

Chapter 38: Zizam Al-Mulk Tusi

Nizam al-Mulk Tusi was born in 408/1018¹ and died in 485/1092. He was not only a minister of the Saljuqs for the last 30 years of his life, a scholar,² and a patron of arts and sciences, but also the founder³ of the famous university styled after his name the *Nizamiyyah*.

He lived in an age which witnessed the lowest degradation of the caliphate, following its transformation during a period of three centuries,⁴ from a democracy into an autocracy and from autocracy into a mere puppetry in the hands of powerful masters. That period also saw the fall of the Ghaznawid Empire and the Buwaihid Kingdom, and the rise of the Saljuqs after their victory over the Ghaznawids in 431/1040, when their nomadic life changed into the life of a gigantic empire, extending from the Oxus and Jaxartos to the Bosphorus. It was an age of change and fusion of social and political ideas and institutions, especially in that part of the Muslim world in which Nizam al-Mulk lived and worked.

The rise of the Persian element in political power in the early period of the 'Abbasids was followed by a gradual revival of the Persian political institutions under the patronage of the Samanids, the Ghaznawids, and then of the Saljuqs. These institutions in their turn, together with their theoretical foundations, came to be assimilated by Muslim thought. For this assimilation, no battle of ideas was ever fought, it came as a process of cultural development in which Nizam al-Mulk stood as one of the representatives of Persian culture, with a bias towards Islamic thought.

Nizam al-Mulk was not really his name. It was a title of honour conferred upon him by his Saljuq master, Alp Arslan, after his appointment as a minister. His name was Abu 'Ali Hassan, and his father's name was Abu al-Hassan 'Ali, who belonged to a family of landowners (*dihqans*)⁵ of Radhkan,⁶ a small town in the suburb of Tus where Nizam al-Mulk was born. In the days of the Ghaznawids his father was appointed a tax-collector of Tus by Abu al-Fadl Suri, who was the Governor of Khurasan.⁷

His early education started with the study of Tradition (*Hadith*) and jurisprudence (*Fiqh*), and as his father wanted him to take up the legal profession for his future career; he was put under the care of 'Abd al-Samad Funduraji,⁸ who was a profound scholar of Law.⁹

In the famous “Tale of the Three School Fellows,” it is related of him that in his school days in Nishapur, where he was sent to attend the lectures of Imam Muwaffaq, he made friends with two boys, who later became eminent personalities. One was ‘Umar Khayyam, the great poet and astronomer, and the other Hassan b. Sabbab, the founder of the Batiniyyah sect of the Assassins. Research by the late Sayyid Sulaiman Nadawi makes it unnecessary to discuss this controversial point¹⁰ of Nizam al-Mulk’s life. This tale, he proves, is a fabrication.

From what the author of *Tarikh-i Baihaqi* relates about Nizam’s family on the reliable authority of his grandfather Shaikh al-Islam Amirak, who had seen Nizam al-Mulk in his boyhood, it may be concluded that it was after he had reached the age of maturity and not in his early years, and after his father had been relieved of financial worries¹¹ that he was able to attend Imam Muwaffaq’s lectures in order to complete his higher studies.

His studies over, he travelled to Bukhara and Merv, and to a number of towns¹² in Transoxiana, most probably in search of a post, and after 441/1049¹³ he went to Ghaznah, where he sought service with the Gaznawids, thus getting an opportunity to acquaint himself with their administration. When Sultan ‘Abd al-Rashid was murdered in 444/1052 and the political affairs were upset, he escaped to Balkh and entered the service of ‘Ali b. Shadhan,¹⁴ who was then the governor of that province on behalf of the Saljuq ruler Chaghari Beg Dawud. Annoyed with the habits of this man, who extorted heavy sums from him every year,¹⁵ he fled to Merv.

Once there, Chaghari Beg appointed him the *mushir* (counsellor) and the *katib* (secretary)¹⁶ of his son, Alp Arslan. It was on the advice of ‘Ali b. Shadhan¹⁷ that Alp Arslan, after his accession to the throne in 455/1062, raised him to the position of a Joint Minister with ‘Amid al-Mulk Kunduri. But Kunduri was soon deposed and then put to death, it is said,¹⁸ on the advice of Nizam al-Mulk, who had then become the full-fledged Prime Minister of the Saljuq Empire.

He became the real master of the whole realm with the succession of Malik-shah to his father’s throne in 465/1072, which he owed entirely to Nizam al-Mulk’s efforts.¹⁹ From the capital of the Saljuqs, his influence spread to the capital of the ‘Abbasid Caliph, who is said to have dignified him with the title of *Radi-u Amir al-Mu’minin*, never before conferred on a vizier.²⁰ He had done much to stabilize the power of the Saljuqs, and to improve their administration, and, therefore, when Malik shah once threatened him with dismissal he dare to reply that the kingship was linked with his vizierate.²¹

In his last days, he came into collision with the Isma‘iliyyah movement of Hassan b. Sabbah, in whose activities he saw danger to the Saljuq Empire. He had actually once deputed Abu Muslim Radi to arrest Hassan,²² but Abu Muslim was himself assassinated by one of the *fiḍa’is* (the Assassins) in 485/1092.

It will be in place here to refer to the two Persian works of Nizam al-Mulk, which are the chief sources for the study of his political ideas: the *Sayasat Nameh* (The Book on State-craft) and the *Dastur al-Wuzara’* (The Conduct of Ministers) or, as it is more generally known, the *Wasaya-i Khuwaja Nizam al-*

Mulk (The Precepts of Khuwaja Nizam al-Mulk). He is said to have written yet another work entitled as *Safar Nameh* (The Book of Travels) which is now extinct.²³

Certain changes and additions may have been made to the original text in a later period, but the *Siyasat Nameh* has generally been recognized as the genuine composition of Nizam al-Mulk himself. There has been some controversy among scholars about the authenticity of the *Wasaya* on account of the doubtful "Tale of the Three School Fellows," which has been set out in detail in the preface of the treatise. There is no need to revive this half a century old controversy²⁴ as it has nothing to do with the study of his political thought.

The *Wasaya* is not claimed to be the composition of Nizam al-Mulk himself in the sense in which the *Siyasat Nameh* is considered to be his work. It was compiled in the ninth/15th²⁵ century by an anonymous person whose family, as he claims in the preface, descended from Nizam al-Mulk. He compiled it partly from the books and partly from the oral traditions handed down in his own family.²⁶ Therefore, the anecdotes cited in it begin invariably with the phrase, "So says Khuwaja Nizam al-Mulk."

The preface, which is one of the reliable sources of Nizam al-Mulk's life, is evidently from the pen of the compiler. But the other two chapters, which form the main part of the work and contain much valuable material on the political ideas of this famous vizier, are composed from his own authentic writings and utterances. It has been justly remarked²⁷ that there is no internal evidence in the main part of the work to show that it does not owe its contents to his pen. A large part of the *Wasaya* may be regarded as the actual utterances of Nizam al-Mulk.²⁸

We are fortunate in having these two important works of Nizam al-Mulk representing his thoughts about kingship and vizierate, which were the two political institutions of primary importance in his days. The *Siyasat Nameh*, which is the exposition of his theory of kingship, was originally written to serve as a "monarch's primer."²⁹ It is said that in 484/1091³⁰ Sultan Malik-shah (r. 465 – 1072/485/1092) instructed some of his dignitaries to think over the state of affairs in his realm and write down the principles of conduct that were followed by monarchs in the past, and were required to be observed by himself.³¹

The treatise of Nizam al-Mulk among the works presented to the Sultan was the only one which he approved of and adopted as a guide (*imam*).³² But it must not be treated as a mere handbook of day-to-day administration, nor must it be regarded as containing simply practical suggestions for the improvement of an administrative system. It is more than that. It is, in fact, the expression of a realistic political theory which emerges out of an actual political situation, and, therefore, helps us to understand the stage in the development of Muslim polity reached in the fifth/11th century.

The *Wasaya* is the exposition of his theory of vizierate. It consists of the counsels which he is said to have addressed in the "last days of his life,"³³ to his eldest son, Fakhr al-Mulk, who also held the office of vizier under the Saljuq Sultans Barkiyaruq and Sanjuar, and was assassinated, like his father, by a Batini³⁴ in 500/1106.

It is fairly easy to present Nizam al-Mulk as one who largely differs from the past writers of political treatises and from his contemporaries, both in his selection of the political institutions which form the subject matter of his writings, and in his approach to those institutions. The method adopted by him in explaining the principles of State administration throws light on his outlook and about the political situation in his days. His approach and outlook regarding the political problems are, indeed, inter-related.

A modern scholar, author of a pioneer work on Muslim political thought, regards his method as "historical." "If it is possible," he writes, "to label the Khuwaja's method with any particular epithet, it is that his method is, to a large extent, historical."³⁵ He considers it historical because "in nearly every case he proves the truth of a principle which he chooses to propound, on the touchstone of tradition or historical facts, though some of the facts he relates are not chronologically correct."³⁶

But it is in a limited sense that his approach can be regarded as historical. It is true that he makes reiterated references to history. But this is not all that makes the historical method what it really is. This method does not consist exclusively in citing historical instances. That is only a preliminary. The historical method consists basically in drawing conclusions objectively from the study of historical facts. The political maxims which Nizam al-Mulk lays down as the guiding principles for the successful administration of the State, are, in fact, the inductive generalizations from the study of history.

They are, indeed, empirical conclusions drawn from his personal experience of practical politics and from his observation of existing conditions. "No event," he believes, "ever happens to take place in the world which might not have occurred already several times. As one might have read, or known, or heard about the circumstances a particular event had brought in, one can surmise the consequences that would follow it in case it happens to occur again."³⁷

In effect he is arguing that history repeats itself, but instead of proceeding from the past to the present he follows a reverse course when he first draws conclusions from the observation of the conditions around him and then turns them back upon the past. History, for him, is not the solution of problems, but the endorser of pre-conceived solutions. The essence of his approach to the political issue lies in the blood of the historical method and the method of observation. Though not very successful in following the historical method, he may be regarded as the most historically-minded writer on political topics both among his predecessors and his contemporaries.

This treatment of history squares well with the object with which he proceeds to formulate a particular political theory. He is concerned with theorizing those institutions and their principles and problems which had developed into an actual political constitution, resting mainly on the Sultanate (kingship) and the vizierate, and to bring them to their possible perfection by suggesting practical reforms. He makes ample use of the past and contemporary history to give his personal ideas the appearance of historical facts.

The political institutions of which he speaks had real roots in the political life of the peoples who inhabited a large part of the eastern lands of the 'Abbasid Caliphate, mostly non-Arab races. Most of those institutions had existed there long before the Great Saljuqs came to adopt them, and still much earlier than they could find their theoretical exposition in the writings of Nizam al-Mulk. The absolute monarchy, for instance, the office of vizierate, the monarchical form of administration of justice, the feudal system, the order of courtiers, the system of espionage, etc., were the institutions handed down by ancient Persia to the successive generations.

Though modified in some respects under the influence of the new Muslim political theory, those political institutions had, nevertheless, succeeded in preserving much of their original Persian character, and exerting, in their turn, a good deal of influence both on the political thought of the indigenous people even after their conversion to Islam as well as on the political system, largely of Persian origin, that Nizam al-Mulk seeks to set out. This makes us look upon his writings as the earliest exposition of what may be called the Persian political theory.

Side by side with this political theory, but with different notions and with a different approach to political problems, there existed the constitutional theory of the Arab jurists of whom Mawardi³⁸ (c. 364/974 – 450/1058), the author of the *Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, was the most eminent. Among this small group of jurists mention must be made of Abu Ya'la (380/990 – 450/1066), a contemporary of Mawardi, and author of another *Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*,³⁹ and of Imam al-Haramain al-Juwaini (419/1028 – 478/1085), an intimate friend⁴⁰ of Nizam al-Mulk, whose treatise *Ghiyath al-Umam*⁴¹ has not yet seen the light of day. (As political thinkers, the two have not yet been properly studied by students of the history of Muslim constitutional theory.⁴²)

While the Persian political theory attempts to throw light on the sovereign powers of the king, by analysing the institutions characteristic of this royal office, the constitutional theory puts forward the doctrine of Caliphate. It will be in place here to look into the general nature of the juristic approach to the political problems, and more especially to the institution of kingship, which Nizam al-Mulk also treats, with even greater interest. This will help us to appreciate the realistic element in his thought and approach.

In the first instance, these two sets of contemporary theories, one of the jurists and the other of an administrator, differ in their subject matter. A comparison of the contents of the two treatises of Nizam al-Mulk with those, for example, of the *Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah* of Mawardi, would hardly make one regard the two writers as dealing with the problem and institutions of the same political community living in the same age.

Of the office of the *Khalifah*, his powers and qualifications, the method of his election, the division of vizierate between the unlimited vizierate (*wizarat tanfidh*), the legal difference between their powers, the economic institutions of *jizyah* (poll tax), *zakat* (tax on the accumulated property), *fai'* (goods taken from non-believers), *kharaj* (land tax), and of so many other institutions of religio-political character, which

from the chapter heads of the *Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, the author of the *Siyasat Nameh* and the *Wasaya* makes no mention at all, and, likewise, most of the topics discussed by Nizam al Mulk have been avoided by Mawardi and other jurists, except the offices of the Sultan and vizier, which they treat on a different plane of thought. In their constitutional theory, the Sultan occupies a position which is quite different from what he actually enjoyed in the political set-up of those days.

To treat the Sultan as a governor by usurpation (*amir bi al-istila*) is to bring him down to the position of the other provincial governors appointed by the Caliph. This amounts to arguing, as they seem to do, that the Sultan did actually derive his powers from the “Imperial” authority of the Caliph. They leave actual facts out of account by putting the main emphasis on the formal legitimization of the Sultan’s authority by the *Khalifah*, which was but an insignificant aspect of their mutual relations. In doing so, they are apt to lose sight of his sovereign powers, which he enjoyed independently of the Caliph’s assent.

This limitation of the juristic approach to contemporary politics was bound to arise from the fact that its exponents were building their argument on the foundations of the political order of the Caliphate, which had ceased to exist as a real force for about 200 years. Deprived of any real power to shape the political life of Muslims, the Caliphate, as a political system, continued to exist in theory, which found its elaborate exposition in the writings of the juristic school of the fifth/11th century.

But by interpreting the political fiction of the Caliphate in terms of political realities of their times, these jurists, regardless of the actual facts, were indoctrinating the people with the belief that the caliph was still the real source of all authority.

They were, thus, unable to appreciate the fact that it was the autocratic rule of the independent prince, and not that of the ‘Abbasid Caliph, under which the people had actually been living, and they failed to see that by legitimizing the authority of the Sultan, the Caliph only recognized his *de facto* sovereignty, and that this in practice did not render him sub-ordinate to the Caliph. Their juristic theory could not take into full account the growth of absolute monarchy in the Muslim polity upon which a formidable political structure had come to rest.

It is this monarchical system of government developing under the aristocratic rule of the prince, as against the constitutional structure of the Caliphate, which Nizam al-Mulk attempts to study. His political theory represents a particular phase of the development of the Muslim polity which was characterized by kingship. As such, it is an essential part of his contribution to Muslim political thought.

The first thing remarkable about his exposition of the institution of kingship is that he is careful to make no reference to the *Khalifah* as the head of the Muslim community, and to say nothing about the constitutional relations of the Saljuq ruler with the ‘Abbasid Caliph. He rarely uses the title of Sultan for the Saljuq King,⁴³ and as for the term *amir muslauri* (governor by usurpation), it does not occur at all through his writings, both being the terms of the constitutional law employed by the jurists to denote the legal superiority of the caliph over the prince. Instead, he generally calls his ruler *padshah* – a Persian

term for the king. All this may reasonably be taken as a conscious effort on the part of Nizam al-Mulk to avoid any discussion or even a phrase which might involve any reference to the legal relations of the Caliph and the prince, for his object in studying the monarchical constitution of the Saljuq Empire is to represent his royal master in his full independent position.

To this political objective his *Siyasat Nameh* was expressly dedicated, for it was composed at the instance of the great Saljuq ruler, Malik-shah, as the *Ahkam al-Sultaniyyah*, the earliest treatise on the constitutional theory of the Caliphate had been written by Mawardi only 40 years before at the instance of an 'Abbasid Caliph⁴⁴ to vindicate his claim to sovereign authority. This indicates the existence of a theoretical conflict between the powers of the Caliph and the king, which of course has been prompted by the historical events which preceded it.

Conscious of the growing weakness of the Buwaihid dynasty in the beginning of the fifth/11th century, the 'Abbasid Caliph Qadir (381/991 – 422/1031) and his successor Qa'im (422/1031 – 407/1075), during whose rules the juristic theory of the Caliphate was formulated, attempted to achieve independence from the tutelage of the Buwaihids.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the Saljuqs, too, who had succeeded both the Buwaihids and the Ghaznawids after over-throwing their power, were no less keen to assert the authority they had established at the point of the sword.

In spite of acknowledging the nominal authority of the *Khalifah*,⁴⁶ who, in turn, had legitimized their rule and conferred upon them titles of honour,⁴⁷ the Saljuqs did not hesitate to inflict humiliation upon him whenever it was demanded by the political situation. Kunduri, the vizier of Tughril Beg (d. 455/1062), is said to have with-held the pension of the Caliph on his refusal to marry his daughter to the Saljuq prince.⁴⁸ On another occasion, Malik shah is said to have intended to banish the Caliph al-Muqtadi from Baghdad.⁴⁹

Under this situation it was not possible for Nizam al-Mulk to make any mention of the *Khalifah* without recognizing him as the supreme authority over his Saljuq prince. This would have been inconsistent with the objective he had in mind in writing his treatise.

His effort to avoid any discussion of the legal or political relations of the Caliph and the king is significant. He is seeking to defend his prince against the theoretical encroachment on his independent position by the advocates of the Caliph's authority.

From the outset Nizam al-Mulk seems to have taken it for granted that the real source from which the king derives his authority, in theory or in practice, is not the institution of the Caliphate. That point has been removed from the plan of discussion. The reason is not far to seek. As it was inconsistent with his political ends to recognize the Caliph as the supreme authority, so an explicit refutation of his claims in this respect would have made Nizam al-Mulk unnecessarily provoke a controversy about the powers of the two offices. To this dilemma he finds a solution in what may be called in modern language the theory of divine right – the theory that the king enjoys the right to rule over his subjects by virtue of divine

appointment.

This becomes obvious from the study of the first chapters in the *Siyasat Nameh*, which mainly explain the divine nature of this institution, and its functions ordained by God. He puts it in very clear words when he says, "In every age God selects one from amongst mankind and adorns him with princely skills, and entrusts him with the affairs of the world and the comfort of the subjects."⁵⁰ This is the remarkably simplified hypothesis of his theory of kingship; he does not argue to prove it, but simply states it as a self-evident truth.

This proposition, as advanced by Nizam al-Mulk, suffers theological weakness common to all the expositions of the divine right theory which set out this hypothesis as a *fait accompli*, to be simply accepted rather than to be argued. It is indeed a dogmatic belief rather than a rational proposition. It is, however, important for our purpose, because it serves to explain how Nizam al-Mulk comes to expound a political theory which is out and out a vindication of autocracy, and how he is led from the outset to reject the democratic principles and enunciated by the advocates of the Caliphate.

After explaining the nature of the king's appointment, Nizam al-Mulk discusses the purposes of kingship in a political community. He argues the *raison d'être* of this institution, and throws more light on its divine nature. The essential function which the king has to fulfil in human society is to bring order of chaos, and to maintain peace and justice. This is what he means when he says, "If the people show any sign of disobedience or contempt towards the *Shari'ah* (the Canon-Law), or if they fail to obey God and to comply with His commands, then he intends to inflict punishment on them for their conduct...Due to their sin they bring this wrath upon themselves.

Benevolent kinds disappear from amongst them. Swords are drawn and blood-shed follows, and whosoever is powerful does as he pleases, until the sinners to one of the people whom God by His grace blesses with success according to his worth, and endows with wisdom and knowledge.⁵¹

Then Nizam al-Mulk goes on to say that the ultimate object to which the king should direct his efforts is to create and maintain wholesome conditions so "that the people may live with comfort under the shadow of his justice."⁵²

It amounts to a sort of "mystical" interpretation of historical changes, bringing about the rise and fall of rulers. The king has been represented here as an instrument of God's will, fulfilling a divine function in political upheavals. It is the punishment for their disobedience that people are first deprived by the Almighty of the benevolent king. Then His wrath takes the shape of calamities and upheavals. And it is again by His mercy that a man rises to the position of a sovereign and brings about peace and order. Thus, in this divine order of political society all things proceed from God's will, and it is from His supreme authority that the king derives his powers.

While speaking of the monarch who succeeds in establishing his rule by subduing the warring elements and in executing God's will by bringing peace and tranquility to the people, Nizam al-Mulk is not

unmindful of the victorious career of the Saljuq dynasty, which had risen to sovereign position by its own strength and successfully established an orderly government. This becomes clear when he says that it is by divine providence that his Saljuq master has been destined to rule his subjects.⁵³

This implies that the king's authority rests, in the first place, on direct authorization from God and, in the second place, on his own ability to gain political power in which he is helped by God the Almighty. He is equally emphatic on the principle of hereditary kingship, which is always an essential part of the divine right doctrine. According to him, the kingly office is essentially of divine origin as well as hereditary, and should pass, like the kingship in ancient Persia, from father to son.⁵⁴ And it is according to this principle that his Saljuq prince, he claims, has inherited this dignified office from his great ancestors.⁵⁵

Nizam al-Mulk's vindication of the claims of the king to sovereign powers is based on a three-fold justification, namely, the divine sanction, the conquest of power, and the hereditary succession. He later states this more clearly in an anecdote in which Nushirwan, the Persian King, has been shown as asserting his eligibility to the throne in a royal speech addressed to his feudatories, "First, this kingship has been bestowed upon me by God the Almighty, secondly, I have inherited it from my father, thirdly,...I have recaptured the kingdom by the sword."⁵⁶

It is obvious now that in explaining the nature of the supreme authority in the political community, he takes the position of a legitimist" who believes not in human choice, but in divine appointment and hereditary succession.

This exposition of kingship is significant from yet another point of view. There is more in it than the mere explanation of the divine origin of the king's powers. It may be regarded as an effort of Nizam al-Mulk to seek moral justification for the passive obedience which the monarch has the right to demand from his subjects, and also for his unlimited authority to control the administration and political life of the people. The two are correlative to each other and follow as corollaries from this legitimist doctrine. This helps us to understand the relation between ruler and subjects as envisaged in his political theory.

He lays great emphasis on obedience as the most essential duty of the people towards the ruler, since he brings to them peace and prosperity after they have been deprived of it as a punishment for their disobedience to God. This has been stated more explicitly in another work, the *Wasaya*, in which he discusses the question of obedience to royal authority. "No doubt," he says, "it is but obligatory to worship the Almighty, and to obey the king. The common people generally, and the royal favourites and courtiers particularly are under the obligation of such obedience, and more especially one who has been entrusted with authority in the matters of administration and finance."⁵⁷

The king is entitled to receive obedience from his subjects as a divinely appointed authority. Nizam al-Mulk asserts that the very fact that the king succeeds in establishing his rule is sufficient to make us regard his authority as resting on the divine sanction. Without the aid of God Almighty," he argues, "an individual can never become a ruler, nor can he bring the world into the bondage of subjugation. Though

there might be several causes of his rise to political power, they all refer undoubtedly to the same divine help.”[58](#)

The gist of this remarkably simplified contention is that it is the duty of the people to obey the prince without questioning the validity of his authority: it is valid as *de facto*. A *de facto* ruler may be unjust and may put the country into disorder, but Nizam al-Mulk, like a true legitimist, is careful to avoid this question as it ultimately involves the right of the people to resist a ruler who is doing wrong to them. If confusion and disorder ever take place in a political society, he attempts to interpret it as resulting not from the misrule of the monarch but from the sinful acts of the people themselves.

It is, therefore, by remaining obedient to the king that they can enjoy peace and prosperity which is restored to them under his rule. The king can rightly inflict punishment upon those who, “not realizing the value of security and comfort,” might revolt against his authority.[59](#) There is no doubt that Nizam al-Mulk believes in the principle of passive and unconditional obedience on the part of the people, and leaves them without any moral right to resist the royal authority.

A political theory like this, with the belief in the divine appointment of the king, coupled with the principle of passive obedience by the people, can result only in the advocacy of absolute monarchy. The prince of whom Nizam al-Mulk is speaking here is surely an absolute monarch in that his powers are unrestricted by any human power. The only authority which could claim, at least in theory, a certain amount of legal right to impose any obligations on a Muslim prince as the ‘Abbasid Caliph, to whom, we have seen Nizam al-Mulk avoids making any reference in this respect.

It is obvious from his attempt to explain the administrative system with constant reference to the royal office that the monarch is the sovereign authority in his realm, and, as such, is the source of all political power, all are sub-ordinate to him, and are endowed by him with powers and privileges according to their capability. In spite of representing the king as directly responsible for the welfare of the whole country, Nizam al-Mulk does not regard him as accountable to the people for his political conduct. On the question of the kings’ responsibility in public affairs he seems to take again the position of the people, but before God. That, however, has not been laid down expressly, and has to be concluded only indirectly from the statements in which, for example, he says that on the Day of Judgment the king will be summoned before God to answer for his conduct towards his subjects,[60](#) and that the government officials are accountable to the king, and the king in his turn is responsible to the Almighty.[61](#)

What Nizam al-Mulk is attempting to set out here is indeed the concept of absolute monarchy. At this point he comes much nearer to the Persian idea of kingship and the Shi’ite doctrine of *imamah* (the leadership of political community), both founded on the divine right of the Head of the State, than to the constitutional theory of the Sunni Arab jurists, which was based on democratic principles. An absolute monarch claiming direct authorization from God to manage the affairs of a political society was an idea quite foreign to Arab thinkers. The *Khalifah* had always been regarded by them, at least in theory, as an elected functionary[62](#) to whom powers were delegated, not directly by God, but by the electors. They,

therefore, held that the *Khalifah* was subject to certain legal restrictions. This democratic idea of Caliphate is in striking contrast with the Persian notion of absolute monarchy revived in Nizam al-Mulk's political theory.

It would not be wrong to suppose that this concept of a divinely appointed ruler came to him mainly from the political system of ancient Persia, and not from the contemporary Shi'ite doctrine,⁶³ which, as systematically evolved under the Fatimid rule in Egypt, was definitely a much later development in comparison with the Persian concept. This is obvious from his repeated references to the political principle on which the monarchical constitution in ancient Persia was based, but he makes no such references to the political ideas of the Shi'ites, of whose political activities in the form of Batini movement he is, on the contrary, vehemently critical.⁶⁴ But it must be admitted at the same time that his exposition of divine right is lacking both in philosophical depth and systematic treatment with which this doctrine was set out in the Fatimid dogmatics.

The reason for imitating the Persian model of kingship is to be sought in his contemporary historical conditions. On the one hand, he is expressing, as pointed out before, the popular idea of kingship prevailing in the territories conquered by the Saljuqs, and, on the other hand, he is seeking to replace the Turkish concept of tribal leadership by the Persian ideal of absolute monarchy.

The peculiar conditions under which he had to work out his political theory, made the adoption of autocratic rule inevitable. The institution of *Khanat*, that is, the tribal leadership among the Saljuqs, had largely become inconsistent with the stage of political power under tribal customs, their Khan was far from having any territorial basis for his authority, with the result that their tribal system of government was found inadequate to cope with the problems of the large territorial empire which they had come to rule. The Empire they had inherited from the Ghaznawids and the Buwaihids was far vaster than the territory hitherto known to them, and more advanced in political principles as compared with their own tribal customs. Despite the large powers that were conferred upon the Khan by the tribal system, he was regarded much more the leader of a large tribe, than as a sovereign in the proper sense.

There were other "minor leaders" of small groups of families who, at least in the early stage of their political career, could lay claim to political power derived not from the "major" tribal leader but from the tribal customary law. It was not until the reign of Malik shah, the third ruler of the great Saljuq dynasty, that the Saljuq prince could become a real autocratic mind⁶⁵ in all State affairs throughout the reign of Alp Arslan and Malik shah, who was mainly responsible for altering their nomadic tribal political organization to harmonize with the requirements of a territorial empire. He converted their power into a centralized autocratic authority essential for successful government in his time.

What he is attempting now in his writings by theorizing about kingship and its institutional organization is to provide the Saljuq monarchy with a theoretical basis. He is seeking, moreover, to shape it on the model of Persian kingship about which he had read in the "works of the ancients" (*kutub-i pishinagan*),⁶⁶ and had seen revived in the monarchical constitution of the Ghaznawids. To him this

Persian monarchy, with its autocratic principles, was more adaptable to the new circumstances than any other type of institution which was founded on democratic principles.

Only an absolute monarchy, he thinks, can vigorously deal with the nomad Turkumans and the *petit* leaders of the Ghuzz tribes in subduing their power to a centralized authority. Therefore, he advises his prince that “God Almighty has created the king most powerful of all people, and all are sub-ordinate to him. It is from that they take their subsistence money and their position. He should treat them in such a way that they always realize their position, and may not throw off the bondage of allegiance, and, moreover, they should not be allowed to do whatever they like; they should do only what they have been ordered to do.”⁶⁷ His aim in stressing the absolute superiority of the king is to introduce a central authority with autocratic powers in the political system of the Saljuqs, the majority of whom were not yet fully accustomed to this principle of government and administration.

To imitate the Persian absolute monarchy was also useful in tackling the problems of the growing “feudal system” in the Saljuq Empire. The Persian institution of kingship had a record of feudal traditions, and could furnish the Saljuqs with the laws applicable in many respects to their relation with the feudatories and the subjects.

The system of land assignment – what Nizam al-Mulk calls the *iqta' dari*⁶⁸ – may be regarded undoubtedly as the Eastern form of feudalism as against the feudalism of medieval Europe. To a great extent, Nizam al-Mulk may be considered responsible for developing, if not for introducing, it on systematic lines within the political structure of the Saljuq Empire. It was due to the military organization of the Saljuqs, on which their political structure ultimately came to rest, together with the problems of revenue administration, that the practice of assigning fiefs (*iqta's*) to the military chiefs, soldiers, and to other private persons was adopted. There were also the *dihqans*, the old Persian land-owners, who continued to exercise proprietary rights as before. This system, in brief, was designed as a means of paying the soldiers and of collecting revenues.

The principles on which Nizam al-Mulk suggests that the *iqta' dari* should be based develop it into a feudal system very different from the Western feudalism, both in character and in social and political consequences. It is basically different in the tenure of the feudatories, in their legal rights over the land and the *ra'yyah* (vassals) as well as in the relation of the king as the over-lord with the *muqta's* (feudatories), on the one hand, and with the subjects, on the other, and with the subjects, strictly hereditary as a general rule. There is nothing in his writing to suggest that he is in favour of assigning lands to an individual with a specified legal right to transmit it by inheritance.

On the other hand, in his system the feudatories come to occupy a position more akin to that of the tax-collectors with large administrative powers than that of the “feudal lords,” in the medieval sense. In their relations with the vassals they are like the *shihnahs* (guards, and in case a feudatory fails to treat them well, “the fief, it is suggested, must be withdrawn from him.”⁶⁹ Besides, “the officials and the feudatories must be changed every two to three years so that they may not get strong enough in their

fortifications.”[70](#)

It appears that side by side with developing the *iqta'* system, Nizam al-Mulk attempts to enlarge the powers of the king as a means of checking the centrifugal tendencies which tend to appear in feudalism. This leads him to put forward a theory of land ownership which goes well with his idea of absolute monarchy. He holds that “the feudatories who hold the fiefs must know that civility and courtesy the lawful amount which has been assigned to them, i.e., to the feudatories, and when that has been taken, the subjects shall be secure in their persons, property, wives, and children, and in their goods and estates....They must know that the land and the subjects all belong to the king, and the feudatories and the governors (*walis*), set over their head, are like the guards to the subjects, as the king is to others.”[71](#)

In entertaining such a view regarding land ownership, Nizam al-Mulk departs from what may be regarded as the Islamic theory, which attributes the absolute ownership of land, not to the Head of the State, but to the State itself, as entrusted to by God. It is also a clear departure from the traditional concept of the Ghuzz tribes, who looked upon the land that they would come to occupy as the common property of their families. It was this tribal concept of land ownership of Nizam al-Mulk was seeking to modify basically, as it was out of tune with the administrative principle of a centralized empire which had now passed into their hands. To him it was essential to bring both the land and the subjects under the central authority of the king.

A good deal of his theory, it appears, has come to him from the old feudal Persia. This is evident from his attempt to explain this principle by an anecdote from Persian history in which the famous vizier Buzurjmihir has been represented as advising Nushirwan that “the kingdom (*wilayah*) belongs to the king (*malik*), and the king has entrusted the dominion, and not the subjects, to the military. When the military is not well wishing unto the kingdom, and kind to the people...and takes the power to arrest and imprison...and to appoint and dismiss, what difference then remains between the king and the military, for that power really belongs to the king, and not to the military.”[72](#) On another occasion Nushirwan exhorts his feudatories to treat the people well, and only to take from them what is due and just, and he stresses the fact that the dominion belongs to him, and it is by him that the estates have been assigned to them.[73](#)

Nizam al-Mulk's feudal theory takes away much of the powers from the hands of feudal lords which they enjoyed, for instance, in Western feudalism. It leaves them with limited power to collect the revenues, and to have only “a fixed amount in their hands.”[74](#) Moreover, it removes them from the position of being the sole intermediaries between the king and the subjects, preventing the latter from getting into direct contact with him.[75](#) In his system, the direct responsibility for the well-being of the subjects rests not with the feudatories, but with the king, and, therefore, he suggests that the king should send spies (*jasusan*) and special confidants (*khwas*)[76](#) to inquire secretly about administration in the fiefs in order to get reliable information about the condition of the subjects, and urges him to dismiss a feudatory who forbids subjects to represent their cases to the king in order to seek redress for grievances.[77](#)

All this results in the concentration of all the political administrative powers, as sought by Nizam al-Mulk, in the central authority of the king which was once enjoyed by the Persian autocrat.

Though his idea of kingship is in essence of Persian origin, it differs in certain respects from the Old Persian prototype, and has been refashioned in other respects under the influence of Muslim political theory and practice. It is, on the whole, an attempt to readjust the Persian model with the contemporary social and political structure.

The most important point of difference is that Nizam al-Mulk is not an incarnationist. Unlike the ancients who could look upon their Persian monarch as the incarnation of Divinity,⁷⁸ he treats his ruler as a simple human being. In spite of once calling the prince the “shadow of God on earth” (*zill Allah fi al-ard*) in the *Wasaya*⁷⁹ – a phrase which does not occur at all in the *Siyasat Nameh* – he does not go the extent of clothing him with divine attributes so as to make him appear an embodiment of Divinity. The phrase is devoid here of any mystical meanings, and has been used in the ordinary sense of a metaphor, to mean that the exalted office of the king is like a shadow provided by God on earth under which mankind may find peace and security. No doubt, he speaks of this monarch as “adorned with the virtues and excellences which were lacking by kings all over the world,”⁸⁰ yet there is in him no tendency to regard the king as a super-human being in any metaphysical sense. Among those excellent virtues with which his prince is adorned, he counts, for example, good appearance, justice, courage, generosity, etc.⁸¹ but they are all divinely gifted qualities, not divine attributes. Therefore, his prince is by no means an incarnation of God.

Far from attaching any “mystical” or metaphysical sense to the concept of kingship, he believes that “the king is endowed by God with wisdom and knowledge so that he can treat each of his subjects according to his worth and can give each a position according to his value,”⁸² and, again, “His (i.e. the king’s) wisdom is just like a lamp that gives off abundant light. People can find their way in its light and can come out of darkness,⁸³ and he does not need himself to be guided by others.” We can see his prince bearing a small resemblance both to the philosopher-king⁸⁴ and to the Shi’ite teacher-Imam,⁸⁵ but suffering from an innate inability to become the true image of either. This seems mainly due to the fact that Nizam al-Mulk is by temperament much more a matter-of-fact exponent of popular ideas than a real philosopher, unable to develop his thoughts into philosophical concepts. He may be taken as possibly expressing a general belief about kingship prevailing in his days, in which the old Persian idea of the divinely-appointed monarch in its moderate form – and not the concept of divine monarch – was superficially inter-mingled with the Neo-Platonic interpretation of the philosopher-king as an embodiment of perfect wisdom. His concept of the king is that of a statesman who is primarily concerned with general beliefs rather than with philosophical generalizations.

His Persian ideal is modified also in another respect, obviously under the direct influence of Muslim thought. Though he treats his prince as a divinely-appointed ruler, invested with unlimited powers, he does not regard him by any means as a law-giver. A human authority with absolute legislative powers

has never existed in Muslim polity, because *legislation* in the proper sense of the term has never been recognized as a human function in the Muslim legal theory. According to this theory, there does already exist a divine Law (*Shari'ah*) supreme, eternal, and perfect, which is theoretically as binding on the ruler himself, however autocratic he may be in practice, as on his subjects. This is what seems to have prevented Nizam al-Mulk from attributing any legislative power to his prince. His king, on the other hand, is subject to the supreme Law of God, and, is, moreover, an instrument for enforcing that law, and for making people abide by it. He emphasizes that it is obligatory for the king to seek knowledge of religion matters and to comply with, and make arrangements to carry out the commands of God and the traditions of the Prophet, and to pay respect to religious scholars.”⁸⁶ Therefore, it is the duty of the ruler to appoint judges (*qadis*) to execute the *Shari'ah* as his deputies (*na'ibin*).

This discussion of the ruler's responsibility in enforcing the *Shari'ah*, apart from explaining a principle of Muslim policy, is also interesting for its historical significance in respect of the Saljuqs. This shows Nizam al-Mulk's attempt to teach the Saljuqs the principles of the Muslim legal system and to familiarize them with the law of the more civilized people of whom they had become the rulers. But his royal masters were altogether strangers to all culture,⁸⁷ and there is no reliable information to prove that they could even read and write. Therefore, books, as the direct source of knowledge of religious Law, were out of their reach. This seems to be the reason why Nizam al-Mulk advises his prince to get himself acquainted with the teachings of religion through the debates of the scholars (*'ulama'*) which he should caused to be held occasionally in his presence, once or twice a week. “Thus, one day he will become conversant with most of the laws of the *Shari'ah*, the commentary of the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet and, thus, the methods of dealing with temporal and religious affairs would become easy for him.”⁸⁸

This discussion leads us at this point to another important question, namely, the place that religion must have, according to Nizam al-Mulk, both in the conduct of a ruler and in the political life of a people, where we can see again that his concept of kingship is modified by the influence of Muslim thought. In spite of his love for the political principles for pre-Islamic Persia, he is essentially a religious-minded man who can believe only in the religious values of social life and enunciated by Islam, and can look upon a political community as dedicated out and out to religious ends. His political theory is made up of reconciliation between the Old Persian ideals and the Muslim political ideology.

To him, in the first place, religion and politics are inseparably joined together and, as such are complementary to each other. “The State (and kingship) and religion,” he believes, “are like two brothers.”⁸⁹ And throughout his writings, the two have been treated in the same spirit. In dealing with them, he closely follows the spirit of Muslim polity which is largely based on the concept of the indivisible unity of religion and politics.

The principles of conduct which he lays down for his king under the influence of this religious trend are in striking contrast with those prescribed by Machiavelli for his prince. Unlike the Machiavellian prince who

is advised to handle religion merely as a useful instrument for achieving political ends, and who is taught to appear rather than become religious.⁹⁰ Nizam al-Mulk's prince is taught to believe sincerely in religious truths, and to exercise political power as an essential means of attaining them. According to him, both the State and religion are dependent upon each other for their existence; therefore, the king must treat them both alike. "Whenever there is any disorder in the state," says Nizam al-Mulk, "there is confusion in the religion of its people also, and the heretics and mischief-makers make their appearance. And whenever religious affairs are disturbed, the State is thrown into disorder, the mischief makers grow strong, and heresy makes itself manifest."⁹¹ He believes that "the most virtuous thing for the king is to uphold the right faith."⁹² To him a wise and just ruler is one who follows the tenets of religion faithfully, and eradicates heresy from his realm.⁹³

It is obvious that the concern of his prince with religion is not mere politics; it is rather a matter of genuine faith in the religious values of social life. It is an instrument to preserve the State as well as a means of salvation in the life to come.⁹⁴ "The ruler who strives to uphold the faith successfully is entrusted by God with temporal and religious affairs, and his wishes are granted in both worlds."⁹⁵

This shows how Nizam al-Mulk is at pains to make his prince a religious as well as mundane authority. It is, however, no artificiality with him to blend the religious and temporal powers in one and the same office. With a religious man like him, looking to faith for guidance in the spiritual as well as in the worldly affairs, it is more natural to combine them than to treat them as separate. Besides his own outlook about the relation of religion and politics, which led him to attribute religious function to kingship, there arose a historical situation in which the king came to be regarded not only as a temporal authority but also as a religious functionary. The age of the Caliph, when he was the undisputed leader of the Muslim community, had practically come to a close by this time, giving rise to the power of the independent autocratic monarch to whom the people now looked for leadership, there arose a historical situation in which the king came to be regarded not only as a temporal authority but also as a religious functionary.

The age of the Caliph, when he was the undisputed leader of the Muslim community, had practically come to a close by this time, giving rise to the power of the independent autocratic monarch to whom the people now looked for leadership in all temporal and religious affairs. It will not help much towards appreciating the role this autocrat came to play in the social life of the Muslim people, to suppose about this historical change that, "politically, the *Khalifah* gave place to the Sultan, that is, a religious executive was replaced by and explicitly independent mundane power."⁹⁶ It must be admitted that the Muslim world, far from thinking in terms of the separation of State and religion, was definitely at a stage of political development in which, as we have seen, it could still easily believe in their ultimate oneness. The Caliph, therefore, was not held to be simply a religious executive; he was a temporal authority as well, and both functions were intricately inter-woven in his office.

The autocratic prince, who came to fill the void left by the Caliph in the Muslim life with the latter's downfall, was his heir in both capacities. He was a replica of the Caliph, in almost every respect, save

that, like the Caliph, he was not an elected functionary, and therefore, unlike him, he was in practice an absolute sovereign with no constitutional limitations on his authority, and under no constitutional obligation even in fulfilling his religious functions. Had he been regarded as simply a mundane power, the Muslims living under his rule would have been left without a leader to organize their religious life, especially after the Caliph had practically been removed as a real force from the scene of their spiritual and political life.

It is this practical necessity that has led Nizam al-Mulk to insist on the essentially religious character of the king's authority. This special emphasis on the religious character is also important on account of the fact that it tones down the autocratic temper of his monarch. The moral obligations he sets on the absolute authority of the king prevent it from growing into an oppressive despotism. His is basically the idea of a *paternalistic* State in which the king is held responsible for the security and well-being of all subjects. The first and foremost moral obligation of the king towards his subjects is to do justice. He believes it to be a religious duty, for it has been ordained by God.

Justice, as a principle of good government, occupies a pre-dominant place in his concept of kingship, and time and again he lays emphasis on its importance for State and society. But, in spite of all its significance, he does not attempt to formulate any systematic theory of justice, nor does he make any effort to define it exactly. This much, however, can be concluded from his statement that, like almost all his ideas, justice, too, is a practical maxim or a social rule rather than a social philosophy. Everyone should be given what is due to him, or what has been legally recognized as his right in a given social order. To him justice is a moral principle which is also usable as an effective means to preserve a political society and to promote peace and prosperity among the people. "The kings should strive," he says, "to seek the favour of God, which can be attained through the kindness with which they treat the people and through justice which they administer to them. When the people pray to the welfare of the king, his State grows stable and prospers ever day."⁹⁷

To stress its significance for the prosperity of the State he quotes the saying that "a State can continue to exist notwithstanding impiety, but it cannot exist with tyranny."⁹⁸ Therefore, he believes that an auspicious age is one in which a prince comes to rule.⁹⁹ He quotes several anecdotes from history to demonstrate the material advantages of justice, and to show that justice is the outstanding moral virtue of a king. He lays equal emphasis on its moral and material aspects as inseparably joined together, and stresses the point that as justice brings prosperity and good reputation in this world, it helps a ruler "to attain salvation in the next world."¹⁰⁰

In his notion of justice he is influenced again both by Islam and by Persia. It is under the Islamic influence that he comes to realize the religious and moral significance of justice, and goes to the extent of linking its worldly aspect with the deliverance of the soul and eternity. To illustrate this point he quotes from the Holy Qur'an,¹⁰¹ the Tradition¹⁰² of the Prophet, and statements about the practice of the pious Muslim rulers, and says that the worthiest prince is one "whose heart is the seat of justice."¹⁰³

From ancient Persia he learns the methods of the administration of justice and principle of direct responsibility of the king in matters relating to it. He is so impressed by the Persian standard of justice that he believes that “the Sassanian kings, especially Nushirwan the Just, have surpassed all other monarchs in justice, generosity, and courage.”¹⁰⁴ He says that the Persian kings used to strive so honestly to live up to the principle of impartiality in justice that they could even allow themselves to appear as respondents before the Chief Justice who heard complaints against their royal person.¹⁰⁵ They held it as their personal duty to see that the others also treated the people with the same impartiality and justice, and, in order to hear the complaints personally, they used to hold public audience twice a year, to which everyone was allowed free access, and whoever prevented anyone from going to the king to obtain redress for grievances was sentenced to death.”¹⁰⁶

Besides justice, which is essential for good government, there are some other moral duties, which, as Nizam al-Mulk says a ruler has to perform for the well-being of his subjects. His idea of benevolent despotism involves the notion that a good monarch must rule, not for his own good, but for the good of the whole country. He is responsible for the welfare of his subjects and is personally accountable to God, not only for his own conduct, but also for the conduct of his officials towards the people.¹⁰⁷ It is therefore, an essential part of his duty that he should appoint as government officers only those who are God-fearing, learned, pious, and righteous,¹⁰⁸ and should instruct them to treat the people well,¹⁰⁹ because as justice brings prosperity, oppression leads to the devastation of a country.

This autocratic but benevolent sovereign, depicted for the first time in the writings of Nizam al-Mulk, is a typical Muslim prince who came into existence with the downfall of the Caliphate and continued to live for centuries in the Muslim polity. Equally typical is his vizier, who stands next to him in rank and power in the political hierarch of the kingdom.¹¹⁰ Like the king, he is also of Persian origin; he is, in fact, the Muslim heir of the pre-Islamic Persian grand vizier, called the *wazurg-farmdhar*, who made his way into the constitutional system of the Caliphate¹¹¹ “when the ‘Abbasids came to copy the administration of Sassanian Empire.”¹¹² This grand vizier was next to the king, and what he was in his relation to the Persian king, the Muslim vizier was to the Caliph.¹¹³

For Nizam al-Mulk, himself a Persian and Grand Vizier, it is quite natural to aspire to model this institution as closely as possible on the traditional line of the Persian vizierate, which had once worked so successfully under the Sassanian rule. But he is not the first writer to speak of this institution, for Mawardi and others had already discussed it in some detail. There is, however, a sharp distinction between the theory, for example, of Mawardi and that of Nizam al-Mulk. What Mawardi speaks of is, in fact, the constitutional position of the vizier in his relation to the caliph, and, therefore, it is what may be called the constitutional theory of vizierate.

With this aspect of the vizierate, Nizam al-Mulk is less concerned, and he seldom refers to it. What really interests him more, or rather exclusively, is the political and moral aspect of this institution. There is yet another difference: unlike Mawardi, who is primarily concerned with discussing the question what

the vizier's functions are in a constitutional set-up, Nizam al-Mulk attempts to show what he ought to be in order to attain perfection in ministerial ethics. He deals with the vizierate on a plane of thought which is nearer to that of the *Qabas Nameh* of Amir Kaika'us (412/1021 – 475/1082).¹¹⁴ Indeed, his field of study is the art of minister ship, but, compared with Amir Kaika'us, he treats it on a wider scale and with a touch of personal experience which obviously could not be claimed by the Amir.

To Nizam al-Mulk the vizierate is the most important and the most exalted office, next only to the Sultanate.¹¹⁵ Though this glorification of the ministerial office is not without a tinge of exaggeration, it serves to give an idea of the importance the vizier once had in the Eastern monarchical States, including the Saljuq Empire, in which he played a significant part in politics, and actually shared a good deal of power with the king. In most of the achievements which were attributed to the royal person he had a real hand. Therefore, there is a certain basis of truth in regarding the vizierate as “an institution on which depends the State and the people, the religion and the kingdom.”¹¹⁶ This indicates Nizam al-Mulk's belief about the vizierate as an indispensable part in the machinery of a monarchical government. He is also conscious of the historical role it played in bringing so much credit to the kingship in the long course of its career. “All the kings,” he says, “who have left their good names on the pages of time, owe it to the felicity of the righteous vizier,”¹¹⁷ and again, “...a good minister brings to the king a good name and leads him to adopt a good conduct. All the princes who had been great, and whose name shall be held in honour until the Day of Judgment, where those who had good ministers.”¹¹⁸ Throughout his arguments about the importance of minister ship, he is insistent on the point that the welfare of both the king and the kingdom depends upon the sagacity of the vizier, and that a bad vizier always leads them to destruction.¹¹⁹

What Nizam al-Mulk is attempting here by stressing the importance of the vizierate is not to represent the vizier as a mere intermediary between the king and his subjects, but to show them as the representative of the king and actually responsible to him for the whole administration. That is to say, the vizier, as conceived by him, is in a sense a share in the king's real powers. This was actually the position which Nizam al-Mulk had himself enjoyed in his own life-time as the vizier of the Saljuqs. That in elevating this office to such an exalted position he is mainly encouraged by the Persian tradition, is evident from statement in which he asserts that since the origin of the State up to the days of Yazdigird all administrative affairs had been exclusively in the hands of the viziers. The vizier was the counter-part and deputy of the king.¹²⁰ He is influenced again by the Persian forerunners, the Barmakids, were the first exponents in Islam. To him it seems most desirable that both the kingship and the vizierate should be hereditary, as was the regular practice in ancient Persia from the days of Ardashir, the son of Babekan, to the reign of Yazdigird.¹²¹ He regrets that “when the kingship came to an end in Persia the vizierate also departed from the house of the viziers.”¹²²

Nizam al-Mulk presents a picture of the typical minister serving at the Court of an Oriental monarch, when he comes to enumerate the dangers with which this important office was fraught, and the noble qualities which were supposed to be the pre-requisites of the vizierate. He gives a detailed account of

them, supported by his personal experiences, or by illustrations taken from contemporary history. It gives an idea of the state of politics and administration in the medieval Orient in which a vizier had to discharge his duties with so many powers to conduct the government, and, at the same time, with so many risks of being suddenly overthrown from office for any mistake.

The dangers in accepting his office, as he enumerates are:

- a) The minister may do injustice to the people as he has to issue numerous orders every day, [123](#)
- b) may please one man and displease thousands of others, high and low, rich and poor, [124](#)
- c) he may displease the princes of the royal household by his acts and may consequently incur the displeasure of the king, [125](#)
- d) he has to always deal with the nobles and grandees of the empire whose hostility and hate might turn the king against him, [126](#) and
- e) there is a large number of officials of high and low ranks upon whom he has to depend in discharging his duties, and their displeasure and conspiracy may undermine his reputation and career. [127](#)

All this renders the office of the vizier a difficult one, requiring a man of sharp intellect and outstanding abilities. Nizam al-Mulk attempts to lay down at length the essential conditions of this office which were regarded in his days as the qualities of an ideal vizier. The duties of the vizier, he says, [128](#) are determined by his four-fold relations: First, he is under the obligation of obedience to God, secondly, he owes allegiance to the royal master, thirdly, he has to care for the favourites of the king, and fourthly, he is concerned with the common people.

One cannot fail to note that his whole discussion of the institution of vizierate, like that of the office of kingship, is pervaded again by a religious and moral outlook, arising out of his sincere regard for religion. In the office of vizierate, as he treats it, diplomacy and morality have been blended together, but emphasis is altogether on its moral ends. To acquire merely worldly pomp and power, he says, should not be the ultimate end of the vizier, what really befits this exalted office is to seek real prestige and a good name in religious and worldly matters. [129](#) This can be achieved through upholding the right faith and following the dictates of God faithfully. [130](#) It is the duty of the minister that he should strive hard to revive and propagate the faith of Islam and try to attain the excellent moral virtues without which divine favour is impossible. He comes to preach to the vizier a sort of Sufi-like attitude towards political life when he says that he should believe in the divine providence, and should regard his success not as the fruit of his own efforts but as the result of the divine will. [131](#)

Then comes the king who is, according to Nizam al-Mulk, a divinely-appointed authority. He is at pains to make him a point of focus for the loyal sentiments of the whole political society and especially of the official community among whom the vizier has a greater obligation to pay homage to the king than

anyone else. [132](#) In order to prove himself a truly obedient servant of his master, he says, the vizier must refrain from seeking any sort of worldly pleasure, because the greatest pleasure for a minister really consists, not in satisfying his own desires, but in pleasing his royal master. [133](#) Therefore, he should direct all his efforts towards reforming the affairs of the kingdom [134](#) and increasing the wealth of the State, [135](#) which is the only way to please the king.

Finally, he advises the minister to have special regard for the companions, courtiers, and other favourites of the king and the nobles and high officials of the kingdom. [136](#) They are always influential figures in a feudal society headed by an absolute monarchy, and have an important role in its politics. As their friendliness has great advantages for the vizier, their antagonism may turn all against him; [137](#) therefore, he advises the vizier to be careful in handling them. It is, however, remarkable about Nizam al-Mulk that, in spite of dealing with the problems of an office of a diplomatic nature within the framework of feudalism, which is always tainted with conspiracies, he does not induce the vizier to follow cunning methods. Instead, he believes in the moral standards of political conduct and insists that the vizier “should steadily follow the path of truth and righteousness in State affairs,” and this would serve to protect him from the enmity of his foes and would ultimately convince them of his integrity. [138](#)

Nizam al-Mulk’s importance as a political thinker must rest, not on the practical suggestions he offered to improve the conditions of a particular State, but on his theories of monarchy and minister ship. He was the first to discover the moral and political principles of kingship and vizierate and wherever the two institutions came into existence in the Muslim world, his ideas served as their theoretical foundations. It is evident from the references to his works in the writings of the succeeding generations, that he was generally studied. Even the contents of *Wasaya*’ “were known far and wide,” [139](#) long before they came to be compiled in the form of a treatise in the ninth/15th century. The vast literature on political ethics produced in later days, especially the treatises written for the guidance of Muslim princes, contain a good deal of the political principles which are enunciated for the first time by Nizam al-Mulk. This may be considered to be his direct influence on the later development of Muslim political thought.

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