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18) The Uprising of the Mahdi (‘a)

Ibn Hanbal says:

A. Hajjaj and Abu Na‘im have related from Fitr from Qasim bin Abi Bazzah from Abi al-Tufayl from (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a), who quoted the Messenger of Allah (S) as saying:

Law lam yabqa mina al-dunya illa yawmun laba‘atha Allahu rajulan minna yamla’uha ‘adlan kama muli’at jawran (If only a day were to remain for the end of the world, Allah will raise a man from my progeny who will fill it [the earth] with justice as it was filled with oppression)”1

Ibn Hanbal says:

B. Fazl bin Dukayn has related to us from Yasin al-‘Ijli from Ibrahim bin Muhammad bin Hanafiyyah from his father (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a), who quoted the Messenger of Allah (S) as saying:

“al-Mahdi minna Ahla al-Bayt yuslihuhu Allahu fi laylatin (The Mahdi is from us the Ahl al-Bayt, Allah will set right his affairs in [the course of] one night).”2

Ibn Hanbal says:

C. Sufyan bin ‘Uyaynah has related to us from ‘Asim (bin Abi al-Najud) from Zirr (bin Hubaysh) from ‘Abdullah (bin Mas‘ud) who narrates from the Messenger of Allah (S):

“La taqum al-sa‘ah hatta yalia rajulan min Ahli Bayti yuwatiu ismuhu ismi (The Day of Resurrection will not come until a man who is from my Ahl Bayt and whose name is my name, will rise).”3

Ahmad Shakir has termed the isnad of all three hadith as sahih, and has criticised the North African scholar ‘Abd al-Rahman bin Muhammad bin Khaldun (1332-1406) for rejecting the reports concerning the Mahdi (‘a). It is worth noting that Ibn Khaldun in his famous Muqaddimah or Introduction to History has embarked on a lengthy discussion on the ahadith concerning the Mahdi (‘a), and writes:

It has been well known (and generally accepted) by all Muslims in every epoch, that at the end of time a man from the Ahl al-Bayt (of the Prophet) will without fail make his appearance, one who will strengthen

the religion and make justice triumph. The Muslims will follow him, and he will gain domination over the Muslim realm. He will be called the Mahdi...Evidence for this matter has been found in the ahadith that religious leaders have published. They have been discussed by those who disapprove of (the matter) and have often been refuted by means of certain (other) akhbar.[4]

Ibn Khaldun in his discussion on the ahadith concerning the Mahdi (‘a) says that those who reject the coming of the Mahdi have criticized these reports, which he acknowledges have been narrated on the authority of some of the prominent companions of the Prophet and have been recorded in all authoritative Sunni books, whose names he has mentioned.

He writes:

Hadith scholars acknowledge negative criticism to have precedence over positive criticism. If we find that some person in the chain of transmitters is accused of negligence, poor memory, weakness or poor judgement, it affects and weakens the soundness of the hadith. It should not be said that the same faults often affect the persons (mentioned as authorities) in the two Sahihs (Bukhari and Muslim).

The general consensus of hadith transmitters confirms the soundness of the contents (of the two Sahihs) as presented by Bukhari and Muslim. The uninterrupted general consensus in Islam also confirms the acceptability of (the two Sahihs) and the necessity of acting in accordance with their contents. General consensus is the best protection and defense. Works other than the two Sahihs are not on the same level with them in this respect...[5]

He goes on to quote, one after another, several of the ahadith from the Prophet concerning the Mahdi (‘a), along with the chain of transmitters as found in the original sources, and tries to find fault with them in a manner which is clearly artificial. One of the ahadith which he criticizes is the narration that Ibn Hanbal has recorded on the authority of ‘Abdullah bin Mas‘ud. Ibn Khaldun then directs his attack at ‘Asim bin Abi al-Najud even after acknowledging him to be “one of the seven authoritative Qur’an readers.”[6] To deflect criticism from his assumption, he writes:

Were someone to argue that (Bukhari and Muslim) published traditions of his, (we should reply that) they published them when there were also other (authorities for the same tradition), and that they did not use him as their basic authority.[7]

The annotator of the Musnad, Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, finds the criticism of Ibn Khaldun unconvincing and rejecting it, writes:

Ibn Khaldun attempted something for which he was not qualified and ventured into an arena which was not his domain. His preoccupation with state and political affairs and his serving of kings and nobles dominated his thought and speech, and as a result induced him to imagine that the report of the uprising and revolution of the Mahdi (‘a), was a (purely) Shi‘ite belief.

However, it is worth noting that first Ibn Khaldun has not properly understood the statements of hadith compilers that negative criticism (jarh) takes precedence over positive criticism (ta'dil). If he had properly understood their statements he would not have commented in this manner. It is also possible that he understood their purpose but since his thoughts were profoundly influenced by the political views of his times, he has tried to weaken the ahadith concerning the Mahdi ('a).

Second, 'Asim bin Abi al-Najud is considered one of the reputed reciters of the Holy Qur'an and is also regarded as a trustworthy transmitter of hadith. Maybe he has made mistakes in some ahadith but these are not to the extent that his narration should be rejected. The strongest criticism against him is that he was not of good memory.

But on the basis of such a single criticism, could we ignore him and consider this as a means of rejecting a report whose authenticity has been confirmed through various other chains and narrated in the words of several companions (of the Prophet)? The soundness of this report is to the extent that no one has any doubts about it, because among the transmitters could be seen just, truthful and candid persons. Moreover, since this hadith has been narrated by other transmitters as well, the likelihood of a slip concerning someone whose memory being sharp is somewhat under doubt, is completely eliminated.[8]

These were some of the examples of the large number of hadith concerning the virtues of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt ('a) found in the Musnad of Ahmad bin Hanbal. The writer of the article had to limit his selection in view of the space. It is hoped that this article would serve the purpose of bridging the gap between the Muslims and promote better understanding of each other.

1. Al-Musnad, hadith no. 773.
2. Ibid, hadith no. 645.
3. Ibid, hadith no. 3571. There are several other hadith in the Musnad concerning the uprising of the Mahdi ('a), e.g. hadith nos. 3572, 3573, 4098, 4279 etc. Most of the isnad of these ahadith have been confirmed as sahih.
4. Ibn Khaldun, al-Muqaddimah, translated by Franz Rosenthal, vol. 2, pp. 156-157, published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1986.
5. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 158.
6. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 159.
7. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 162.
8. Shakir, Sharh al-Musnad, vol. 5, pp. 197-198.

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