and fixed fate of each creature. By depicting this rhetorical shift from the elements of determinism (the Divine decree and predestination) to the elements of free will (intellect and speech), Nāser-e Khosrow emphasises mankind's ability to change (himself and the world around him) and to act.

From the epistemological point of view, Nāser-e Khosrow goes beyond rhetorical comparisons and redefines *qazā* and *qadar*. He claims that the Divine decree is the intellect that has been bestowed upon us, and *qadar* is our ability to perceive and articulate the Divine knowledge. Here, we have the identity relation rather than the rhetorical one. The Divine decree *is* the intellect, while predestination *is* speech. There is a statement in the third line of the *qasida* that the notion of *qazā* as intellect and *qadar* as speech was something that the poet had learnt from 'a well-known scholar' (*ze yeki nāmvar*). Mehdi Mohaqqueq states that *yeki nāmvar* here might refer to Abu Ya'qub-e Sejestāni, the prominent Ismaili theologian and missionary whose ideas on Divine Oneness were briefly discussed in the previous chapter. Mohaqqueq quotes a passage from Sejestāni's Arabic treatise, *tuhfat-al mustajibin* (The Masterwork of the Converts),³⁴² in which Sejestāni gives an encyclopaedic account of some significant Ismaili terms, including intellect and soul. The title, style and content of the treatise suggest that it was written for newly converted Ismailis. Sejestāni explains the position of intellect and soul in the theory of *ebdā'* (*origination*) and their function in the hierarchical structure of creation. According to Sejestāni, intellect is 'the first originated' (*mobda'-e avval*) that holds the primary and universal knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the forms and qualities of all beings. Soul, on the other hand, is 'the second originated' (*mobda'-e sāni*) that brings the universal knowledge from the

³⁴² Mehdi Mohaqqueq, *sharh-e bozorg-e divān-e Nāser-e Khorosow* (Comprehensive Commentary of Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*), vol. I, p. 113.

potential to the actual.³⁴³ Soul, therefore, is nourished by the intellect, since it receives the universal knowledge and manifests it by creating the realm of the material world. Sejestāni states that the intellect is called *qazā* because it has the divine decree of God, which is the universal knowledge of all beings. The soul is *qadar* since, as Sejestāni explains, whatever unifies with the soul becomes naturally determined, with limited qualifications.³⁴⁴ We therefore have this descending journey, starting with the universal knowledge that the intellect gives to the universal Soul and ending with the manifestations of the Divine knowledge through the work of the universal soul. In this journey, the universal knowledge of existence is regarded as God's determining decree, while all the beings in the material realm are the manifestations of that decree, with each created being possessing specific qualities and existential limits.

The concepts of Intellect and Soul in Sejestāni's argument are metaphysical. They are part of the Ismaili metaphysics of creation in which the narrative follows a descending chain with God as the highest entity at the top, right down to the material world. In contrast, the intellect and speaking soul in Nāser-e Khosrow's poem are anthropological concepts. They form an ascending narrative structure, which is the journey of the soul from the material world up to the divine realm. In this context, intellect is the religious device through which humans distinguish right from wrong. Secondly, the speaking soul in Nāser-e Khosrow's *qasida* no.5 is different from the universal soul (*nafs-e kolli*) that we see in Sejestāni's work. The former explains the divine substance of human beings, which acquires knowledge and transcends after death. The latter is the metaphysical entity that works as a medium between the intelligible and the material world.³⁴⁵ Thirdly, Nāser-e Khosrow regards *sokhan* – speech – as *qadar*, and not the soul (*nafs*) as in Sejestāni's work, a significant difference that Mohaqqeq does not mention. Speech, for Nāser-e Khosrow, is mankind's distinctive capability which enables him to seek the truth and act with a conscious mind. Sejestāni's account, therefore, is basically not about free will and human power. His argument merely concerns the levels of metaphysical origination and not the condition of human beings as the privileged subject. Nonetheless, it can

³⁴³ Abu Ya'qub Sejestāni, 'tuhfat-al mustajibin (The Masterwork of the Converts)' in *khams rasā'il ismā'iliyah (Five Ismaili Treatises)*, ed. by Aref Tamer (Syria: Dar al-Ansaf, 1956), pp.148-49.

³⁴⁴ Abu Ya'qub Sejestāni, 'tuhfat-al mustajibin (The Masterwork of the Converts)' in *khams rasā'il ismā'iliyah (Five Ismaili Treatises)*, ed. by Aref Tamer, p. 149.

³⁴⁵ It is important to note that although the human Intellect and the Speaking Soul have anthropological significance, in Ismaili theology they are the traces of the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul and have a transcendental origin. Naser-e Khosrow, as I quoted earlier, regards the Intellect and Soul in human beings as two divine assets that emerge from the substance of the Universal Intellect and Universal Soul. See Leonard Lewisohn, 'Hierocsmic Intellect and Universal Soul in a Qasida by Nasir-i Khusraw, in *Iran*, 45 (2007), 193-226 (pp. 195-96).

help us to understand better the relationship between natural determinism and predestination in Ismaili theology. In Sejestāni's Neoplatonic view, like that of Nāser-e Khosrow, natural determinism is reconciled with the Divine universal decree and predestination. From this perspective, predestination and determinism are essential parts of the process of creation. They determine the natural existence of human, but at the same time, they necessitate humans' consciousness and free will.

The importance of Nāser-e Khosrow's interpretation of *qazā* and *qadar*, compared with that of Sejestāni, is that he focuses on the anthropological aspects of intellect and soul. Nāser-e Khosrow's comparison is far more radical because, in his poems, the intellect and speaking soul are the elements of human power and free will, and by designating them as *qazā* and *qadar*, free will becomes an inevitable aspect of human existence. Through applying the Ismaili method of *ta'vil*, Nāser-e Khosrow establishes a third position, whereby recognising human beings as capable and unrestrained beings gives hope, while at the same time keeping us cautious. This can be observed in the last line of *qasida* no.5, where he advises those who are naively pleased by the 'name' of *qazā* and *qadar* (*delkhosh gashtan beh nām*). Earlier, in the second line, Nāser-e Khosrow speaks of the people who stand on the opposite side: those who run away from *qazā* and *qadar* and are cautious of predestination. For Nāser-e Khosrow, being cautious of or pleased with predestination are two sides of the same coin: both are the result of being imprisoned within the apparent and conventional meaning of *qazā* and *qadar*. Those who escape from predestination fail to see that forces of nature cannot be changed nor challenged, while those who are satisfied with predestination are unable to see that what they possess or achieve can be quickly gone. In both cases, Nāser-e Khosrow specifies that the role of the individual in determining his fate is neglected.

c) Speaking Soul, Intellect and the Question of Ethical Responsibility

The idea of mankind as the privileged being is a significant factor for Nāser-e Khosrow's understanding of predestination and free will. According to this principle, a Divine essence, the 'speaking soul' (*nafs-e sokhangu*), has been bestowed upon human beings, with which he can receive the Divine knowledge and seek emancipation. The speaking soul, however, needs a device – the intellect (*kherad*) – through which to gain and perceive the right knowledge. The idea of free will, therefore, appears as an essential element in Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative of spiritual redemption and emancipation. The intellect, in this narrative, justifies the fact that men have the power to distinguish the truth and act accordingly. The intellect and the speaking soul, therefore, necessitate *qadar* (power and freewill). Without *qadar*, that is the control over

voluntary deeds, the existence of the intellect and the speaking soul would be meaningless, and this, in turn, questions the idea of mankind as a divinely privileged being:

خرد ز بهر چه دادندمان؟ که ما به خرد
گهی خدای پرست و گهی گنه کاریم

1) Why [do you think] we have been given the intellect?

Because it is with the intellect that we are sometimes pious and sometimes sinful.

«مکن بدی و تو نیکی بکن» چرا فرمود،
خدای ما را، گر ما نه حیّ و مختاریم؟

2) If we are not living beings with free will,

Then why did God declare: ‘avoid doing evil and do good’?

چرا بر آهو و نخچیر روزه نیست و نماز؟
چرا من و تو بدین کارها گران باریم؟

3) Why are the deer and other prey not supposed to fast and pray?

Why are we, you and I, burdened with these tasks?

چه داد یزدان ما را ز جملگی حیوان
مگر خرد که بدان بر ستور سالاریم؟

4) What did God bestow upon us that distinguished us from all animals,
except for the intellect with which we have become superior to all beasts?

اگر به فضل و خرد بر خران خداوندیم
همان به فضل و خرد بندگان جباریم³⁴⁶

5) It is by the virtue of the intellect and knowledge that we have become dominant over animals, and it is again due to the intellect and knowledge that we are servants of God, the determiner. (*qasida* no.33)

Intellect (*kherad*), along with soul (*nafs*) and knowledge (*dānesh*), are the most significant elements in Nāser-e Khosrow’s systematic thought. The relationship between the intellect and free will lies in two assumptions: Intellect is a gift bestowed upon humanity by God, and it is the means through which human beings distinguish right from wrong. Now, if one is to reject the idea of free will, then the act of bestowing intellect would be meaningless. This, in turn,

³⁴⁶ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 71.

questions God's act of creation as well as His omnibenevolence (*kheir-e motlaq*).³⁴⁷ The second is that activities such as ethical assessment, or knowing right from wrong, which are done by the intellect, are also dependent on the existence of free will; therefore, there is an essential mutual relationship between free will and Intellect. The ability of human beings to decide and to act upon their decision derives from the fact that they can define what is right and what is wrong, and can act according to such knowledge. The relationship between the speaking soul and free will is also an essential one. As the Divine essence of human beings, the speaking soul has the potential either to receive illumination or stay within the darkness of ignorance and material associations. Believing in absolute determinism and predestination precludes the possibility of the soul's emancipation and the practice of knowledge. It rejects the idea that the human soul needs guidance and illumination, and that mankind must aspire to obtain knowledge and moral virtues.

In the same *qasida* (no. 33), after emphasising the role of the intellect, Nāser-e Khosrow moves towards mainstream theological (*kalāmi*) debates regarding the subject of predestination and free will. The following lines echo the fundamental questions through which the two sides of the discussion, that is, the Ash'arites and the Mu'tazilites, constructed their arguments against each other:

چرا گرگ ستمگاره نیست سوی خدای
به فعل خویش گرفتار و، ما گرفتاریم؟

1) Why does the fierce wolf not suffer

God's punishment for his actions, but we do?

به خون ناحق ما را چرا نمیراند
خدای، گر سوی او خونی و ستمکاریم؟

2) If we are guilty of unlawfully spilling someone's blood,
if we are cruel murderers, why do we see no retribution from God?

و گر گناه نخواهد ز ما و ما بکنیم
نه بنده ایم خداوند را، که قهاریم

3) And if He doesn't want us to commit sins, yet we do,
then we are not servants of God, but dominant determiners.

و گر به خواست وی آید همی گناه از ما

³⁴⁷ According to this principle, no evil or sin can emanate from God, as He is the source of absolute goodness. See Asghar Dādbeh, 'Determinism and Freewill', in *Encyclopaedia of Shi'a*, Vol. 5, p. 296.

4) And if our sins are the outcomes of His will, not ours,
then we are not disobedient, but innocent, well-behaved beings.

The first line reflects Nāser-e Khosrow's principal argument, in which possessing the speaking soul and the intellect distinguishes human beings from animals. Nāser-e Khosrow usually compares humans with animals in order to emphasise the necessity of enlightenment and moral practice. For him, without free will, there would be no difference between humans and animals. Along with the issue of human as the privileged being, he introduces the subject of obligatory religious tasks to strengthen the religious side of his arguments about free will. According to this latter argument, religious tasks are not obligatory for infants (or animals) because they cannot act consciously and willingly according to their Intellect. Nāser Khosrow's reference to the question of obligatory religious tasks helps him prove the essential relationship between the intellect and free will in particular, and between free will and religion in general.

In the second line, Nāser-e Khosrow challenges the pro-*qadari* arguments, in which God's punishment proves that humans are the creators of their actions. By putting himself in a *jabri* position, he argues that if God made humans responsible for their deeds, why does someone who has unlawfully suffered see no justice, while someone who has sinned is left free and comfortable? The third and fourth lines bring up another controversial issue in the free will–determinism debate, and that is the question of God as the creator of sins. If God creates sins, as a pro-*jabri* might argue, then this would be against the principle of God's omnibenevolence (*khodā hamchon kheir-e motlaq*). It also provides an excuse for people to justify their sins by arguing that God creates human actions, and therefore they should not be blamed for their deeds. Now let us see how Nāser-e Khosrow situates his arguments within these theological debates.

d) Nāser-e Khosrow and the Middle-Way Approach (*Bayn al-Amrayn*)

As discussed earlier, both Ash'atites and Mutazilites argue for neither free will nor predestination, but a moderate position in which both elements exist. Arguments in support of free will run the risk of challenging God's infinite power and knowledge, while arguing for predestination fails to explain the problem of God's punishment and reward, or justify the act of sending prophets and holy books. Moreover, believing in predestination may imply that God

³⁴⁸ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 71.

is the creator of sins and evil. From the philosophical point of view, the idea of predestination contradicts the causality principle. It cannot explain the significance of the intellect and ethical responsibility while arguing for free will without acknowledging that its divine origins may have resulted in heresy.

It was due to these problems that the Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites, Philosophers and Shias stood for a moderate approach. They tried to explain the role of God, on the one hand, and human power of choice and ethical responsibility on the other. Each group articulated its intermediate position. The Imami Shia and philosophers supported the *amr bayn al-amrayn* theory (something between the two) as their midway position. The Mu'tazilites articulated the theory of *Tafviz* (delegation), and the Ash'arites came up with the theory of *Kasb* (acquisition). Although all these theories are midway positions, the point of focus in each is different. In *Tafviz*, the focus is more on the significance of the free will, human knowledge and ethical responsibility. The human subject is, therefore, considered to be independent of metaphysical forces. According to the Mu'tazilites, what is bestowed upon mankind by God is not the action, but the power by which humans can act. This view places the issues of choice, knowledge and intellect at the centre of the theory of *Tafviz*. The main reason behind the Mu'tazilites' emphasis on the idea of mankind as the creator of deeds is to exonerate God from the act of creating sin and evil, since God is the absolute goodness and evil cannot originate from Him.³⁴⁹ In the Ash'arite's theory of *kasb*, meanwhile, human power is recognised not in creating the deeds, but in acquiring them. Free will, therefore, works as long as it refers to the power of human beings in acquiring what has been already created by God.³⁵⁰

The theory of *Bayn al-Amrayn* was developed by relying on a famous hadith, apparently by Imam Sādeq. It goes as follows: *la jabr wa la tafwidh, bal amr bayn al-amrayn* (no predestination, nor delegation, but something between the two).³⁵¹ According to this hadith, *tafviz* and predestination are two extremes, each insufficient to answer the problem. The word *tafviz* in the text can also have a broader meaning. That is, it can be a metonymy for *ekhtiyār* (free will) in general, instead of the Mu'tazilite theory. The terminological meaning of *tafviz*

³⁴⁹ Asghar Dādbeh, 'Jabr-o Ekhtiyār (Determinism and Freewill)', in *Dā'erat-ol Ma'āref-e Bozorg-e Eslāmi (The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia)* (Tehran: The Centre for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia, 2009), p. 503.

³⁵⁰ Asghar Dādbeh, 'Jabr-o Ekhtiyār (Determinism and Freewill)', in *Dā'erat-ol Ma'āref-e Bozorg-e Eslāmi (The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia)*, p. 502.

³⁵¹ Asghar Dādbeh, 'Jabr-o Ekhtiyār (Determinism and Freewill)', in *Dā'erat-ol Ma'āref-e Tashayyo' (Encyclopaedia of Shi'a)*, Vol. 5, p. 303.

in the hadith, in fact, suggests that, for the supporters of the *Bayn al-Amrayn* theory, the Mu'tazilite approach to free will is too radical.

The theory of *Bayn al-Amrayn* seeks to avoid each of the abovementioned problems. According to Sheikh-e Saduq (923-991) and Sheikh-e Mofid (948-1022), God has given mankind the ability to do good, while Sheikh-e Tusi (995-1067) and Allāmeḥ Majlesi (1627-1699) believed that human actions are the result of a combination of human ability and God's assistance. Sheikh-e Mofid argued that the existence of voluntary activities in human beings is an undeniable fact, which rejects any form of absolute determinism beforehand. As far as the causality principle is concerned, Khājeḥ Nasir Tusi (1201-1274) proposed that a human is the *near cause* (*ellat-e nazdik*) of his actions, while God is the *ultimate cause* (*ellat-e dur*), suggesting that human power is bestowed by God. This power enables men to choose and act according to their knowledge.³⁵² In his treatise *al-qadā' wa'l qadar*³⁵³ (The Treatise on *Qazā* and *Qadar*), the prominent Iranian philosopher, Sadr al-Din Shirāzi (aka Mulla Sadra 1571-1636) argues for the *Bayn al-Amrayn* theory, stating that *Bayn al-Amrayn* does not mean that our deeds are a *combination* (*tarkib*) of determinism and free will, or that they are *empty of* (*khāli as*) both determinism and free will. It also does not imply that only a degree of both determinism and free will exists (*ekhtiyāri nāqes, jabri nāqes*). He states that *Bayn al-Amrayn* means that humans are compelled (*majbur*) in the sense that they are free (*mokhtār*), and they are free in the sense that they are compelled.³⁵⁴ In other words, we are necessarily and inevitably free and have the power to choose and act. Mulla Sadra, therefore, focuses on human subjects and their deeds rather than continuing abstract debates on the concepts of *qazā* and *qadar*.

In the following lines, Nāser-e Khosrow also speaks of 'a middle way':

به میان قدر و جبر رود اهل خرد،
راه دانا به میانه دو ره خوف و رجاست

1) The wise choose the way between *qadar* and *jabr*,

Since the wise path should be between fear and hope.

³⁵² Asghar Dādbeh, 'Jabr-o Ekhtiyār (Determinism and Freewill)', in *Dā'erat-ol Ma'āref-e Bozorg-e Eslāmi* (*The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia*), pp. 505-6.

³⁵³ Quoted in: Mehdi Mohaqeq, *sharh-e bozorg-e divān-e Nāser-e Khorsow* (*Comprehensive Commentary of Nāser-e Khosrow's Divan*), vol. I, p. 168.

³⁵⁴ 'Mokhtār ast az ān jahat ke majbur ast, majbur ast az ān jahat ke mokhtār ast'. See: Mehdi Mohaqeq, *sharh-e bozorg-e divan-e Naser-e Khorsow* (*Comprehensive Commentary of Naser-e Khosrow's Divan*), vol. I, p. 168. Also: Asghar Dādbeh, 'Jabr-o Ekhtiyār (Determinism and Freewill)', in *Dā'erat-ol Ma'āref-e Tashayyo* (*Encyclopaedia of Shi'a*), Vol. 5, p. 305.

2) Look for the right path which is between *qadar* and *jabr*

Since for the wise *qadar* and *jabr* mean pain and hardship. (*qasida* no. 10)

The emphasis on ‘the way between free will and determinism’, as Mehdi Mohaqqeq confirms, refers to the *Bayn al-Amrayn* hadith.³⁵⁶ For Nāser-e Khosrow, the midway is the wise choice because it stands between *khowf* (fear) and *rajā’* (hope) (line 1). *Khowf* and *rajā’* are religious / Quranic terms. They are usually accompanied together and work as coexisting concepts to explain the relationship between the believer and God.³⁵⁷ In the Quran, *khowf* has numerous significations, among which are God’s punishment, His wrath,³⁵⁸ His glorious position and His majesty.³⁵⁹ On many occasions, God calls upon His servants to *fear* His power and wrath.³⁶⁰ *Rajā’*, on the other hand, refers to God’s grace and His mercy.³⁶¹ In the Quran, those who do not have hope will not receive the grace of God.³⁶² As the two concepts accompany each other, however, they explain the ideal psychological/spiritual state of the believer, where the believer seeks for God’s mercy (*rahmat-e elāhi*), but, *at the same time*, he fears God’s wrath (*qhar-e elāhi*).³⁶³ Fear and hope are necessary components of any religious belief. Without fear, comes indolence, and without hope comes despair. That is why some scholars argued for the state

³⁵⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqeq, p. 20.

³⁵⁶ Mehdi Mohaqqeq, *sharh-e bozorg-e divān-e Nāser-e Khorsow (Comprehensive Commentary of Nāser-e Khosrow’s Divan)*, vol. I, p. 168.

³⁵⁷ ‘Khowf-o Rajā (Fear and Hope)’ in *Dāneshnāmeḥ-ye Jahān-e Eslām (Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam)* < <https://rch.ac.ir/article/Details/8899> > [accessed 8 December 2019]

³⁵⁸ Al-An’am, 15: ‘Say, “Indeed I fear, if I should disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous Day.”’

³⁵⁹ Ibrahim, 14: ‘And We will surely cause you to dwell in the land after them. That is for he who fears My position and fears My threat.’

³⁶⁰ Az-Zumar, 16: ‘They will have canopies of fire above them and below them, canopies. By that Allah threatens His servants. O My servants, then fear Me.’

³⁶¹ Az-Zumar, 9: ‘Is one who is devoutly obedient during periods of the night, prostrating and standing [in prayer], fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the mercy of his Lord, [like one who does not]? Say, “Are those who know equal to those who do not know?” Only they will remember [who are] people of understanding.’

³⁶² Az-Zumar, 53: ‘Say, “O My servants who have transgressed against themselves [by sinning], do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful.”’

³⁶³ Al-Isra 57: ‘Those whom they invoke seek means of access to their Lord, [striving as to] which of them would be nearest, and they hope for His mercy and fear His punishment. Indeed, the punishment of your Lord is ever feared.’ Also:

Al-Anbya, 90: ‘So We responded to him, and We gave to him John, and amended for him his wife. Indeed, they used to hasten to good deeds and supplicate Us in hope and fear, and they were to Us humbly submissive.’

As-Sajda, 14-15: ‘Only those believe in Our verses who, when they are reminded by them, fall down in prostration and exalt [Allah] with praise of their Lord, and they are not arrogant. They arise from [their] beds; they supplicate their Lord in fear and aspiration, and from what We have provided them, they spend.’

between fear and hope, or as Nāser-e Khosrow put it, ‘the path between fear and hope’.³⁶⁴ From this perspective, fear and hope complete each other; one covers the other’s deficiency. This view corresponds with Nāser-e Khosrow’s systematic thought. According to Nāser-e Khosrow, as the believer obtains knowledge about the weaknesses of his material life, his fear increases, but, at the same time, he gains hope for spiritual emancipation. For him, fear cautions the mind about worldly desires, while hope provides aspiration and hunger for seeking knowledge and spiritual emancipation.

Conclusion

Nāser-e Khosrow follows the Ismaili approach towards free will and predestination. In this approach, human has a free will and (s)he is responsible for his/her deeds. Predestination (*qazā-o qadar*) is also identified as the universal intellect and universal soul, two major components in the Ismaili cosmology and theory of creation. The Ismaili approach is close to the philosophical discourse and Avicenna’s peripatetic view, in which predestination turns into a form of natural determinism (*jabr-e tabi’i*). Nāser-e Khosrow’s emphasis on the role of the firmament and the soul/body dichotomy in his *Divan* correspond with natural determinism in the philosophical discourse. However, the representation of free will in his *Divan* finds a broader meaning with different aspects. Human free will in Nāser-e Khosrow’s *Divan* represents itself through resisting fatalism and astrological thoughts, the necessity for ethical responsibility and ethical practice, political activism, criticising the corrupt rulers, and the necessity of speech and enlightening the people’s mind.

³⁶⁴ The prominent Iranian theologian, Fakhr-e Rāzi (1150-1210) is among the scholars who believes in a middle state between fear and hope. See: ‘Khowf-o Rajā (Fear and Hope)’ in *Dāneshnaāmeḥ-ye Jahān-e Eslām* (Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam) < <https://rch.ac.ir/article/Details/8899> > [accessed 8 December 2019]

Chapter Five:

Temporality and Endurance

Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyse those concepts that form Nāser-Khosrow's narrative of resistance against the condition of temporality in his *Divan*. I will start by reviewing the elements of the condition of temporality, which I have discussed in the previous chapters. Then I will analyse the major components which shape the discourse of endurance as opposed to the discourse of temporality. I will discuss the Speaking Soul and Intellect as two fundamental notions based on which Nāser-e Khosrow constructs his narrative of resistance within the discourse of endurance. Then, I will study different aspects of speech, knowledge and esoteric interpretation as elements of resistance in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. Then, I will argue that what Nāser-e Khosrow depicts as redemption contradicts with his real situation as a poet and thinker in exile. In the final section, I will apply the theoretical terms that I introduced in the introduction chapter to critically assess the condition of temporality and the condition of endurance.

The Condition of Temporality

In the previous chapters, I already discussed about the position of firmament and time in Nāser-e Khosrow's theory of creation (or origination to be more precise) and in his theory of free will and predestination. Three significant factors in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* define the condition of temporality: firmament, time and world. In philosophical discourse, these concepts represent natural determinism. The universal soul creates *falak* or firmament. The firmament creates time with its cyclical movement, and time brings generation and corruption (*kown-o fesād*) to the material world. This philosophical doctrine entered the literary tradition and became the subject of endless poetic images.

In Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, the firmament, time and the transient world usually come together, in that they all emphasise the temporality of our existence in this world. The metaphors for the firmament and time in the *Divan* include: the unfaithful companion, the vengeful mother, the fraudster, the haunting falcon, the dragon with a wide-open mouth, and the restless horse. These imageries emphasise on the supremacy of the firmament, time and the material world as the components of the macrocosm or the universe. They rule over human beings, and humans are always dominated by the forces of natural determinism, that is, the movements of firmaments and the passing of time. Their existence is also limited to physical and material, which means that their soul is imprisoned, and it has to bear the pain of living within the material body as long as the body lives in this world. But this is not the whole story

in the *Divan*. These forces also dictate a constant awareness and a sense of alarm about the temporary and transient nature of the worldly life.

The literary imageries that I mentioned some of them earlier *mystify* Nāser-e Khosrow's philosophical definition of natural determinism and turn it into a cultural discourse in which the significance of socio-political reality and worldly engagements are degraded in favour of an otherworldly and supernatural emancipation. According to Nāser-e Khosrow, the world is the place in which time passes, and generation and corruption take place. In Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, the world is depicted as a mirage:

به چه ماند جهان مگر به سراب
سپس او تو چون دوی به شتاب؟³⁶⁵

1) This world is nothing but a mirage,
Why are running after it in full speed?

A hungry and vicious snake:

روی نیارم سوی جهان که بیارم
کاین به سوی من بتر ز گرسنه مارست

2) I won't turn to this world for comfort,
for this world to me is worse than a hungry snake!

هرکه بدانست خوی او ز حکیمان
همره این مار صعب رفت نیارست³⁶⁶

3) Of the wise of the past whoever understood its nature,
could not [did not find it appropriate to] continue accompanying this vicious snake.

And a passageway:

رهگذر است این نه سرای قرار
دل منه اینجا و مرنجان روان³⁶⁷

4) A passageway this [world] is, and not a resting place

³⁶⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 27.

³⁶⁶ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 48.

³⁶⁷ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p.14.

Do not give your heart to it, do not inflict pain on your soul.

These three imageries represent three features of the condition of temporality. Comparing the world to a mirage is based on the assumption that we are deceived by the way this world appears to us. The joys and pleasures of this world are fake, mortal and worthless, yet they appear to us as real and perpetual entities. The one who possesses the enlightening knowledge (*hekmat*) can see the truth behind this fake and transient pleasures and enjoyments.

The image of the world as the hungry snake refers to the mortal nature of our physical existence in this world, and that we are dominated by the natural forces which cause us pain and loss. In this picture, we are unaware of the fact that what we hold as dear and much loved, can be taken from us by the forces of nature.

In the third image (the world as a passageway), our worldly life is considered as transient and temporary, and therefore secondary and without any real substance. On the other hand, we are pictured as travellers who do not belong to this world and soon, we reach our place of origin (the divine realm) once we leave this material body.

Therefore, we are dealing with three aspects of human's natural existence: 1) the state of being deceived and having a distorted perception about worldly manifestation, 2) the state of loss and suffering, 3) and the state of being a traveller and living in a temporary situation.

In the condition of temporality, the human subject should always be cautious and aware of his temporary situation. Happiness or prosperity do not last; therefore, one must not rely on it (*del maneh*, line 4). Similarly, sadness and pain are also temporary; therefore, one must not hurt his/her soul for it (*maranjān ravān*, line 4). To *know* the temporary nature of life is essential, and those who acknowledge this fact are *hakims* (line 3). The subject must, therefore, stay conscious in every moment of his life (line 1). Without such a consciousness, one's understanding of his/her surroundings would be delusional, and one would become subject to the world's duplicity and vengeance.

The imageries of firmament and time can also be divided into three discourse: the discourse of nature, the discourse of travelling and lodging, and the discourse of witchery and bewitchment. In the discourse of nature, the forces of natural determinism are compared to beasts, dragons and snakes which are constantly watching us. In the discourse of nature, we are like prays, waiting to be haunted by these beasts. In the discourse of travelling and lodging, the world is compared to a hotel or a lodging house; we are travellers in this world, and this life is just a

passing stage. In the discourse of witchery, we are bewitched by a wicked sorceress, and it made us blind to see the true nature of our material existence.

With his compelling poetic vision, Nāser-e Khosrow makes a distinction between the world as it might appear to us and the world as it is in reality. Through this distinction, he warns his fellow human beings that entities that are mortal and transient might look immortal and permanent. According to Nāser-e Khosrow, in each situation, we must remember the temporary nature of our life in order to see what lies behind perceptions and feelings, and behind the vicissitudes of life. It is by having such self-awareness that one can stay prepared as to what might come next:

گر یست این جهان به مثل، زیرا
بس ناخوش است و، خوش بخارد گر

1) This world is like a scabby person because
he suffers constantly and is okay if he scratches himself all the time.

با طبع ساز باشد، پنداری
شیر یست تازه، پخته و پر شکر

2) It seems as if it is in harmony with human temperament,
like fresh milk, boiled and sweetened.

لیکن چو کرد قصد جفا، پیشش
خاقان خطر ندارد و نه قیصر

3) But when it intends to do harm,
neither a Khaqan, nor a Caesar can confront it.

گاهی عروس وارت پیش آید
با گوشوار و یاره و با افسر

4) Sometimes it comes to you like a beautiful bride,
adorned with earrings, bracelets and a crown,

دیوانهوار راست کند ناگه
خنجر به سوی سینه ات و زی خنجر³⁶⁸

5) But suddenly, like a lunatic, it pulls a dagger on you,
aiming at your heart and your throat.

By regarding the material life as something transient, earthly and without any sublime substance, Nāser-e Khosrow relates the real inconsistencies and contradictions of the world

³⁶⁸ Naser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 46.

around him to the work of firmament and time. By referring the cause of real contradictions to natural determinism, the tyranny and corruption of the Turkic rulers becomes an inevitable part of the condition of temporality. Particularly in his final years in exile, as we shall see by the end of this chapter, relating the real inconsistencies in the world to firmament and time became the dominant discourse in his poems, serving thereby to transform politics from the realm of social practice to a contemptible and loathsome phenomenon that degrades the human soul. Such a depiction of politics, in my view, was an ideological justification for the failure of the Ismaili political movement. The triumph of the Turks and the condition of exile took Nāser-e Khosrow's political radicalism and replaced it with metaphysical and eschatological thoughts. The more he referred to the firmament, time and the transient world, the more metaphysical and meta-historical his emancipative thoughts became:

جهانا من از تو هراسان از آنم
که بس بدنشانی و بدهمنشینی

1) O world! I am afraid of you because
you are such a bad companion and so notorious.

یکی بی‌خرد را به گه برنشانی
یکی بی‌گنه را به سر برنشینی

2) You put an ignorant person on the throne,
while you sit on and trample the head of an innocent person

هم آن را که خود خوانده باشی برانی
هم آن را کنی خوار کش برگزینی

3) You expel the one whom you once called for,
you humiliate the one whom you once elected.

اگر مردمی بوده‌ای گفتمی مر
ترا من که دیوانه‌ای راستینی³⁶⁹

4) If you were a human being, I would say about you
that you are a true lunatic!

بر آزادگان کبر داری ولیکن
«ینال» و «تگین» را ینال و تگینی

5) With honest and honourable people, you are arrogant

³⁶⁹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 16.

But with Yanal and Tagin you are Yanal and Tagin [with the Turkic rulers you are kind and supportive (as if you one of them)].³⁷⁰

به خاصه تو ای نحس خاک خراسان
پر از مار و کژدم یکی پارگینی

6) O, especially you, ominous land of Khorāsān!
full of snakes and scorpions, like a filthy swamp!

برآشفته‌اند از تو ترکان، نگویی
میان سگان در، یکی ارزینیی

7) The Turks are in rage over you! Don't you see
Fallen among the dogs, you're a piece of millet bread! [you have lost your worth, but dogs are fighting over you!]

امیرائت اصل فسادند و غارت
فقیهانئت اهل می و ساتگینی

8) Your rulers are the source of corruption and plunder,
your clergy are the lovers of wine and tun!

مکان نیستی تو نه دنیا نه دین را
کمین‌گاه ابلیس شوم لعینی³⁷¹

9) You're not a home for worldly gains, nor hopes of religion,
indeed, you are just the ambush of the cursed devil.

Nāser-e Khosrow relates injustice to the tyranny of the world, for the world takes fortune and power from honourable people and gives them to ignorant and corrupt rulers. Juxtaposing the decadent condition of Khorāsān with the concept of the world in the above *qasida* implies that Khorāsān's socio-political decline is the act of firmament and time. Nāser-e Khosrow recognises the forces of determinism as serving to support the Turks' reign. This implies that the reason why there was no just and legitimate ruler in Khorāsān, was because firmament and time are against the succession of such a ruler.

³⁷⁰ Yanal was Nezam al-Molk's most beloved concubine, but the term has also been used to mean beautiful and gentle. Tagin was the name of a leading Turkic commander. The latter name has also been used as a title for a regional ruler of Turkic origin.

³⁷¹ Naser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 16.

The Condition of Endurance

a) Speaking Soul

As discussed in the previous chapter, for Nāser-e Khosrow, the intellect and the speaking soul are two fundamental factors defining the human as the privileged being. They are also two key concepts in his response to the condition of temporality which is governed by the firmaments and time. They provide the necessary philosophical and theological platform upon which he formulates a solution for the material and temporary condition of existence. He aims to articulate an ideal moral framework in which human subjects can resist forces of nature and reduce their dependency on material affairs and desires.

This resistance derives from the fact that the human soul, though attached to the body, receives forms of consciousness and knowledge from the intellect. On the one hand, it governs the needs of the organic body, such as nourishment, growth and reproduction. On the other hand, it receives knowledge from the intellect that allows the body to reach its moral and intellectual perfection.³⁷² As Nāser-e Khosrow has explained in his *Zād al-Mosāferin* (The Pilgrim's Provision), the movement and life in the body is the reason for the existence of the Soul.³⁷³ However, the speaking soul rationalises the needs of the body with the help of the intellect. The intellect provides consciousness that enables the soul to govern the needs of the body in the most appropriate way. Nāser-e Khosrow concludes that if the soul brings the body to completion (*tamām konandeh*), then the intellect does the same for soul.³⁷⁴ The human soul therefore has the potential for elevation and enlightenment.

That is why, for Nāser-e Khosrow, the way of life and the level of consciousness are crucial factors in resisting worldly affairs. Based on his account in *Zād al-Mosāferin*, the Soul acts according to the knowledge (*hekmat*) it receives from the Intellect; therefore, the nature and level of knowledge is a determining factor. The level of consciousness determines the rational quality of the Soul. A poor level of rationality degrades the Soul, while a high level elevates it.³⁷⁵ It is due to such a view that Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative of resistance is the narrative of transcendence and elevation. He believes that material attachments minimise the function of

³⁷² 'Soul in Islamic Philosophy' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* <<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/soul-in-islamic-philosophy/v-1>> [accessed 11 December 2019]

³⁷³ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Zād al-Mosāferin (The Pilgrim's Provision)*, ed. by Mohammad Bazl al-Rahmān (Berlin: Kāviyāni, n.d.), p. 193.

³⁷⁴ '*Tamām konandeh-ye nafs, 'aql ast*'. See: Naser-e Khosrow, *Zād al-Mosāferin (Provision for Travellers)*, ed. by Mohammad Bazl al-Rahmān, p. 193.

³⁷⁵ '*Fe'l, beh hekmat, tamām tar as fe'l-e bi hekmat ast*'. See: Naser-e Khosrow, *Zād al-Mosāferin (Provision for Travellers)*, ed. by Mohammad Bazl al-Rahmān, p. 193.

the speaking soul, while the emancipative knowledge maximises its rational capacity. The role of the intellect, therefore, is to elevate the soul from its carnal stage to its rational or *speaking* level. Below, Nāser-e Khosrow formulates the position of the speaking soul and intellect with the literary metaphors of ‘mother’ and ‘children’:³⁷⁶

ای قبه‌ی گردنده‌ی بی روزن خضرا
با قامت فرتوتی و با قوت برنا

1) You, the circling windowless jasper dome,
your stature is like an old person [with a hump], but in power you are young!

فرزند تو ایم ای فلک، ای مادر بدمهر
ای مادر ما، چون که همی کین کشی از ما؟

2) We are your children, O firmament, you unkind mother!
O, our mother! Why are you so vengeful with us?

فرزند تو این تیره‌تن خامش خاکی‌ست
پاکیزه خرد نیست، نه این جوهر گویا

3) Your child is this dark body of silent clay,
not the righteous intellect, nor this speaking soul.

تن خانه‌ی این گوهر والای شریفست
تو مادر این خانه‌ی این گوهر والا

4) The body is the house of this noble soul,
and you, the mother of this house.

چون کار خود امروز در این خانه بسازم
مفرد بروم، خانه سپارم به تو فردا³⁷⁷

5) The day I complete/finish my work in this house,
I shall be off alone, and this house will be yours.

In these few lines, Nāser-e Khosrow forms his emancipative narrative by situating the position of the human in this world. Firmament, speaking soul, intellect and body are the major elements of this narrative. Firmament, as discussed in the previous section, represents the natural determinism of human life, the pre-given condition which is beyond the control of human beings. The body is part of this determinism and belongs to it. It attaches us to the worldly life. The speaking soul and intellect, however, do not define this determinism. They are not bound

³⁷⁶ The lines enclosed in quotation marks are translated by Peter Lamborn Wilson. See: Naser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam Reza A’vani, p. 34.

³⁷⁷ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 4.

by the limits and conditions of material life. They are noble and transcendent, and they shall return to their divine origin. In this narrative, one part is negative, limited and determined, and the other is positive and emancipative. The negative part concerns the worldly life and its associations, and the emancipative part aims for redemption and elevation.

The importance of the speaking soul in Naser-e Khosrow's *Divan* is that it refers to the act of speaking and the ability of speech. *Sokhan goftan*, or speaking, is the quality that distinguishes human beings from animals. This ability has a metaphysical character, however. Being able to speak means we can receive and understand meaning. Words and language help us to utter the meaning, but words by themselves do not have an essential value. It is consciousness that gives meaning to words and makes them sensible. The necessity of meaning as a sublime entity explains the association between the speaking soul and the intellect. Intellect provides the meaning, and the speaking soul receives the meaning and puts it into words. The following lines finely illustrate this association between intellect (*kherad*), soul (*jān*) and speech:

سوار سخن را ضمیر است میدان
سوارش چه چیز است؟ جان سخن دان

1) The rider of the speech has the mind as its field.

And who is the rider? The speaking soul.

خرد را عنان ساز و اندیشه را زین
براسب زبان اندر این پهن میدان

2) Take Intellect as the bridle, and thought as the saddle,
then speak like a horse that rides in the field.

به میدان خویش اندر اسب سخن را
اگر خوب و چابک سواری بگردان³⁷⁸

3) Ride the horse of speech in your field,
if you are a well-trained and agile rider.

As we shall see in this chapter, in many cases, Nāser-e Khosrow uses the discourse of battle and warfare to describe the significance of intellect, speech and knowledge. Here, *savār* (horseman) is the metaphor for the speaking soul, and riding the horse is imagery for the act of speaking. The speaking soul rides (speaks) in the field of his conscience (*zamir*). It has *kherad* (intellect) as its *'enān* (bridle) and *andisheh* (thought) as *zin* (saddle). The role of *zamir* is unclear here, since it can also be taken as soul. Given the fact that Naser-e Khosrow clearly

³⁷⁸ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 83.

mentions *jān-e sokhandān* (the speaking soul) as the rider of the horse of speech, however, then *zamir* here as the field can have a broader meaning. Given the words such as *meydān-e khish* (your field) and *pahn meydān* (vast field), I believe *zamir* stands for one's individual mind. That is, the open realm of thought (*pahn meydān*), where ideas and perceptions form.

Using the literary imagery of horse riding for the speaking soul, intellect, knowledge and speech, testifies that, for Nāser-e Khosrow, these concepts are the elements of resistance and human agency. To speak, is to ride with confidence and power. To have an active mind is to stand against the forces of darkness, whether the forces of nature and determinism (firmament and time), or the unjust and illegitimate rule of the Turks.

b) Intellect

The mutual relationship between the intellect and the speaking soul helps Nāser-e Khosrow to articulate the ideas of *dānesh* or 'elm (Knowledge) and *sokhan* (speech). Knowledge and speech come from a religious and moral background. Their existence and necessity are justified by being connected to the speaking soul and intellect as two divine substances. This divine and religious background brings two important outcomes. One occurs in the narrative structure, which, as I mentioned earlier, is the narrative of redemption and transcendence. Based on this narrative, by acquiring the true knowledge and ethical practice, the human subject gradually learns that worldly engagements are unreliable. The second outcome happens in the nature of intellect and the content of knowledge. Intellect, in this context, is a God-given gift that has a pre-determined aim. Knowledge, as the result, is a specific discourse whose legitimacy and rightfulness have been taken for granted.

Shāhrokh Meskub argues that³⁷⁹ in Nāser-e Khosrow's work, the meaning of intellect originates in its Quranic usage, where 'aql is a device by which one can distinguish truth from untruth (*haq as bātel*). The Quranic intellect serves to show people the right path (*serāt-e mostaqim*) and the way towards faith and salvation. There is a relationship between the intellect and knowledge, but this knowledge is the religion itself (*elm-e din*), therefore the intellect is about either *knowing* or *not knowing*. Those who know, are believers (*mo'menān*), and those who do not, are infidels (*kāfarān*). Meskub emphasises that the relationship between the intellect and the subject of the intellect, which is knowledge, is considered to be obvious and

³⁷⁹ Shāhrokh Meskub, 'Mansha'-o Ma'nāy-e 'aql dar andisheh-ye Nāser-e Khosrow (The Origin and Meaning of Intellect in the thought of Nāser-e Khosrow)', in *Shekārīm Hameh Yek Sar Pish-e Marg; Jostārḥā, Goftārḥā, Neveshtārḥā* ('We are all Death's Pray': A Collection of Queries, Lectures and Essays), by Shāhrokh Meskub (Tehran: Ney, 2012), pp. 11-78.

indisputable in the Quran. Intellect testifies to the knowledge and vice versa. The subjects of intellect are God's signs (*āyāt-e khodā*), which are self-evident. The role of the intellect is only to confirm this certainty.³⁸⁰

The meaning of the intellect in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* resembles its Quranic sense in many ways. For Nāser-e Khosrow, the relationship between the intellect and knowledge is indisputable. There is one true, ultimate knowledge, and the role of the intellect is to guide the seeker towards such wisdom. Knowledge stands prior to intellect; therefore, as it is in the Quran, intellect serves just to confirm and represent such knowledge. Intellect, in this religious sense, does not rely on its own independent foundations, in fact, it does not have any independent foundations at all; rather, it justifies its existence by relating itself to the pre-existing divine knowledge. Knowledge, therefore, stands beyond the realm of intellect and determines the intellect's limits and aims:

راست آنست ره دین که پسند خرد است
که خرد اهل زمین را ز خداوند عطاست

1) The right path of religion is the one that Intellect confirms,
since Intellect is the gift of God for the people of earth.

خرد اندر ره دنیا سره یارست و سلاح
خرد اندر ره دین نیک دلیل است و عصاست³⁸¹

2) For worldly life, Intellect is your loyal friend, your weapon,
for religious life, Intellect is your guide, your walking stick.

In the above lines, Nāser-e Khosrow points at two features of the intellect. One is that it is the means for achieving the 'right' religious knowledge. At first glance, it appears that religious knowledge has a rational nature, and it does not go beyond the realm of intellect. However, in the second hemistich of line 1, intellect itself is a divine gift. This means that both intellect and its subject (both for religious knowledge and worldly matters) are divinely determined, and therefore they are dependent on each other. The second point is that intellect is an inclusive gift that is not only for otherworldly needs, but for daily worldly life. This comprehensiveness might suggest that they are aspects of intellect which are secular and limited to material experience. But according to Nāser-e Khosrow, the worldly side of intellect is also religious,

³⁸⁰ Shāhrokh Meskub, 'Mansha'-o Ma'nāy-e 'aql dar andisheh-ye Nāser-e Khosrow (The Origin and Meaning of Intellect in the thought of Nāser-e Khosrow)', pp.17-18.

³⁸¹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 21.

since it is represented as a means of resistance (*selāh*), as well as a companion that assists us with the hardships of life (*yār*).

Although Nāser-e Khosrow's intellect is determined by the religious discourse, it has some unique aspects that go beyond a mere religious cause. One is the realist aspect, which values objective knowledge, or 'exoteric knowledge' as an Ismaili intellectual might put it. He recognises the natural world and human achievements as essential subjects of knowledge and contemplation. This aspect of intellect manifests itself when Nāser-e Khosrow brings in subjects of natural science and philosophy. On these occasions, he usually uses his favourite rhetorical device, that is *estefhām-e enkāri* (rhetorical question). In the context of intellectual resistance, Nāser-e Khosrow refers to the issues of natural philosophy, cosmology and creation in the form of questions. He poses questions about the nature of human beings, material life, plants and animals, planets and stars, usually starting with phrases such as: '*ke dānest ke...?*' (who knows?), '*ke kard...?*' (who did?), '*ke bud...?*' (who it was?). Nāser-e Khosrow brings in random subjects from natural science, human history, theology and philosophy in the form of rhetorical question in order to provoke the investigative spirit of his readers and to encourage them in seeking knowledge. More importantly, he shows the significance of rational and scientific knowledge.³⁸²

In most cases, however, as soon as he makes references to natural sciences, he ends up advising his readers that answering these problems, though vital, is not enough. There is an esoteric meaning behind this rational and scientific knowledge. If we need our physical eyes and ears accompanying our rational intellect for the exoteric knowledge, for esoteric intellect we need spiritual eyes and ears, a different set of devices. The driving force that leads Nāser-e Khosrow to propose the inefficiency of objective knowledge is ethical responsibility and the necessity of a redemptive self-consciousness, which, according to him, exoteric knowledge is unable to offer:

همی خویشتن را نبینیم نفعی
نه در سیم و زرّ و نه در دُرّ و مرجان

1) I do not see any advantage for myself
in having silver, gold, pearl, or coral stones.

³⁸² For instance, see Qasideh number 39, in: Naser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtaba Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqeq, pp. 480-81. From line 12, Nāser-e Khosrow speaks about planets, natural life on earth, civilisation and human achievements in the form of rhetorical questions. Naser-e Khosrow's realist approach, and the attention he gives to empirical knowledge can be seen in his most famous work, *safarnāmeḥ* (Book of Travels). See: Nāser-e Khosrow, *Book of Travels*, transl. by Wheeler M. Thackston (California: Mazda Publishers: 2001).

در اینها به چشم دلت ژرف بنگر
که این را به چشم سرت دید نتوان

2) Look at these deeply with the eyes of your heart
as these cannot be seen with the eyes of your head.

به درمان چشم سر اندر بماندی
بکن چشم دل را یکی نیز درمان

3) You remain concerned with curing your physical eyes.
Do also cure the eyes of your heart.

ز چشم سرت گر نهانست چیزی
نماند ز چشم دل آن چیز پنهان

4) If something is hidden from your physical eyes,
It will not remain hidden from the eyes of your heart.

نهان نیست چیزی ز چشم سر و دل
مگر کردگار جهان فرد و سبحان

5) Nothing is hidden from the eyes of head and heart, [Everything can be seen with the eyes of head and heart,]
Except for God, the unique and the extolled one.

خرد هدیه‌ی اوست ما را که در ما
به فرمان او شد خرد جفت با جان³⁸³

6) The Intellect is His Gift to us,
with his decree, the Intellect became the companion (united with) of our Soul

Although Nāser-e Khosrow makes a distinction between exoteric and esoteric forms of knowledge, this does not mean that objective, empirical knowledge is separate to esotericism and has its independent foundations. For Nāser-e Khosrow, objective knowledge is the starting point of reaching subjective knowledge. Empirical knowledge by itself is incomplete and limited. It is not comprehensive and cannot answer all human problems. One of those problems, for Nāser-e Khosrow is the morality and the purity of the Soul. For him, the exoteric forms of knowledge, since they deal merely with the sensible world, are unable to provide for the needs of one's soul. If limited to exoteric knowledge, one might give ultimate credit to the material world and assume the sensible and objective things to be eternal substances. This can have destructive moral outcomes, as line 1 of the above quotation implies. It seems that, for him, both philosophy and religion belong to the esoteric world. Considering Nāser-e Khosrow's

³⁸³ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, pp. 483-84.

Ismaili position, however, each religious or philosophical discourse might have a degree of truth with regards to esoteric wisdom, but there is only one discourse that represents the true esoteric knowledge. I will return to this point under the topic of Speech later in this chapter.

The other non-religious aspect of the Intellect in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* is the practical and moral Intellect. This Intellect focuses on the moralities and virtues that are in favour of social happiness and political stability, rather than otherworldly liberation. This intellect relies more on the heritage of Persian didactic poetry, in which moral virtues for daily life are represented without being discursively appropriated. There are indeed some moral statements in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan* that are discursively neutral and do not have any necessary connection with the Ismaili cause. These virtues are usually positioned in the middle of his *qasidas*, juxtaposed with discursive statements. The following lines come after Nāser-e Khosrow's account of the intellect, speaking soul and worldly pleasures:

آزار مگیر از کس و بر خیره میازار
کس را، مگر از روی مکافات مساوا

1) Don't allow anyone to harass (inflict suffering on) you, and don't harass/torture anyone with no reason.

Except in cases of equal and just punishment/retaliation

پرکینه مباش بر همگان دایم چون خار
نه نیز به یکباره زبون باش چو خرما

2) Don't be vindictive and full of hatred against people like brambles, but don't bend in humiliation like a date palm.

با هرکس منشین و مبر از همگان نیز
بر راه خرد رو، نه مگس باش و نه عنقا

3) 'Don't mingle with everyone you see, but don't also cut yourself from everyone.

Walk in the path of wisdom, be neither the fly nor the phoenix:

چون یار موافق نبود تنها بهتر
تنها به صدبار چو با نادان همتا³⁸⁴

4) If no good companion is around, it is better to be alone

It is a hundred times better to be alone than to associate with idiots³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqeq, p. 4.

³⁸⁵ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Forty Poems from the Divan*, transl. by Peter Lamborn Wilson and Gholam Reza A'vani, p. 35.

In this moral and practical sense, the intellect is usually identified with ‘the golden mean’, ‘the balanced path’ or the ‘middle way’ discourse. It saves human beings from the hazards of the extremes by offering the middle position of rationality in which one holds one’s dignity, and at the same time does not inflict suffering on others. There will be no isolation, and no drowning in material pleasures. It is in this context that Nāser-e Khosrow relates the concept of ‘*adl*’ (justice) to the intellect. Justice is a hierarchical order which guarantees stability, peace and balance, and the intellect is the device that can give such stability:

عدل بنیاد جهان است، بیندیش که عدل
جز به حکم خرد از جور به حکم که جدا³⁸⁶

Justice is the foundation of the world.

Think! By what faculty can justice be distinguished from tyranny, except for the Intellect?

Juxtaposing the moral values specified in the literary tradition with those discussed in the Ismaili statements helps Nāser-e Khosrow to propagate the Ismaili doctrine with a greater persuasive power. He reconciles Ismailism with the Persian literary tradition and presents the Ismaili doctrine as part of that tradition. Such a juxtaposition enables him to justify Ismaili ideas with an inclusive voice that can influence a wider range of readers.

Speech and Knowledge: From Literature to Discourse

In chapter 1 and 4, I briefly discussed that through criticising the court poets and court poetry, Nāser-e Khosrow argues for an alternative path, which he specifies as *sokhan* (speech). Speech in this context emerged from the necessity of action and ethical practice. The court poetry, in Nāser-e Khosrow’s view, was an institution engaged in spreading lies, duplicity and propaganda for an unjust and illegitimate political system. The need for intellectual enlightenment and ethical purification made Nāser-e Khosrow argue for *sokhan* (speech) as an alternative to *she’r* (poetry).

As in the case of the concepts of time and firmament, the term *sokhan* had already been established in the literary tradition and Nāser-e Khosrow was not the first person who used it in his poetry. Indeed, it seems that this term was quite common among writers and poets in Khorāsān. Ferdowsi, who died almost 60 years before Nāser-e Khosrow, used this term on so

³⁸⁶ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 21.

many occasions. Here, he mentions *sokhan* on the occasion of finishing his grand masterpiece, the *Shāhnāmeḥ* (Book of Kings):

چو این نامور نامه آمد بین
ز من روی کشور شود پرسخن

With this famed book of mine coming to completion,
This country will be full of ‘speech’ originating in my work and about me [and my work].

از آن پس نمیرم که من زنده‌ام
که تخم سخن من پراگنده‌ام

Then, I will be immortal, as I will remain alive
Due to spreading the seeds of speech.

هر آنکس که دارد هوش و رای و دین
پس از مرگ بر من کنند آفرین³⁸⁷

Whoever is gifted with awareness, good judgement and goodness of religion,
Will praise me after I die.

In the above lines, Ferdowsi’s uses of *sokhan* has three aspects. The first is the act of composing poetry and literary production as a grand human achievement. In this context, being able to write and produce a literary piece that contains and promotes wisdom is regarded as a virtue that gives privilege to the author. The second, which is particularly relevant in Ferdowsi’s case, is the importance of using and celebrating Persian language and Iranian culture. From this perspective, speaking and writing in one’s indigenous language, particularly if it involves narrating nationally significant stories, is regarded as an act of resistance, as a mission for promoting the language and reminding people of their past and of the need to fight against the hegemony of the conquerors. The third aspect is the role of speech in expanding the good reputation of the author and making him immortal. By being the origin of a powerful speech, one would gain a posthumous life. Life and death would no longer be physical issues and those who speak or produce such a discourse gain eternal life as their impact on their audience will be eternal and people will celebrate them for ages to come.

On many occasions, Ferdowsi uses *sokhan* in the context of storytelling. To speak is to narrate a story that contains wisdom, and those who are gifted with *kherad* (intellect) can decode that wisdom. One can see the same relationship between intellect and speech as is in Nāser-e

³⁸⁷ Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), ed. by Jalāl Khāleqi Motlaq, 8 vols (Tehran: Markaz-e Dā’erat-ol Ma’āref-e Eslami, 2007), VIII, p. 288.

Khosrow's *Divan*. In the opening section of the story of *Siyāvash*, the person who narrates the story is called *sokhangu* (the one who speaks). Ferdowsi states that the value of *sokhan* is in its power to raise one's spirit, and this happens only if *sokhan* becomes coupled with *kherad*:

کنون ای سخن گوی بیدار مغز
یکی داستانی بیار ای نغز

Now you, the wise and alert speaker,
Recount [with all your figures of speech] a subtle, pleasant story.

سخن چون برابر شود با خرد
روان سراینده رامش برد

When speech becomes tied with the intellect,
It elevates and calms the speaker's spirit.

کسی را که اندیشه ناخوش بود
بدان ناخوشی رای او گش بود

The one who has unsound thoughts,
Will have a judgement affected by that imbalance of humour.

تو چندان که گویی سخنگوی باش
خردمند باش و جهانجوی باش³⁸⁸

As long as you speak, put forward proper speech,
Be wise. Be the seeker of good in life!

In another example from the Khorāsāni style, Farrokhi Sistāni uses speech as a poetic act and with regards to the question of old and new:

فسانه گشت و کهن شد حدیث اسکندر
سخن نو آر که نو را حلاوتیست دگر³⁸⁹

The story of Alexander has become obsolete and sounds too fancy,
Bring a new speech, since the new has a special appeal [sweetness].

It seems that while maintaining its general meaning (the act of speaking), *sokhan* also had a literary connotation: it was a specific form of discourse that offered wisdom in the form of a didactic point while having an aesthetic effect on the reader. The didactic function, although it relied on common religious and philosophical discourses, had a more inclusive meaning. In

³⁸⁸ Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings), ed. by Jalāl Khāleqi Motlaq, II, pp. 201, 202.

³⁸⁹ Farrokhi Sistāni, *Divan*, ed. by Mohammad Dabir Siyāqi (Tehran: Eqbal, 1956), p. 66.

other words, *sokhan* represented the literary tradition that had consisted of some major themes and statements, along with some aesthetic strategies. This literary tradition provided an *a priori* structure, a framework for poets and writers. In my view, the word *sokhan* for these poets and readers had the same signification that the word *adabiyāt* (literature) had for later periods. *Sokhan* was not limited to a specific genre or form of writing. It could have been either in prose or verse. It could have been either epic or lyrical. Within any known genre and form, *sokhan* had a substance, a sublime meaning encoded by rhetoric strategies and devices. The philosophy of meaning was to give a practical wisdom to the readers, so that they can apply that wisdom in their daily life.

To return to the role of Speech in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, one can specify that the word *sokhan* (speech) for Nāser-e Khosrow goes further than its usual literary meaning and turns into a fundamental concept in his response to the condition of temporality. In *qasida* no.5 Nāser-e Khosrow identifies those aspects of speech that helps him construct his narrative of resistance:

آبی است جهان تیره و بس ژرف، بدو در
زنهار که تیره نکنی جان مصفا

1) 'The world is a bottomless mud-choked pit.
Beware of polluting your pure soul in its dark depths.

جاننت به سخن پاک شود زانکه خردمند
از راه سخن بر شود از چاه به جوزا

2) Your soul is purified by Speech – as the wise
Will fly from the pit's bottom to the stars through Speech.

فخرت به سخن باید ازیرا که بدو کرد
فخر آنکه نماند از پس او ناقله عضبا

3) Take pride in the speech as the Prophet (who willed not even a camel to his heir) had his speech as the source of his pride and honour.

زنده به سخن باید گشتنت ازیراک
مرده به سخن زنده همی کرد مسیحا

4) You should come to life with speech
As Jesus raised the dead with his speech;

پیدا به سخن باید ماندن که نمانده است
در عالم کس بی سخن پیدا، پیدا

5) You should remain visible through speech,

For no one has remained visible in the world without apparent/visible speech.

نیکو به سخن شو نه بدین صورت ازیراک

والا به سخن گردد مردم، نه به بالا.³⁹⁰

6) Become beautiful with Speech, not with your appearance.

People become elevated with speech, not with their well-shaped stature. (*qasida* no.5)

a) Redemption

The first feature of *Sokhan* (lines 1-2) that Nāser-e Khosrow emphasises is redemption and purification. This aspect of speech is formed as a response to the condition of temporality that we discussed thoroughly in chapter four of this research. Speech, in this context, is a gift that saves humanity from the darkness of ignorance and obsession with the material world. It purifies the soul from its worldly desires and opens up a space for intellectual contemplation. Speech, therefore, already has an inherent purpose and a pre-structured narrative: to redeem and elevate the soul from its lowest to the highest levels.

b) Social Privilege

In line 3 above, Nāser-e Khosrow ethically redefines the concept of honour and pride (*fakhr*). This ethical concern derives from his emphasis on the temporal condition of material life, and his insistence of the fact that worldly achievements, though seemingly attractive and grand, are deceptive and do not last. That is why he advises his readers to consider speech as the true achievement. To support this, he refers to Prophet Mohammad's most important claim to honour, which is the Quran, the locus for the revelation of the miraculous speech. For Muslims, among the many attributes and virtues they assign to Prophet Mohammad, it is his message, his discourse, which is considered as divine, standing unique and above all other virtues.

The importance of Nāser-e Khosrow's reference here is that he ascribes the same ability as far as the power and impact of speech is concerned to humans as well. The person who speaks, is the person who changes society, and with this change that person gains recognition. The impact of those who have the power of *sokhan* in society is therefore similar to that of the prophets. There is more in Nāser-e Khosrow's religious reference to the Prophet Mohammad, however. He compares the position of the holder of *sokhan* with that of the Prophet Mohammad, and the act of speech with His miracle, the Quran. Through this comparison, he regards speech as

³⁹⁰ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 5.

divine, with the same characteristics as those of a religious text. This, in my view, is mainly due to the fact that the concepts of *sokhan* (speech) and *dānesh* (knowledge) have specific significance for Ismailis. For Nāser-e Khosrow, Speech, regardless of its general implications in the literary tradition, has a religious significance. It belongs to a specific interpretation of the holy text which is guarded by the Imam, the religious and political authority of the Ismaili movement. Here, Speech is reduced to an utterance or manifestation of truth. If for Ferdowsi and Sistāni Speech was an aesthetic entity with no reference to a specific doctrine, for Nāser-e Khosrow it turns into a means through which one can reveal the truth or spread the knowledge. For Ferdowsi, the subject of speech was inclusive and general, with focus on general moralities in the Persian literary tradition. For Farrokhi Sistāni, it was more about a fresh historical narrative in the form of poetry. For Nāser-e Khosrow, however, while speech holds its secular signification, it is defined and conditioned by its subject, which is the religious truth. Meaning, in this view, is divided from utterance and dominates the quality of speech. The speaker (*sokhangū*) is therefore a committed thinker who follows the right knowledge and propagates it so as to show his commitment to the rightful and legitimate cause.

With regards to the issue of social privilege, Nāser-e Khosrow is not against it. On the contrary, becoming an honoured member of community is one of the side benefits of his literary and intellectual activities, which he really cherishes. What he criticises, however, is the way in which social recognition is perceived among people. That is why he redefines *fakhr* or social recognition and honour to identify speech as the alternative for worldly positions and achievements. This is the reason for mentioning *nāqeh-ye qazbā* (the name of the Prophet's camel) in line 3 of *qasida* no. 5, suggesting that the Prophet is not honoured or remembered by any of his material or worldly possessions, but by his speech. Since speech has a religious and discursive purpose, however, social recognition for Nāser-e Khosrow turns into social *privilege*. The speaker gains recognition not because of his art of speech, but because of the knowledge that his speech reveals. *Fakhr* for Nāser-e Khosrow has less to do with social appreciation or public benefit; rather, it is the result of *knowing* things that common people do not know. The speaker, therefore, gains honour and considers himself above others due to his knowledge. In fact, on many occasions, Nāser-e Khosrow regards this privilege as the reason for his isolation and exile. He believes that he has gained a unique intellectual position, and this has separated him from the rest of the community. In this respect, the privilege is the result of knowledge, not people's appreciation:

ای حجّت زمین خراسان تو

هر چند قهر کرده‌ی غوغایی

1) You are the Proof [the spiritual guide] of the realm of Khorāsān,
Although you have been shunned by its noisy masses.

پنهان شدی ولیک به حکمت‌ها
خورشیدوار شهره و پیدایی

2) You have hidden in a secret place.
However, in fields of knowledge, you shine like a sun, visible and renowned to all people.

از شخص تیره گرچه به یمگانی
از قول خوب بر سر جوزایی³⁹¹

3) Though in your earthly body you are in exile in Yomgān
Due to your fine sayings, you are in the highest point where the sun is in June. (*qasida* no.3)

In *qasida* no.19, the poet speaks with self-respect, about how he gained *fakhr dar hekamt* (honour in wisdom) as a result of spending years seeking the good Speech. Privilege and honour are not in contrast with the poet's miserable life in exile. In fact, isolation and exile prove the poets' high position in wisdom (receiving the title of Proof/Guide from the Fatimids). In other words, if it was not for the poet's knowledge and his power of speech, he could have had a secure, comfortable life in his own homeland:

من اندر جستن نیکوسخن تن را بفرسودم
سرم زین فخر در حکمت همی بر چرخ ازین سایید

1) I frustrated my body in my quest for good Speech.
But because of the honour I gained for this Knowledge my head touches the sky.

نبینی در خراسان من نشسته پست در یمگان
همی آید سوی من یک به یک هر چه همی باید؟³⁹²

2) Don't you see, that although in all the cities in Khorāsān I am residing in Yomgān,
fortuneless and alone,
Whatever I deserve to have come to me one by one?

³⁹¹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 8.

³⁹² Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 40.

c) The Reviving Effect

In line 4 of *qasida* no.5, Nāser-e Khosrow refers to speech as an agent of resurrection, and links its power to Jesus and his miracle of resurrecting the dead. Here, the same rhetorical narrative works: speech has a miraculous effect, and the works of a speaker are similar to those of prophets. The addressee in this line is ‘you’, the reader of the poem. The poet therefore specifies that, through speech, his reader will revive his soul and become alive. Speech, in this line, has two meanings: to seek speech and the act of speaking. It seems both meanings work here. The addressee is advised to save his soul by *listening* to the true Speech, which means to gain Knowledge. He is also encouraged to produce speech to become the producer of the resurrecting knowledge. The reviving function of Speech reminds the reader of Ferdowsi’s notion of perpetual remembrance that I briefly explained earlier. Indeed, Nāser-e Khosrow shares the same opinion, however, in the context of this narrative of resistance against worldly obsessions, his notion of having an eternal name is more concerned with the spiritual realm rather than the material world. That is, our life in this world has no value unless we enlighten our soul with the knowledge/Speech. Having an everlasting fame does matter, but it must be achieved through redemption and enlightenment. This is because, for Nāser-e Khosrow, being famous is a worldly desire, and therefore, has no value unless it serves an ethical and religious cause. For Nāser-e Khosrow, becoming alive/conscious is more important than becoming a famous poet, that is why in this line he regards those without knowledge and the gift of speech as dead/ignored ones.

d) Enunciation and Propagation

Peydā shodan (to become visible) is the fourth aspect of speech, in line 5 of *qasida* no.5. Again, this might bring Ferdowsi’s notion of perpetual fame into mind, which specifies that through speech one would gain social recognition and carves one’s name into the fabric of human history. As in the case of social honour/privilege and the reviving effect of Speech, however, the social and historical aspect of speech for Nāser-e Khosrow stems from the moral and philosophical purpose that Speech is attached to. *Fakhr* (pride/honour) has more to do with the knowledge that the Speech represents than the public benefit or social appreciation that it may entail. *Zنده kardan* (reviving), was more about becoming enlightened and gaining consciousness. *Peydā shodan* must also be placed in such a narrative of redemption and revival. The narrative starts with the condition of decadence and ignorance (first sequence- line 1). Then comes redemption and purification (second sequence- line 2), which is then followed by gaining a privileged intellectual position among people (third sequence- line 3). With

redemption and enlightenment comes revival and the beginning of a new life (fourth sequence-line 4). *Peydā shodan*, as the fifth sequence of this narrative, in my view, underlines the necessity of utterance and enunciation. For an Ismaili missionary, becoming enlightened with religious knowledge is vital, but not enough. One should then start to *speak*, that is, to spread the knowledge and enlighten people's souls and minds. *Peydā shodan*, or becoming visible, in this context, is the beginning of propagation and discursive production. In this final section of the narrative, the enlightened subject should announce his beliefs and define his identity, in order to distinguish himself from others. If in the early stages, the individuality and consciousness of the subject were the main issues, now the focus is on influencing the public through discursive production.

e) The Politics of Speech

So far, I have examined those aspects of speech which belong to the literary tradition but were reformulated for use in a new context by Nāser-e Khosrow. I have stated that the content and purpose are two *a priori* factors determining the nature of speech in Nāser-e Khosrow's poetry. By narrowing down the concept of Speech, Naser-e Khosrow redefines speech as a specific doctrine or belief that can fulfil the purpose of emancipating the soul from its material attachments. Through this shift from the general to the particular, Nāser-e Khosrow warns his readers that not all discourses are enlightening and worth listening to. Below, he states that it is knowledge which determines the quality of the speech:

سخن را به میزان دانش بسنج
که گفتار بی علم بادت و دم³⁹³

Assess the Speech with the scale of knowledge,

As discourse/utterance/words without knowledge is nothing but the wind and exhaling.

In *qasida* no.9, one is advised to seek the right speech. This implies that there are many discourses, but there is one which contains the true knowledge and demands a conscious speaker to articulate it at the right moment:

سخن را جای باید جست، ازیرا
به میدان در، خوش رود اسب رهوار

1) The speech must be uttered in its right place,

Only in the field, the powerful horse can gallop properly.

³⁹³ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 62.

سخن بشناس و آن‌گه گو ازیرا
که بی نقطه نگردد خط پرگار

2) Know the subject/speech well, and then engage in saying it:

As without a centre point, the compass cannot draw the circle line.

سخن را تا نداری پاک از زنگ
ز دل‌ها کی زدايد زنگ و زنگار

3) Since you have not cleansed your speech of its rusts,

how can it remove the rusts and dusts of the people's heart?

چرا خامش نباشی چون ندانی؟
برهنه چون کنی عورت به بازار؟³⁹⁴

4) Why don't you keep quiet when you do not have knowledge?

Why on earth do you make yourself naked and expose your genitals in the market?

Nāser-e Khosrow is very well aware of what I would call *the politics of speech*. For him, speech is about what to say, when and to whom. Speech has a purpose; it is to deliver knowledge and to influence people. Speech produces power; therefore, one must use it strategically in order to maximise its effect. One must first start learning from the wise until one becomes wise oneself. One must also know the moment when speaking is needed. There is therefore a process that involves maintaining silence, gaining knowledge, and then producing the discourse of wisdom. The speaker must be prepared, so that he can deliver the speech at the strategic moment. As Nāser-e Khosrow has put it, one should clean the rust away from the speech to make it pure and ready for deliverance.

f) Ta'vil (Esoteric Interpretation)

Nāser-e Khosrow starts by stating the general aspects of speech as a virtuous and enlightening practice and ends with a specific account of speech as a particular discursive act that seeks to change the way people think and behave. This particular speech, to him, is the Ismaili method of esoteric interpretation, known as *ta'vil*. *Ta'vil* comes from the root 'a-v-l, and literally means 'to bring back the primordial meaning,'³⁹⁵ or as Farhad Daftari has put it, 'to lead back to the

³⁹⁴ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 18.

³⁹⁵ In Persian, the meaning of *ta'vil* can be translated as follows: *bāzgardāndan-e chizi be asl-e ān*.

origin'.³⁹⁶ As a term in the science of exegesis, *ta'vil* was 'to deduce the *bātin* from the *zāhir*'.³⁹⁷ Ahmad Pakatchi gives a more linguistic understanding of *ta'vil* as a term:

Ta'vil is to lead back a sign (*dāl*) from an apparent/conventional meaning (*ma'nā-ye zāheri*) to a meaning far from the apparent/conventional (*dur as ma'nāy-e zāher*). [This esoteric meaning] is believed to be more important, and that it reveals the true intention of the speaker (*maqṣud-e asli-ye guyandeh*), more than the apparent meaning does.³⁹⁸

Ta'vil, in the Ismaili discourse, was a *method* of interpreting the symbols and allegories, not only of the Quran, but also religious rituals and prescriptions. It meant to extract the hidden or inner meanings beneath the literal wording or the apparent meaning. Farhad Daftari regards the theory of *ta'vil* as one of the earliest doctrines of the Ismailis and traces it back to the middle of the ninth century, more than two centuries before Nāser-e Khosrow.³⁹⁹ As Daftari explains:

The early Ismā'īlīs made a fundamental distinction between the exoteric (*zāhir*) and the esoteric (*bātin*) aspects and dimensions of the sacred scriptures, as well as religious commandments and prohibitions. [...] the early Ismā'īlīs held that the revealed scriptures, including especially the Qur'ān and the sacred law of Islam (*sharia*), had their apparent or literal meaning, the *zāhir*, which had to be distinguished from their inner meaning or true spiritual reality, hidden in the *bātin*. They further held that the *zāhir* or the religious laws (*sharī'ās*) enunciated by different prophets underwent periodical changes, while the *bātin*, containing the spiritual truths (*haqā'iq*), remained immutable and eternal. For the Ismā'īlīs, the *haqā'iq* in effect formed a gnostic system, representing an esoteric world of hidden spiritual reality. [...] The early Ismā'īlīs further thought that, in every age, the esoteric world of spiritual reality could be accessible only to the elite (*khawāss*) of mankind, as distinct from the common people (*'awāmm*), who were merely capable of perceiving the *zāhir*, the outward world and the apparent meaning of the revelations. [...] The initiates were bound by their oath to keep secret the *bātin* imparted to them by a hierarchy of teachers authorized by the Ismā'īlī imam. The *bātin* was thus both hidden and secret, and its knowledge had to be

³⁹⁶ Daftari, p.130.

³⁹⁷ *Zāher*: the apparent and literal meaning, *Bāten*: the hidden and esoteric meaning. See: Daftari, p. 130.

³⁹⁸ Ahmad Pakatchi, 'Ta'vil' in *Dā'erat-ol Ma'āref-e Bozorg-e Eslāmi (The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia)* (Tehran: The Centre for the Great Islamic Encyclopaedia, 2009) XIV, pp. 371-380 (371).

³⁹⁹ Daftari, p. 129.

kept away from the uninitiated masses, the *'awāmm*, the non-*Ismā'īlīs* who were incapable of understanding it.⁴⁰⁰

In Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, *ta'vil* is where the concepts of speech, knowledge and the Imam meet each other. The Imam is the holder or guardian of the hidden meaning, knowledge is the art of interpreting or decoding the apparent meaning, and speech is to articulate the true meaning, which emerges as a result of applying the method of esoteric interpretation. Now the speech has an authority. The act of speech is an order from the Imam that the speaker, as a soldier, follows:

خیز به فرمان امام جهان
برکش در بحر سخن بادبان⁴⁰¹

Stand up with the command of the Imam of the world.

Raise the sails and move in the sea of Speech!

Ta'vil is also the most important aspect of the critique of ideology in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, and that was why I discussed some of its manifestations in the previous chapters. Before going any further, however, I will review a few lines from *qasida* no.2 in which Nāser-e Khosrow mentions different aspects of *ta'vil*:

دریای سخن ها سخن خوب خدایست
پرگوهر با قیمت و پر لؤلؤ لالا

1) The sea of speeches is the good Speech of God,
full of precious gems and radiant pearls.

شور است چو دریا به مثل صورت تنزیل
تأویل چو لؤلؤست سوی مردم دانا

2) The surface meaning of the revelation is briny like the sea,
its exegesis, however, is like the pearl for the wise.

اندر بن دریاست همه گوهر و لؤلؤ
غواص طلب کن، چه دوی بر لب دریا؟

3) All the pearls and gems are lying at the bottom of the sea.
You should seek a diver, do not waste your time running along the shore.

⁴⁰⁰ Daftari, p. 129. For a detailed account, with proper references to the early works of Ismailis, see: Ahamd Pakatchi, 'Ta'vil' in *Dā'erat-ol Ma'āref-e Bozorg-e Eslāmi (The Great Islamic Encyclopaedia)*, XIV, pp. 376-77.

⁴⁰¹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 15.

اندر بُن شوراب ز بهر چه نهاده ست
چندین گهر و لؤلؤ، دارندهی دنیا؟

4) Why, [you may ask], has God placed
such gems and pearls at the bottom of this salty water?

از بهر پیمبر که بدین صنع ورا گفت:
«تأویل به دانا ده و، تنزیل به غوغا»

5) It was for the Prophet's sake, who asked him:

'Give the apparent meaning of revelation to commoners, and the inner meaning to the wise'.

غواص تو را جز گل و شورابه ندادهست
زیرا که ندیدهست ز تو جز که معادا

6) The diver did not bring to you but mud and saltwater,
because he did not see in you but hostility and refusal.

معنی طلب از ظاهر تنزیل چو مردم
خرسند مشو همچو خر از قول به آوا

7) Seek deep meaning from the apparent words of revelation.

Do not become like common people who are easily satisfied with the apparent meaning like
donkeys who become satisfied with the sounds of words.

قندیل فروزی به شب قدر به مسجد
مسجد شده چون روز و، دلت چون شب یلدا

8) You light candles in the Night of Decree/revelation (*shab-e qadr*) in the mosque,
The mosque has become bright like the day, but your heart is as dark as the winter solstice
[longest night of the year].

قندیل میفروز، بیاموز که قندیل
بیرون نبرد از دل پر جهل تو ظلما⁴⁰²

9) Do not light a candle, learn that such lights
will not take darkness out of the your ignorance-ridden heart.

With the idea of *ta'vil*, speech becomes an elitist, hierarchical practice, which echoes Nāser-e
Khosrow's path from the general (speech as a virtuous practice) to particular (speech as a
discursive propaganda).

The above lines from Nāser-e Khosrow point at two major features of the theory of *ta'vil* in
Ismailism. One is the dichotomy between the exoteric and esoteric (*zāher-o bāten*), and the

⁴⁰² Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqeq, p. 5.

other is the dichotomy between the elites and the commoners (*khavās-o avām*). He represents these two oppositions with the imagery of the sea, which contrasts the terms seashore, runner, surface and saltwater with diver, depth and pearls. This metaphoric picture depicts speech as something elitist and exclusive, which requires hard work and knowledge at a level that transcends the common sense of the time. Based on this imagery, the truth is the spiritual kernel of light in an unknown realm. It is the illuminous substance, dissociated from material life and any attachment or need that might degrade its sublime nature. Furthermore, this meaning is not accessible or visible. It is hidden. Therefore, reaching it requires effort and causes pain. One of the reasons for such pain is that the seeker is already in the realm of darkness. As Nāser-e Khosrow has brilliantly put it, he is ‘satisfied’ (*khorsand shodan*) with the apparent world that he sees and the apparent knowledge that he has taken for granted. He has got accustomed to common beliefs and the way people understand things. He has become alienated in a ritualised world where the meaning/knowledge is the absent element from any religious or ethical practice (lines 8-9, *qasida* no.2). That is why he needs a guide who can see what others cannot see, transcend the realm of ritualised beliefs, and extract the unseen meaning that has been neglected.

The reason for such negligence is unclear. At some points in the *Divan*, it appears to be due to the evil policies of the irreligious, illegitimate and corrupted rulers.⁴⁰³ In the above example, however, through a narrated dialogue between the Prophet Mohammad and God, the apparent knowledge is depicted as a necessary and inevitable thing. That is, the division between the apparent and the hidden, the inaccessibility of truth, are not historical, but essential (lines 5-6, *qasida* no. 2). For Nāser-e Khosrow, the hierarchical structure of knowledge and the exoteric/esoteric division is due to the way this world has been created. The condition of ignorance and decline therefore becomes naturalised beyond any historical development. In his *vajh-e din* (The Face of Religion), Naser-e Khosrow argues that physical beings do not have a substance of their own, and neither does our knowledge of them. Our rational knowledge of the world, for Nāser-e Khosrow, necessarily has a Divine source. The process of perception, the transformation of physical experience into rational consciousness, is a kind of *ta’vil*, since it also is a journey from the sensible (*mahsus*) to the intelligible (*ma’qul*).⁴⁰⁴ This kind of

⁴⁰³ For instance, in *qasidas* number 37 and 65, the rule of ‘demons’ in Khorāsān is considered as the cause of decline in religion and wisdom, See: Naser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqeq, pp. 78-144.

⁴⁰⁴ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Vajh-e Din (Face of the religion)*, ed. by Taqi Arani, (Tehran: Asatir, 1384, reprinted), pp. 61-63.

knowledge, however, is the beginning of a thorough esoteric journey that will lead to a spiritual resurrection. Apart from our rational knowledge, Nāser-e Khosrow states that truth is divine and metaphysical; and therefore, hidden by the deceptive cover of the apparent world. It is possible for the masses to reach an understanding of this apparent cover, since it is essential to have a degree of knowledge for the needs of the worldly life and public dealings (line 5, *qasida no. 2*). The true seeker of knowledge, however, must gain the ability to translate the exoteric knowledge into the esoteric, to see the Divine truth, which is possible only with the help of the Imam of the time.

By regarding *ta'vil* as a necessary form of Knowledge, Nāser-e Khosrow disregards any historicity in human relations and social experience. The injustice resulting from a particular political regime therefore becomes a natural phenomenon. The idea that the apparent meaning is an essential discourse for common people, in fact, generalises human sufferings and ignores the real forces that cause misery and injustice in each case. According to this thesis, injustice and suffering are inevitable characters of human life and history. The only way out of this determinism lies within a kind of theosophical and gnostic discourse which brings with it an enlightenment that occurs only in the realm of the mind, not that of social life. This religious/intellectual enlightenment seeks to solve the contradiction between the material and spiritual existence by disregarding the former in favour of the latter. The lived experience, and the authority of material forces, are not the subject of knowledge. Solving the deficiencies of the material life is not the aim of Nāser-e Khosrow's speech and knowledge, since these deficiencies are the inherent features of the material life. The lived experience and material forces are only signs of temporality and decadence. Their function is merely to confirm *a priori* knowledge: that the material world is temporal and transient, and what is eternal and real is otherworldly and divine.

The Condition of Endurance: Imprisoned in Body, Unchained in Soul

So far, I have analysed the key concepts which act as elements of resistance to the condition of temporality in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. These elements are founded on two general platforms. One is the literary tradition, and the other is the religious discourse. While in the former, literary themes and aesthetic strategies provide an inclusive and discursively neutral framework for literary practice, in the latter, they are recontextualised and reformulated based on an exclusive discursive regime. Now in this section, I will discuss how these elements of

resistance leave the contradiction between the lived experience and consciousness/knowledge unsolved and, instead, invest merely in otherworldly spiritual emancipation.

In his narrative of resistance, Nāser-e Khosrow relies on an emancipative discourse which demands political commitment, while promoting a gnostic subjectivity that renounces any material engagement. What triggers Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative of resistance is the contradiction that the poet identifies between subjectivity and objectivity. This major contradiction is manifested as the contradiction between moralities and politics, religion and practice, and speech and action. To overcome this contradiction, Nāser-e Khosrow formulates an emancipative narrative in which the material world is disregarded in favour of the metaphysical world and religious subjectivity. As a result, the same antagonism that originally instigated such a narrative is reproduced at the end. He tries hard in his *Divan* not to let his readers see such failure or inconsistency of speech or knowledge, but there are some *symptomatic points* in his *Divan* where one can observe that struggle.

One of these symptomatic points is where he speaks of his uncomfortable life in exile and isolation and attempts to justify his unfortunate life with reference to the emancipative discourse to which he has dedicated his whole *Divan*. The tone and style of the poet on these occasions remind the reader of a literary genre, *habsiyyeh* (prison poem), used by several Khorāsāni poets. In *habsiyyeh*, the imprisoned poet projects a voice that describes his condition in prison. This description contains two major themes: complaints about the prison, and the desire for freedom. One of the important aspects of *habsiyyeh*, as a premodern literary genre, is autobiographical self-narration, which allows the poet to become the narrator of his own life and emotions. The significance of this feature can be better understood when it is noted that poetry in the Khorāsāni style was mostly about describing the visible world, as in the court poetry of the era, or religious dedication, as in Nāser-e Khosrow's case. Within such an aesthetic regime, *habsiyyeh* could have given the poet the chance to express his personal feelings by remembering the past, old friends and the life he had before becoming a prisoner. Since the life in prison disconnected the poet from the outside world, he was left with his own memories and consciousness as the source for poetic creativity.⁴⁰⁵

Given Nāser-e Khosrow's approach towards the worldly life and the role of firmament in his *Divan*, there would be no surprise to see how some aspects of *habsiyyeh* fitted well in his poems of exile. These poems do not specifically belong to the *habsiyyeh* genre, and it is not known if

⁴⁰⁵ 'habsiyyeh (prison poetry)' in *Dāneshnāmeḥ-ye Jahān-e Eslām* (Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam) <<https://rch.ac.ir/article/Details?id=9419>> [accessed 19 December 2019]

Nāser-e Khosrow was ever officially imprisoned by any authority. According to his own accounts,⁴⁰⁶ it was his missionary activities as an Ismaili teacher that forced him to become a fugitive and lead an isolated life.⁴⁰⁷ Elsewhere in his *Divan*, he specifically states that *majānin* (lunatics) imprisoned him (*mahbus kardan*).⁴⁰⁸ It not clear if he was officially sentenced, however, or if the lines are referring to his self-exile. In any case, since the situation of the poet in exile is similar to that of a poet in prison, one can find some of the features of *habsiyyeh* poetry in Nāser-e Khosrow's exile poems.

As in the *habsiyyeh*, Nāser-e Khosrow's exile poems are full of complaints, mostly for being isolated and away from Khorāsān's centres for learning, as well as from other scholars, poets and writers. Nevertheless, unlike the *habsiyyeh* poetry, his poems contain no expression of a desire for freedom and getting back to normal life. Freedom for Nāser-e Khosrow became a spiritual concept that concerns the Soul rather than the body. For him, the body is always in prison, no matter how and where one might live. It is the soul that urges for freedom, and once it receives the enlightening knowledge, it is free. The poet therefore considers himself already emancipated, even in the condition of exile. For him, banishment and captivity are not the markers of freedom or its absence in this world. The real factor is the Knowledge that illuminates one's Soul. Real captivity is the result of a degraded and ignorant Soul no matter where one is. Moreover, Nāser-e Khosrow regards his intellectual productivity as a sign of his victory over his physical confinement. For him, the fact that he has been able to write enlightening books during his exile proves that exile and isolation failed to stop him from undertaking his missionary responsibilities, and that he continued to have an impact on his community through his works:

منگر بدان که در دره‌ی یمگان
محبوس کرده‌اند مجانینم

406 گرچه مرا اصل خراسانی است
از پس پیروی و مہی و سری،
دوستی عترت و خانہ رسول
کرد مرا یمگی و مازندری

'Although I am originally from Khorāsān
now that I am old, wise and noble,
my love and respect for the Prophet's family and decedents
made me a refugee in Mazandaran and Yomgan.'

See: Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtaba Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqeq, p. 56. Also see chapter 2 of this research.

⁴⁰⁷ I claim Nāser-e Khosrow's poems are among the first samples of *exile poetry* (*she'r-e tab'id*) in Persian literature.

⁴⁰⁸ See line 1 in the following quotation.

Do not see me being captivated by the lunatics in the valley of Yomgān,

از جان پاک رفته به علین
وز جسم تیره مانده به سجنیم

My pure soul has ascended to the heavens,
although my despicable body has remained in prison.

شاید اگر ز جسم به زندانم
کز علم دین شکفته بساتینم⁴⁰⁹

It is befitting that my body is imprisoned,
for my knowledge of religion has blossomed flowers.

The second issue is that, as demonstrated in the case of Mas'ud-e Sa'd in chapter four, in the *habsiyyeh* poetry, the poet condemns the firmaments and time for his imprisonment. The same process of condemnation occurs in Nāser-e Khosrow's exile poems, but within the context of his gnostic system of thought. Thus, although he argues against the idea of reproaching the firmaments and time for worldly misfortunes, he does blame the firmaments for his exile. This condemnation is different from recognising the firmament as the agent or reason for exile, however. For Nāser-e Khosrow, exile, isolation and imprisonment are parts of the worldly life, just as wealth, position and comfort are. They are all temporal and transient. Exile, for Nāser-e Khosrow, even when he addresses the real forces that have caused his miserable condition, is still part of the general determinism of the firmament and time. In the *qasida* no.6, which is one of the most powerful *qasidas* in the *Divan*, the contradiction between knowledge/consciousness and the lived experience of the poet manifests itself very well:

آزرده کرد کژدم غربت جگر مرا
گوئی زیون نیافت ز گیتی مگر مرا

1) The scorpion of exile stung my heart –
as if he found in all the world no one as downtrodden as me!

در حال خویشتن چو همی ژرف بنگرم
صفرا همی برآید از انده به سر مرا

2) When I look into my state, intensely, deeply hurt –
bile rises into my head from grief

گویم: چرا نشانه تیر زمانه کرد
چرخ بلند جاهل بیدادگر مرا

⁴⁰⁹ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqqueq, p. 135.

3) I ask: why did the high wheel of sky, that cruel, ignorant sphere made me the target of the arrows of the time?

گر در کمال فضل بود مرد را خطر
چون خوار و زار کرد پس این بی خطر مرا؟

4) If man's high rank depends on perfect virtue – then, how did this low thing make *me* so worthless, so abject?

گر بر قیاس فضل بگشتی مدار چرخ
جز بر مقر ماه نبودی مقر مرا

5) If the wheel of fortune turned on the axis of virtue, then my place would be nowhere but on the lofty moon!

نی‌نی که چرخ و دهر ندانند قدر فضل
این گفته بود گاه جوانی پدر مرا

6) No, no! Time and sphere do not know the value of virtue – My father had told this to me when I was young:

«دانش به از ضیاع و به از جاه و مال و ملک»
این خاطر خطیر چنین گفت مرا

7) 'Knowledge is better, son, than belongings, rank and properties!' Thus, spoke to me this man of high, penetrating mind.

با خاطر منور روشن‌تر از قمر
ناید به کار هیچ مقر قمر مرا

8) With my radiant mind, which is more brilliant than the moon, the station of the moon is of no use to me.

با لشکر زمانه با تیغ تیز دهر
دین و خرد بس است سپاه و سپر مرا⁴¹⁰

9) My faith, my intellect, suffice me as shield and soldiers against time's cutting sword, against world's army strong.⁴¹¹

This *qasida* offers an objective perspective that challenges the fruits of intellectual emancipation while arguing for a moral subjectivity which justifies the benefits of ethical practice and religious wisdom. The ethical subjectivity is based on the perfection of virtue (*kamāl-e fazl*), which is to bring dignity, privilege and honour (lines 4-5), and is considered

⁴¹⁰ Nāser-e Khosrow, *Divan*, ed. by Mojtabā Minovi and Mehdi Mohaqeq, pp. 11-12.

⁴¹¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Make a Shield from Wisdom; Selected Verses from Nāsir-i Khusraw's Dīvān* (London and New York: I.B Tauris, 1993), pp. 75-6.

above worldly accomplishments and desires (line 7). The objective aspect of the *qasida*, however, is characterised by isolation and exile (*ghorbat*), which bites the soul like a scorpion (line 1). It brings sorrow (*andoh*), humiliation and grief (*khāri-o zāri*). To solve this contradiction, Nāser-e Khosrow relates the lived experience (exile and isolation) to firmament, thereby representing it as something inevitable, determined by natural forces. It is no longer the exile and isolation that has caused humiliation and grief, rather, it is the firmament and time (*charkh-o dahr*) (line 6). As a result, the subject of resistance changes from the objective and lived experience to firmament and time. The condition of exile and the real forces that have caused such condition are no longer the subject of knowledge. It is firmament and time that knowledge, or the religious consciousness, seeks to resist (line 9). We know, however, that these two are the forces of determinism, beyond the control of humans. Therefore, what knowledge and speech promise will appear not in the material world, but in the afterlife and the spiritual realm.

By recognising time and firmament as the agents of injustice in the material world, Nāser-e Khosrow rescues moral subjectivity from its apparent contradiction with the objective and material condition and re-establishes its emancipative position.

Temporality and Endurance: A Discourse Analysis

Having discussed the different aspects of temporality and endurance, we can now apply the terms of our discourse analysis method.

a) Discourse of Temporality

Firmament, time and the material world are the *nodal points* of the discourse of temporality. Beside these nodal points, being ‘deceitful’, ‘disloyal’ and ‘vengeful’ are some of the *moments* in the discourse of temporality. The major *group formation* within the discourse of temporality is the ‘common people’, ‘the masses’, who do not have any identity of their own and follow the authorities without questioning their merits or their knowledge. The main *rhetorical imageries* in the discourse of temporality are based on three discourses: nature, witchery, and travelling and lodging. The *narrative structure* of the discourse of temporality is based on the logic of descending. It follows a path from the top, the highest position (the heavens) down to the lowest position (the earth). There are two major *subject positions* within the discourse of temporality:

1) The one who considers himself as a traveller and regards his life as temporal and transient. He postpones his emancipation to the spiritual/divine world, and he does not rely on worldly achievements.

2) The one who is blindly and ignorantly engaged with worldly affairs and sees the condition of temporality as a perpetual state.

There is also a *chain of equivalence* between firmament, time, and world. These three nodal points are equalised, and they are the different names of the condition of temporality. They are referring to each other, and each one of them extends the state of natural determinism to the fields of politics, history and social relations. As a result of equalising these three nodal points, political power becomes an immoral and transient entity which must be avoided in order to protect the human soul from degradation. History, on the other hand, turns into a lesson for the wise to be learned, and that is to know about the transient and ephemeral nature of human life and human achievements. Moreover, socio-political contradictions appear as *natural* and *inevitable*.

Apart from the chain of equivalence between firmament, time and world, *the dialectics of incarnation/deformation* takes place in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. In order to solve the contradiction between the objective and the subjective, Nāser-e Khosrow recognises the dominant forces of nature as the reason behind suppressions, exile, isolation, injustices and political corruption. He then postpones human liberation to a sublime and metaphysical realm. The socio-historical experience becomes naturalised, and the political and cultural change incarnates itself into the sublime and spiritual realm. As a result, the sublime becomes *deformed* by becoming the subject of human emancipation, while political change becomes *etherealised*. This is very much the situation of the early Fatimid Imams in North Africa as they were dealing with managing the social conflicts in their territory.⁴¹²

By naming firmament and time as the agents of human sufferings and injustices, these forces of natural determinism turn into *objective* or *ideology*. *Falak* (firmament), *zamān* (time) and world (*jahān*) remain undisputed and their function in naturalising the social contradictions is reproduced in Nāser-e Khosrow's *divan*. In other words, Nāser-e Khosrow's forces of resistance such as free will, esoteric interpretation, knowledge, intellect and the unknowable God, cannot re-interpret the nodal points of the discourse of temporality and they fail to change the deterministic function of firmament, time and the material world in the *divan*. *Falak*, *zamān*

⁴¹² See chapter 2 of this this research.

and *jahān* are parts of a *sedimented discourse* in Nāser-e Khosrow's *divan* which cannot revive the political and pave the way for an epistemic break with regards to the relationship between the material experience and the religious and metaphysical authorities.

b) Discourse of Endurance

The *nodal points* of this discourse are intellect and soul. Knowledge, speech, patience, the esoteric meaning (*bāten*) and esoteric interpretation (*ta'vil*) are the *moments* in the discourse of endurance. The rhetorical imageries are based on the following discourses: horse-riding, warfare, and flying and liberation. The narrative structure is based on the logic of ascending and elevation, and it follows the path from the lowest position (physical realm) up to the highest point (metaphysical realm). Speech (*sokhan*), knowledge and intellect are the *floating signifiers*. Speech in the context of the literary tradition has a general and neutral meaning. It is about a literary speech that has a degree of aesthetic effect and ethical enlightenment. In Nāser-e Khosrow's discursive *articulation*, this term merges with the Ismaili discourse and finds a more radical function. The same is the case with knowledge (*dānesh*), which in its fixation in Nāser-e Khosrow's discourse of endurance, it signifies the Ismaili doctrine and theology. Intellect also has a more secular and practical meaning in the literary tradition, it is more about practical ethics and managing daily life as a conscious and wise member of the community. However, in Nāser-e Khosrow's *divan*, it follows the Quranic approach and becomes *equal* to knowledge, which is the Ismaili doctrine. The major *subject position* in this discourse is the wiseman or the *hakim*, the one who resists worldly engagements by being patient and elevates his soul by gaining the divine knowledge. The *group formation* in this discourse is the Ismaili elites and teachers, those who are guided by God and selected by the Fatimid Imam to enlighten the people's mind.

Conclusion

As established in this thesis, Nāser-e Khosrow is an exceptional figure in the history of Persian literature, since he challenged the hegemony of court poetry by changing the subject of poetry from the descriptions of the natural world, lyricism and epic exaggerations to philosophy and theological doctrines. Being an Ismaili missionary and propagandist, Nāser-e Khosrow lived as a marginal scholar and spent most of his time in exile, under the constant threats of zealous religious jurists. The painful experience of living an unconventional life affected Nāser-e Khosrow's way of thought and his literary creativity. The image of *self* in his *Divan* and his well-known *Safarnāme* (Book of Travels) is a powerful self-narrative which reveals his unique and distinctive position in the history of Persian literature. In this narrative, Nāser-e Khosrow depicts himself as someone who, at a particular time of his life, became frustrated with the state of affairs and found that his beliefs no longer gave a satisfying answer to his questions and doubts. The more he observed the moral decline and political corruption of his time, the more deeply he felt dissatisfied and desperate. In a short autobiographical account in *The Book of Travels*, Nāser-e Khosrow demonstrates these feelings by saying that he was a successful clerk in the court of the Turkic rulers of Khorāsān and that he suddenly felt he could no longer accept his situation. Nāser-e Khosrow shows a keen awareness of the contradictions of both the socio-political conditions and the cultural and religious norms and beliefs. He criticises the role he had in legitimising the state of injustice, falsehood and corruption. Later in his *Divan*, Nāser-e Khosrow represents this consciousness as an intellectual privilege which separates him from those who fail to see these inconsistencies. The division between the person who *knows* and those who do not know is a frequent theme in his *Divan*.

If the first stage of Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative is the stage of consciousness and discontent, the second stage is about finding the path to redemption and emancipation. This latter stage is no longer about real inconsistencies, however, but spiritual assistance and metaphysical sources. This part of the narrative happens in a dream and not in reality. Although the narrator was awake when he expressed his state of dissatisfaction, it was in a dream that he received the guidance, the direction, which led him to his ideal city: Cairo during the Fatimids.

Heretic, irreligious, *magus*, *zindiq*, *Qarmati*, were some of the tags used for unorthodox thinkers or practices. The use of such a wide range of words to refer to unorthodox practices or persons reveals the crisis of political representation during that period. Establishing a legitimate and hegemonic power under a specific political identity was a problem for both the Caliphs in Baghdad and the new Turkic rulers of Khorāsān. Having a fixed and symbolic political identity was therefore an essential factor in securing power and maintaining social

order and stability. It was such a need for identity and representation that brought the Caliphs and the Turkic sultans together and re-politicised religion, aesthetics, ethics, philosophy and theology. These disciplines became the subjects of political identity and found new functions. At this stage, being a poet or a theologian was tantamount to being a participant in constructing the evolving political identity of the new system. The need for the political identity expedited the construction of religious orthodoxy, and as the result, the cultural realm became a field of constructing *the other*, of distinguishing the heretic from the believer. It became an area of specified discourses with a fixed and exclusive domain of signification. Nāser-e Khosrow's discontent with the religious and social norms, which he demonstrated in his narrative of redemption, was a response to such a fixed and normalised realm of signs and discourses. The construction of religious orthodoxy became an essential political factor for the rule of the Turks in Khorāsān. The Turkic rulers used religion as a means for gaining political hegemony and justifying their military invasions. Their oppressive religious policies targeted cultural and religious diversity and brought about exclusion and marginalisation in society. Nāser-e Khosrow was among a few Iranian intellectuals who responded to this process and rejected it. Ismailism for Nāser-e Khosrow was the true religious doctrine since it revived the power of religion in challenging corruption and moral decline. The Ismaili doctrine of esoteric interpretation, for Nāser-e Khosrow, was a potential idea that could have challenged the fixation of religious statements and freed religious dogmas from their short-term and limited functions. As a poet, however, Nāser-e Khosrow's cultural background did not disappear after his conversion to Ismailism but was merged with, and reshaped, his Ismaili ideas while itself also changing.

Two discursive trends are therefore at work at the same time in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. One challenges the fixed and exclusive symbolic order, and the other reinstates statements and values that legitimise the arbitrary structure of power and its tyrannical order. These two trends depict two conditions of social existence: the condition of temporality and the condition of endurance.

In the condition of temporality:

1. Human beings live under the tyranny of the firmament and time which are unchangeable.
2. Everything is subject to change and nothing lasts.
3. One must be in a constant state of awareness and cautiousness.

In the condition of endurance:

1. Men have the free will to act and consciously choose between right and wrong; they are responsible for their deeds.
2. Men are gifted with Intellect, by which they can learn moral and religious knowledge and act accordingly.
3. This conscious moral action includes taking a stand against the injustice and tyranny of corrupt rulers and faqihs.
4. One of the forms of this ethical-political practice is speech (*sokhan*). Enlightening and committed speech works through the method of *ta'vil* (gnostic interpretation). Speech serves to challenge the dominant religious discourse and provides an alternative interpretation in favour of the Ismaili theology and its missionary organisation.
5. Men possess a Divine substance, the speaking soul, by which they are distinguished from other creatures. The speaking soul is imprisoned in the body. It has to tolerate the pain of being in the condition of temporality. The speaking soul belongs to the Divine realm and urges a return to its origin. It is for this purpose that Nāser-e Khosrow seeks for the kind of knowledge that can make the soul immune from worldly engagements and material attachments.

However, these forces of resistance in the discourse of endurance cannot change the transient and temporal nature of life, and worldly inconsistencies such as injustices and political tyranny remain inevitable and beyond our control. The essential task to face this determinism is to be patient. Patience for Nāser-e Khosrow has three aspects: philosophical, religious and political. On a philosophical level, patience helps one to stay in a moderate position, away from either side of the extreme. On a religious level, it helps us to remain faithful and morally conscious in times of difficulty and misfortune. On a political level, it keeps us away from the humiliation of being part of the corrupt political establishment. It is a form of protest against the inconsistencies of time.

Nāser-e Khosrow recognises the forces of determinism as serving to support the Turks' reign. This implies that the reason why there was no just and legitimate ruler in Khorāsān (namely, a Fatimid Imam), was because firmament and time are against the succession of such a ruler. By referring the triumph of the Turks to natural determinism, Nāser-e Khosrow ideologically *justifies* the failure of the Ismaili Imams to dethrone the Turks. As a result, all that was left from the Ismaili's emancipative mission is a Metacosmic liberation that happens in the afterlife. By relating historical experience (the decline of Khorāsān) to a meta-historical

agent (forces of natural determinism), Nāser-e Khosrow *naturalises* the socio-political decline of his homeland. The decline of Khorāsān was, therefore, no longer the result of human relations; instead, it was part of the natural cycle of life. It was, therefore, inevitable and beyond control. By regarding the historical experience as something beyond control and natural, Nāser-e Khosrow *eternalises* the state of socio-political decline. The actual condition loses its historicity and becomes a phenomenon true for all ages. The real forces behind each actual condition are put aside, and injustice becomes a common story, an inherent part of temporality which must remind the wise reader of the transient and temporary nature of life, at the expense of the historical factors which result in particular cases of injustice and corruption. Moreover, Nāser-e Khosrow suppresses the individuality and particularity of each historical experience and *generalises* one particular historical incident to a fundamental condition beyond any historical context.

By recognising the speaking soul as the Divine substance of human, Nāser-e Khosrow removes the significance of the lived-experience (marginalisation and exile) and the socio-political reality (injustice, plunder and corruption). The place where the liberation happens is no longer this world, but the *Divine* realm, the Metacosm (*jahān-e barin*). Also, the subject of liberation is not the oppressed people, but the speaking soul. As a result, Nāser-e Khosrow's narrative of resistance becomes elitist and subjective, indifferent to collective practice, social experience or social solidarity.

There are two solutions for the condition of decline. One is moral and entails having patience. The other is political and entails promoting the ideas and the rule of the Fatimid Imams as the legitimate and rightful sovereigns. Patience recognises the meta-historical elements as the reasons for injustice (firmament and time); therefore, it hopes for the kind of emancipation that occurs afterlife and beyond the historical reality.

As for the Fatimid state, Nāser-e Khosrow cannot solve the primary contradiction in his *Divan*. If any political experience is doomed due to the temporary and transient nature of being, and if politics is evil due to its engagement with worldly affairs, why would the Fatimid political establishment be different? How can the Fatimids' material and worldly grandeur, that is, their court, palaces, conquests and statesmanship be any different from those of the Caliphs in Baghdad or the Turks in Khorāsān? One answer would be that for Nāser-e Khosrow, religious legitimacy, that is, the rule of the best among Prophet Mohammad's descendants would solve the problem. But this answer only proves that the political alternative and legitimacy for Nāser-e Khosrow has nothing to do with social contradictions or political regulations. The reasons for

the legitimacy of the Imam as a political leader, for Nāser-e Khosrow, are religious and metaphysical. Imam is to reveal the inner and hidden meaning of the religious text because he is holy and from the descendant of the Prophet. This hidden meaning will open the eyes of believers to true religious knowledge. Therefore, knowledge, in its Ismaili context, is redemptive and anti-orthodox, and necessarily political by nature since it stands against the official religious knowledge which is authorised by the *faqih*s. At the same time, it aims for the otherworldly salvation as it regards the worldly life mundane and temporary. Therefore, the subject of the Ismaili discourse, as it deals with the genuine and authentic religious knowledge, is the redemption and liberation of the soul rather than equality and justice in material life. The political struggle of the Ismailis mainly derives from the fact that they found the Abbasids and their political allies as the supporters of the *faqih*s. For them, such division between the political power (the caliphate) and religion (jurisprudence and the *faqih*s) was the sign of disparity and division in religion, and it would bring corruption, ignorance and misguidance. That is why in their alternative, the Ismaili Imam was not only the political leader but the source of the divine and ultimate knowledge. Under the unifying and emancipative rule of the Imam, divisions and disagreements would disappear, and Muslims will no longer suffer from the lack of a rightful and legitimate religious authority. However, this religious and political alternative does not guarantee that the Ismaili political experiment would be any different from that of the Ghaznavid or the Saljuqs since Ismailism did not offer a political discourse that was different from that of Persian Kingship or the Sunni caliphate. It is quite probable that the Ismaili Imams, just like the caliphs and the Turks, would have adopted the principles and procedures of the Persian Kingship if they had the chance to take over the Iranian lands. It is also quite probable that just like the Abbasids, the Fatimids had to establish a system of religious law and give a degree of religious authority to the Ismaili missionaries and jurists had they expanded their territory to a broader region. It is true that in their Egyptian rule, due to the diverse and multiple nature of society, the Ismaili Imams had to exercise a more inclusive and tolerant politics; however, being inclusive and open towards different religious identities or social groups was more the inevitable consequence of managing tribal and religious conflicts rather than the Ismaili political discourse.

In Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*, it is the intellectual and religious aspect of Ismailism which has the dominant voice. However, as he faces the hardships of exile, the Metacosmic and otherworldly aspect of Ismailism gains a bolder presence. Fighting with inequalities, injustice, corruption and tyranny loses its significance as these subjects are regarded as the inevitable

aspects of material life. Instead, possessing the right religious knowledge, the unique and privileged position of the enlightened and conscious subject and the spiritual and otherworldly emancipation become the major themes of Nāser-e Khosrow's exile poetry. This fundamental contradiction, that is, calling the political yet rejecting it at the same time, remains unsolved in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*.

On the one hand, Nāser-e Khosrow becomes thoroughly engaged with the political. Rejecting the dominant political establishment and the religious orthodoxy, questioning the legitimacy of the Turkic Sultans and the Abbasid Caliphs, and advertising for the rule of the Fatimids as a political alternative are some aspects of his political engagement. On the other hand, and at the same time, politics and political engagement becomes contemptible. In Nāser-e Khosrow's ethical and theological thought, no political establishment lasts. All the victorious kings have seen their downfall, and their story tells us how temporary and unstable the state of worldly affairs is. This state of temporality, which includes politics, is the result of natural determinism, enforced by the movements of firmament and time.

In general, natural determinism remains as an ideological realm in Nāser-e Khosrow's *Divan*. It naturalises social contradictions and etherealises the subject of socio-political change. However, Nāser-e Khosrow's depiction of the condition of endurance still holds its cultural power and value with regards to rationalism, human agency, criticising religious alienation and superstitions, and social criticism during the medieval period.

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