

MIKAYEL NALBANDYAN ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

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Mikayel Nalbandyan
(1829-1866)

A prominent representative of the Armenian social-political thought is Mikayel Nalbandyan, a poet, writer, literary critic, publicist, and revolutionary-democrat. His rich literary and public heritage has been studied, literarily criticized, and appreciated in a number of literary, historical, philosophical, and economic studies. Particularly, the two-volume work by the academician Ashot Hovhannisyan entitled “Nalbandyan and His Time,” a principal and historical-philological monograph, is devoted to the description of “the historical and social sources of his revolutionary-democratic views”, “linked to the intellectual and social-political ideological battles of his time”¹.

Prominent literary critics, such as A. Terteryan, Kh. Sargsyan, S. Daronyan, A. Inchikyan, and K. Danielyan, have highly appreciated Nalbandyan’s literary and public heritage, regarding him as a prominent figure in the Armenian literary realism and the founder of aesthetics and critical analysis in the Armenian literary realism².

Literary studies mention that, while narrating his work, M. Nalbandyan consulted Ogaryov, Gertsen, and Bakunin in London, as well as used materials published in “Kolokol” and other London publications³. According to K. Danielyan, the essence of his study is based on the following concept adapted from the physiocrats: Agriculture is the real source of the wealth of the nation⁴, while the agenda of economic development is social utopia⁵.

As a broad thinker and a supporter of promoting Armenian national issues, M. Nalbandyan especially emphasized economic problems within the broader issues. This is why he has prioritized economic development in his works and developed advanced concepts in this regard, which later on have become research topics for the economists.

S. Zurabyan has thoroughly discussed and evaluated M.

Nalbandyan’s economic views and economic program, arguing that he, “together with Russian revolutionary democrats, built a conceptual platform for the spread of Marxism in the Armenian reality”⁶. M. Nalbandyan’s economic views have been

¹ Հովհաննիսյան Ա., Նալբանդյանը և նրա ժամանակը, հ. 1, Երևան, 1955, էջ 10:

² Հայկական Սովետական Հանրագիտարան (այսուհետև՝ ՀՍՀ), հ. 8, Երևան, 1982, էջ 150-151:

³ Դարոնյան Ա., Միքայել Նալբանդյան, Երևան, 1979, էջ 382

⁴ Դանիելյան Կ., Հայ գյուղացիությունը XIX դարում (1860-1890), Երևան, 1973, էջ 23:

⁵ Ibid, p. 56.

⁶ Զուրաբյան Ա., Հայ տնտեսագիտական մտքի զարգացման ուղիվազներ, XVIII դարի վերջին քառորդ - XIX դարի 90-ական թվականներ, Երևան, 1959, էջ 229:

provided similar evaluation by Kh. Gulanyan⁷.

In his book “The Socio-Economic Views of Mikayel Nalbandyan”⁸, V. Aghuzumtsyan has tried to incorporate Nalbandyan’s philosophical, revolutionary, illuminative, and economic views, and assess them in the history of the Armenian social thought. According to the author, M. Nalbandyan has had certain influence from the physiocrats, and “wrongly puts an equation sign between the land and economic issues, arguing that everything depends on the resolution of the land issue”. Nalbandyan’s approach to the economic issue has served a reason to present him as a representative of utopian socialism⁹.

Different scholars have attributed to Nalbandyan concepts that he has not authored. For example, according to some authors, Nalbandyan “has defended the labor theory of value and considered labor and the means of production as the main elements of material production”¹⁰, or that “the main branch of the economy is exploitation-free agriculture,” while, as it will be pointed out later, he has also emphasized processing industry and trade. Perhaps, under the pressure of social-political circumstances, there was an attempt to present Nalbandyan as more a revolutionary and a proponent of the theory of Karl Marx, while the first volume of “Das Kapital,” the main scholarly work of scientific communism, was first published in 1867 (the Russian edition in 1872).

These observations have, indeed, been made from the standpoint of the Marxist-Leninist ideology dominant in the former Soviet Union, where the only option for social progress was considered the establishment of communal order through class struggle and revolution. These ideas, however, do not derive from the logic of Nalbandyan’s scholarly work.

Nalbandyan’s philosophical views, this time without ideological limitations, were considered in the monograph by S. Sargsyan.¹¹ “Nalbandyan was a realist,” writes the author, “and, as a national ideologist and supporter of national advancement, was convinced that for the self-establishment and development of the nation, the platform of the nation, that is, the social, economic, and legal conditions for the existence of ordinary people comprising the majority of the nation, and the liberty of the nation, should be ensured”¹². This interpretation and evaluation of Nalbandyan’s study is in line with the problems and proposed solutions discussed in his work. In the conclusion of his above-mentioned book, A. Hovhannisyan writes, “The dust of time has covered his literary heritage and the number of undisclosed memories of his time. But wipe the trace of time from his deceased life and smudged heritage, and you will see

⁷ Гуланын Х., Микаел Налбандян, Москва, 1955.

⁸ Աղուզումցյան Վ., Միքայել Նալբանդյանի սոցիալ-տնտեսագիտական հայացքները, Երևան, 1955, էջ 134:

⁹ Ibid, p. 135.

¹⁰ ՀԱՀ, հ. 8, էջ 151:

¹¹ Սարգսյան Ս., Մարդու հիմնախնդիրը XIX դարի հայ փիլիսոփայական և հասարակական մտքում, Երևան, 2001:

¹² Ibid, p. 260.

underneath it lively and energetic, sparkling and passionate pages, which have been written as if yesterday in order to become supportive directives for today's struggles. This is why we often witness the steady strength of his mind in our times"¹³.

Studying Nalbandyan's social-economic heritage, we become convinced about A. Hovhannisyan's thoughts.

Below follow interpretations of Nalbandyan's views on public administration, which, as we will see in the coming text, are really "supportive directives" for the strengthening and development of the current Armenian statehood¹⁴.

Liberty and Civil Society

It is known that public administration, as a phenomenon, concept, and a complete system of government, has been formed in parallel with and as a result of democratization and the formation of civil society. A feature of civil society is the opportunity of individuals to think, act, and live freely. Published in 1859, the poem of Nalbandyan, entitled "Liberty," emphasizes the importance of the liberty of an individual citizen, which is an important precondition for the democratization of the public life and the establishment of the principles of public administration. It is worth mentioning that Nalbandyan's concept of liberty has one more perception - the liberty of the Motherland.

"Death is unique everywhere, A person dies only once,
But blessed is the person,
That dies for the liberty of his nation"¹⁵

Nalbandyan's concept of liberty is further developed in his prominent work entitled "Agriculture as the Right Way." Analyzing the essence of tyranny, Nalbandyan writes: "Tyranny, if its representative is one individual, be it Nero, Caligula or his pupil, or a political crook, is not scary at all, for it will go down to grave together with the individual"¹⁶.

But "tyranny is indescribably violent, naughty, and persistent, if it stems from the principles adopted by ordinary people. An everlasting tyrant government in a nation is nothing other than the reflection of that nation"¹⁷. According to the author, many times the nation, feeling the burden of tyranny and without analyzing its roots, comes out against the tyranny, gets rid of the reflection of tyranny, without acknowledging that "the element of tyranny and corruption is within itself."

According to Nalbandyan's logic, the liberty granted from above is nothing, "if, first,

¹³ Հովհաննիսյան Ա., Նալբանդյանը և նրա ժամանակը, գիրք երկրորդ, Երևան, 1956, էջ 605:

¹⁴ Suvaryan Yu., Mirzoyan V., Hayrapetyan R., Public administration: theory and history, Yerevan, 2014, pp. 157-167.

¹⁵ Նալբանդյան Մ., Երկեր, Երևան, 1985, էջ 34:

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 472.

¹⁷ Ibid.

the person is not free within himself and, second, he exercises tyranny towards his fellow person.” The author relates real freedom to the economic system and the nature of property rights. “And because the economic problem - the old Gordian Knot - is not resolved, the society is not free in its friendly and family relations. Let them change the government system forty times, if they please; because part of the society owns the land, and the other part remains poor, tyranny comes to reign there”¹⁸.

Thus, Nalbandyan’s perception of liberty is multi-layered and broad. First, it implies individual liberty, which is equivalent to today’s human rights and liberties that are guaranteed by the constitutions of democratic countries and are important components of the civil society. The next reflection of liberty is the liberty of the Motherland, the existence of the independent state, which is an important precondition for the establishment and development of the national state, its economy, and culture.

The next reflection of liberty is economic. “Liberty by itself is merely a word and cannot be materialized without solving the economic problem. No free government, no free legislature can save a person from slavery until that person acquires rights over land. And until then, poverty will exacerbate and reach enormous levels.”¹⁹

Another interpretation of Nalbandyan’s liberty is that only the citizens that have internal liberty can form free and democratic government free of tyranny. This issue is especially important for the post-Soviet countries, including Armenia, which pursue the development of a democratic state. Democratic institutions and the civil society can develop, if people, as individuals, are free in their mentality and social behavior, being exempt of “the element of tyranny and iniquity”.

Matters of Economic Policy

Nalbandyan emphasized economic policy as one of the principal functions of public administration. According to him, generally and specifically, the economic issue has been crucial for the Armenian people. “The economic issue is a matter of life and death, we like to reiterate. It is impossible to repair the base of the Armenian nation and to insert strength and power into it, until the nation, the ordinary people, struggles for daily bread, until its economic issue is not resolved”²⁰. He goes on to propose a solution. “What are the sources of ordinary people’s means of living, to avoid saying wealth, belief of living, eternal and not just daily?” asks Nalbandyan, and goes on to answer, “For the ordinary people directly and the rest of the people indirectly, but nevertheless necessary as water for the fish, the only source of living and wealth is agriculture”²¹.

Thus, he accepts the viewpoints expressed during his time, according to which,

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 474.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 479.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 493.

²¹ Ibid, p. 462.

for the salvation of the Armenian nation it is required to spread illumination or develop trade. Nalbandyan argued that “the majority of the nation should be occupied with agriculture,” while “the minority, which is not engaged in agriculture... should be able to process, build, act, and trade what is being taken out of land by the majority.” It is noteworthy that Nalbandyan emphasizes the need for agro-processing. “It is not only the raw harvest that can attract the activities of Armenian traders, the processing of this harvest is a broad spectrum of activity for those diligent and hard-working people who are good at trading”²². Nalbandyan talks about creating agricultural product processing factories, which can produce food and light manufacturing products. According to the author, “the people of that nation are wealthy and secure, which is based on nature.”

Nalbandyan wrote these lines in the beginning of the second half of the 19th century (“Agriculture as the Right Way” was published in 1862), when in Europe, particularly in England (starting from the sixth decade of the 17th century), France (after 1789-1797), and Germany (after 1848-1849), industrial revolution had gathered pace, manual work was being replaced by mechanization, light manufacturing and production of technology were developing at a rapid pace. Armenia (having millennia old civilizational history) at that time was partitioned between the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire which were lagging behind the European civilization, that is why the direction outlined by Nalbandyan was justified for its time. In today’s wording, he emphasized the development of real production and provided evidence that trade alone, especially in goods not produced in our country, cannot foster the development of national economy.

Trade with European countries, according to M. Nalbandyan, can be called national trade for the sole reason that “there were Armenians.” “Their trade is not national and it has nothing to do with the common national interest. Trade can be national only when goods produced predominantly by Armenians are traded. The nation will benefit from trade, when traders become intermediaries between Armenia and Europe. Trade is national when it is anchored to the basis of the nation”²³. This concept expressed in the middle of the 19th c. had broad strategic importance. Today, the concept is deployed to develop real production and services sectors, and ensure a positive balance of trade and payments based on increased economic competitiveness. In contemporary era of globalization, countries import and export products; the main thing is that the latter exceed the former, “the nation will only benefit from it.”

Nalbandyan discusses price inflation in the context of justifying the need to foster agriculture. “The value of money is conditional. Its strength or weakness, its appreciation or depreciation depends on the quantity of goods and materials money

²² Ibid, p. 500.

²³ Ibid, pp. 419–492.

had been intended to trade for”²⁴. According to the author, “... if agriculture prospers, and the goods to be exchanged with money become abundant, ...the value of money too will increase proportionally to the increase in goods”²⁵.

It is obvious that the solution of the problems of price change and money circulation was rightly seen by Nalbandyan, in the words of macroeconomics, in the domain of changes in supply and demand for goods, while conditioning the change in the value of the national currency to real economic development. Regarding the issue of agricultural raw materials, Nalbandyan notes: “Lots of machinery, which function in Europe on fire and steam, within the Asian simplicity can function on water currents furiously coming down the mountains, which does not require the money spent on coal and wood in Europe”²⁶. It is obvious that the author has predicted 150 years ago the need for the development of hydro energy and its advantage over the alternative sources of energy.

Nationality and Government

There are important observations on the concepts of “nationality,” “government,” and their interrelationship, as well as on the rights of nations, in Nalbandyan’s “Agriculture as the Right Way.” According to Nalbandyan, “Nationality, as a historical reality and concrete phenomenon, cannot be rejected in the general human life.” To the question “what is nationality?” Nalbandyan answers: “Nationality is the individuum of the nation, its face. Millions of people lose their personal individuality for the sake of that individuum. They do not appear as persons, but rather as members of one or another collective individuum. And that individuum lives morally and independently; it has its life, its tongue, its customs, and its traditions...”²⁷ Nalbandyan then goes on. “Sacred is its every property and damned are those who would dare to challenge any of its sacred properties.” Criticizing the fact that “one nation oppresses and robs another, and forces limits to the latter’s land by its weapon,” he emphasizes that “there is no need to transform nationality into blind fanaticism. It’s enough that blind and fanatic nationality has its selfish sides, we say it’s enough that one nationality the slaughter the bull of another for the sake of its one portion of barbeque...”²⁸

“Harmful and illegal is the nationality that sacrifices everyone other for its life,” goes on Nalbandyan, “... Such a nation, no matter how violent, no matter how furious, will some day be exhausted by time”²⁹. This prediction has been partially fulfilled. A number of Empires existing in his times (the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Russian Empires) have collapsed, although the government systems have changed too.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 483.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 500.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 503-504.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 502.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 512.

By the way, Nalbandyan has come very close to the nations' right for self-determination. "Nationality is useful and necessary when it is not a moral luxury but a necessity, a right, a claim for a piece of land on the Earth so that the members of that nation can provide for their living, so that they are not slaves or hostages to others. A nation is immune to accusations and accepted by others, if it can promise other nations similar and unconditional right as enjoyed by itself"³⁰.

It is especially noteworthy that Nalbandyan considers the self-determination of nations fulfilled, if it is realized "through acquiring rights on the name of the collective individuum, which then passes on the same rights and privileges equally to its members"³¹. Thus, Nalbandyan stresses the close interconnection between the right of nations' self-determination, on the one hand, and democracy and the protection of human rights on the other, which has been confirmed by centuries-long experience of human civilization. A lot of nations have self-determined and new countries have been formed in the 20th century, although, based on old traditions, the realization of nations' right for self-determination is forbidden predominantly in tyrannical government countries but not only. Can a country be considered fully democratic, if there is a nation within itself striving for self-determination? Of course, not. Nalbandyan elaborates "If there is a balance and rights within the country, the same balance and rights should be within the nations enslaved in that country....You talk with other countries on the name of rights, but in relation to myself [*the nation within the country* (Yu. Suvaryan)], why are you ignoring them and acting illegally?"³²

Nalbandyan was convinced that government and nation are two different things. The government "is the officials or rulers of a country," who owns "the country's land, treasures, etc.," "governments reign different countries and different nations"³³. Examining the expansionary politics of the English, Austro-Hungarian, Prussian, Russian, and Turkish Empires, Nalbandyan refutes the colonization-justifying thesis, as if "it is the love towards humanity that makes them enslave nations, because those nations lag behind and do not civilize"³⁴.

The aim of Nalbandyan's work "is only to make the nation think about its future," that is why, in his own words, there is a need for "preaching the economic issue, preaching the human being, preaching the nation..."³⁵ as the main pillars for the establishment and development of statehood.

***Translated from Armenian
by R. A. Hayrapetyan***

³⁰ Ibid, p. 513.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid, p. 512.

³³ Ibid, p. 509.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, pp. 510, 522.