



# A comparative Study of Shirin and Layla in Khamsa of Nizami Ganjavi

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**Abstract:** Lyrical literature is one of the most important and famous types in Persian literature, which is used to express romantic themes and it has been common in various forms such as ghazal and masnavi (double-rhymed verses). The fifth century poet Unsuri's Vāmiq u 'Adhrā, Ayyuqi's Varqa wa Golshāh, Fakhruddin As'ad Gurgani's Vis and Rāmin are among the famous works in this type of literature. However, this type of literature reached its height in the sixth century in the form of masnavi by Nizami Ganjavi, who among lyrical and romantic poets, according to the masters of speech, no poet has ever achieved his success in storytelling and the evolution of this type of literature. Taking the importance of "Shirin" and "Layla" in the well-known poetries of "Khosrow and Shirin" and "Layla and Majnun" into account, in order to clarify the layers and dimensions of their personality and society on one hand and in attempt to identify the effect of society and parents in forming one's personality and life on the other hand, the author first presents the summaries of these two stories and then tries to compare and contrast these two elegant characters- according to the characterization of the master and the storyteller of Ganja- and compare their parents and the society among which they were living.

May God's grace abound toward us.

**Keywords:** lyrical; comparative; romantic; Layla and Majnun; Khosrow and Shirin; Nizami Ganjavi

## 1. Introduction

Ghana (lyric) literally means music, and lyrical poetry has a kind of melodic and delicate tone so that it can be combined with music. lyrical poetry is composed in forms such as ghazal and masnavi, and the best lyrical poetries can be seen in the sixth century poet Nizami Ganjavi's masterpieces, as more than fifty poets have been influenced by him.

Lyrical poetry is a poem that shows the poet's passion, excitement, emotions and feelings and it has been common amongst nations and different people since ancient times. In Farsi language, lyrical poetry does not have a specific format and it has been composed in different styles such as masnavi, ghazal, ode, quatrain, couplet, song, qit'a (lit. fragment) and stanzas with recurrent rhymes. This type of poetry is considered as the most common type of poetry in Persian literature and mystical and panegyric poems are widely used in this type. In fact, it can be claimed that lyrical literature has been also the basis of mystical literature. Many scholars consider folklore literature to be the root of lyrical poetry.

## 2. A brief history about Nizami Ganjavi

Abu Muhammad Ilyas ibn-Yusuf ibn-Zakki Mu'ayyad, known Nizami Ganjavi, was born around 536 (AH) in Aran, located in Ganja, and died around 605 (AH). He studied history, philosophy, logic, architecture, music, painting, poetry, astronomy, astrology, geometry, geography and jurisprudence. Being fluent in Azeri, Farsi, Arabic and Jewish languages, he studied scientific and literary works prior to his era and he was also familiar with the poetry and philosophy of ancient Greece. Paying attention to the format of masnavi, frequency of the complexity of the imaginal forms and the numerous uses of Arabic words are significant

characteristics of the Iraqi style in his poetry. He has shown his mastery in creating natural landscapes, depicting details and accuracy in description, the ability to choose appropriate words and proper expressions, creating new and pleasant themes, and using desired imaginal forms. Nizami was a unique poet in storytelling. He paid a great attention to the mental details of the protagonists of the story. He acted professionally both in arranging and writing the stories and in describing and depicting the details. He has well understood the spirit of the story which was the subject of his poem and the poet's spirit is intertwined with the spirit of the story. Nizami was a combination of great genius, innocent personality, inclined to theoretical and practical theosophy, with abundant knowledge and strong diction, and exquisite poetic imagery. On one hand, he paid attention to the philosophy of ancient Greece and even pre-Socratic Greek philosophy, and on the other hand, he was interested in the divine wisdom of Islam with a mixture of mysticism.

Unlike Ferdowsi, who adhered to the accuracy of the narration, Nizami, more or less, interfered in the events of the story and added embellishments where necessary. That is why he got close to the style of ancient Greek dramatists.

Taking innovation into account and not imitating the existing narrations had given him the opportunity to create art, and inventing fantasies and making changes, using novel similes and subtle metaphors. In fact, to tell the history does not rest on poet or artist's shoulder but rather to create a work that lusters the life and culminates the human soul.

### 3. Khosrow and Shirin

Shirin, the heroine of the story, is the symbol of love, affection, honesty, unique beauty, wisdom, and determination. Khosrow Parviz is the second protagonist of the story, who earns a new aspect by Nizami's narration. He belongs to the society of nobles. The last authoritative king of Sassanid dynasty, who reveals a part of his historical face in the Nizami's work, insomuch that many of his moral and personal details, such as imprudence, have been mentioned in history. The existence of Mahin Banoo is necessary to clarify Nizami's patriotism and also to recognize the source of Shirin's spirituality. Mahin Banoo is a legendary figure, who is the result of the poet's imagination. Not only her beautiful appearance, but also her spiritual magnitude is worthy of attention and imitation. She is also a lover who is extremely decent and infallible.

According to Dr. Zarrinkoob, *Makhzan al-Asrar* (The treasury of Mysteries) may not have met the acceptance and admiration that the poet had expected. It seems that Bahramshah sent a considerable guerdon to the poet, but Nizami was not probably pleased by the reaction of the coteries to which he was caring about. So now that "they have found the song of advisor bird bitter", the poet embarks upon new experiences to which inclinations have more attraction; Love (Ahmadnejad, 1369,25).

What is better than the ardour of love in the world

Flower did not laugh without it, the cloud just stared

Inclinations know nothing but attraction

Sages call this attraction love

(Nizami, 1384, 143)

#### 4. The summary of “Khosrow and Shirin”

*Khosrow and Shirin* is the adventurous love story of Khosrow, prince of Persia, and Shirin, Armenian queen's niece, who, under the guidance and deliberation of Shapur, Khosrow's servant, seek each other out and after a series of tantrums and reconciliations, they finally get together.

Neither the coquetries of Maryam and Shekar inhibit Khosrow from loving Shirin, nor do the pain and need of Farhad, the carver of the mountain (Koochkan), tempt Shirin, whose heart is tied to Khosrow's love. The gloomy-ending destiny of these two lovers has such a pain and ardour that gives the stories of other masters the seasoning pain of real love- the love of infatuated and unhappy people: Khosrow, who is resting next to Shirin at night, gets murdered by his son who is also his rival in loving Shirin. He passes away roughly in the midst of his wave of blood and since he is considering his beloved's comfort so much, he would not wake her up. The next day, Shirin deceives Sheroe by a false promise of marriage and when she enters the Khosrow's crypt, she rips her flank with such amazing loyalty and dies peacefully next to Khosrow. Thus, the end of the story, in terms of strength and impact, is equal to the whole story, which is full of graciousness, passion and beauty, and the ardour and excitement reaches to the climax (Zarrinkoob, 1378, 196 & 197).

#### 5. A few words about “Layla and Majnun”

If the Western world flaunts *Romeo and Juliet*, the masterpiece of English playwright, William Shakespeare (1564-1616), we in the Orient have Layla and Majnun years before that, even if it was not the most common love story, not only in Iran but also in Turkey, it has been one of the most famous and common ones. For the beginning of the story, the poet did not consider the arid environment of the scorching deserts of Saudi Arabia to be suitable for the delicate soul of poetry, and he considered the gravel grounds to be unsuitable for creating beautiful scenes and describing this love story; But due to the insistence of Akhsitan Ibn Manouchehr, the ruler of Shirvan, and his son Muhammad, who was 14 years old back then, he started to create this poetry and he composed this literary masterpiece in about four thousand and five hundred verses in about 14 months:

I would say and my heart would answer

I would cry and the spring would pour water

(Nizami Ganjavi, 1384, 453)

In this poetry, different levels of love can be seen. God's love for His bondsmen; For instance, when he does not consider something to their benefit:

If you fail to find what you seek

It must be related to your best interest

Every good and evil in your life

By precision, you'll see it's for the best interest

The initiation of the unseen isn't clear  
By precision, you'll see that the lock is the key

(Nizami Ganjavi, 1384, 453)

**The love of parents to the child:**

You, who is father's soul, come and hurry  
Perceive until your father's soul isn't gone

(Nizami Ganjavi, 1384,528)

Since the mother saw her son in the distance  
She saw a broken diamond in her heart

Her body crashed into pieces  
She died because of thinking of him

(Nizami Ganjavi, 1384,554)

**The love of Layla and Majnun for each other that the story is based on:**

The one, who my kind heart loves, is there  
My soul is where my heart is there

Your covenant, die next to the beloved  
She takes my life, I give my life

(Nizami Ganjavi, 1384,504)

In fact, this love is more of a rebellion and protest than love (Ahmadnejad,1369,35).

The poet defines them as parables who have good human characteristics and traits and he takes them to the stage of immortality in literature. They think about their wishes without

being bound by the traditions of their era and society. The association of Qays with beasts is also a kind of Qays's protest. He has cut, like a sage, from the society of mad people.

Lion has kneed on his pillow

Like creatures with swords in hands

(Nizami Ganjavi, 1384,535)

## 6. The summary of "Layla and Majnun"

Layla and Majnun is the story of a love full of deprivation and pain, that confronts two grudging tribes with a difficult situation. A kind of love which occurs between a child named Qays and a girl of his age at school, and the Arabian zeal and prejudice create obstacles in the way of this passionate and innocent love. Layla is forced to marry a husband named Ibn Salam and Qays, who becomes disappointed from the interceding of his father and the mediation of Nofal, drives really mad (Majnun), moves to the desert and gets acquainted with animals. Neither the news of the death of his parents, who die from his grief, will stop him from mania, nor the death of Ibn Salam will bring him to peace. In the meantime, Layla also dies and Majnun goes to her grave. While saying "O friend", he passes away (Zarrinkoob, 1378, 197).

According to Nizami, love and poetry are twins. The lover loves poetry, because poetry is the representation of the ecstasy and excitements of the lover, and in fact, the lover is the true poet of beauties. Poem acts as a bridge of attachment, mystery and need between Qays and Layla. Qays is a thoughtful poet and Layla is also a poet and she loves poetry.

In Nizami's Khamsa, women are unique in love and affection. Like their beautiful and exhilarating appearances, they have a beautiful esoteric aspect and enchanting identity. But sometimes, they are deprived of their most primary right, which is the right to choose their spouses, and their marriages are either political, or compulsory, or testamentary. Only in a few cases, they are romantic and heartfelt. Women in Nizami's poetries are unique and one of a kind in love and affection. They know how to guide and, through love, they lead them to the truth. Women in Nizami's works fall head over the heels in love and they would never be manipulated by lustful men.

## 7. The comparison of Layla and Shirin in Nizami's Khamsa

By resisting her father and husband, Layla shows the utmost altruism and self-sacrifice to the point that she becomes a myth in love and the manifestation of true love. She is the symbol of the true beloved. her state of loving is reminiscent of and similar to the state of mystics' mania in seeing the Haqq (Divinity). Next to Khosrow's lifeless body, Shirin, who is the symbol of loyalty and the creator of the myths of loving, rips her flank with a dagger, and while kissing her beloved's lips, she rests in his arms in the crypt. She is an exemplar of a sincere lover who turns a lustful man like Khosrow to a loyal and sublime human being by relying on her conscious piety and high self-confidence.

In both stories the mutual love is obvious, so that the life of each lover depends on the life of the beloved one. When Khosrow died, Shirin had not the strength to continue living. Layla also got extremely sick in an atmosphere full of despair and hopelessness and passes away glumly. Majnun comes to her grave as a lover and sacrifices his life for his beloved. Undoubtedly, if Shirin

and Majnun had passed away prior to their beloved ones, the other two lovers would have followed the same way.

One of the differences between these two is that Shirin has the chance to attain Khosrow and finally they get together; Although this attainment does not last long, but on the other side, Layla, until the moment of her death, does not have the opportunity to get to attain Qays. They begin with tears and grief, and this sorrow continues to exist until the end of their journey and the end of their short lives.

Because of living in a zealous and confined society, Layla can never be as alike as Shirin. She is bound by the strict beliefs of her tribe and she has no right to break those harsh laws. But Shirin chooses her ideal man with piety, without having to comply any orders or laws.

In Nizami's narrative, Shirin is the one who dominates the story of Khosrow and Shirin. In all the ups and downs and events, Shirin's feature affects significantly every single character and event in the story, and among all the glory and magnificence of Khosrow Parviz, there is nothing brighter and more impressive than Shirin.

But in the story of Layla and Majnun, the role of Majnun is quite evident in the whole story. Majnun is an absolute mania, who has forgotten everything. Although Layla's love is another manifestation of the same kind of love and somehow is the other side of the coin. Meanwhile, feminine reckoning and expediencies and ancestral customs and considerations are imposed on women (Rezaei Ardani, 1378, p. 13 - Zarrinkoob 1374, 107 and 127).

Shirin is interested in hunting, hiking, and sports but poor Layla is a prisoner in seraglio. Shirin, without being blamed by her peers or rebuked by her relatives, sees Khosrow's enchanting face in one of those trips. On the other side, Layla lives in a society in which attachment and love are being considered as the cause of unforgiveable corruption and inevitable downfall.

Since they fell in love for each other

They started talking with each other

It was disgraceful from every aspect

The secret was told in every path

(Nizami Ganjavi, 1384,472)

But Shirin's noble spirit does not tolerate contempt even for a second and she would not surrender herself to its expediency and command. The atmosphere of the story of Khosrow and Shirin is full of self-reliance and such a pride arising from self-knowledge. This trait can be observed in all characters of the story. But here, in the poetry of Layla and Majnun, we constantly see Layla moaning and shedding tears; Burning, tolerating and unison with Majnun. And finally,

they pass away drown in depths of wistfulness and failure and get rid of the bondage of the world.

But contrary to Layla, Shirin stands against fate, and with all her abilities, with such self-confidence and strong determination, sets others aside and turns lustful Khosrow into a loyal man whose whole existence invokes peace and comfort for Shirin. In order not to disturb her sleep, Khosrow does not even sigh in his last moments.

Layla, on the other hand, is unjustly surrendered to the fate and doomed to endure tribal coercions. Such surrender and tolerance are the result of oppression and tyranny. She becomes a captive in the house and a prisoner of an undesirable husband's seraglio, and the only solution she has in her father's prison and husband's seraglio is crying and wailing.

### **8. But both women's love transforms their men:**

Layla's love creates delirium and restlessness in Qays. Qays becomes mania, moves to the desert and lives with wild animals. But Shirin's love causes Khosrow to improve. A love along with intellection and balance between happiness and effort and endeavor. Because man was not created solely for having pleasure. She makes such a change in Khosrow that he rebuilds his determination, regains the lost throne, and recaptures his inherited property.

But both women also suffer from the tolerance of their husbands.

Majnun is a decent and honest man with two moral qualities:

1. He extremely loves suffering, hardship, humiliation, and moaning and he gets deep into worshipping grief.
2. Majnun's self-deprecations and the idea that he does not deserve Layla.

But Khosrow:

1. He is a lustful man and somewhat promiscuous and forgetful.
2. Shirin suffers from the news of Maryam's wedding to Khosrow.

The lives of both women are not empty of unpleasant men. Men who consider one-sided love enough to satisfy their desires.

In Layla's life: Ibn Salam

In Shirin's life: Sheroe

#### **Caretaker:**

In Layla's father's prison, things are based on secrecy, and the woman does not dare to share a secret or a word with her husband.

But Shirin's caretaker, Mahin Banoo, is a someone like Shirin. She knows the techniques of loving and she is familiar with ups and downs of young girls' love, without any frustration and anger.

In the patriarchal system of the tribe, the death and life of a young girl is within the authority of a man who is her father. A father who does not know his daughter's feelings, nor do these feelings matter to him. A father who imprisons his daughter at home, and interestingly, her jailer is the mother. A father who prefers to behead his daughter and lets the dogs prey on her, but he would never let her be with her beloved one.

This father surrenders when an unpleasant man, who owns properties, horses and mules, splurges gold coins and hands over poor Layla to him. Layla goes from one prison to another.

I'll get the head of that moonlike bride

I'll throw it to the dogs in this way

I'd rather dogs eat my daughter

Rather than these demonic people

(Nizami Ganjavi, 1384, 507)

There is no jail or jailor in Shirin's life, though. Neither a sword nor a tyrant. Shirin chooses her path, picks up the horse and rides solely from Armenia to Madain to shape her own destiny.

Layla's parents decide that she should marry Ibn Salam. Without any consultation with Layla, they promise her to Ibn Salam without having Layla seen Ibn Salam or spoken to him for a moment. While Shirin chooses Khosrow voluntarily and stands by her choice until her last breath and no one decides for her. This is the difference between two caretakers in two different societies.

### **The Society**

Nizami presents a picture of an authoritarian society with strict and oppressive traditions in the story of Layla and Majnun. A society that condemns any disobedience from traditional customs and rules and adheres to the old ancestral customs and regulations.

But the poet of Ganjeh talks about high culture and admirable customs in the poetry of Khosrow and Shirin. A world in which people enjoy happiness and pleasure and they gain their benefits from the world. They do not concern about do's and don'ts. They barely worry about the probabilities and appropriate or inappropriate behaviors.

In the society in which Shirin lives, men and women are free to have relationships. Piety and personality of girls would maintain and guarantee their chastity. In such society, instead of fearing the father, all people are busy with their jobs and daily routines, but in Layla's society, Qays and Layla's smiles at each other do not remain hidden at school. Their smiles cause disgrace and the ruthless father forcibly gets the daughter out of the school and imprison her in seraglio. Because in Layla's society, absolute rule is based on violence and masculinity is depended on the sword. But in Shirin's society, men would never think of force or sword to achieve their favorite woman.



Layla has grown up in a society that sees love and fondness as the beginning of vulgarity and destruction. But on the other hand, When Shirin is on a jaunt, she sees Khosrow's deceitful face - a painting artistically created by Shapoor. She falls in love with him without fear from being ridiculed by friends and peers or without being blamed by her family or relatives.

Layla's city is a land of violence and entanglements. The land of swords and daggers, to the extent that Nofal, who understands Qays's condition, draws a sword and sheds blood to bring Layla and make Qays happy. In the other story and in contrast to Nofal, Shapur tells Khosrow Parviz about Shirin and her beauties. He describes her stature as a cypress, her teeth as pearls, and her hair as a spring. In this way, he ignites the fire of the love of Shirin in Khosrow's heart, and on the other hand, he draws the enchanting image of Khosrow with his unique talent and puts it on the path from which Shirin passes and she loses her heart when she sees it.

In Layla's city, people are so idle and sick that they would not leave Majnun even in the desert. When one of these people hears the news of Layla's wedding, he abandons everything to find poor Majnun in the desert. Instead of healing him, he breaks his heart again and tells him about Layla's wedding as if Layla is in Ibn Salam's arms in love and excitement.

Hey! You don't know anything

You are worshiping idols

The beloved one to whom you gave heart

You didn't doubt about her animosity

She became your enemy due to her unfaithfulness

She denied that even she knows you

(Nizami Ganjavi,1384,521)

Majnun is heartbroken by what he heard, he went crazy and hit his head to a rock.

He hit his head on the rock so hard

The mountain turned red from his blood

The day I gave my heart to you

I never thought of you that way

I assume that they blindfolded me

But others are watching me

(Nizami Ganjavi, 1384, 522 and 524)

But in the land of Khosrow Parviz, someone who acts dastardly is a traitor who has been paid to accomplish a mission, not an unpaid sick person who dastardly pours the poison of betrayal into the noble lover's goblet.

### 9. What is Layla's sin?

Layla's guilt is that she was born as a woman, and because she is a woman, she is deprived of any choice and option. Her other sin is her beauty and living in a society that condemns women instead of educating men.

But Shirin grew up in such environment in which no girl has been convicted of her beauty. No woman was kept in the prison of seraglio because of the guilt of being woman or being seen erotically.

In Layla's land, being a woman equals to condemnation and misery, but in the Shirin's land, the mighty king listens to Shirin's rebukes without drawing the sword.

Layla	Shirin
Layla and Majnun's love: an innocent love Two school children	Khosrow: A young man on the verge of becoming king Shirin: A graceful and trained girl familiar with secrets of love. She is about to become the ruler of Armenia in the near future
A prisoner in seraglio Grown up in a society that considers love as the initiation of failure and corruption	She likes hunting, sports, and walking In one of the tours, she sees Khosrow without any sarcasm or obloquy from anyone.
Being woman and being beautiful = condemnation and misery Because she is a woman, she is deprived of any choice and option. Because she is beautiful, she is sinful.	Woman = freedom and liberty ≠ condemnation and misery No girl has been convicted of her beauty and sent to the prison-like seraglio for her loving look.
Instead of educating men, women are condemned. Therefore, in the confined space of the school, Layla and Qays's first smile is unseen by mullah, who is also the punisher at school, but curious classmates notice that smile and this causes disgrace for them, and the ruthless father imprisons Layla.	There is no barrier for men and women to have relations, and girls' personalities are their protector of their decency. Instead of fearing the father, everyone is busy with her work.
Absolute rule is along with violence and masculinity is depended on the sword.	Men do not use force and sword to achieve the woman they want
In Layla's father's seraglio, everything is based on secrecy, and the woman does not dare to talk to her husband after finding out the secret.	Shirin's caretaker (Mahin Banoo) is a woman just like her, familiar with girls' emotional states, without anger and limitations.
There are just surrender and silence » it is the result of tyranny and inequality	Unyielding, intolerant of contempt – as a result of her common sense
Moaning and tears and regret, failure and having pain and tolerating	Self-reliance, pride and self-knowledge

<b>Layla</b>	<b>Shirin</b>
Layla's country: The land of violence and obsessing, and companions who pokes their nose into people's lives.	People are busy with work and attached to their own lives
The impact of Layla's love: Passion and restlessness, Qays goes maniac and lives with wild animals in the desert	The effect of Shirin's love: The cause of Khosrow's future promotions, love along with reason and intellection, and the balance between happiness and effort
Men, unpleasant and undesirable. Ibn Salam splurges gold coins	Unpleasant and undesirable men Lustful Sheroe
Men's disadvantages: 1) They extremely love suffering, humiliation, hardship and moaning 2) Majnun's inferiority complex and the illusion that he does not deserve Layla	1) Lustful, somehow vulgar and forgetful 2) Shirin suffers from the news of Maryam's wedding to Khosrow
They never experience getting together, they do not even have a comfortable meeting	Although it is not long, they get together
She has not the right of making decision – Her father makes all decisions	She has the right to choose willingly, she stands against destiny
Society: Closed and condemned to the cruel domination of traditions, adherence to ancient ancestral customs, banned from leaving the traditions	Society: Open and reasonable culture and customs. A society that is not bound to the do's and don'ts, proper and improper behaviors (a free society)
Arabic environment: Arabic spaces and symbols and customs such as conflicts of the story and desert wanderings, loves associated with violence. Desert animals, Layla's captivity in the primitive Arab customs, and Majnun's descriptions, etc.	Iranian environment: Iranian spaces, symbols, and living environment such as folk anecdotes, the existence of magical lands such as in killing heroes, belief in the existence of fairytales and their role, and etc.

## 10. Conclusion

Nizami is one of the first people who has protested against the oppression of women in history. He asks men and women to think about and stand against this ruthlessness. Such a violence that has definitely ruled in different parts of the society in Nizami's era. Perhaps the poet of Ganjeh composed this story to say "How long should oppression last?". He was a free man who would never compromise on oppression and injustice, and he never accepted irresponsibility. He would call people to chivalry and modesty and ask them to defend their position and honor. Due to contemplating this story, especially about Layla's life, we would realize that mankind is alive upon hope and lives hopefully. Layla embraces death in the hope that maybe in another world she will join her beloved one.

There is no doubt that malignancy and spying into other people's private lives and divesting the girls of the society of all their rights and choices, who will be the future mothers of the society, are rooted in mental illnesses and eventually they will end up taking someone's life.

That I am a martyr, my graveclothes are bloody

The color of blood, to be the color of Eid day

Attire, I have my bride

Burry me, I have pudency

(Nizami, 1384, 570)

The society and the parents play a significant role in forming a person's personality, as well as on the progress or destruction of his/her life. They can even destroy one's life. Since Layla is so disappointed of her life and despite the fact that she is young, she feels very old, she is ready to die. The behavior of her parents and society has brought her to such a condition that she embraces such death in the hope of a better life in another world, or at least in the hope of the end of a life full of tears and sighs and regrets. Qays is not really mania, rather, the society that does not understand him considers him mania. Certainly, the level of the sanity of the society is miles away from his intelligence and common sense, therefore he is stoned and rejected, so that he accompanies wild animals and prefers to be with them rather than to be with those human beings.