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ORIGINAL STUDY

Contrasting Utopias: A Comparative Analysis of Societal Ideals in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and Nizami Ganjavi's *Iskandarnama*

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ABSTRACT

The notion of an ideal society has long been a central theme in literature across diverse cultures and epochs. Originating in Plato's *Republic* in the fourth century B.C., the concept evolved through various literary genres and styles. Notable contributions emerged from both Western and Eastern traditions, exemplified respectively by Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Nizami Ganjavi's *Iskandarnama* (12th century). This article undertakes a comparative analysis of these works, examining their portrayals of individual life, economy, religion, governance, and justice. Both *Utopia* and *Iskandarnama* underscore the importance of nature, animals, and human relationships, emphasizing harmony and peace in society. They share beliefs in the afterlife, divine power, and gratitude for divine favour, depicting prosperous cities achieved through diligence and penalizing disobedience. However, distinctions arise in ideologies and cultural specifics; *Iskandarnama* lacks class hierarchy while *Utopia* acknowledges slaves and a structured governance system. *Iskandarnama* idealizes peace and worship, while *Utopia* focuses on societal routines and the roles of religious and wealthy elites. By comparing and contrasting these works, this research aims to explore diverse cultural ideals and identify parallels and variations in the concept of the perfect society.

Keywords: Utopia, Ideal society, Religion, Nizami Ganjavi, Iskandarnama, Thomas More

Introduction

Comparative literature explores the diverse expressions of culture and philosophy across different nations and languages, revealing universal human aspirations. Central to this field is the concept of the “ideal society,” a theme that has preoccupied thinkers for millennia. While the Western utopian tradition is often traced back to Plato's *Republic* in the fourth century B.C. and later crystallized in Sir Thomas More's 16th-century prose-fiction *Utopia*, there exists a parallel, equally rich Eastern tradition. This Eastern lineage began with the arrival of Socratic philosophy in the Middle East, where the philosopher Abu Nasr

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Al-Farabi harmonized Platonic ideals with Islamic doctrine. This intellectual framework was later adopted by the 12th-century Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi in his epic poem, *Iskandarnama*, from the series of poems called *Khamasa*.

Despite their shared roots in Greek philosophy, the Western and Eastern utopian traditions are frequently studied in isolation. This scholarly separation represents a significant research gap; by failing to compare these works, we overlook the profound ideological intersections between the English Renaissance and the Eastern literary golden age. This study is significant because it challenges the notion that utopianism is a purely Western construct. Instead, it posits that the quest for an ideal society is a global phenomenon that addresses the fundamental relationship between humanity, governance, and the natural world.

This article intends to examine the similarities and differences in the concept of the ideal society through a comparative analysis of More's *Utopia* and Ganjavi's *Iskandarnama*. Specifically, it seeks to answer: To what extent do these authors use the imagined or fictional land to critique the moral and ecological failures of their own societies? By comparing their visions, this study examines both the shared utopian foundations and the significant philosophical differences that shape each author's conception of an ideal society.

However, the comparison also reveals distinct cultural specifics. While More's *Utopia* remains grounded in the practicalities of a structured society—even including controversial elements like class distinction and slavery—Ganjavi's *Iskandarnama* presents a more spiritualized vision that relies on divine favor and communal happiness. While both works ultimately derive inspiration from classical philosophical traditions, they emerged within distinct intellectual environments. More's vision reflects the influence of Renaissance humanism, Christian ethics, and civic reform, whereas Nizami's ideal society developed within a cultural context shaped by Islamic ethical philosophy, Persian literary traditions, and the legacy of Al-Farabi's conception of the virtuous city. These differing intellectual backgrounds significantly influence how each author conceptualizes justice, authority, and social harmony.

Ultimately, this study approaches utopian literature not merely as the representation of ideal societies but also as a form of social critique. As Fredric Jameson argues, utopian narratives derive their significance from their capacity to reveal the limitations and contradictions of existing social realities rather than from the practical feasibility of the worlds they depict (2005: 145). From this perspective, both More's *Utopia* and Ganjavi's *Iskandarnama* may be understood as literary responses to the political, social, and moral concerns of their respective historical contexts. Their imagined societies function simultaneously as visions of an ideal order and as critiques of contemporary realities. To achieve this objective, the study adopts a qualitative comparative literary approach based on close textual reading and thematic analysis, examining how each text constructs and evaluates the concept of an ideal society within its respective cultural framework. The article argues that More's *Utopia* presents an institutionally organized model of social reform, whereas Nizami's *Iskandarnama* imagines a morally and spiritually integrated community. This distinction allows the study to compare not only themes but also the different intellectual systems through which utopian ideals are constructed.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative literary methodology to examine representations of the ideal society in Thomas More's *Utopia* and Nizami Ganjavi's *Iskandarnama*. The selection of these texts is based on their significance within Western and Eastern utopian traditions and their shared engagement with questions of governance, justice, religion, wealth, social organization, and human flourishing.

The analysis is primarily based on close textual reading and thematic comparative criticism. Rather than tracing direct influence between the two works, the study adopts a cross-cultural comparative approach that examines how each author constructs an imagined ideal society within a distinct historical, cultural, and philosophical context. The comparison focuses on major thematic categories, including human–nature relations, religion, governance, justice, wealth, social trust, agriculture, and community life.

Methodologically, the study combines thematic analysis with interpretive literary criticism. Textual passages are examined not only for similarities and differences but also for their broader ideological, philosophical, and cultural implications. Drawing upon comparative literature and utopian studies, the research seeks to explore how utopian discourse functions as both a representation of ideal social order and a critique of contemporary social realities.

Unless otherwise stated, all English translations of passages from Nizami Ganjavi's *Iskandarnama* cited in this study are the author's own translations from the Azerbaijani edition of the text.

Theoretical framework

Fredric Jameson argues that utopian narratives derive their significance from their ability to reveal the limitations and contradictions of existing social realities rather than from the practical feasibility of the worlds they depict (2005: 145). From this perspective, both Thomas More's *Utopia* and Nizami Ganjavi's *Iskandarnama* can be understood as literary responses to the political, social, and moral concerns of their respective historical contexts.

The study also draws upon Ruth Levitas's understanding of utopia as the expression of a desire for a better way of living. According to Levitas, utopian thought reflects humanity's aspiration for social improvement and alternative forms of collective existence (2013: 8). Both More and Ganjavi construct ideal societies that challenge greed, injustice, conflict, and moral corruption while proposing different visions of social harmony and human fulfillment.

Furthermore, the comparative dimension of this research is informed by Lyman Tower Sargent's argument that utopian thought extends beyond the Western literary tradition. Sargent emphasizes that ideal societies have been imagined in numerous cultures long before the emergence of the modern utopian genre (2010: 85). This perspective provides a theoretical basis for examining *Utopia* and *Iskandarnama* within the same analytical framework despite their distinct cultural origins.

Finally, Nizami's vision may be contextualized through the influence of Abu Nasr Al-Farabi's concept of the virtuous city, which emphasizes moral excellence, communal responsibility, and social harmony. While More's ideal society relies primarily on institutional organization and political structures, Nizami's utopia is grounded in ethical consciousness and spiritual perfection. Together, these theoretical perspectives enable a deeper examination of how Eastern and Western literary traditions conceptualize the ideal society.

Comparative perspectives on Utopian literature

Utopian literature, as defined across various dictionaries, encompasses visions of an idealized society where perfection in governance, laws, and social harmony prevails. Oxford Learner's Dictionaries describes it as "*utopia is an imaginary place or state in which*

everything is perfect,” while Cambridge Dictionary characterizes it as “*a perfect society in which people work well with each other and are happy.*” Britannica Dictionary further refines this definition to include “*perfect government and social conditions.*” Thus, “utopia” broadly signifies an ideal state where humanity’s aspirations for peace, tolerance, liberty, justice, and happiness find expression, relying heavily on the imaginative faculties of the author. As summarized in Bukier’s article utopian literature “aims at establishing a society devoid of man’s evils; a society of peace, tolerance, liberty, justice and happiness. It depends on tremendous imagination and great fantasy of the author” (2018: 3). It seeks to imagine a society devoid of human evils.

Western Utopian tradition

The concept of utopia traces its roots to the Greek words “outopia” (no place) and “eutopia” (good place), initially coined by Sir Thomas More in his 1516 work, *Utopia*. More’s intent was to critique the socio-political issues plaguing Europe, presenting an alternative societal model. However, utopian thought predates More, with Plato’s *Republic* (370-360 B.C.) standing as an early example. Plato’s work delves into the structure of an ideal society founded on principles of justice and political fairness, setting a precedent for utopian literature that emphasizes human happiness and perfection.

Ruth Levitas explores the historical evolution of utopian literature, noting its presence in ancient Greece, European Middle Ages, Asian and indigenous cultures, Enlightenment philosophy, Marxist theory, anarchist movements, and socio-political theories (2010: 8). This widespread influence underscores utopia’s enduring appeal and its role in shaping philosophical and literary discourse over centuries.

Lyman Tower Sargent in his book *Utopianism: A Very Short Introduction* argues that, “Thomas More invented a literary genre, but there are numerous texts both in the West and outside it that pre-date More’s *Utopia* that describe a non-existent society identifiably better than the contemporary society” (2010: 85). He challenges the notion that utopianism is exclusively Western, arguing that pre-More texts in non-Western traditions also envision societies superior to contemporary realities. This global perspective highlights the universality of utopian ideals across diverse cultural contexts, demonstrating their capacity to inspire visions of societal improvement worldwide. The idea that numerous societies had utopias before the western genre was developed by Muharremov, who argued that “Middle Age Islamic thinkers were both Westerners and Easterners, blending Eastern and Western perspectives” (2014: 216).

Eastern Utopian tradition

Eastern contributions to utopian literature are exemplified by figures like Abu Nasr Al-Farabi, whose *The Virtuous City (Al-Madina al-Fadila)*, published in 943, aimed to construct an ideal society influenced by Platonic and Islamic principles. Al-Farabi’s work, popular in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, contributed significantly to Renaissance humanism by integrating Greek philosophy with Islamic thought, emphasizing moral and social harmony. Similarly, Nizami Ganjavi’s twelfth-century poem *Iskandarnama*, drawing on Plato and Al-Farabi, emphasizes social identity over individuality within a utopian framework. Ganjavi’s synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophical ideas reflects a broader trend in utopian literature of integrating diverse cultural influences to envision ideal societies.

Cyrus Masroori's classification of utopian texts into prescriptive (providing plans for ideal cities) and descriptive (depicting imaginary societies) highlights a distinction between Eastern and Western approaches. "Medieval Persian (by Persian the author refers to the language of the writers) political discourse primarily focused on heroic personalities and ideal cities, lacking descriptive accounts" (2013: 53). Eastern utopianism, he argues, is predominantly prescriptive, focusing on moral greatness and spiritual belief as essential elements for achieving societal perfection.

Utopian literature transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, offering diverse visions of ideal societies rooted in human imagination and philosophical inquiry. From Plato to Al-Farabi, from More to Nizami Ganjavi, utopian thinkers across history have envisioned societies founded on principles of justice, harmony, and human flourishing, shaping intellectual discourse and inspiring aspirations for a better world.

Nizami Ganjavi and his ideal world

Ilyas Yusuf Nizami Ganjavi, a renowned Azerbaijani poet and philosopher, was born in Ganja, "a Caucasian town known for its cultural activity" (Chelkowski, 1975: 2). He studied medieval sciences and was considered a "physician" or "hakim" (Bürge & van Ruymbeke, 2011: 14) by his contemporaries. His poems are found in almost all branches of folklore of the twelfth century and benefited from Islamic sciences and Greek philosophy. He collected the world genesis theories of Greek philosophers in his own poetic language, summarizing their thought systems about the origin of the world in his own poetic language (Resulzade, 2011: 63). Nizami Ganjavi was closely associated with oral and written Eastern and Western literature. His lyric poems were the first step in his creative process, expressing the most humanitarian, universal, and universally applicable sociopolitical, social, and moral-ethic values of his period. His *Khamsa*, a collection of five poems known as the *Treasury of Mysteries*, *Khosrov and Shirin*, *Leili and Medjnun*, *Seven Beauties*, and *Iskandarnama*, was written in the masnavi form, featuring double-rhymed verses. These poems explore themes such as the inner world, emotions, thoughts, and character development of the main heroes.

Iskandarnama is considered the final masterpiece of the renowned Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi in his collection *Khamsa (Quintet)*, composed either in 1194 or between 1196 and 1202. This narrative poem holds a unique position in the history of world literature, as it is the remarkable outcome of the great artist's versatile work. Nizami places a strong emphasis on logic and a negative outlook, arguing that a perfect city with divine values would also get heavenly assistance. The narrative mostly draws from Islamic legends about Alexander the Great, which have their roots in references to the Dhu'l-Karnayn found in the Qur'an. Inspired by historical chronicles and myths, Nizami Ganjavi showcases the epic genre in eastern literature, blending themes and plots from Alexander the Great's life and marches. The work consists of two books, *Sharafname (The Book of Honor)* and *Iqbalname (The Book of Fates)*. The poem describes Iskandar's life through three stages: conqueror, knowledge seeker, and prophet. He conquers the world, gains wisdom, and travels across the world to proclaim his monotheistic creed.

Sharafname, also known as *The Book of Honor*, is a historical account of Iskandar's life, including his military campaigns against African invaders, conquest of Persia, and marriage to Darius' daughter. It also includes his journey to Mecca, residence in the Caucasus, and encounters with Queen Nushaba of Barda. Iskandar's personal development into the ideal king is described in *Iqbalname (The Book of Fates)*, which focuses on three directions and goals: human mind, intelligence, philosophy, human morality, justice, freedom, unity, and

a community of friendly people. Composed in medieval philosophical poetry, *Iqbalname* combines allegory and realistic images to depict Iskandar's spiritual rise and his quest for worldly happiness. The peak of perfection is a city of social equality (Quluzade 1984: 12), where Iskandar encounters many countries, spreads goodness, and overcomes social oppression and spiritual passions.

Nizami Ganjavi's *Iskandarnama* is a literary work that presents an ideal society that serves as a guiding light for those disillusioned with existing political and moral frameworks. Ganjavi advocates for a society where human worth is determined by spiritual purity, selfless service to others, and shared experiences of joy and sorrow. His writings not only present an idealized ruler or society but also outline the path towards achieving such ideals. Ganjavi's ideal society is not just a historical reflection but also a critique applicable to contemporary societies. Rezulzade suggests that "today's humanity is thirsty for an order based on spirituality and love, rather than materialism and hate" (2011: 320). In *Iskandarnama*, Ganjavi depicts Iskandar's journey to a utopian society, where he encounters a tribe living in peace and harmony. The Yajujis tribe, depicted as monstrous and destructive, pose a stark contrast to the idealized society Iskandar encounters. Upon reaching the ideal society, Iskandar and his army encounter a paradise-like environment characterized by lush gardens and abundant natural resources. However, touching these resources without permission results in severe consequences, emphasizing the sacredness of communal property and the importance of respecting societal norms.

Ganjavi's portrayal of the ideal society extends beyond material prosperity to include spiritual enlightenment and communal harmony. His emphasis on moral integrity and communal well-being resonates as a timeless critique of societies that prioritize material gain over spiritual growth. Ganjavi's *Iskandarnama* serves as both a literary vision and a critique of contemporary moral and political realities.

Thomas More and his *Utopia*

Sir Thomas More, born in 1478, was an English jurist, philosopher, author, lawmaker, and chief legal official during the Henry VIII era. He is considered the foremost Christian humanist and the most contentious Christian intellectual of his time. More was a key figure in the advancement of Renaissance Humanism and was a key figure in the New Learning Movement, advocating for the revival of Greek classics and Latin Literature masterpieces. He actively engaged in public affairs and political spheres, becoming Speaker of the House of Commons in 1523 and Lord Chancellor in 1529. His friendship with King Henry VIII ended when he was accused of treason for refusing to acknowledge the monarch as the supreme authority of the Church of England. More is primarily known for coining the phrase 'Utopia', which describes an ideal political system governed by reason to counterpoint the unstable state of European politics during his time. In 1935, the Catholic Church officially recognized him as a saint, but the Church of England regards him as a martyr of the Reformation.

Sir Thomas More's *Libellus Vere Aurfus Nec Minus Salutaris Quam Festius De Optimo Reip. Status, Deque Nova Insula Utopia*, first published in Latin in 1516, is a humorous and educated work that addresses the political and social issues of his time. The book is divided into two parts: *Dialogue of Council* and *Discourse on Utopia*. In *Dialogue of Council*, the characters discuss social and economic issues in early sixteenth-century England, while *Discourse on Utopia* focuses on More directly answering these problems with solutions. The English translation of *Utopia* was published by Ralph Robynson in 1551, sixteen years after More's untimely death.

The term “Utopia” originates from the Greek words “outopia,” meaning “no place,” and “eutopia,” meaning “good place.” The fictional character Hythloday, a highly knowledgeable individual in Greek language and philosophy, arrives on the island of Utopia. More, an ambassador for England and King Henry VIII, engages in intellectual discussions with Peter Giles during his visit to Belgium. They discuss Hythloday’s travels and beliefs, and their motivations for taking the position. More offers him the chance to use his skills and experience as a consultant for a royal court, but Hythloday publicly rejects the proposal, stating that “he would enslave himself to any king whatsoever” (2013: 15).

More’s plans for *Utopia* were criticized but given authority by the Cardinal, leading to broad acceptance. Hythloday claims that Utopian society is superior to European society, although Europeans would find this ridiculous. The three argue that Hythloday should be more specific when describing Utopian society, as many of his traditions appear absurd. Utopia explores the virtues and newness of the New World, with Peter Giles challenging Hythlodaeus’ lack of experience. He asserts that the New World is older than the Old World, with historical records of stages and cities. Utopia’s affinities with Europe and Greek literature and philosophy suggest continuities between the two civilizations, suggesting that *Utopia* can still learn from Europe.

More’s work *Utopia* aims to build a world of equality and true friendship by rewriting society, scripts, and roles while remaining faithful to human nature. This late Renaissance work signifies “the revival of political research and theory, focusing on social reprogramming and ensuring that human nature remains constant” (Davis, 2000: 107). Utopia is an ideal society that prioritizes moral ideals, tolerance, and plurality in both private and public life. It emphasizes the unity of the person and the state, allowing for forced labor and slavery instead of execution. Thomas More advocates for the welfare of people and opposes absolute monarchy and fake money. A utopian society prioritizes justice and equality, with total control over its members and a society ruled by reason and nature.

In *Utopia*, the ideal society is just and in harmony with the needs and ambitions of its people. The concept of a social utopia portrays a harmonious society governed by exemplary laws, while also highlighting the flaws present in the writer’s own society. Positional goods, such as gold, real estate, diamonds, and luxury goods, are meaningless in Utopia, as the social context emphasizes friendship, equality, and labor sharing. Households are managed as family groups, and power is no longer related to bloodline. Utopians believe in a good creator, immortality, and afterlife judgment, and private interests become public interests. The geography, towns, peoples, and laws of Utopia are characterized by fifty-four large communities with the same language, laws, customs, and institutions.

Utopian works blend religious ideals with real-world challenges, fostering a mutual affinity between utopia and religion. Thomas More’s utopia advocates for communal society and Christian values, while Utopians grant liberty and promote harmony with nature. Religion influences social hierarchy and beliefs in eternal happiness and pleasure.

Comparison of ideal cities

Ideal societies, as depicted in *Iskandarnama* and *Utopia*, represent two distinct yet overlapping visions of human perfection. Both Nizami Ganjavi and Thomas More construct utopian frameworks that address fundamental concerns such as morality, governance, social harmony, and human nature. While they share several thematic similarities, their approaches diverge due to differences in cultural, philosophical, and historical contexts. These differences shape not only how each author defines an ideal society but also how they envision the role of humans within it. The significance of this comparison lies not

merely in identifying common utopian themes but in examining how similar social ideals emerge from different intellectual traditions. The following analysis therefore explores both the shared foundations and the divergent philosophical assumptions that structure each author's vision of the ideal society.

Shared Utopian principles

Although their cultural backgrounds differ, both authors construct societies grounded in shared utopian ideals. Yet the significance of these similarities lies not in the ideals themselves, which are common features of utopian literature, but in the different philosophical foundations through which these ideals are justified and maintained. The following discussion therefore examines how comparable utopian goals emerge from distinct intellectual traditions.

Moral and spiritual foundations

In both works, a strong connection between humans and nature is evident, and both authors emphasize the moral and social significance of animals within an ideal society. In the social order, humans exist in apparent harmony with the natural world. In Nizami's ideal society, humanity is depicted as an extension of nature itself, suggesting not merely coexistence but a deep integration. This relationship is often idealized to a fantastical degree, where even wild animals are entirely submissive to humans:

Even wild animals do not try to escape from us.
We do not cause them any trouble or torture them.
When we need deer or gazelles,
they rush in through our doors themselves. (2011, lines 285–288)

Nature operates in complete harmony with human beings, reflecting a symbolic representation of moral perfection. Nature is not exploited but respected, and even wild animals coexist peacefully with humans. This portrayal constructs a vision of nature governed by moral perfection, where human needs are met without excess and violence is entirely absent. However, one could argue that such a depiction is less an ecological model and more a symbolic or poetic ideal, reflecting a spiritualized vision of harmony rather than a realistic social or environmental system.

Similarly, Thomas More's *Utopia* critiques contemporary society's exploitation of nature, particularly the cruelty involved in hunting. He questions the ethical justification of deriving pleasure from such acts, expressing empathy toward animals: "Even if the enjoyment is in witnessing a frail, harmless hare being slaughtered by strong, fierce, and merciless dogs, it makes him feel even more pity" (2013: 112). More's critique reflects a rational and ethical standpoint rooted in Renaissance humanism, emphasizing moral responsibility rather than mystical harmony. Both authors reject unnecessary cruelty toward animals. Despite these shared ethical concerns, the two authors differ significantly in their conceptual foundations. Nizami's vision is grounded in a metaphysical and moral framework in which harmony with nature stems from divine perfection. In contrast, More presents a socially engineered system in which human behavior is regulated through reason and communal organization. This distinction highlights how differing philosophical traditions—Islamic moral cosmology in Nizami and Renaissance humanism in More—shape their respective utopian visions of nature. In More's *Utopia*, hunting is not entirely abolished but restructured; it is delegated to slaves who perform butchery as a necessary and regulated function. This reflects a pragmatic rather than purely idealistic approach, suggesting that even in an ideal society, certain forms of labor considered morally undesirable are still required.

Additionally, the Utopians carefully manage their environment and avoid excessive urbanization, aiming to preserve natural beauty. As noted, “The town was designed at first by Utopus, but he left all that belonged to the ornament and improvement of it to be added by those that should come after him” (2013: 70). Utopus initially designed the town, but left its ornamentation and improvement to be added by future generations. This indicates a society that values sustainability and collective stewardship. Nature, in this context, functions both as a material resource and a moral guide, reflecting Renaissance ideals of balance between human progress and environmental preservation. Above all, people should not forget that each living thing has its own function and respect them. According to Muharremov, “Nizami points to the ecosystem understanding and indicates that human is also a part of this ecosystem. Just as a person loves his own life, he must love other souls as well. Nizami describes the human being as a person walking through a gallery in nature” (2014: 220). This metaphor reinforces the idea that humans are participants within, rather than masters of, the natural world. However, while this emphasizes harmony, it may also idealize human existence by downplaying conflict and ecological constraints. Nizami’s depiction can be interpreted as symbolic, representing an ideal moral state rather than a literal ecological system. More’s approach, however, reflects Renaissance concerns with ethics and human responsibility. This difference demonstrates how cultural and philosophical contexts shape the conceptualization of nature in utopian literature.

Moderation in diet and physical behavior, linking bodily health with moral and social stability have been emphasized by both authors. In Nizami’s ideal society, eating is framed as a balanced practice, avoiding both excess and deprivation. Humans are encouraged to consume food generously but without indulgence, distinguishing themselves from animals:

We neither eat like an ox or a donkey,
nor seal our mouths.
Even if there are all kinds of blessings on the table,
we eat until our bellies are full. (2011, lines 293–296)

Food consumption is both a natural right and a regulated activity, reflecting a moral ideal of balance. However, this balance can also be interpreted as a form of normative control over the body, where even basic needs like eating are governed by ethical expectations. From this perspective, Nizami’s ideal may be seen not only as harmonious but also as prescriptive, limiting individual variation in behavior.

Thomas More similarly emphasizes the importance of diet, but frames it within a broader ethical and rational system. In *Utopia*, bodily pleasures are accepted insofar as they contribute to health and social well-being. As More explains, bodily pleasure includes nourishment and the maintenance of health, but must be subordinated to higher moral and social goals: “bodily pleasure provides sensory delight... and promoting health... pleasures are only desirable if they maintain health (2013: 116). This reflects a utilitarian approach in which pleasure is not rejected but carefully regulated. The Utopians view health as the primary bodily pleasure, and they avoid behaviors such as idleness or excessive indulgence that might weaken the body. While this system promotes discipline, it also raises a potential tension: the extent to which individual freedom is constrained by collective definitions of “healthy” and “proper” living. Nizami’s vision is grounded in a moral-spiritual worldview, where moderation aligns with divine order. In contrast, More’s perspective reflects Renaissance humanism, emphasizing reason, utility, and social harmony. This raises a key utopian dilemma: whether regulation of the body enhances freedom or restricts it. In both cases, the body becomes a site of moral control, reflecting broader social values.

Death is viewed as a natural and meaningful part of life, emphasizing acceptance rather than excessive mourning. In Nizami's ideal society, death is not portrayed as tragic or disruptive, but rather as a regulated and almost natural transition limited to the elderly:

Death is far from the young,
it belongs only to the old man who has lived a long time.
We do not mourn the dead,
we know that this is not a solution to the problem. (2011, lines 297–300)

Death is integrated into a moral and social order where loss is understood, and mourning is considered unproductive. Instead, belief in the afterlife encourages individuals to remain hopeful and spiritually oriented. In this sense, death is not an end but a transition toward divine existence, reinforcing a worldview grounded in mysticism and spiritual continuity. However, this idealized depiction may also be interpreted critically. By removing death as a source of emotional and social disruption—especially through the exclusion of youth from mortality—Nizami's vision minimizes one of the most universal human experiences. This raises the question of whether such a model represents an attainable social order or a symbolic projection of moral perfection that suppresses the realities of human vulnerability.

Similarly, Thomas More's *Utopia* presents death as a process to be approached with calmness and rationality. The Utopians do not emphasize grief; instead, they celebrate a virtuous death through prayer and ritual: "When any die cheerfully, and full of hope, they do not mourn for them, but sing hymns. . . and commend their souls very earnestly to God" (2013: 162). Rather than expressing sorrow, they focus on the moral quality of the individual's life and their preparedness for the afterlife. This reflects a combination of religious belief and rational acceptance, influenced by humanist and possibly Stoic traditions, where emotional restraint and virtue are prioritized. Comparatively, both Nizami and More reject intense mourning and emphasize belief in an afterlife, yet their underlying frameworks differ. Nizami's approach is rooted in a mystical and spiritual worldview, where death aligns with divine will and cosmic order. More, by contrast, integrates religious belief with rational humanism, presenting death as a moment for ethical reflection rather than emotional collapse. Utopian visions often balance between emotional regulation and emotional suppression, reflecting broader questions about how ideal societies define and manage human experience.

Religion plays a central role in both societies, shaping ethical behavior, social order, and individuals' understanding of fate. However, the nature and function of religious belief differ significantly between Nizami's and More's visions, reflecting their distinct philosophical and historical contexts. In Nizami's ideal society, religious belief is deeply integrated into everyday life, particularly through the concepts of destiny and gratitude. Human beings interpret all events—especially misfortune—as part of divine will, responding with acceptance rather than resistance:

Whatever comes from God, we are always thankful,
because dissatisfaction is ingratitude.
Whatever comes from God, we are always satisfied.
Will you hostile with the worshipped one? (2011, lines 237–240)

Questioning God's will is seen as a moral failing. This suggests that social harmony is achieved through spiritual discipline and acceptance. While it promotes stability, it raises the question of whether moral perfection is achieved through genuine conviction or through the restriction of doubt and inquiry.

In contrast, Thomas More's *Utopia* presents a more flexible and less doctrinal approach to religion. While the Utopians believe in a single, supreme God, the text deliberately avoids detailed theological definitions, allowing for a degree of religious pluralism. As long as individuals acknowledge a divine creator, different forms of worship are tolerated: "The people accept God as the creator and ruler of the universe... and resolve to follow Him wherever He takes them" (2013: 165). This reflects a system in which religion functions more as a unifying ethical framework than as a rigid doctrinal structure. More's approach can be interpreted as an early expression of religious tolerance, shaped by Renaissance humanism and concerns about religious conflict in Europe. However, an alternative interpretation suggests that this tolerance is still limited, as it requires acceptance of a supreme deity, thereby excluding atheistic perspectives. A key difference between the two works lies in the role of divine authority. In Nizami's vision, religion is absolute and all-encompassing, directly governing human thought and behavior. In More's *Utopia*, religion supports social order but is mediated through reason and collective agreement, allowing for diversity within certain boundaries. Nizami's emphasis on moral virtue and submission to divine order reflects broader traditions of medieval Islamic ethical philosophy, particularly the Farabian conception of a virtuous society governed by spiritual and moral perfection. By contrast, More's emphasis on rational self-discipline reflects the influence of Renaissance humanism, which sought to reconcile Christian morality with human reason and civic responsibility. Taken together, these examples demonstrate that morality functions as the foundation of social order in both texts. However, the sources of moral authority differ considerably. Nizami grounds ethical behaviour in divine wisdom and spiritual harmony, whereas More locates morality within a framework of rational self-discipline and communal responsibility. From a Jamesonian perspective, these moral systems should not be viewed simply as prescriptions for ideal conduct but as critiques of societies perceived as ethically fragmented, materialistic, or unjust (2005: 157). The idealization of moral virtue therefore serves as a literary response to the social and spiritual anxieties of each author's historical context. Thus, the comparison demonstrates that similar utopian values do not necessarily reflect a shared model of ideal society. Rather, Nizami and More employ different philosophical mechanisms—spiritual perfection in one case and rational social organization in the other—to achieve comparable utopian ends.

Nature, wealth, and material life

The importance of material wealth and emphasize communal living is rejected in both works. In Nizami's ideal society, gold and silver hold no intrinsic value, and material possessions cannot be used to manipulate or corrupt individuals:

No one can be fooled by gold or silver.
 They do not mean anything in our world.
 We do not know what greed is in our world.
 We do not get even a barley with a force. (2011, lines 281–284)

An idealized society is entirely absent, and economic transactions are replaced by moral integrity. However, this vision is less a realistic economic model and more a symbolic expression of moral purity. By eliminating the possibility of greed altogether, Nizami constructs a society that appears flawless, but potentially at the cost of overlooking the complexities of human desire and economic necessity.

Similarly, Thomas More's *Utopia* challenges conventional valuations of wealth by rejecting gold and silver as symbols of status. Instead, the Utopians privilege utility, valuing materials like iron for their practical usefulness. They even interpret the abundance of gold in nature as evidence of its inferiority. As noted, visitors adorned in gold are regarded

with suspicion or amusement: “They consider the ambassadors who are visiting the island with wearing lots of gold to be slaves and wonder why gold, a useless substance, is so highly desired” (2013: 95). This inversion of conventional values reflects More’s critique of European society, where wealth is often equated with power and status. However, it also introduces a potential tension: while wealth is devalued, it is not entirely absent. Instead, it is redistributed and regulated by the state, suggesting that material resources are still essential but must be controlled for the benefit of the collective. Both Nizami and More construct societies that eliminate or minimize the influence of wealth, yet their approaches differ in underlying motivation. Nizami’s vision is rooted in a moral-spiritual framework where the absence of wealth reflects divine justice and the absence of greed. More’s approach is grounded in humanist and socio-political critique, aiming to reduce inequality and prevent corruption through rational organization.

Both Nizami and Thomas More present development as a process rooted in human effort, discipline, and collective organization. However, they conceptualize development through different philosophical lenses—one more spiritual and symbolic, the other more pragmatic and historical. In Nizami’s ideal society, development is closely tied to the relationship between human beings and their environment. The transformation of a seemingly harsh landscape into a livable and flourishing space reflects both human effort and the proper alignment with moral and social order: “The truth is that we have made this mountain / and this desert our home since ancient times” (2011, lines 225-226). Continuity and endurance is not merely physical but also spiritual and cultural. The ability to inhabit and “develop” a mountain or desert can be interpreted as a metaphor for human resilience and the capacity to create harmony within challenging environments.

In contrast, More’s Utopia presents a more concrete and material account of development, emphasizing architectural progress and the transformation of living conditions over time. The description of urban growth illustrates a clear trajectory from simplicity to sophistication: “But now their houses are three storeys high, the fronts of them are faced either with stone. . .” (2013: 70). A historically grounded vision of progress, where technological advancement and collective labor lead to improved living standards. More’s account highlights gradual development through practical effort, suggesting that societal improvement is achieved through structured planning and sustained work. Both authors share the view that development is inseparable from communal effort. In neither society is progress achieved through individual accumulation alone; instead, it emerges from collective work and shared purpose. Consequently, wealth functions not merely as an economic category but as a symbolic measure of social values. Both authors use the rejection of greed to criticize contemporary social inequalities and to imagine alternative forms of human flourishing that prioritize communal well-being over individual accumulation. From a Jamesonian perspective, the rejection of wealth functions less as an economic proposal than as a critique of the material inequalities and social hierarchies of the authors’ contemporary societies (2005: 23). While Nizami’s rejection of wealth reflects a moral-spiritual critique rooted in Islamic ethical traditions, More’s treatment of property and material accumulation reflects Renaissance concerns regarding inequality, enclosure, and economic injustice. Consequently, both authors reveal alternative pathways through which utopian societies seek to overcome inequality.

Community, trust, and social cohesion

The well-being of the community takes precedence over individual desires, reflecting a shared belief that social harmony is essential for achieving an ideal society. In Nizami’s ideal society, spiritual and social perfection are deeply interconnected. The perfection of the individual is seen as a prerequisite for the perfection of the community, suggesting

a reciprocal relationship between personal morality and collective well-being. This perspective is rooted in a traditional and spiritual worldview, where individual identity is subordinated to the collective “we.” As a result, the concept of the self is diminished in favor of communal unity, aligning with classical utopian ideals that prioritize social harmony over individual distinction. “Pass thy life making hearts happy, / That God may be pleased with thee” (2011: 294-295). Individuals are encouraged to dedicate their lives to the happiness of others as a path toward divine approval. This emphasis on collective happiness may also function as a form of moral regulation, where individual desires are directed and constrained by religious and social expectations. While this fosters unity, it may also limit personal autonomy and diversity of thought.

Similarly, More’s *Utopia* emphasizes communal living and the suppression of private property as a means to achieve equality and social stability. Communal dining, shared resources, and the absence of ownership all contribute to a system in which individual actions are closely aligned with collective needs. More explicitly links this vision to classical philosophy, particularly Plato, suggesting that social equality is essential for achieving happiness: “I grow more favourable to Plato. . . the setting all upon a level was the only way to make a nation happy” (2013: 56). This reflects a rational and structured approach to social organization, where equality is enforced through institutional design rather than purely moral or spiritual alignment. Such enforced equality could suppress individuality and personal ambition, raising questions about whether true happiness can be achieved through uniformity. An important difference between the two authors lies in their underlying motivations. Nizami’s model is grounded in spiritual and moral perfection, where the community’s well-being is an extension of divine will. In contrast, More’s approach is more pragmatic and human-centered, emphasizing rational planning, social order, and the elimination of inequality as tools for achieving collective happiness.

Nizami and Thomas More depict societies in which security is not maintained through physical force or surveillance but through deep-rooted social trust and moral cohesion. In both visions, the absence of fear—particularly fear of theft or intrusion—serves as a key indicator of social harmony. In Nizami’s ideal society, this sense of security is highlighted through Iskandar’s observations and questions about the absence of guards and protective measures:

Why don’t the people of the city feel any fear?
 Why are the doors unlocked here?
 There is no watchman. . .
 Who do you trust in? (2011, lines 208–215)

These questions emphasize the contrast between Iskandar’s expectations—shaped by societies governed by control and suspicion—and the apparent openness of Nizami’s society. The response given by the inhabitants underscores a system grounded in mutual trust:

We are neither afraid of thieves. . .
 Nobody steals from others.
 Others also don’t steal from us. (2011, lines 251–254)

A vision of perfect moral alignment, where the absence of crime eliminates the need for security mechanisms can be interpreted as idealized rather than realistic. It assumes a level of moral perfection that may not account for conflict, inequality, or human fallibility, suggesting that security is achieved through moral absolutism rather than social complexity.

Similarly, More's *Utopia* presents a society in which physical security measures are unnecessary due to the absence of private property and the presence of collective responsibility. The image of unlocked doors symbolizes openness and equality, but also reflects a system in which ownership—and therefore the incentive for theft—is fundamentally eliminated. As described: "Their doors. . . are easily opened. . . and, there being no property among them, every man may freely enter into any house whatsoever" (2013: 69). This arrangement promotes a high degree of social trust, but it also raises important questions about privacy and individual autonomy. While the absence of locks suggests a society free from fear, it may also imply a level of surveillance or social expectation that discourages deviation from communal norms.

Both Nizami and Thomas More present mechanisms of exclusion as part of maintaining order within their ideal societies, suggesting that harmony is not only achieved through inclusion but also through the removal of those who do not conform to established norms. In Nizami's society, social cohesion is preserved by ensuring that all members adhere to shared moral and ethical standards. Individuals who deviate from these expectations are excluded from the community:

The person who lives together with us,
should be clean and nutritious like us.
If a person deviates from the path we have taken,
we expel that person from us. (2011, lines 308–311)

A strict standard of conformity, where deviation is not tolerated reinforces unity and shared values and raises critical questions about tolerance and individuality. Such exclusion may be seen as necessary to preserve the moral integrity of the community.

Similarly, in More's *Utopia*, social order is maintained through the enforcement of laws and the exclusion of those who refuse to comply. Nonconforming individuals are not integrated but instead removed, sometimes through the use of force: "But if the natives refuse to conform themselves to their laws they drive them out. . . and use force if they resist" (2013: 83). This reflects a more institutionalized form of control compared to Nizami's morally grounded exclusion. While both systems aim to protect the stability of the community, More's approach introduces the use of coercion, suggesting that maintaining order may require not only moral agreement but also legal enforcement. The emphasis on trust and communal solidarity reflects a broader utopian concern with overcoming social fragmentation. In both societies, the absence of theft, conflict, and social distrust symbolizes the possibility of a harmonious collective existence. Yet this harmony is achieved through different mechanisms: Nizami relies upon internalized moral virtue, while More depends upon institutional structures that regulate social behaviour. Following Jameson, the significance of these representations lies not in their practical realism but in their exposure of social fragmentation, distrust, and moral decline within existing social systems (2005: 263). This distinction reveals two contrasting assumptions about human nature and social order. More importantly, it suggests that utopian literature is not defined by a single model of collective life but by competing visions of how social harmony can be created, maintained, and justified.

Civilization, space, and cultural identity

Both Nizami and Thomas More construct a contrast between civilized societies and groups portrayed as "barbaric," using these depictions to reinforce the moral and social ideals of their respective utopias. In Nizami's work, the description of the Yajujis prior to Iskandar's encounter with the ideal society presents them as a destabilizing and uncivilized force, positioned outside the boundaries of moral and social order. This framing establishes

a clear binary between order and chaos, where civilization is associated with ethical governance and harmony, while barbarism represents disorder and threat.

A similar pattern appears in More's *Utopia*, where the Zapolets are depicted as a "rude, wild, and fierce nation" who live in remote and untamed environments:

"... but chiefly from the Zapolets, who live five hundred miles east of Utopia. They are a rude, wild, and fierce nation, who delight in the woods and rocks, among which they were born and bred up" (2013: 146). This description reflects a clear opposition between the structured, rational Utopian society and the perceived disorder of neighboring peoples. However, while this contrast supports the internal coherence of More's ideal society, it also reveals an implicit hierarchy that privileges one form of social organization over another. We might question whether the depiction of the Zapolets represents an objective characterization or a projection of cultural superiority rooted in European Renaissance thought. In this sense, both Nizami and More use the concept of barbarism not only to contrast external groups but also to define the moral identity of their ideal societies. This comparison demonstrates how utopian literature often depends on oppositional structures, revealing underlying cultural assumptions about civilization, difference, and human order.

Both Nizami and Thomas More present ideal societies in which geography and urban design reflect underlying moral and philosophical principles. In Nizami's vision, the absence of defensive structures such as walls and gates symbolizes a society governed by moral integrity and divine protection. Rather than relying on physical barriers, the safety of the society is attributed to its ethical purity and alignment with divine will. As Nahmedov observes, "this shows that he has a universalist understanding on a large scale... moral superiority will automatically be the guarantee of everything" (2012: 133). This universalist understanding values morality and avoids social anxiety since moral superiority assures everything. Iskandar's most impressive moment is entering the city, where he expects to see walls and gates like in other countries. However, he notices no stone walls or iron gates.

The most impressive part for Iskandar is when he enters the city...

But there are no walls made of stones and no gates made of iron...

Noticing no walls, no gates Iskandar only takes wise people with him to the city. (2011, lines 190–193)

The lack of walls can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of trust, openness, and moral perfection. The absence of physical defense assumes either an inherently harmonious external environment or a philosophical rejection of conflict, both of which may be more idealistic than practical. Thus, Nizami's depiction can be seen as privileging symbolic moral order over geopolitical realism.

Similarly, More's *Utopia* presents an island society whose geography is deliberately shaped to support isolation, security, and social cohesion. The island itself functions as both a physical and conceptual boundary, separating Utopia from the outside world. According to More, the island's origins—being artificially separated from the mainland—reinforce its distinct social structure: "Utopus conquers the island... and brings the sea around it... the island lacks walls and fences... as a divine power protects the island" (2013: 59). While the island appears open and without traditional fortifications, its geographical isolation effectively serves the function of protection. Although both societies claim to transcend the need for walls, in More's case, security is still achieved through natural and geographic constraints rather than purely moral ones. This separation highlights the contrast between Utopia and contemporary European society, while also suggesting that such an ideal may only be possible under highly specific and isolated conditions. Both models reveal a shared utopian tension: the desire to eliminate insecurity and conflict

while simultaneously constructing systems that may depend on idealized or artificial conditions. Representations of space and cultural identity perform an important ideological function within both works. The contrast between civilized and uncivilized societies allows each author to define the values of the ideal community through opposition to perceived disorder. At the same time, the geographical organization of these utopian spaces reflects deeper philosophical assumptions concerning security, belonging, and collective identity. These imagined landscapes therefore operate not only as settings but also as symbolic expressions of each author's vision of social perfection.

Divergent Utopian perspectives

While similarities establish a shared utopian foundation, the differences between the two works reveal fundamentally different assumptions about human nature, authority, and the conditions necessary for achieving social harmony.

Social and political organization

In Nizami's ideal society, social equality is presented as a fundamental principle, with no distinction between classes or hierarchical divisions. Although the text does not provide detailed institutional descriptions, it clearly emphasizes the absence of social stratification: "We have an equal property. / We divide all the goods together. / Everyone is equal. No one is higher than the other" (2011, lines 247-249). The rejection of private property reinforces the idea that class distinctions are eliminated through communal sharing. However, this ideal may be interpreted as highly abstract, as it does not address how differences in roles, abilities, or responsibilities might be managed within such a system. While equality is emphasized, the absence of structural detail leaves open questions about how this equality is maintained in practice.

In contrast, Thomas More's *Utopia* also advocates for social and economic equality through the abolition of private property. The elimination of ownership is intended to ensure that no one is deprived or impoverished, thereby fostering a sense of collective well-being: "In a society in which no one owns property. . . everyone is concerned with the common good. . . everyone is wealthy. . ." (2013: 166) This reflects a utilitarian vision of equality, where material resources are distributed in a way that prevents inequality and promotes social stability. However, despite this emphasis on equality, More's system introduces a clear exception: slavery. In *Utopia*, slavery is used as a form of punishment for serious crimes, and slaves may also include individuals from neighboring regions who voluntarily serve. This creates a contradiction within the otherwise egalitarian structure. While the society claims to uphold equality, it simultaneously maintains a class of individuals who are denied freedom. Although slaves are sometimes depicted as benefiting from their condition—since they are freed from the burdens of life—this justification raises ethical concerns. The use of slavery as a corrective mechanism complicates More's vision of equality and suggests that his utopia still relies on hierarchical distinctions, even if they are not based on wealth or birth. Both authors aim to eliminate class distinctions through the removal of private property and the promotion of communal living.

Nizami's ideal society is notable for the absence of a formalized governance structure, relying instead on communal ethics, mutual responsibility, and moral conduct to maintain social order. Authority does not appear to be institutionalized; rather, governance is embedded in collective behavior and moral obligation. The elderly members of the community describe a system based on care and shared responsibility:

We solve the problem of the poor.
 We save the ones who get into trouble. . .
 We pay for it out of our pocket. (2011, lines 243–247)

A model in which governance is not exercised through laws or rulers but through voluntary cooperation and ethical commitment can be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, it represents an ideal of perfect social harmony where external authority becomes unnecessary because individuals act virtuously. On the other hand, it raises questions about how such a system would function in cases of conflict, dissent, or unequal participation, suggesting that Nizami's model may rely on an idealized assumption of universal moral alignment.

In contrast, Thomas More's *Utopia* presents a clearly structured political system, though it does not correspond directly to modern democratic frameworks. More describes a hybrid system that incorporates elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, creating a balance of authority and participation: "a unique form of governance" (2013: 72). The presence of elected officials, such as the Syphogrants, and an elected prince suggests a system in which leadership is both representative and hierarchical. While citizens participate in governance, ultimate authority remains concentrated, indicating a controlled form of political organization.

Both approaches reflect utopian attempts to address the problem of governance, but they do so in contrasting ways. Nizami envisions a society where governance is internalized through virtue, whereas More envisions a society where governance is institutionalized through carefully designed political structures.

The judges' senior members lavish admiration on King Iskandar, highlighting his many virtues. Nizami's ideal society presents a justice system that is not institutionalized but grounded in moral integrity, truthfulness, and religious faith. Instead of formal courts or legal procedures, justice appears to be maintained through collective ethical behavior and self-regulation. The community emphasizes honesty and moral discipline as the foundation of social order:

We are a proud and a religious tribe, we will not shy away from the truth,
 We have nothing to do with crooked ways. . .
 We never lie. . . (2011, lines 227–233)

Justice is internalized within individuals rather than enforced by external authority on truth and the avoidance of wrongdoing indicate a system where ethical behavior replaces formal legal structures. This raises questions about how disputes or injustices are resolved in the absence of formal mechanisms. While the system assumes a high level of moral integrity, it may be overly idealistic in presuming that all individuals will consistently adhere to such standards.

In contrast, Thomas More's *Utopia* presents a structured and institutionalized justice system designed to ensure fairness and social stability. Although the text does not provide exhaustive procedural details, it clearly indicates the presence of officials and legal processes responsible for handling disputes and administering justice. Unlike Nizami's model, justice in *Utopia* is explicitly organized and systematized, with an emphasis on legal accountability. More's justice system is characterized by its focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment, reflecting a humanist concern with reforming individuals rather than simply penalizing them. This approach suggests a belief that criminal behavior can be corrected through appropriate social and legal measures, rather than through retribution alone. The comparison of governance and social equality reveals one of the most significant differences between the two utopian models. Nizami imagines a society

in which moral perfection largely eliminates the need for formal institutions, whereas More develops a carefully structured political system designed to regulate social life. This contrast suggests two competing visions of justice: one rooted in ethical transformation and communal virtue, and the other grounded in institutional design and political organization. The distinction ultimately reflects broader differences between spiritual and humanist conceptions of social order.

The differing political structures therefore operate as forms of ideological critique, revealing alternative responses to perceived failures of governance and justice.

The contrast between these models reflects broader intellectual traditions. Nizami's vision resembles the idealized moral community associated with Al-Farabi's concept of the virtuous city, whereas More's system reflects Renaissance humanist confidence in institutional reform and rational political organization.

Conflict, war, and social control

Nizami's ideal society is notably characterized by the absence of military structures, with no mention of armies or organized armed forces. This silence itself can be interpreted as meaningful, suggesting that warfare is either unnecessary or incompatible with the moral and social harmony of his utopia. In this sense, peace is not maintained through force but through ethical perfection and divine order. However, a critical reading might question whether such a society presupposes a completely conflict-free world or whether it simply omits the mechanisms by which potential conflict would be managed.

In contrast, Thomas More's *Utopia* presents a more pragmatic approach to defense. While the society strongly rejects war as a practice, it nonetheless prepares for potential conflict by training its citizens in military skills. War is not idealized but regarded as a last resort, used only when necessary to defend the community. The Utopians' attitude toward war reflects a deliberate ethical stance, emphasizing restraint and moral discomfort with violence: "They detest war as a very brutal thing. . . They would be both troubled and ashamed of a bloody victory over their enemies. . ." (2013: 146). This passage highlights a deep moral aversion to warfare, framing it as a practice that contradicts human dignity. At the same time, the Utopians' decision to hire mercenaries rather than fight directly introduces a critical tension. While the Utopians condemn war on ethical grounds, their reliance on mercenaries exposes a central tension within More's model: violence is not eliminated but displaced. This suggests that even ideal societies may remain dependent on practices they publicly reject. The treatment of conflict exposes the limits of each utopian vision. While both authors aspire to peaceful societies, they differ substantially in their understanding of how peace can be maintained. Nizami largely eliminates conflict through moral harmony, whereas More acknowledges its persistence and develops practical mechanisms for managing it. This divergence reflects broader philosophical differences concerning the nature of humanity itself. Through Jameson's lens, these representations of peace and conflict reveal the authors' dissatisfaction with the violence and instability characteristic of their historical environments (2005: 95). The treatment of conflict therefore reveals one of the clearest differences between the two utopian models. Nizami imagines peace as the natural consequence of moral perfection, whereas More treats peace as a political achievement that must be protected through institutional and military preparedness. The comparison thus reflects two fundamentally different assumptions about human nature: one that views conflict as potentially eliminable and another that regards it as a permanent condition requiring management rather than eradication.

Material life and economic organization

Agriculture and rural life are central to both Nizami's and Thomas More's utopian visions, yet they are presented in markedly different ways that reflect their underlying philosophical assumptions about nature, labor, and divine or rational order. In Nizami's ideal society, agriculture is depicted as almost effortless and divinely sustained. Livestock graze freely without human supervision, and the natural world appears to be fully aligned with human needs and protected by a higher power:

Our cattle graze without a guard. God is raising our children. . .
If a wolf touches a sheep, it dies immediately. . .
We sprinkle seeds during cropping time, then entrust it to the heavens. . .
Our fertile lands produce seven hundred crops. (2011, lines 256–268)

Human labor is minimized, and the natural environment operates in perfect harmony with human life. This can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of abundance and divine favor rather than a realistic agricultural system. The absence of labor-intensive farming practices suggests that Nizami's vision prioritizes spiritual trust over practical engagement with the material world.

In contrast, More's *Utopia* presents a more structured and pragmatic approach to agriculture. Farming is organized as a collective activity, with careful planning and rotation of labor between urban and rural settings. This system ensures both efficiency and social equality, as all citizens participate in agricultural work at some point in their lives: "Husbandmen shift annually. . . they sow corn. . . and when harvest time comes, magistrates inform towns about the number of hands needed" (2013: 65). This passage highlights a highly organized system in which agricultural production is integrated into the broader social structure. Unlike Nizami's vision, More's approach emphasizes human labor, coordination, and administrative planning. Agriculture is not left to divine forces but is instead managed through rational organization and communal responsibility. Both models present idealized versions of agriculture that overlook certain practical challenges. Nizami's system may appear unrealistic in its reliance on divine protection and extraordinary yields, while More's system, though more practical, raises questions about the demands placed on individuals who must contribute labor across both urban and rural settings.

In Nizami's *Iskandarnama*, there is little direct discussion of daily routines or the presence of social classes such as the wealthy or the destitute. This absence itself can be interpreted as significant, suggesting that Nizami's focus lies more on moral and spiritual ideals than on the detailed organization of everyday social and economic life. The lack of attention to poverty or wealth may imply that such distinctions are either irrelevant or resolved within the moral harmony of his ideal society.

In contrast, Thomas More's *Utopia* explicitly engages with issues of daily life and social inequality, particularly by critiquing idleness and the misuse of social roles. More describes groups within European society—such as idle priests, wealthy nobles, and able-bodied beggars—who contribute little to communal well-being: "idle priests. . . rich noblemen. . . and strong, lusty beggars who pretend to have diseases for begging" (2013: 77). More's critical stance toward the social structures of his time, where privilege and poverty often coexisted with inequality and exploitation exposes the inefficiencies and moral shortcomings of contemporary society, using his utopian framework as a contrast. At the same time, this emphasis on productivity and social utility may raise questions about how individual value is defined within More's system. While idleness is criticized, the expectation that all individuals contribute to society may also impose pressure and limit personal freedom, suggesting a tension between efficiency and individuality. Economic life in both works serves purposes that extend beyond material production. Agriculture, labour, and resource

distribution become expressions of broader social and moral principles. Nizami's vision emphasizes abundance achieved through harmony with divine and natural order, while More emphasizes productivity achieved through collective labour and rational planning. These contrasting models reveal differing understandings of prosperity and suggest that economic organization in utopian literature functions as a reflection of deeper ideological commitments regarding work, justice, and human fulfillment.

Utopian purpose and the role of the hero

In both Nizami's and Thomas More's works, the reactions of key figures to the ideal society serve as a narrative device to evaluate and interpret utopian values. However, while both characters express admiration, their responses reflect different philosophical orientations: one grounded in spiritual retreat, and the other in intellectual dissemination. In Nizami's account, Iskandar responds to the ideal society with a sense of awe and humility, interpreting what he sees as a manifestation of divine wisdom. His reaction is not only admiration but also a form of moral self-reflection, as he reconsiders his previous understanding of the world:

Leave alone all that I know, I am satisfied with this talk.
If this is the right way of living, if these are the people, then what are we?
The creator sent us. . . to learn from them. (2011, lines 325–328)

Iskandar's experience leads him toward spiritual withdrawal and contemplation rather than active engagement with society. He ultimately chooses to live in seclusion and dedicate himself to worship, indicating that the ideal society serves as a model not necessarily to be replicated, but to be internalized as a moral and spiritual lesson.

In contrast, More's *Utopia* presents a different kind of engagement through the character of Raphael Hythloday, whose response is characterized by admiration combined with a desire to share the knowledge of Utopian society with others. Unlike Iskandar, who turns inward, Hythloday seeks to disseminate what he has learned: "During five years living in Utopia, he was delighted with their laws and rules. . . he would never have abandoned them" (2013: 59). More's *Utopia* is intended as a model for critique and potential reform of European society. Hythloday's role as a traveler and observer positions him as a mediator between worlds, highlighting More's intention to use utopian ideas as a lens through which to evaluate contemporary social and political structures. The differing responses of Iskandar and Hythloday illuminate the broader purposes of the two texts. These differing narrative functions correspond to broader cultural traditions. Nizami's hero ultimately pursues spiritual enlightenment, reflecting the ethical and philosophical orientation of medieval Islamic literature, while More's traveler functions as a humanist observer whose experiences encourage political reflection and social criticism. These contrasting narrative functions demonstrate that utopian literature may operate simultaneously as ethical instruction, philosophical inquiry, and social critique, depending upon the cultural and intellectual context in which it is produced.

Conclusion

This study has explored the concept of the ideal society through a comparative analysis of *Thomas More's Utopia* and *Nizami Ganjavi's Iskandarnama*. Although both works envision harmonious societies founded upon justice, communal well-being, and moral order, they construct these ideals through different intellectual frameworks. More presents an institutionally organized model of social reform grounded in Renaissance humanism, whereas Nizami imagines a morally and spiritually integrated community shaped by Islamic ethical

philosophy. The comparison demonstrates that similar utopian aspirations may emerge from fundamentally different conceptions of governance, prosperity, conflict, and social harmony. Viewed through Jameson's understanding of utopia as social critique, both texts function not only as representations of ideal societies but also as responses to the political, social, and moral limitations of their historical contexts. By placing Nizami alongside More, this study expands the geographical and conceptual scope of utopian studies and demonstrates that utopian thought developed through parallel yet distinct Eastern and Western traditions.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author contribution

Turkan Elbayiyeva conceived and designed the study, conducted the literature review, analyzed and interpreted the data, drafted the manuscript, critically revised the manuscript, and approved the final version for publication.

Data availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

AI usage statement

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used in the conception, writing, analysis, interpretation, or preparation of this manuscript.

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