

## Part C: Persecution of the Shia by the Abbasid kings

The Abbasids did not fall in the category of the progeny of the Prophet (S), the Ahlul Bayt. Al-Abbas was a paternal uncle of the Prophet (S). The children of Ali and Fatima alone were called Shareef or Sayyid, a term which came to be used more commonly later to denote the progeny of the Prophet (S). A Sunni writer of repute states, “The offspring of Ali are known as the ‘Ahlul Bayt’, ‘Aal Muhammad’, ‘the Progeny of the Prophet’, ‘the Children of the Messenger’, ‘Aal Taha’ and ‘Aal Yasin’. They are also known by the title of ‘Sayyid’ or ‘Shareef’.”<sup>1</sup>

Moulana Ali Naqi Naqvi draws a fallacious assumption that since Abdul Muttalib was the leader (Sayyid) of the Arabs, his children also came to be called ‘Sayyids’. It is a historical fact that none from the offspring of Abdul Muttalib’s other children, except those born to Ali, ever were called Sayyid.

Yet, the Abbasids assumed a garb of the Khilafah indirectly from Abu Hashim bin Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya, the grand son of Imam Ali (a.s.). In order to pretend a proximity to Imam Ali (a.s.), the Abbasids created a legend saying that Abu Hashim al-Alawi appointed Muhammad bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Abbas as his successor (Khalifa) at the place called Hamiya. The Abbasids claimed that Abu Hashim was the Khalifa of Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya, who in turn got to the Khilafah from Imam Ali (a.s.). The Abbasids also claimed that Abu Hashim had a great following of the Shia of Khurasan. Based on the above assumption, Ibn Khaldun, Ibnul Athir, Abul Faraj al-Isfahani, and some other writers state that the Abbasids invited people towards the ‘contentment of Aal Muhammad’. The Abbasids claimed that before he died, Muhammad bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Abbas appointed his son Ibrahim, and when Ibrahim was arrested by Marwan al-Himar, he appointed his younger brother Abul Abbas Abdullah as-Saffah as his successor.

The Abbasids also contended that Abu Hashim sent twelve persons as his deputies to espouse his cause into the various districts of Iran. This contention is not supported by any historical record that would show that Abu Hashim bin Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya went anywhere near Khurasan or that he

sent his emissaries. His father Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya himself was under the Imamate of the Fourth Imam Ali Ibn Husayn Zainul Aabidin (a.s.). Muhammad bin al-Hanafiyya predeceased Imam Zainul Aabidin (a.s.). Abu Muslim, who was a native of Khurasan, was appointed as one of the emissaries by Ibrahim. Abu Muslim succeeded in gathering huge support for the cause of 'the contentment of Aal Muhammad' since the people of Khurasan loved the Ahlul Bayt. The cruelty and oppression of the Umayyads had vexed the public and a revolt was already brewing. The cause of 'the contentment of Aal Muhammad' was heartily welcomed.

Though the Abbasids touted the cause of this conception, they cleverly did not disclose the name of the person, who was supposed to represent the Aal Muhammad, for the simple reason that if they had named themselves, it would have been contested since, as detailed above, the Abbasids did not fall in the category of Aal Muhammad. Therefore, they claimed that they represented the children of Imam Ali (a.s.).

## **[1] Abul Abbas as-Saffah (133–137 AH)**

Abul Abbas as-Saffah became the first Abbasid Caliph in 133 AH, who controlled Asia, Egypt and West Africa. The truth is that having gained power in the name of *Aal Muhammad*, the Abbasids turned to be their tormentors.

In order to establish his reign, Abul Abbas indiscriminately killed the Shia and the Sunni. His brother Yahya, who was sent to quell the rebellion in Mosul, earned the title of 'Shedder of Blood'. The Caliph's title 'as-Saffah' in itself means 'butcher'. K. Ali writes, "The name as-Saffah (butcher), by which the caliph was known, is well chosen, for as such he is distinguished beyond all others in a dynasty that had small respect for human life. He intensified his cruelty and guilt by treachery in the face of solemn oaths and also by ingratitude, for amongst his victims there were not a few who had spent their lives in helping him to the throne."<sup>2</sup>

The Abbasids were always suspicious that they might be dethroned, particularly by the Imams of the Shia. They also realized that unless held on a tight leash the public might see through their game and demand that an Alawid be invested with the Caliphate. For these reasons, they perpetrated untold hardships against anyone suspected to be a sympathiser with the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.). K. Ali, a Sunni present-day historian, wrote, "The murder of Abu Muslim and Abdullah who helped him greatly to raise the Abbasids to power and prestige, and his treatment toward the descendants of Ali, the fourth Caliph, are the darkest records in the Abbasid history."<sup>3</sup> It was actually as-Saffah's younger brother, al-Mansur who was responsible for the murder of Abu Salama and Abu Muslim. The only reason behind the murder was that people such as Abu Salama Hafis bin Sulaiman in Kufa and Abu Muslim in Khurasan, were supporters of the Ahlul Bayt. Most of them were also greatly disappointed by the character of as-Saffah.

## [2] Abu Ja'far al-Mansur ad-Dawaniqi (137–159 A H)

As-Saffah, at his dying moments, nominated his younger brother Abu Ja'far Abdullah, who on becoming the caliph in 137 AH, assumed the title 'al-Mansur'. Among all the Muslim monarchs, al-Mansur was the first to keep near him an executioner holding an unsheathed sword, ever ready to behead anyone instantly.

About al-Mansur's cruel nature, Allama Abdur Rabbah reports, "When al-Mansur sat in his court, the executioners will bring row upon row of people and behead them so much so that the blood used to flow in the court and splatter on to al-Mansur's cloak. Al-Mansur then ordered his chaplain to preach to him. When the chaplain preached, al-Mansur used to sit with his head bowed down as if he were ashamed, but in no time another group of persons would be brought and beheaded as before."<sup>4</sup> People were brought on the ground that they were Alawid or on a mere suspicion that they sympathised with the Ahlul Bayt.

Al-Mansur ordered that the progeny of Imam Hasan (a.s.) should be gathered in one place. He got them chained and threw them into a dark cell. As they could not make out day from night, and the times for prayers, the prisoners divided the Qur'an into five parts in order to approximate the time of prayer and after finishing each part they offered prayers. There was no sanitation due to which they fell sick. When one died, the corpse was left to rot. Soon all of them died.<sup>5</sup>

Frequently, the progeny of Ali and Fatima and their sympathisers were gathered and al-Mansur ordered to be flogged so severely that the victims soon died.

Al-Mansur was the first person to make the victim stand and a masonry pillar raised all around him. Thus when the pillar was raised around him, Muhammad bin Ibrahim bin al-Hasan, was alive.<sup>6</sup>

One day, al-Mansur said, "By God, I do not find anyone as obedient as al-Hajjaj was to the progeny of Marwan." Once, al-Musayyab got up and said, "My master, al-Hajjaj is nothing compared to us, for God has elevated our Prophet (S) to the highest position among His creation, and yet when you order us, we unhesitatingly carry out your orders to kill the Prophet's progeny. Tell us; are we not more obedient to you than al-Hajjaj was to the progeny of Marwan?"<sup>7</sup>

Al-Mansur arrested Ibrahim bin al-Hasan bin al-Hasan bin Ali ibn Abi Talib along with Abdullah bin al-Hasan, Abu Bakr bin al-Hasan, and his brothers Abbas, Abdullah, Hasan, and Ja'far, and Hamza bin Ishaq bin Ali bin Abdullah bin Ja'far. They were kept in confinement in Medina for three years.

Thereafter, they were shifted to a dark dungeon in az-Zabadah where they all died one after another.<sup>8</sup>

Allama Muhammad Jawad wrote, "According to al-Mansur's own admission, he had killed more than a thousand persons who were from the progeny of Ali and Fatima (a.s.). He killed innumerable Shia and invented new and outrageous methods of torture and ultimate death."<sup>9</sup>

Though several persons wrote to Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq (a.s.) asking him to accept the leadership of the Muslims, he refused. He was content to preach Islam at Medina. It is said that he had as many as six thousand students studying various sciences at his hand. Despite his noninterference with politics, Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) was always looked upon with suspicion by al-Mansur.

Al-Mansur often used to send for the Imam with the intention of killing him, but he always lost his nerve at the last moment. At-Tabari records in his *Tarikhul Umam wal Muluk* that the Imam demanded that al-Mansur should return the properties confiscated from him (the Imam).

Al-Mansur ordered the Imam to be poisoned. The order was carried out. There was a cenotaph on the Imam's tomb but that was demolished in 1344 AH, by Abdul Aziz bin Sa'ud of Saudi Arabia.

In his last moments, al-Mansur called his wife and son al-Mahdi and entrusted a key saying that it was for the house that holds the most precious of all his possessions. He instructed that the house should be opened only after his death and that none except his wife and son al-Mahdi should enter inside. When al-Mansur died, his wife and son opened the house and were shocked to see rows upon rows of bodies of young, old people, and children with tags in their ears showing the branch of the Family of Fatima and Ali (a.s.) to which they belonged.<sup>10</sup> Such was the cruelty of al-Mansur.

### **[3] Muhammad al-Mahdi (157-169 A H)**

Al-Mahdi was as cruel as his father al-Mansur. He bore an unabated hatred toward the Shia and Sayyids. When he found that his father had hundreds of tagged bodies of the progeny of Ali and Fatima (a.s.) stored in a house, as we saw above, he ordered all the bodies to be buried in a common ditch and a shop to be erected upon the ditch. He spared no effort to trace Ali and Fatima's progeny and to incarcerate them until their death or to have them beheaded. Any person least suspected of harbouring good will towards the Ahlul Bayt was unceremoniously killed without trial. So ferocious was al-Mahdi that people concealed their identity for fear of being persecuted for being the progeny of Ali and Fatima (a.s.). The Shia concealed their faith and preferred to be branded as zindiq (atheists) rather than to be known as Shia.

### **[4] Abu Muhammad Musa al-Hadi (169-170 A H)**

Though he ruled for a short period of one year, he became as notorious as his father was for his cruelty and persecution toward the *Sayyids* and the Shia. He imposed restrictions on the progeny of Ali and Fatima (a.s.) who lived in Medina, and made them stand surety for each other. He made it obligatory on them to report every morning to the local authority. Often, they were made to wait for long hours just to insult them. The insults led to altercations. Being unable to bear the insults and harassment, al-Husayn bin Ali bin al-Hasan bin al-Hasan bin al-Hasan bin Ali ibn Abi Talib called for the progeny of Imam Ali (a.s.) and the following persons gathered around him; Yahya, Sulaiman, and Idris the sons of Abdullah bin al-Hasan, Abdullah bin al-Hasan al-Aftas, Ibrahim bin Isma'eel, Umar bin al-Hasan, Abdullah bin

Isma'eel, and Abdullah bin Ja'far. These ten persons were proceeding on their pilgrimage. They were joined by thirty-six persons who were the progeny of Ali (a.s.) and a few bondsmen. They went to the governor's house early in the morning. On seeing them, the governor ran away. However, they were soon surrounded by the army of al-Hadi the Abbasid king and were massacred. The bodies remained lying on the ground for three days.<sup>11</sup> Six persons were taken prisoners and were brought before al-Hadi who beheaded them.

## **[5] Haroon ar-Rashid (170-193 A H)**

Haroon ar-Rashid was the son of al-Mahdi and the brother of al-Hadi. In his long reign of 23 years, he perpetrated great crimes of murdering the progeny of Ali and Fatima and their supporters. He either killed or imprisoned them to death. The following are a few names of those who were killed or jailed to death by Haroon ar-Rashid, in addition to the unnamed sixty ones from the Progeny of Ali and Fatima (a.s.) in Toos. Here are the names:

Ibrahim bin Isma'eel, Ali bin al-Hasan bin Ibrahim, Ali bin Hashim bin Buraid, Ma'qil bin Ibrahim, Abdu Rabbih ibn Alqama, Idris bin Abdullah, Hasanain bin Abdullah bin Isma'eel, Abbas bin Muhammad bin Abdullah, Abu Muhammad Hisham bin al-Hakam, Ali ibn Salih at-Taliqani, Ishaq bin al-Hasan bin Zaid...etc.

Haroon ar-Rashid was the first to order to demolish and remove Imam Husayn's tomb. Before him, neither the Umayyads nor the Abbasids, though desired, dared to destroy the tomb of Imam Husayn (a.s.). However, they imposed severe restrictions on visiting the tomb.<sup>12</sup>

Imam Musa al-Kadhim (a.s.) was living in Medina. When Haroon visited the holy city, he went to the Prophet's tomb and in order to show his proximity to the Prophet (S), he saluted the tomb saying '*Peace be upon my cousin*'. Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.), who was present at that time, put down Haroon ar-Rashid by saluting the Prophet's tomb saying: '*Peace be upon my (grand) father*.' Thus, the Imam proved that if proximity in relationship was what would count, Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.) was closer to the Prophet (S) than Haroon was.

Due to the above incident, Haroon felt so insecure that on several occasions, he made Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.) travel from Medina to Baghdad to kill him, but, whenever he met the Imam, he was scared to take any precipitate action. Instead, on several occasions, Haroon imprisoned Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.) for long periods. Seeing the piety of Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.), who was in prison for over a year, the jailor, at Basra, Eesa bin Ja'far bin Mansur wrote to Haroon ar-Rashid asking him to transfer the Imam to some other jail; otherwise he would himself release.

Haroon sent Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.) from Basra to Baghdad and kept him imprisoned under al-Fadhl bin ar-Rabee'. Soon, al-Fadhl found that Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.) was innocent and that he was being unjustly persecuted. Haroon learnt that Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.) was living a relatively comfortable life. He

sent his confident Masrur to spy upon al-Fadhl. Haroon gave two letters, one addressed to Abbas bin Muhammad and another one addressed to Sindi bin Hashak asking him to follow the instruction of Abbas bin Muhammad. Accordingly, Abbas inflicted one hundred whips on al-Fadhl bin ar-Rabee' and handed over Imam al-Kadhim to the custody of Sindi bin Hashak. Sindi bin Hashak asked Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.) to lie on the floor and he made some Christian wrestlers to sit on, due to which the Imam died. According to Ardabili, Sindi bin Hashak inserted poison and martyred Imam al-Kadhim (a.s.) [13](#)

Haroon's jealousy of the infallible Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) was so intense that he closed down the university run by Imam as-Sadiq (a.s.) at Medina. He frequently ordered Imam as-Sadiq to leave Medina and travel to Baghdad just to disturb the Imam's teaching of his students who were said to be more than four thousand ones. Very cleverly, Haroon ar-Rashid used the pretext of encouraging sciences and he invited different persons for debates. His son al-Ma'mun followed the same policy of diverting people from seeking knowledge from the Imams of the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.).

## **[\[6\] Abdullah al-Ma'mun \(198- 218 AH\)](#)**

Al-Ma'mun was the son of Haroon Rashid. He was highly educated and was cunning. He was an expert politician. He killed his brother al-Amin, who was the caliph, after a prolonged battle of four years. Al-Ma'mun was a son of a bondwoman whereas al-Amin was of pure Abbasid descent. This created a rift between the Abbasids who were about eighty thousand people, and this constituted the biggest threat to al-Ma'mun. Like his predecessors, al-Ma'mun was also scared of the Alawids. Being a clever politician, he first forced Imam Ali ibn Musa ar-Ridha (a.s.) to marry his daughter and offered to nominate as his heir apparent. By this stratagem, al-Ma'mun had planned to subdue the Abbasids with the threat that if they rose in revolt against him, he would hand over the caliphate to the Alawids. For this purpose, he gave the title of 'ar-Ridha' based on the original Abbasid slogan of 'ar-ridha min Aal Muhammad; (seeking) the contentment of the progeny of Muhammad'.

Such a prospect was horrifying to the Abbasids. Al-Ma'mun was also confident that once the pomp and glory of the earthly kingdom surrounded him, Imam ar-Ridha (a.s.) also would fall into the trap of all the attendant vices, just like the judge of judges Yahya bin Aktham had fallen. It is said that al-Ma'mun was initially not given to any vices, but when he got rid of his brother al-Amin, he felt safer and in course of time fell into all sorts of vices that he indulged in that along with his ministers, counselors, and religious heads. [14](#)

However, Imam ar-Ridha (a.s.) saw through the game of al-Ma'mun and consistently he refused to have anything to do with rulership. Under threat, Imam ar-Ridha was forced to accompany al-Ma'mun and sit next to him. Imam ar-Ridha explained that his position was similar to his grandfather Imam Ali's when he was nominated and forced to participate in the Shura [15](#) or to the Prophet Yousuf (a.s.) who became the minister of the king of Egypt. [16](#) However, the Imam refused and never participated in the state affairs. Al-Ma'mun asked Abdullah bin Basheer to grow his fingernails. When they had grown to a

considerable extent, he gave something that appeared to be tamarind, and asked Abdullah to squeeze it. According to a popular tradition, it was through grapes filled with poison that the Imam was made to consume and die.

There is an unending list of people who were martyred under al-Ma'mun's orders. The well-known among them are:

Al-Hasan al-Harsh, al-Hasan bin Zaid, al-Hasan bin al-Husayn bin Zaid, al-Hasan bin Ishaq, Ali bin Abdullah, Abu Sara bin Mansur, Muhammad bin al-Husayn bin al-Hasan, Muhammad bin Zaid bin Ali, Muhammad bin Ja'far, Abdullah bin Ja'far, Muhammad bin Abdullah bin al-Hasan,... etc., in addition to thousands of their supporters.

## **[7] Al-Mu'tasim Billah (218-227 A H)**

He was the son of al-Ma'mun and was nominated to the caliphate by his father. He inherited from his ancestors the hatred for the Prophet's progeny. He imprisoned thousands of Shia and of the Prophet's progeny who died in prison or were killed on the orders of him.

Al-Mu'tasim married his daughter Ummul Fadhl, apparently out of respect and love, to Imam Muhammad al-Jawad (a.s.), but in fact to keep a close watch on the activities of the Imam and to have an executioner ready to eliminate the Imam by poison. Thus, Imam al-Jawad (a.s.) was martyred by poison inserted to him by Ummul Fadhl at the behest of al-Mu'tasim

## **[8] Al-Mutawakkil `Alallah (232-247AH)**

Al-Mutawakkil was the cruelest of all the Abbasid kings. He bore great ill will towards the progeny of Imam Ali and Fatima (a.s.) and their Shia. He used to abuse and tell lies against Imam Ali (a.s.) in the open court. His clown Ibadah, who was a eunuch, pretended to imitate Imam Ali (a.s.). When al-Mutawakkil's son al-Muntasir Billah saw this, he chided his father saying that Imam Ali (a.s.) was the nephew of their grandfather Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib and allowing a clown to imitate him was the worst thing. Al-Mutawakkil was given to heavy drinking and was always surrounded by female dancers.

Al-Mutawakkil had abdicated his authority to the Turkish slaves who were whimsically running the administration of the state. Al-Mantahir Billah, with some disgruntled persons, killed his father al-Mutawakkil in 247 AH, when he heard him abusing Imam Ali and Fatima az-Zahra' (a.s.).<sup>17</sup>

Al-Mutawakkil not only bore ill will, but he also hated the popularity of Imam Husayn's tomb at Karbala to which millions flocked as pilgrims. Al-Mutawakkil wanted to erase the tomb completely. He destroyed the tomb seventeen times during his rule of fifteen years, but there is a record of four times; in the years 233, 236, 237 and 247 AH.<sup>18</sup> Every time the tomb was erased a new and more magnificent structure was put up by the Shia.<sup>19</sup> By al-Mutawakkil's orders, anyone attempting to visit the tomb of Imam

Husayn (a.s.) was arrested and sent to the governor of Kufa who either killed or punished him severely. Every time the tomb of Imam Husayn (a.s.) was demolished, the surrounding houses and shops of the Shia were demolished too. On four occasions, the entire town of Karbala was demolished.

Umar bin Faraj, the governor of Medina and Mecca, looted the properties of the progeny of Ali and Fatima (a.s.) and harassed the Shia in all possible manners. Similarly, the governors of Egypt and Kufa used to arrest the Shia on false allegations and they punished them unjustly.

The names of the despotic governors are as follows:[1] Ibrahim ad-Daizaj who demolished Imam Husayn's tomb in 233 and 236AH, [2] Umar bin Faraj who demolished the tomb in 237 AH, [3] Harun al-Mu'ammari who demolished the tomb in 437 AH, [4] Ja'far bin Muhammad bin Ammar.

From the progeny of Imam Ali and Fatima (a.s.) al-Mutawakkil killed the following well-known and learned persons:*al-Qasim bin Abdullah, Ya'qub bin Ishaq, Ahmed bin Isa, and Abdullah bin Musa.*

1. [Manaqib of ibn Shahr Ashub](#), vol. 2 p. 134 quoted in [Masa'ibush Shia](#), vol. 5 p. 29.
2. [A Study of Islamic History](#) by K. Ali. P. 229.
3. [Ibid.](#), P. 234.
4. [Masa'ibush Shia](#), vol. 5 p. 93 quoting [al-Iqd al-Farid](#), vol. 1 p. 41.
5. [Ibid.](#), p. 101-102 quoting [Muruj ath-Thahab](#).
6. [Masa'ibush Shia](#), vol. 5 p. 103, quoting [at-Tabari's Tarikh](#).
7. [Ibid.](#), p. 104 quoting [al-Mas'udi's Muruj ath-Thahab](#). vol. 2 p. 171.
8. [Ibid.](#), p. 114-115 & 119 quoting [Maqatil at-Talibiyin](#).
9. [Ibid.](#), p. 146 quoting [ash-Shia wal Hakimun](#).
10. [Masa'ibush Shia](#), vol. 5 p. 125-127 quoting [at-Tabari's Tarikhul Umam wal Muluk](#).
11. [Masa'ibush Shia](#), vol. 5 p. 187-199 quoting [al-Mas'udi's Muruj ath-Thahab](#), vol. 3, p. 336.
12. [Ibid.](#), vol. 6 p. 46 quoting from ['History & Geography of Karbala](#).
13. [Masa'ibush Shia](#), vol. 6 p. 69-71.
14. [Masa'ibush Shia](#), vol. 6 p. 79 quoting [Shibli Nomani's 'Al-Ma'mun'](#).
15. [Ibid.](#), p. 127.
16. [Ibid.](#), p. 128.
17. [Masa'ibush Shia](#), vol. 6 p. 164-171 quoting [at-Tarikh al-Kamil](#), vol. 7 p. 20, [Muruj ath-Thahab](#), vol. 2, [ash-Shia wal Hakimun](#), p. 169...etc.
18. [Masa'ibush Shia](#), vol. 6 p. 186-199.
19. [Ibid.](#), p. 186.

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