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## **A Critical Study on Components of Political Thought in Amir Adel tale by Nizam al-Mulk**

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### **Abstract**

Making historiography about Iran's political thought in Seljuk era is futile without considering Nizam al-Mulk's Siyasatnama. Applying historical approach to several tales in this book, Nizam al-Mulk endeavored to formulate his favorite and pleasant political-religious thought which defines political thought of Sunni Islam. The first and the most prominent and detailed tale is Amir Adel, which is investigated closely in this research by comparing to the other historical texts. This study sheds light on differences and peculiar aspects of Nizam al-Mulk's Amir Adel narration and seeks reasons behind these significant differences in Nizam al-Mulk's religious and political thought. Hence, there are two questions for this research: 1- What are the components of Nizam al-Mulk's political thought; 2- How these components can form his Amir Adel narration.

**Keywords:** Political thought, Amir Adel, Siyasatnama, Nizam al-Mulk, Seljuk.

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## **Introduction**

Nizam al-Mulk is known as one of the most prominent figures in formulation of theoretical and practical base for political thought in Seljuk era. Being a minister more than thirty years, he tried to improve political thought which is our subject of study. He was very successful in his ministry and other affairs, so that historians call his ministration golden age, and have consensus about his ministration as the most successful period of Seljuk era. Nizam al-Mulk formulated his political thoughts precisely with historical narrative under Siyasatnama.

Nizam al-Mulk's Siyasatnama is a historical narrative since it contains narratives, events, and their interpretation. Regarding narrative's outcomes, he tried to prove or to justify his favorite political thoughts. But considering his non-historian occupation and concern which is not discovery of historical facts, Nizam al-Mulk is not loyal to facts and dignity of historiography in some tales and narrates. For his political religious discourse justification, he uses genre of narrative to represent historical facts favorable to his opinion and belief. For this reason, we need both narrative history's literary interpretation and historical interpretation of literary narrative such as Siyasatnama to have correct reading of political thought in Seljuk era. Regarding this approach, the main issues of this research are firstly finding components of political thought's of Nizam al-Mulk and secondly condition of these components in making of plot for Amir Adel tale.

There is no uncertainty in Nizam al-Mulk's view of history as a noetic resource which is useful in achieving cognition and alleging his political religious claim. In fact, his epistemological approach affected by Shafi branch of Islam. Hence, the texts are basic to this quest and principal power for adjudication (Jaberi, 2010: 160).

However this purpose is occasion to use history for justifying Nizam al-Mulk's political-religious discourse and he doesn't consider historical facts in some narrative in order to achieve his purpose, and one of them is Amir Adel which is about Yaqub ibn al-Layth al-Saffar and his brother Amr ibn al-Layth.

Considering the mentioned points, researcher's main claim is about tale's interpretation in single context which is Nizam al-Mulk's faith and fixation to religious and political discourse generally and Shafi particularly.

## **Amir Adel tale; Nizam al-Mulk's framework of expression**

Amir Adel tale is about Abu Ibrahim Ismail ibn Ahmad and Nizam al-Mulk decided to reminisce his great kingdom and beneficence, but considering context before reimburse to Abu Ibrahim Ismail ibn Ahmad, he narrated history of Saffarid dynasty. Certainly his

sequence is intentional and with his roguish style joined unpleasant history of Saffarid dynasty to justice and beneficence of Abu Ibrahim Ismail ibn Ahmad. So we can consider history of Saffarid dynasty as an introduction to the main tale which is more important and detailed than introduction and present research investigate tale's introduction to the end of battle between Yaqub ibn al-Layth and Al-Mu'tamid.

In the beginning of the tale, Nizam al-Mulk's speech about authority of Yaqub ibn al-Layth in Sistan and Khorasan is concordant and congruent with historical texts. However this concordance and similarity does not prolongs. He wrote in the next lines of the tale about of Yaqub ibn al-Layth: "he seized the whole of Iraq. Propagandist deceived him and he secretly swore allegiance to Ismailis. He hardened his heart against the caliph of Baghdad. Then he mustered the armies of Khorasan and Iraq and prepared to march to Baghdad to kill the caliph and overthrow the house of Abbasids" (Nizam al-Mulk, 1968: 20). This point disassociate it from other historical texts.

There is no speech and reference to these two charges, namely overthrowing the house of Abbasids and swore allegiance to Ismailis in other historical sources. Indeed, Nizam al-Mulk might have some sources which were not available to other, but lack of reference to Siyasatnama's narratives in other historical text like Tārikh-e Sistān and the complete history by Ali ibn al-Athir.

### **Yaqub's campaign to Baghdad and its reasons**

As mention above; Nizam al-Mulk in his narrative about Yaqub's campaign to Baghdad discusses about two accusations: converting to Ismailism and overthrowing Abbasid Caliphate. He also mentions these accusations in other parts of narrative to have more impression (Ibid: 21). However other historical resources such as History of the Prophets and Kings (Tabari) have no reference to these accusations. Though Tabari has no clear and explicit speech about Yaqub's intention for campaigning and he preferred to be neutral in this case but illustration of Yaqub's corps which have more than 10000 horses and mules; lot of Dinar and Dirham which were hard to haul, and lot of musk and amber (Tabari, 1979 :8/23). So that reader interpretations are confidence of Yaqub's about war's outcome and his expectation which was not exhaustive battle.

However other sources unravel Yaqub's confidence and peace of mind and they contend about reason which was his correspondence and friendship with Al Muwaffaq (Al-Mu'tamid's brother and crown prince), namely Gardezi contend: "Yaqub attempted to conquer Baghdad and had intention of Al-Mu'tamid's dismissal and succession of Al Muwaffaq. Al Muwaffaq

told this situation to Al-Mu'tamid and showed Yaqub's letters to him". The other historical sources contend about their correspondence but they give no speech about Yaqub's intention. Also Tārikh-e Sistān's author explains narrative from Al Muwaffaq's invitation since he became aware of Yaqub's intention and in his letter wrote "this is our grace and opportunity and he will come to our visitation, and all our empire belong to you and be our ruler and all of us obey you and we are at your service and we are satisfy of sermon".

One other historical source, namely Hndvshah, contends about position of Al Muwaffaq and describes his success "He [Al-Mu'tamid] was coward and his brother [Al Muwaffaq] prevailed his government and it is unusual and whimsical. Sermon, coins and empire had his name, however command, injunction, order, dismissal and resolution were in dominance of his brother (Hndvshah Nakhjavani, 1978: 189). Also Ibn Khallikan mentioned Al Muwaffaq's talents and Al-Mu'tamid as symbol of Caliphate. He contends about Al Muwaffaq as real Caliphate and mentions his correspondence with Yaqub ibn al-Layth and his invitation to Baghdad (Ibn Khallikan, 1832: 317).

So there is no vague point in hauling Dinar and Dirham, musk and amber, horses and mules instead of military equipment for this great triumph. But about Al Muwaffaq and his commitment after those correspondence some historical texts suggest lack of elders' accompaniment (Ibid 319). Also, the other possibility is craftiness in those correspondence. In this case, Yaqub did not expect such a war and according to Ibn Khallikan narrative, after his defeat, in answer to elders whom rebuke him said "I have no opinion about war, and no doubt in my victory and I guess I can make it with correspondence but my destiny was different" (Ibid: 321). According to Siyasatnama in conversations between Caliph's ambassador and corps leader: Ambassador asks: "do you agree with Yaqub and accompany him?" corps leader replies: "we are unaware of it and have no opinion about his battle with Caliph" which is another evidence which indicate Yaqub's purpose was not a war.

The other important point in Siyasatnama is lack of reference to Al Muwaffaq in question of war, as he was first man in the war and Caliph's victory. Tabari contends about Mohammed bin Ali bin al-Taie famous poet of era and his poem in veneration of Al Muwaffaq's courage in Battle of Dayr al-'Aqul (Tabari, 1979: 24/8). According to historical texts which mention earlier Al-Mu'tamid had symbolic role however Nizam al-Mulk' did not mention his brother and certainly it is not because of his brevity concern. If we ponder upon about silence and its reason, we should follow political proponent of Nizam al-Mulk.

## **Nizam al-Mulk's political thought and caliphate**

According to Nizam al-Mulk's view, Amir Adel has talent and capacity to justify some of Sunnite political thought, and certainly there are some irrelevant narratives in this process. So in this case the only assumption was inefficiency of Al Muwaffaq in his political-religious discourse and purpose and simultaneously it was against its oneness. Nizam al-Mulk did not mention Al Muwaffaq, because of his companionship with Yaqub in caliph dismissal, debilitation of caliph, and its effect, and assumption of overthrowing caliph with corps and fraud, and to present unity of caliphate without issuing any problem. Hence, brevity and oversight were not Nizam al-Mulk's reasons for his silence about Al Muwaffaq, but his inclination to dominate some areas such as resource, noetic, and discourse which determine Sunnite political thought.

This point demonstrates importance of caliphate in Sunnite political thought generally and Nizam al-Mulk as prominent figure particularly. So there is no claim about his non-attachment to caliphate as evidence to lack of reference to caliphate as an institute which gave legitimation to kings and rulers and all suggestion about caliphate should be interpreted regarding their kingdom but not their value. So his silence about caliphate and their inferiority in comparison to ruler demonstrate Nizam al-Mulk's idea about caliphate which lost its power, and cannot regain it specially in Iran (Tabatabai, 2011: 77).

However these claims which mentioned are not defensible and historical texts do not prove them and have different points about them, namely friendship between Nizam al-Mulk and caliph breach earlier claims, so that Khwandamir describes their first encountering: "Malik-Shah wanted to satisfy Al-Muqtadi so he commanded all great man whether Arab or Iranian to walk to Dar Al Khalifa; and when caliph realized, he sent a messenger to the place and wanted Nizam al-Mulk to ride a horse, so I mounted and all great man follow me afoot and when I reached Dar Al Khalifa, I sat on the seat which was great and full of ornament and other great men were around me and everybody including Sadat, scholars, and grand brought out robe from Dar Al Khalifa and my robe has the name of erudite and righteous vizier and from rise of Islam until now, nobody had this position" (Khwandamir, 1954: 2/496).

The majority of his effort in his ministration was to save dignity of caliphate against Seljuk dynasty and he had studious endeavor to balance these two power institutions which created legitimacy. So regarding this purpose his ministration could be interpretable. Also foundation of Nezamiyeh and choosing most reliable figure for its presidency to promote religiosity favorable to caliphate and creating marriage relationship between them to stabilize their friendship and Siyasatnama which honor caliphate and specially Amir Adel tale which is very important in his effort in glorification of caliphate. So all these effort demonstrate Nizam al-

Mulk tireless effort to maintain dignity and status of this institution which give religious legitimacy and simultaneously surviving Sunni Islam.

Nizam al-Mulk considered his purpose as prophecy and his servant quotation is evidence for it, when Nizam al-Mulk prepared for pilgrimage “a person with pacifying face encounter with me and gave me a letter and said this is fiduciary for vizier, for god sake give it to him. So I took that letter and went to the Nizam al-Mulk’s tent, and then gave it to Nizam al-Mulk and as he read it and began to cry and his cry made me remorseful about that letter...and then he gave it back to me which is about a dream of Muhammad the prophet: he commanded him to tell Nizam al-Mulk that his pilgrimage is here, and why he has intention of Mecca, you are not the Turk concomitance and you should know employers’ needs and problems” (Khwandamir, 1954: 497-498/2).

His dream of the prophet and depositing divine mission is very similar to divine mission which prophet gave to Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari in dream (Sabki, 1954: 2/245). Certainly this similarity has some reasons and illustrates his spiritual and religious aspect of his mission than its political and mundane aspects. So this point should be acknowledged about Nizam al-Mulk’s decision to save caliphate which was symbol of religious and political power and he took no care to Seljuk dynasty. So that Sabki contends about Nizam al-Mulk’s death “since Malik-Shah saw Nizam al-Mulk as obstacle in dismissal of the caliph, he planned his assassination before arriving Baghdad” (Ibid: 4/324).

### **Animosity with Shia**

Although, maintaining the caliphate is central to Nizam al-Mulk’s political thought, there are other components in his discourse and political thought. The other dimensions of his political thought will be unveiled by following Amir Adel tale; one of them is religiosity which indicates animosity with other Islamic schools and particularly Shia. This animosity made Nizam al-Mulk identify Yaqub liable to Ismailism to justify other components of his political thoughts.

However, historical texts have no idea about Yaqub’s liability to Ismailism. Basically there is no clear information and evidence in resource about Yaqub’s faith. But there are few evidences about his religious inclination in historical texts. Namely Al-Tabari whom mentioned a letter which had read to the Muslim congregation by Muhammad ibn Tahir after Yaqub’s defeat of Battle of Dayr al-'Aqul. And its important point is caliph addressed Yaqub as Almlvn Almareq. Considering Mareq in its three different definitions in Arabic language: rebellious, exiting from religion –that refers to Khawarij in that era- or wayward. But none of

them implicate his inclination to Ismailism. However Tabari uses Mareq for Bahram Chobin whom rebelled against Khosrow and the word rebellious has used exactly (Tabari, 1979: 1/588). So it seems that the word Mareq is equal to rebellious against caliph and not exiting from religion.

Masoudi narrative has no evidence about Yaqub's motivation in campaign of Baghdad in his opposition to official religion but indicates his positive intention about religion. Masoudi contends about Yaqub's poem for this campaign and his protest to Al-Mu'tamid, slaves, and his accomplice about religious degradation and his inattention to Zanj Rebellion: "I occupied Fars and Khorasan and I never lose my hope in occupation of Iraq, when you left religious preposterous and it has become obsolete like old customs, I with god companionship, rebel since the caliph is impotent".

Beside historical narratives which contain no evidence about Yaqub's inclination to Ismailism and even Masoudi contends about his honor and zeal about religion, and this point should be considered about regions such as Ray and Jebal and promoter of Ismailism whom being sent there some years after Yaqub presence (Daftar, 1999: 61). Nizam al-Mulk himself contends about Isma'ilism in second part of book and mentions its promoter and their futile attempt in Jebal region third hegira century. "So he reach to Ray...and remain there for a long time and he can't share his secret to other until achieve one with thousand skill and learn that religions" (Nizam al-Mulk, 1968: 283) and this point indicates historical inconsistency.

In the next lines, Nizam al-Mulk brought a new claim and of course it was inconsistency with previous claims about Yaqub. Accordingly, "Yaqub rebels and integrates with Shia and his purpose is to discriminate us and empower our enemy" (Ibid: 21). So this point is strange and notable that in previous lines Yaqub was accused to Ismailism; however, in here he had been accused for been Shia.

Nizam al-Mulk contends about names of Batinism in Siyasatnama: once upon a time they have names and epithets and have variety of names in each city. In Aleppo and Egypt they had been called Ismaili, they were Zindīq in Baghdad, Transoxiana and Ghazni, Mobaraki in Kufa, Ravandi and Burqae in Basra, Khalafi and Bateni in Ray, Mohammareh in Gorgan, Mbyzh in Sham, Saedi in Maraco, Jenabi in Lahas and Bahrain, and Bateni in Isfahan. Their purposes include discriminating Islam, animosity with Ahl al-Bayt and seducing people (ibid: 311).

### **Ethnicity, result of religious dogmatism**

Nizam al-Mulk mentioned other important points and of course he was consistent with historical facts. According to Siyasatnama when caliph's ambassador entered Yaqub's camp

and accused him of companionship with Shia and discriminating Abbasid Caliphate, that situation dissented Iraqi and Khorasani soldiers. One group in answer to ambassador said: from him we have received subsistence and by virtue of service to him we enjoy the position and prosperity. The majority said, we are not aware of these circumstances of which the commander of the faithful speaks, we do not think that he will oppose the commander of faithful; hereafter if he openly rebels, we shall entirely disapprove and in the hour of battle we shall come to your aid, this party consisted of army commanders of Khorasan (Ibid: 21). Also Tabari mentioned that dissention, but without Khorasan name: “when they saw caliph as a leader of corps, they betrayed Yaqub and shared caliph and then broke Yaqub’s corps”.

Mentioning Khorasanian as main supporter of Abbasid Caliphate demonstrates validity of his perception about political-religious thoughts of Khorasanians. And in fact Khorasan was particular to Nizam al-Mulk’s political thought since it was strategic region and simultaneously its religious aspect. Furthermore its religious-political history and concurrency with rise of Abbasid Caliphate confirm particular position of Khorasan.

The Abbasid revolution was turning point in primeval history of Islam. They shared their power with more people and reduced differences between Arab and Mawla and tribe’s advantages lost its previous values. And Mawla achieved their sociological and political rights. Therefore, the important point was dissociation between Mawla generally, and Iranian with rancorous movement particularly. Mawla which became main enemy of Umayyad Caliphate in 66 AH after Mukhtar uprising, however Abbasid conquest changed this enmity to association and friendship. The Mawla, particularly Iranian whom converted to Islam, improved foundation of caliphate and Sunni political discourse using theoretical and practical political thought of ancient Iran such as ministry, epistle, court affairs and tradition, and divine rights of government.

In 144 AH after Hosni’s elder being captured, Mansour gave speech to justify his affair for Khorasanian and appreciated them as they empowered Abbasid, “you are our supporters and followers and you have resurrected our honor and falsehood expunged with your effort and gave back our inheritance to us”. Tabari also contended “you are our followers and friends and member of our government. And if you didn’t swear allegiance to us, there was no better choice. After Umayyad, attacked us, we lost our honor...we were in Ta’if, Levant and then in Sherrat, until God send you to us and you resurrected our honor and expunged falsehood (Tabari, 1979: 4/534).

It is very important to understand Khorasan attitude toward Sunni Islam generally and Abbasid caliphate particularly in perception of Nizam al-Mulk orientation whom himself native of Tous. Regarding reports of geographical texts, the majority of Khorasanian were



supporters of Abbasid Caliphate as a base to save Sunni Islam. Al-Muqaddasi in his detailed report in *the Best Divisions for Knowledge of the Regions* contends: populations of Khorasan are supporters of Abbasid government, and when God sent Islam, they accepted it the best and sooner (Al-Muqaddasi, 1982: 2/426).

Al-Muqaddasi also suggested long relationship between Khorasanian and Abbasid caliphate and contended “when As-Saffah took the power, they had the best relationship with caliphate and were the best servant and caliphate treated them the best” (Ibid: 2/ 428). Al-Muqaddasi added hadith of Muhammad “In future Khorasanian are very helpful in restoring religion”.

Nizam al-Mulk in *Siyasatnama* has many suggestions to religious orthodoxy and faithfulness of Khorasan to Abbasid and Seljuk and wrote in their commemoration: “And administrators from Khorasan, who were of the Hanafi or Shafi sects; both these sects are orthodox like Turks, and hostile to Rafidis, Batinis and other rebel” (Nizam al-Mulk, 1968: 97). Also this confidence shows itself in Yaqub tale, however there was no need to make change in historical contexts regarding his political religious discourse. And while there is no doubt about Khorasan accompaniment, Nizam al-Mulk tried to have more political application in this tale. And this application has different options for accompaniment and according to Nizam al-Mulk’s tale caliph’s ambassador contended about Yaqub rebellion and his subversive purposes among Iraqi and Khorasanian corps, but at the end regarding Nizam al-Mulk’s narrative, Khorasanian accompanied caliphate. So that the readers’ perception is glorification of Khorasan.

This point reveals position of Iraq and Iraqi in Nizam al-Mulk’s political thought. Nizam al-Mulk as a Shafi was very sensitive to Iraq as a center of Shia. He considered Iraq as a weak point to Abbasid caliphate and Seljuk kingdom, however caliphate’s center located there, so Nizam al-Mulk tried to counteract all impacts and thuds from this center to his favorable political thought. Also in *Siyasatnama* without heeding Iraqi, indicate his animosity: “I let no Iraqi secretary inscribe...therefore Iraq became free from unorthodox” (Ibid: 97). As well as, he would like to enhance Khorasan position as caliph informed khorasanian support, he wrote: “the fence verdict among us, and your troops is mine” (Ibid: 22).

### **Turning point of tale; concise description of political thought and its trauma**

When the two corps encountered, caliph and Yaqub were at the center of their campaign. Nizam al-Mulk skillfully demonstrated his art of writing and his component of political thought using caliph’s ambassador language, and made turning point of narrative. When caliph’s ambassador cried: “Yaqub is rebellious, and his purpose is to resign caliph and replace him by his adverse and to expunge Sunnite and unfold innovation” (Ibid: 22). He

demonstrated five basic elements using ambassador language. The first is rebellion, second is discrimination, assignment to Ismailism, and then elimination of Sunnite and unorthodoxy.

Each case gives special meaning to the text considering other. The first is Nizam al-Mulk's referral to the Ya'qub's rebellion which has some suggestion before. But the sequence of other cases realize this term: "every rebellion against Abbasid caliphate, expunge Sunnite and reveal innovation". So that eradication of rebellion saves religion and faith. The important point is perching Abbasid caliphate among these two terms: rebellion and religion. And he saw caliphate as a base to maintain Sunni Islam and its destruction by disobedient is occasion for religious annihilation.

Nizam al-Mulk's effort to eliminate each rebellion from Ismailism and his effort to maintain friendship between Seljuk and Abbasid demonstrates his particular political thought. His narrative of Ya'qub tale indicates his concern about dark relationship between them. And he hoped Ya'qub's unpleasant ending became edification for Malik-Shah to avoid rebellion and maintain Sunni political thought. And at the end structure of his political thought came with his concerns and the past became regular so that explanation of actual events need paraphrasing past events; therefore, reconstructing the past was necessary for Nizam al-Mulk.

## **Conclusion**

This research considers Nizam al-Mulk's fixation and belief to political religious of Sunni Islam generally and Shafi sect particularly and Abbasid Caliphate. By comparing some historical texts which belong to different eras, some differences have been identified and some of them are significant, such as Ya'qub and caliph encountering, lack of referral to correspondence between Ya'qub and Al-Muwaffaq, replacing Abbasid caliphate by Ismaili caliphate. These cases demonstrate that Nizam al-Mulk's political thought and his effort to maintain caliphate as a clear example of maintaining Sunni Islam.

Amir Adel tale, which is at the beginning of the narrative, demonstrates Nizam al-Mulk's concerns of enmity between Abbasid Caliphate and Seljuk dynasty. This theoretical effort demonstrates his historical approach in *Siyasatnama*. A close reading reveals Nizam al-Mulk's sympathy with Abbasid Caliphate and importance of Caliphate in his political thought. Therefore, Amir Adel tale should be considered as a prominent cultural structure of political discourse of Sunnite in rivalry between different factions.

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