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Home > Explanation to the Belief of Mahdism in Shi'a Imamia > 36. Absence of Imam al-Mahdi

36. Absence of Imam al-Mahdi

The disappearance of the Imam was an event of most importance. Shias became upset and much disappointed they were uncertain as to what would happen politically, religiously and socially. It's far reaching effects in every as peek at every field was alarming. Some remained dumbs founded, perplexed and confused knowing not what to do.

A true Shia's concern was as to how to confront the adversary who was a staunch appetent, a Sunni, and how to protect his own strategy in that political hurricane; and to this added his worry as to how to guard an ordinary Shia whose belief was their hunt in which it was a moving object in the jungle that had engaged their arrows and could fell prey to the beast of their propaganda.

The safety of a common Shia, and the danger of the security of a learned Shia was the anxiety of the hour. Although they saw themselves exposed to an ambush from behind a tree in that society, which to them had turned into a forest ruled by wild and bestial animals, yet the most learned scholars of Shia were safe in their hidings. They were armed by the Prophet's (S) traditions and the verses of the Holy Quran, which had established the truth of Imamate to rescue them and to guard a common Shia against the danger.

As a result we now see that Shiaism has survived every risk of eradication. It has preserved its originality rejecting any deviation. Whose make up is her original face and whose ornaments are her natural features. Indeed, malice incited the ugly to abnubilate her beauty by any fuliginous way or to fash its admirers. But her admirers stood a grueling test and her own numinous beauty stood a palladium. However, no matter their practice the Shi'ism deranged its entity. The learned ones gave refuge to the thought of the people. The Nawabs took the affairs of the Shia in their hands.

While everything was in order, the belief in the twelfth Imam was never shaken; Nou Bakhti says that in the town of Qum, there existed a sect that believed in thirteen Imams. We have heard nothing of that kind, and know that all there believed and believe in twelve Imams. Everyone in books of narration claim that there existed scholars during the past two and half centuries to tell people about the Imamate of the twelve Imams.

Yes, a deeper look will show that a few who had turned aside from the original path in search of personal gains or to whom a deliberate deviation had taken far away from the track, later regret persuaded them and repentance returned them back to their right path and to which they adhered in fealty and stuck in faith.

B. Earlier to Ibn Babway and Nomani others like Fazi Bin Shazan (died 260) have written books about both the periods of the absence of the twelfth Imam. These books had appeared before the birth of Imam Hasan Askari. Mashikha Hasan Bin Mahboob (died 224) has also written about this subject. The writer too maintains that the two periods of the absence of the Imam has brought forward changes in the views.

We should point out here that both periods were of importance and of a new kind in the history of Shiaism but not in the sense that the theme of Shiaism varied with that of the past. These two periods further cemented the faith of those who were having a pre knowledge through the sayings of the Prophet (S) and the Imams.

The way of installing a proof or housing evidence was at variance among the lecturers. But at the same time they all depended on the traditions, that is, the sayings of the Prophet (S). Side by side they used reason as well. This method of presenting or producing evidence of reason or logical proofs became wider and wider during the space of time. From the time of Sheikh Mufeed to the time of Allama Hilli and toward this method took an entity to itself.

The proof for divinity, the evidence for prophet hood attained a wider range. Likewise, there is still a possibility that it may still go beyond. But the evidence of narration, that is, the narrative proofs remains what they had been because the words could be invented to install in the Prophet's (S) sayings.

The absence of the Imam is reflected in a way to give an impression that to revolt against tyrant rulers is not an obligation on the people. Therefore, the scholars, that is, the Shia clergymen and their jurisprudents in association with the family of Buyid did not oppose the caliphate of the Bani Abbas dynasty. They propagated Shiaism. If the Buyid family (Ale Buye) committed atrocities, Shias had no obligation to oppose it.

It was only the right of the Imams to revolt or upraise against the tyrant rulers and their governments. If the occultation of the twelfth Imam makes an uprising impossible then no upraising should take place and the concern should be only towards the protection of Shiaism. To bring down a government is the only right of the twelfth Imam.

Such an impression is quite wrong and misleading. First: Shias were in no circumstances and under no conditions obliged to bring down the governments of the Bani Abbas dynasty. Shias were and are obliged to obey the Imam. The Shia ponders, thinks and considers himself under the yoke of twelve Imams, individually and collectively. Even to this day the yoke of the Imamate of the twelfth Imam is around the neck of the Shia. Bani Abbas knew this. They knew that to bring down their government was

not the responsibility of a Shia.

It depended on the stand and outlook of the Imam of that time. Obedience of the Shia to their Imam, their love, affection, and faith in him was to Bani Abbas a dread and a matter to take into calculations and something to bestow consideration to. On the other hand, the conduct, character, behavior, abundant knowledge, truth, honesty, up righteousness, straightforwardness, endurance, tolerance, forbearance, and forgiveness of the Imam was in itself an element and a factor that weakened the Bani Abbas politically, socially and morally.

This the Bani Abbas well knew that they very presence of the Imam, whoever he be, was their own weak point because his existence demonstrated what he possessed and what they were deprived of. Whatever qualities and abilities they had, the Bani Abbas caliphs were short of. They lacked. The people too witnessed the same what the Bani Abbas saw.

The ability of the people to judge and compare could not be taken away from them. As they compared, they hated one and liked one; they hated one and honored one; they hated one and obeyed the other. This being out of their power, the Bani Abbas remained always uneasy, harassed, confused, and uncertain.

To secure their own rescue from this harassment the easiest thing to do was to detain the very object of fear. This they did. They imprisoned the Imams. They put them under home arrest. They implied secret agents, police to keep a watch on them. They broke the link of the people with them. Motawakkil brought the tenth Imam, Ali Al-Naqi, from Madina to Samarra so that he may keep a direct watch on him and control his every movement.

In any circumstance there was never the question that the Shia would revolt. In the days of the tenth and eleventh Imams, Ali Al-Naqi and Hasan Askari, there was no probability of any such thing. It was a general belief that it was up to the Imam to decide what to do. But there was a strong belief running among Shias that each Imam did what he was under commission to do. The Prophet (S) had a charted the program by the command of God for every Imam, framing his responsibility.

So, every Imam in his time acted and behaved accordingly. This secret chart was transferred from one Imam to the other. The other factor to be considered is this, that in those days conditions had become so bad and the people were in such a low mentality that there was no preparedness on their half to consume a change. In such a probability of failure it was wise to avoid the upraising. Its consequences would have been more futile and reverse rather prolific and useful.

The Buyahid's stand did not totally discard the caliphates of the Bani Abbas dynasty although they took the helm of affairs in their hands. They installed a caliph and they even dismissed a caliph. But they did not declare their disagreement with the machinery of the caliphate. Had they done so they would have had to confront a huge front of opposition of Sunnis. A total chaos would have entailed posing a general danger to Shias. Any change in their stand would have reflected a religious basis for that change.

To avoid Bani Abbas and appoint an Alawi caliph was tantamount to the continuation of the same trend. Some say that the interests of Ale Buye was in keeping the Bani Abbas dynasty in order to retain their own power. Anyway, Ale Buye was neither to do nor think of any other way. This should not be forgotten that in the time of the absence of the twelfth Imam some of the Bani Abbas clan was not bad towards the Shia.

They even pretended to be Shia. Nasiruddin was a scholar among the caliphs of Bani Abbas. He believed in the Imamate of the twelfth Imam and in his absence. He even considered himself as the deputy of the twelfth Imam.

There runs a theory that no one has a right to revolt against tyrant governments during the absence of the twelfth Imam. This is absolutely wrong. To upraise against tyranny in the event of possible conditions is in jurisprudence an obligation. This obligation becomes a general one in case the tyranny of a ruler happens to consume one's property, life, or one's honor so that all people should go to the victim's help. To defend against a tyrant needs no sanction of a religious jurisprudent.

Defense is a sacred liability. To defend a Muslim, or to defend a Muslim society is obligatory no matter whether the enemy be an outsider or one from inside. For example the ex-Shah of Iran wanted to change the Islamic identity of Iran.

So to defend such a danger becomes a liability. In jurisprudence these questions are discussed, the defense or the effort to oppose the tyranny of a ruler who is not a jurisprudent or a believer. These issues during the period when the Imam is absent are decided by the scholars of jurisprudence. In the span of the absence of the twelfth Imam the tyrant governments in certain conditions become compulsory to be brought down.

D. The motive of Ale Buye in their upraising obviously was political with lust for power. But it cannot be waived off that originally they should have been motivated by religious matters or the atrocities committed against the Shia might have incited them to revolt against the tyrant rulers.

On the ground that their upraising was contrary to Shia religious standards we cannot condemn them. There are several considerations. When their upraising had succeeded their behavior in general and that of some of them in particular was far better than all their predecessors. They even surpassed in their competency and good conduct with others. The rulers among them showed no enmity with the Shia.

They were jealous and very much enthusiastic towards propagating the Shia belief and at the same time advertent enough to not encroach the Sunni sanctity. In other words they had brought freedom for the Shia and obliterated those conditions that necessitated the Taqia (concealing one's belief). In any case, their policy was not to invalidate the Sunnism or to crush any other religion. They did quite the opposite to what their predecessors had done.

They provided liberty for Shias and also opened avenues for them to enter any government service. Ale

Buye nullified the previous policy for restricting Shias in every aspect of social life.

So, they in fact protected Shi'ism and helped it. What they gave to others by way of freedom they gave to Shias as well. Because of the equity, which they maintained with the Shia, they were accused of religious bigotry. However, we are not here to defend the Ale Buye's policies. This cannot be denied that they too were a dynasty, which appeared on the political scene and became recorded in history.

They differed with their previous rulers who were Sunnis and did everything against the Shias by way of harm. One of them was Motawakkil who even tried to annihilate the Shia belief. But the Buyid dynasty did not act to take revenge nor did they adopt any negative attitude towards the Sunni.

They opened opportunities of jobs and propaganda to them. They were more human comparing to their predecessors like Motawakkil, Salahuddin Ayubi and Taqhrool Saljokhi. The Buyid dynasty was in fact Shia. They believed in Imamate and also the disappearance of the twelfth Imam. But they did not intervene nor did they interfere in religious matters. What they pondered they used to pronounce openly. The Shia clergymen coordinated with the Buyid's harass on the basis that, in the politics people should not take part nor should they participate in revolts against the governments. This is wrong. The Shia religion does not dictate such a thing.

If we look from a political angle, the Buyids were Shia. Therefore they felt themselves secure from any Shia revolt against them. Since they were good with the Sunnis if by any case the Shia were to make any upraising it would have been crushed by the forces adversary to the Shia thought. All the political fronts of the Shias would have been lost. If Shia clergy would have revolted the result would have been the same. On the other hand, Buyids had paved the way for the Shias to enter into jobs and have well stations in society.

So, the Shia thought it prudent to support the Buyid rules. In such circumstances the Shia clergy took to serve the expansion of knowledge and the propaganda of the Shia ideology and at the same time made it obligatory upon themselves to support the Buyids.

As things took shape an understanding opened its umbrella shadowing the Shias and the Buyids without these being a contract or an agreement. Their understanding was the result of the security which the Buyid rulers felt at the hands of Shia, and the contemplation of the Shia clergy that the harm of a revolt would be more than the gain. To not make a movement was a religious conviction to one party while to the other a good prudent policy to honor that conviction.

In any case let us pronounce that we cannot repudiate the legitimacy of their rule, at least, some of them.

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