

11 Nizāmī Ganjavī, the Wordsmith: The Concept of *sakhun* in Classical Persian Poetry

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The word *sakhun* or *sukhun* (سخن), contemporarily pronounced *sakhun*, abounds in the pages of Nizāmī Ganjavī's five *mathnavīs*, known collectively as the *Panj Ganj* (Five Treasures), as well as in his collection of odes and lyric poems. سخن literally means "parole", "speech", "words", or "حرف *harf*".¹ *Sakhun guftan* (سخن گفتن) means "to speak" and *sakhunrānī kardan* (سخنرانی کردن) means "to lecture."² Elsewhere, I have argued that for Nizāmī the term *sakhun* refers to a more significant concept beyond its literal meaning: it has a rather broader meaning and implication, that might be understood in terms of eloquent rhetoric, a quality he has demonstrated in his poetry, and that became synonymous with poetry and literature itself.³ Indeed, I have shown that because of this centrality of *sakhun*, Nizāmī offers a consistent concept of love and a favorable characterization of women, derived by literary exigencies rather than ideological prejudice.⁴ In substantiating my arguments, I demonstrated how different Nizāmī is from Firdawsī and Jāmī in their portrayal of the female.

In this essay, I will elaborate on Nizāmī's concept of *sakhun* for whom, I maintain, the term is synonymous with "literature", "literary work", and "poetry". Comparing the Nizāmian concept of *sakhun* with the use of the word in the works of Rūmī (d. 1273), Sa'dī (d. 1291), and Hāfiz (d. 1389/90) who have also used the word frequently, I further maintain that for these latter poets, *sakhun* is closer to its contemporary usage, meaning "parole", "speech" or "talk", or simply *harf*. I will also try to explain why Nizāmī holds a high opinion of the concept of *sakhun*, particularly its poetic forms to the extent that it becomes an independent, discernable theme in his work, and a connecting motif that holds his poetry together. Realizing the centrality of the role of *sakhun* in Nizāmī's work enables a better understanding of his use of so many different themes including scientific, philosophical, romantic, and religious motifs and thereby his literary representation.

Scholars have tried to explain the significance of words in the realm of human intellectual activities on the basis of the religious significance that the act of articulation has earned.⁵ Dabashi stresses the importance of

language and the concept of *sukhan* in Nizāmī's work believing that these provided Nizāmī with an identity. He states that, for Nizāmī, "being" is conceived by *sukhan* and it is used "not only to convey meaning but also create,"⁶ as they did in *Genesis*. Meskub makes a similar attempt as he explains the role of *sukhan* in the *Shāh Nāma*. He starts his analysis by citing the creation story of *Genesis* and the first verse of the *Book of John* that reads "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and finding similar concepts in the *Qur'an* and in the words of Zoroaster in the *Avesta*. The latter, he believes created a tradition which Firdawsī adopted. Meskub believes that *sukhan* for Firdawsī is similar to the concept of the spoken word presented in the religious books and it is the embodiment of ideas and above all, the idea of creation, man, and the truth of his transcendental world.⁷ However, the author sheds a more pertinent light on the topic when he states that Firdawsī, like other poets such as Hāfiz, perceived *sukhan* as a structure, a design that resulted in the writing of the *Shāh Nāma*. I should first mention that the *Shāh Nāma* presents epic and love stories based on material from mythical, heroic, and historical periods of Iranian history, versified in lucid language that uses nearly exclusively Persian vocabulary. Firdawsī remains quite faithful to his historical sources and to the logic of the epic stories he versifies. The genre rather than the holiness of the words carries out the labor.

Moreover, to explain in terms of biblical exegeses the significance of certain terms in Persian poetry is moot, if only because it cannot fully demonstrate the variety of meanings contained in the concept of *sakhun* in different authors' works. Indeed, a comparative study of classical Persian poetry reveals that each of these poets takes a different position in the realm of language philosophy, that may go beyond the biblical notion, the Platonic *doxa* ("opinion"), the Augustan concept of "fleshly" speech (words produced by the mouth for the ears), the Aristotelian concept of the mimetic nature of language and the Aristotelian *logos*-like discourse. For example, while the opposition between living speech and writing does not play out in the works of these classical Persian poets to any significant extent, Nizāmī seems to prefer the written form. In addition, unlike Augustine who advanced writing over speech because of its visual and stable qualities and its similarity to the divine *logos*, Nizāmī prefers the written form that provides more opportunities for embellishment.⁸ Furthermore, references to fauna and flora in the works of some Persian poets, often acknowledged as part of *sakhun*, have been influenced by mystical schools of thought, in which, the believer is encouraged to come to peace with all creatures. At times, these references serve as reminder to man that he should keep his priority by behaving more peacefully. All these of course may create the opportunity to speak of God. However, as the findings on the use of *sakhun* in Persian poetry show, poets have different, multiple, and even contradictory understandings of the word.

To be sure, in applying the concept of the divine *logos* to Persian poets, one must be careful since such a concept is more in line with the ideology of scholasticism in which a sweeping distinction between medieval Christian philosophers and theologians, and their philosophical exposé and theological writings did not exist. Unlike the great scholastic authors, the Persian poets did not all use their entire rhetoric to justify and elaborate on faith. The closest ideological influence one might detect in Persian poetry are mystical elocutions (more accurately, Sufi poetry by which virtue, familiarity with Islamic ideology was no doubt a prerequisite) for the expression of which, the poet's language demonstrates significant difference from the author of a theological exposé. In mystic poetry, the poet feels much freer in his inward expression, imagination and depiction. For example, even in a highly imaginative, surrealist description of the ascension (معراج *mi'rāj*), and after amazing portrayals of the angelic boundaries, Nizāmī refuses to narrate the words that the Prophet hears from the One. Without such a freedom and imaginative aspiration, the poet would produce a more established and structured form of work, a prayer, or a *munājāt* مناجات, as did Ansārī.⁹

It might therefore be more productive to look for the actual meanings covered by the term *sakhun* in the Persian poets' verses. The works of Rūmī, Sa'dī, and Hāfiz combined, contain hundreds of occurrences of the word *sakhun* whereas Nizāmī's *mathnavīs* alone contain more than seven hundred occurrences. While the works of Rūmī, Sa'dī, and Hāfiz together contain one hundred *misra*'s that start with the term, there are two-hundred and ten of such half verses in the work of Nizāmī. Moreover, there are very few occurrences of the plural or derivative forms of *sakhun* in the works of Rūmī, Sa'dī and Hāfiz, whereas Nizāmī's works are replete with these, many creative derivatives combined with a suffix, a prefix, or with another word.¹⁰

Beyond these approximate statistics, it is important to illustrate the way these poets have used the term. What does each poet mean by the word, how does he vary in his use of the term? Beyond the similarities in the works of Rūmī, Hāfiz, and Sa'dī in their use of the word (and while they all differ from Nizāmī in his treatment of the word), each one of these poets shows creativity with *sakhun*. Even a study limited to this one single concept requires extensive reading and rendering. However, I hope that this introductory effort will help promote similar studies, especially in regard to the first three poets whom I am only examining for the sake of comparison and as an introduction to the more elaborate study of Nizāmī's notion of *sakhun*.

Sakhun in Rūmī's Work

In both *Mathnavī-yi Ma'navī* (Spiritual Couplets) and *Dīvān-i Shams*, Rūmī's best-known works, the term *sakhun* occurs in hundreds of verses, and occasionally more than once in the same verse:

سخن به نزد سخن دان بزرگوار بود ز آسمان سخن آمد سخن نه خوار بود

Speech (sakhun) is exalted for the speech-knower (sakhun-dān)/ It descended from the sky, it is not inferior.¹¹

The use of the word is a way of expressing ideas and feelings. Knowing Rūmī's discourse, the word often refers to the expressions of the amorous, the drunken, and the unusual, those who often speak best. Thus, drink improves speech:

بده آن می رواقی هله ای کنیم ساقی چو چنان شوم بگویم سخن تو بی محابا

Give me that stoic wine to advance, Oh Cupbearer!// Once drunk, I will speak of you frankly.¹²

Moreover, *sakhun* can be the subject of unusual verbs and the theme of strange circumstances. For example, it can have a taste or a bitter consequence (which causes the death of a parrot upon hearing a bad news):

گر سخن خواهی که گویی چون شکر صبر کن از حرص و این حلوا مخور

If you want to talk sweet as sugar/ be patient, avoid greed, and do not eat this sweet yet.¹³

It may be eaten:

این سخن شیرست در پستان جان بی کشنده خوش نمیگردد روان

This sakhun is milk in the breast of the soul./ If no-one is suckling, it does not flow well.¹⁴

It can function like an arrow:

تن آدمی کمان و نفس و سخن چو تیرش چو برفت تیر و ترکش عمل کمان نماند

Man's body is like a bow, words its arrow / Once the arrow is gone, the bow's act is done.¹⁵

It may even represent the sound of a fly's wing:

هله می گو که سخن پر زدن آن مگس است پر زدن نیز نماند چو رود دوغ فرود

*Beware keep quiet, word is that fly's flapping / Flapping is no more
once things settle down.*¹⁶

It may also be uttered in sleep:

در خواب سخن نه بی زبان گویند در بیداری من آنچنان گویم

*In sleep, they don't speak without their tongue / In wakefulness, I
speak in that manner.*¹⁷

It can express a miracle or a sublime religious moment:

آن نیاز مریمی بودست و درد که چنان طفلی سخن آغاز کرد

*That was Mary's need and ache / That such a child began to
speak.*¹⁸

It is also the speech of madmen:

بیگانه شوی ز صحبت بیگانه بشنو سخن راست از این دیوانه
سخن راست تو از مردم دیوانه شنو تا نمیریم میندار که مردانه شویم

*A stranger you will become by hearing a stranger's words/ The
truth, you hear from this madman.// The truth, you should hear
from the madman/ As long as we are not dead, don't consider us
men.*¹⁹

It may be the word of a drunken man, as in the famous Moses and the Shepherd story:

گفت او را محتسب هین آه کن مست هو هو کرد هنگام سخن

*"The Muhtasib said to him, "Come! Say, 'Ah!' / The drunkard ut-
tered 'Hu-Hu!' when he spoke."*²⁰

Even dead ones can understand *sakhun*:

پیش او مردن بهر دم از شکر شیرین تر است مرده داند این سخن را تو مپرس از زندگان

Before him, dying is sweeter than sugar/ The dead knows this meaning, do not ask [it] of the living ones.²¹

Stones can even express it:

چون شنید از سنگها پیر این سخن پس عصا انداخت آن پیر کهن

When the old man heard this from the stone/ The old master threw his cane.²²

It can be associated with greenery:

نرگس در ماجرا چشمک زد سبزه را سبزه سخن فهم کرد گفت که فرمان ترا

Narcissus winked at the meadow in that affair/ The meadow perceived it and said "I am at your command".²³

Sometimes, however, the word is a mode of communication that is less effective than connections through feelings, love or the heart:

چو خاموشانه عشقت قوی شد سخن کوتاه شد این بار ما را ...
بس کنم این گفتن و خامش کنم در خمشی به سخن جان افزا

*Since in silence my love for you grew/ words now fail me.
(...) I shall stop talking and be silent/ In silence, better words invigorate.²⁴*

It refers to a mode of communication that is less effective than eye contact:

بر بند دهان از سخن و باده لب نوش تا قصه کند چشم خمار از ره دیده

*Shut the mouth, away from speech and imbibe the lips with wine/
So that drunken eyes can tell the tale through their gaze.²⁵*

One at times should avoid speech:

شصت فرسنگ از سخن بگریز که بدام سخن درین شستی

Run far, sixty farsakhs away from this speech/ Since the speech has trapped you in this garment.²⁶

Nevertheless, *sakhun* must be pronounced by one and heard by another:

جان پیش تو هر ساعت می ریزد و می روید از بهر یکی جان کس چون با تو سخن گوید

*Before thee the soul is hourly decaying and growing/ And for one soul's sake how should anyone plead with thee?*²⁷

Occasionally, Rūmī distorts this convention and the speaker-listener dichotomy:

چندان سخن شنیدم اما دو لب ندیدم من بر دریچه دل بس گوش جان نهادم

*I laid the spiritual ear at the window of the heart/ I heard much discourse, but the lips I did not see.*²⁸

Sometimes *sakhun* has a religious function; the praise of God or even the words of God:

سخن ز پرده برون آید آنگهش بینی که او صفات خداوند کردگار بود

*Speech once appeared from behind the curtain. You will see/ that it defines the God Almighty.*²⁹

Sometimes it has a dramatic effect:

چون آتش می شود عذارش به سخن خون می چکد از چشم خمارش به سخن

*From words, his face turns red like fire/ from words, he sheds tears as blood from his drunken eyes.*³⁰

It can be endless, as expressed in more than forty-five verses starting with این سخن پایان ندارد ("This *sakhun* has no end"). For example:

این سخن پایان ندارد لیک ما باز گوئیم آن تمامی قصه را

*There is no end to this talk, however we/ shall recite the entire story.*³¹

Nevertheless, there are passages in which Rūmī seems to prefer silence to *sakhun*. In *Dīvān-i Shams*, he writes:

اکنون ببند دو لب و آن چشم بر گشا دیگر سخن مگوی اگر هست اتحاد ...
هر کس هوس سخن فروشی داند من بنده آنم که خموشی داند

Close your lips and open those eyes / Say no more if there is unity.
(...)

*Everyone desires to sell speech/ I am a slave to the one who knows silence.*³²

It is indeed a manly habit to be silent:

طفايست سخن گفتن مردیست خمش کردن تو رستم چالاکی نی کودک چالیکی

*It is childish to speak, manly to be silent / Be agile like Rustam not playful like an infant.*³³

Thus, Rūmī displays tremendous ability, creativity and philosophical effort in the use of the term. At times, his repetition of the word is a rhetorical device. The term refers to nothing more than a mode of expression that is often subject or even victim of its circumstances, as for example, in the verses where he decrees silence.

Sakhun in Sa'dī's Poetry

Sa'dī uses the term more than three hundred times. His use of the term as “talk” is more formal than Rūmī's *sakhun* (or Hāfīz's, as we shall see). In the *Gulistān*, he writes:

سخن گفت و دامان گهر فشاند به نطقی که هاش آستین بر فشاند

*He spoke, and expanded his skirt of jewels [of speech]/ With such a grace, that the king extended his sleeve [in rapture].*³⁴

In this verse, سخن is equated with نطق, meaning “speech”; it is official, and it will be rewarded if it is good. While there is vagueness in the verse about the content of that rewarding speech, the following verse that stand among the contemporary sayings and proverbs, reveal more about the nature of Sa'dī's *sakhun*:

تا مرد سخن نگفته باشد عیب و هنرش نهفته باشد

*Until a man hath spoken, his defects and his skills are concealed.*³⁵

In the section entitled “On Being Silent,” Sa'dī's prose indicates that the terms also means “parole”, “talk”, “discussion”, “*harf*”:

گروهی حکما به حضرت کسری در به مصلحتی سخن همی گفتند. بزرگمهر. ه. مهتر ایشان بود خامش. گفتندش چرا با ما در این بحث سخن نگوئی. گفت: وزیران بر مثال اطبا اند و طبیب دارو ندهد جز سقیم را. پس چو بینم که رای شما بر صواب است مرا بر سر سخن گفتن حکمت نباشد

*At the court of Kisra a number of wise men were debating on some affair. When Buzurgmihr who was the best amongst them, remained silent, they asked him why in this debate he did not say anything. He answered, 'Ministers are like physicians, and the physician administers medicine to the sick only; there when I see that your opinions are judicious, it would not be consistent with wisdom for me to add speech.'*³⁶

In a further reference we find:

یکی را از دوستان گفتم: امتناع سخن گفتنم به علت آن اختیار آمده است در غالب اوقات که در سخن نیک و بد اتفاق افتد و دیده دشمنان جز بر بدی نمی آید. گفت: دشمن آن به که یکی نبیند

*I said to one of my friends 'I have myself determined to observe silence because in conversation there frequently happens both good and evil, and the eye of an enemy observes only that which is bad.' He replied, 'O brother; an enemy does not deserve to see the good.'*³⁷

Both anecdotes preache the avoidance of unnecessary speech. Sa'dī also advises thoughtful speech:

به پندار نتوان سخن گفت زود
نباید سخن گفت نا ساخته
نگفتم تو را تا یقینم نبود ...
نشاید بریدن نینداخته
سخن تا نگوئی برو دست هست
چو گفته شود یابد او بر تو دست

*When unsure, one cannot quickly speak/ So long as I was uncertain, I spoke not, (...)
One should not speak when unprepared/ What's not spread out cannot be cut,
Words you've not said are still within your hand/ But what's been said may get the upper-hand of you.*³⁸

In opposition to Rūmī and Hāfiz, for whom *sakhun* comes from all possible sources, often the heart, Sa'dī's *sakhun* often comes from the head:

شنیدم که یکبار در حله ای
سخن در صلاحست و تدبیر و خوی
سخن گفت با عابدی کله ای ...
نه در اسب و میدان و چوگان و گوی

*I've heard that once by the Tigris stream/ A head addressed a devotee. (...)
Of propriety I speak, good management and character/ Not of horses and playing-fields or polo-sticks and balls!*³⁹

The qualities of good management and character are attainable, and will enhance the speaking ability which, according to the first verse of the *Būstān*, was given to man by God:

به نام خدایی که جان آفرید سخن گفتن اندر زبان آفرید

*In the name of the God who created life! / The One who created speech-creating for the tongue.*⁴⁰

Sa'dī stresses that *sakhun* is a good quality to possess; it fosters admiration and respect:

نکو سیرتش دید و روشن قیاس سخن سنج و مقدار مردم شناس

*[The king] saw his good way of life, and illuminated judgment/ his considerate speech, and capability of man-appraising.*⁴¹

However, possessing this ability does not entitle one to talk in front of a superior:

که من بعد بی آبرویی مکن ادب نیست پیش بزرگان سخن

*They would say: 'Henceforth behave not so disgracefully/ It is not mannerly to speak before the great!'*⁴²

Indeed, gender and class play a role in Sa'dī's conceptualization of *sakhun*:

چو بیچاره گفت این سخن نزد جفت نگر تا زن او را چه مردانه گفت ...
به دهقان نا دان چه خوش گفت زن به دانش سخن گوی یا دم مزن

*Helplessly he uttered this speech to his partner (his wife)/ Behold how like a man she spoke to him! (...)
How fair to the ignorant yeoman spoke his wife/ Speak knowledge-ably or do not breathe a word!*⁴³

Like any other utterance or conversation, Sa'dī's *sakhun* can be negative:

شنید این سخن بخت بر گشته دیو به زاری بر آورد بانگ و غریو ...
شنید این سخن عابد هوشیار بر آشفت و گفت ای ملک هوش دار ...
گر از حاکمان سختت آید سخن تو بر زیر دستان درشتی مکن ...
چو دشوارت آمد ز دشمن سخن نگر تا چه عیب گرفت آن مکن

Shaytan of overturned fortune heard this speech / In lament, he raised a shout and cry; (...)

The prudent and devout man heard these words / Then said, incensed: O king! Have sense; (...)
If the word of rulers be hard to thee / Exercise not harshness towards thy inferiors. (...)
*When from the enemy's speech, it comes hard to thee/ See! What defect he takes up, that do not.*⁴⁴

The term is used in the realm of fighting and conflict:

و گر نه مجال سخن تنگ نیست ...	نداند که ما را سر جنگ نیست
جهانی سخن را قلم در کشم	توانم که تیغ زبان بر کشم
سخن چین بدبخت هیزم کشست	میان دو تن جنگ چون آتشست

Does he not know we have no mind to warfare? / Else, is the scope for utterance not confined? (...)
I too can draw the sword-blade of the tongue/ Or through all mundane utterance draw the pen.
*Hostility between two people is like fire/ and the evil fated backbiter supplies fuel.*⁴⁵

Elsewhere, Sa'dī writes:

رفیق این سخن بشنید و به هم بر آمد و روی از حکایت من در هم کشید و سخنهای رنجش آمیز گفتن گرفت. کین چه عقل و کفایت است و فهم و درایت. قول حکما درست آمد که گفته اند دوستان به زندان به کار آیند که بر سر سفره همه دشمنان دوست نمایند

سخن چین بدبخت در یکنفس	خلاف افکند در میان دو کس
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My friend heard these words, was displeased, looked angry, and began to speak with a degree of asperity saying, 'In all this what is there of wisdom, propriety, intelligence, or penetration? And the words of the sages are verified, namely 'That friends are serviceable in prison, for at a table [all] enemies assume the appearance of friends.

He concludes that:

*The evil-fated backbiter in one breath/ creates hostility between two people.*⁴⁶

Sa'dī very effectively uses the term سخنچین (today *sukhanchīn*). It is not present in Nizāmī's poetry as a prominent concept. In any case, whether it is positive or negative, whether it is valuable advice or a source of

antagonism, *sakhun* can only be heard through the ears. A number of verses convey this:

همان کاین سخن مرد رهرو شنید	برون رفت و بازش کس آنجا ندید ...
فراوان سخن باشد آکنده گوش	نصیحت نگیرد مگر در خموش
شنید این سخن مرد پاکیزه خوی	بدو گفت ازین نوع با من مگوی ...
شنید این سخن مرد نیکو نهاد	بخندید کای بار فرخ نژاد

No sooner had the traveler heard these words/ Than, going out, he was never seen again within that place. (...)
The man of many words has stuffed-up ears/ counsel will not take except in silence.
The man of pure disposition heard these words/ And answered: Say not such things to me. (...)
*Hearing such words, that goodly natured man/ Smiling said: Colleague, of a line illustrious.*⁴⁷

To be sure, the term is often juxtaposed with or accompanied by the word *dehan* or *deh* (*dihān*, *dihan* mouth). For example:

سخن گفته دگر باز نیاید به ده	اول اندیشه کند مرد که عاقل باشد
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*The words once spoken do not come back to the mouth// Man would think first if he wishes to be wise.*⁴⁸

Sa'dī begins many of his anecdotes with the phrase "I heard," as exemplified above. Then of course his *sakhun* also requires an audience:

سخن گر چه دلبد و شیرین بود	سزاوار تصدیق و تحسین بود
فهم سخن چون نکند مستمع	قوت طبع از متکلم مجوی
تا ندانی که سخن عین صوابست مگوی	و آنچه دانی که نه نیکوش جوابست مگوی

Although a discourse be captivating and sweet/ commanding belief and admiration.
When the hearer does not understand the discourse/ expect not any effect of genius from the orator.
*Until you are persuaded that the discourse is strictly proper, speak not;/ and whatever you know will not obtain a favorable answer, ask not.*⁴⁹

Sakhun ceases when two people in argument choose to stop all communication:

چه جرم رفت که با ما سخن نمی گویی	چه کرده ام که به هجران تو سزاوارم
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What crime have I committed that you speak no more/ What acts have I done that I deserve your separation?

The speaker of *sakhun* should not be interrupted:

یکی را از حکما شنیدم که می گفت: هر گز کسی به جهل خویش اقرار نکرده است
مگر آنکس که چون دیگری در سخن باشد همچنان، سخن آغاز کند

سخن را سرست ای خردمند و بن میاور سخن در میان سخن

I heard a sage say, that no one confesses his own ignorance, excepting he who begins speaking, whilst another is talking; and before the discourse is ended.

And:

*O wise man, a discourse hath a commencement and a conclusion.
Confound not one discourse with another.⁵⁰*

Like many other classical poets, Sa'dī also uses *sakhun* to describe his own orating ability:

زبان در کش از عقل داری و هوش چو سعدی سخن گوی ورنه خموش

*Restrain your tongue, if you possess intelligence, good-sense /
Speak as does Sa'di, or silent remain.⁵¹*

And he follows this up with the mother of self-compliments!

من دگر شعر نخواهم که نویسم که مگس زحمت می دهد از بس که سخن شیرینست

*I will write no more poetry because the flies/ trouble me for the
sweetness of my words!⁵²*

In all these compliments, the term refers to his wise sayings rather than to his poetic craft. In the final analysis, *sakhun* may be the oral expression of an idea, a feeling. It is most often praise for a beloved or for himself. But in all of those cases, *sakhun* has a didactic mission: Sa'dī maintains that he is conveying useful *sakhun* and asks his readers to listen carefully.

Sakhun in Hāfiz's Poetry

In the *Dīvān* of Hāfiz, portraying the life and historical events in his birth-town Shiraz, I have come across the word *sakhun* more than eighty times. Given the relative small size of Hāfiz's work compared to that of the other poets analyzed here, this is a high incidence of the term. For Hāfiz also, the term often means "harf"; even when used in an allegorical sense, for him "*sakhun guftan*" means "*harf zadan* (to speak)". For example:

گل بخندید که از راست نرنجیم ولی هیچ عاشق سخن سخت به معشوق نگفت

*The rose laughed and said: "I don't mind hearing the truth, but/ no lover speaks harshly to his beloved."*⁵³

از سخن چینان ملالتها پدید آمد ولی گر میان هم نشینان نا سزایی رفت رفت

*Tale-bearers caused a lot of vexation. However/ If any abuse happened among the companions, let it be.*⁵⁴

مزن ز چون و چرا دم که بنده مقبل قبول کرد به جان هر سخن که جانان گفت

*Do not try to argue. A fortunate slave [of love]/ accepts with all his heart whatever his beloved says.*⁵⁵

گفتم به باد می دهم باده نام و ننگ گفتا قبول کن سخن و هر چه باد باد

*I said: "Wine casts my name and fame to the wind"/ He said: "Accept the word and let be whatever will be."*⁵⁶

حدیث دوست نگویم مگر به حضرت دوست که آشنا سخن آشنا ننگه دارد

*I do not speak about the friend's pain except to the friend/ For only a friend keeps the words of a friend.*⁵⁷

And he has also written:

بیار باده و اول به دست حافظ ده به شرط آنکه ز مجلس سخن به در نرود

*Bring wine and hand to Hāfiz first/ provided that the word does not leave the assembly.*⁵⁸

In the first half verse of the first line, *rāst* is an adjective for the word *sakhun*, even though this latter term itself is missing. It implies that *sakhun* can be truthful or false, straightforward or vague. The truth or straightforward *sakhun* is harsh and that is why in the second *misra'*, Hāfiz advises lovers not to say anything harsh to their beloved. *Sakhun* therefore becomes the subject of human conditions and circumstances. This very concept is creatively portrayed in the verses that follow. The word has the same meaning in the following verse, part of which has become a saying:

با خرابات نشینان ز کرامات ملاف هر سخن وقتی و هر نکته مکانی دارد

*Do not boast of miraculous powers with tavern-dwellers/ Every word has a time and every remark a place.*⁵⁹

And:

پیران سخن ز تجربه گویند، گفتمت هان ای پسر که پیر شوی پند گوش کن

*Old people speak from experience, I am telling you. Hey, sonny, until you have become old, listen to advice!*⁶⁰

At other times, Hāfiz uses the word to refer to his own speech:

سرود مجلس است اکنون فلک به رقص آرد که شعر حافظ شیرین سخن ترانه تست

*The carol of your assembly will bring the sky to dancing/ now that the verse of Hāfiz, sweet of speech, is your song.*⁶¹

حافظ تو این سخن ز که آموختی که بخت تعویذ کرد شعر تو را و به زر گرفت

*Hāfiz, who taught you the prayer / that caused Fortune to make an amulet of your poem and wrap it in gold?*⁶²

منم آن شاعر ساحر که به افسون سخن از نی کلک همه قند و شکر می بارم⁶³

I am that magician poet who, with the magic of words / makes the pen of reed pour out sugar and comfit.

من و سفینه حافظ که جز درین دریا بضاعت سخن در فشان نمی بینم

*Hāfiz's Dīvān suffices for me, because except in this sea / I do not see any bounty of fascinating speech.*⁶⁴

And:

ز شعر دلکش حافظ کسی بود آگاه که لطف طبع و سخن گفتن دری داند

*Hāfiz's charming poetry is appreciated by the one/ who knows the grace of the verse and prose of Dari.*⁶⁵

Hāfiz's *sakhun* comes from the heart:

چو بشنوی سخن اهل دل مگو که خطاست سخن شناس نئی جان من خطا اینجاست

*When you hear the speech of men of heart, don't say it is wrong / The problem is, my dear, you are not an expert in speech.*⁶⁶

بیان شوق چه حاجت که سوز آتش دل توان شناخت ز سوزی که در سخن باشد

*What need is there to express yearning? For the quality of the heart's fire / can be known from the blaze of words.*⁶⁷

ایش سزا نبود دل حق گزار من کز غمگسار خود سخن ناسزا شنید

*My grateful heart did not deserve to hear abusive words / from the one who used to remove my sorrow.*⁶⁸

And:

سخن درپرده میگویم چو گل از غنچه بیرون آی که بیش از پنج روزی نیست حکم میرنوروزی

*I utter these words in veil: Emerge from the bud like the rose!! For the reign of the king of Nawruz is a mere five days away.*⁶⁹

The term also appears in contexts referring to discussion and conversation, making a single conceptualization of Hāfiz's use difficult. Occasionally he refers to his poetry, and to the fact that it is written in Persian. But we can conclude that for Hāfiz, it seems that *sakhun* is a complex issue belonging to the realm of human relations. His speech is often critical of the established social norms.

Thus far, I may conclude that there are similarities in Rūmī's, Sa'dī's, and Hāfiz's use of the term *sakhun*. They understand it to mean "uttered words", "parole", or "*harf*," which may occasionally be expressed in a poetic form. They also use it to refer to wise sayings that come from either

one's soul, mind, or heart when they strive to explain the content of their *sakhun*. They distinguish between good *sakhun* and bad *sakhun*. Finally, they all use it to refer to their own didactical sayings as an example of good *sakhun*. Other poets beside the three above, have dealt with the *sakhun* in an extensive manner, not only quantitatively but also in terms of the significant place they have given the term in their works. For example, in the poetry of Nasīr Khusraw (1004-ca. 1088), especially in his *qasā'id*, the term occurs frequently to conceptualize a variety of philosophical, didactic, and religious statements.⁷⁰ He is amongst those who have been influenced in his metaphysics by Aristotle, through the works of Avicenna and al-Fārābī.⁷¹ Examples are numerous and a separate study would be needed in order to cover all the nuances in his work.⁷² However, the word *sakhun* is mostly used in the ways discussed above.⁷³

***Sakhun* in Nizāmī's Work**

Ilyas Yūsūf Nizāmī Ganjavī (d. c. 1204) appears to have received an excellent education in several branches of science and learning that informs his portrayals of women, love, and relations between men and women. He brings a progressive and humanistic approach to the portrayals of his female characters such as Shīrīn, Laylī and those ladies in *Haft Paykar*. The term *sakhun* appears more often in his work than in those discussed above. This might be related to the fact that for him, *sakhun* is an art, which he repeatedly claims to possess. Often, and contrary to other poets discussed, Nizāmī uses the term to present the particularities of this art. He determines its boundaries and its different shapes. Poetry is a form of *sakhun* art and he of course considers poets to be creative artists with an almost divine status. *Makhzan al-Asrār* starts with a section entitled سخن آغاز “The Beginning of *sakhun*”, followed by another subsection entitled گفتار در فضیلت سخن “Discourse on the Virtue of *sakhun*”. These indicate the relation between his book of poetry and the word *sakhun*, leaving the possibility that to him they are synonyms. Indeed, he continues to equate the two in many other places. In the “Discourse on the Virtue of *sakhun*”, the term appears thirty-two times. He is not referring to the act of speech, or the act of conversation between two individuals, nor is he making a mystical reference to the holy text. Here, he talks about *sakhun* as the most essential element in existence:

حرف نخستین ز سخن در گرفت
جلوت اول به سخن ساختند
جان تن آزاد به گل در نداد
چشم جهان را به سخن باز کرد
این هم گفتند و سخن کم نبود
ما سخنی این طلل ایوان ماست

جنبش اول که قلم بر گرفت
پرده خلوت چو بر انداختند
تا سخن آوازه دل در نداد
چون قلم آمد شدن آغاز کرد
بی سخن آوازه عالم نبود
در لغت عشق سخن جان ماست

بر پر مرغان سخن بسته اند
 موی شکافی ز سخن نیزتر
 هم سخنست این سخن اینجا بدار
 وان دگران آندگرش خوانده اند
 گه بنگار قلمش در کشند
 وز قلم اقلیم گشاینده تر
 پیش پرستنده مشتی خیال
 مرده اوئیم و بدو زنده ایم ...
 حرف زیادست و زبان نیز هم ...
 گوی چه به گفت سخن به سخن ...
 نام نظامی بسخن تازه باد

(MA13, 1-14;18;22;27)

خط هر اندیشه که پیوسته اند
 نیست درین کهنه نو خیزتر
 اول اندیشه پسین بر شمار
 تاجوران تاجورش خوانده اند
 گه بنوای علمش بر کشند
 او ز علم فتح نماینده تر
 گر چه سخن خود ننماید جمال
 ما که نظر بر سخن افکنده ایم
 با سخن آنجا که بر آرد علم
 کز سخن تازه و زر کهن
 تا سخنست از سخن آوازه باد

*The first movement of the Pen produced the first letter of the Word.
 When they drew back the curtain of non-existence, the first manifestation was the word.*

Until the voice of the Heart spoke, the soul did not submit its free self to the clay.

When the Pen began to move, it opened the eyes of the world by means of the Word.

Without speech, the world has no voice; much has been spoken, but Word has not diminished.

In the language of love, speech is our soul. We are speech; these ruins are our palaces.

The line of every thought which is written, is bound to the wings of the birds of speech.

In this ever changing old world, there is no subtlety finer than speech.

The beginning of thought and the final reckoning is speech; remember this word.

Kings have thought it worthy of a crown, and others have called it by other names.

At times, the voice of speech is raised by banners, at other times it is written with the pen.

It wins more victories than banners, and it conquers more empires than the pen.

Though speech does not show its beauty to the worshippers of imagination,

We have looked upon speech, are its lovers, and by it we live. (...)

To such a degree that where the Word raises its banner, language and voice are both silent. (...)

Saying: "Tell me, which is better, the new speech, or the old gold?"

He answered: "The new speech." (...)

*So long as the Word exists, may its fame continue; may the name of Nizami be kept fresh by his words.*⁷⁴

In these verses, the poet asserts that the world begins and ends with *sakhun* (which could have been translated as “discourse”, “speech”, “poetry”, or “book”, in addition to “word”). Moreover, words have not only created the world but also the soul. The passage also indicates that the poet wants to establish a relationship between himself, his art, his world, his philosophy, and his career.

In the following subsection, entitled *برتری سخن منظوم از منثور* (“The Advantages of Poetic [linked or versified] *sakhun* over Prose [dispersed] *sakhun*”), Nizāmī provides a short comparison of the two forms, while elaborating on specifications of *sakhun*:

هست بر گوهریان گوهری	چونکه نسخه سخن سرسری
نکته که سنجیده و موزون بود	نکته نگهدار ببین چون بود
گنج دو عالم به سخن در کشند	قافیه سنجان که سخن بر کشند
زیر زبان مرد سخن سنج راست	خاصه کلیدی که در گنج راست
بختوران را به سخن بخته کرد	آنکه ترازوی سخن سخته کرد
باز چه مانند به آن دیگران	بلبل عرشدن سخن پروران

(MA14,1-6)

*Since the ordinary unrhymed speech is as a gem to the jewelers,
Remember this subtle point, see what a weighed subtlety would be
when it is measured.*

*Poets who raise their voices, gain the treasure of both worlds by
their poetry.*

*Especially as the key of the treasury lies under the tongue of the
poet.*

*He, who made the balance of speech, educated the fortunate ones
by his words.*

*The poets are the nightingales of heaven; how do they resemble
others?*⁷⁵

Thus, *sakhun* is an art that can be expressed in poetic or prose form. Can then *sakhun* mean literature? If *sakhun* with قافیه (*qāfiya* “rhyme”) means “poetry”, and قافیه سنجان (*qāfiya-sanjān* “the appraisers of rhythm”) means “poets” (he uses the term شعر (*shi’r* “poetry”), several times in the same passage almost as a synonym for *sakhun*), and if سخن منثور *sakhun-i manthur* means “prose”, then what can *sakhun* mean, but “literature” which can be written in the form of poetry as well as prose? Is this then the word that has been missing from the Persian language to mean ادبیات? When did the words ادب *adabiyāt* and ادبیات *adeb* become prevalent? Was it when improvisation, i.e. the recitation of literature by authors or

rhapsodists became less practiced? At such a time, prose and poetry should have possessed approximately the same written value.

Nizāmī assigns the poet a high status in *Laylī u Majnūn* where he once again elaborates on his *sakhun* or literary discourse. He ranks his own verses with the *Qur'an*, a very ambitious aspiration for his time, not to mention that such a claim stands against the religious belief that the *Qur'an* could not and cannot be written or imitated by a human being. On the other hand, he praises the *Book* as a high form of *sakhun*, literature. Finally, he describes *sakhun* as an immortal art, and correctly so:

بنگر از هر چه آفرید خدای تا ازو جز سخن چه ماند بجای
یادگاری کز آدمیزاد است سخن است آن دگر همه باد است

(HP6,7-8)

*Look round: of all that God has made/ What else, save discourse,
does not fade?*

*The sole memorial of mankind/ is discourse; all the rest is wind.*⁷⁶

چون سخن در سخن مسلسل گشت بر زبان سخنوری بگذشت

(HP25,53)

*When words had followed words, speech passed/ to one most
eloquent.*⁷⁷

آنچه او هم نوشت و هم کهن است سخن است در این سخن سخن است

(HP6,1)

*That which at once is new and old/ is discourse; let its tale be
told.*⁷⁸

And of course, he is aware of literature in other languages when he mentions Greek, Pahlavi, and Persian.

سخن را نشان جست بر رهبری ز یونانی و پهلوی و دری

(IN8,6)

From the manner in which he talks about this art, it appears that he is aware of the great literary classics, whether religious or not, but also of the fact that he himself will become immortal through his *sakhun*. In a more worldly sense, he compares himself with kings in the *Sharaf Nāma* (The Book of Honor), considering himself a great poet who is imitated by others. In the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, he makes the wish:

تا سخن از سخن آوازه باد
نام نظامی به سخن تازه باد
(MA13,27)

*So long as sakhun exists – and may its eminence continue –; may the name of Nizāmī be kept alive by his words.*⁷⁹

He uses the term in varied contexts, often presenting criteria against which the art of *sakhun* may be appraised:

سینه مکن گر گهر آری بدست
تا سخن از دست بلند آوری
بهر از آن جوی که در سینه هست ...
(MA14,47 and 49)

*If thou acquirest a pearl, do not wear it immediately/ seek a better one than thou hast (...) It is better to accept words slowly – so that thou mayest receive them from a sublime hand.*⁸⁰

In *Khusraw u Shīrīn*, he writes:

سخن بسیار داری اندکی کن
یکی را صد مکن صد را یکی کن
(KS11,11)

*Shorten your work if you have plenty to say, don't make a hundred words out of one, reduce a hundred to one.*⁸¹

Here the poet is talking about the difficulty of creating original works, expressing ideas in succinct ways, knowing the old stories, being able to give the work some epigrammatic quality, and finally, of acquiring fame. In the same book, Nizāmī continues his deliberations on his art:

سخن باید که با معیار باشد
که بر گفتن خزان را بار باشد
*Words must be written based on criteria/ without which, they are loads for donkeys.*⁸²

He returns to this topic in the *Iqbāl Nāma*:

سخن گفتن نرم فرز انگیست
درشتی نمودن ز دیوانگیست
*Peaceful speech indicates wisdom, rough sakhun, madness.*⁸³

And he embodies the art in the story of Shīrīn:

شکر ریزان همی کرد از عنایت
که گوهر بندی بنیادی نهادی
حدیث خسرو و شیرین حکایت
در آن صنعت سخن را داد دادی
(KS103,75-6)

He poured sugar generously as he began to narrate the story of Khusraw and Shīrīn / With the story, constructing a jewel foundation, and in it, making sakhun famous.

In this section, Nizāmī praises Shīrīn, his favorite character, for her power of speech. Nizāmī's women are almost all portrayed favorably and similar qualities are attributed to Laylī.

لیلی که چنان ملاحتی داشت
نا سفته دری و در همی سفت
در نظم سخن فصاحتی داشت
چون خود همه بیت بکر می گفت
(LM19, 56-7)

*Laylī, with matchless elegance/ was also blessed with equal eloquence. With her fluency and savor refined/ she composed her fond-est original verse.*⁸⁴

In continuation to this passage, Nizāmī states that the two lovers exchange their feelings through poetry, for which he uses the word *sakhun*. He expresses similar ideas in the same *mathnavī*, in the section on the occasion of the compilation of the book, saying that *sakhun* reigns high and art is scripted in the jewel box. He continues to refer to himself as the one capable of magic speech:

بر اوج سخن علم کشیده
کای محرم حلقه غلامی
در درج هنر قلم کشیده ...
جادو سخن جهان نظامی
(LM4,6 and 22)

In his description of Laylī, he writes that a message from court requested he compose a poem in memory of Majnūn; the composition had to be as unique as the character of Laylī. The king also mentioned in his message that he was a connoisseur of good writing. This is the section in which Nizāmī expresses his hesitation about composing the poem since the story did not provide much material for creativity:

خواهم که به یاد عشق مجنون
چون لیلی بکر اگر توانی
رانی سخنی چو در مکنون
بکری دو سه در سخن نشانی ...
کابیات نواز کهن شناسم
دانی که من سخن شناسم
(LM4,25-6 and 31)

The word بکر (*bikr* “virgin” or “original”), not only refers to Laylī’s body, but also to the creativeness of her poems. In order to achieve this, one should be a literary expert and a savant of *sakhun*; just like Nizāmī who claims to be able to distinguish between old and new poetry, between repetitive and genuine poetry. Nevertheless, he continues to compose the poem and in a section on the complaints of those who are jealous of him, he writes that he is so perfect in the magic art of *sakhun* that he is nicknamed the Invisible, or Mysterious Mirror. He claims that his speech is like fire, the way it shines. If you were to lay a critical finger on it, your finger would burn.

در سحر سخن چنان تمام
حرفم ز تبش چنان فروزد
کاینه غیب گشت نامم ...
کانگشت بر او نهی بسوزد

(LM8,6 and 9)

There is no doubt that Nizāmī mostly talks about the written word:

یاران سخن از لغت سرشتند
ایشان لغتی دگر نوشتند

(LM11, 76)

Friends created sakhun out of words [لغت] lughat can mean “language”]/ they wrote a different word [language].

بی قلم از پوست برون خوان تویی
گوش سخا را ادب آموز کن
بی سخن از مغز درون دان تویی
شمع سخن را نفس افروز کن

(MA9,32 and 11,29)

*Without a pen, you read what is not written on parchment / without words you know the innermost thoughts of the mind.
Bring discipline to generosity/ inspire the candle of speech.*

The word قلم (*qalam* “pen”) and the verb نوشتن (*nivishtan* “to write”) indicate the nature of the *sakhun* genre. That is, *sakhun* might be read aloud or recited, but it is always created by the might of the pen. The juxtaposition of *adab* and *sakhun* in the last line of this passage is also curious, as *adab* here does not mean “literature”. Indeed, the word *adab* appears in the *Makhzan al-Asrār* more than twenty-five times and not once does it refer to literature per se.

In the *Sharaf Nāma*, he presents and reemphasizes some of the principles, ideas, and theories that in his opinion shape the art of *sakhun*:

چو می کردم این داستان را بسیج
بسی در شگفتی نمودن طواف
سخن راست رو بود و راه پیچ پیچ ...
عنان سخن را کشد در گزاف

و گر بی شگفتی گزاری سخن
 سخن را به اندازه ای دار پاس
 ندارد نوی نامه های کهن
 که باور توان کردنش در قیاس
 سخن گر چه بر آرد فروغ
 چو نا باور افتد نماید دروغ
 (SN10,16 and 82-5)

When I was preparing this work (the Sharaf Nāma)/ speech was straight-moving (fluent) but the road (of information) ambient. (...) To circulate much about a wonderful matter/ Draws the rein of speech into foolish talking. And if thou should utter speech without some wonder (the subtlety of verse)/ the old books (void of the imagery of verse) would have no freshness. Of speech, keep watch to this extent/ that in imagination one can believe it. Although speech (verse) produces (in the orator's opinion) the splendor of the jewel/ When it is not believed it seems the lie.⁸⁵

Here, he believes that the art of *sakhun* requires a certain element of surprise by saying that the existence of a certain level of شگفتی (*shigiftī* “wonder”, “surprise”) makes the work original. Judging by his writing, his portrayal of his characters, and the intricate stories of the *Haft Paykar*, one may conclude that شگفتی is something similar to the notion of the sublime. This makes sense, considering his advice that one should not remain in a sublime mode too long because that will give *sakhun* an element of exaggeration. He delves into this topic again in the *Iqbāl Nāma*, saying that it is not easy to be creative all the time, and that one needs to be versed in knowledge and prosody, in order to be at ease in the creation of *sakhun*.

بدینگونه بر نو خطان سخن
 دلی هرکرا کو سخن گستر است
 کند تازه پیرایه های کهن ...
 سروشی سرآینده یارگیر است ...
 سخن گفتن آسان بر آن کس بود
 که نظم تهییش از سخن بس بود
 (IN4,6;15 and 78)⁸⁶

These passages, which represent a small portion of Nizāmī's writing on the theories of *sakhun*, indicate the importance of literary creativity to him. There is no limit to the themes and topics of Nizāmian *sakhun*, which covers such diverse subjects as logic, philosophy, Islam and Islamic jurisprudence, Ash'ari doctrine, Zoroastrianism, culture, nation, love, women's portrayals, *kalam* (speculative theology), geometry, astronomy, geography, history, music, and architecture.⁸⁷ In his own words, in the *Iqbāl Nāma*, *sakhun* should indeed have different themes ranging from the divine to nature:

یکی از طبیعت سخن ساز کرد
 یکی از الهی گره باز کرد
 (IN15,8)

Knowing several languages enabled him to enrich his ideas and knowledge with the borrowings from foreign sources.⁸⁸ And, he often points out that to be knowledgeable in these fields is helpful in the creation of *sakhun*, helpful in the enrichment of rhetoric. This makes him a wordsmith. In his own words,

پراکنده از هر دری دانه ای بر آراستم چون صنم خانه ای
(SN10,12)

*Having collected a grain (of information) from every door (of history)/ I adorned (the Sharaf-Nāma) like an idol-house.*⁸⁹

This means that *sakhun* should contain ideas, new ideas, and that it is not all about form. Nevertheless, because of the significance of form, which he also discusses extensively, he offers another theory about the issue of the translation of *sakhun*. He treats *sakhun* as a literary art again when he brings up the question of translation. As a literary critic, he argues that poetry is hardly translatable at all.⁹⁰

Speaking of form, Nizāmī believes that in the art of *sakhun*, as a genre, there is a distinction between form and content; a notion with which present-day literary critics would agree. By including all the above branches of knowledge, he has supposedly taken care of the content, but he also acknowledges the effort and work it takes to write good poetry by pointing out the issues of editing and proofreading.⁹¹ In the *Makhzan al-Asrār*, he writes:

هر سخنی کز ادبش دوریست و آنچه نه از علم بر آرد علم گر نه درو داد سخن دادی این طرفم کرد سخن پای بند	دست بر او مال که دستوریست گر منم آن حرف درو کش قلم شهر به شهرش نفرستادمی جمله اطراف مرا زیر دست ⁹²
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(MA40,10-13)

Erase any word which lacks courtesy and eloquence/ because this is my wish.

Draw the pen through whatsoever raises its banner against knowledge/ even though it were myself.

If in it I have not done justice to speech/ I would not have it sent from city to city.

Eloquence has shackled me in this place, but all places are under my hand.

He repeats this point in *Sharaf Nāma*:

سخن به که با صاحب تاج و تخت بگویند سخنه نگوینده سخت⁹³

*Best, – that with lord of the crown and the throne, – speech –
Weighed (soft) they should utter; hard, they should not utter.*

But the fact is that Nizāmī makes manifest this idea about literary form and content as he creates his works. With regard to the issue of form in the *Haft Paykar*, Meisami writes that both the story's character Bahrām, and Nizāmī's reader learn about the nature of the human design through the medium of "discourse – specifically, structured discourse." She refers to Nizāmī's verses where he "calls attention to the importance of his poem's design," observing that "design is a recurrent motif throughout the poem, reiterated in the references to building (the palace of Khavarnaq and of the Seven Domes, ultimately transformed into fire-temples (51: 17-52: 10), exemplifying building of this world and building for the next) and to astrology and astronomy, and expressed in terms of number and geometry. Design and number are, indeed, the principles upon which the poem is based."⁹⁴ Khaleghi-Motlagh also emphasizes the importance of form in Nizāmī's work, noting that his art is not limited to discursive and conceptual design. It includes the creation of the desired structure for his stories.⁹⁵ A prime example of such artistic effort, as Ghanoonparvar points out, is the "Story of the Black Dome" in *Haft Paykar*, where Nizāmī presents a very complex design for his poem.⁹⁶ His aesthetic games are not limited to his preoccupation with form but are demonstrated in verses as well. The following lines exemplify his artistic ability in that regard:

آنکه ترازوی سخن سخته کرد سخت وران را به سخن بخته کرد⁹⁷
(MA14,5)

*He who weighs the scale of words / Makes the hard workers harder
with words.*

He skillfully conveys several meanings with only one word. Because he does not place any dots on the first letters of [-]akhtvarān and [-]akhta, these words can be read in eight different ways. Thus, the verse implies that a man of speech can characterize someone as good or bad just by changing a dot. He also often uses words with more than one possible meaning to create multiple readings. Nadirpur aptly states, "Nizami throws his arrows to the neighboring meanings of words instead of targeting the most direct meaning."⁹⁸ I believe this is not aphasia or a shortcoming in the poet's work. It is a deliberate, creative aspect of his work. Nizāmī does all of this in the name of *sakhun*. This passion for *sakhun*, for words, this adroitness in rhetoric runs through his diverse poetic utterances like an ornamental chain, connecting them all together inter-textually and stylistically.

Such an understanding of the word *sakhun* is consistent with Nizāmī's many compound and derivative forms of the word. In addition to the plural *sakhun-hā*, such forms include *sakhundān* or *sakhunvar* (سخن *sakhun-var* سخنور *sakhun-dān*), meaning a person who demonstrates an oratorical, eloquent, and poetic manner when writing or speaking. Other compound words with similar meanings also appear, such as:

سخن آفرین، سخن پرور، سخنران روان، سخن شناس، سخن گستر، و سخن سنج

This creativity points to an eloquent rhetorician who knows the value of words, an excellent writer, or orator who has made a career of this art. Can we translate some of these words into contemporary Persian terminology as follows?

سخن دان = ادیب؛ سخنور = شاعر؛ سخن پرور = ادب پرور؛ سخن شناس = ادب شناس؛
سخن گستر = شاعر

If so, then each of these words refers to the terms “poet”, “writer”, or “creative writer”. In addition, there are a great number of verbs compounded with *sakhun*, from the simple سخن گفتن *sakhun guftan* to the complex سخن ساختن *maghz-i sukhān sākhtan*. The following cases are from the *Makhzan al-Asrār* alone:

سخن آفریدن، سخن آغاز کردن، سخن آرایایی کردن، سخن آمیختن، سخن دانستن، سخن افکندن، سخن دارا بودن، سخن داشتن، سخن باز کردن، سخن بخته کردن، سخن افشاندن، سخن بر کشیدن، سخن بستن، سخن پروراندن، سخن پیش بردن، سخن پیش داشتن، سخن تازه کردن، سخن خواندن، سخن خوردن، سخن دادن، سخن دانستن، سخن در کشیدن، سخن بر آمدن، سخن در گرفتن، سخن آرایایی کردن، سخن آوازه کردن، سخن راندن، سخن رستن، سخن زدن، سخن ساختن، سخن سخنن، سخن کردن، سخن واگشادن، سخن بدست آوردن

Can we translate these verbs to contemporary Persian as well?

سخن خواندن = شعر خواندن؛ سخن آرایایی کردن = قافیه پردازی کردن؛ سخن آفریدن = خلق ادبیات؛ سخن آرایایی کردن = شعر سرودن

If so, their meanings refer to creative and poetic writing. In any case, by the virtue of the above verbs, we have ascertained that *sakhun* is certainly not simply *harf* or “parole”. If it were, there would be no need for so many compound verbs.

Finally, like many other poets, Nizāmī mentions the word *sakhun* when he praises his own work. Contrary to the belief that for Nizāmī the art is a purely religious matter,⁹⁹ these flattering references show that he looks at his art of *sakhun* as a means of achieving prosperity, a means of living, and a life challenge. In his *Dīvān*, he states:

به سخن گنج سعادت به کف آر که سخن کیمیاست که بر سنگ نهی زر گردد¹⁰⁰

*Through words gain the treasure of happiness because they/ are al-
chemy able to turn rocks to gold"*

In *Khusraw u Shīrīn* he writes:

سخن پولادین کن چون سکندر
بدین سکه درم را سکه می بر¹⁰¹
(KS11,7)

*Make your words as strong as steel just like Alexander/ I did so,
and through such coinage, I gained coins.*

In the *Sharaf Nāma*, he writes:

دلم با زبان در سخن پروری
سخن گفتن آنگه بود سودمند
ز چندین سخن گو سخن یاد دار
گه از هر سخن بر تراشم گلی
بدین دل فریبی سخن های بکر
سخن گفتن بکر جان سفتن است
سخنگوی پیشینه دانای طوس
در آن نامه کان گوهر سفته راند
چو در من گرفت آن نصیحت گری
نهادم ز هر شیوه هنگامه ای
چو هاروت و زهره به افسونگری ...
کز آن گفتن آوازه گردد بلند ...
سخن را منم در جهان یادگار ...
بر آن گل زخم ناله چون بلبل ...
به سختی توان زد از راه فکر
نه هر کس سزای سخن گفتن است ...
که آراست روی سخن چون عروس
بسی گفتنیهای نا گفته ماند ...
زبان بر گشادم به در دری
مگر در سخن نو کنم نامه ای
(SN5,25; SN7,8; SN7,29; SN7,63; SN7,91-2; SN7,118-9; SN8,38-9)

*My hearth engaged with the tongue, in word-cherishing/ like (the
angel) Harut and (the woman) Zuhra, in sorcery. (...)*

*It is profitable to utter speech, at that time/ when, from the uttering
of it, reputation becomes lofty. (...)*

*Of so many eloquent ones (ancient poets)—remember (this my)
speech/ I am the remembrancer of (their) speech in the world. (...)
Save that, with speech, I should chaunt the rose (utter a modulated
melody)/ should express, over that rose, a (joyous) cry like a night-
ingale. (...)*

*Virgin (lustrous) words with this heart-enchantingness/ One can
only with difficulty bring forth by the path of thought.*

*To utter virgin (lustrous) words is to pierce the soul/ Not everyone
is fit to utter (virgin) speech. (...)*

*The former poet, the sage of Tūs (Firdawsī),/ who (with verse)
adorned the face of speech, like the bride. (...)*

*In that book (the Shāh Nāma) in which he urged pierced jewels
(previously uttered subtleties of verse)/ fit to be uttered (of
Sikandar), much that he left un-uttered. (...)*

*When this counseling took hold on (affected) me,/ I opened my tongue with a pearl of the Dari language.
I established a great crowd of every subtlety (of verse),/ perhaps, in speech, I may make a new book.¹⁰²*

And, he advocates valuing one's work:

چون سخنت شهد شد ارزان مکن شهد سخن را مگس افشان مکن
(MA14,38)

Since thy poetry is as sweet as honey, do not cheapen it; do not let flies contaminate the sweetness of thy poetry.

Finally, he ends the *Sharaf Nāma* and the *Iqbāl Nāma* by saying:

مرا تا بدینجا سر آید (مد) سخن تو دانی دگر هر چه خواهی بکن ...
گر اقبال شه باشم دستگیر سخن زود گردد گزارش پذیر ...
نظامی که خود را غلام تو کرد سخن را گزارش بنام تو کرد
(IN41,47; SN62,50; SN63,30)

*Here, I bring my discourse to end/ You know what to do, do what you want.
... If the king bestows upon me / My works will be accepted soon.
Nizāmī who made himself your servant/ Coined his work in your name.*

Without these references in the context of his career, his *sakhun* discourse would have not been complete. Through them, he further emphasizes and theorizes the art of book writing, the question of publishing, the challenges of creating a long-lasting work, and the sublime.

It should also be mentioned that while Nizāmī in his conceptualization of *sakhun* might be considered as an anomaly, the proximity of the meanings of *sakhun* and literature is not foreign to the Persian literary tradition. This notion used by Nizāmī is only unique in the sense that it becomes a constitutive element in his work. Others have occasionally come close to such understanding of the word. Firdawsī for example, as discussed earlier, writes in the beginning of the *Shāh Nāma* that whatever he is about to write has already been uttered by others who have entered the garden of knowledge.

سخن هر چه گویم همه گفته اند برو باغ دانش همه رفته اند¹⁰³

Classical authors of literary criticism also discussed this notion of *sakhun*. For example, the eleventh-century author Muhammad ibn Umar al-

Radūyānī talks about the interpretation of eloquence and he offers a notion of the proper structure of *sakhun*, which to him too means poetry and literary prose.¹⁰⁴ For some of these authors, the issue has additional significance as they relate it to the Islamic tradition of knowledge. In the *Qur'an*, for example, on many occasions both knowledge and speech are revered.

To be sure, Nizāmī's description of *sakhun* complies with the description of Nizāmī Arūzī's definition of the art of poetry in which the poet arranges "*imaginary propositions, and adapts the deductions*" and the artist "*must be of tender temperament, profound in thought, sound in genius, clear of vision, and quick of insight. He must be well versed in many diverse sciences, and quick to extract what is best from his environment; for poetry is of advantage in every science, so is every science of advantage in poetry.*" About the notion of the social qualities of a poet, Arūzī continues: "*And the poet must be of pleasing conversation in social gatherings, of cheerful countenance on festive occasions; and his verse must have attained to such a level that it is written on the page of Time and celebrated on the lips and tongues of the noble, and be such that they transcribe it in books and recite it in cities.*"

Nizāmī Ganjavī's description of *sakhun* also complies with Amīr Khusraw Dihlavī's four conditions for the art of poetry: "*Now it should be kept in mind that a poet who fulfils four conditions will be regarded as an absolute master by the far-sighted. First, he should implant the banner of poetry in such a manner that its magnificence impresses others. Second, having the essence of what is important, the style of his verse should be sweet and simple like the (ancient) poets and not like the preachers and Sufis. Third, the components of his writing should be free of errors. Fourth, like the stitcher of leather, he should not prepare a gown of a thousand patches with the rags of (different) people.*"¹⁰⁵

All this explains why, of Nizāmī's approximately thirty-thousand verses, more than two thousand five-hundred deal with issues of language, aesthetics, and rhetoric, representing his effort to explain and elaborate on the concept of *sakhun*. Furthermore, these dealings are expressed in passages and not in sporadic single verses. Contrary to examples from other poets where references to *sakhun* are limited to a verse or two, in Nizāmī, the deliberations on the topic can span a dozen consecutive verses.

This conceptualization of *sakhun* helps us understand how in Nizāmī's work all philosophical as well as religious issues are framed in the language for the sake of the superior goal of creativity. Existence, religious beliefs, holy books, Greek philosophy, and all branches of science are means through which Nizāmī practices his artistic language, and his understanding of the art and the world, and his cherished art of *sakhun*. He is, in a sense, a philologist, in its broad meaning, rather than, as many traditional analyses have portrayed him, a philosopher or even a theologian. That is why, in order to understand Nizamian *sakhun*, one hardly needs outside

referent. His poetic discourse is, in that regard, to a great extent, self-sufficient as he is constructing a notion the subject of which is itself. No other poet of the classical period has ever engaged so extensively in the explanation of the process of *sakhun* creation, *sakhun* structures, *sakhun* forms, and the epitome of *sakhun* thoughts, as has Nizāmī, the wordsmith.

Notes

- 1 For the translation of poems and passages, when accessible, I have used existing translations and provided the bibliographical information. Some of these I have adapted. For those poems and passages for which I could not find published translations, I present my own literal renditions.
- 2 The Pahlavi pronunciation of the word is *sukhvan*. It was also pronounced as *sakhan*, or in Pahlavi, as *sukhvan* or *sakhvan* (سخون) (See Dihkhudā (1372-73)).
- 3 Talattof (2000).
- 4 Ibidem.
- 5 This approach might of course be different from those who cast a descriptive light on the poets' works. For example, Meisami (1989) aptly acknowledges the importance of *sukhan* in Nizāmī's work. She points to the poet's reference to *sukhan* discourse as a "flawless soul," one that holds "the key to unseen treasure."
- 6 Dabashi (1992).
- 7 Meskub (2004).
- 8 Like other terminology, the word *sakhun* also has additional connotations in Sufi thought. It is safe to assume that when a devout Sufi uses the word in a certain context, he might be referring to God's words.
- 9 See Rypka (1968) 235.
- 10 I collected these figures and verses during my graduate studies. Since then, electronic versions of Persian poetry (both on CD ROMs and online versions) have made keyword search much faster. However, results from such searches differ and I am hesitant to include here my findings on the exact numbers. Generally speaking, other poets in whose work the word *sakhun* appears frequently are: Firdawsī: 843; Nasīr Khusraw: 413; Awhadī Maraghī'ī: 322; 'Attār: 238; Khāqānī: 189; Anvarī: 184; Vahshī: 157; Jāmī: 145; Dihlavī: 115; Sanā'ī: 144; Kāshānī: 141; Khwāju Kirmānī: 106. According to these approximate calculations, the combined works of Rūmī, Nizāmī, Sa'dī, and Hāfiz contain more than one thousand four hundred occurrences of the term.
- 11 Rumi (1996) 378.
- 12 Rumi (1996) 111.
- 13 Rumi (1987) 117.
- 14 Rumi (1987) 153.
- 15 Rumi (1996) 317.
- 16 Rumi (1996) 324.
- 17 Rumi (1996) 590.
- 18 Rumi (1996) 548.
- 19 Rumi (1996) 624.
- 20 Rumi-Wilson (1976) I, 207; Rumi (1987) 332.
- 21 Rumi (1996) 727.
- 22 Rumi (1987) 671.
- 23 Rumi (1996) 126.
- 24 Rumi (1996) 90 and 142.
- 25 Rumi (1996) 871.
- 26 Rumi (1996) 1147.

- 27 Rumi-Nicholson (1898) 75.
- 28 Rumi (1996) 638; Rumi-Nicholson (1898) 129.
- 29 Rumi (1996) 378. The longer passage attributes *sakhun* to God and yet it is the medium through which God can be described.
- 30 Rumi (1996) *Ruba'iyat*, 13.
- 31 Rumi (1987) *Daftār* 1.
- 32 Rumi (1996) 350 and *Ruba'iyat* 7.
- 33 Rumi (1996) 956.
- 34 Based on Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 42; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 46.
- 35 Based on Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 8.
- 36 Based on Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 129; Sa'di-Yusofi (1986) 67.
- 37 Based on Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 325; Sa'di-Forughi (1986) 121.
- 38 Based on Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 42 and Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 178-9; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 154.
- 39 Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 43 and 177; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 62.
- 40 Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 34.
- 41 Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 43; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 46.
- 42 Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 150; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 134.
- 43 Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 294; Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 179; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 149 and 154.
- 44 Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 49; Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 36; Sa'di-Clarke (1985) 254 and 257; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 49, 57, 132, 133.
- 45 Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 153; Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 516; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 136, 162.
- 46 Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 70; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 52 and 162.
- 47 Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 122; 134; 135; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 115; 123; 124.
- 48 Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 124.
- 49 Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 330; 158; 464; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 76.
- 50 Sa'di-Anderson (1985) 331; Sa'di-Forughi (1986) 124.
- 51 Sa'di-Wickens (1974) 184; Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) 157.
- 52 Sa'di-Yusofi (1996) *Ghazaliyat*, 87.
- 53 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 98; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 185.
- 54 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 100; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 188.
- 55 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 107; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 198.
- 56 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 118; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 219.
- 57 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 143; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 507.
- 58 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 266; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 263.
- 59 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 147; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 269.
- 60 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 460; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 904.
- 61 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 43; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 85.
- 62 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 103; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 193.
- 63 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 381; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 734.
- 64 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 415; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 811.
- 65 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 212; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 398.
- 66 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 32; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 59.
- 67 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 191; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 358.
- 68 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 287; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 545.
- 69 Hafiz-Saberi (2002) 528; Hafiz-Zulnur (1988) 1035.
- 70 More than four hundred times.
- 71 Rypka (1968) 189.
- 72 Nizāmī's *Iskandar Nāma* is essential in the study of Platonic and Aristotelian influence. See Arberry (1958) 126: "One of the chief topics is the role of philosopher-minister assigned to Aristotle; in treating this motive Nizāmī underlines, as throughout his writings, the need of the just ruler for sound advisers. This was a point to be made again and again by Persian poets, successors to Plato; we are also reminded of the part played in the royal

circle by the vizier, and the control of imperial patronage that he exercised, so that no poet aspiring to the ruler's favour dared neglect to win the sympathy of his chosen minister."

- 73 These examples include: It is "parole, or *harf*" that requires an audience:

ناجسته به آن چیز که او با تو نماند
مرد هشیار چه سخن گوید
بشنو سخن خوب و مکن کار به صفرا
با گروهی همه چون غول بیابانی؟
ز نادان سخن که نیست صواب
به پیش خوگ نهادن نه من و نه سلوی

In terms of its religious connotation being God's word, he writes,

سخن ز جمله حیوان به ما رسید، چنانک
سخن نهان ز ستوران به ما رسید، چو وحی
ز ما به جمله به جان نبی رسید نبی
نهان رسید ز ما زی نبی به کوه حری

In that sense, it can perform miracles,

زنده به سخن باید گشتنت از یراک
گر به فسون زنده کرد مرده مسیحا
مرده به سخن زنده همی کرد مسیحا
جز سخن خوب نیست سوی من، افسون

And similarly to Sa'di, he too believes that,

آن به که نگوئی چو ندانی سخن ایراک
ناگفته سخن به بود از گفته رسوا

It can provide an example, a lesson as where he writes,

من این سخن که بگفتم تو را نکومثل است
چه دهی پند و چه گوئی سخن حکمت و علم
مثل بسنده بود هوشیار مردان را
این خزان را که چو خر یکسره از پند کردند؟

Perhaps the best simile he ever uses to describe his notion of *sakhun* is where he writes,

جان تو درختی است خرد بار و سخن برگ
مر شاخ خرد را سخن حکمت برگ است
وین تیره جسد لیف درشت و خس و خار است
دریای سخن را سخن پند بخار است
بشکن به سر بی خردان در به سخن جهل
شاخی است خرد سخن برو برگ
زیرا که سخن آب خوش و جهل خمار است
تخمی است خرد سخن ازو بر

- 74 Nizami-Darab (1945) 120-2; Nizami-Sarvatyan (1984) 78.

- 75 Nizami-Darab (1945) 122-3.

- 76 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 23.

- 77 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 100.

- 78 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 22.

- 79 Nizami-Sarvatyan (1984) 80.

- 80 Nizami-Darab (1945) 125-6; Nizami-Sarvatyan (1984) 84.

- 81 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) 141.

- 82 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) 332.

- 83 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) 1259.

- 84 Nizami-Atkinson (1915) vii.

- 85 Nizami-Clarke (1881) 111 and 123-4.

- 86 with an alternative reading in Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372).

- 87 See van Ruymbeke (2000) and Khazrai (2000).

- 88 He knew Persian, Arabic, Azari, and very likely Pahlavi.

- 89 Nizami-Clarke (1881) 110.

- 90 He writes:

لغت همه علومی چو از آن نمت بگردد
نمتی که شعر دارد چو از آن زبان بگردد
صلب دگر ببوشد به سیاق معانی
چه نوشتن آید از وی چه رسد به ترجمانی

- 91 Occasionally, however, he denies he is concerned with any of them at all: "I know nothing of meaning nor am I aware of form / for meaning and form have left my heart and my eyes."

خبر از معانی و آگاهی از صورت نیست
که رفت از دل و دیده معانی و صورت
(Ibid., 201)

- 92 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) 117.

- 93 Nizami-Clarke (1881) 292; Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) 934.
- 94 Nizami-Meisami (1995) xxv.
- 95 Khaleghi Motlagh (1991).
- 96 Ghanoonparvar (1991).
- 97 Nizami-Sarvatiyan (1984) 81.
- 98 Nadirpur (1991).
- 99 See Jafari (1991) and Sarvatyan (1989) 37, 40.
- 100 Nizami (1983) 226.
- 101 Nizami-Dastgirdi (1988) KS11, 7, with alternative reading in Nizami-Dastgirdi (1372).
- 102 Nizami-Clarke (1881) 48; 64; 67; 72; 76; 77; 81 and 88-9.
- 103 Firdawsī, Khaleghi-Motlagh (1987-2005).
- 104 Raduyani (1960) 201-12.
- 105 Ansari (1975) 171.