

The Quarterly Journal of Iranian Islamic Period History, Volume 12, Issue 27,  
Summer 00/21, Pages 65-77

Received Date:  
99/04/05 (2020/6/25)

Accepted Date:  
99/10/27 (2021/1/16)

***Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tusi, the Guide of the Mongol Ilkhans  
towards Iranian and Islamic Civilization  
(Based on the Writings of Khajeh Nasir)***

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**Abstract**

From the time of the Mongol invasion of the Ismaili castles to the present day, one of the points of concern for many people has been the reason for Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's collaboration with prominent Muslim scholars and non-Muslim Mongols. Many have accounted Khajeh's political behavior during the rule of Ilkhanate as his hostility towards denominations and the Sunnis. Many others have known it as part of his opportunistic character and claimed that he has done so to achieve a certain political status. However, by carefully studying the works of Khajeh, one could find other logical and fundamental reasons for Khajeh's behaviors that unfortunately have been mostly disregarded. By reading his works, many Islamic legal, historical, psychological, philosophical, and other kinds of reasons can be found that deserve paying attention. Khajeh's prominent personality trait is related to philosophy and Kalaam (scholastic theology); hence, it only makes sense to seek the reason behind this collaboration in Khajeh's frame of thought. Khajeh's most important work in this area is Akhlaaq e Naasiri, in which the most important topic is Madina Faazila.

**Keywords:** Mongols, Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tousi, Iran.

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## Introduction

The massive casualties and destructions that Mongols' aggression against Iran caused at the beginning have shadowed over the historians' minds and unfortunately led to the misconception that Mongols' period lacked any valuable achievements and does not hold any importance or value for attention. This is while looking at this period with an objective point of view reveals many invaluable material and spiritual gains for Iranians during this time that our ancestors would have understood if they distanced themselves from the irrational stereotyped biases and scrutinized carefully. They could have helped Iran to have a multidimensional development through conservation, continuation, and evolution of the mentioned-above legacies.

One of the elements of these valuable legacies is the fundamental thought frames and pragmatic yet logical methods used by great figures of Iranian history when confronting the problems of the society. The thought frame and political attitude of Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tousi, the well-renowned Persian scientist, astronomer, philosopher, scholastic theologian, and Islamic legal specialist, with Mongol non-Muslim Ilkhanate who were not exposed to any form of Islamic civilization deserves much attention and deliberation. We learn about this important issue through comparing and corresponding Khajeh's political behavior... and written works. He has many books, but the one that is helpful for this objective is his *Akhlaaq e Naasiri*. Part of this book is dedicated to municipal politics, which follows a political-moral theme. Although not all the themes and subjects of this book were invented and created by Khajeh and he was not the first person to point out many of them, as some of them can be found in the works of Ibn-Maskooye, al-Farabi, and Plato, there is no doubt in the authorship of *Akhlaaq e Naasiri* by Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tousi. More than any of his other works, this book helps us in understanding the reasons behind Khajeh's political behavior. Though the book does not provide us with much help to understand other reasons behind Khajeh's political behavior, such as historical, psychological, or religious reasons, it guides us to a reason based on which Muslim scholars rarely acted in collaboration with non-Muslim Mongols. Therefore, just as we need to refer to *Sharaye' al-Islam* if we are to comprehend the reasons behind the political behavior of scholar Helli,

the infamous Islamic legal specialist of the same period, or refer to *al-Lama' al-Dameshqiyyah* for Shahid Aval, we have to study *Akhlaaq e Naasiri* in case of Khajeh. In this book, the subject of "Madina Faazila" (utopia) is the cornerstone and perhaps all other subjects and topics are built around it. Hence, the topic of Madina Faazila has been Khajeh's most important theoretical principle behind his political performance.

Collection of paradoxes and their active presence in human life have been a topic of interest since the earliest times. Ever since, the wise people of societies have recognized not only humans, but also the whole universe as full of, and integrated with, paradoxes. Many of them have recognized as human's duty to know them and use his free will to choose the right way that leads to prosperity. Early philosophers in ancient Greek, such as Plato, or in the Islamic world, such as al-Farabi, and then in mid-Islamic period, such as Khajeh Nasir, have all clearly explained the world order on the same basis. In their collective opinion, humans' civil life can be divided into two parts: one Faazila city, and one non-Faazila city. Therefore, we are aiming here to analyze the role of Khajeh Nasir's belief in Madina Faazila in his collaboration with non-Muslim Ilkhanate, and show that his particular political attitude was not due to Shi'ite anger or sectarian hostilities against Sunnis, but to a very exquisite, significant, and epistemological basis.

### **Review of Literature**

Numerous books and articles have been written about Khajeh Nasir al-Din al-Tusi. Razavi (2013) has written several articles about Khajeh, among which is the article on the discourse of restraint in the non-Muslim era<sup>1</sup> of the Ilkhans which is somewhat closer to the subject of this article. But he has not specifically dealt with the role of Khajeh in leading the Ilkhans, relying on his book entitled, "Nasirean Ethics" with the focus on the utopia. Many articles have been published about the utopia from the point of view of Khajeh, but none of them have addressed the purpose of Khajeh to re-discuss the issue of the utopia in the time of Hulaku. He wanted to educate the Mongols about the proper way of governing.

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1. Razavi, Seyyed Abolfazl (2013). Nasir al-Din Tusi and the discourse of restraint in the non-Muslim era of the Ilkhans. *Scientific and Research Quarterly of the History of Islamic Culture and Civilization*, 4(13), pp. 93-108.

### **Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tousi before and after Mongols' Aggression**

Khajeh Nasir al-Din Muhammad Tousi (death at 672 AH), was born in Jamadi al-Aval of 597 AH in Jahrood of Qom or in Toos. His father, Muhammad Ibn-Hasan, was one of the famous Islamic legal specialists, scholars, and specialists in religious narratives in Toos. Khajeh spent his childhood and adolescence years studying in the classrooms of well-known teachers and mastered different fields of literature, Islamic narratives, Islamic law, Hikmat (a form of philosophy), theology, mathematics, astronomy, and natural sciences; yet his fame mostly came from rational fields of philosophy and Kalaam (scholastic theology) to which he confesses himself: "Because my inner tendency was toward distinguishing right and wrong, I deliberated in fields such as Hikmat and Kalaam." (Tousi, 1956, p.39) Throughout his life, Khajeh brought together many invaluable books, such as *Tajrid al-E'teqad va Qava'ed al-A'qayed*, *Fosool al-A'qayed va Resale Imam*, *Sharh al-Ishaarat e Ibn-Sina*, translation of Ibn-Maskooye's *Taharat al-Iraq*, *Akhlaaq e Naasiri* that is somehow a supplement to Ibn-Maskooye's book, *Resale Mo'ayene*, *Akhlaaq e Mohtashami*, *Rozat ol-Qoloob*, *Asas al-Iqtibas*, *Resale Tavala va Tabara*, *Tahrir e Majisti*, *Tahrir e Euclid*, *Tahrir e Akar Manalaus*, and *Resale Matloob al-Mo'menin*.

Before Mongols' aggression, Khajeh Nasir had voiced his interest in connecting to the people of power at the time of Ismailies or Abbasid Caliphate several times and had spent many years in the castles of Ismailiyeh, maximizing his use of the scientific context available there and creating valuable works. With Hulagu Khan's capture of the castles of Ismailiyeh, Khajeh surrendered and was spared from being killed because of his certain skills, particularly in the field of astronomy; he even gradually grew closer to Hulagu Khan and was appointed as his minister and counselor. The Shia Khajeh Nasir could offer valuable services to the Islamic world through this collaboration with Hulagu. First, he mostly prevented mass murders of ordinary people. Second, he saved the lives of many Muslim, and particularly Shia, scientists and scholars and even brought them to the scientific centers that he had created himself, provided them with privileges and endowments, and encouraged them to produce as much knowledge in different areas as

possible. Third, he spared the Islamic civilization from being destroyed by Mongols who lacked a highly respected culture and civilization and gathered thousands of copies of books that were about to be destroyed in scientific centers such as the Maragheh Observatory. Fourth, he strengthened the Shi'ite tradition in different ways, including: (1) improving religious schools in different places, particularly in the city of Helleh, (2) returning the donated properties of Shias to Shia guardians, (3) helping authors in bringing together many works on Shia beliefs, (4) selecting Shia scholars, scientists, and bureaucrats and introducing them to the Mongol administrative system for appointment to important Shia positions. Fifth, he familiarized the Ilkhanate with Islam, its laws, and the Shi'ite tradition, and caused their support of Shias.

It can be said that Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tusi was the savior of Islamic sciences, sciences that were on the verge of disappearance because of Mongols' aggression. Khajeh's services to the Islamic world are undeniable, but since the capture of Baghdad and the death of the last Abbasid Khalifa, ordered by Hulagu, is known to have related to and depended on Khajeh's opinion and insistence, many were caught in a political movement, consciously or unconsciously, that aimed at misrepresenting and undervaluing Khajeh's great role in reviving, improving, and developing the Islamic civilization.

### **Politics in Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tusi's Opinion**

In Khajeh's point of view, politics is an inseparable part of humans and their being. In his opinion, humans are naturally and fundamentally social and civil, because they have to communicate with each other throughout life. Via this communication, they eliminate each other's basic needs and collaborate with each other. For this goal to be realized, this connection shall be organized and the way it should be organized is for every person to hold their own distinctive position. This is how Madina (city) will be created and the truth behind "Humans are naturally civil" be realized (Tousi, 1994, pt 251) In Khajeh's opinion, in this Madina "there is a requirement for some sort of maneuver that convinces people of the position they deserve, gives them their share, prevents one from encroaching or seizing others' rights, and makes them work in a job where they are responsible for acts of assistance; this maneuver is called politics." (Tousi, 1994, p. 252) Therefore, in Khajeh's opinion politics is

necessary and essential for Madina, based on which justice will be delivered in the city; hence, the true objective that is virtues will be achieved. At the top level, one tries to bring others toward virtuousness as well (*Ibid*, p. 70). Therefore, in Khajeh's point of view, humans cannot escape politics since earning virtuousness is one of their natural desires.

In Khajeh's view, humankind inevitably has to have knowledge of good and evil, and prosperity and misery, and after gaining the knowledge, has to work towards prosperity. In fact, in Khajeh's view, politics is regulating the relationships of the people in society and bringing justice to them. To achieve this goal through rationality, laws shall be made with humans' best interest in mind (*Ibid*, p. 304). In Khajeh's opinion justice will not be realized unless an integration of rationality and religious law occurs (Tousi, 1956, chap. 34). Hence, only someone can try to bring justice to a society who, in addition to being rational, has sufficient knowledge of Islamic law. Naturally, in Islamic law, it is a duty to correct the matters of Muslims, arrest them, and follow on the issue of Haq on-Naas ("The right of the people", the term is used when one's right is taken away undeservingly). Such policies are the "highest" politics (politics faazila), aiming to create Madina Faazila; a Madina in which there will be no sign of corruption, tyranny, encroachment, domination, greed, lechery, and more.

#### **D Deserving Ruler in Khajeh's opinion**

Khajeh spent a great deal of his life in a period when Iran's rulers only knew force. In fact, the rulers were mostly powerful people lacking knowledge and culture, holding positions in the political system. In contrast to the ruling class, Khajeh believed in goal-oriented politics and that politics stay strong with wisdom. In his opinion, a wise man must be forward-looking, lawful, and just to be able to realize all of this. He believed that a wise ruler "... must demand people to abide by the rules of justice and virtue, because just as body finds stability in nature, and nature in self-consciousness, and self-consciousness in rationality, cities find stability in their monarchs, and monarchs in politics, and politics in wisdom. If wisdom is recognized in the city and righteousness respected, a system will be formed and virtuousness will be paid attention to. On the other hand, if wisdom distances, abasement of honor will happen and

if honor is disrespected, the value of a land will be lost, and problems will rise, and the rites of friendship will be outdated, and a blessing will turn into a curse.” (Tousi, 1994, p. 309) In this point of view, if a wise ruler bases his politics on wisdom, people will want wisdom and will begin behaving justly following their ruler’s model, and hence, a society will be guided towards virtuousness. This is because in his opinion, “if the wisdom behind knowing things be what it should be, and if standing up and taking action be how it should be, it will reach the virtuousness that knows it as much as possible with human self-consciousness.” (Tousi, 1998, p. 37) Therefore, it can be concluded that at a time when one’s credit and significance depended on his force and power, and when the society was moving in an indecent path in terms of management, Khajeh had tried to enlighten the society and enforce or encourage undeserving people of power to change in some ways.

### **The Horizon before Khajeh Nasir**

To clarify the different angles that can be taken to look at Khajeh’s vision, his famous work *Akhlaaq e Naasiri* needs to be addressed; Khajeh’s political philosophy is extensively explained in this book. In Khajeh’s opinion, societies have different political systems that match their goals, and parts and structure of the society. Every one of these systems is different from others based on their ability to lead people to virtuousness. One of these systems is Madina Faazila. In “the highest city”, people have good objectives and are far from evil, and since all have good end goals, their good behavior follows. Therefore, no tension or conflict is seen among people and being united as well as almsgiving is very bold among them. Hence, they are the most successful on the road to virtuousness and will eventually find prosperity, because their doings are based on justness and ingrained with wisdom: “But their majority vote was that believing in an origin and resurrection of people and deeds that happen in between the two were righteous and compatible, while their majority in terms of action was such that everyone knew one way to achieve virtuousness and the deeds by them were done in the context of wisdom, standing on self-cleansing, rational strength, and their destiny tied to the rules of justice and political conditions” (Tousi, 1994, p. 283). In Khajeh’s opinion, the chiefdom of Madina Faazila should be in the hands of the wisemen, because they are

qualified more than anyone to bring justice. Since they are merits themselves, they will put meritocracy high on their agenda: “The chief of Madina who is the leader, and who is the great monarch and the righteous chief of the chiefs, would bring every tribe to their own location and turf, and manage their superiority and service matters in a way that every people would be subordinates to another people and superiors to yet another, until it gets to a people who have no superiority and are absolute subordinates. The people of this Madina will be like the creatures of the world in terms of organization and each will be like a step of many steps of creation that fall between the first cause and the latest effect; and this is standing up to the divine tradition of absolute wisdom behind events.” (*Ibid*, p. 305) He writes somewhere else, “The second condition in justness is to look into the moods and actions of the people of Madina and determine each person’s status based on merit and talent.” (*Ibid*, p. 284) Meritocracy is obvious in the above-mentioned passages; so, not only merits are distinctly defined in Khajeh’s opinion, he also must be one of them and act on the details of this definition and appoint them to executive positions.

Khajeh’s Madina Faazila acts as an abstract and mental picture that is placed before everyone and they can assess their own behavior with looking at it and try to get their actions closer to the idea. This duty is not just for politicians and rulers; all social classes must find this duty, act on it, and furthermore, try to awaken and enlighten others and take them with themselves. For example, he writes about educators and preachers, “They are the people who take the masses and the subordinates to added levels of virtuousness and invite the public of Madina to what the first tribe (the highest people) of Madina believes, so whoever has potential will rise from his status based on their advisement and counseling.” (*Ibid*, p. 286) Khajeh believes in another responsibility for people, and particularly those involved in executive matters, and that is an attempt to promote justness in society. “A population that keeps justness among the people of Madina, who abides by the mandates of Islam in case of taking and giving sentences, and encourage equality and equity” (*Ibid*). Khajeh thinks that in Madina Faazila, the responsibility of the wise ruler is to come up with requirements and laws that lead people to prosperity, which is achieving virtuousness. Albeit, Khajeh does not comment on the process of coming up with these laws and does not say what the



position of Islamic law or common practice is in this law making.

Khajeh Nasir accounts some characteristics for wise and highly-regarded (Faazilaneh) leadership of the society and says, “Who wants to rule must have seven properties: first, a sense of fatherhood; second, excellence in endeavors; third, consistency in opinion; fourth, full determination; fifth, patience in times of difficult sufferings; sixth, material wealth; and seventh, righteous supporters.” (*Ibid*, pp. 301-302) He recognized every person with these conditions not just as qualified for, but as holding a duty to rule Madina Faazila. “Ruling is truly the right of a wise man who can heal when it is not well, and who can rise in rebellion...” (*Ibid*). This can be a narrative of Iran’s situation at the time of Mongols.

Khajeh’s political performance in Mongol period can be evaluated based on the subjects discussed above. Khajeh’s political performance during the rule of Mongol Ilkhanate has actually been an attempt to get closer to creating a Madina Faazila, because he himself says that getting to know non-Faazila cities is a tool to better know Madina Faazila and trying to achieve it. “Societies are divided into two: ... Faazila cities ... [and] non-Faazila cities. Faazila cities are only one type, ... but non-Faazila cities are three types: first, Madina Jaahila (the ignorant city); ... second, Madina Faasiqa (the sinful city); ... and third, Madina Zaalla (the lost city). ... Each one of these cities breaks into infinite sub-groups... And the purpose of these cities is awareness to take other cities to that status with effort.” (*Ibid*, p. 280) He writes somewhere else, “Creation of Faazila cities and chiefdom of valued people from necessary cities and cities of people is easier and more possible than from other cities.” (*Ibid*, p. 289) Khajeh advises Abaqa Khan, the second Mongol Ilkhan, to be constantly patient and not get angry; he advises him to not breach the rights and livelihood of “charity givers”, “orphans”, “the property of those who are absent”, and “the property donated to public”.

Based on what mentioned above, it can be understood that Khajeh’s intention from closeness to Mongols had been realizing the idea of Madina Faazila, because he believes that achieving it is possible.

## **Conclusion**

Khajeh's period is the same time as Mongols' aggression and their consolidation of power in Iran. Considering that Khajeh is one of the scientific, religious, and political elite of his time and Mongols, on the other hand, were not accepted among people for a long time for religious, ethnic, and cultural reasons, the reasons behind the connection between and the collaboration of the two have long been a topic of speculation among historians and scholars. In this research, this collaboration was studied based on Khajeh's philosophical perspectives. In Khajeh Nasir al-Din Tusi's view, humankind is naturally a civil being and it is through social life and connections to other humans that humans are able to respond to their needs. For this goal to be realized, this connection shall be organized and the way it should be organized is for every person to hold their own distinctive position; and Madina (city) will be created in this way.

Khajeh introduces different types of cities among which there is only one type of city accredited and justified enough to hold the ability to lead people towards virtuousness and prosperity and this type of city is Madina Faazila; all other types of city are non-Faazila cities. In his opinion, it is through gaining knowledge regarding these different types of cities that humankind can recognize his path and step in the road to righteousness and prosperity. Hence, it is natural for Khajeh to believe in these, and firstly, account himself as free and willful, and secondly, to take a step towards achieving virtuousness, because in Khajeh's opinion, one must, first, gain knowledge and act on it before becoming the light of awareness for the rest of the people in the city.

In Khajeh Nasir's perspective, politics is a tool for humans to seek virtue. Humankind can use this tool to bring justice and promote it. This important issue has a rational, and religious base as well, and standing for it is even a duty. Henceforth, Khajeh has to stand by it as well and use it to justify his entrance to political matters.

Khajeh recognized politics as a goal-oriented act and connects its stability to wisdom. Therefore, a wise man, who is the only one deserving of government, must be a forward-thinking, lawful, and just person who can bring all these characteristics to action through his

knowledge and promote wisdom amongst people. This way, the society will also focus on justness and gain virtuousness. Based on this, could the wise Khajeh, philosopher, specialist in religious law, and more, sit aside and refuse to get involved in such important matter? The answer is certainly no, since a wise man like Khajeh who has written the subjects and materials above would have never agreed to being a minister and counselor for Mongol Hulagu Khan without such incentives.

By writing this book and dedicating it to Hulagu, and by introducing different types of cities, evaluating each type, naming the positive or negative attributes of each, and finally choosing the best city, his goal has first and foremost been the education of pagan Mongols, especially the Mongol Ilkhanate, lacking a civilization. He not only theoretically showed this to Mongols, but also, with his practical entrance to the political system, wanted to first, make them theoretically understand justice, and then take them to the place of just behavior, a justness that can only be found in the framework of Madina Faazila.

The wise Khajeh did not want to act in harmony with Mongol Ilkhanate through collaboration to make a better material life for a short while, but he actually used this collaboration to educate not only them, but the whole society. He wanted to teach them that they will only be deserving and legitimate rulers if they act with Hikmat (wisdom), and people shall also accept the rule of wise people.

Khajeh believed that in Madina Faazila, only merits deserve to rule over the city and such ruler shall try to appoint other merits to posts and positions. In his opinion, a wise ruler who deserves the right to rule Madina Faazila is like a person who, first, because there is a patient, learns medicine to treat him, and second, because he knows medicine must act on his duty and treat all the patients in the society from all groups and classes. This physician himself must be healthy to be able to treat others. A wise ruler is similar to this healthy physician who must know the illnesses of the society and act on treating and healing them. In Khajeh's opinion, a ruler has, first and foremost, a duty to raise awareness in people. This is because in his opinion, when people learn about non-Faazila cities themselves, they will be automatically attracted to Madina Faazila, and so, in his opinion, a Madina Faazila is much more achievable than non-Faazila cities. Therefore, it must be concluded

that the context for realizing Madina Faazila should be prepared and this is a duty for any deserving person who takes a step in this direction and acts on his mission. Khajeh knows it as his responsibility to enter one of these non-Faazila cities that is closer to a Faazila city and then lead the people and the rulers toward Madina Faazila.



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