

Lineage of 'Allamah ash-Sharif ar-Radi and his Life

In the galaxy of the outstanding Shia Scholars two brothers from an eminent family of the descendants of the Prophet (saw) outshone all the others due to their extraordinary brilliance in their time. They were al Sharif al-Murtada, who occupied the chair of his teacher as his successor to the marji'iyah of the Shi'ah world of scholarship, and his younger brother al-Sharif al-Radi, acclaimed to be a great genius of versatile talents, still unprecedented in the history of Islamic scholarship and Arabic literature.

Al-Radi (359–406/970–1015) died young, much earlier than his elder brother, but left his mark on the history of Muslim thought and poetry, which in no way can be described as less significant than that of any other Imamiyyah scholar who lived much longer than him. He shone on the bright horizon of the fourth century Hijri, regarded as the most extraordinary period of all round intellectual and cultural renaissance in the history of Islam, lived for a short period of forty-seven years but generated enough light to lead human quest for excellence for centuries.

Al-Radi's parents' lineage came directly from the Imams (as) of the Prophet's Family. From his father's side he descended from al-Imam Musa al-Kazim (as) ibn Ja'far al-Sadiq (as) ibn Muhammad al-Baqir (as) ibn 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin (as) ibn al-Husayn (as) ibn 'Ali (as) in the following order: Abu Ahmad Husayn Tahir al-'Awhad Dhu al-Manaqib ibn Musa ibn Muhammad ibn Musa ibn Ibrahim al Mujab ibn Musa al-Kazim (as). All his forefathers were eminent in their own right. From his mother's side he descended from the famous al-Nasir al-Kabir also known as Nasir al-Haqq (225 or 230–304/840 or 844–916) who descended from the second son of al-'Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn (as) ibn Ali (as).

Al-Sayyid al-Murtada, in *Nasiriyyat*, a commentary upon al-Nasir al-Kabir's book *Mi'at mas'alah*, writes that: My mother Fatimah [was] the daughter of Abu Muhammad al-Husayn al-Nasir (al-Saghir) ibn Abi al-Husayn Ahmad ibn Abi Muhammad al-Hasan al-Nasir al-Kabir (the conqueror and ruler of Daylam) ibn al-Husayn ibn 'Umar al-Ashraf ibn Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

Al-Sharif al-Radi's name was Muhammad and his kunyah was Abu al Hasan. He was the second son of al-Husayn ibn Ahmad, known as al-Tahir al-Awhad and Dhu al-Manaqib. Al-Radi's title 'al-Sharif' was

a common title used for those who were descendants of the Prophet (saw) from both the maternal and paternal sides.

The word which is now commonly used for al-Sharif is al-Sayyid in Persian and Urdu. Al-Radi's father was the most eminent among the Alawids of his time. He held all the important positions which a Shi'ah could attain under the 'Abbasid regime during the fourth century H. Al-Thalibi (d. 429), in *Yatimat al-dahr*, a bibliography of poets and writers of Arabic, writes about the father of al-Radi: His forefathers were held in high respect by the people of Iraq.

His father, Abu Ahmad for a long time occupied the post of Naqib of the Talibiyin, a position that empowered him to look after the Sayyids of Abu Talib's lineage. At the same time he held the office of the Nazarat Diwan al-mazalim (headship of the highest court of appeal) as well as the office of the chief of hajjaj (pilgrims to the Holy Ka'bah). In the year 380/990 he relinquished these posts in favour of his son al-Sayyid al-Radi.

Ibn Abi al-Hadid (d. 655 or 656/1257 or 1258), in his preface to the *Sharh Nahjul Balaghah*, confirms this statement saying: His father al-Naqib Abu Ahmad was held in high regard at the courts of Banu 'Abbas and the rulers of Al Dayalimah, and was entitled as al-Tahir Dhu al-Manaqib. Baha' al-Dawlah al-Daylami called him al-Tahir al-'Awhad, which meant "uniquely purified". He was appointed the Naqib of the Talibiyin five times, and apart from this job; he occasionally performed duties of great political sensitivity also; for instance, he served as a negotiator to settle certain disputes between the Caliphs and the Buwayhids on the one hand, and the Hamdani rulers on the other.

Because of his political influence he was so feared by Baha' al-Dawlah's son 'Adud al-Dawlah (reigned 367-72/978-83), that in 369/980 he imprisoned him in a fort in Fars, where he underwent the hardships of prison life for seven years. 'Adud al-Dawlah (d. 372/982-83) arrested along with him his brother Abu 'Abd Allah ibn Musa and another influential 'Alawid, Muhammad ibn 'Umar, also. Abu Muhammad, the chief qadi of Baghdad, and Abu Nasr Khwanshadh were also arrested and imprisoned in the same year, 369/980.

With Abu Ahmad's arrest his entire property was confiscated, and his family had to live for seven long years in dire poverty. It was, most probably, in this period that al-Radi and his brother al-Murtada were brought to al-Shaykh al-Mufid by their mother for being educated in fiqh and other religious sciences. And perhaps it was during this period that Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Ahmad al-Tabari, a Sunni Maliki faqih, gifted a house to al-Sayyid al-Radi when he came to know that the brightest of his pupils had no residence of his own for his wife and had to live with his mother.

During the period of his father's imprisonment, al-Radi composed many poems to pay tribute to him. Abu Ahmad was set free by Sharaf al-Dawlah, son of Adud al-Dawlah, while proceeding to Baghdad from Kirman in 376/ 986-87 to depose his brother Samsam al-Dawlah, who also had not released Abu Ahmad and other captives. It is to be noted that 'Adud al-Dawlah was a Shiah of Zaydi inclination, but

for him, like most of the monarchs of the Muslim world, political expediency and interest were much more important than the matter of faith.

As even the 'Abbasid caliph of his time was afraid of al-Radi's connection with the Prophet's Family and his influence among the people, probably 'Adud al-Dawlah was also afraid of al-Radi's father, fearing that if at any time he aspired to wrest power out of his hands he could pose a serious challenge to him. Abu al-Faraj al-Jawzi has also referred to the arrest of Abu Ahmad in the course of recording the events of the year 369/979-80.

The influence of Abu Ahmad and his family assumed greater dimensions in the eyes of the rulers due to the tense and highly explosive situation created by the rivalries and conflicts between the Sunnis and the Shi'ah and the Turks and the Daylamites. These clashes resulted in looting, killing and burning of al-Karkh, a predominantly Shi'ah locality, for one week continuously, in the year 361/971-72, that was repeated in 363/974.

Moreover, there was a conflict between Bakhtiyar al-Daylami, the vizier, and 'Adud al-Dawlah, in which the latter emerged victorious later. Abu Ahmad was on good terms with Bakhtiyar also, which was a sufficient reason for 'Adud al-Dawlah to regard him as an enemy. Abu Ahmad died at the age of 97 in 403/1012-13, and the high offices held by him fell upon al-Radi.

From his mother's side al-Radi belonged to a lineage that was more distinguished for its political activities than the former. His grand-father al-Nasir al-Saghir al-Husayn ibn Ahmad (d. 368/979) was a pious and respected man. According to al-Sayyid al-Murtada he was held in high regard by Mu'izz al-Dawlah (reigned 320-56/932-967), who appointed him to the office of the Naqib of al-Talibiyyin in 362/972-73 when Abu Ahmad was stripped of this post. Al Wasir al-Saghir's father Ahmad ibn al-Hasan served as a commander in his father's army, and was known for both his valour and virtue.

Al-Nasir al-Kabir whose name was al-Hasan ibn 'Ali, was responsible for propagating Islam among the Daylamites after himself conquering Daylam. He was a commander of the army of his cousin Muhammad ibn Zayd al-'Alawi, popularly known as al-Da'i al-Kabir, who conquered Mazandaran in 250/864 and laid down the foundation of the 'Alawis' rule there. Al-Mas'udi, in *Muruj al-dhahab*, has mentioned him at two places as al-'Atrush, which meant "the deaf".

At one occasion, he writes: Al-'Atrush appeared on the scene of Tabaristan (Mazandaran) in the year 301/913-14, and drove away the 'Abbasids, called "the Black robed people", from there. He was a gifted man with great intelligence, scholarship, knowledge and conviction of faith. He lived for a long time among the Daylamites, who were Zoroastrians, and some even pagans, living in complete darkness.

The people of Gilan also lived in the same conditions. Al-Nasir al-Kabir invited them to worship the One God, and they embraced Islam accepting his call. In those days the Muslims reached Qazwin and the adjoining areas. Al Nasir al Kabir built a mosque in Daylarn.

At another place, mentioning al-'Atrush's efforts to convert the Zoroastrians to the fold of Islam, he writes that it was he who built mosques in the cities of Tabaristan (Present Mazandaran and Gilan), and extended the frontiers of the Muslim rule up to Qazwin and Chalus.

There is a common misunderstanding regarding al-Nasir al-Kabir's faith. As he supported the Daiis of the Zaydi rule and was instrumental in laying the foundation of the Zaydi dynasty, he was called a Zaydi by many historians as well as by the Zaydis themselves. Al-Najashi (d. 450/1058), a contemporary of al-Radi and al-Murtada, dispels such claims: Al Hasan ibn Ali ibn al-Hasan ibn 'Umar ibn 'Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib Abu Muhammad al-'Atrush believed in the imamah, and wrote several books in strict adherence to this faith, viz. Kitab al-'imamah, Kitab at-taliq, a larger book on the Imamah, Kitah Fadak wa al-khums, Kitabb al-shuhada', Kitab fasahat Abi Talib, Kitab ma'adhir Bani Hashim fi ma nuqim 'alayhim, Kitab ansab al-A'imma wa mawalidihum (up to the Twelfth Imam (as)).

However, it seems to be a mere conjecture that he was a Twelver Imami, for al-Murtada, his grandson, in al-Nasiriyyat, criticized some of his views for being against the Twelver Imami faith. 'Ali Dawani, subscribing to the views of some early Shi'i 'ulama', holds that he was a Twelver Imami but without any conclusive evidence. Most probably he was a Zaydi Shi'ah. According to Ibn Abi al-Hadid, he fought battles against the chiefs of the Samanids and died in Mazandaran in 304/916 at the ripe age of seventy-nine. Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn Dawud al-Hasani, known as Ibn 'Anabah (d. 828/1425), a Sunni descendant of the Hasani Sayyids, in his famous work 'Umdat al-talib, describes him as being called Nasir al-Haqq, and writes that he died in Amul in the year 303/915.

Al-Nasir al-Kabir's father, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, and his grandfather, al-Husayn ibn 'Ali, were both regarded as eminent scholars and men of virtue. The latter is reported to be a narrator of hadith also. 'Umar ibn 'Ali ibn al-Husayn, son of the Fourth Imam (as) and known as al-'Ashraf, was among the eminent personalities of the 'Alawids. Al-Shaykh al-Mufid, in al-'Irshad, writes about him: 'Umar b. 'Ali b. al-Husayn, peace be on them, was a man of merit and of high standing.

He was in charge of the endowments (sadaqat) of the Apostle of God may God bless him and his Family, and the endowments (sadaqat) of the Commander of the Faithful, peace be on him. He was pious and God-fearing. Dawud ibn al-Qasim, on the authority of al-Husayn ibn Zayd, who was a nephew of 'Umar al-'Ashraf, described him to be extremely honest and cautious in dealing with the matters related to the income of the endowments and their proper management. Some traditions of the Prophet (saw) and the Imams (as) are also reported on his authority. He was treated with respect even in the court of the Umayyads.

Al-Sayyid al-Radi's mother Fatimah bint al-Da'i al-Saghir was a pious and learned lady, who brought her two sons and daughters up with care and arranged for their proper education during the seven-year period of her husband's imprisonment. It is said that al-Shaykh al-Mufid wrote his book Ahkam al-nisa' at her instance, as she asked him to compile a book according to Islamic Law, which could serve as a guide for women.

It was she who took her two sons to al-Shaykh al-Mufid after al-Murtada and al-Radi had completed primary stage of their education. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, in *Sharh Nahjul Balaghah*, narrates a story which is indicative of the high position of this lady of great virtue. The story goes that one night al-Shaykh al-Mufid dreamt that Fatimah (as), the Prophet's daughter, came to his place in Karkh bringing her two young sons, al-Hasan (as) and al-Husayn (as), and asked that he take up the task of teaching them. Al-Mufid awoke amazed at the dream.

The next morning Fatimah, mother of al-Sayyid al-Murtada and al-Sayyid al-Radi, came to his mosque surrounded by her servants, bringing her two small sons, asking that he teach them. Al-Sayyid al-Radi in his elegy on her death paid rich tributes to her virtue, piety, religiosity, courage and other qualities of the heart and the mind. She died in the month of Dhu al-Hijjah 385/995. Al-Sayyid al-Radi was twenty-six years old at the time of his mother's death.

Al-Radi was born in 359/970 four years after his elder brother al-Murtada. His genius came to the notice of his family and teachers at a very young age. He started composing poetry at the tender age of nine. His wit and alertness of mind surprised all. He went to different teachers to study various branches of Islamic sciences, Arabic language and literature. He studied *Sharh al-'Usul al-khamsah* and *Kitab al-'umdah* under al-Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbar al-Mu'tazili (b. circa. 325/936, d. 415/1025), and studied Arabic language and grammar under Abu Sa'id al-Hasan ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Marzban al-Sirafi (284-368/897-979), an expert of Arabic language and literature.

He also went to study the language and literary sciences to Abu Muhammad al-'Asadi al-'Akfani, Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'isa al-Rummani (296-384/908-94), Abu al-Fath 'Uthman ibn Jinn; (330-392/942-1002) and Ibn Nubatah (335-94/946-1004). He studied hadith under Muhammad ibn 'Imran al-Marzabani (d. 378/988) and Abu Masa Harun ibn Musa al-Tal'akbari (d. 385/995). His teacher in fiqh, besides al-Mufid, was Muhammad ibn al-'Abbas al-Khwarizmi (d. 383/993).

Abu Hafs 'Umar ibn Ibrahim al-Kinani was his teacher in qira'ah and the Quran. Most of his teachers were eminent scholars and writers of Arabic. He had started teaching at the young age of seventeen when he was himself studying. He completed his education at the age of twenty. Very soon he acquired fame as a scholar, commentator of the Quran, thinker and poet. His fame as a poet overshadowed his excellence in all other fields.

Among his teachers a few other names may be mentioned: Abu 'Ali al-Hasan ibn Ahmad al-Farsi (307-77/919-87), a Mutazili; Abu al-Hasan al-Karkhi; 'Ali ibn 'Isa ibn Salih al-Rub'i (328-420/939-40-1029); and Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Ahmad al-Tabari (d. 393/1002-3), a faqih of the Maliki school. In those days due to a climate of tolerance at least among scholars and students, the Shi'ah and Sunni students used to attend classes of teachers belonging to different sects. A number of al-Radi's teachers were Sunni and Mu'tazili.

Al-Sharif al-Radi had intimate friendly relations of mutual respect and love with eminent contemporary

scholars, poets and writers professing different faiths, which was an indication of his broad humanism and tolerance. Al-Sahib ibn 'Abbad (326–85/938–95), one of the most influential of Muslim prime ministers and a great scholar of his age, was a patron of scholars and poets.

Yaqut al-Hamawi says that five hundred poets composed qasa'id in his praise. Al-Radi, despite being much younger to him, was highly respected by him. Abu al-Hasan al-'Umari, who is reported to be alive till the end of the first half of the fifth century Hijrah, was from the descendants of 'Umar ibn 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, and was an expert of genealogy. He was in close contact with the al-Sharif family. Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri (363–449/973–1057), one of the greatest poets of Arabic, attended al-Murtada's lectures and was a great admirer of al-Radi.

Upon receiving the news of al-Radi's death in his hometown, al-Ma'arri paid rich tributes to him in an elegy, included in his book Siqt al-zand. Al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Nili al-Baghdadi, known as Ibn al-Hajjaj al-Baghdadi (d. 391/1001) was much respected by al-Radi, who compiled two selections of his poetry, viz., 'al-Hasan min shi'r al-Husayn' and 'al-Ziyadat fishi'r Ibn al-Hajjaj, and also wrote an elegy on his death. Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Hilal al-Harrani al-Sabi (d. 384/ 994), a Sabaeen by faith and a confidant of the Buwayhids, was so close to al-Radi that once he wrote in a poem addressed to al-Radi: When you get the caliphate, do not forget my wife, son and family...

Al-Radi wrote a moving, emotionally charged elegy on his death, the first couplet of which became very famous: Do you know whose coffin people are carrying? Do you know how was the light of our company extinguished? People, particularly the Sunnis, admonished al-Radi saying how could a man like him, belonging to the family of the Prophet (saw), praise a non-believer. Al-Radi said in reply that he paid tribute to his learning and art, not to his faith. Whenever he passed by the side of the grave-yard where al-Sabi was buried, he used to get down from the horse as a mark of respect for the departed soul of the friend and the poet.

Nine years after al-Sabi's death al-Radi happened to visit the grave-yard and saw his friend's grave, he composed another qasidah addressing himself to the departed soul in the following words: Had my companions not been angry with me for stopping near you, I would have saluted your grave O Abu Ishaq!

Al-Radi compiled a selection of al-Sabi's poetry Mukhtar Shir Ibn Ishaq al-Sabi. Among al-Radi's close friends were two other scholarly persons. Shapur Ibn Ardshir (d. 416/1025), who served as the vizier of the Buwayhids till their fall at the hands of the Saljuqis, and who had placed his huge library of rare value at the disposal of al Radi; and Fakhr al Mulk, the vizier of Baha al Dawlah, who led al Radi's funeral congregation, and was himself murdered by Sultan Dawlah in one year after al Radi's death, that is in 407/1016.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/nahjul-balagha-part-1-sermons/lineage-allamah-ash-sharif-ar-radi-and-his-life#comment-0>