

The Fourth Special Deputy: Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.)

Name : Ali

Agnomen (Kuniyyat): Abul Hasan

Father : Muhammad

The fourth deputy of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) Abul Hasan Ali Ibn Muhammad (r.a.) attained this special position after Husain Ibn Rauh Naubakhti (r.a.). Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) himself ordered Abul Qasim Ibn Rauh Naubakhti (r.a.) to appoint him to this post.

The Samaris were among those Shia families that were highly respected for their services to Islam in general and the Shiite cause in particular. Hence, his appointment as the fourth deputy was undisputed. Many individuals from this family like Hasan, the son of Ismail Ibn Saleh and Muhammad, the son of Ali Ibn Ziyad were owners of large estates. They had gifted the income from their estates to the eleventh Imam Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.).^{[1](#)}

Apart from this, some members of Samari family were amongst the supporters of Imam Reza (a.s.). In this way, some of the companions of other Imams (a.s.) also belonged to this family. For example, Ali Ibn Muhammad Ibn Ziyad served as a representative of Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) and Imam Hasan Al-al-Askari (a.s.).

He also wrote a book 'Al-Awsiyaa' in which he clarified doubts on the Imamate of the twelfth Imam (a.s.). The respected Sayyid Ibn Taawoos (r.a.) has made a mention of this book on page number 427 of his highly acclaimed work, 'Mohaj al-Da'waat' (p. 428 of the new edition with Persian translation).

Sayyid Ibn Taawoos (r.a.) has brought two incidents from the book 'Al-Awsiyaa' that describe the end of the Abbaside Caliphs Mo'tasim and Motazid, the murderers of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.).

In the same manner, we find that Ali Ibn Ziyad wrote a letter to Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) seeking a shroud from him (a.f.t.s.). Imam (a.s.) replied,

‘You will require this only at the age of 80 (i.e. in 270 AH).’

Ali Ibn Ziyad passed away in the year 270 AH and a few days prior to his demise, Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) fulfilled his request.²

These few incidents are sufficient to exemplify the importance, nobility and dignity of the members of Samari family. Their illustrious position does not come as a surprise given that over the years, they were active supporters and helpers of the cause of the holy Imams (a.s.).

The Title of the Fourth Deputy

There exists a difference of opinion in the title of the fourth deputy from the aspects of pronunciation and writing. The respected Ali Ghaffarzaadeh, while providing references from learned scholars, has concluded his research on this topic as follows. He says, “His title was سَمَرِي (Samari) or سَيْمَرِي (Saimori) or سَمُورِي (Samori).”

In this regard, he records that in Al-Ghaibah of Shaikh at-Tusi (r.a.), Kamaaluddin of Shaikh Sadooq (r.a.), Al-Kharaaej of Qutbuiddin al-Raawandi (r.a.) and other authentic books, the title has come with سَمَرِي. There is little doubt in the fact that in books of traditions and narrators, references to سَيْمَرِي or سَمُورِي are few and far between.

Some of the fourth deputy’s contemporaries while recording the events of his life have written his title as سَمُورِي, while some have recorded it as سَمَرِي. The title سَمَرِي is more acceptable and appears more likely vis-vis other titles. This is because between Basraa and Waasit, there is a place called سَمَر and Aqa Buzurg al-Tehrani (r.a.) has recorded the name with سَمَرِي.³ In short, the title of the fourth deputy was سَمَرِي.

The Period of the Fourth Deputy

The period of Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.) is remembered as one in which the oppressions and tyrannies of the ruling Abbaside government were at its peak. Consequently, like his predecessors, socially he was not very active and had deliberately limited his interaction with his representatives.

However, despite these constraints, he maintained contact with the Shias. In fact, he continued to enjoy the same respect and position amongst the Shias as the preceding three special deputies. It was for this reason that the Shias continued to send their religious financial taxes to him through his representatives.

The details of his date of birth and life history are few and far in books of history. Nonetheless, the relatively short span of his appointment as special deputy of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) has been reported with regular frequency in books.

Ali Ibn Muhammad, A Companion of Imam Hasan al-Askari

(A.S.)

The venerated Shaikh at-Tusi (a.r.) in his book ‘Al-Rejaal’ (p. 432) has regarded Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.) amongst the companions of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.).

Apparently, Imam Hasan Al-al-Askari (a.s.) also corresponded with him through letters. For example, Ali Ibn Muhammad says that on one occasion, Imam Hasan Al-al-Askari (a.s.) wrote to him,

‘A dispute will soon arise which will trouble you such that you will lose your hands and feet. Remain alert of this corruption and safeguard yourself from it.’

After three days, Bani Hashim were involved in an incident due to which they were engulfed with hardships and sufferings. I wrote to Imam Hasan Al-al-Askari (a.s.) enquiring whether this was the same incident which he had referred to in his letter. He replied,

‘No, there is yet another incident. You protect yourself completely from it.’

After a few days, we were informed of the murder of the Abbaside caliph Mo’taz. [4](#)

This letter shows that he was in contact with Imam Hasan Al-al-Askari (a.s.).

News of The Unseen: Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.)

Like his predecessors, many incidents of nobility are reported about Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.). These incidents served a dual purpose. Firstly, they established the strong relationship between him and Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and secondly, the Shias who witnessed these noble actions never harboured any doubt about his designation as the special deputy of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.).

Shaikh at-Tusi (r.a.) based on reports from his teachers, narrates an incident from Husain Ibn Ali Ibn Babwayh Qummi (r.a.) – brother of Shaikh Sadooq (r.a.). He reports, ‘Some members of Qum which included Imran Saffaar, Alawiyyah Saffaar and Husain Ibn Ahmad Ibn Idrees (may Allah have mercy upon them) reported to me that in the year in which my father Ali Ibn Husain Ibn Musa Ibn Babwayh (the father of Shaikh Sadooq- r.a.) passed away, they were present in Baghdad.

They report that Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.) asked each one of us about the health of Ali Ibn Babwayh and we replied to him that we have received a letter from him that he is fine. Till the time of his death, he kept enquiring about Ali Ibn Babwayh and we kept replying that he was well. One day, he (Ali Ibn ‘Muhammad Samari) asked us the same question and we replied that we had not received the reply to our letter from him. To this, he said, ‘May Allah grant you patience on his demise!’

We noted the day, month and time of his statement. After about seventeen or eighteen days, we

received the news of the death of Ali Ibn Muhammad Babwayh and it was at exactly the same day and time when Abul Hasan Samari (r.a.) had paid condolence to us.⁵

Shaikh Sadooq (r.a.) heard this incident about his father 10 years after his demise through reports from Abul Hasan Saleh Ibn Shu'aib Taleqani. Taleqani reported this incident from Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim Mukhallad who heard Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.) say,

رَحِمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيَّ بْنِ الْحُسَيْنِ بْنِ مُوسَى بْنِ بَابَوَيْهِ الْقُمِّي

'May Allah have mercy upon Ali Ibn Husain Ibn Musa Ibn Babwayh Qummi. '6

The Last Tauqee'

The last Tauqee' that was issued during the Minor Occultation (Minor Occultation (غيبتِ صغرى)) bore tremendous historical import. Not only did this letter declare the conclusion of the era of special deputies and herald the onset of Major Occultation (Ghaibat al-Kubra), but it also carried with it a profound and deep rooted message.

This letter was issued by Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) six days before the demise of the fourth deputy and can be found with minor variations in the books of traditions. Prior to his death, Janab Ali bin Muhammad Samari (r.a.) was asked about his successor. In reply to this question, he placed the following letter before the people:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ السَّمَرِيِّ، أَعْظَمَ اللَّهُ أَجْرَ إِخْوَانِكَ فِيكَ فَإِنَّكَ مَيِّتٌ مَا بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَ سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ، فَاجْمَعْ أَمْرَكَ وَلَا تُوصِلْ إِلَى أَحَدٍ فَيَقُومَ مَقَامَكَ بَعْدَ وَفَاتِكَ فَقَدْ وَقَعَتِ الْغَيْبَةُ النَّامَةُ فَلَا ظُهُورَ إِلَّا بَعْدَ إِذْنِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى ذِكْرُهُ وَذَلِكَ بَعْدَ طُولِ الْأَمَدِ وَقَسْوَةِ الْقُلُوبِ وَامْتِلَاءِ الْأَرْضِ جَوْرًا وَسَيِّئَاتِي شَبِيعَتِي مَنْ يَدْعِي الْمُشَاهَدَةَ إِلَّا فَمَنْ ادَّعَى الْمُشَاهَدَةَ قَبْلَ خُرُوجِ السُّفْيَانِيِّ وَالصِّحْحَةِ فَهُوَ كَذَّابٌ مُفْتَرٌّ وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ الْعَلِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ

'O Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari! May Allah increase the reward of your brothers concerning you (i.e. your demise)! Death will come to you within the next six days. So you complete your works and do not nominate any person after you. The sequence of special deputies will come to an end and the Major Occultation (غيبتِ كبرى) will commence with your demise.

Now the reappearance will occur only with the permission of Allah, after a prolonged period and after the hearts of people are hardened. And such a period will emerge on my Shias when people will claim that they have seen me. Whoever makes such a claim before the advent of Sufyani and the heavenly voice,

is a liar, an impostor. There is no strength and power save that of Allah, the High, the Great.”

As stated above, when the people enquired from Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.) about his successor, he advanced this letter unto them. Shaikh Tabarsi (r.a.) narrates that some of these people noted down the contents of the letter and left. They returned on the sixth day and found Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari in a state of illness, grappling with death pangs. They enquired once again,

مَنْ وَصِيُّكَ مِنْ بَعْدِكَ؟

‘Who is your successor?’ He replied,

لِلَّهِ أَمْرٌ هُوَ بِالْغُهِ

‘To Allah belongs the affair (of succession), He will fulfill it.’

These were the last words of his life.

One can refer to the following books for this Tawqee’:

Al Ghaybah by Shaikh at-Tusi (r.a.), p. 593; Kamaaluddin vol. 2, p. 615; Al Ehtejaaj, vol. 2, p. 874; Bihar al-Anwar vol. 51, p. 63, vol. 25, p. 151 and vol. 35, p. 813; E’laamul Waraa’ p. 714; Yaumul Khalaas (Persian tr.) vol. 1, p. 403; Ayanush Shiah (Persian tr.) p. 55; Muntakhabul Asar (Old Edn.) p. 993; Yanaabiul Mawaddah (Urdu) p. 517.

Analysis of The Tawqee’

A meaningful investigation of the above Tawqee’ indicates that Imam (a.t.f.s.) has drawn the attention of Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.) towards various important aspects. Apart from this, this Tawqee’ is also a conclusive proof of the existence of the Imam (a.t.f.s.) for those who deny it and ridicule the Shias for it.

Some of these aspects are noted here:

1. The prophecy made by Imam (a.t.f.s.) about the demise of Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.) within six days. The accuracy of the prophecy proved that the Tawqee’ was issued from none other than Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.).
2. Imam (a.t.f.s.) ordered Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.) not to appoint any person as his successor. With this decree, Imam (a.t.f.s.) sealed the only door for all to meet him directly. The decree was a pointer to the fact that in the future (during the Major Occultation), none would be able to meet Imam (a.t.f.s.) as and when he pleased. It also implies that there would be no ‘designated’ special deputy

during the Major Occultation, thus falsifying any claimant to that position.

3. The Tawqee' marked the commencement of the Major Occultation.

4. Imam (a.t.f.s.) will not reappear but with the permission of Allah.

5. It made it abundantly clear that any person who claimed to meet or to be able to meet Imam (a.t.f.s.) at will would be a liar, an impostor.

An Objection

There is a seeming contradiction in the Tawqee'. On one hand we see that if a person claims to meet Imam az-Zaman (a.s.), he is a liar. However, on the other hand, there are numerous incidents and events reported in books where not only scholars, but also ordinary people have met Imam (a.t.f.s.) and have reported such meetings.

Reply

Allamah Majlisi (r.a.) has replied to the above objection at two places in his book, Bihar al-Anwar. His reply is beneficial even to the scholars after him. We clarify his position on the above issue as follows:

1. As reported by illustrious scholars, one reason could be that the one who claims to have met Imam (a.t.f.s.) would use this claim to place himself as a special deputy and cheat the people. Since there are several incidents of people having met Imam (a.t.f.s.), it is clear that the scholars believe that the Tawqee' does not reject the possibility of meeting and seeing Imam (a.t.f.s.), it only rejects the appointment of a special deputy after Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.).

2. It is also possible that the one who contends to be able to see Imam (a.t.f.s.) is a liar and an impostor if he maintains that he can get a meeting with Imam (a.t.f.s.) at will. Anyone who makes such a preposterous claim in the Major Occultation is a pretender and deserves to be snubbed.

So, meeting Imam (a.t.f.s.) is not rejected outright in the Tawqee'. It is just that in the Major Occultation, meeting Imam (a.t.f.s.) voluntarily is not possible. Rather Imam (a.t.f.s.) will meet whosoever he wants and hence, the choice of the meeting lies with Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and not with the people.

The Conclusion of the Chain of Special Deputies

Ayatullah Baqar Al-Sadr (r.a.), writes, "The transformation of the Minor Occultation into the Major Occultation signifies that the objectives and aims of the Minor Occultation had been adequately fulfilled.

This elaborate programme protected the Shias from the difficulties arising from the occultation of Imam (a.t.f.s.) and gradually, they made a mental shift from the special deputies and accustomed themselves

to referring their religious matters to the scholars.

Thus the responsibility to represent the Imam (a.t.f.s.) in the Major Occultation fell upon the just, religious jurisprudents and it became obligatory for the people to follow their rulings in worldly as well as religious matters.”

This viewpoint is endorsed by the famous tradition of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) which is regularly quoted,

أَمَّا الْحَوَادِثُ الْوَاقِعَةُ فَارْجِعُوا فِيهَا إِلَى رِوَاةِ حَدِيثِنَا فَإِنَّهُمْ حُجَّتِي عَلَيْكُمْ وَ أَنَا حُجَّةُ اللَّهِ

*‘If any fresh incident occurs (in matters of religious issues), then refer them to the narrators of our traditions. For surely, they are my proofs upon you and I am Allah’s Proof.’*⁷

This tradition is attributed to a Tawqee’ issued to the second special deputy Muhammad Ibn ‘Uthman Al Amri (r.a.) and many traditionalists have quoted it as such. However, the author of ‘Yaumul Khalaas’, Kaamel Sulaymani has credited this tradition to the last days of the Minor Occultation and has attributed it to the fourth deputy Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.).⁸

Note

It is possible that the tradition may have been reported twice and there is nothing wrong with that. We can understand clearly that the unmistakable message in the tradition is towards the solution of issues and dilemmas that would arise during the Major Occultation.

The Conclusion of the Chain of Special Deputies

The fourth special deputy passed away on 15th Shabaan, 329 AH. His demise was accurately prophesied by Imam (a.t.f.s.) in his Tauqee’ wherein he informed him of his death within six days. The period of his deputyship lasted for approximately 3 years from 326 AH to 329 AH. His age coincided with the reign of two Abbaside caliphs – Al-Raazi Billah and Muttaqi.

His Grave

Shaikh Abbas Qummi (r.a.) writes in vol. 6, p. 234 of his renowned book ‘Safinatul Behaar’, ‘The illustrious Shaikh Ali Ibn Muhammad Samari (r.a.) was the successor to Husain Ibn Rauh (r.a.) and shouldered the responsibilities of deputyship for a period of 3 years. He passed away in the year 329 A.H., marking the onset of the Major Occultation. His grave is in Baghdad near the tomb of Shaikh Kulaini (r.a.).’

Shaikh at-Tusi (r.a.) records that his grave is in Baghdad at the Khalatji Road off the Abu Etaab river.

Nowadays this area is more popular as Sooqul Kutub which is on the eastern bank of the river Dajlah. For centuries, lovers of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) have been visiting his grave and reciting salutations:

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكَ يَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ مُحَمَّدٍ أَشْهَدُ أَنَّكَ بَابُ الْمَوْلَى أَدَّيْتَ عَنْهُ وَ أَدَّيْتَ إِلَيْهِ

'Peace be upon you, O Ali Ibn Muhammad. I bear witness that you are the door to our Master (Imam (a.t.f.s.)). Certainly you fulfilled the trust presented to you by Imam (a.t.f.s.) and returned the trust to him (a.t.f.s.).'

- [1.](#) Pazoohash al-Peiramoon al-Zindegaani al-Nuwwaab al-Khaas al-Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), p. 304
- [2.](#) Kamaaluddin, vol. 2, pp. 501-2
- [3.](#) Pazoohash al-Peiramoon al-Zindagaani al-Nuwwaab al-Khaas al-Imam al- Zamana (a.t.f.s.), p. 305
- [4.](#) Kashf al-Ghummah, vol. 3, p. 207, Pazoohash al-Peiramoon al-Zindagaani al-Nuwwaab al-Khaas al-Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.), p. 304
- [5.](#) Behaar al-Anwaar, vol. 51, p. 163, tradition 8, from Al-Ghaibah of Shaikh at-at-Tusi (r.a.)
- [6.](#) Kamaaluddin, vol. 2, p. 305, tradition 23
- [7.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 53, p. 180 narrating from al-Ehtejaaj
- [8.](#) Yaumul Khalaas (Persian tr.) vol. 1, p. 303

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