



Type Of Article (Review Article)

The Change In Cultural, Social And Moral Behavior Of Iranians During The Mongol Invasion From The Perspective Of Zaydari Nasavi

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Article Info

Received: 2025/05/17

Accepted: 2025/09/07

pp. 47-58

Keywords:

Cultural

Social

Moral

Iran

Mongols

Zaydari Nasavi

Nafsah Ul-Masdur

Abstract

Examining the cultural, social, and moral changes among Iranians during the Mongol invasion, beyond a mere historical narrative, provides an opportunity to understand the causes of the Khwarazmian state's collapse and the relationship between moral crises and weaknesses in socio-political structures. Zaydari Nasavi's work, *Nafsah Ul-Masdur*, as a direct eyewitness account and the secretary of Jalal al-Din Khwarazmshah's court, serves as a credible source for investigating these transformations. This study, employing a library-based approach and historical content analysis, critically rereads and contextualizes Nasavi's text, extracting his key concepts regarding ethics, society, and politics on the eve of the Mongol invasion. The findings indicate that Nasavi, emphasizing moral decline within the ruling class and the weakening of social capital among the populace, identifies changes in Iranians' cultural and social behaviors as a fundamental factor facilitating Mongol penetration and dominance. In his view, the moral crisis is not an individual issue but a socio-historical variable that explains political collapse. Nasavi's approach can be considered a "historical analytical model" in which social ethics and cultural norms play a decisive role in the stability or disintegration of political power. This analytical framework, while opening a new horizon for understanding the link between ethics and politics, also has the potential to be applied to other critical periods in Iranian history.

Citation: Rabti, Mahdi. Asadollahi, Khodabakhsh. Nazaricharvadeh, Ahmadreza. Zirak Goushlavandani, Nasrollah. (2025). The Change In Cultural, Social And Moral Behavior Of Iranians During The Mongol Invasion From The Perspective Of Zaydari Nasavi. *Journal Of Socio-Cultural Changes*, 22, Special Issue 1; (Serial No. 87): 47-58.

DOI:

This Article Is Extracted From The Doctoral Thesis Of 'Mahdi Rabti', Titled "*A Comparative Study Of The Ethical Foundations Of Nafsah Ul-Masdur By Zaydari Naswi With The Quran And Narrations*", Under The Supervision Of 'Dr. Khodabakhsh Asadollahi', & 'Dr. Ahmadreza Nazaricharvadeh', & Advisory 'Dr. Nasrollah Zirak Goushlavandani'.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Historical literature in medieval Iran, especially during critical periods, was not merely a tool for narrating events but served as a medium to reflect the deep cultural, social, and moral layers of society. Among these works, Zaydari Nasavi's *Nafsah Ul-Masdur* stands out as more than an official court report; it is a literary-historical document illustrating Iran's crises on the eve of and during the Mongol invasion. What distinguishes Nasavi's narrative is his use of literary language, employing metaphor, allusion, and allegory as instruments for social critique and ethical analysis. In this framework, the moral decay of the ruling class and the fragility of the populace's social capital are not individual deficiencies but structural conditions facilitating Mongol domination. Thus, the literary devices in Nasavi's account are not merely aesthetic; they carry layers of social critique, presenting history at an analytical and interpretive level. Accordingly, the main research question of this study is: How can one, beyond the literary style and rhetorical techniques of this work, analyze the cultural, social, and moral transformations of Iranians during the Mongol era, and can Nasavi's narrative be considered a conceptual framework for explaining the link between moral crises and political collapse?

Methodology

This study employed a library-based approach grounded in historical text analysis, with Nasavi's *Nafsah Ul-Masdur* as the primary source. Initially, the complete text was examined, and through meticulous note-taking, all metaphors and allusions reflecting the ethical and social dimensions of Iranian society during the Mongol invasion were extracted. The collected data were then categorized and organized based on content criteria to enable systematic analysis. In the next phase, content analysis was conducted on these elements to identify shifts in the social and moral behaviors of both the ruling elite and the broader society. This methodology not only provides a rigorous, evidence-based approach to examining the relationship between moral crises and social transformations but also offers an analytical framework applicable to other critical periods in Iranian history.

Results And Discussion

The findings indicate that the moral and social collapse during the Mongol invasion in Iran had both individual and structural roots. Key vices included envy, gossip, suspicion, ambition, greed, and miserliness, which not only caused personal harm but also undermined political and administrative relations within the Khwarazmian court. Nasavi, employing metaphors and allusions, depicts corrupt ministers and officials whose ambition, greed, and suspicion facilitated embezzlement, betrayal, deceit, and factionalism, ultimately eroding social trust and governmental cohesion. These ethical deviations, combined with the naivety and low character of officials, severely weakened decision-making processes and accelerated the dynasty's collapse. At the collective level, this moral decline led to widespread public distrust, pessimism, despair, and social anxiety, bringing fear, humiliation, and collective degradation. Consequently, conditions became favorable for theft, robbery, murder, and massacres, and social security was thoroughly destabilized. This analysis demonstrates that societal collapse during the Mongol era was not solely the result of external pressures but stemmed from the complex interplay of individual vices, structural corruption, official betrayal, and collective socio-psychological responses, all of which severely undermined both political institutions and social capital. This study shows that Zaydari Nasavi's *Nafsah Ul-Masdur* is not merely a historical text but an analytical and critical account of the intersection between ethics, politics, and society on the eve of the Khwarazmian collapse. Using the Persian rhetorical tradition, Nasavi portrays ethical vices such as envy, greed, disloyalty, and the absence of social cohesion as structural and institutional factors in political collapse, demonstrating that weaknesses in collective ethics and public trust undermine political foundations and resilience against external crises. Compared with contemporary historians like Ata-Malik Juvayni and Ibn Athir, Nasavi's approach is unique, as it presents ethical and social mechanisms as hidden causes of collapse, pioneering the analysis of the ethics-politics relationship. Critical rereading of *Nafsah Ul-Masdur* thus offers not only historical insight but also a model for understanding the dialectical relationship between ethics, politics, and society, which remains relevant for analyzing the stability of socio-political systems and the role of ethical capital in shaping nations' destinies. Nasavi's message provides a lasting warning regarding the inseparable link between moral integrity and political-social survival.