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The Concepts of Statehood and the Ideal Ruler in the Golden Horde Literature: The *Husraw and Shirin* of Qutb

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Abstract

This paper studies the concepts of statehood, governance and the ideal ruler in the Golden Horde literature through a synthesis of political thought, philosophy, religious ethics and poetry presented in a poem by Qutb named *Husraw and Shirin* (written in 1342). The first part of the paper provides an overview of the Golden Horde civilization and suggests that its intellectual culture accumulated the all-inclusive scholarly, literary and scientific achievements of that time with the most advanced scholarly and educational centers. The following parts provide a general idea about Qutb and his *Husraw and Shirin*, including its plot and main ideas. The last part analyses the concepts of statehood and an ideal ruler that are depicted in the poem within the framework of governance in Islam. The paper finds that, by referring to a famous love story between Husraw and Shirin, Qutb was able to address the needs of his era and society, and created an original composition through an intense creative processing of literary material that was available to him. Given the fact that the Golden Horde is among the less studied periods of Islamic history and intellectual thought, this paper is expected to contribute to the field positively.

Keywords: Golden Horde, Governance in Islam, *Husraw and Shirin*, Justice, Qutb, the concept of ideal ruler in Islam, Statehood, Turkic literature, women as rulers

Introduction

The themes of genuine human nature, governance in Islam, the features and qualities of an ideal ruler, and provisos for perfect relations between the ruler and the ruled were always central in Muslim intellectual thought since the period of the righteous caliphs (632-661). Over the centuries of expansion to three continents of the world and an internal evolution through integration with various regional cultures and norms, Islamic political thought has always maintained certain foundational principles. As Gerhard Bowering observes, “Islamic forms of state and government, power and authority, and rule and loyalty have exhibited great diversity.”¹ However, these various forms of states and governments maintained one common feature: the premise of unity of religion and state.

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¹Gerhard Bowering, “Introduction,” in Gerhard Bowering (Ed.), *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction* (USA: Princeton University Press, 2015), 4.

What is worth mentioning here is that not only intellectual and scholarly works but folklore, poems, epics and other literary genres written in Muslim lands also focused on issues related to governance and authority in Islam. It was not unusual for an ordinary love poem or an epic praising the military victories of the Muslim army to discuss acceptable conduct and ethics of both the ruler and the ruled before Allah.

This paper sheds light on an instance of a wonderful fusion of political thought, philosophy, religious ethics and poetry in the poem titled *Husraw ve Shirin* (Husraw and Shirin) written by Qutb (1297 – mid 14th century) in 1342 during the period of the Golden Horde. The Golden Horde (*Jusi Ulusi* in Mongol or *Altyn Urda* in Tatar) Khanate (State) was a western province of the vast Mongol empire that was established by Batu Khan in 1242 (or the beginning of 1243) as a result of the Mongol invasion of the Bulghar Kingdom and other neighboring territories in the region that is considered the Russian Federation in the present day.

The Golden Horde is one of the less studied eras and regions in Islamic history. This may be due in part to the language barrier but also to the lack of original sources as most of the evidence related to this period was destroyed during Russian imperial rule and then the Soviet regime. Hence, there is a lack of scholarly works and research in English on the Golden Horde literature and intellectual thought in general, and Qutb and his poem, *Husraw and Shirin*, in particular. *Husraw and Shirin* is one of the rare literary pieces that has been preserved in its original form since the Golden Horde era of Tatar history. Hence, by studying this poem, a modern reader may obtain an original information about the Golden Horde society, their life styles, activities and political events. *Husraw and Shirin* is also significant to understand the main intellectual and political ideas that had been prevailed among the Golden Horde elites and the society.

Several contemporary scholars studied the *Husraw and Shirin* of Qutb, mainly in Russia, and highlighted its importance in the development of art and literature among the Turkic-speaking nations. Abdurrahman Tahirjanov stated that, without *Husraw and Shirin*, it is impossible to envisage the features and scope of literature in Turkic languages during the classical era, especially the literary progress in the Golden Horde.² Professor in Tatar and Oriental literature Rezeda Ganieva called this poem as “one of the most striking examples of literature in the Golden Horde.”³ Actually, the problems and issues raised in the poem have not lost their importance till the present time. We hope that this paper will contribute positively to the discussion of the intellectual history of the Golden Horde.

2. The Golden Horde and Its Civilization

When the Mongols retreated from central Europe, Batu Khan (r. 1227-1255) built his capital Sarai (from Persian *saray*, ‘palace’ or ‘court’) on a hill near the lower Volga basin and began ruling a vast territory in Eastern Europe and Central Asia named the Golden Horde Khanate. It extended across the steppe from the Danube River in the west to Khwarezm in the east, and at its southern end it included the Crimean Peninsula and the northern Caucasus. Along with the Ilkhanid (1256-1353) and then the Timurid (ca.1370-1507) states in Iran, Anatolia and Iraq, and the Delhi sultanates in India, the Golden Horde played a significant role in the post-Mongol invasion era of Muslim history.

Like the rest of the Mongol empire, the Golden Horde was a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural state that was controlled by the nomadic military hierarchy, headed by a khan of Mongol origin. However, the small number of Mongol elite who stayed in the area did not have a substantial cultural impact on the fabric of the local society, especially in the lands that were formerly

²Abdurrahman Tahirjanov, *From History to Literature* (Kazan: Tatar Publishing House, 1979), 23.

³Ibid.

ruled by the Bulghar Kingdom and Russ principalities. Therefore, culture, language, religion, and social life remained the same. The best literary pieces and scholarly works of the Golden Horde were composed mainly in the local Kipchak Turkic language, heavily influenced by Arabic and Persian in terms of vocabulary, theme and predominant concepts.

Islam had already been present in the Volga basin since the ninth century as it had gradually spread there through trade and other economic relations with the Muslim world. The first Muslim state in the region was the Bulghar Kingdom, which voluntarily accepted Islam as the official state religion in 922 in the presence of a delegation sent by the Abbasid Caliph Ja'far al-Muqtadir Billah (r. 908–932).⁴ From there, Islam spread to other parts of the land that is known Russia in our days, culminating during the period of the Golden Horde. In 1261, Berke Khan (r. 1257-1266), the ruler of the Golden Horde of Mongol origin, accepted Islam. This was an impetus for Golden Horde elite and inhabitants to accept Islam. Under the rule of Uzbek (Öz Beg or Uzbek) Khan (r. 1313-41), Islam became the official religion of the empire and, from the mid-14th century until the demise of the Golden Horde in 1437, the Turkic Volga Bulghar elite dominated the cultural and Islamic discourse of the empire.⁵

Uzbek Khan urged the ruling Mongol elite to convert to Islam, but at the same time he was quite tolerant toward Christian inhabitants and the local pagans. Freedom of religion and tolerance toward followers of other creeds were practiced throughout the existence of the Golden Horde. For instance, in 1261, Berke Khan gave permission to Alexander Nevsky, Grand Prince of the Novgorod and Vladimir principalities, to build a Christian Orthodox church in Sarai. Significantly, the Russian Orthodox Church was given a preferential legal status, which enabled it to strengthen its economic and political position in Rus. Thus, under the Mongol rule, the Orthodox monasteries became the largest landowners in Rus.⁶

Numerous cities, *madrasahs* and mosques were built in the Golden Horde period such as the mosque and *madrasah* of Uzbek in the Crimea and the Cathedral Mosque in Bulghar city. The Muslim traveler Ibn Batuta (1304-1369) recorded the cities of Kaffa, Qirim, Azaq, Majar, Sarai, New Sarai and Khwarezm as vibrant and complex cosmopolitan and commercial centers in the Golden Horde. He visited the court of Uzbek Khan in New Sarai (built in 1330) during the winter of 1332-1333.⁷ He described it as a rich city, having 14 mosques, and jewelry and ceramic-making industries, stating it as “one of the finest cities, of boundless size, choked with the throng of its inhabitants, and possessing good bazars and broad streets.”⁸

Other cities such as Ukek, Bulghar, Saksin and Kerman were also named by other travelers as significant urban centers of that time.⁹ These cities gradually became significant Islamic administrative and commercial centers that enjoyed favorable conditions for the development of culture, arts and scholarship. The khans attracted prominent scholars, scientists, engineers and poets

⁴Enders Wimbush, “Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus,” in John Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Modern Islamic World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2/271-272; and Galina Yemelianova, *Russia and Islam: A Historical Survey* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 7.

⁵Galina Yemelianova, “Islam in Russia: An Historical Perspective,” in: Hilary Pilkington and Galina Yemelianova (eds.), *Islam in Post-Soviet Russia: Public and Private Faces* (New York: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 21; and Elmira Akhmetova, “Russia,” in Stephanie Müssig and others (Eds.), *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 13/ 566.

⁶Yemelianova, “Islam in Russia: An Historical Perspective,” 21.

⁷Uli Schamiloglu, “The Rise of Urban Centers in the Golden Horde and the City of Ukek,” *Golden Horde Review*, 6(1), 2018, 20.

⁸Ibid., 23.

⁹Ibid., 23.

from other parts of the world, and offered them privileges and opportunities to produce their masterpieces while they stayed in the khanate.

The Golden Horde became enriched by religious ties as well as educational, diplomatic and commercial relations with the rest of the Muslim world. It is worth noting here that its intellectual and cultural centers attracted famous scholars and scientists from the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia, Persia, China, India, Byzantium, Italian Black Sea colonies and Europe. Subsequently, the intellectual culture of the Golden Horde accumulated all the scholarly and scientific achievements of that time. No doubt, literary activities and tradition constituted the major part in these developments.

Most of the literary works in the Golden Horde period were written in the local Kipchak Turkic language, which developed substantially as an official, literary and spoken language throughout the 14th and 15th centuries. Famous authors such as Nasreddin Rabguzi, Mahmud ibn ‘Ali al-Bulghari, Kharazmi, Qutb, Hisam Katib, Saif Sarai and Ahmed Urgenji lived in the Golden Horde cities¹⁰ and wrote their famous works of art in diverse poetic and prose genres such as *dastans* (tales), *hikayats* (short stories), novels, fables, legends, *qasidah* (poem of mourning or praise), *rubai* (a verse form consisting of four-line stanzas) and other forms of poetry. Khatip Minnegulov, an expert on Tatar literature, identified a few reasons for the emergence of the prevalent literary activities’ milieu in the Golden Horde. These include fervent communal life, statehood, the emergence of cities as centres of trade and craftsmanship and, most importantly, strong relations with other regions and peoples, mastering their achievements, and engaging in cultural, scientific and religious exchanges.¹¹

3. Qutb and His *Husraw and Shirin*

This part of the paper briefly discusses a poetic novel (novel in verse form) titled *Husraw and Shirin*, written in 1342, which is considered one of the most significant literary works of the Golden Horde period. We do not have much information about the author and his life details, except his name, or perhaps nickname, Qutb. Some scholars suggest that the name ‘Qutb’, which is inscribed as the author in the manuscript copied by Berke Faqih in Egypt in 1383, could be a short version of the popular Muslim name prevalent in Central Asia, Persia and the Indian subcontinent, ‘Qutb al-Din’. Others assume that Qutb could be a nickname (*tahallus*) of the poet with the meaning of ‘chief, leader, commander and superior’. In Sufism, Qutb refers to the perfect human being (*al-insan al-kamil*) or connotes a Sufi spiritual leader who has a divine connection with Allah;¹² thus, he is the most knowledgeable among his fellows. The term Qutb was also used in classical Muslim societies to refer to prominent figures, sages, intellectuals, and spiritual mentors.

Qutb was probably born at the end of the 13th century and died in the middle of the 14th century. Recently, the date of his birth has been estimated and generally accepted in scholarly circles to be 1297.¹³ Qutb’s life and career were connected with the capital city of the khanate, Sarai. Based on features of the language he used in the poem, Abdurrahman Tahirjanov (1907-1983), an expert of Persian-Tajik, Turkic and Arabic classical literature, attributes Qutb to the Iskil (Chigil) tribe, which had migrated from Central Asia to Eastern Europe and constituted a part of the Mishar Tatars, who

¹⁰Khatip Minnegulov, *Urta Gasirlar Tatar Adabiyati: Natijalar, Burichlar: Dunyada Suzemez Bar* [Medieval Tatar Literature: Results, Tasks: We have a Word in the World] (Kazan: Tatarstan Publishing House, 1999), 65.

¹¹Khatip Minnegulov, *Medieval Tatar Literature*, 24.

¹²M. Th. Houtsma and others (Eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam. A Dictionary of the Geography, Ethnography and Biography of the Muhammadan Peoples* (Leiden: Brill, 1938), 1165-1166.

¹³Khatip Minnegulov, *Gasirlar Önen Tinglap* [Listening to the Sound of Centuries] (Kazan: Magarif Publishing House, 1989), 219.

live in the Penza-Mordovian region on the right bank of the Volga.¹⁴ After reading the poem, its author Qutb appears to us as an intelligent, erudite, and incredibly talented person. He must have been fluent in Turkic-Tatar, Persian and Arabic languages, well-versed in their literature and aware of the subtleties of poetic language and canons.

When Qutb was writing *Husraw and Shirin*, he was a relatively mature, respected and powerful man in his society. In the introductory part, Qutb gave an avuncular advice (*nasihah*) and instructions to Tini Beg (Dinibeg), the khan of the Golden Horde between 1341-1342. Qutb appears to be a strong supporter of Tini Beg's rule based on the fact that he dedicated his *Husraw and Shirin* to the khan. Unfortunately, the reign of Tini Beg was ended in 1342 by a military campaign led by his brother, another son of Uzbek khan, Jani Beg (r. 1342-1357). Tini Beg was killed, and Jani Beg succeeded him as khan. It is possible that Qutb, as a staunch supporter of Tini Beg, was also killed in early 1343 along with the khan, or he may have migrated to another region.¹⁵

The earliest copy of *Husraw and Shirin* preserved in Paris does not indicate the exact date of its composition. However, the detail that it was dedicated to Tini Beg Khan and his wife permits us to assume that Qutb must have completed the poem in 1342, when Tini Beg was still alive and ruling.

In fact, the earliest copy of *Husraw and Shirin* preserved in Paris is not an original monograph written by Qutb. It was copied in Egypt in 1383 by a man named Berke Faqih, who had come from the Volga region to Alexandria, Egypt, where he became a judge (*faqih, qadi*). It is not known exactly when and how this copy reached France. It consists of 238 pages: pages 4 to 17 comprise dedications and the reasons for the writing the poem; in pages 232 and 233, the author made conclusions; in pages 233 – 236, the hand copier Berke Faqih added his own poems. The main part of *Husraw and Shirin* is found on pages 18 to 231. In total, the work consists of 4,659 verses (*bayet*); i.e., two-line stanzas.

Like many other ancient and medieval Turkic-Tatar literary and scholarly works, the *Husraw and Shirin* of Qutb was neglected and even completely unknown to scholarship until the 20th century. In 1913, the international press publicized the discovery of a new manuscript titled *Husraw and Shirin* in the National Library of Paris. This report stirred interest in Oriental studies circles, and many experts requested a copy of the manuscript. Orientalists and Turkologists such as F. Kuprezada, A. Samoilovich, E. Bertels, A. Najib, H. Gosman, A. Zayonchkovsky and A. Tahirjanov studied the manuscript and commented on its features and importance. In the 1940s and '50s, the manuscript was studied textually and linguistically by the Polish scholar A. Zayonchkovsky, who published its photocopy and transcription in 1958-1961 in three volumes in Warsaw, and he also prepared a dictionary to assist understanding of the terms used in the poem. Following the publication of Zayonchkovsky, the *Husraw and Shirin* of Qutb was published many times in Kazan (Russia), Tashkent (Uzbekistan), and Turkey.

4. Plot and Main Ideas

The plot of *Husraw and Shirin* is based on one of the most popular romantic stories of Persian origin, the love of the Sassanid King Husraw II Parviz (r. 590-628) for his Aramean wife Shirin. Throughout the centuries, many literary works were written based on this love story in different languages, including versions by Abul Qasim Firdausi (940-1025), Nizami Ganjawi (1141-1209), Amir Husraw (1253-1325), Nur Al-Din Jami (1414-1492) and Ali-Shir Navai (1441-1501). Qutb chose as the main source of his poem the version of *Husraw and Shirin* written by the Persian poet

¹⁴Tahirjanov, *From History to Literature*, 54.

¹⁵Khatip Minnegulov, "Problems of Ruler and Statehood in the Golden Horde Literature," *Golden Horde Review* 4 (1), (2016): 165.

Nizami circa 1177-1180. This choice can be explained simply by the availability of Nizami's work in the Golden Horde territory during the time of Qutb as it was a relatively recent version.

Traditionally, ancient and medieval writers preferred to compose poems and novels on topics that were well known to readers, and this phenomenon was even considered a kind of poetic norm. It is worth noting that the plots which were used in these classical literary pieces were not so simple but, rather, instructive and complex, revolving around the sufferings experienced by a man and a woman in love. Examples include the stories of Yusuf and Zulaikha, Leyla and Majnun, Husraw and Shirin, and Tahir and Zuhra. The authors usually referred to the stories available on that particular topic and, based on these existing versions, they created a new one that was more relevant to their times and society. Consequently, new variations and translations, semi-legendary, edifying and intellectual works spread across the entire Muslim world in the classical age.¹⁶

Following this tradition, Qutb preserved the original plot, characters, poetic style, ideas and general intellectual orientation of Nizami's work in his *Husraw and Shirin*. However, these characters, events and ideas were altered by Qutb to make them more relevant to his time and the cultural context of the Turkic-Tatar society of the Golden Horde. As a result, Qutb was able to create an artistically perfect and independent realism with his own voice, poetic thinking, and independent style. There are many specific details as well as social and cultural patterns in Qutb's *Husraw and Shirin* that are directly associated with the Golden Horde culture and the Volga region realities. Hence, it is impossible to categorize Qutb's *Husraw and Shirin* as a simple translation of Nizami's poem into Turkic. It might be more appropriate to categorize Qutb's opus as a semi-translation and semi-original literary work. By riffing on Nizami's poem, Qutb was able to address the needs of his era and society and created an original composition through an intense creative processing of material that was available to him.

Besides, Qutb's *Husraw and Shirin* could be defined as a poetic novel due to its comprehensive scope, ideological richness, complex plot and compositional structure. It illustrates the life of Husraw in the light of a series of events from birth until his death. Throughout these events and various challenges, the character of Husraw develops positively, and he progressively becomes a better person as a result of the trials of life. The author presents him as exemplifying the finest traits of his society in terms of nobility, beauty (he is described as being as handsome as Yusuf), intellect, mind, education, strength and courage.¹⁷ Already in his youth, Husraw excelled in all the necessary skills and had become the most suitable candidate to ascend to the Sassanid throne after the death of his father Shah Hormizd (r. 579-590).

The love between Husraw and Shirin is central to the plot. Shirin is described as an extremely beautiful, just, courageous, decent, dignified and intelligent lady from a royal family. Husraw had loved her for his entire life but was able to marry her only after the death of his first wife, Maryam, who is presented as a daughter of the Byzantine Caesar. Husraw married Maryam under the pressure of her father, Caesar, who promised to help Husraw to recapture the Sassanid throne from Bahram. Hence, young Husraw chooses a throne over his love, Shirin, and marries Maryam.

Interestingly, Shirin does the opposite as she willingly abandons her throne and moves to Persia to live close to Husraw. For her, love is much more important than power as she says: "Love and power cannot exist together."¹⁸ Qutb exalts women in the exemplar of Shirin, praising her for her

¹⁶M. F. Kuprelezada, *Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* [History of Turkish Literature] (Istanbul: n.p., 1926), vol. 1, 321.

¹⁷Qutb, *Husraw ve Shirin: Poeticheskiy Perevod na Sovremenniy Tatarskiy Yazik* [Husraw and Shirin: A Poetical Translation into Modern Tatar Language], trans. by Ahmetjanov (Kazan: Magarif, 2003), 32-36.

¹⁸Qutb, *Husraw ve Shirin*, 316.

unconditional loyalty to her love Husraw for her entire life. Actually, this is one of the central points that distinguishes Qutb's *Husraw and Shirin* from Nizami's original version. Nizami expressed a denigrating assessment of women in his poem, accusing them of infidelity and betrayal.¹⁹ But Qutb declares that: "There are many women who are superior to men, Who, on the right occasion, can perform the work of hundreds of men."²⁰

Khatib Minnegulov links Qutb's stance to the elevated status of women in the Golden Horde society, where he lived and wrote his poem. Travelers of that time who visited the Golden Horde such as Ibn Batuta, Iohannes de Plano Carpini (1182-1252) and Ibn Arabshah (1389-1450) recorded that women enjoyed great honor and respect in the Volga region.²¹

Husraw and Shirin reveals the deep philosophical and social meaning of love. According to Qutb, true love is the fundamental essence of humanity. In true love, there is no place for any inequality and unfairness; there is no place for power, authority, and oppression; rather, only humanity and justice will prevail from true love. Thus, Qutb seeks to purify his society by arousing and developing feelings of love in the hearts of people, seeking to base social relations on the laws of love and compassion. He invokes the theme of love, urging the world and people to love each other: "Without love, please, do not take even a single breath."²²

The love story in the poem is described in various literary styles through the characters' relationship, their actions and inner experiences, as well as the philosophical reflections of the author. Qutb employs the character of an adept sculptor named Farhad, who also falls in love with Shirin, to reveal the deep philosophical meaning of love. When Husraw comes to know of this, he sends Farhad to Behistun Mountain with the impossible task of carving stairs out of the cliff rocks. There Farhad receives false news of Shirin's death and, not seeing a meaning of life without her, hurls himself from the mountain top and dies.

Shirin and Farhad are described by Qutb as possessing not only physical beauty but also inner beauty with outstanding character and great vivacity. They both possessed noble qualities such as loyalty, sincerity, spiritual purity, courage, justice and dignity. For them, love was the noble and sacred feeling, the source of life, and the cause for inspiration. Farhad and Shirin fought for their love, and they died for their love. This is the main difference between the love of Husraw and Farhad. Husraw had neither courage nor strength to fight for his love. Husraw's conflict with Farhad revealed his inferiority, moral weakness and selfish love, which is not a true love according to Qutb.

One of the most important objectives of *Husraw and Shirin* is to establish that true love has a healing power that can change a person and develop him spiritually. The immense love of Shirin increasingly purifies Husraw's character and nature, brings meaning to his purposeless life, and engenders in him the feeling of responsibility for his actions.

In sum, the love discussed in this poem is not merely selfish feelings between two individuals. Rather, it is a sacred power given by Allah to human beings, the foundation of their healthy and balanced existence, and it purifies the soul and character against the satanic drives of the *nafs*. Moreover, Qutb considers life and death to be natural phenomena; the most essential issue is how a person, regardless of being a king or ordinary person, rich or poor, goes through this journey from birth until death. If you do good for people, your good name will remain after you; but if you do evil, your name will soon be forgotten; however, you shall answer for your wrongdoings in front of Allah.

¹⁹Khatib Minnegulov, "Problems of Ruler and Statehood in the Golden Horde Literature," 164.

²⁰Qutb, *Husraw ve Shirin*, 424.

²¹Minnegulov, "Problems of Ruler," 164.

²²Farida Gabidullina, "Elitist Education: Historical Experience of the Russian and Tatar Peoples," *Social Studies Education Research*, 11(1), (2020): 270.

As Minnegulov states, the concepts of accountability and responsibility for one's deeds was one of the main topics in classical Tatar literature.²³

5. Governance, Statehood and an Ideal Ruler

In the Islamic worldview, governance is seen as a vital component of Allah's trust (*amanah*) to mankind. The system of rule that the Qur'an envisages is founded in principles such as trust (*amanah*), justice (*'adalah*), consultation (*shura*), accountability of the government (*muhasabah*), the rule of law (Shari'ah), pledge of allegiance (*bay'ah*), the principle of vicegerency (*khilafah*), representation (*wakalah*), and bidding good and forbidding evil (*amr bi'l-maruf wa nahy 'an al-munkar*).²⁴ Hence, these topics were extensively deliberated by Muslim intellectuals, and not only in scholarly works, they also constituted a central theme in literature and artistic compositions.

The Volga-Urals region was one of the prominent centers of Islamic civilization with an advanced state system. The concepts of governance, an ideal ruler and the state were extensively discussed by Yusuf Balasaguni (1017-1070), Qul Gali (1183-1236), Saif Sarai (1323-1396), Qutb and other local scholars and poets. The Golden Horde era, in particular, left a strong impact on the development of Islamic concepts of governance, state and good rulers.²⁵ The Golden Horde intellectuals envisaged sovereignty not as a gift and blessing bestowed by Allah but, rather, as an enormous duty and responsibility that Allah entrusts the ruler with. A ruler is responsible for the wellbeing and security of every person who lives under his rule, and he is accountable for the fulfilment of this duty before Allah. If the responsibilities of the ruler are properly implemented, then a perfect society will be established wherein welfare, happiness, justice and prosperity will exist.

Husraw and Shirin is one of the best examples of Islamic literature on governance. In this poem, the concept of a ruler is deliberated within the framework of an ideal person (*insan kamil*). Qutb suggested that the ruler should be the best person in his society, one who is well-educated and trained, having the best morals, especially justice. For example, Hormizd IV (579-590), the father of Husraw, is presented in the poem as a fairest and humble ruler. Under his rule, people lived in peace and stability without any occasions of oppression or distress.²⁶ Husraw was also presented as the best in his society, and, thus, the only qualified person to ascend the throne after the death of his father. However, within a year, his rule was overthrown by a general named Bahram Chobin. However, Husraw was soon able to return to the throne with the help of the Byzantine Caesar and was thus obliged to marry Caesar's daughter, Maryam.

The question which needs to be asked here is: if Husraw was the one best suited to rule and well prepared for the throne since his childhood, then why he was not able to protect his throne from Bahram's attack? Qutb attributed Husraw's failure to his youth and lack of political and life experiences.²⁷ Coming to power is difficult, but keeping it is even harder. Sovereignty requires of the ruler extensive preparation in politics, life and morality.

The character of Husraw is depicted by Qutb as undergoing change and evolution. Under the influence of Shirin's love, Husraw gradually rids himself of his selfish qualities and becomes a fair, intelligent and wise ruler. In their conversations, Shirin always guides Husraw towards becoming an ideal ruler; she says, "Be just," "Do not harm anyone after establishing the right," "Rule in the way

²³Minnegulov, *Medieval Tatar Literature*, 36.

²⁴Elmira Akhmetova, "The Arab Spring, Good Governance and Citizens' Rights," *Islam and Civilisational Renewal*, 5(3), 336.

²⁵Minnegulov, "Problems of Ruler," 158.

²⁶Qutb, *Husraw ve Shirin*, 36.

²⁷Minnegulov, "Problems of Ruler," 163.

that no one will curse you,” and “Take care of your people.”²⁸ What is worth mentioning here is that, for Qutb, the ruler must experience feelings of love and affection because without these feelings he cannot understand others and assess the situation.²⁹ The feeling of attraction and love has the capacity to ennoble anyone; thus, rulers should experience it in order to rise to the ideal.

Besides, the Golden Horde writers stipulated that the rulers should follow the advice of scholars and religious leaders. They reminded them of the shortness of worldly life, the reality of death, accountability in front of the Creator, and the necessity of leaving a decent name after death. Thinkers highly appreciated the role of scholars and the educated in their societies and repeatedly emphasized the necessity of following their advice in public policy. The same tradition of emphasizing the significant impact of scholars on rulers can also be noticed in *Husraw and Shirin*. Qutb depicted conversations between Husraw and a sage named Bozorg Umid. Husraw and Shirin’s conversations with this sage deal mainly with global issues and philosophical questions such as the infinity and eternity of the universe, the movement of the planets, the meaning of life, and the observance of measure and moderation in one’s actions.³⁰

Another point we wanted to discuss in this paper is the issue of women in matters of state. Islam liberated women from all kinds of discrimination and empowered them with progressive social, legal, economic and political rights. During the early period of Islam, women actively served their societies as educators, significant scholars, and luminous public and political figures. There is no textual ruling in the Qur’an or the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) to deprive women of public and political rights. Later, a general consensus (*ijma’*) was attained that only men are eligible for the position of the head of the state, the caliph.³¹ Such opinion could have been affected by the realities of that particular time such as safety issues, the Arab culture, and the principal responsibilities of a caliph including leading the congregation prayer as well as the Muslim army when needed.

The Turks were relatively open to the participation of women in politics and state affairs. Their women rode into battle with men, took an active part in affairs of state and sat next to the sultans and jurists advising them in the dispensation of justice.³² Women enjoyed civic and economic rights in the Golden Horde society. In Qutb’s poem, a woman is placed in the highest social position of the state structure. Muhibbanu rules in her country successfully. After her death, her sister Shirin comes to the throne and establishes justice, stability and order. Qutb depicts that under the just rule of Shirin, the “state enjoys happiness,” and “abundance and richness in the country are established.” Qutb writes, “The prosperity and welfare of the state depend on the will of the ruler; even on the salt marsh a rich harvest grows.” Also: “Under a just ruler, harmony and friendship will arise even between incompatible creatures such as a wolf and a sheep.”³³ As was mentioned earlier, Qutb characterizes Shirin as a beautiful, intelligent and brave woman with excessive feelings of love towards Husraw. She is courageous enough to leave her throne in order to be close to her love although she knows that Husraw had chosen to marry Maryam for political and state reasons. Due to her unconditional love, the personality of Husraw gradually develops and he becomes an ideal ruler.

²⁸Qutb, *Husraw ve Shirin*, 396-397.

²⁹Minnegulov, “Problems of Ruler,” 165.

³⁰Qutb, *Husraw ve Shirin*, 398-405.

³¹Muhammad Hashim Kamali, *Freedom, Equality and Justice in Islam* (Malaysia: Ilmiah Publishers, 2002), 69.

³²Nazeer Ahmed, “Women Sovereigns in Islam,” *History of Islam: An Encyclopaedia of Islamic History*, <https://historyofislam.com/contents/the-post-mongol-period/women-sovereigns-in-islam>, accessed 28 March 2022.

³³Qutb, *Husraw ve Shirin*, 189-190.

Besides, Qutb also highlighted that only individuals such as Shirin and Husraw could be truly fair rulers. Unfortunately, the life of such ideal people is short. The happy life of Husraw and Shirin ends tragically right after their marriage. Shirui, Husraw's son from his first marriage with Maryam, kills his father as he has become interested in Shirin. Shirin, not being able to find a meaning in life without her love Husraw, commits suicide. Such a tragic end of the story demonstrates, on the one hand, the author's reckoning with harsh reality, and on the other hand, the relatively utopian nature of the idea of a just ruler, as Kuprilezade mentioned.³⁴ Interestingly, in Qutb's version, he directly related the reason for this tragic end to the fact that Husraw had rejected the message of Islam and had torn up the letter that was sent to him by Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*). Besides, Minnegulov suggests that the tragedy of Husraw and Shirin could be understood as the author's warning to Tini Beg khan about the cruelty of the world of politics as well as the reminder to the rulers of the need for vigilance and caution.³⁵

Moreover, the choice of Qutb to end the lives of his main heroes, Farhad and Shirin, by suicide raises the doubts in modern readers as suicide is considered an unethical action and a great sin in Islam. Yet, it is worth mentioning here that Qutb did not aim at making considerable changes to the original plot of *Husraw and Shirin* depicted by Firdausi first and, then, replicated by Nizami. Simply, it was a rule to maintain the original plot in replica works. Besides, *Husraw and Shirin* of Qutb is a literary work based on symbolic interpretations and exaggerations to demonstrate the power of love, thus it could be problematic to simply conclude that Qutb supported suicide or even approved it. At the same time, Husraw, Shirin and Farhad lived in the seventh century, around the same time when the Prophet Muhammad (*SAW*) began receiving a revelation from Allah and established his state in Madinah based on the Islamic principles. All heroes portrayed in the poem were non-Muslims and followed their own local traditions and beliefs. Perhaps, this could be the main reason for Qutb in maintaining the same details of plot and not condemning the action of suicide openly. Yet, as already been underlined earlier, Qutb directly related the reasons for tragedies to the fact that Husraw had rejected the message of Islam. In sum, this poem of Qutb, which may appear at first glance to be a simple love story, has a deep meaning and can be considered a guideline for rulers about their responsibilities and priorities.

6. Conclusion

This paper presented an overview of *Husraw and Shirin*, one of the significant poems of the Golden Horde period, written by Qutb in 1342. The results of the discussion in this paper can be arranged in the following four points. First, its philosophical concentration and conceptual framework make the poem *Husraw and Shirin* a perfect example of a literary work in Islamic civilization. Although it illustrates individuals and events that occurred before the coming of Islam, its main characters are depicted by the author through the lens of Islamic ethical norms. The concepts of statehood, ideal ruler and governance are also treated by Qutb based on an Islamic worldview.

Second, Golden Horde scholarship appears to be analogous to intellectual developments that occurred in other parts of Islamic civilization in terms of its wide-range thematic scope, and multi-disciplinary, inclusive and integrated nature. *Husraw and Shirin* encourages us to assert that topics related to the main principles of governance in Islam such as justice, welfare, trust, human dignity and accountability were not necessarily restricted to books of a political or legal (*fiqhi*) nature but also constituted a central theme in literary works and artistic compositions.

Third, governance and statehood were among the most essential topics in classical Islamic discourse as good governance and the establishment of wellbeing, prosperity and security for all

³⁴M. F. Kuprilezade, *Türk Edebiyatında Mutassuflar Tarihi* [History of the *Mutasuflar* in Turkish Literature] (Istanbul: n.p., 1918), 143.

³⁵Minnegulov, "Problems of Ruler," 165.

citizens, regardless of their ethnic and religious differences, constituted the main objectives (*maqсад*) of Islamic rule. Hence, the necessity of having an ideal ruler and ideal state in order to achieve the objective of the Shari'ah in governance was a central theme in Islamic scholarship, whether of a philosophical, political, theological, legal, literary or pedagogical nature. It is worth mentioning here that there was no clear-cut separation between governance and religion; rather, throughout Islamic history, various forms of states and governments maintained one common feature: the premise of unity of religion and state.

Fourth, although the original version of *Husraw and Shirin* written by Qutb himself did not survive in the region where it was composed, similar philosophical concepts, ideas and literary elements can be found in the subsequent Turkic-Tatar oral tradition and literature. *Husraw and Shirin* played an important role in the development of the literary language of the Golden Horde. The ideological-thematic, descriptive measures, conceptual-aesthetic features, and poetic details that were used in *Husraw and Shirin* were developed and used creatively in the following eras. Later Tatar poets such as Saif Sarai (1321-1396), Mahmud Muhammadyar (1496-1547) and Abdullah Tukai (1886-1913) freely used the principles of creativity and literary motifs that Qutb had mastered from Persian literature and skillfully applied in his *Husraw and Shirin*.

In sum, *Husraw and Shirin* is a remarkable work with richness of ideas and language, elegance of style, and deep philosophical reflections that are primarily based on Islamic values and principles. Qutb was a prominent representative of the fourteenth-century Golden Horde society and its scholarly circle. Since information about this powerful Islamic state is limited and has often been distorted in official history books for various political and ideological reasons, *Husraw and Shirin* can be considered a precious piece which beautifully portrays the Golden Horde society, their lifestyles and habits, principal thoughts and norms.

Conflict of Interest

Author(s) declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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