

## NIZAMI-POET FOR ALL HUMANITY

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Azerbaijan's literature is a unique spiritual treasure-house for its people and there is no doubt that Nizami Ganjavi is one of the greatest representatives of this literary heritage. His works, with their unique poetic innovations and universal themes, have transcended borders to influence the literature of distant lands. We hope that by introducing reader to more detailed information about the great poet's life and work, Nizami will be more appreciated in the West, too. Perhaps we can encourage more research in academic circles.

We will run a series of articles about Nizami by both Azerbaijani and international experts. The first article in the series deals with the poet's creative environment and his ideas about the Azerbaijan- Turkish people. In the next issue we will introduce his Khamsa and other literary gems.

In reviewing world literature we see that two principal poets used the strong humanistic influence of art to rise above a cultural environment generally defined by the mysticism and prejudices of patriarchal feudalism. One of these was Nizami Ganjavi, the greatest representative of the Eastern Renaissance, who was born in the 12th century in Sunny Azerbaijan and represented the quintessence of world literature and philosophy in his immortal work Khamsa (Five) via the aesthetic power of his art. The other was William Shakespeare, the greatest representative of the Western Renaissance, who was born in Foggy Albion more than 400 years later to become a child of humanity. Even now, in times when science and technology are no longer developing in linear series but exponentially, we see how mysticism prevails proudly over healthy minds and it is impossible not to be amazed by the clear logic and consciousness in the works of these two brothers in art and intellect.

Nizami (his real name was Ilyas ibn Yusif) was not satisfied with just the deep intellect and poetic talent gifted by God. Throughout his lifetime he pursued knowledge diligently and doubled his experience with his poetic talent; these two great attributes contributed to his scientific and philosophical research into the happiness of the human being.

Nizami Ganjavi, who began by writing lyrics in short forms – gasida, gazal, rubai, soon compiled an anthology, Divan, and gained fame as a favourite and esteemed poet not only in the Near and Middle East, but also on distant shores. It is no accident that Muhammad Ovfi, who was engaged in literary activities in the palace of the Turkish sultan Eltutmush in Delhi, praised Nizami's art in his narration Lubabul-elbab (The jewel of the select). The Indian poet Amir Khosrow Dehlevi (1253-1325) who lived a century after Nizami and who wrote his works in the Dari (middle Persian) language, as was traditional at that time and

who was born into the Lachin family of Turks, was one of the first world-known poets to answer the Azerbaijani's Khamsa.

The genius son of Azerbaijan, Nizami Ganjavi, shed the light of his creative synthesis of progressive humanist thought and inimitable poetic art across the world over the following centuries. Brought up in the environment of Ganja, which was a Near and Middle Eastern centre of science and culture of the in those times, this allowed the young Ilyas to study developments in science and philosophy. Sultan Muhammad, the Khamsa of Nizami, British Library, Or. MS 2265, f.18r. Old Woman complaining to Sultan Sanjar. 1539-43, border replaced in the 17th C  
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After devoting his youth to the study of sciences, he wrote his first poem when he was already 30 years old. He inscribed his name forever in the annals of art with his five poems, Treasury of Secrets (1175), Khosrow and Shirin (1180), Leyli and Majnun (1188), Seven Beauties (1197) and Iskander-Nameh (1203), presented to the world of literature over the next 30 years. They laid a strong foundation for the great Nizami school of literature which continues to exert its influence nowadays.

Humanity is the motif at the very heart of Nizami's poetry and the poet regarded it as his sacred mission to apply every ounce of creativity to the service of his people. In this lies the immortality and eternal youth of Nizami's art through the centuries. His works have been translated into Western as well as into Eastern languages from time to time and played their role in humanity's moral development.

Unfortunately, Nizami is still sometimes represented as an Iranian poet in certain academic circles, whether through ignorance or with deliberate intent. The best response to this is regular publication, popularization and translation of the works of the Azerbaijani genius by his own compatriots. It has to be said that no extensive research into Nizami's work is being undertaken in countries like Iran.

There is convincing evidence to place the poet within Azerbaijani history: Both Nizami himself and all medieval sources which wrote about him confirm that he was born in 1141 in the city of Ganja, one of the ancient cultural centres of Azerbaijan and a capital of the Azerbaijani Atabey's state (1136- 1225); he lived and created in Azerbaijan throughout his life.

Known as a poet, scholar and philosopher, Nizami is recognized for using his poetry to examine the development of mankind in society. His romantic epic poems are full of passionate emotion and philosophical commentary on humanity.