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Infallibility of the Imams

The writer of “What is Shi’aism?” has given four “proofs” to show that the Shi’as are kafir. The fourth proof according to him is as follows:

“The Shi’as believe that their Imams are infallible and sinless. These attributes and qualities are reserved only for the Prophets and the Messenger of Allah.”

COMMENT: This unknown writer is unaware that his co-religionists, i.e., the Wahhabis, do not believe in the ‘ismah (infallibility and sinlessness) of even the Prophets. I do not want to quote narratives of Sahih al-Bukhari which present the Holy Prophet of Islam (S) in extremely bad light. Although a Persian proverb says that “Quoting a kufr is not kufr”, but my iman does not allow me even to quote those blasphemous ahadith which are the hall-mark of al-Bukhari, and which have given ammunition in the hands of the Christians and Jews for attacking Islam and its Holy Prophet (S) using this so called Sahih of al-Bukhari.

Apart from that, the Wahhabis openly believe that the Holy Prophet (S) was no more than a big brother to the Muslims; and that he was giving orders based on his Ijtihad. In other words he was just a Mujtahid. And everyone knows that a Mujtahid sometimes arrives at correct decision while at other times he may make mistakes. With such beliefs, how can he claim that the Prophets, especially the Holy Prophet, was ma’sum (sinless and infallible)?

Obviously this unknown author, if not ignorant of his own religion, has committed the sin of Taqiyyah by hiding his actual belief!

Sunni Belief About The Prophets’ Ismat

As for the Sunnis’ belief, I quote here from two authoritative books on this subject:

1. The famous ‘Allamah at-Taftazani (Sa’d al-Deen Ma’ud ibn ‘Umar al-Ash’ari ash-Shafi’i) writes in his Sharh ‘l Maqasid:

“Our madhhab is that (the Prophets) do not commit any major sin (al-kaba’ir) after bi’tah (getting nabuwat) under any circumstances (i.e. neither intentionally nor unintentionally), and (do not do) any small sin intentionally. They can commit small sins unintentionally, but they do not persist nor continue in it; rather they are cautioned and they become cautious.”¹

In other words, the Prophets could commit major sins before bi’tah.

2. Mulla ‘Ali al-Qari-Hanafi writes:–

“The Prophets are ma’sum from lie, especially concerning the matters of shari’ah and conveying of (divine) commandments and guidance of ummah, intentionally (according to ijma’) and unintentionally (according to the majority).

As for all other sins there are some details as follows:

1. They are ma’sum from kufr before bi’tah and after it, according to the ijma’.
2. Likewise, they are ma’sum from intentionally committing major sins, according to the majority of Muslims; But al-Hashawiyah disagree.
3. Whether the Prophets can commit major sins unintentionally, the majority says they can.
4. As for minor sins, the majority says the Prophets could commit it intentionally, contrary to what al-Jubba’i and his followers say.
5. All the scholars unanimously say that the Prophets can commit minor sins unintentionally – except such things which show meanness like stealing a morsel, or short-weighting a few grains; but the research-scholars have added a proviso that they are warned and they become cautious. However, all the above discourse concerns the period after revelation. As for the period before that, that is no proof to show that they could not commit minor sins at that time. But the Mu’tazilites do not agree with it (i.e. according to the Mu’tazilites, the Prophets could not commit minor sins even before revelation.)
6. And the Shi’as say that the Prophets could not commit any sin, minor or major, before receiving revelation or after it.”²

Study all this detailed description of the Sunnis’ actual belief on this subject, and see the clear statement that the Hashawiyah i.e. the Wahhabis believe that the Prophets could commit major sins intentionally. Then note how deceitfully the unknown Wahhabi writer pretends that he believes in the ‘ismah of the Prophets and Messengers of Allah.

It is the established fact of Islamic history that all their Khalifas were non-ma’sum; they were not sinless or infallible. To protect them from criticism they have pulled down the Messenger of Allah (S) from the pedestal of ‘ismah, and as mentioned above, their Imam al-Bukhari has played a major role in degrading

the Messenger of Allah (S).

You have seen that the Sunni scholars know and admit that the Shi'as belief concerning the 'ismah of the Prophets is most comprehensive and that according to Shi'as the Prophets were sinless and infallible from beginning to the end of their lives and were ma'sum from all the major and minor sins.

Naturally, because we believe in ma'sum Prophets, we say (as the Quran and ahadith have guided us) that the successors of the Prophet (S) too should be ma'sum. (For our arguments and proofs for the 'ismah of the Prophets and Imams see my books, "Prophethood" and "Imamate", available from the Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania.)

But the Wahhabis believe in a Prophet who was liable to commit major and minor sins. Naturally they believe in fallible and non-ma'sum persons as his successors.

Further on the unknown author writes: "Shah Waliullah Dehlavi in his book "Tafheemat e Ilahiyah" (p. 224) unveils the curtain by saying, "Actually they do not believe in the Finality of Prophethood of Muhammad (S). Although they do not believe in the Finality of Prophethood of Muhammad (S), they vehemently profess it."

It is true that Shah Waliullah Dehlavi claimed that the Shi'a belief was batil (false) because they considered their Imams were ma'sum, although they believe that Muhammad (S) was the last of the Prophets.

Much can be said about the book, At-Tafhimatu 'l-Ilahiyah, and its grandiloquent claims which reflect on the egotistic nature of its author; but this is not the place to go into this subject. If one reads the said book, he will see that the Shah's self-aggrandizing pronouncements are no less outrageous than those of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani. But the Shah was clever enough to cover his claims under the mask of tasawwuf. However let us come back to the present topic.

Shah Waliullah's claim that Shi'a madhhab was batil is understandable. Everyone from among the 73 sects of Islam believes that only his madhhab was the true one and the other 72 sects were false (batil). But the Muslims do not say that other sects are kafir. Even Shah Waliullah refrained from using this word for the Shi'as. His famous son, Shah 'Abdu 'l-'Aziz says that someone enquired of his father (Shah Waliullah) whether the Shi'as were heretics. His father reiterated the different views of the Hanafi jurisconsults on the subject. The man was not satisfied and urged the Shah to give his own ruling. On getting the same reply, he went away filled with rage and is said to have declared that Shah Waliullah himself was Shi'a.^{[3](#)}

[Shah Waliullah, Shah 'Abdu'l-'Aziz, Muhyiddin Ibn Al-'Arabi And](#)

Others Believe In Ismat Of The 12 Imams

Be as it may. Now let us have a look at Shah Waliullah's main argument that the belief of the 'ismah of our 12 Imams was incompatible with the belief in the Finality of Prophethood of the Holy Prophet (S). There is no need to look elsewhere. Interestingly enough, Shah Waliullah Dehlavi himself in this very book (quoted by this unknown writer), *At-Tafhimatu 'Il-lahiyah* has attributed the following four spiritual qualities to our twelve Imams:

1. 'Ismah (Sinlessness, infallibility),
2. Hikmah (Sagacity, wisdom).
3. Wajahah (Prestige, excellence),
4. Qutbiyat Batiniyah (Being Spiritual Pivot).

Just to give a glimpse of what he says, I am translating a part of his writing about the wajahah:

"O brother! I have told you only one in a thousand concerning wajahah. When a servant becomes wajih (excellent, distinguished), he becomes beautiful and perfect. Then every step he takes becomes a good act; when he moves or takes a morsel to his mouth, it is a good act; when he rides, every step of his horse is a good act; when he sleeps his turning to his right side and his left sides, all becomes good acts; Allah accepts from him such deeds, multiples of which from others are not accepted.

"And He is (Allah's) beloved, and whatever Allah has created was created for him. And when 'ismah is completed, all his actions become haqq (true, correct). I do not say that his actions occur according to the haqq; but (I say that) his actions are the haqq (personified); rather, the haqq is a thing which is reflected from those actions as the rays are (reflected) from the sun. And the messenger of Allah has pointed to this rank when he prayed to Allah Ta'ala about 'Ali, saying: "O Allah! turn the haqq with him wherever he ('Ali) turns"; and he did not say: Turn him ('Ali) wherever the haqq turns." (Vol.2, p.19)

One Mirza Hassan 'Ali wrote a long letter to Shah 'Abdu 'l-'Aziz Muhaddith Dehlavi, objecting to how his illustrious father could establish the above mentioned for qualities for "Hazaraat A'immah Ithna 'ashar 'Alayhumussalaam" (the respected twelve Imams, peace be upon them), when 'Ismah, according to Sunni madhhab was not accepted for other than the Prophets, the Messengers and the angels; and how he (Shah 'Abdu 'l-'Aziz Dehlavi) has confirmed it in his own "Risalah" while explaining the belief of his father.

The question and Shah 'Abdu 'l-'Aziz's detailed reply is printed in "Fatwa Shah 'Abdu 'l-'Aziz". It is not feasible to translate the whole description in this small booklet, but some sentences are quoted here to show the general import of his reply. He says:

"Ismah has two meanings: First: Impossibility of committing sins, although one has power to do so. This meaning, according to the Ijma' of Ahlus-Sunnah is reserved for the Prophets and angels. Second: Not

only committing any sin, although one could do so. There is no difficulty in this idea; and this meaning is called “mahfuziyyat” (Protection) in the Sufis’ language..... This meaning is not reserved for the Prophets. The Holy Prophet (Blessings and peace from Allah be upon him and his progeny) has asked for this ‘ismah when he prayed for his Ahlul-Bayt in these words: ‘O Allah! keep uncleanness away from them and purify them a thorough purification.’

“The useful hikmah is the useful knowledge. If it is learned (from people), it is not called hikmah.... If that knowledge is (divinely) gifted to someone’s heart, it is called hikmah, whether it concerns belief, actions or ethics. This too is not reserved for the Prophets..... That is why it has come in the noble hadith: ‘I am the house of hikmah and ‘Ali is its door’; and it has come in (another) well-known hadith: ‘I am the City of knowledge and ‘Ali is its door: And the knowledge in these traditions has this very same meaning (i.e. God-given knowledge.)

“*Wajahah* means that Allah deals with some of His servants in such a way that rebuts the enemies’ calumny from them, and shows their cleanness from allegations of faults and failings..... It is proved about ‘Ali Murtaza (May Allah be pleased with him) when (the Prophet S) prayed for him: Oh Allah! turn the haqq wherever he turns: and he did not say: Turn him wherever the haqq turns”.

“And Qutbiyat Batiniyah means that Allah Ta’ala selects from some of His servants, so that the divine favour first reaches them personally and directly, and then from them it goes to others, even if the (latter) receiver apparently has not learned or received directly anything from them. For example, sun’s rays reach inside a house through a skylight; first that skylight is illuminated and then other things are brightened through the skylight.”[4](#)

In this way, the belief in the ‘ismah and other qualities of our twelve Imams (“Alayhumussalaam”) is established by Shah Waliullah Dehlavi and confirmed with proofs by Shah ‘Abdu ‘l-‘Aziz Dehlavi. We have a right to ask these two illustrious Sunni scholars, whether they themselves believed in the Finality of Prophethood of Muhammad (S) or not?

The belief in the ‘ismah of our twelve Imams is not confined to the above mentioned two scholars who incidentally were among the bitterest enemies of the Shi’as. Even before and after them Sunni ‘ulama have been announcing such beliefs. For example, Shaykh Muhyiddin ibn Al-‘Arabi Al-Undulusi (died 638 A.H) writes in his famous book, *Al-Futuhāt Al-Makkiyah*:

“Know that Mahdi (Allah be pleased with him) must appear. But he will not appear till the world becomes full of tyranny and injustice, then he will fill it with justice and equity: and if there were no more than one day remaining from the (life of the) world, Allah would elongate that day to enable this Khalifa to rule. And he (Imam Mahdi) is from the progeny of the Messenger of Allah (Blessings and peace from Allah be upon him), from the children of Fatimah (Allah be pleased with her): his forefather is Hussain, son of ‘Ali bin Abi Talib, his father is Hassan Al-‘Askari, son of Imam ‘Ali An-Naqi, son of Imam Muhammad At-Taqi, son of Imam ‘Ali Ar-Rdha, son of Imam Musa Al-Kazim, son of Imam Ja’far As-Sadiq, son of

Imam Muhammad Al-Baqir, son of Imam Zainu 'l-'Abideen 'Ali, son of Imam Hussain, son of Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib. His name is the name of the Messenger of Allah (i.e., Muhammad). The Muslims will do his Bay'at (will declare their allegiance to him) between Rukn and Maqam (i.e, Rukn Yamani and Maqam Ibrahim in Ka'bah); he will be like the Messenger of Allah (Blessings and peace be from Allah upon him) in appearance, and below him in character because nobody can be like the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace be from Allah upon him) in character as Allah has said: "verily thou art on great character....." He will distribute wealth equally and will do justice to the public.... (Help from Allah) will precede him: he will follow the foot-steps of the Messenger of Allah, and he will commit no mistake, there will be an angel supporting him though he will not see him:...."[5](#)

Mark the word: *and he will commit no mistake, there will be an angel supporting him.*

Later on, another well-known Sunni Sufi scholar, Maulana 'Ali Akbar Maududi, wrote a hashiyah on Nafahat, in which he writes:

"Shaykh Abu 'l-Hasan ash-Shadhili (may Allah be pleased with him) has said that the Qutb[6](#) has fifteen signs, as (for example) he is helped with 'ismah (sinlessness), rahmah (mercy), khilafah and niyabah (successorship) and he is supported by those angels who hold up the 'arsh (throne of God), and the reality of (divine) attributes etc.... Accordingly, the madhhab of those is confirmed who believe that persons other than the Prophets can be ma'sum..... The fact that the promised Mahdi (May Allah be pleased with him) is in existence and he is the Qutb after his father al-Hassan al-'Askari (Peace be upon them both), as he was the Qutb after his father and so on upto Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (May Allah honour us through them), indicates that this rank (of Qutbiyat) is confined into their (these twelve Imams) personalities since the time Qutbiyat came to the person of his (Mahdi's) forefather, 'Ali ibn Talib until it is completed in him (in Mahdi) -- not before that. Now any other Qutb who gets this rank, does so as his substitute -- because he (Mahdi) is hidden from the eyes of the general public and even special people (although he is not hidden from the eyes of highly distinguished persons....). Therefore, it is inevitable that every Imam from these twelve Imams should be ma'sum."[7](#)

And in the last (14th) century, the well-known Sunni scholar, Maulana Wahidu 'z-Zaman of Hyderabad Deccan had written:

"The correct view is that in this verse (of Purity) only these five persons are included (i.e. the Prophet, 'Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn), although in Arabic usage, the word Ahlu 'l-Bayt is used for wives also. Some people prove by this verse that these five persons were sinless and ma'sum (infallible). But if not ma'sum, then of course they were surely mahfuz (protected from committing any sin or error)."[8](#)

So, these are our twelve Imams, whose 'ismah is accepted even by our bitterest enemies. They had to be ma'sum because the Prophet (S), whose successors they were, was ma'sum.

Those whose Prophet was not completely free from sins and errors, had to be content with leaders who were not ma'sum. It is amusing to see such people blaming us why we believe in these ma'sum Imams!!

We have not closed the door of Shi'ism to anyone. If they envy us because of our ma'sum Imams, they are welcome to enter the fold of Shi'ism and they too will get guidance from the same ma'sum Leaders!!

Finality of Prophethood

The unknown writer asserts: "Shi'a belief in 'Imamate' is nothing but an extension to Prophethood, which of course is given a different name. But what is then in name when the intent and content is the same?"

Anyone interested in knowing our belief concerning Khatmun Nabuwwat (Finality of Prophethood) should study my book, "Muhammad (S) Is the last Prophet" or its Swahili translation, "Muhammad (S) Ni Nabi wa Mwisho", which are available from the Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania. A few sentences are quoted from it for easy reference:

"When humanity reached that stage, Allah sent the final Shari'ah which was to serve the mankind to the last day of the world. After Muhammad Mustafa (S) there was no need for any Shari'ah, there was no need for any new Prophet or messenger from God. And it was for this reason that he was declared by Allah to be the Last of the Prophets." (p. 13)

"Of course, the need for an interpreter of the Qur'an and Protector of the Shari'ah will remain forever. But Allah appointed Imams for this purpose, after the Last Prophet. The chain of the Prophethood came to an end and a new system of religious leadership, known as 'Imamat' was introduced. The Holy Prophet said:

"Bani Israel, Prophets were leading them; when a Prophet died another Prophet succeeded him. But after me there is no Prophet, and surely there will be the successors." (pp. 14–15)

Now this unknown writer should ask the Holy Prophet (S): "But what is then in name when the intent and content is the same?" (But actually the intent and content is not the same, as is clear from the quotation given above).

The unknown author has used p.7 to p.13 of his booklet quoting some sentences from various Shi'a books and booklets to show that Imamate in the eyes of the Shi'as is a continuation of the divine guidance after the Last Prophet; and that the Shi'as believe that an Imam must be ma'sum (infallible) and *mansur min Allah* (appointed by Allah). If that author of unknown origin does not like this belief, he should have refuted the proofs offered by those authors. If he had not seen the books printed in Iran, Pakistan or India, surely he must have seen my book "Imamate" from which he has quoted a single sentence on p.10 of his booklet. Now, my book contains 188 pages, all on this very subject.

And the topic of 'Ismah and appointment by Allah begins on p.39 and goes on to p.105. I would have enjoyed it if that author would have tried to refute any of my arguments. But he did not have the courage to do so; and merely went on claiming that this belief of the Shi'as was against the Sunnis' belief. Well, everyone knows that there is a world of difference between the Shi'a and Sunni beliefs about Imamate

and Caliphate. So why labour on this point. If he thinks the Shi'a belief is wrong, he should have refuted our arguments. But he has brought no argument, and there is nothing to reply.

In addition to the proofs written in Imamate, I have given here assertions by Shaykh Muhyiddin ibn al-'Arabi, Maulana 'Ali Akbar Maududi, Shah Waliullah Dehlavi, Shah 'Abdu 'l-'Aziz Dehlavi and Maulana Wahidu 'z Zaman Hyderabadadi that our Twelve Imams were Ma'sum (sinless, infallible). If the Shi'as are kafir because of this belief, what about these stalwarts of Sunniism? Were they Muslims? Or they too were kafirs?

1. at-Taftazani, Sharu 'l-Maqasid, Beirut, 1409/1989, vol. 5, p.51

2. Mulla Ali al-Qari, Sharu 'l-fiqhi 'l-akbar, Beirut, 1404-1984, p. 93.

3. Manazir Ahsan Gilani, Tadhkirah-e-Hazrat Shah Waliullah, Karachi, 1959, pp. 198- 199.

4. Shah 'Abdu'l-'Aziz Dehlavi, Fatwa 'Azizi, Dehli (India). n.d., pp. 126-128.

5. Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyah, Chapter 366. These words of Shaykh Muhyiddin ibn Al-'Arabi (died in 638 A.H.) have been quoted by many respected Sunni and Shi'a scholars of Turkey, Egypt and India. Important among them are:

a. Shaykh 'Abdul Wahhab as-Sha'rani, (b. 898- d. 973 A.H.) in his Al-Yawaqit wal Jawahir, (which he completed in Rajab, 955, i.e., 18 years before his death), Egypt. 1307, Vol. 2, p.145, reprinted Darul Ma'rifah, Beirut;

b. Shaykh Muhammad As-Sabban ash-Shafii (d. 1206 A.H.), in his Is'afu 'r-Raghibein, Egypt, 1312, p.142; also published on the margin of Mashariqu 'l-Anwar, (see below);

c. Shaykh Hasan Al-'Adawi Al-Hamzawi (d. 1303) in his Mashriqu 'l-Anwar, Matba'at Al-'Uthmaniyah, Istanbul, 1307;

d. Sayyid Hamid Husayn Al-Musawi (d. 1306), in his Istiqsa'u'l-Ifham, Lucknow, Vol.2 Tahreef in Al-Futuhat:

Keep in view all these quotations by such respected 'ulama, and then look into Al-Futuhat printed in Egypt in 1339 in 4 volumes. You will find that the publishers have changed the words, "his forefather is Husain", to his forefather is al-Hasan; and then they have omitted the whole genealogy beginning with the words, "his father is Hasan Al-Askari" and ending four lines later at, "son of Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib".

Regrettably such tahreef has become a regular feature of all old books published in Egypt and some Muslim countries since last 100 years or so.

6. Some particulars of Qutb have been described by Shah Waliullah, as quoted earlier.

7. Maulana 'Ali Akber Maududi, al-Mukashafat (Hashiya on Nafahat), under the name 'Ali ibn Sahl al-Isfihani, as quoted in Istiqsa'u'l-Ifham, vol.2

8. Wahiduzzaman Khan, Anwaru 'l-lughah, Banglore, para 22, p.51.

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