

A Review of the Reviews

I hereby give a resume of the main points of criticism contained in Muhammad Surush's review in Persian, published in the fortnightly `Sahifah' of the daily `Jumhurt Islami'. This review is based on the Persian translation of Hamid Enayet's book by Baha' al-Din Khurramshahi.

Islamic Beliefs (`aqa'id) and Laws (ahkam):

(1) The author has confused *usul al-`aqa'id* (fundamental doctrines of faith) with *furu`* (subsidiary rules). He says that the five pillars of the faith are: prayer, fasting, alms-giving (*zakat*), pilgrimage to Ka'bah (*Hajj*), and *al-shahadatan* (*tawhid* and *nubuwwah*).

(2) Islam, in the author's words, does not frame an integrated legal system. This shows his ignorance of the comprehensiveness of the Islamic Law.

(3) In the author's view woman's position is made vulnerable in Islam mainly because of the law of inheritance which favours men. The author does not take into consideration greater financial responsibility of men in managing family affairs, and also ignores the fact that husband has no right over wife's earnings, while wife has a rightful share in husband's earnings and property.

In defence of Hamid Enayet it can be pointed out that all these three objections arose because of reading the author's remarks out of the context. He did not refer to *usul* or *furu`*, he just mentioned the five `pillars' of Islam. The second point under criticism is with reference to a misconception, to which the author does not subscribe.

(4) Without any reference to authentic sources, he claims that the Sunnis believe that the Prophet (S) said that his followers were more well-informed in the worldly affairs than himself.

Historical Errors:

(1) it is said that Muslims, throughout history, have been indifferent to political events, and they rarely

revolted against unjust rulers. This sweeping remark is contrary to the historical facts with regard to Muslims in general, and the Shi'ah in particular. The author unwittingly contradicted himself by citing examples of the founders of the four schools of Sunni fiqh, who had to undergo all sorts of hardship and oppression at the hands of the rulers.

(2) He seems to accept the view of the Orientalists that the Prophet (S) did not lay down any guide-lines and principles for political life of the future generations of Muslims.

(3) The author, while giving the meaning of *khawarij* (plural of *khariji*, derived from *khuruj*), has confused the Persian usage of the term with the Arabic connotation of the word. The reviewer's objection is not clear, for in both the languages the word means rebellion, revolt, secession or breaking away.

But so far as the fallacious statements made by the author in connection with the political and religious role of the Khawarij are concerned, the reviewer is justified in his criticism. These points would be discussed in some detail later.

C. Misstatements and Allegations Against Tashayyu` (The Shiite faith):

(1) The author's distinction between the Shi'ah and the Sunnis is made on false grounds. For instance, the author writes that the key terms with regard to Shi'ism are *Imamah*, *wilayah* and *'ismah*, and with regard to Sunnism are *khilafah*, *ijma`* and *bay'ah*. *Bay'ah* is acknowledged as an essential condition of accepting a leader's authority in both the sects, and *ijma`* is also accepted by the Shi'ah as one of the basic principles of *ijtihad*, but of course in a limited sense.

The author holds that the Sunnis believe that distance from the time of the Prophet (S) caused remoteness from the ideals of Islam, while the Shi'ah regard passage of time as a factor helping to attain the ideal.

In fact both the Sunnis and Shi'ah consider the Prophet's lifetime as the ideal epoch, and as to latter periods no general rule can be framed either according to the beliefs of Sunnis or Shi'ah, for each period is judged according to its deeds.

Similarly, both the sects believe in the establishment of an ideal State before the end of the world. The reviewer has quoted, extensively from both the Sunni and Shi'ah sources for substantiating his point. At another place, it is alleged that Hamid Enayet holds that while the Sunnis believe in the inherent goodness of man, the Shi'ah believe that man is essentially sinful and carries a sense of guilt. On this ground, the Sunnis regard man as superior to angels, and the Shi'ah regard him to be inferior to angels.

This controversy owes its origin to the beliefs of the Mu'tazilah and the Asha'irah, and has a long and complicated history, which in no way can be appended particularly to the Shi'i or Sunni beliefs. The

reviewer's brief survey of the controversy, ending with `Allamah Tabataba'i's view on the issue, is quite scholarly. All Muslims unanimously accept that man is the cream of creation and there is no difference among them with regard to human nature and its great potentialities. The *Nahj al-balaghah*, more than any other book, stresses upon the inherent virtue of human existence and the worth of the human self.

(2) The author gives an account of the Egyptian author Ahmad Amin's strictures against the Shi'i faith, but passes on without referring to their refutations by the Shi'ah scholars, which is against the basic principles of academic honesty required for research work, and gives an impression as if he is in agreement with the criticism.

For instance, it is narrated that the source of the Shi'i belief in *Imamah* and *'ismah* (the spiritual leadership of the twelve Imams and their infallibility) is based on the Sasanian myth of the infallibility of the kings of ancient Persia, which was popularized among the Shi'ah as a result of the marriage of al-Imam al-Husayn (A) and Shahr Bano, an Iranian princess. The author's silence on this issue shows his susceptibility to the influence of some Orientalists like Count de Gobineau and Edward G. Brown, who propagated this myth.

It is also stated that the Iranians, in their attempt to make themselves distinct from Arabs, smuggled their old beliefs into Islam and moulded the Shi'ite faith according to them, for it served their cultural and political ends. It has not been pointed out by the author that almost all Iranians were Sunni for many centuries, and they embraced the Shi'i faith on mass scale only after Safawids came in power (1502 A.D.).

The early Shi'ah were all Arab with the only exception of Salman al-Farisi. The reviewer has discussed the baselessness of Ahmad Amin's objections in a convincing manner, and pointed out that a number of great Sunni scholars, *fuqaha*; *mufasssirun*, and *muhaddithun* were Iranians. Abu Hanifah, al-Bukhari (the greatest Sunni *muhaddith*), Sibawayh (one of the founders of *al-nahw*) and al-Zamakhshari (the author of *al-Kashshaf*) were Iranian by origin. A long list of Sunni luminaries may be added to these names.

The author has written that the significance of the martyrdom of al-Husayn (A) in the context of Iranian culture has its origin in the pre-Islamic myth of the assassination of Siyawash. The most startling statement quoted without any critical remark is that Iran was conquered during the reign of `Umar, the second caliph, and, therefore, Iranians became his staunch enemies and supported 'Ali (A) and his family.

Such a statement totally belies historical facts and perspective. Iranians had no reason to wait for centuries for smuggling ancient Iranian beliefs into Islam in the garb of the Shi'i faith. Why did Iranians not give vent to their supposedly anti-Arab feelings for a long time and so devotedly served Islam and contributed richly to the development of Islamic sciences? All such issues have been logically raised and discussed in the review.

(3) Hamid Enayat is of the view that the Shi'ah invented *ahadith* to enhance the value of mourning on the

martyrdom of al-Imam al-Husayn (A) in addition to the *ahadith* praising weeping while reciting the Quran or offering prayer. He conveniently ignores all *ahadith* and traditions referring to the value of mourning on the martyrdom of al-Husayn (A) recorded in the authentic Sunni collections of hadith.

(4) He similarly did not critically examine the allegations made by Ibn Taymiyyah against the Shi'i faith. He should have at least mentioned how Ibn Taymiyyah was severely criticized by his contemporary Sunni 'ulama' and was not only dubbed a heretic but also an infidel, and a king had ordered his execution.

(5) Hamid Enayet writes that the martyrdom of al-Imam al-Husayn (A), at one level, is similar to the crucifixion of Christ. As Christ by his death on the cross guaranteed the salvation of his followers, in the same fashion al-Imam al-Husayn (A) purified the Muslim Ummah of all sins. This interpretation of the Imam's martyrdom is meant to belittle its political and social significance. Here again he uncritically accepted a false idea propagated by some Orientalists.

(6) The comparison of the Sunni and Shi'i concepts of the caliphate with that of the Khawarij's is misleading, and fails to give a correct account of the Shi'i position in this matter.

(7) The author's views on the attitude of the Shi'ah towards the rulers are also baseless. In his view, the Shi'ah were always in a passive state of waiting for the appearance of al-Imam al-Mahdi (A.F.); and as they regarded all the rulers and governments as illegitimate, they abstained from politics.

Enayet further writes that the Sunni realistic approach to this problem is preferable to the Shi'ah view. He also says in another place that because of the influence of Orientalists and non-Shi'ah scholars the view is held that the Shi'ah consider all the rulers to be usurpers and they have been opposed to them.

The oldest Shi'i sources, like the works of al-Shaykh al-Tusi (d. 461/1068) and Ibn Idris (d. 598/1202), suggest quite an opposite line of thought. The reviewer gives an account of the Shi'i views and beliefs, which could be derived from even a sketchy study of the history of *tashayyu`*. According to the Shi'i view:

(a) Islam is a perfect *din* which takes into consideration all aspects of life.

(b) As it is a comprehensive system of belief and action, it has also paid sufficient attention to the political problems of the Ummah during the period of the Twelfth Imam's occultation (*ghaybah*), and it actually laid down a course of action appropriate for it.

(c) As Islam is a religion meant for the whole society, it prescribes certain laws for ensuring social justice and proper utilization of taxes like zakat (alms) and *khums* (twenty percent Islamic tax levied on seven categories of property), which can be done under a just government only. It is impossible, therefore, that any Shi'i may be indifferent to the existing form of government, which eventually means indifference to the implementation of the Divine Law.

(d) There is no contradiction between the belief in the establishment of the ideal government under the guidance and leadership of the Twelfth Imam (A.F.) and a just government before that period. A just and ideal government may be of different degrees, and it is possible that just governments, much lower in degree than the ideal one, may exist in the form of the government of *faqih-e `adil* or even of a *sultan-e `adil*.

Hence, the Ayatullah Na'ini, in his book *Tanbih al-'umamah*, says: 'Though the reins of government should be in the hands of the fuqaha', but if the time is not opportune for this, it is better to have a constitutional government in preference to monarchical rule for the sake of achieving the targets made obligatory by Islam.'

At this juncture attention may be drawn to Hamid Enayat's another remark regarding the attitude of the `ulama' towards constitutional government. According to him, in the past the `ulama' supported monarchy but later changed their opinion in favour of constitutional government. It may be generally believed that the Usuli (rationalist) `ulama' supported constitutional government, while the *Akhbari* (traditionalist) `ulama' favoured tyrannical government.

This inference is certainly wrong, for the `ulama' are divided into the Usuli and the *Akhbari* groups on the basis of the method they employ in *ijtihad*, and not according to political ideology. Contrary to Hamid Enayat's conjecture, Shaykh Fadl Allah Nuri, an opponent of constitutional government, was an *Usuli*.

The author committed another error by labelling the anti-monarchy movement of the spiritual leaders as a means of promoting the interests of the bourgeoisie, using the Marxist class-analysis.

(8) The author considers the thought of Muslim philosophers, like Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra to be purely deductive and unhistorical in content. This view, which holds speculative metaphysical thinking as unproductive and fruitless, is un-Islamic as well as unphilosophical.

(9) The author's estimation of some great Shi'ah thinkers amounts to insolence. For instance his remarks about al-'Allamah al-Hilli's *al-Minhaj* and Khwajah Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's ideals of justice are contemptuous. Moreover they are not based on serious study. Similarly, his estimation of al-'Allamah al-'Amini, describing him as an opponent of the Muslim unity, is totally unjustifiable. In order to estimate his position correctly, the reviewer suggests, one should analyze the meaning of unity. This term may be defined in three different ways:

(1) to select common elements of belief, and do away with all the ideas, derived from the basic tenets, which give rise to differences—this amounts to inventing a faith, to which no one adheres in fact ;

(2) to select one of the various versions of faith and reject all other versions;

(3) all Muslims should unite as one community, retaining their specific beliefs, for meeting the challenge of hostile forces. The Muslim intellectuals accept the third definition, which emphasizes unity in diversity,

i.e. unity on the basis of co-existence of different interpretations of the Islamic faith.

The second alternative amounts to the suggestion that all the sects except one should be suppressed, and the first alternative logically results in the creation of a new faith rejecting all the existing faiths.

Al-`Allamah al-`Amini took into consideration all the above-mentioned possibilities in his magnum opus, *al-Ghadir*, and critically evaluated the strictures passed against the Shi'ah by Ibn Taymiyyah, al-`Alusi and alQasimi.

He holds such criticism not only as malicious but also responsible for sowing the seeds of difference and enmity between the Shi'ah and other Muslims. He particularly takes Rashid Rida to task for making an extremely absurd statement saying that the Shi'ah are happy whenever Muslims are defeated in any field.

In reality the Shi'ah always held Muslim interests in high esteem irrespective of inter-sectarian differences, and never confined Islamic fraternity to their own sect. *Al-Ghadir* played a positive role in attaining Muslim unity by highlighting the following facts about Shi'ism: It is proved logically and conclusively that the emergence of the Shi'ah does not owe its origin to any political or racial movement; many prejudices against the Shi'ah are products of the gulf created among them and other Muslim sects, such as the charge of jubilation over the defeat of Muslims, or the popular notion that the Shi'ah pay visit to the tombs of the Imams in preference to the *Hajj*; it explained the real character and role of 'Ali (A) in Islam.

It is for this reason that the honest Sunni `ulama' like `Abd al-Ghani Hasan al-Misri and `Adil Ghadban paid rich tributes to the book *al-Ghadir*.

(10) The author writes that the Shi'is' indulgence in mourning (*marthiyyah, rawdah khwani*) has been a powerful ally of the forces of tyranny, for it valued defeat and grief, and encouraged a sense of oppressedness more than active rejection and defiance of injustice and tyranny.

The review justly proves that the case is quite opposite by pointing out the political role that the Shi'i emotionalism played in Muslim history. But the reviewer ignored those passages in the book which bring to light the revolutionary role played by the ceremonial mourning. Hamid Enayet, with reference to F. Bagley, says that the Shi'i emotionalism carries with it a more humanistic message. (F. Bagley, "The Azhar and Shi'ism", *Muslim World*, vol. L2, 1960, pp. 65 ff.)

He also holds that this factor produced great literature which enriched the emotional content of the Shi'i culture. At another place, he writes that "The memory of Husayn's martyrdom serves as an everlasting exhortation to the Shi'is of all times to brave their numerical inferiority in the face of firmly established majorities." (p. 20)

Hamid Enayet explains both the positive and negative effects of the mourning ceremonies observed by the Shi'ah. There is no doubt that what the author calls the Shi'i emotionalism in its ritualized form has

lost the true spirit of the memory of the martyrdom and put undue emphasis on the virtue of suffering and deprivation, which dulled the spirit of dynamism among the majority of the Shi`i masses, or the Shi`ah *ruhaniyyun* could not exploit the potentiality of the saga of the martyrdom to the advantage of their followers.

There is no doubt that *`azadari* (mourning ceremonies) was started by Zaynab (A), the sister of al-Imam al-Husayn (A), and `Ali ibn al-Husayn (A), the fourth Imam, with a view to reviving the spirit of martyrdom and to prepare Muslims emotionally to overthrow the tyrannical rule of the Banu Umayyah. It was essentially a revolutionary movement aimed at establishing the true Islamic State in conformity with the Quranic teachings.

Later, when the Imams of the Prophet's Family realized that the time was not opportune for attaining this goal, they concentrated on educating and training their followers in Islamic sciences, and the mourning ceremonies were used as a vehicle of religious and political training so that Muslims might not be alienated from the socio-political realities.

It was the institution of keeping alive the legacy of al-Husayn's martyrdom that brought the Banu al-`Abbas to power, for they wore black robes and raised black flag and standard in memory of the martyrs of Karbala', and their slogan was: "Avenge the martyrdom of al-Husayn (A)." Had this memory not been kept alive as an effective weapon against the assassins of al-Husayn (A), the Banu Umayyah would not have been routed so decisively.

In the history of Islam, the legacy of Karbala' has been a vital force, with which all the unjust and tyrannical powers had to reckon. In later epochs, with the deterioration setting in all Islamic institutions, *`azadari* also lost its spirit and became an instrument of blunting the sharp sense of protest and agitation against injustice.

But this spirit, however, remained effective in the Shi`ah ethos, and if one analyzes the role of different sects and factions in the movements of protest and revolution in various garbs, one can easily find the Shi`ah in the forefront of them in the Muslim world, even in countries which are not predominantly Muslim. Hamid Enayet played down this aspect of *`azadari* and unwittingly emphasized its negative aspect.

Had he not tried to avoid any discussion on the Islamic Revolution of Iran, he would have had to deal with the vital role played in the Revolution by the living legacy of the martyrdom of al-Husayn(A). There is no other way to explain the great passion for martyrdom among the Iranian youth except by giving fullest credit to the Shi`i passion for Karbala'.

At another occasion when the author, perhaps unconsciously, plays into the hands of the Western political analysts and is trapped in their jargon is his estimation of the Iran-Iraq war, which he describes as a struggle between Arab and Persian nationalisms, and on this basis regards it as harmful to Muslim unity.

Five years of the war imposed on the newly-born Islamic Republic of Iran by Iraq at the instance of the U.S.A. have falsified the myth of `Arab-`Ajam enmity, and proved it to be an ideological war in which Iran is supported by the progressive Arab powers. Iran has launched a programme of Islamic unity on both the national and international planes. The `Sahifah' review has justifiably taken exception to the author's statement regarding the nature of Iran-Iraq war.

One more point that needs to be discussed in some detail is the statement that the Shi'ah are more concerned with personalities than principles, while the Sunnis are concerned with beliefs and principles. In the reviewer's view, this statement is totally false and misleading. Hamid Enayet expresses this view in connection with the Shi'ah conception of *Imamah*, according to which the office of the caliphate could not be treated as elective, for it was a matter of Divine choice like that of prophethood. Hamid Enayet has discussed the significance of the notions of *Imamah* and *'ismah* (infallibility of the Imams) treating them as complementary to each other.

The belief that the Prophet (S), Fatimah (A), and the Twelve Imams (A) are infallible does not logically lead to the inference made by the author. They are infallible because they are the embodiments of the principles taught by Islam and willed by God. The reviewer has aptly quoted `Ali's (A) saying that: "Don't determine the truth with reference to personalities. On the contrary, know the truth, so that persons can be judged accordingly."

Hamid Enayet's judgement implies that the Shi'i criterion of *Imamah* revolves around certain personalities and is not based on any principle. As we do not like to indulge in the controversy of the caliphate, we leave it as it is.

At the end of this brief account of the *Sahifah's* review I would make a few brief critical remarks. Firstly, the review highlights only the weak points or errors made by the author. The reviewer himself says in another context that when the critical remarks against any faith are quoted, it is the duty of the writer to state how those objections were met by the defenders of the said faith. It would have been better if the reviewer had also applied the same criterion with regard to the book under review.

The book, undoubtedly, has some commendable points, which are not at all discussed. The reason for this lapse may be that the review is mainly concerned with defending the Shi'i faith and aims to counteract the popular notions about Shi'ism propagated by the Orientalists, who totally rely upon the Sunni sources and interpretations, or distortions in some cases, and the Muslim scholar also falls in their trap and uses the borrowed glasses to view Shi'i Islam.

At the beginning of the review it is stated that great importance is attached to this book because it is written by an Iranian Shi'i after the -Islamic Revolution of Iran. It is, therefore, treated as an inside's view of the Shi'i political thought and faith, and is credited to be the most authentic and scholarly work on the subject. It is also said that the aim of the review is not to assess the author and his work in the light of his total contribution to Islamic studies. The book is reviewed for the following reasons:

(1) Every book written about – Islam and possessing overt or covert distortions ought to be critically evaluated, so that the genuine searchers of truth should be in a position to separate facts from fiction and truth from falsehood. Other papers usually ignore or avoid reviewing books that are in conflict with Islam.

(2) It is desired that the readers, instead of accepting such books uncritically, should themselves research and investigate the truth. It is thus obvious that the book is regarded as misleading, which it is, of course, in some parts. But that cannot be said of the whole book. At least some credit should be given to the author, for his is the first attempt, in spite of all his lapses, to project the Shi'i faith in the proper perspective with justified emphasis on characteristic Shi'ah ethos.

I feel that some objections have arisen because of the inadequacy of the translation, which at many places leaves gaps, and it is not fully ascertainable which statement or idea belongs to whom, the author, the scholar whom he is quoting, or the general Orientalist view. Sometime the translation, however faithful it may be, strays away from the original.

It would have been safer if the reviewer had compared the translation with the original. In most of the Eastern languages English terminology cannot be translated accurately due to the paucity of standardized terms. Despite these remarks, the translation by Khurramshahi is quite good and faithful to a great extent.

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