



The Political-Social Crises and Mystical Teachings in Merṣād al-‘Ibād by Najm al-Dīn Rāzī

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Abstract

This research aims to explore the thoughts of the great mystical writer from the medieval period, namely Najm al-Din Razi. This article seeks to answer the question: What did Najm al-Din Razi identify as the societal problems, and what solutions did he propose for these problems? Using Spragens' theory of crisis in understanding political theories, we based our hypothesis on the idea that Najm al-Din Razi saw the fundamental crisis of the 6th and 7th centuries After Hijri as the divergence of social arrangements from true and righteous order. According to him, recognizing this true order and implementing it in society would resolve its problems and crises. According to Razi, this righteous order is achieved through genuine knowledge (ma'rifat), which is realized by transitioning from the outer to the inner self, prioritizing the hereafter over the worldly life, and ultimately establishing order on earth based on a true heavenly order. Establishing political, social, and economic relations based on the teachings derived from true mystical knowledge, according to Razi, paves the way for overcoming crises and achieving an ideal society where humans reach the goal of creation, i.e., knowing the Divine and attaining the status of God's vicegerency.

Keywords: Political Theory, Islamic Governance, Sufism, Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, Philosophical Political Thought, Spiritual Leadership, Shari'ah and Politics.

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Methodology

Thomas Spragens believes that in every era, political thoughts are responses to the problems faced by the political thinkers of that time. Due to their realism, these political theories are practical and aligned with the conditions of their era. In his book 'Understanding Political Theory,' Spragens suggests a method to study and comprehend political issues and the thoughts of political thinkers. He introduces four stages for the formation of political theory:

1. Problem Identification: The initial stage is recognizing that a disorder has occurred, and there is a problem that needs addressing.

2. Cause Analysis: After identifying the problem, the next step is to search for the reasons behind the disorder. This is the most crucial part of developing political theories.

3. Ideal Theory Formulation: In this stage, the theorist moves beyond the current reality to conceptualize an ideal state, which serves as a guide for solving the problem. Spragens states, "The theorist transcends what is and reaches what 'ought to be'" (Spragens, 2015: 37).

4. Solution Proposal: The final stage in Spragens' model involves offering practical solutions to address the disorder and re-establish order (ibid).

In this research, relying on the concept of agent and structure, we aim to understand Razi's political mysticism using Spragens' method. The assumption of this study is that Razi, through a dialectic of theory and practice, attempts to present a mystical framework for identifying the crises of his time.

Literature Review

Seyyed Javad Tabatabai, in 'An Introduction to the History of Political Thought in Iran,' under the section titled 'The Impossibility of Establishing Political Thought Based on Mystical Thought,' argues that Najm al-Din Razi reproduced the ancient Iranian thought within a mystical framework: "There is no doubt that this influence from ancient Iranian thought was not easily achieved without pressure. However, what is noteworthy in the history of Iranian thought is that despite the persistent tension between Shariah-based Islam and ancient Iranian political thought, there has been no Iranian thinker who has completely reflected outside the domain of ancient Iranian thought." (Tabatabai, Seyyed Javad, 2014: 229). This return to ancient Iranian thought, in a philosophical manner, also caught the attention of Henry Corbin. Using a phenomenological method, or as he called it, the method of interpretation (ta'wil), Corbin attempted to demonstrate the nature of this return to ancient Iranian thought by Suhrawardi and similarly by Razi. From this perspective, the return to ancient Iranian thought is not seen as an undesirable element but as a significant spiritual event. (Corbin, Henry, 2023: 214) Mousa Najafi, in 'The Levels of the Emergence of

Political Philosophy in Islamic Civilization,' dedicates the third chapter to examining political thought in mystical, experiential, and Sufi texts. After briefly reviewing the social, political, and cultural history of Sufis and mystics, he introduces the political thought emerging from mystical texts and delves into the ideas of notable figures like Rumi, Suhrawardi, and Razi. He begins his discussion on Razi as follows: "The journey from the chief philosopher (Sage) of the city to the mystical sage and the illuminationist doctrine progresses in a unique manner. However, this connection between peripatetic philosophy and illuminationist wisdom took a significant step forward in the 6th and 7th centuries AH, blending theoretical mysticism with practical conduct. From there, it spread from the head to the entire body, i.e., the whole society. This spreading did not only transform the bloodthirsty Mongols into peaceful builders and people but, with an even more significant step, seated the perfect spiritual guide on the throne of the kingdom." (ibid: 243) To illustrate this spiritual journey and the interplay between the earth and the heavens, Najafi examines Razi's 'Mirsad al-'Ibad.' The importance of this book among other mystical works that discuss politics lies in its comprehensiveness. Razi provides a detailed discourse on the origin of beings, the nature of spirits, the explanation of the angelic realm, human bodies, and people's livelihoods. In the fifth chapter, based on the worldview presented in the previous chapters, he addresses the conduct of various groups. He begins this discussion with the mystical concept of the ruler being the shadow of God, talks about the kings of religion and the world, and favours the eternal true world over the transient, borrowed kingdom.

Crisis and Perception of Disorder: The Emergence of End-Time Catastrophes and Turmoil

In the introduction of *Mirsad al-'Ibad*, Najm al-Din Razi vividly portrays the chaos resulting from the Mongol invasion and attempts to provide a shrewd evaluation of its consequences. Razi writes: "The tribulation and corruption caused by those cursed ones upon all of Islam and the Muslims is beyond what can be expressed in words, and this event is so widespread in the world that it requires no further elaboration" (Razi, 2020: 17). This assessment is particularly significant because Razi had lived through the dire conditions of Iran prior to the Mongol invasion, a period marked by the height of the Crusades and the reign of terror imposed by the Ismailis. These two threats, both internal and external, posed significant dangers to the unity of the Islamic Caliphate and the cohesion of the Islamic Empire. Razi, referencing a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), which states, "The first thing God created was my Noor (spirit or my light)," he believes that God initially created the spirit or light of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). From the radiance of this spirit, the souls of prophets, the

souls of all creatures, and then the material or earthly worlds were created. He conveys his mystical thoughts through metaphors. In his view, the pure Muhammadan spirit is like a pen with which God inscribes the words of the Book of Creation. Attention to the Hadiths narrated by the Prophet Muhammad regarding the end times can help in understanding Razi's perspective on the events during the Mongol and Tatar invasions. For example, among the Hadiths mentioned in 'Nahj al-Fasaha' about the end times is: when authority is entrusted to those unworthy of it, then await the Hour (of Resurrection). Before the Resurrection, there will be tribulations like the dark parts of the night, and surely, the bonds of Islam will be undone one by one. When one bond is undone, people will cling to the next one. The first bond to break will be the rightful governance, and the last will be the prayer. From this, it becomes clear that Najm al-Din Razi understood the crises and disorder of his time within a narrative framework. He concluded that the tribulations and afflictions faced by Muslims were very similar to those described as end-time trials in the Hadiths of the Holy Prophet. As a Muslim mystic and a Sunni thinker, drawing from the Quran and prophetic traditions, Razi reflected on the nature of the crisis and its solutions. He concluded that a false order had been imposed on the Islamic society of his time due to the absence of divine governance. The result of this false and corrupt order, in Razi's view, was the chaos and disorder reminiscent of the prophetic Hadiths about the tribulations of the end times.

Identifying the Problem: Following (lustful) Desires and Distancing from True Inner Knowledge

As previously mentioned, Najm al-Din Razi, as a Muslim mystic, understood the crisis of his society by comparing it to an ideal utopia in his intellectual vision. Thus, in diagnosing the problem, he adopted a normative and prescriptive approach. He believed that following the prescriptions of the Sharia (Islamic law) was the path to achieving this utopia. Consequently, he identified the root of the crisis in distancing from religion and failing to adhere to its norms and commands. He says: "No ruler felt a deep concern for religion in their heart to work towards alleviating this calamity and rectifying this deficiency. This calamity became evident and powerful in the past twenty years; otherwise, in previous times, no one from this group dared to express such thoughts openly. They concealed their disbelief because in those days there were many pious scholars and devout rulers who protected religion from such defilements. However, in this period, pious leaders who cared for religion have become few, and there is no one to speak of these ailments before the rulers to address them" (Razi, 2020: 396-397). According to Razi, the prosperity of the world depends on the survival of religion, and the disappearance of religion is one of the signs of the end times. As he states: "The entire world is dependent

on the entirety of religion. The decline of religion is caused by the death of the devout, and the devout who uphold the faith are the pious scholars. As long as these pious scholars exist, religion will persist, and the world will endure. When religion vanishes entirely, the Day of Judgment will commence” (Marmuzat, 2020: 125-126). Najm al-Din Razi realized that the decline of the Islamic society was not merely due to the Mongol invasion but was rooted in a situation where the concern for religion had vanished. Scholars, abandoning the most beneficial sciences that bring one closer to God, turned instead to subjects like philosophy, astrology, and divination, which have no inherent benefit for the worldly or spiritual life of individuals. Practicing these could lead to misguidance and destruction (Marmuzat, 2020: 128). In addition to these corrupt sciences, there existed corrupt scholars and deceitful ascetics who weakened the faith of rulers, commanders, and soldiers, causing them to turn away from religion. This was due to the influence of hypocritical ascetics and false scholars, who would sell their religion for worldly gain, frequenting the courts of rulers with servility. They would flatter the rulers, praising their false virtues, and falsely affirm every wrongful act they performed, abandoning the practice of ‘Amr bil Ma’ruf’ (enjoining good) and ‘Nahy anil Munkar’ (forbidding evil) in pursuit of material gain. This led to the corruption of the beliefs of rulers and military leaders, who then viewed all scholars and mystics with contempt, thus depriving themselves of the true scholars’ guidance and spiritual light. According to the Hadith, scholars who acquire religious knowledge only for worldly gains will have no other reward from their knowledge except what they gain in wealth and status in this world. In the hereafter, they will be among the first to be cast into the fire of Hell (Mirsad al-‘Ibad, 2020: 488-489). Due to the decline of true religious practice and the rise of false scholars and wicked people, in the eyes of unjust rulers, corruption (evil) appears as if it is something good. As a result, taxes increase, accusations are made against the innocent, the properties of orphans and religious endowments are misappropriated, and unjust tolls are levied on roads. This situation leads to the disgrace of both the worldly and religious aspects of the ruler's reputation, causing the deterioration of society, which is a sign of the end times. Neglect of the afterlife, corruption in religion, and disregard for death and resurrection divert the ruler’s focus from piety to worldly gain, which in turn causes the kingdom’s affairs to stagnate and its foundations to crumble. If the ruler becomes obsessed with accumulating wealth and greed arises, he turns to oppression and innovation, diminishing the military’s strength and causing hardship for the people. When the people’s conditions worsen, the region falls into disrepair, and when the army is weakened, the kingdom becomes unstable, leading to the expectation of great calamities that even the treasures of the earth cannot prevent. Razi emphasizes

the importance of caring for the prosperity of the region and the well-being of the people. A well-supplied army leads to a stronger nation, and a stable country becomes the treasury of the ruler. These observations reflect Razi's critical understanding of the prevailing conditions in Iran at that time. His outlook is both normative and idealistic, and it is this normative and idealistic vision that informs his critical assessment of the prevailing state of affairs. Razi speaks of individuals who, with cunningness and eloquence, present falsehood as truth and disguise the truth as falsehood ('Mirsad al-'Ibad, 2020: 489'). Moreover, his deep understanding of historical changes at the brink of Iran's fall during the Mongol invasion also provides insight into the historical evolution of thought ('Mirsad al-'Ibad, 2020: 244'). The connection between an idealistic understanding and the blending of mythical and heroic history of ancient Iran with the idealistic interpretation of Islamic history becomes especially significant from this perspective. Najm al-Din Razi's theory of ideal kingship serves as a barrier against the false presentation of truth and the truthful appearance of falsehood. Contrary to Islamic political writers who tied the legitimacy of kingship to adherence to religious rulings of the scholars, Razi revived the ancient Persian idea of kingship as not only the 'shadow of God' but also the manifestation of God's majestic and beautiful attributes (Mirsad al-'Ibad, 2020: 247'). He states: "Know that kingship is the vicegerency and caliphate of God on earth. The sage, may peace be upon him, called the ruler the 'shadow of God,' and this is also a form of caliphate. Just as a person standing on a roof casts a shadow on the ground, this shadow is a reflection of his essence on earth. Thus, this shadow is attributed back to the person and is called his shadow. When God placed a secret of His grace in the mythical bird Huma, observe what blessings emerged from it. Whoever the shadow of Huma fell upon would attain the honour of kingship and the fortune of a prosperous kingdom" (Mirsad al-'Ibad, 2020: 416). This analogy signifies that when God chooses a servant with the grace of being His 'shadow on earth' and prepares him for the receptivity of reflecting God's attributes, this dignified servant becomes endowed with fortune, glory, and respect, elevating the prosperity of the realm.

Order and Imagination: Reconstructing Society

True Objectives: Adherence to Sharia and Public Welfare (A Society Based on True Order)

As mentioned earlier, Najm al-Din Razi envisioned an ideal utopia in his intellectual horizon. His understanding of the crisis and his thoughts on it were made possible through this vision of utopia. In the phase of 'order and imagination' and societal reconstruction, as discussed by Spragens, Razi aimed to depict and illustrate this utopia in his intellectual outlook for the readers of

‘Mirsad al-‘Ibad’. In reconstructing his ideal society, Razi continually referred to his anthropological, ontological, and epistemological foundations, striving to visualize his utopia. Without considering these principles, it is impossible to grasp a realistic understanding of his intellectual horizon, as noted by Strauss. In Razi’s view, ‘mysticism’ is the understanding of God, His attributes, and actions, achieved through heart-based perception and inner comprehension, rather than through rational thought. It is a state that first manifests in the human being and subsequently in their thoughts, behaviours, and actions. These thoughts, behaviours, and actions lead to a journey from illusion to reality (as Razi terms it), known in mystical thought as *Sulūk ilā Allah* (the journey towards God), which Razi describes as a movement from the outward (*ẓāhir*) to the inward (*bāṭin*). From Razi’s perspective, this mystical journey involves traversing stages and stations, allowing the human soul to free itself from the shackles and limitations of the lower world and reach the purpose of creation, which is the knowledge of the Divine Presence. This is what is discussed in mystical literature as ‘*fanā’ fī Allah*’ (annihilation in God). Various mystics, relying on their own viewpoints, have described different stages for this journey in both practical and theoretical mysticism. In mystical literature, the seeker (*sālik*) initially faces veils that stand between them and the divine light. The seeker becomes aware that they must begin their journey by removing these obstacles and freeing themselves from their constraints. This journey or ‘pathway’ has always been the central topic of discussion in mystical literature, and Razi wrote ‘Mirsad al-‘Ibad’ for this very purpose. In this context, the secret to success in both worlds is the knowledge of oneself, which ultimately leads to knowing God. This understanding creates a desire for moral perfection, refinement of character, and efforts to rid oneself of vices. Mystics describe the spiritual journey as a movement from lower traits to higher traits, a transcendence beyond one’s individual existence to unite with the ultimate reality (God). From the mystics’ perspective, true existence belongs entirely to God, and all beings will eventually return to Him. The term ‘*sulūk*’ in Arabic means to go or to journey. It can refer to a journey in the external world or an inner, spiritual journey. In the context of Sufism, the second meaning is discussed, the inner journey towards God, which is referred to as the ‘path to God,’ “‘*Sulūk*’ means that the seeker ascends through various stages, gradually uncovering these stages in their entirety. As long as a person does not complete the journey through the microcosm (the individual human), it is impossible for them to become the vicegerent of the Divine in the macrocosm (the greater universe) and to attain dominion over the world. Once all the stages of the journey are fully revealed, the ‘*sulūk*’ is complete” (‘Nasafī, 1999: 135-137). The spiritual journey (‘*sīr wa sulūk*’) refers to the path the seeker traverses,

ultimately leading to the renunciation of worldly attachments. The seeker realizes the fundamental truth that there is only one true cause in existence. All their actions aim to understand and perceive the reality of this concept, and in essence, these actions are in service of maintaining the rights of the Divine. “The seeker comes to the understanding that, in reality, there is only one true effective cause. The purpose of all their actions is to understand and perceive this reality. These actions, in essence, serve to protect and uphold the rights of God” (Sa’adat Parvar, 2007: 139-140).

Types of Spiritual Journey from Najm al-Din Razi’s Perspective

Najm al-Din Razi identifies ‘two types’ of individuals on the spiritual journey (‘sulūk’): ‘the seekers (sālikīn)’ and ‘the attracted ones (majdhūbīn)’. The attracted ones are those who are swiftly drawn by a powerful divine attraction, rapidly passing through spiritual stages without much awareness of the path’s intricacies, such as the recognition of stations, the uncovering of pitfalls, or the discernment of good and evil. They do not require a spiritual guide or master. In contrast, the seeker, even if initially drawn by divine attraction, must still journey slowly and steadily. They are made to experience each spiritual station justly and comprehensively, being exposed to both good and evil aspects of the path. At times, they may be misled before being guided back onto the right path, thus gaining full awareness of both correct and incorrect paths. This comprehensive understanding qualifies them to guide others (Najm al-Din Razi, 2007: 375).

Six Conditions of the Spiritual Journey

Razi outlines six essential conditions for the spiritual journey:

1. Renunciation (Tark): Abandoning status, wealth, and the love of these worldly desires; forsaking bad morals and sins.
2. Reconciliation (Sulḥ): Making peace with all people and not causing harm through words or actions. One should show compassion to everyone, seeing them as equally helpless and in need.
3. Seclusion (‘Uzlat): Withdrawal from society.
4. Silence (Ṣamt): Practicing quietness.
5. Hunger (Jū‘): Fasting and limiting food intake.
6. Vigilance (Sahar): Staying awake for spiritual practices at night (Nasafi, 1998: 146).

Razi also quotes a poem: “Hunger, silence, seclusion, vigilance, and continuous remembrance, these five complete the path.” (Nikki Maleki, 2008: 343).

The Role of the Disciple (Murīd)

A disciple or seeker (murīd) must obey their spiritual guide (murād) or master. A true disciple detaches their heart from everything except God and strives

for closeness to Him, thus overcoming worldly desires (Ansari, 2003: 32). According to Maulana Rumi, being a disciple is an attribute of the Divine Essence. When the seed of this happiness is planted in the heart by divine grace, one must nurture it so it does not wither away (Khalaji, 2008: 55). Najm al-Din Razi's views are similar to that of Maulana, stating that initially, the divine light is like a spark falling into the heart. If not kindled with a flint or placed among dry firewood, the flame will diminish and disappear. After traversing various stages and fields of the spiritual path, the seeker reaches the station of 'fanā' fī Allah' (annihilation in God). There, in the light of divine manifestation, the seeker finds their imaginary self entirely annihilated and, with God's help, attains the station of 'baqā' bi-Allah (subsistence through God) ('Zafar Nava'i, 2009: 134).

The Purpose of the Spiritual Journey

According to Najm al-Din Razi, the aim of discussing the spiritual journey is to guide seekers towards true existence. He also seeks to refute impostors, lazy individuals, those with animalistic traits, and those driven by base desires, who immerse themselves in worldly pleasures like beasts. These individuals, content with superficial acts of worship such as fasting and prayer tainted by worldly distractions, are deprived of the companionship of the pious and the wisdom they offer. They are satisfied with merely external religious rituals, missing out on the deeper aspects of faith, wisdom, and the ranks of those who truly reach God. This way, they won't be able to claim on the Day of Judgment that they were unaware of true worship. Najm al-Din Razi believes that true speech about the path to God ignites an inner desire in seekers and kindles the spark of divine love in the hearts of the faithful, especially when it emanates from the viewpoint of perfected and sincere lovers of God (Najm al-Din Razi, 2007; Najafi Tabataba'i, 1982: 195). If someone sets foot on the path of seeking and resolves to detach their heart from everything else, maintaining this resolve without doubt, a divine light will illuminate their heart. Through the radiance of this light, every action they perform is seen as an act of worship and a step towards God (Shoja'i, 2010: 131).

The Spiritual Journey of Social Groups from Najm al-Din Razi's Perspective

Najm al-Din Razi, in various sections of 'Mersad al-Ibad,' employs different metaphors to convey his views. These mystical metaphors, in their order of precedence, include: the world as a khanqah (Sufi lodge), the human being as the greater world (alam-e akbar), God as the spiritual master (murād), the king (ruler) as the heart, and the vizier as the intellect. Without understanding these metaphors and their roles in Razi's thought, one cannot fully grasp his

discussions on different social strata and groups. In Razi's view, the world is a grand *khanqah* where God is the spiritual master, and the servants of this lodge are the Prophets, especially Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), along with other prophets, saints, and the rightly guided. Their duty is to guide and lead the disciples (human beings) toward the spiritual master (God). Other societal groups, such as farmers, craftsmen, and traders, have roles like providing food (agriculture), clothing, and tools (craftsmanship). This setup aims to meet the needs of the disciples in the world's *khanqah* so that they can pursue the ultimate purpose of creation — attaining knowledge of the Divine. For disciples who are preoccupied with meeting their basic needs, the spiritual journey is impossible; it is a task for those who have leisure and freedom from worldly concerns. From Razi's perspective, God has assigned various social groups to serve the needs of the disciples in this world's *khanqah*. The proper functioning of this cosmic *khanqah* depends on the correct performance of each social class's duties, enabling the disciples (humans) to gain the freedom necessary for their journey towards the spiritual master (Najm al-Din Razi, 2007: 535-537).

Social Philosophy in Razi's Mysticism

Razi's view provides a mystical explanation of why humans need society and emphasizes human sociability. Before him, other Muslim thinkers had also expressed various jurisprudential, philosophical, and theological perspectives on the necessity of social life. For example, Nasir al-Din Tusi stated: "Human beings, the noblest of all creatures, need mutual assistance from other types and cooperation within their own kind, both for the survival of the species and the individual" (Nasir al-Din Tusi, 1986: 164). Despite his abstract thoughts about humanity, Razi emphasizes earthly life and mutual cooperation. He balances an emphasis on seclusion and solitude with an appreciation for social interactions and even addresses governance, as well as the social and political actions of human beings (Parhizgar & Oghdai, 2011: 145).

The Heart, the King, and the Vizier Metaphors

Further metaphors in Razi's thought compare the human being to the greater cosmos (*alam-e akbar*), with the king as the heart and the vizier as the intellect. These metaphors complete Razi's mystical understanding of human society. He first refers to the material world as the lesser cosmos (*alam-e asghar*) and the human being as the greater cosmos (*alam-e akbar*). According to Razi, it is by establishing order in the greater cosmos (the human soul) that order can be achieved in the lesser cosmos (the material world). The human being, as the noblest of creatures, is the controller of the world. Once proper and true order is established in line with the divine order governing the universe, humans, as

controllers of the material world, can instil order within it. Razi likens the king of the human existence (the *alam-e akbar*) to the heart, and the vizier to the intellect. The heart, being the only entity capable of direct and unmediated knowledge of God, is the one to receive divine wisdom and insight. The intellect serves as the vizier, assisting the heart (the king) in implementing divine decrees within the greater cosmos (human existence) and the lesser cosmos (the material world). In this way, Razi's ideal vision of society mirrors traditional mystical ideas, with the throne of the divine at the top and human society at the bottom. The hierarchical layers include various spiritual realms, such as the world of angels and jinn. Order prevails in all these realms except human society, where the potential for chaos exists due to free will granted to humans by God. This is where the concepts of kingship (the heart) and vizierate (the intellect) become crucial in Razi's thought. Only through the kingship of the heart and the vizierate of the intellect can order be established in the human soul (*alam-e akbar*) and, consequently, in the material world (*alam-e asghar*). Razi believes the heart is superior in human existence because it alone can attain direct, intuitive knowledge of God and thus comprehend the true, divine order. The intellect then implements this divine insight within both the greater and lesser worlds.

The Ideal Society

Razi envisions an ideal society where all its parts function in harmony, working towards God's purpose in creating humanity — attaining knowledge of the Divine Essence. The various groups and strata, from farmers and craftsmen to the ruling class, contribute to this divine goal. According to Razi, the spiritual journey is not limited to a specific group. For him, every craft and profession can serve as a path toward God, heaven, or hell. Thus, the utopia that Razi presents is a mystical society where all social groups, including the ruling class, benefit from an understanding of the true divine order. By following and implementing this divine order, a genuine, celestial harmony is established in the material world.

The Path to Remedy: Transition from a Secular State to a Transcendent State (Moving from Secular Politics to Divine-Oriented Politics)

The final stage in explaining a political theory is to propose a way out of the crisis and solve the problem. Here, the thinker, considering the actual circumstances and existing possibilities, aims to present the best solution to address the issue. In this stage, the practical solution of the theorist is revealed. Najm al-Din Razi begins his discussion of governance in 'Mersad al-Ibad' by stating, like other writers of Islamic Ethics and Morality, that humans are social beings, making governance inevitable. Razi introduces a dual categorization of

rulers, calling them Kings of the Outer World (Muluk-e Surati) and ‘True Kings (Meluk-e Haqiqi), thus presenting his political theory on governance. As mentioned at the beginning of this research, ‘Mersad al-Ibad’ by Najm al-Din Razi can be understood within the framework of a paradigmatic and narrative interpretation of Ethics and Morality. Therefore, in the final stage of this research, using Spragens’ method, the remedy or, more appropriately, the strategic guidance from the advisory paradigm of ‘Mersad al-Ibad’ should be analysed. Within his intellectual horizon, Razi, in his pursuit of an ideal state, discusses the path to remedy through the strategic guidance of ‘spiritual sovereignty,’ transitioning from the ‘temporary realm (melk-e fani)’ to the ‘eternal realm (melk-e baqi)’. He speaks of a type of religious government led by a ‘mystic king,’ positioning the ‘mystic king’ as a replacement for the ‘philosopher king’ of Plato and al-Farabi. This is perhaps the most significant contribution of political mysticism in the history of Islamic and Iranian thought.

Kings of Religion and Kings of the World in ‘Mersad al-Ibad’

In this section, Razi differentiates between the kings of religion and the kings of the world. He believes that although worldly kings are manifestations of God’s attributes of grace and wrath, they do not truly benefit from their real position and value. ‘Mersad al-Ibad’ introduces a higher stage that combines both aspects, describing the union of ‘religious and worldly sovereignty.’ Razi subtly interprets the durability and attainment of a state’s true position through the standards of Sharia, stating: “The greatest happiness and supreme state is when a noble individual is granted the sovereignty of both the religious and worldly realms, thus becoming the vicegerent over both realms” (Mersad al-Ibad, p. 235). Razi presents prophets as the supreme example of this vision of governance, citing Prophets David and Solomon as his examples.

The King’s Role as God’s Vicegerent

Najm al-Din Razi considers kingship as the ‘vicegerency of God on earth,’ stating: “The shadow of the vicegerent is his essence on earth, and that shadow is referred to in this manner.” (Najm al-Din Razi, p. 187). He argues that this so-called “shadow of God” is valid only when the king supports his subjects, protecting the oppressed from the tyranny of the unjust. Ibn Arabi, the founder of theoretical mysticism, also mentioned this concept before Najm al-Din: “The king is the shadow of God on earth when he manifests all the divine names that influence the worldly realm.” (Ibn Arabi, 2010: p. 149). Razi adds that kings are manifestations of God’s attributes of grace and wrath, and ‘kingship’ is the greatest means of approaching God. From Najm al-Din’s perspective, kings are divided into two groups: ‘worldly kings (Muluk-e Dunya)’ and ‘spiritual kings

(Meluk-e Din).’ The worldly kings reflect the outward attributes of God’s grace and wrath but remain unaware of their true qualities. Their attributes are revealed to others, much like a beautiful person unaware of their own beauty, which others enjoy. However, the spiritual kings are aware of these divine attributes. They have opened the ‘Supreme Talisman of the Outward Form’ with the key of Sharia through the path of mysticism, and they study the hidden and treasured states and attributes with the eye of truth (Razi, 2020: p. 413). True happiness, Razi asserts, is achieved when a ruler governs both realms, as exemplified by Prophets David and Solomon, where God says: “O David, We have made you Our vicegerent on earth.”

The King’s Role in Achieving Divine Proximity

In another part of Mersad al-Ibad, Najm al-Din discusses why kingship is the greatest means of achieving proximity to God. Here, the social dimensions of Najm al-Din’s thought are clearly evident, as he discusses the concept of righteous kingship through the lens of public welfare. Kingship, as an institution with predominant power in the Islamic societies of Najm al-Din’s era, had a direct impact on the nature and fate of these communities. Najm al-Din’s focus on the moral character of the ruler reflects his concern for the well-being of society, aiming to spiritually educate rulers through mystical discourse. If a king abandons negative traits and strives to cultivate virtuous qualities, he attains spiritual perfection. As it is said, “Lordship precedes servitude” (Sajjadi, 2010: p. 100).

The Ideal King’s Three Relationships: Najm al-Din envisions three key aspects for his ideal king:

1. The king’s relationship with his own soul.
2. The king’s relationship with his subjects.
3. The king’s relationship with God.

In all these cases, the king is instructed to practice benevolence, justice, and kindness to close kin, and to avoid injustice, immorality, and wrongdoing. Here, Razi’s anthropological and ontological principles intersect with his political theory. He views human beings as dual-dimensional, with one part directed towards the higher, spiritual realm and the other towards the lower, material realm. If a person, through piety, actualizes the higher spiritual dimension of their being, they become qualified to rule the lesser world (alam-e asghar) because they have first attained rulership over their own being (alam-e akbar).

Conclusion

Najm al-Din Razi, inspired by the glorious early period of Islam, dreamed of a return to the era of the caliphs and the revival of the institution of the caliphate. However, given the circumstances of his time, he deemed such a revival

unrealistic. As a result, he sought to create a political and social text to guide the people of his era, aiming to reconcile governments and the populace with Sharia to free his era from the crisis of irreligiosity, which he considered the root cause of other crises. Razi believed that the absence of an Imam and caliph had led Islamic societies toward corruption, providing a fertile ground for the expansion of power and the spread of deviant ideologies. His ideal was to establish a government led by an ideal king, around whom the unity of Muslims would be restored. This would allow the Islamic society to repel the influence of non-believers from the Dar al-Islam and reestablish order and peace. Using the Spragens model, Razi's thought can be summarized as follows: He attributed the emergence of calamities and upheavals (the turmoil of the End Times) to following personal desires and drifting away from true inner knowledge (forgetting religion and being deprived of true understanding). To solve this problem and establish his ideal society, Razi spoke of Sharia-based governance and the welfare of the people (a society founded on true order). He proposed the realization of this ideal through the establishment of a political order centred on spiritual sovereignty, thus transitioning from the ephemeral realm (*mulk-e fani*) to the eternal realm (*mulk-e baqi*), where the ideal king rules based on knowledge of true order.

The Ideal King vs. the Philosopher-King

Najm al-Din Razi's ideal king differs from the 'Philosopher-King' of Plato and the 'Ruler of the Virtuous City' of al-Farabi. The 'Philosopher-King' of Plato and the 'Virtuous Ruler' of al-Farabi attain truth through reason, making them free from error. In contrast, Razi's 'Divine King,' despite being a manifestation of divine attributes on earth, is not the absolute truth. Although he is worthy of governance, he still requires the counsel of wise advisors and, like all human beings, stands before God with humility. Moreover, akin to Aristotle's 'ideal statesman,' he practices moderation. He is subject to personal desires, can be deceived by hypocrites, and, like any human, experiences sadness, anger, despair, and pride. It can be argued that Razi's ideal king is more realistic and grounded compared to al-Farabi's 'Ruler of the Virtuous City.' Despite possessing complete religious and political authority, he does not sacrifice the worldly for the sake of religion, nor does he sacrifice religion for the sake of the worldly. Razi introduces a form of 'political mysticism' where politics serves as a precursor to universal mysticism. This mysticism is neither world-denying nor anti-rational and is not limited to the elite. It is sensitive to the general condition of the people, striving to morally and spiritually educate the common masses. Hence, Razi employs reason to guide them because, from his perspective, the common people can achieve self-knowledge and an understanding of the world through reason.

The Path to Transforming Society

The most fundamental way to transform society and overcome crises, according to Razi, is to 'guide the people through reason.' Thus, leadership and governance should be in the hands of individuals who possess both the highest levels of rational and intuitive faculties. This concept of governance can be discussed under the title of the 'Mystic King' (Arif Shah). In other words, the 'Philosopher-King' of Plato and al-Farabi, through a process of change and transformation in Islamic civilization and mystical thought, is replaced by the 'Mystic King.' This Mystic King is someone whose inner being (alam-e akbar) has reached kingship of the heart and whose intellect has attained the role of vizier. Through this, his higher, divine aspect overcomes his lower, worldly aspect. His inner kingdom, illuminated by divine light, has been enlightened by intuitive and heartfelt knowledge of the reality of existence. The Mystic King, endowed with true understanding, has the capability to establish a true order based on divine knowledge among humans on earth. This is where Najm al-Din Razi's intellectual framework reaches its logical conclusion.

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