

Part 8: The Role of the Shi'ah Poets in the Spread of Shi'ism

Lesson 27: The Shi'ah Poets and the Station of Poetry

During the past periods, poetry occupied a special station, and in addition to its literary and aesthetic dimensions, it had been considered the most important instrument of propaganda, playing the role of today's mass media such as printed matters, radio and television.

During the pre-Islamic period of ignorance *{yawm al-jahiliyyah}*, this fact was conspicuously prevalent among the Arabs because they used to give ample importance to eloquence, fluency and beauty of speech. For this reason, one of the significant forms of the miracle of the Qur'an is its eloquence and fluency; hence, poetry occupied a special place among the Arabs.

As Ya'qubi says in this regard:

The Arab people used to regard poetry as equal to knowledge and wisdom. If in a certain tribe a sagacious and ingenious poet emerged, his presence at the annual trade fairs and the *Hajj* ceremony and its assemblies would be provided so as for him to recite his poetry and be heard by other tribes and clans, and thus, his tribe would be proud of his poetry.

The Arab tribes used to refer to poetry in all their works. They would also express enmity through poetry; give example through poetry; give honor to one another through poetry; find fault with one another through poetry; and extol and eulogize one another through it. ¹

After the event of Saqifah and the overt formation of Shi'ism, Arabic poetry maintained its station and the

Shi'ah made use of it in propagating their viewpoint regarding Imamate and guardianship {*wilayah*}. Poets who were upholding the *wilayah* on the rightfulness of the Shi'ah school whose foundation was the rightfulness of the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ('a) over the caliphate recited poems and had pivotal role in the spread and propagation of Shi'ism. Notwithstanding his anti-Shi'ah tendency, Zubayr ibn Bakkar has mentioned some of these poems. Among these were the poems of 'Utbah ibn Abi Lahab which run as follows:

!ما كنت احسب أن الأمر منصرف عن هاشم ثم منها عن أبي حسن

أليس اولى من صلى لقبلكم و أعلم الناس بالقرآن و السنن؟

و أقرب الناس عهداً بالنبي ومن جبريل عون له في الغسل و الكفن؟

ما فيه و ما فيهم لا يمترون به و ليس في القوم ما فيه من الحسن

ماذا الذي ردهم عنه فنعلمه ها ان ناغبنا من اعظم الغبن

I did not imagine that they would take away the matter of caliphate from the Banu Hashim and among whom from Abu'l-Hasan ('Ali)!

Is he not the first person to pray toward your qiblah and the most learned of people about the Qur'an and the Sunnah?

Was he not the last person to see the Prophet? And has he not been assistant of Jibra'il in bathing (for the dead) and enshrouding the Prophet?

Why do you not think about the difference between you and 'Ali? Among the people, no one possesses his good qualities.

What has been the reason behind their deviation from him? Make him aware of this fact as this loss is the greatest of losses. [2](#)

The pure Imams ('a), who were also aware of the utility and influence of poetry, used to satisfactorily appreciate and honor Shi'ah poets. One day, Kumayt Asadi came to Imam al-Baqir ('a) and recited his elegy until he reached this couplet:

و قتيل بالطف غودر منهم بين غوعاء أمّة و طغام

And the killed one among them in the land of Taf has been abjectly and miserably abandoned by people.

Imam al-Baqir (‘a) wept and said: “O Kumayt! If we only had wealth we shall give it to you. Yet, I will tell you whatever the Messenger of Allah (‘a) said to Hassan ibn Thabit: ‘So long as you defend us *Ahl al-Bayt*, you are confirmed by the Holy Spirit {*ruh al-qudus*}’.”³

Similarly, Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) used to say: “O assembly of the Shi‘ah! Teach the poems of ‘Abdi⁴ to your children as he is with the religion of God.”⁵

For this reason, the truth-speaking Shi‘ah poets were held in high esteem and regard by the Shi‘ah and devotees of the Prophet’s (S) descendants. As Ibn al-Mu‘tazil has narrated, “The people of Qum used to make it incumbent upon themselves to allocate fifty thousand dirhams for Da‘bal Khaza‘i, a Shi‘ah poet.”⁶

As such, the Shi‘ah poets were always subjected to persecution and harassment by the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid rulers. Due to the poems he has recited in praise of Banu Hashim and the pains experienced by the progeny of the Prophet (S), Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi fell prey to the bigotry of the Umayyads and was imprisoned.⁷ Because of poems he had recited in acknowledging Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah,⁸ Sadif ibn Maymun⁹ earned the tirade of the ‘Abbasid caliph Mansur and by the caliph’s order, ‘Abd as-Samad ibn ‘Ali, the then governor of Medina, buried Sadif alive.¹⁰

Ibrahim ibn Hurmah was also one of the silver-tongued Shi‘ah poets who composed beautiful poems in praise of the *Ahl al-Bayt* (‘a). When he entered the court of the ‘Abbasid caliph Mansur, Mansur spoke to him harshly and said: “After this, if you would recite poems which we do not accept, I will kill you.”¹¹

Nonetheless, the self-sacrificing poets such as Du‘bal paid less attention to these threats. Du‘bal used to say, “For fifty years, I have been carrying a gallows but I cannot find anyone who would hang me in it.”¹²

The Shi‘ah Poets Till the End of Minor Occultation

As indicated earlier, from the very first few days after the event of Saqifah, there were those among the truth-speaking poets who defended the school of Shi‘ism through their eloquent tongues.

During the rule of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) and at the Battle of Jamal and the Battle of Siffin, apart from the poets of Iraq who were among the followers of ‘Ali (‘a), many of the companions of the Prophet (S) such as ‘Ammar ibn Yasir, Khuzaymah ibn Thabit, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, ‘Abd Allah ibn al-‘Abbas, and others recited poetry in defending the right of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a).

During the Umayyad period, some poets had also kept their attachment to the progeny of the Prophet (S). During the Umayyad period compared to the ‘Abbasid period, however, there were fewer poets who were present on the scene because during that period an extreme atmosphere of strangulation was prevalent in the Shi‘ah community.

As Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani says, "The preceding poets of the Umayyad period recited fewer poems in lamentation for Imam al-Husayn (‘a)." [13](#) When Kumayt al-Asadi recited the poetry in praise of Banu Hashim {*hashimiyyat*}, ‘Abd Allah ibn Mu‘awiyah who was one of the descendants of Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib at-Tayyar addressed the Banu Hashim, saying: "O Banu Hashim! At the time when the people refrained from expressing your superiority, this Kumayt recited poetry for you and risked his life vis-à-vis the Umayyads." The same poetry was the cause of the trouble that Kumayt endured. [14](#)

Prior to him, Farazdaq was also sent to the Umayyad prison because of his eulogy to Imam as-Sajjad (‘a). [15](#)

During the ‘Abbasid period, sensitivity toward the truth-speaking poets was also strong, but since the Shi‘ah community had expanded then, less control was exerted against them compared to that of the Umayyad period. When the ‘Abbasids gradually became weak, more poets were present on the scene for defending the school of Shi‘ism. As Dr. Shawki Bayf says, "During the second ‘Abbasid period, more Shi‘ah poems were recited, and the Shi‘ah poets during that period were of two groups: ‘Alawi poets and non-‘Alawi poets." [16](#)

Meanwhile, scholars and notables such as Ibn Shahr Ashub, ‘Ali Khan Shirazi and the late ‘Allamah Amini have written about the numbers of Shi‘ah poets. Yet, the most comprehensive work in this regard is by Sayyid Muhsin Amin who has counted the number of Shi‘ah poets according to their year of death up to 329 AH, i.e. the end of the minor occultation {*ghaybah as-sughra*}. [17](#)

The Leading Shi‘ah Poets

In every period, some renowned and famous Shi‘ah poets were the vanguards of Shi‘ah poetry and thawed themselves in the guardianship {*wilayah*} of and love for the progeny of the Prophet (S). Among these poets were Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi, Kuthayyir ‘Azzah, Farazdaq and Sayyid Humayri during the Umayyad period. As Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih says, "Kumayt and Kuthayyir were among the staunch and extreme Shi‘ah." [18](#)

The son of Kumayt, Mustahil, says: "At the time of death, the last time that he opened his eyes, Kumayt said three times, ‘*Allahumma al Muhammad*’." [19](#) Ibn Mu‘taz has said: "Sayyid Humayri expressed in poetry all the famous virtues of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib (‘a)." [20](#)

Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani also says, "The poems of Sayyid Humayri are mostly in praise of Banu Hashim and reproach to their enemies. Two thousand three hundred odes in praise of Banu Hashim have been reported from him." [21](#) For this reason, Sayyid Humayri occupied a lofty station among the Shi‘ah and there was a special seat for him in Masjid al-Kufah. [22](#)

During the first ‘Abbasid period, the two great silver-tongued and eloquent Shi‘ah poets were Mansur Namri and Da‘bal al-Khaza‘i. Harun ar-Rashid issued Namri’s execution order but he was not found

when still alive.[23](#)

Dr. Mustafa Shak'ah says regarding Da'bal:

Da'bal used to praise the Household of the Prophet (S) describing them in his poems in such a manner that as if they were part of his family. He used to harass the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids, and if they would intimidate him, he would say, "For fifty years, I have been carrying a gallows but I cannot find anyone who would hang me in it."[24](#)

Concerning this, Dr. Shawqi 'ayf thus says:

During the second 'Abbasid period,[25](#) Shi'ah poems had been much recited some of which had been recited by 'Alawi poets while others had been recited by other Shi'ah poets. Among the most prominent 'Alawi poets during that period were Muhammad ibn Salih al-'Alawi al-Hummani and Muhammad ibn 'Ali from among the descendants of 'Abbas ibn 'Ali. During the reign of Mutawakkil, this Muhammad ibn 'Ali used to take pride in his forefathers and reflect the Shi'ah views in his poems.[26](#)

Lesson 27: Summary

Poetry in the past occupied a special place and apart from its literary dimension, it had been considered the most significant means of propaganda.

After the event in Saqifah, the Shi'ah made use of poetry in spreading their viewpoint concerning the Imamate, and the poets played a key role in strengthening and spreading Shi'ism.

The pure Imams ('a) who were completely aware of the use and influence of poetry appreciated and acknowledged the Shi'ah poets satisfactorily. Meanwhile, on account of the impact of their words, the Shi'ah poets had always been subjected to persecution and harassment by the hostile Umayyad and 'Abbasid rulers.

During the rule of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) and in the Battle of Jamal and the Battle of Siffin, apart from Iraqis, many of the companions of the Prophet (S) had also recited poems in defense of the right of 'Ali ('a). On account of the intense atmosphere of strangulation during the Umayyad period, however, less number of poets had kept on expressing their attachment to the progeny of the Prophet (S).

During the first 'Abbasid period, the same condition was prevalent, but during the second period, more Shi'ah poets were present on the scene due to the weakening of the caliphate. The most comprehensive work on the number of the Shi'ah poets has been done by the late Sayyid Muhsin Amin.

Lesson 27: Questions

1. What was the station of poetry among the Arabs?
2. After the event of Saqifah, what service did the Shi'ah poets offer?

3. How was the pure Imams' ('a) treatment of the Shi'ah poets?
4. How did the hostile Umayyad and 'Abbasid rulers deal with the Shi'ah poets?
5. Which of the scholars has performed the best computation of the number of Shi'ah poets?
6. Who were the leading Shi'ah poets during the Umayyad period?
7. Who were the leading Shi'ah poets during the first and second 'Abbasid periods?

[1.](#) Ahmad ibn Abi Ya'qub ibn Wadhih, *Tarikh al-Ya'qubi*, 1st edition (Qum: Mansurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1414 AH), vol. 1, p. 262.

[2.](#) Zubayr ibn Bakkar, *Al-Akhbar al-Muwaffaqiyyat* (Qum: Mansurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH), p. 581.

[3.](#) 'Ali ibn Husayn ibn 'Ali Mas'udi, *Murawwij adh-Dhahab*, 1st edition (Beirut: Mansurat Mu'assasah al-'alami Li'l-Matbu'at, 1411 AH), vol. 3, p. 254.

[4.](#) 'Abdi was among the companions of Imam as-Sadiq ('a) and has been mentioned in *Rijal Kashi* as Sufyan ibn Mus'ab with the epithet of Abu Muhammad. Shaykh at-Tusi, *Ikhtiyar Ma'rifah ar-Rijal* (*Rijal Kashi*) (Qum: Mu'assasah Al al-Bayt Li Ihya' at-Turath, 1404 AH), vol. 2, p. 704. Ibn Shahr Ashub has mentioned Sufyan ibn Mus'ab in the category of "muqtasad" poets while erroneously mentioned as 'Ali ibn Hammad 'Abdi in the category of "mujahir" poets. Ibn Shahr Ashub Mazandarani, *Ma'alim al-'Ulama'* (Najaf: Mansurat al-Matba'ah al-Haydariyyah, 1380 AH/1961), pp. 147, 151.

[5.](#) *Ma'alim al-'Ulama'*, p. 147.

[6.](#) Dr. Shawqi Bayf, *Tarikh al-Adab al-'Arabi al-'Asr al-'Abbas al-Awwal* (Egypt: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.), p. 321.

[7.](#) 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Al-Aghani* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d.), vol. 17, pp. 1-8.

[8.](#) Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah was one of the grandchildren of Imam al-Hasan ('a) and his father was 'Abd Allah ibn al-Hasan Muthanna. During the concluding part of the Umayyad rule, the Banu Hashim pledged allegiance to him though Imam as-Sadiq ('a) had then believed that his work would lead to nowhere. After the 'Abbasids' ascension to the office of caliphate, Nafs az-Zakiyyah staged an uprising during the reign of the second 'Abbasid caliph Mansur, but he was defeated by the 'Abbasid forces and was killed.

[9.](#) Sadif ibn Maymun was one of the attendants of Imam as-Sajjad ('a) and Ibn Shahr Ashub has mentioned him in the category of "mudqasid" poets of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). Through his poems, it was also he who urged Saffah, the first 'Abbasid caliph, to kill the surviving Umayyads. Sayyid Muhsin Amin, *A'yan ash-Shi'ah* (Beirut: Dar at-Ta'aruf Li'l-Matbu'at, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 169.

[10.](#) Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn 'Abd Rabbih al-Andalusi, *Al-'Aqd al-Farid* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, 1409 AH), vol. 5, pp. 72-73.

[11.](#) Asad Haydar, *Al-Imam as-Sadiq wa'l-Madhahib al-Arba'ah*, 3rd edition (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1403 AH), vol. 1, p. 452.

[12.](#) Dr. Mustafa Ash-Shak'ah, *Al-Adab fi Mawakib al-Hadharah al-Islamiyyah, Kitab ash-Shu'ara 1* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnaniyyah, n.d.), pp. 162-163.

[13.](#) 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin* (Qum: Mansurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH), p. 121.

[14.](#) *Al-Aghani*, vol. 17, pp. 1-8.

[15.](#) Qutb ad-Din Rawandi, *Al-Khara'ij wa'l-Jara'ih*, 1st edition (Qum: Mu'assasah al-Imam al-Mahdi, 1409 AH), vol. 1, p. 267.

[16.](#) Shawki Bayf, *Tarikh al-Adab al-'Arabi al-'Asr al-'Abbas ath-Thani* (Egypt: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.), p. 386.

[17.](#) The Shi'ah poets according to the computation of the late Sayyid Muhsin Amin are as follows:

The Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ('a); Fatimah az-Zahra bint Rasulullah ('a); Fadhl ibn al-'Abbas (died 12 or 15 AH); Rabi'ah ibn Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (died 23 AH); 'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (died 32 AH); Hasan ibn 'Ali ('a); Husayn ibn 'Ali ('a); 'Abd Allah ibn Abi Sufyan ibn Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (martyrdom 61 AH); 'Abd Allah ibn al-'Abbas (died 68

AH); Umm Hakim bint 'Abd al-Muttalib (died 1st century AH); Arwa bin 'Abd al-Muttalib.

Among the non-Banu Hashim and companions of the Prophet (S): Nabi'ah Ju'di Qays ibn 'Abd Allah (died 1st century AH); Abu'l-Haytham ibn Tayyahan al-Ansari (martyrdom 37 AH); Khuzaymah ibn Thabit Dhu'sh-Shahadatayn (martyrdom 37 AH); 'Ammar ibn Yasir (martyrdom 37 AH); 'Abd Allah ibn Badil ibn Waraqa' al-Khaza'i (martyrdom 37 AH); Kharim ibn Fatik al-Asadi (died 1st century AH); Sa'sa'ah ibn Sawhan al-'Abdi (died 1st century AH); Labid ibn Rabi'ah al-'Amiri (died 41 AH); Ka'b ibn Zuhayr al-Aslami (died 45 AH); Hujr ibn 'Udayy al-Kindi (martyrdom 51 AH); Ka'b ibn Malik al-Ansari (1st century AH); Qays ibn Sa'd al-Ansari (died 60 AH); Mundhir ibn Jarud 'Abdi (died 61 or 62 AH); Sulayman ibn Sard al-Khaza'i (martyrdom 65 AH); Ahnaf ibn Qays at-Tamimi (died 67 or 68 AH); 'Uday ibn Hatam at-Ta'i (died 68 AH); Abu't-Tufayl 'Amir ibn Wathilah Kanani (died 100 AH).

Among the Followers {tabi'un} (the generation after the sahabah), Followers of the Followers {tabi'un at-tabi'un} and the succeeding generations:

Hashim Mirqal (martyrdom 37 AH); Malik al-Ashtar (martyrdom 38 or 39 AH); Thabit ibn 'Ajlan al-Ansari (1st century or 50 AH); Najashi Qays ibn 'Amru Harithi (one of the Iraqi poets in the Battle of Siffin); Qays ibn Fahdan al-Kindi (died 51 AH); Sharik ibn Harith A'war (died 60 AH); Sa'yah ibn 'Aridh (died 1st century AH); Jarir ibn 'Abd Allah Bajli (died 1st century AH); Rabbab bint Imra'i al-Qays, wife of Imam al-Husayn ('a) (died 62 AH); Umm al-Banin Fatimah Kalabiyah, wife of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) (died 1st century AH); 'Ubayd Allah ibn Hurr Ju'fi (died 1st century AH); Muthanna ibn Mukharramah 'Abdi (died 1st century AH); Abu Dahbal Jamhi (died 1st century AH); Abu'l-Aswad ad-Da'uli (died 69 AH); 'Uqbah ibn 'Amru as-Sahami; 'Abd Allah ibn 'Awf ibn Ahmar; Musayyab ibn Najbah al-Fazari (martyrdom 65 AH); 'Abd Allah ibn Sa'd ibn Nufayl (martyrdom 65 AH); 'Abd Allah ibn Khadh'al at-Ta'i (died 1st century AH); 'Abd Allah ibn Wal at-Tamimi (martyrdom 65 AH);

Rafa'ah ibn Shadad Bajli (martyrdom 66 AH); A'sha Hamdan (died 1st century AH); Ibrahim al-Ashtar (martyrdom 66 AH); Ayman ibn Kharim al-Asadi (died 90 AH); Fadhl ibn al-'Abbas ibn 'Uqbah ibn Abi Lahab (died 90 AH); Abu'r-Ramih al-Khaza'i (died 100 AH); Khalid ibn Ma'dan at-Ta'i (died 103 AH); Kuthayyir 'Azzah (105 AH); Farazdaq Hammam ibn Ghalib at-Tamimi (died 110 AH); Sufyan ibn Mus'ab 'Abdi (120 AH); Zayd ibn 'Ali ibn al-Husayn ('a) (martyrdom 122 AH); Sulayman ibn Qutaybah 'Adawi (died 126 AH);

Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi (died 126 AH); Mustahil ibn Kumayt (died 2nd century AH); Yahya ibn Ya'mar (died 127 AH); Fadhl ibn 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn al-'Abbas ibn Rabi'ah ibn Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib (died 129 AH); Malik ibn A'yan Jahni (died mid-2nd century AH); Ward ibn Zayd, brother of Kumayt (died 140 AH); Qadhi 'Abd Allah ibn Shabramah al-Kufi (died 144 AH); Ibrahim ibn Hasan (killed in Bakhmara 145 AH); Musa ibn 'Abd Allah (died 2nd century AH); Sadif ibn Maymun (died 147 AH); Muhammad ibn Ghalib ibn Hudhayl al-Kufi (died 2nd century AH); Zurarah ibn A'yan (died 150 AH);

Ibrahim ibn Hurmah (died 150 AH); 'Abd Allah ibn Mu'awiyah, a descendant of Ja'far at-Tayyar (died 2nd century AH); Abu Hurayrah 'Ajli (died 2nd century AH); Abu Hurayrah al-Abar (died 2nd century AH); Qudamah Sa'di; Ja'far ibn 'Affan at-Ta'i (died 150 AH); Abu Ja'far Mu'min Taq (died 2nd century AH); Sharik ibn 'Abd Allah Nakha'i (died 2nd century AH); 'Ali ibn Hamzah Nahawi Kasa'i (died 189 AH); Mansur Numri (died 2nd century AH); Mu'adh ibn Muslim Hara' (died 188 AH); 'Abd Allah ibn Ghalib al-Asadi (died late 2nd century AH); Muslim ibn Walid al-Ansari (died at the end of 2nd century AH);

Abu Nu'as Mutawallid (died 198 AH); Sayyid Humayri (died 199 AH); 'Ali ibn 'Abd Allah Khawafi (died 3rd century AH); 'Abd Allah 'Ali Marani (died 3rd century AH); 'Abd Allah ibn Ayyub Huraybi (died 3rd century AH); Mash'i Ma'i (died 3rd century AH); Qasim ibn Yusuf Katib (died 3rd century AH); Ashja' ibn 'Amru Salmi (died 210 AH); Muhammad ibn Wahib Humayri (died 3rd century AH); Abu Dalf 'Ajli (died 255 AH); Abu Talib al-Qummi (died 3rd century AH); Abu Tammam Habib ibn Aws at-Ta'i (died 3rd century AH);

Dik al-Jinn (died 236 AH); Ibrahim ibn al-'Abbas as-Sawli (died 234 AH); Ibn Sakit Ya'qub ibn Ishaq (died 244 AH); Abu Muhammad 'Abd Allah ibn 'Ammar Barqi (died 245 AH); Da'bal ibn 'Ali al-Khaza'i (died 246 AH); Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah al-Khaza'i, cousin of Da'bal (died 3rd century AH); 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Khaza'i (died 3rd century AH); Husayn ibn

Da'bal al-Khaza'i (died 3rd century AH); Musa ibn 'Abd al-Malik (died 246 AH); Ahmad ibn Khalad Ashrawi (died 3rd century AH); Ahmad ibn Ibrahim (died 3rd century AH);

Bakr ibn Muhammad an-Nahawi (died 248 AH); Ahmad ibn 'Umran Akhfash an-Nahawi (died 250 AH); Abu 'Ali Husayn ibn 'Aahak (died 250 AH); Muhammad ibn Isma'il Sumayri (died 255 AH); Fadhl ibn Muhammad (mid-3rd century AH); Hummani 'Ali ibn Muhammad (died 260 AH); Dawud ibn Qasim Ja'fari (died 261 AH); Ibn Rumi 'Ali ibn al-'Abbas (died 283 AH); Bahtari Walid ibn 'Ubayd at-Ta'i (died 284 AH);

Sharif Muhammad ibn Salih (died 3rd century AH); Nasr ibn Nasir Halwani (died 3rd century AH); 'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Mansur ibn Bassam (died 302 AH); Ahmad ibn 'Ubayd Allah (died 314 AH); Khubz-Arzi Basri Nasr ibn Ahmad (died 317 AH); Khabbaz al-Baldi Muhammad ibn Ahmad (died 4th century AH); Ahmad ibn 'Alawiyah al-Isfahani (died 320 AH); Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Hasan Darid (died 321 AH); Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Ibrahim Tabataba'i al-Hasani (died 322 AH); Muhammad ibn Muzid Bushanji (died 325 AH); Mufajja' Basri Muhammad ibn Ahmad (died or martyred 327 AH); 'Ali ibn al-'Abbas Nawbakhti (died 329 AH).

See A'yan ash-Shi'ah, vol. 1, pp. 166-172.

[18.](#) Al-'Aqd al-Farid, vol. 5, p. 290.

[19.](#) Al-Aghani, vol. 17, p. 40.

[20.](#) 'Allamah Amini, Al-Ghadir fi'l-Kitab wa's-Sunnah wa'l-Adab (Tehran: Dar al-Kitab al-Islamiyyah, 1366 AHS), vol. 1, p. 242.

[21.](#) Ibid., p. 241.

[22.](#) Al-'Aqd al-Farid, vol. 4, p. 320.

[23.](#) Al-Imam as-Sadiq wa'l-Madhahib al-Arba'ah, vol. 1, p. 254, as quoted in Zahra'l-Adab, vol. 3, p. 70.

[24.](#) Al-Adab fi Mawqib al-Hadharah al-Islamiyyah, Kitab ash-Shu'ara 1, pp. 162-163.

[25.](#) The second 'Abbasid period refers to the beginning of the third century AH starting from the time of Mu'tasim with the entrance of the Turks in the 'Abbasid court.

[26.](#) Tarikh al-Adab al-'Arabi al-'Asr al-'Abbas ath-Thani, p. 386.

Lesson 28: The Subjects of the Poems of the Shi'ah Poets

The Shi'ah poets have recited poetry in various arenas and diverse themes, which may be classified into the following:

[1. Argumentation against the Usurpers of the Ahl al-Bayt's \('a\) Rights](#)

The Shi'ah poets and orators, believing in the guardianship *{wilayah}* of 'Ali ('a) and his progeny, spoke out immediately after the event of Saqifah and the oppression against 'Ali ('a), defending the right of the Imam and trying to describe the course the Holy Prophet (S) specified with respect to the Imamate and guardianship through the language of poetry. In this regard, it was known that Kumayt al-Asadi was the

first to open the gate of argumentation for the Shi'ah poets.

'Allamah Amini attributes this fact to Jahiz and then continues thus:

Long before the fetus of Kumayt was to be formed, a number of the great *sahabah* and *tabi'un* such as Khuzaymah ibn Thabit Dhu'sh-Shahadatayn, 'Abd Allah ibn al-'Abbas, Fadhl ibn al-'Abbas, 'Ammar ibn Yasir, Abu Dharr al-Ghiffari, Qays ibn Sa'd al-Ansari, Rabi'ah ibn Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, 'Abd Allah ibn Abi Sufyan ibn Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, Zafar ibn Zayd ibn Hudhayfah, Najashi ibn Harith ibn Ka'b, Jarir ibn 'Abd Allah Bajli, and 'Abd Allah ibn Janbal had defended the right of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) through their poems. [1](#)

Among the first persons to have recited poetry in defence of 'Ali ('a) was 'Abd Allah ibn Abi Sufyan ibn Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib. Shaykh al-Mufid says, "When the Prophet (S) passed away, 'Abd Allah ibn Abi Sufyan was not in Medina. When he arrived in Medina, I saw that the people had pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr. As such, he stood at the middle of the mosque and recited this poem:

!ما كنت احسب أن الأمر منصرف عن هاشم ثم منها عن أبي حسن

أليس اولى من صلى لقبلكم و أعلم الناس بالقرآن و السنن؟

I did not imagine that they would take away the matter of caliphate from the Banu Hashim and among whom from Abu'l-Hasan ('Ali)!

Is he not the first person to pray toward your qiblah and the most learned of people about the Qur'an and the Sunnah? [2](#)

Similarly, a number of other Hashimite poets from among the *sahabah* and *tabi'un* had also recited poetry in defence of the right of 'Ali ('a). For instance, while reciting poetry Fadhl ibn al-'Abbas has thus said:

الا ان خير الناس بعد محمد وصي النبي المصطفى عند ذي الذكر

و اول من صلّى و صنوبيه و اول من اردى الغواة لدى بدر

Be aware that the best of people after Muhammad in the sight of God is the successor of Prophet al-Mustafa (S).

He is the first performer of prayer, the brother of the Prophet, and the first person to drive away the tyrants in (the Battle of) Badr. [3](#)

Mughayrah ibn Nawfal ibn Harith ibn ‘Abd al–Muttalib addressed the supporters of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) during the Battle of Siffin and poetically said:

فيكم وصي رسول الله فأتدكم و صهره و كتاب الله قد نشرًا

Among you is the successor of the Messenger of Allah (S)—your commander—and his son-in-law, and the Book of Allah is scattered.[4](#)

Fadhli ibn al–‘Abbas ibn ‘Utbah ibn Abi Lahab has been one of the famous poets at the end of the first century AH. Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih has narrated: “When Walid ibn ‘Abd al–Malik was circumambulating {*tawaf*} the *Ka‘bah*, Fadhli ibn al–‘Abbas was reciting this poem while getting water from the well of Zamzam:

يأيها السائل عن عليّ تسأل عن بدرٍ لنا بدريّ

مُرَدِّدٍ في المجد ابطحي سائلةٍ غره مضيّ

O he who is asking from ‘Ali! You are asking from the moon of Banu Hashim and the one present at the Battle of Badr.

Are you doubtful in praising the greatness of the ‘abtahi’ man, or asking about his precedence in Islam?[5](#)

Among the first persons to have recited poetry in defending the right of the Commander of the Faithful ‘Ali (‘a) was a woman named Umm Mastah ibn Athathah. Historians have narrated, thus: After Abu Bakr and ‘Umar treated ‘Ali harshly to acquire his allegiance by force, Umm Mastah came to the mosque, stood in front of the grave of the Prophet and recited this poem:

قد كان بعدك انباء هنيئةً لو كنت شاهداً لم تكثر الخطب

انا فقدناك فقد الأرض و ابلها فاختل قومك فاشهدهم و لا تغب

After you, an event and differences have occurred that would never happen if you were present.

We lost you just as the soil would lose water. Your community is going astray. Be witness and neglect not.[6](#)

Among the poets who used to engage in argumentation and defend the right of ‘Ali (‘a) was the great Arab poet and man of letter, Abu’l–Aswad Daw’ili who lived in Basrah at the place of the tribe of Banu

Qashir that were sympathetic to ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan. None of them could surpass Abu’l-Aswad in speech. So, they instead persecuted and harassed him, throwing stones at his house every night. He gave this reply to them:

يقول الأزدلون بنوقشير طوال الدهر لا تنسى علياً

فقلت لهم و كيف يكون تركي من الأعمال مفروضاً علياً؟

أحب محمداً حباً شديداً و عباساً و حمزة و الوصياً

بني عم النبي و اقريبه أحب الناس كلهم إلينا

فان يك حُبُّهم رشداً اصبه و لست بمخطيء ان كان غياً

هم اهل النصيحة غير شك و اهل مودتي ما دمت حياً

رايت الله خالق كل شى هداهم واجتبي منهم نبياً

و لم يخصص بها احداً سواهم هنيئاً ما اصطفاه لهم مرئياً

The vile people such as Banu Qashir say, “With the passage of time, why have you not forgotten ‘Ali?”

I said to them, “How could I abandon deeds that are incumbent upon me?”

I love Muhammad so much, and ‘Abbas, Hamzah and the successor {wasi} (i.e. ‘Ali) as well.

The cousins and nearest of kin of the Prophet are the most beloved of people for me.

If love for them is guidance, I have attained it then, and if this love is useless, then I have lost nothing.

Undoubtedly, they are the people of admonition and my beloved ones so long as I live.

I regard God as the Creator of everything. He has guided them and appointed the Prophet from among them.

Except them, nobody is worthy of it. May this God’s choice of them be pleasant!⁷

This continued until finally, at the end of the Umayyad rule, great and famous poets such as Kumayt al-Asadi, Kuthayyir ‘Azzah and Sayyid Humayri who thawed themselves in the guardianship {wilayah},

have recited more poems in defense of ‘Ali’s (‘a) right.

2. The Shi‘ah Poets’ Confrontation with the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid Poets

The second subject about which Shi‘ah poets have recited poetry is the poems they have composed to counter the Umayyad and ‘Abbasid poets. After 35 AH when ‘Uthman ibn al-‘Affan was murdered, the Umayyads used to utilize the weapon of poetry to attain their wicked objectives and incite people against the Commander of the Faithful (‘a).

Among those who had recited poetry against the Imam was Walid ibn ‘Uqbah, maternal brother of ‘Uthman, who has been described by the Qur’an as *fasiq* {transgressor}.⁸ He had accused Banu Hashim, the head of which was ‘Ali (‘a), of killing ‘Uthman, saying:

بنی هاشم ردوا سلاح ابن اختکم و لا تنهبوه لا تحل نهائیه

بنی هاشم کیف الهوادة بیننا و عند علی درعه و نجائبه

بنی هاشم کیف التودد منکم ودم ابن اروی فیکم و حرائبه

O Banu Hashim! Return the weapon of your maternal cousin and do not usurp his property as his property is not lawful for you.

O Banu Hashim! How could harmony be established between you and us while the chain mail and camels of ‘Uthman are with ‘Ali?

O Banu Hashim! How could I accept your friendship while the spears of Ibn Arwa (‘Uthman) are with you?⁹

Then, ‘Abd Allah ibn Abi Sufyan ibn Harith ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib answered him, saying thus poetically:

فلاتسألونا سیفکم ان سیفکم اضعی و القاه لدى الروع صاحبه

و شبهته کسری و قد کان مثله شبيهاً بکسری هديه و ضرائبه

منا علی الخیر صاحب خیبر و صاحب بدر يوم سالت کتابه

وكان ولي الأمر بعد محمد عليّ و في كل المواطن صاحبه

وصي النبي المصطفى و ابن عمه وأول من صلى و من لان جانبه

You may not get your sword from us because when its owner was frightened, he threw it and it was lost. You likened him to Khosroe, and in fact he was like him. And his horses and properties were like that of his (Khosroe).

'Ali, the good, is from us; the victor of Khaybar and Badr when the hostile army came.

'Ali is the one vested with authority after Muhammad and the companion of the Prophet in all the wars. He is the successor of Prophet al-Mustafa and his cousin. He is the first person to perform prayer and the one who is so well-mannered. [10](#)

Walid ibn 'Uqbah composed his next poem against the Commander of the Faithful ('a) when he wrote a letter to his brother, 'Umarah ibn 'Uqbah who was then living in Kufah, inciting him to be inimical to the Imam, saying thus:

ان يك ظنّي في عمارة صادقاً ينم و لا يطلب بذحل و لا وتر

يببت و اوتار ابن عفان عنده مٌخيمَةً بين الخورنق و القصر

تمشى رخيّ البال متشزر القوى كانك لم تسمع بقتل ابي عمر

الا إنّ خير الناس بعد ثلاثة قتبل النجيبى الذي جاء من مصر

If my guess is ever correct about 'Umarah, he is sleeping and does not take revenge!

He is sleeping comfortably while the murderers of 'Uthman are near him encamping between the Khawarnaq {magnificent building} and the Palace!

He is walking with a peace of mind and sound body, as if he has not heard of the killing of Abu 'Amru ('Uthman).

Be aware that the best of people after the three persons [11](#) is the one who has been killed by the 'tajibi' who came from Egypt. [12](#)

Then, Fadhl ibn al-'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib replied to him reciting thus:

أطلب ثاراً لست منه و لاله و مالابن ذكران الصفورى و الوتر

كما افتخرت بنت الحمار بأمها و تنسى ابها إذا تسامى او لوالفخر

الا ان خير الناس بعد نبيهم وصي النبي المصطفى عند ذي الذكر

و اول من صلى و صفونبيّه و اول من اردى الغواة لدى بدر

Are you taking revenge for a person who has no relationship with you? Ibn Dhakran Safuri is one thing while taking revenge for ‘Uthman is another.

You can still remember that you were suffering from poverty, he forgot the father of his donkey while taking pride in the mother of his horse.

Be aware that the best of people after the Prophet in the sight of God is the successor of Prophet Mustafa.

He is the first to have performed the prayer, the brother of the Prophet, and the first person to have driven away the oppressive contingent in (the Battle of) Badr. [13](#)

Sometime during the Battle of Jamal when the supporters of the Umayyads and the so-called ‘Uthmanis were reciting *rajaz*-metered [14](#) verses in affirming their movement and inciting their supporters, the companions of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) were also answering them in return. Among these persons were ‘Ammar ibn Yasir and Malik al-Ashtar. For example, some members of the tribe of Banu ‘Abbah who had surrounded the camel of ‘A’ishah would take the reins of camel and would be killed. The last person to have taken the bridle of camel said, thus:

نحن بنو ضبّة أصحاب الجمل ننعى ابن عقان باطراف الاسل

رُدّوا علينا شيخنا ثم بجل

We are the Banu ‘Abbah, supporters of (the Army of) Jamal, and are taking ‘Uthman’s revenge with our spears.

Return to us our sheikh in safety. [15](#)

Malik al-Ashtar rushed to confront him and said, thus:

كيف نرُدُّ نعثلاً و قد قخل سارت به أم المنايا و رحل

How could we return Na‘thal (‘Uthman) while he is enshrouded, swords having penetrated his body, and

is dead?!

Then, Malik al-Ashtar gave a strike to him and killed him. [16](#)

During the Battle of Siffin, due to the prolongation of the battle, in addition to military combat and confrontation, there was also confrontation in poetry in its broadest sense between the two belligerent armies. Nasr ibn Muzahim has mentioned great poets such as Malik al-Ashtar, Khuzaymah ibn Thabit, Fadhl ibn al-'Abbas, Qays ibn Sa'd 'Udayy ibn Hatam, 'Amru ibn Hamq al-Khaza'i, Hujr ibn 'Udayy al-Kindi, Nu'man ibn 'Ajlan al-Ansari, Muhammad ibn Abi Sabrah Qurayshi, Mughayrah ibn Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, Jundab ibn Zuhayr, Abu Zubayd at-Ta'i, Ahmar (an Iraqi poet), Abu Habbah ibn Ghuzayyah al-Ansari, and others who had recited poetry in countering the poets of the people of Sham. The Commander of the Faithful ('a) himself had been giving replies to individuals such as 'Amr ibn al-'As.

Ibn Abi'l-Hadid thus says: "Najashi was one of the Iraqi poets in (the Battle of) Siffin who had been ordered by 'Ali to confront the poets of the people of Sham such as Ka'b ibn Ju'ayl and others." [17](#)

Lesson 28: Summary

The Shi'ah poets had recited poetry in various arenas:

1. Argumentation: After the event of Saqifah, the truth-speaking Shi'ah poets spoke out in defense of the Commander of the Faithful's ('a) right, among whom were the leading orators of the Banu Hashim such as 'Abd Allah ibn Abi Sufyan ibn Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib and Mughayrah ibn Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib.
2. Confronting the Umayyad and 'Abbasid poets: After 'Uthman's murder in 35 AH, the Umayyads used to recite poetry against the Commander of the Faithful ('a). From then on, the Shi'ah poets responded through poetry.

For example, during the Battle of Siffin there was also a battle of poetry between the two warring parties.

Lesson 28: Questions

1. What does 'Allamah Amini say about the argumentation of the Shi'ah poets?
2. Since when did the Shi'ah poets' confrontation with the poets affiliated to the enemies of the Shi'ah start?

[1.](#) 'Allamah Amini, *Al-Ghadir fi'l-Kitab wa's-Sunnah wa'l-Adab* (Tehran: Dar al-Kitab al-Islamiyyah, 1366 AHS), vol. 1, p. 191.

[2.](#) Shaykh al-Mufid, *Al-Jamal*, 2nd edition (Qum: Maktab al-'Alam al-Islami (Publication Center), 1416 AH), p. 118.

The identity of the one who recited this poem is a source of disagreement among historians and writers. Shaykh al-Mufid has attributed this poem to 'Abd Allah ibn Abi Sufyan ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib. In *Al-Isabah*, Ibn Hajar has regarded Fadhl ibn

al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Utbah ibn Abi Lahab as the one who recited it. In the book *Al-Manaqib*, Muwayyid ad-Din Khwarazmi has identified ‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, the Prophet’s (S) uncle, as the composer of this poem. In the book *Al-Majalis*, Sharif ar-Radhi has attributed it to Rabi‘ah ibn Harith ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib.

Qadhi Baydhwai, in his exegeses {tafasir} of the Qur’an, has considered it belonging to Hassan ibn Thabit. Zubayr ibn Bakkar has said, “One of the children of Abu Lahab had recited this poem.” Finally, Qadhi Nur Allah has rejected the view of Ibn Hajar, saying that the one who recited must be prior to the event of Saqifah and he could not be Fadhl ibn al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Utbah because he was born later.

So, the one who recited it bore the name of Fadhl; hence, Fadhl ibn ‘Utbah ibn Abi Lahab. Sayyid ‘Ali Khan ash-Shirazi, *Ad-Darajat ar-Rafi‘ah fi Tabaqat ash-Shi‘ah* (Qum: Manshurat Maktabah Basirati, n.d.), p. 193. At any rate, this difference in opinion has no contrary effect on our discussion because it is obvious that the one who recited it had been one of the Shi‘ah.

[3.](#) *Ad-Darajat ar-Rafi‘ah fi Tabaqat ash-Shi‘ah*, p. 143.

[4.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 187.

[5.](#) Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Rabbih al-Andalusi, *Al-‘Aqd al-Farid* (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ at-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1409 AH), vol. 5, p. 75.

[6.](#) ‘Abd al-Hamid ibn Abi‘l-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah* (Cairo: Dar Ihya’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabi, 1961), vol. 6, p. 43.

[7.](#) ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu‘l-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Al-Aghani* (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ at-Turath al-‘Arabi, n.d.), vol. 12, p. 321.

[8.](#) Surah 32:18: “Is he then who is a believer like he who is a transgressor {fasiq}? They are not equal.” For the commentary of this verse, see the following Sunni references: Al-Qurtubi, *Tafsir* (Cairo, 1947), vol. 14, p. 105; At-Tabari, *Tafsir Jami‘ al-Bayan*, under commentary for this verse; Al-Wahidi, *Asbab an-Nuzul* (Dar ad-Diyan Li’t-Turath edition), p. 291. {Trans.}

[9.](#) *Ad-Darajat ar-Rafi‘ah fi Tabaqat ash-Shi‘ah*, p. 188.

[10.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 189.

[11.](#) It alludes to the Prophet (S), Abu Bakr and ‘Umar. {Trans.}

[12.](#) *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah*, vol. 2, p. 114.

[13.](#) *Ibid.*

[14.](#) Rajaz: name of several meters, two of which are the most important. {Trans.}

[15.](#) Al-Jamal, p. 118.

[16.](#) *Ibid.*

[17.](#) *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah*, vol. 4, p. 87.

Lesson 29: Elegy-Recitation

Another important arena about which the Shi‘ah poets have recited poetry and delivered speeches extensively is the commemoration of the tragedy experienced by the descendants of the Prophet (S) and elegy-recitation for the martyrs among them. This arena came into being after the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (‘a) in 61 AH. In this regard, two parts may be discussed and examined:

Elegies for Imam al-Husayn (‘a) and the Other Martyrs in Karbala’

From the beginning of Islam, no tragedy more serious and painful than the event of Karbala’ has happened in the history of Islam, and after the lapse of one thousand and four hundred years, it still has the greatest impact upon the hearts of the devotees of the Prophet’s (‘a) descendents. Since then, anyone who has the love of the Prophet’s (S) *Ahl al-Bayt* and talent in composing poetry has recited poetry in this regard.

The pioneering poems pertaining to the event of Karbala’ have been recited from the end of the first century AH and the commencement of the Umayyad decline. As Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani says:

Many of the latter poets have recited poetry in mourning for Imam al-Husayn (‘a) about which we do not tend to complain as we are fond of long speech. Yet, on account of the harshness of the Umayyad’s atmosphere of strangulation, the earlier poets during the Umayyad period have recited fewer elegies about the tribulation of Imam al-Husayn (‘a).¹

For example, ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Hurr was chased by ‘Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad for reciting elegy for Imam al-Husayn (‘a) and was forced to flee.² Of course, many poems have been composed during the first century AH about the tribulation of the Doyen of the Martyrs (‘a) though they are lesser in number compared to the quantity of poems that have been recited since the second century AH.

The bereaved women of Banu Hashim were among the pioneering people who have recited elegies in lamentation of their lost loved ones. When the news of the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (‘a) reached Medina, Zaynab bint ‘Aqil came out wailing amidst the women of Banu Hashim while reciting the following poem:

ماذا تقولون إذ قال النبي لكم ماذا فعلتم و انتم آخر الامم

بعترتى و باهلي بعد مُفْتَقَدَى نصف اسارى و نصف ضُرِّ جُوا بدم

ما كان هذا جزائي إذ نصحت لكم أن تخلفوني بشرّ في نوى رَحْمِي

What shall you say in reply to the Prophet when he will ask from you, “O the latter ones of the ummah! What have you done?”

“{What did you do} with my descendants and Household after I passed away? Half of them were taken as captives while the other half was weltered in blood.”

“It was not my reward for my admonition to you that you would do the worst treatment to my nearest of kin.”³

Among the most heartrending elegies ever recited for the martyrs of Karbala’ are the elegies of Umm al-Banin, the mother of Hadhrat Abu’l-Fadhli. Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani has narrated that Umm al-Banin was holding the hand of ‘Ubayd Allah, son of Hadhrat al-‘Abbas and going to the Baqi’ Cemetery while the people of Medina were gathering around her and weeping because of her elegies. Even an enemy such as Marwan ibn al-Hakam used to weep with of her elegies.⁴ Umm al-Banin was thus saying:

يا من رأى العباس كر على جماهير النقد

وورائه من أبناء حيدر كل ليث ذي لبد

انبئت أن ابني أصيب براسه مقطوع يد

ويل على شبلى اما ل براسه ضرب العمد

لوكان سيفك في يدك لمادنا منك احد

*I wished I saw (with my own eyes) how ‘Abbas was assaulting the groups of vile people!
Behind him were the sons of Haydar (Imam ‘Ali (‘a)) standing like lions.
I have been informed that his hands have been amputated while his head has received a blow.
Woe to my son whose head has received a strong blow!
If your sword were in your hand, no one could have ever come near you.⁵*

When the caravan of the captives of Karbala’ was heading toward Medina and arrived near the city, Imam Zayn al-‘Abidin (‘a) dispatched Bashir ibn Jadhlam to Medina ahead of them, and Bashir informed the people of their arrival in the city through this poem:

يا اهل يثرب لامقام لكم بها قتل الحسين فادمعى مدرار

الجسم منه بكر بلاء مضرّج و الرأس منه على القنّاة يدار

O people of Yathrib! No more opportunity for you to stay there. Husayn was killed; shed your tears.

His corpse has been weltering in blood in Karbala' and his head is placed on top of spear.[6](#)

Khalid ibn Ma'dan, 'Uqbah ibn 'Amru, Abu'r-Ramih al-Khaza'i, Sulayman ibn Quttah al-'Adawi, 'Awf ibn 'Abd Allah Ahmar al-Azdi, and 'Ubayd Allah ibn Hurr were among the elegists of the first century AH who have recited poetry about the tribulation of Imam al-Husayn ('a). It has been narrated that when Khalid ibn Ma'dan saw in Sham the Imam's head on top of the spear, he recited this poem:

جاؤا برأسك يا ابن بنت محمد مترملاً بدمائه ترميلاً

و كأنما بك يا ابن بنت محمد قتلوا جهاراً عامدين رسولاً

قتلوك عطشاناً و لم يترقبوا في قتلك التنزيل و التأويلاً

و يكبرون بان قتلت و أنما قتلوا بك التكبير و التهليلاً

O son of the daughter of Muhammad! They have made your head weltering in blood.

O son of the daughter of Muhammad! By overtly killing you, as if they wanted to take revenge from the Prophet!

They have killed you while thirsty and they have not observed the interpretation and injunction of the Qur'an about killing.

And that they have killed you, they are uttering "Allahu akbar" {Allah is the greatest} while uttering "Allahu akbar," they have also killed your companions![7](#)

Among the first poets to have recited poetry in lamentation for Imam al-Husayn ('a) is 'Ubayd Allah in Hurr whose ode starts with the following couplet:

يقول امر غادر اى غادر ألاكنت قاتلت الشهيد بن فاطمه

The treacherous chief, son of a traitor asks {me}: "Did you not fight against the martyr, the son of Fatimah?"

When Ibn Ziyad heard this poem, he chased 'Ubayd Allah who immediately rode on a horse and escaped, thus saving his life.[8](#)

Sulayman ibn Quttah al-'Adawi has been one of the most prominent elegists for the tribulation of Imam al-Husayn ('a). The following poem is attributed to him:

مررتُ على أبيات آل محمد فلم أرها كعهدها يوم حُلَّتِ

و كانوا رجاءً ثم صاروا رزيةً و قد عظمت تلك الرزايا و جَلَّتِ

ألم تر أن الشمس اضحت مريضة لفقد حسين و البلاد اقشعرت

و قد اعولت تبكي السماء لفقدة و انجمها ناحت عليه و صلَّتِ

I roamed around the house of Muhammad's progeny and I saw them not fully occupied as before. They were the House of hope and later became the House of tribulation—grave and serious tribulations. Can you not see that due to the loss of Husayn the sun turned lackluster and the cities melancholic?! Can you not see that owing to the loss of Husayn the sky has wept and wailed and its stars lamented and invoked salutations?⁹

But after the end of the first century AH when the repression of the Umayyad rulers diminished because of their confrontation with the 'Abbasid movement and other revolts and were finally defeated by the 'Abbasids, the pure Imams (‘a) revived the recitation of elegies for Imam al-Husayn (‘a) and great poets such as Kumayt al-Asadi, Sayyid Humayri, Sufyan ibn Mus‘ab ‘Abdi, Mansur Namri, and Da‘bal al-Khaza‘i used to recite poetry in their presence for the tribulation of Imam al-Husayn (‘a). As Sufyan ibn Mus‘ab ‘Abdi narrates:

I visited Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) and the Imam said to his attendant, “Tell Umm Farwah to come and listen to what happened to his (great) grandfather.” Umm Farwah came and sat behind a curtain. Then, Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) said to me: “You recite.” I started reciting an elegy which commences with this couplet:

فرو جودي بدمعك المسكوب

O Umm Farwah! Render tears to your eyes.

At this point, Umm Farwah and other ladies burst into tears. [10](#)

Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani also narrates from Isma‘il at-Tamimi, thus:

I was with Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) when Sayyid Hamayri asked for permission and entered. The Imam asked the members of his household to sit behind a curtain. He then asked Sayyid Humayri to recite poetry in lamentation for Imam al-Husayn (‘a). Sayyid recited this poem:

امرر على جدت الحسين فقل لاعظمة الزكية

يا اعظماً لازلت من وظفا و ساكبة روية

فاذا مررت بقبره فاطل به وقف المطية

و ابك المطهر للمطهر و المطهرة النقية

كبكاء معوله اتت يوماً لواحدھا المنية

You pass by the grave of Husayn and tell to his pure bones:

“O bones! Be always sound and glutted.”

As you pass by his grave, make a long stopover as the camels do.

Let the pure {mutahhar} Imam weep for the pure Husayn.

Your cry must be like the cry and lamentation of the mother of a dead son.

The narrator says, “I saw the tears of the Imam fall on his cheek and weeping reigned in the house.” [11](#)

Sometimes also others such as Fadhil Rasan and Abu Harun Makfuf would recite the poems of Sayyid Humayri in lamentation for Imam al-Husayn (‘a) near Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) and make the Imam cry. As reported by Ibn Qawlawayyah, Imam as-Sadiq (‘a) asked one of his companions named Abu ‘Ammar to recite for him the poems of ‘Abdi in lamentation for Imam al-Husayn (‘a). [12](#)

Poet such as Da‘bal al-Khaza‘i who recited many poems in lamentation for Imam al-Husayn (‘a) also engaged in reciting elegies near Imam ar-Ridha (‘a) for his great grandfather. [13](#)

Elegies for the Other Martyrs among the Descendants of the Prophet (S)

--As a deeply touched Shi‘ah poet is witnessing the scene of martyrdom of Muslim ibn ‘Aqil and Hani ibn ‘Urwah, he recites this poem and this poem is thereafter recited by many:

إذا كنت لا تدرين ما الموت فانظري إلى هاني في السوق و ابن عقيل

إلى بطل قد هشمَّ السيف وجهه و آخر يهوي في طمار قتيل

اصابهما أمر الأمير فأصبحا أحاديث من يسعى بكل سبيل

ايترك أسماء المهايج آمناً و قد طلبته مذبح بذحول

If you do not know what is meant by death, look at Ibn 'Aqil and Hani at the market.

His (Ibn 'Aqil's) face was heroically cut into pieces by swords while the other one (Hani) was thrown from the top (of palace) and was killed.

By the order of the emir, this happened to them on this day and the news about them was relayed by the travelers.

You can see a corpse whose color has been changed by death and every part of which has been weltering in blood.

Will the names of Mahayij be in safety? This is while the tribe of Madhhaj is about to be punished. [14](#)

While reciting a long elegy in lamentation for the martyrs of the *Tawabun* {the Penitents}, a certain poet named A'sha Hamdan thus says:

توجه من دون ثنية سائراً إلى ابن زياد في الجموع الكتائب

فياخير جيش للعراق و اهله سقيتم روايا كل اسحم ساكب

From that direction, soldiers rushed toward Ibn Ziyad.

O the best of Iraqi army! You filled every gutter for rainwater. [15](#)

The Shi'ah poets also used to recite poetry in mourning for Zayd ibn 'Ali, his son Yahya, and the descendants of Imam al-Hasan ('a) who staged uprisings during the 'Abbasid period and attained martyrdom.

The poets such 'Ali ibn 'Abd Allah al-Khawafi, Mashi' Madani, Ashja' ibn 'Amru Salmi, and Abu Talib al-Qummi have also recited poetry in mourning for Imam ar-Ridha ('a). [16](#)

But after Imam al-Husayn ('a), among the murdered descendants of Abu Talib, the greatest number of elegies has been recited in mourning for Yahya ibn 'Umar at-Talibi. He staged an uprising in 248 AH and was killed by Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah ibn Tahir. [17](#) Mas'udi says, "People from near and far recited elegies for him while young and old wept for him." [18](#)

Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani says, "Of all the descendants of Abu Talib killed during the 'Abbasid period, I do not find anyone about whom poems and elegies have been recited as much as what has been done to Yahya ibn 'Umar at-Talibi."¹⁹

The Virtues and Merits of the Descendants of the Prophet (S)

Since the second century AH, the Shi'ah poets used to recite poetry more about the virtues and merits of the Commander of the Faithful ('a), and in this manner, engaging in the information drive and spread of the school of Shi'ism whose basic foundation is the succession and Imamate of 'Ali ('a). The great poets such as Kumayt al-Asadi, Humayri, Sufyan ibn Mus'ab 'Abdi, and Da'bal al-Khaza'i were forerunners in this affair.

Sayyid Humayri spent his time expressing the merits of the Commander of the Faithful, and he was one of the prominent preachers of the school of *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a) during his time. As narrated by Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, he recited two thousand three hundred odes in praise of Banu Hashim, while none of his poems has been devoid of praise for Banu Hashim and reproach for their enemies.

Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani has also said that in Kufah, Sayyid Humayri used to go to the house of Sulayman ibn Mihran known as A'mash from whom he would learn about and write the virtues of the Commander of the Faithful 'Ali ('a), and thereafter, he would express them in poetry.

Ibn Mu'taz says:

Sayyid Humayri has transformed into poetry all the virtues of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) and he would easily become tired sitting at any assembly where the progeny of Muhammad was not pleasantly mentioned. For example, someone has thus narrated: "We were sitting beside 'Amru ibn 'Ala' when Sayyid Humayri came. And we were then busy talking about common affairs such as farming and date palms. Sayyid stood up as he wanted to go. When we asked for the reason why he wanted to leave, he gave this reply to us:

إِنِّي لَأَكْرَهُ أَنْ أَطِيلَ بِمَجْلِسٍ لَا ذَكَرَ فِيهِ لِفَضْلِ آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

لَا ذَكَرَ فِيهِ لِأَحْمَدَ وَوَصِيَّهُ وَبَنِيهِ ذَلِكَ مَجْلِسٌ نَظْفٍ رَدِي

ان الذي ينساهم في مجلس حتى يفارقه لغير مسدد

I abhor sitting at an assembly in which none of the virtues of the progeny of Muhammad is ever mentioned.

Any assembly in which there is no mention of Ahmad, his successor and his offspring is a worthless

assembly.

Anyone who shall not mention them in the assembly shall leave that assembly without gaining any benefit. [20](#)

Similarly, one day, one of the chiefs of Kufah gave a horse and a gift to Sayyid Humayri. He mounted the horse and took the gift, and went to the working place of Kufah. He then addressed the Shi'ah, saying: "O Kufans! If anyone could mention any of the virtues of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib about which I have not expressed in poetry yet, I shall give this horse and gift to him."

People from every direction would mention each of the superiorities of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) and in return he would recite the poem he composed about it. Finally, someone said:

One day, 'Ali ('a) wanted to wear his shoes and go out. He had already worn one pair of his shoes when an eagle came, picked up the other pair of shoes and brought it up. But it suddenly abandoned as a black snake went out of the shoe and entered into a ground hole. 'Ali ('a) then wore the other pair of his shoes.

At this point, Sayyid Humayri thought for sometime and then said, "I have not composed a poem about it so far." As such, he gave the horse and the gift to the man, and recited the following poem:

الا يا قوم للعجب العجب لخفّ ابى الحسن و للحباب

عدوّ من عداة الجن وغدّ بعيد في المراد من صواب

اتى خفاً له انساب فيه لينهش رجله منه بناب

لينهش خير من ركب المطايا امير المؤمنين اباتراب

فخر من السّما له عقاب من العقبان او شبه العقاب

و دوفع عن ابي حسن علي نقيع سمومه بعد انسياب

Be aware O people that there is a miracle in the shoe of Abu'l-Hasan.

One of the hostile jinns among the imprudent and strayed from the path

Hid in the shoe of 'Ali himself so as to bite him with its fangs—

So as to bite the one who rides on four-footed animals—the Commander of the Faithful, Abu Turab. At that moment, one of the eagles of the sky or a bird that looks like an eagle descended upon his head. In this manner, its (the hostile jinn's) venom and wickedness were warded off. [21](#)

Sufyan ibn Mus'ab 'Abdi is among the poets who have spent their time in mentioning the merits of the Commander of the Faithful ('a). 'Allamah Amini says, thus: "I never found any poem of his that was in praise of other than the progeny of Muhammad (S)."

He used to learn the *hadiths* about the merits and virtues of the progeny of the Prophet (S) from Imam as-Sadiq ('a) and immediately composed pertinent poems. [22](#) For this reason, Ibn Shahr Ashub narrates that Imam as-Sadiq ('a) says, "O assembly of the Shi'ah! Teach the poetry of 'Abdi to your children as he is with the religion of God."

The Demerits of the Enemies of the Prophet's (S) Descendants

One of the ways of fighting the enemies is propaganda war, which is tremendously rampant today through the mass media. In the past, the demerits of the enemies in the context of poetry also had a very significant propaganda impact.

In defending the school of Shi'ism, the Shi'ah poets used to also deal with the demerits of the enemies of *Ahl al-Bayt* ('a). At any opportune time, they could destroy an enemy and break his back through some couplets. Persons such as Mu'awiyah, Walid ibn 'Uqbah and 'Amr ibn al-'As who were enemies of God and the Messenger (S) have been dispraised many times by the poets of Banu Hashim, and the supporters and poets of the Commander of the Faithful ('a).

Without revealing his name and thus be pursued by the Umayyads, a certain poet has soothed the hearts of the Shi'ah by dispraising Yazid after his death by saying, thus:

يا أيها القبر بحوارينا ضممت شرَّ الناس أجمعينا

O grave which is in "hawarin"! The worst of all people is in your bosom. [23](#)

One of the best satires about the Umayyads is a poem which has been recited by Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi concerning them:

فقل لبني أمية حيث حلُّوا وإن خِفْتَ المهندَّ و القطيعا

اجاع الله من اشبعتموه و اشبع من بجوركم اجيعا

بمرضِيّ السّياسة هاشميّ يكون حياً لامّته ربيعاً

Tell the Umayyads wherever they are, if you are afraid of sword and scourge.

May God make him hungry he who has satiated you and satiate him he who has remained hungry because of your tyranny.

With the pleasant Hashimi policy, there shall be the spring of life for the ummah.[24](#)

Dr. Shawqi Dayf says: “The Shi‘ah in Iraq, Khurasan and Hijaz used to transmit to one another the poems of Kumayt. For this reason, the Umayyads and their governor in Iraq, Yusuf ibn ‘Umar ath-Thaqafi, felt seriously threatened by Kumayt.”[25](#)

Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani has thus said about Kumayt:

Kumayt al-Asadi, the great Shi‘ah poet during the Umayyad period of repression would not hesitate to reply in whatever form to the poets inimical to ‘Ali (‘a), affiliated to the Umayyads and were reciting poetry against the descendants of the Prophet (S). For example, a certain poet named Hakim ibn al-‘Abbas al-Kalbi who was considered one of the Qahtanis had dispraised ‘Ali (‘a). Kumayt seriously assaulted him and in his poems he placed Hakim vis-à-vis the notables of Quraysh and ‘Adnanis. In this way, Kumayt dispraised and defeated him.[26](#)

Sometimes also, without divulging their names, poets used to reply to the court poets, dispraising and crushing them. For example, Sa‘id ibn Hamid who was one of the enemies of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) and the descendants of the Prophet (S) during the rule of Musta‘in had been humiliated by the Shi‘ah poets on various occasions.

On the same period, a certain poet named ‘Ali ibn Jahm who had been one of the Nasibis and enemies of the Commander of the Faithful (‘a) has been dispraised by the Shi‘ah poet, ‘Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Ja‘far al-‘Alawi. He had rejected the genealogy of ‘Ali ibn Jahm, regarding him connected to Samah ibn Lawi.

In dispraising Ibn Ziyad, Abu’l-Aswad Da’uli has said:

اقول و ناك من جَزَع و وَجَدِ ازال الله ملك بني زياد

و ابعدهم بما غدروا و خانوا كما بعدتْ ثمود و قوم عاد

Out of agony and anguish I am saying that may God destroy the dominion of the offspring of Ziyad!

And cause them to perish for their deceit and treason just as the people of Thamud and Ad have been ruined![27](#)

Sayyid Humayri has humiliated one of the ‘Abbasid judges who had dismissed his testimony on account of his faith in Shi‘ism, and he has said:

ابوك ابن سارق عنز النبي و انت ابن بنت أبي جحدر

و نحن على رغمك الرافضون لاهل الضلالة و المنكر

*Your father steals the sheep of the Prophet while you are maternal grandchild of Abu Jahdar!
And notwithstanding your whim, we shall abandon the people of misguidance and deviation.* [28](#)

Abu Nu‘amah Daqiqi al–Kufi, one of the poets during the third century AH, had dispraised the notables of the ‘Abbasid rule, attributing to them the commission of abominable acts until such time that he had been killed by one of the ‘Abbasid Turkish commanders named Mufallah. [29](#)

Lesson 29: Summary

3. One of the most important areas about which the Shi‘ah poets have recited poetry was the elegy–recitation for the martyrs of the progeny of the Prophet (S). This area can be divided into two parts:

a. Elegies for Imam al–Husayn

The first persons to have recited poetry in mourning for the martyrs of Karbala’ were the bereaved women of the Banu Hashim.

Among them was Lady Umm al–Banin, the mother of Hadhrat Abu’l–Fadhli. He used to recite elegies for her sons at the Baqi’ Cemetery while the people of Medina gathered around her and wept. Due to the Umayyad policy of repression, the elegists of the martyrs of Karbala’ were lesser in number during the Umayyad period compared to that of the ‘Abbasid period except during the time of Imam as–Sadiq (‘a) when the condition was conducive for the Imam to revive the elegy for Imam al–Husayn (‘a).

b. Elegies for the martyrs among the descendants of the Prophet (S)

The descendants of the Prophet (S) were oppressed and have always been killed by the tyrants. Poets used to recite poems in lamentation for them. Next to the martyrs of Karbala’, among the offspring of Abu Talib, the most number of poems has been recited in mourning for Yahya ibn ‘Umar at–Talibi.

4. The merits and virtues of the descendants of the Prophet (S)

The poets such as Farazdaq, Kumayt, Sayyid Humayri, and Da‘bal al–Khaza‘i used to recite poetry to express the virtues of the descendants of the Prophet (S).

5. Dispraising the enemies of the descendants of the Prophet (S)

Shi‘ah poets used to engage in dispraising the enemies of *Ahl al–Bayt* (‘a) in defending the school of

Shi'ism.

Lesson 29: Questions

1. When did the recitation of elegies start?
2. Who were the poets who recited poetry regarding the event of Karbala'?
3. After the end of the first century AH, how did the elegies for Imam al-Husayn ('a) flourish?
4. Next to Imam al-Husayn ('a), about whom among the murdered offspring of Abu Talib were so many elegies recited?
5. How did the Shi'ah poets benefit from the use of dispraising?

1. 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin* (Qum: Mansurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH/1374 AHS), p. 121.

2. Abu Mikhnaf, *Maqatal al-Husayn 'Alayhi's-Salam*, researched by Hasan Ghaffari, 2nd edition (Qum: n.p., 1364 AH), p. 245.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 227-228.

4. *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin*, p. 90.

5. *Maqatal al-Husayn 'Alayhi's-Salam*, p. 181.

6. 'Ali ibn Musa ibn Tawus, *Al-Luhuf 'ala Qatli at-Tufuf*, trans. Muhammad Tahir Dezfuli, 1st edition (Qum: Mu'assaseh-ye Farhang va Intisharati-ye Ansari, 1378 AHS), p. 284.

7. Sayyid Muhsin Amin, *A'yan ash-Shi'ah* (Beirut: Dar at-Ta'aruf Li'l-Matbu'at, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 6023.

8. *Maqatal al-Husayn 'Alayhi's-Salam*, p. 245.

9. *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin*, p. 121.

10. 'Abd al-Husayn Amini, *Al-Ghadir fi'l-Kitab wa's-Sunnah wa'l-Adab* (Tehran: Dar al-Kitab al-Islamiyyah, 1366 AHS), vol. 2, pp. 294-295.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 235.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

13. 'Ali ibn Husayn ibn 'Ali Mas'udi, *Murawwij adh-Dhahab*, 1st edition (Beirut: Mansurat Mu'assasah al-A'lami Li'l-Matbu'at, 1411 AH), vol. 3, p. 327; *Rijal ibn Dawud* (Qum: Mansurat ar-Radhi, n.d.), p. 92.

14. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 71.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

16. *A'yan ash-Shi'ah*, p. 170.

17. *Murawwij adh-Dhahab*, vol. 4, pp. 159-160.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

19. *Maqatil at-Talibiyyin*, p. 511.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 242.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 441-442.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

23. *Murawwij adh-Dhahab*, vol. 3, p. 65.

24. Abi 'Uthman 'Amru ibn Bahr Jahiz, *Al-Bayan wa't-Tabayin*, 1st edition (Cairo: Matba'ah Lajnah at-Ta'lif wa't-Tarjamah wa'n-Nashr, 1367 AH/1948), vol. 3, p. 365.

25. Dr. Shawqi 'ayf, *Ash-Shi'r wa Tawaba'ah ash-Sha'biyyah 'ala Murr al-Ma'sur* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.), p. 36.

26. 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Al-Aghani* (Beirut: Dar Ihya' at-Turath al-'Arabi, n.d.), vol. 17, p. 36.

[27.](#) Murawwij adh-Dhahab, vol. 3, p. 81.

[28.](#) Al-Ghadir fi'l-Kitab wa's-Sunnah wa'l-Adab, p. 256.

[29.](#) Dr. Shawqi Bayf, Tarikh al-Adab al-'Arabi al-'Asr al-'Abbas ath-Thani (Egypt: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.), p. 388.

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