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# Lesson 22: The Rifts within Shi'ism

There were major rifts within Shi'ism during the first and second centuries AH, and at the end of the second century remarkable splits among the Shi'ah had emerged. As such, members of the different nations and religions, in dealing with Waqifiyyah, have called the Shi'ah Imamiyyah who believed in the Imamate of Imam ar-Ridha (*'a*) as Qat'iyyah and Ithna 'Ashariyyah for believing in Imam ar-Ridha (*'a*) and the Imams after him up to the Imam of the Time (*'a*).1

Of course, during the first century AH up to 61 AH (i.e. up to the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn (*'a*)) these splits had not occurred within Shi'ism, although Shahristani regards the Ghulat Saba'iyyah sect that emerged during the time of Hadhrat Amir (*'a*) as Shi'ah.2

This is while there is doubt concerning the existence of a person named 'Abd Allah ibn Saba'.3 At any rate, according to *Rijal Kashi*, there had been some *Ghali*s during the time of 'Ali (*'a*) who were asked by him to repent, and since they had not repented, he ordered for their execution.4

Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn (*'a*) had excellent positions in the sight of Muslims and have been considered as progeny of the Prophet (S). Apart from the Shi'ah, other Muslims also regard them worthy of the caliphate. As such, there was no doubt concerning the matter of the Imamate and no rift whatsoever had ever occurred during the lifetime of these two personages. After Imam al-Husayn's (*'a*) martyrdom, we witness rifts within Shi'ism, and some of those sects that split from mainstream Shi'ism are the following:

- **Kaysaniyyah:** They believe in the Imamate of Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah.

- **Zaydiyyah:** They believe in the Imamate of Zayd ibn 'Ali.

- **Nawusiyyah:** They believe in the occultation {*ghaybah*} of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) and in his being the Mahdi.

- **Fathiyyah:** They believe in the Imamate of 'Abd Allah ibn Aftah, son of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*).

● **Samtiyyah:** They believe in the Imamate of Muhammad Dibaj, another son of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*).

● **Isma'iliyyah:** They believe in the Imamate of Isma'il, yet another son of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*).

● **Tafiyyah:** They believe that Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) entrusted the Imamate to Musa ibn Taffi.

● **Aqmasiyyah:** They believe that Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) entrusted the Imamate to Musa ibn 'Umran al-Aqmas.

● **Yarma'iyyah:** They believe that Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) entrusted the Imamate to Yarma' ibn Musa.

● **Tamimiyyah:** They believe that Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) entrusted the Imamate to 'Abd Allah ibn Sa'd at-Tamimi.

● **Ju'diyyah:** They believe that Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) entrusted the Imamate to a person named Abu Ju'dah.

● **Ya'qubiyyah:** They reject the Imamate of Musa ibn Ja'far (*'a*), saying that Imamate could be entrusted to other than the sons of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*), and their leading figure is a person named Abu Ya'qub.

● **Mamturah:** They suspend their judgment concerning Imam al-Kazim (*'a*), saying that they are not sure if the Imam really passed away or not.[5]

● **Waqifiyyah:** They believe that Imam al-Kazim (*'a*) did not die and that he shall remain alive till the Day of Resurrection (*'a*).[6]

Of course, some of these sects had also split into smaller sects. For example, Kaysaniyyah has two groups regarding the Imamate of Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah:

Some believed that Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah was the Imam after Imam al-Husayn (*'a*) while another group was of the opinion that he was supposed to be the Imam after his father, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (*'a*), and after ascribing the Imamate to pass to his son, Abu Hashim after him, they were again divided into some groups:

A group believed that Abu Hashim had entrusted the Imamate to Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-'Abbasi. The second group maintained that Abu Hashim had entrusted the Imamate to his brother, 'Ali ibn Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah. The third group opined that Abu Hashim had entrusted the Imamate to his nephew, Hasan ibn 'Ali. The fourth group held that Abu Hashim had entrusted the Imamate to 'Abd Allah ibn 'Amru al-Kindi.[7]

Zaydiyyah is also divided into three main groups:

**Jarudiyyah:**[8] They believe that after the Holy Prophet (*'a*), 'Ali (*'a*) was the one worthy of the caliphate but the Prophet (*'a*) introduced him to the people for the caliphate only by descriptions and not by name,

and that due to the people's failure to recognize him correctly, they chose Abu Bakr and for doing so, the people became infidels {*kuffar*}.

**Sulaymaniyyah:**[9] They believe that Imamate is determined through consultation {*shura*} and that the Imamate of 'a deserving one' {*mafdhul*} while 'the most deserving one' {*afdhal*} is present is permissible. It is by means of this notion that they are proving the legitimacy of the caliphate of Abu Bakr and 'Umar and that the *ummah* erred in not choosing 'the most deserving one' (viz., 'Ali (*'a*)) but their error does not reach the level of transgression {*fisq*}. Also, they declare 'Uthman as an infidel {*kafir*}.

**Batriyyah:**[10] Their beliefs are similar to that of Sulaymaniyyah with the only difference that they suspend their judgment concerning 'Uthman.[11]

Isma'iliyyah is also divided into three groups:

One group is of the opinion that the Imam after Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) is Isma'il who did not die as he is alive and the promised Mahdi.

The second group believes that Isma'il died and the Imamate transferred to his son, Muhammad, who is in occultation {*ghaybah*} and shall appear and fill the world with justice and equity.

The third group, like the second one, believes in the Imamate of Muhammad ibn Isma'il with the only difference that Muhammad died and the Imamate has remained in his offspring.[12]

Of course, most of these sects did not last long, and they could hardly be called "sects". Rather, they were groups that faded away with the death of their respective leaders, and they had no appearance in the sociopolitical scenes. Among these sects, Kaysaniyyah, Zaydiyyah and Isma'iliyyah emerged and remained in the first, second and third centuries AH. Of course, although during the second century AH and after the martyrdom of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) the Isma'ili sect was separated from the body of Shi'ism, it had no appearance up to the middle of the third century AH, and in a sense, their Imams were in hiding.[13]

During the first century AH, next to the Shi'ah Imamiyyah and prior to the emergence of Zaydiyyah, Kaysaniyyah had been the most influential Shi'ah sect. Kaysaniyyah emerged and made its appearance in the uprising of Mukhtar. Although we do not regard Mukhtar himself as a Kaysani, many of his forces were adhering to Kaysaniyyah.[14]

This sect struggled politically until the end of the first century AH, and Abu Hashim, 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad al-Hanafiyyah, who was the leader of this sect, had for the first time used the terms "*da'i*" {propagator} and "*hujjat*" {proof} for his preachers. Later on, these terms were used by other groups such as the 'Abbasids, Zaydis and Isma'ilis. He was also the one who founded the "office of propagation" which was later imitated by the 'Abbasids.[15]

When the Umayyad caliph Sulayman ibn 'Abd al-Malik felt threatened by Abu Hashim, he invited him to

Sham and poisoned him. When Abu Hashim realized that that was his end, he went to Hamimah, the living place of his ‘Abbasid cousins, declared Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-‘Abbasi as his successor, and introduced to his successor his preachers and forces.[16] From then on, the Banu ‘Abbas assumed the leadership of the followers of Kaysaniyyah and focused their activities in Khurasan. As Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani says,

The people of Khurasan believed that Abu Hashim was the successor of his father and that his father inherited the right of succession {*wasayah*} from his father (viz., ‘Ali (*‘a*)). He in turn appointed Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-‘Abbasi as his successor and who, in turn, designated his own son, Ibrahim, as the Imam. In this manner, they were proving the right of succession of Banu ‘Abbas.[17]

Even Shahristani believes that Abu Muslim al-Khurasani had been a Kaysani at the beginning but after the triumph of the ‘Abbasids, they established their legitimacy based on the alleged right of succession of their forefather, ‘Abbas, from the Messenger of Allah (S) himself.

In retrospect, the sociopolitical appearance of the Kaysanis can be found in the uprising of ‘Abd Allah ibn Mu‘awiyah, a descendant of Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib at-Tayyar. As Shahristani says,

A number of the Kaysanis believed in the right of succession of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Amru al-Kindi and when they found him committing treachery and making lies, they believed in the Imamate of ‘Abd Allah ibn Mu‘awiyah ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Ja‘far at-Tayyar… There was a serious difference over the issue of Imamate between the companions of ‘Abd Allah ibn Mu‘awiyah and the companions and followers of Muhammad ibn ‘Ali.[18]

Besides the Kaysaniyyah, the second sect that was active in the sociopolitical scene, was the Zaydiyyah, which emerged after the uprising of Zayd and the most politicized Shi‘ah sect. Of all the Shi‘ah sects, it is the closest to the principles of Ahl as-Sunnah. For example, in addition to acknowledging the caliphate of Abu Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthman, Batriyyah Zaydiyyah was not also considering Talhah, Zubayr and ‘A’ishah as infidels.[19]

For this reason, many of the Sunni jurists {*fuqaha*} used to approve the uprising of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah who was a Zaydi.[20] Mas‘ar ibn Kudam, a leading Murjite {*murja’ah*} figure, had written to Ibrahim, brother of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah, to come to Kufah.[21] Abu Hanifah, the Imam of the Hanifi school of thought {*madhhab*} participated in Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah’s uprising, encouraging the people to support the leader of the uprising.[22]

Regarding the Zaydiyyah Batriyyah sect, Sa‘d ibn ‘Abd Allah Ash‘ari al-Qummi thus says, “They mix together the guardianship {*wilayah*} of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar.”[23] In particular, regarding the roots of religion {*usul ad-din*}, they follow Mu‘tazilism {*mu‘tazilah*} and concerning the branches of religion {*furu‘ ad-din*}, they follow Abu Hanifah while some follow Shafi‘i.[24]

The Zaydi school of thought, that is Shi‘ism in a general sense, does not differ much from the Sunni

beliefs. It is for this reason that in some Zaydi uprisings, such as that of Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah and his brother Ibrahim, a number of the Sunni *'ulama'* and prominent figures had participated. Similarly, the Shi'ah who had participated in the Zaydi uprisings were probably of the opinion that the 'Alawi leaders of the uprisings were designated by the infallible Imams and perhaps the scattering of Shi'ah and their being away from the Imam of the time were the reasons behind it. In the end, only the Zaydis had remained with their leaders. For example, as narrated by Mas'udi, Ibrahim ibn 'Abd Allah, Muhammad Nafs az-Zakiyyah's brother, had fought in the end with only four hundred Zaydis on his side who were all killed.25

The third sect which had presence and been active in the sociopolitical scenes is the Isma'ili sect. This sect separated from the body of Shi'ism during the second half of the second century AH. Yet, until the end of the third century AH, they did not have much public appearance and their leaders remained in hiding until 296 AH, i.e. the year of appearance of 'Abd Allah al-Mahdi, the first Fatimid caliph in North Africa. For this reason, the evolutionary phases of this sect remained completely unknown. Nawbakhti who lived during the third century AH used to link their initial activities with the *Ghulat* and followers of Abi'l-Khattab.26

Their beliefs have also remained in the halo of ambiguity. In this regard, Mas'udi thus writes:

The scholastic theologians {*mutakallimun*} of the various sects—Shi'ah, Mu'tazilah, Murja'ah, and Khawarij—have written about the sect and reputation of the objections against it... But none of them has expressed opposition against the doctrines of the Qaramatah (Isma'ili) sect. There are also those who have written against them such as Qudamah ibn Yazid an-Nu'mani, Ibn 'Abdak al-Jurjani, Abi'l-Hasan Zakariyya al-Jurjani, Abi 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn ar-Razzaq at-Ta'i al-Kufi, and Abu Ja'far al-Kalabi. Each of them had described the creeds of the people of falsehood. Yet, others have not discussed those matters. Besides, the followers of this sect disregarded the claims of these writers, not confirming them.27

This is the reason why the followers of this sect have been referred to by diverse names in the different regions. In this regard, Khwajah Nizam al-Mulk has thus written:
They had been called by different names in every city and every province; "Isma'ili" in Halab and Egypt; "Saba'i" in Qum, Kashan, Tabaristan, and Sabzewar; "Qarmati" in Baghdad and Mesopotamia; "Khalafi" in Rey; and in Isfahan...28

Prior to the establishment of the Fatimid state, the Isma'ilis were less engaged in political struggles, and instead focused on drawing people's attention toward them, propagation, training and education. As such, we are witnesses to the travel of the Isma'ili leaders, such as Muhammad ibn Isma'il, 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad, Ahmad ibn 'Abd Allah, and Husayn ibn Ahmad, to the regions such as Rey, Nahavand, Damavand, Syria, Jabal Qandahar, Nayshabur, Daylam, Yemen, Hamedan, Istanbul, and Azerbaijan where they dispatched their preachers and propagators.29

It was by considering these grounds that the Qarmatis {*qarmatiyan*} designated "Isma'iliyyah" for themselves. Given such an expansion, they used to try their best for the 'Abbasid not to be able to extinguish the fire of their sedition.30

In 296 AH the Fatimid state, based on the Isma'ili sect, was established in North Africa and a vast part of the Muslim territories was detached from the 'Abbasid sphere of influence.

## Lesson 22: Summary

The most prominent Shi'ah sects emerged during the first and second centuries AH, and notable rifts within Shi'ism had occurred after the end of the second century AH. As such, in contrast to Waqifiyyah, the Shi'ah Imami who believed in the Imamate of Imam ar-Ridha (*'a*) were called Qati'ah and Ithna 'Ashariyyah.

No rift within Shi'ism occurred during the time of Imam al-Hasan and Imam al-Husayn (*'a*) on account of their towering station.

Most sects mentioned in the books about nations and religions could hardly be called "sects". Rather, they were groups that eventually faded away with the death of their respective leaders and founders.

But the sects that have appeared in the sociopolitical scenes are the Kaysaniyyah, Zaydiyyah and Isma'iliyyah.

## Lesson 22: Questions

1. From which period up to which period did sects emerge within Shi'ism?

2. Name the sects that had a presence in the sociopolitical scenes?

3. In terms of the roots {*usul*} and branches {*furu'*} of religion, which way and method does the Zaydiyyah sect follow?

1. Shahristani, Kitab al-Milal wa'n-Nihal (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1364 AHS), vol. 1, p. 150.
2. Ibid., p. 155.
3. See Sayyid Murtadha al-'Askari, 'Abd Allah ibn Saba' wa Asatir Ukhra, 6th edition (1413 AH/1993), vol. 2, pp. 328-375. Its abridged English version is Sayyid Murtadha al-'Askari, 'Abdullah ibn Saba' and Other Myths, trans. M.J. Muqaddas (Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services, 1984). {Trans.}
4. Shaykh at-Tusi, Ikhtiyar Ma'rifah ar-Rijal (Rijal Kashi), researched by Sayyid Mahdi Raja'i (Qum: Mu'assasah Al al-Bayt at-Turath, 1404 AH), vol. 1, p. 325.
5. Maytham ibn 'Ali ibn Maytham al-Bahrani, An-Najah fi'l-Qiyamah fi Tahqiq al-Imamah, 1st edition (Qum: Majma' al-Fikr al-Islami, 1417 AH), pp. 172-174.
6. Kitab al-Milal wa'n-Nihal, p. 150.
7. Ibid., pp. 131-135.
8. They were the companions of Ziyad ibn Abi Ziyad, better known as Abi'l-Jarud. Hence, their group was called

“Jarudiyyah”.

9. Their leader was a person named Sulayman ibn Jarir. Thus, their group was known as “Sulaymaniyyah”.

10. Their leader was a person named Kaythar an-Nawi Abtar. So, their group was labeled as “Batriyyah”.

11. Kitab al-Milal wa’n-Nihal, pp. 140-142.

12. Muhammad Karim Khurasani, Tarikh va ‘Aqa’id-e Ferqeh-ye Aqakhaniyyeh, abridged and compiled by Husayn Husayni (Qum: Nashr al-Huda, 1377 AHS), pp. 2-3.

13. Ibid., p. 43.

14. ‘Ali ibn Husayn ibn ‘Ali Mas‘udi, Murawwij adh-Dhahab, 1st edition (Beirut: Manshurat Mu’assasah al-A‘lami Li’l-Matbu‘at, 1411 AH), vol. 3, p. 91.

15. Dr. Samirah Mukhtar al-Laythi, Jihad ash-Shi‘ah (Beirut: Dar al-Jayl, 1396 AH), p. 87.

16. ‘Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu’l-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyin (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH), p. 124; Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Abd Rabbih al-Andalusi, Al-‘Aqd al-Farid (Beirut: Dar Ihya’ at-Turath al-‘Arabi, 1409 AH), vol. 4, p. 438.

17. Maqatil at-Talibiyyin, p. 123.

18. Kitab al-Milal wa’n-Nihal, p. 135.

19. Ibid., p. 142.

20. Maqatil at-Talibiyyin, p. 247.

21. Ibid., p. 314.

22. Ibid.

23. Sa‘d ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Qummi Ash‘ari, Al-Maqalat wa’l-Firaq, 2nd edition (Tehran: Markaz-e Intisharat-e ‘Ilmi va Farhangi, 1360 AHS) p. 10.

24. Kitab al-Milal wa’n-Nihal, vol. 1, p. 143.

25. Murawwij adh-Dhahab, vol. 3, p. 326.

26. Abi Muhammad al-Hasan ibn Musa Nawbakhti, Firq ash-Shi‘ah (Najaf: Al-Matba‘ah al-Haydariyyah, 1936), p. 71.

27. ‘Ali ibn Husayn ibn ‘Ali Mas‘udi, At-Tanbiyyah wa’l-Ashraf (Cairo: Dar as-Sawi Li’t-Tab‘ wa’n-Nashr wa’t-Ta’lif, n.d.), p. 341.

28. Siyasatnameh (Tehran: Intisharat-e ‘Ilmi va Farhangi, 1364 AHS), p. 311.

29. See Rasul Ja‘fariyan, Tarikh-e Tashuyyu‘ dar Iran az Aghaz ta Qarn-e Hashtum-e Hijri, 5th edition (Qum: Shirkat-e Chap wa Nashr-e Sazman-e Tablighat-e Islami, 1377 AHS), pp. 207-209.

30. Murawwij adh-Dhahab, vol. 4, p. 297.

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