Al-Islam.org
Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project
Published on *Al-Islam.org* (https://www.al-islam.org)

Part 6: The Rifts within Shi'ism

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.

Lesson 23: Factors behind the Rifts within Shi'ism

The blessed names of the twelve Imams (*'a*) have been recorded in the Prophetic traditions and Shi'ah had learned of their names before personally seeing them. As Jabir ibn 'Abd Allah, a devoted companion of the Prophet (S) narrates: When the verse,

"O you who have faith! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority among you,"[1]

was revealed, I asked: "O Messenger of Allah! We know Allah and His Apostle and we do obey them, but who are 'those vested with authority' {*uli'l-amr*} obedience to whom has been mentioned by God alongside the obedience to Himself and obedience to you?"

He said: "'Those vested with authority' are my successors and the leaders after me. The first of whom is 'Ali ibn Abi Talib; after him, Hasan and then Husayn; after him, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn; and after him is Muhammad ibn 'Ali who is known in the Torah {*tawrat*} as "Baqir" {he who cleaves something asunder} and you shall see him. Once you meet him, extend my salutations to him.

After him is as-Sadiq, Ja'far ibn Muhammad, and then Musa ibn Ja'far followed by 'Ali ibn Musa; after him is Muhammad ibn 'Ali; after him is 'Ali ibn Muhammad and then Hasan ibn 'Ali, and after him is his son who shall have the same name and epithet as mine. It is he who shall conquer the east and west of the world. He shall be hidden from the visible ones—a long occultation on account of which the people will doubt his Imamate except those whose hearts shall be endowed with untainted faith by God...[2]

The same Jabir used to sit at the Masjid an-Nabi and say: "O Baqir al-'Ilm {he who cleaves knowledge asunder}! Where are you?" People who heard him would say: "Jabir, you are talking nonsense." He would reply, "I am not talking nonsense. Rather, the Holy Prophet (S) has informed me that "You shall meet a man from my descendants whose name and physical appearance is like that of mine who will cleave knowledge asunder."[3]

The infallible Imams (*'a*) also used to prove their rightfulness by showing manifest miracles and wonders. In spite of this, a series of reasons and factors caused some Shi'ah to commit error concerning the matter (of Imamate) and a number of them deviated from the straight path. These factors can be stated as follows:

1. Repression

After 40 AH intense persecution and repression of the descendants of the Prophet (*'a*) and their followers prevailed. This suppression hindered some Shi'ah from establishing a link with their Imams to have enough acquaintanceship with them.

During the second half of the first century, in particular after 72 AH and the defeat of 'Abd Allah ibn Zubayr who was anti-Shi'ah, Hajjaj ibn Yusuf ruled over Iraq and Hijaz for twenty years, brutally suppressed, killed and imprisoned the Shi'ah, expelling them from Iraq and Hijaz.[4]

Imam as-Sajjad (*'a*) was exercising dissimulation {*taqiyyah*} and he could express the Shi'ah teachings only within the framework of supplication {*du'a*}. The Kaysaniyyah sect emerged during that time.

Although Imam al-Baqir and Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) enjoyed relative freedom and were able to propagate the Shi'ah fundamentals and teachings, when the 'Abbasid caliph assumed power, he focused his attention on the Shi'ah. And when he heard the news of the martyrdom of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*), he wrote a letter to his governor in Medina instructing him to identify and behead the successor of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*).

Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) designated five persons as his "successors"—Abu Ja'far al-Mansur, Muhammad ibn Sulayman, 'Abd Allah, Musa, and Hamidah.[5] Imam al-Kazim (*'a*) languished in prison for a long time.

Initially, the 'Abbasid caliph Musa al-Hadi imprisoned the Imam and released him after sometime. Harun arrested the Imam four times and prevented the Shi'ah from visiting him.[6] The Shi'ah remained in limbo and without a guardian paving the way for Isma'iliyyah and Fathiyyah preachers. At the time, the Shi'ah had nobody to clarify their doubts. The 'Abbasid rule's control and surveillance over Imam al-Kazim's (*'a*) activities were such that even 'Ali ibn Isma'il, the Imam's nephew, was relaying information regarding him.[7]

Yes, most of the Shi'ah at the time were not sure whether Imam al-Kazim (*'a*) was alive or not. As Yahya ibn Khalid Barmaki used to say,
I uprooted the religion of the *rafidhi*s {dissidents} (pejoratively referring to the Shi'ah) because they were thinking that religion without the Imam will not survive and remain alive, while today they do not know whether their Imam is alive or not."[8]

During the moment of Imam al-Kazim's (*'a*) martyrdom, none of the Shi'ah were present on the scene. This matter seems to be the reason why the Waqifiyyah would deny the death of the Imam though financial issues contributed more to the emergence of this sect.

Yes, the infallible Imams (*'a*) were under constant 'Abbasid surveillance. They even coerced Imam al-Hadi and Imam al-'Askari (*'a*) to live in the military city of Samarra so as to keep them under constant surveillance. After the martyrdom of Imam al-'Askari (*'a*), the 'Abbasids imprisoned his spouses and bondwomen with the aim of identifying the Imam's successor (the Master of the Age, Imam al-Mahdi (*'a*)). Even Ja'far ibn 'Ali, known as Ja'far al-Kadhdhab (Ja'far the Liar) used to act against his brother Imam al-'Askari (*'a*). As such, the *Ghulat* doctrines were spread through Nasiriyyah founded by Muhammad ibn Nasir Fihri. A number of them gathered around Ja'far and then he started claiming for the Imamate.[9]

2. Taqiyyah {Dissimulation}

Taqiyyah {dissimulation} means expression of what is contrary to the truth when there is fear for the life of a Muslim. It is adopted in following previous laws and the law of Islam as dictated by both the text and reason.

For example, 'the believer among the family of Pharaoh' {*mu'min al fir'awn*} kept his faith in secret out of fear of Pharaoh and his men. Among the companions of the Messenger of Allah (S), 'Ammar also exercised *taqiyyah* on account of torture and persecution perpetuated against him by the polytheists {*mushrikun*} (of Mecca). When he was crying (for repentance) beside the Prophet (S) for doing so, the Prophet (S) said to him: "You have to do the same if they torture you again."[10]

Since the Shi'ah have always been few in numbers, they practiced *taqiyyah* in a bid to survive and save their lives. This method was responsible for the preservation of the school of Shi'ism. As Dr. Samirah Mukhtar al-Laythi writes,
Among the contributory factors for the perpetuation of the Shi'ah movement are *taqiyyah* and the clandestine propagation, which gave opportunity to the nascent Shi'ah movement to advance away from the attention of the 'Abbasid caliphs and their governors.[11]

But on the other hand, *taqiyyah* has been one of the causes of rifts within Shi'ism because the Shi'ah used to conceal their beliefs out of fear of the tyrants of the day. Even the Imams (*'a*) used to do so. On account of the atmosphere of strangulation, the infallible Imams (*'a*) somehow refrained from explicitly declaring their Imamate. This matter is indicated clearly in a dialogue between Imam ar-Ridha (*'a*) and some followers of Waqifiyyah:

'Ali ibn Abi Hamzah who was a Waqifi asked Imam ar-Ridha (*'a*): "What happened to your father?" The Imam replied: "He passed away." Ibn Abi Hamzah said: "Whom did he appoint as the successor after him?" The Imam answered: "It is me." He said: "So, are you the Imam ought to be obeyed?"

The Imam responded: "Yes." Ibn Siraj and Ibn Makari (two other Waqifis) inquired: "Has your father determined it for you?" Imam ar-Ridha (*'a*): "Woe to you! There is no need for me to say, 'He has designated me.' Do you like me to go to Baghdad and say to Harun, 'I am the Imam ought to be obeyed'? By God! I do not have such a duty."

Ibn Abi Hamzah said: "You expressed something which had never been expressed by any of your forefathers." The Imam said: "By God! My best grandfather, namely, the Prophet, expressed it when the verse was revealed and God commanded him to convey the message to his nearest of kin."[12]

During the time of Imam al-Baqir (*'a*), a number of the Shi'ah abandoned their belief in his Imamate, on account of his exercise of *taqiyyah* in dealing with some issues, and embraced Zaydiyyah Batriyyah.[13]

Meanwhile, some people who could not grasp the expediency of *taqiyyah* accused the pure Imams (*'a*) of error for not explicitly expressing their Imamate. They were in a sense radical and extremist. This motive had far-reaching contribution in the emergence of Zaydiyyah.

As such, when the pressure and repression were lessened and there were some opportunity for the pure Imams (*'a*) to prove their Imamate, sprouting of Shi'ah groups were minimal. During the time of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) when there was good opportunity and the Imam had freedom of action due to the conflicts

between the Umayyads and the ‘Abbasids, we witnessed the least number of rifts that take place, but after his martyrdom when the pressure and persecution of the ‘Abbasid caliph Mansur prevailed, the Nawusiyyah, Isma‘iliyyah, Khatabiyyah, Qaramatah, Samtiyyah, and Fathiyyah sects emerged.[14]

During the time of Imam ar-Rida (*‘a*), the condition was again favorable and even during the caliphate of Harun, the Imam enjoyed relative freedom of action. At the time, a number of the leading figures of Waqifiyyah such as ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Hajjaj, Rafa‘ah ibn Musa, Yunus ibn Ya‘qub, Jamil ibn Dibaj, Hamad ibn ‘Isa, and others abandoned their faith and believed in the Imamate of Imam ar-Ridha (*‘a*).

Similarly, after the martyrdom of the Imam, notwithstanding the young age of Imam al-Jawad (*‘a*), less rifts within Shi‘ism took place due to the efforts of Imam ar-Ridha (*‘a*) in introducing his son as his successor.

3. Ambition for Leadership

Whenever repression was prevalent and the pure Imams (*‘a*) were practicing *taqiyyah* for the preservation of the foundation of Shi‘ism and protecting the lives of the Shi‘ah, opportunist and power-greedy individuals within the ranks of the Shi‘ah, though without much belief in religion, used to take advantage of this condition. For example, in reply to one of his companions who asked about the contradiction of *hadith*s, Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) said: “There are those who want to possess the world and acquire leadership by means of personally interpreting {*ta’wil*} our *hadith*s.”[15]

For this reason, during the second century AH and after the spread of Shi‘ism as well as after the martyrdom of Imam as-Sadiq, Imam al-Kazim and Imam al-‘Askari (*‘a*), such opportunist and leadership-greedy individuals multiplied in the midst of the Shi‘ah and founded different sects for financial and political motives. After Imam al-Baqir (*‘a*) Mughayrah ibn Sa‘id claimed that he is the Imam and he has been designated by Imam as-Sajjad and Imam al-Baqir (*‘a*). Hence, his supporters were called followers of Mughayriyyah.

After the martyrdom of Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) the Nawusiyyah and Khatabiyyah sects came into existence whose founders used to utilize the names of Imam as-Sadiq (*‘a*) and his son Isma‘il in a bid to draw the people’s attention toward themselves. Ibn Nawus was the founder of Nawusiyyah; his followers denied Imam as-Sadiq’s (*‘a*) death and pointed to him as the Mahdi. The followers of Khatabiyyah rejected the death of Isma‘il, Imam as-Sadiq’s (*‘a*) son, and introduced their leader as the Imam after these two personages.[16]

The peak of financial motives in founding a certain sect was after the martyrdom of Imam al-Kazim (*‘a*). Yunus who was one of the companions of Imam al-Kazim (*‘a*) narrated that when Abu’l-Hasan Imam al-Kazim (*‘a*) passed away, each of his deputies acquired abundant possessions and wealth. As such, they suspended their judgment concerning the Imam and denied his death. For example, Ziyad Qanadi had a deposit of seventy thousand dinars while ‘Ali ibn Hamzah had three thousand dinars. Yunus thus

wrote:

When I saw that condition and the truth became clear to me and also, I learned of the issue of Imamate of Hadhrat Ridha (*'a*), I started relaying the truths and inviting the people toward the Imam. Those two persons pursued me, asking: "Why are you are calling on the people toward the Imamate of Ridha? If your motive is to acquire money, we shall make you rich" and they offered ten thousand dinars to me but I refused. They became angry with me and expressed enmity and hostility toward me.[17]

Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allah al-Ash'ari also says:
After the martyrdom of Imam al-Kazim (*'a*), the followers of Hasmawiyyah sect believed that Imam al-Kazim (*'a*) did not die and was never imprisoned rather he was in occultation and he is the Mahdi. Their leader was Muhammad ibn Bashir who claimed that the seventh Imam appointed him as the successor; that rings and all things that the people need in the affairs of the religion and the world had been granted to him; that all prerogatives had been given to him; and that he assumed the position of the Imam.

Then, he was allegedly the Imam after Imam al-Kazim (*'a*) and at the time that this Muhammad ibn Bashir was about to die he designated his son, Sami' ibn Muhammad, as his successor, alleging that obedience to him is obligatory till the appearance of al-Kazim (*'a*). He also urged people to give to Sami' ibn Muhammad whatever they want to offer in the way of God. These people were labeled as "*mamturah*".[18]

4. The Existence of Mentally Weak Individuals

There were coward individuals among the Shi'ah who, when they would see a miracle from the Imam of their time, their intellect could not digest it and they would start expressing extreme beliefs notwithstanding the fact that the pure Imams (*'a*) themselves used to strongly combat such beliefs. As narrated in *Rijal Kashi*, seventy black-skinned persons residing in Basrah expressed extreme beliefs about 'Ali (*'a*) after the Battle of Jamal.[19]

Opportunist and leadership-greedy elements also exploited the spirit of these people, misguiding them and letting them do things for their own benefit. For example, Abi'l-Khattab founded the Khattabiyyah sect, introduced Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) in the position of prophethood, allegedly bestowed on him by God, and claimed himself to be the Imam and successor of Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*).[20]

Also, during the minor occultation {*ghaybah as-sughrah*} of the Imam of the Time (*'a*), Ibn Nasir initially introduced himself as the 'door' (medium) {*bab*} and deputy {*wakil*} of the Imam in explaining the religions laws and collecting the religious funds. Later on, he started claiming prophethood and finally went to the extent of claiming divinity.[21] His followers also accepted him as such. As a matter of fact, it was on account of such a mentality of his followers that he made such claims. In essence, extremist sects were founded under such grounds.

The Infallible Imams' ('a) Campaign against Extreme Views

One of the potent dangers that threatened the Shi'ah throughout history is the issue of the extremists {*ghalis*} and the attribution of their views to the Shi'ah. The state of affairs is such that the adversaries and enemies of the Shi'ah have always accused them of committing extremism and fanaticism with respect to their Imams.

At this juncture, we shall not engage in talking about the different extremist {*ghullah*} sects, discussing their views and beliefs. Of course, it must be noted that the most salient feature and point of convergence of all the extremist sects is their extremism with respect to the right of the Imams by blasphemously elevating their station to the station of divinity.

The existence of the extremists {*ghullat*} among the Muslims is caused more by external factors than internal ones. Through direct and face-to-face confrontations and encounters, the enemies of Islam were not able to strike a blow to Islam while Islam enlightened their lands and defeated its enemies. As such, they decided to strike a blow to Islam from within. So, they targeted the principal principles of Islam.

The political establishments were also not disinterested in encouraging, or at least tolerating, such individuals to emerge from among the Shi'ah and followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* of the Prophet (S) so as to attribute these individuals' views to the Shi'ah, and in so doing, the followers of the *Ahl al-Bayt* could be presented as extremists and outside the community of Muslims.

Although this trend had started since the caliphate of the Commander of the Faithful (*'a*) and a number of mentally weak elements held extreme views regarding him (who were executed for not recanting their deviant views),22 'Abd Allah ibn Saba' is a fictitious and imaginary figure. The first person to have mentioned him is Tabari the historian. He, in turn, has taken the account of this Ibn Saba' from Sayf ibn 'Umar, whose being known as a liar has been unanimously agreed upon by the scholars of *rijal*.23

The pure Imams (*'a*) had always faced this problem and strongly combated it, constantly cursing the extremists and informing the people of the danger posed by these extremists. The Imams (*'a*) used to order the Shi'ah not to socialize with them nor establish relationship with them.24 Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) had mentioned the names of a number of chief extremists {*ghalis*} such as Mughayrah ibn Sa'id, Bayan, Sa'id Nahdi, Harith Shami, 'Abd Allah ibn Harith, Hamzah ibn 'Ammar Barbari, and Abu'l-Khattab, and cursed them.25

As the effect of the pure Imams' (*'a*) curse, they suffered from pain and torment and were killed under terrible conditions. As Imam ar-Ridha (*'a*) says,
Banan used to tell lies about Imam as-Sajjad (*'a*); God made him taste the sharpness of the sword. Mughayrah ibn Sa'id used to tell lies about Imam al-Baqir (*'a*) and he also tasted the sharpness of the sword. Muhammad ibn Bashir used to lie about Abu'l-Hasan al-Kazim (*'a*) and God, the Exalted, also

made him perish via the sword. Abu'l-Khattab used to lie about Abu 'Abd Allah Imam as-Sadiq (*'a*) and he was also killed via the sword. And the one telling lies about me is Muhammad ibn Furat.[26]

The period of Imam Hasan al-'Askari had been one of the periods when the trend of extremism {*ghullah*} gained optimal momentum. It is for this reason that the Imam had cursed individuals such as Qasim Yaqtini, 'Ali ibn Haskah Qummi, Ibn Baba Qummi Fihri, Muhammad ibn Nasir Numayri, and Fars ibn Hatam Qazwini who were considered among the chiefs and leaders of extremism.[27]

Therefore, in Shi'ah-populated regions such as Qum there had always been an anti-extremism {*ghullah*} atmosphere and the extremists were not permitted to reside there. For this reason, in describing the personal characters of Husayn ibn 'Abd Allah Muharrar, Ibn Dawud has said: "It is reported that he always expelled from the city of Qum those who were accused of extremism."[28]

As narrated by Ibn Hajm, Abu'l-Hasan Muhammad ibn Ahmad, a son of Imam al-Kazim (*'a*) who, during the third century AH, lived in Azerbaijan where he was held in high esteem, was so strict against the preachers of extremist sects that they provided the means for his murder and they persuaded Mufallah Ghulam ibn Abi's-Saj, the governor of Azerbaijan, to kill him.[29]

Lesson 23: Summary

Although the blessed names of the twelve Imams (*'a*) are recorded in the Prophetic traditions and the Shi'ah were familiar with their names prior to meeting them, a series of reasons and factors caused some Shi'ah to commit error with respect to the matter (Imamate) and to deviate from the straight path. Among these factors are the following:

1. Repression: After 40 AH when the Umayyads assumed power, repression of the Shi'ah community was the order of the day. The same state of affairs prevailed during the 'Abbasid period, and this condition caused the Shi'ah not to be able to acquire the necessary knowledge about their Imams.

2. *Taqiyyah* {dissimulation}: *Taqiyyah* contributed to the preservation of the Shi'ah school. Yet, it has also been one of the factors for the emergence of rifts within Shi'ism because the pure Imams (*'a*) used to avoid explicitly declaring their Imamate.

3. Ambition for leadership and love of the world: There were always opportunist individuals in the ranks of the Shi'ah who used to take advantage of the atmosphere of strangulation prevalent in the Shi'ah community and create sects to advance their personal interests.

4. The existence of mentally weak individuals: There were mentally weak individuals among the Shi'ah whose minds could not properly grasp the miracles that they witnessed from the Imams and would start to hold extreme views.

The issue of extremism {*ghullah*} was one of the most serious dangers that had threatened the Shi'ah.

The pure Imams (*'a*) always confronted this matter, intensely informing the people of its peril.

Lesson 23: Questions

1. What were the reasons behind the rifts within Shi'ism?

2. How did the Imams (*'a*) combat extremist trends?

1. Surah an-Nisa' 4:59.
2. Mahdi Pishva'i, Shakhsiyyat-ha-ye Islami-ye Shi'eh, 1st edition (Qum: Intisharat-e Tawhid, 1359 AHS), p. 63 as quoted from Tafsir Safi, vol. 1, p. 366; Kamal ad-Din wa Tamam an-Ni'mah with Persian translation (Tehran), vol. 1, p. 365.
3. 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. 218.
4. Muhammad Husayn Zayn 'Amili, Ash-Shi'ah fi't-Tarikh, trans. Muhammad-Rida 'Ata'i, 2nd edition (Mashhad: Bunyad-e Pazhuhesh-ha-ye Islami-ye Astan-e Quds-e Radhawi, 1375 AHS), p 120.
5. Abi 'Ali al-Fadhl ibn al-Hasan Tabarsi, I'lam al-Wara bi A'lam al-Huda (Qum: Mu'assasah Al al-Bayt Li Ihya' at-Turath, 1417 AH), vol. 2, p. 13.
6. Muhammad Husayn Muzaffar, Tarikh ash-Shi'ah (Qum: Manshurat Maktabah Basirati, n.d.), p. 47.
7. 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Abu'l-Faraj al-Isfahani, Maqatil at-Talibiyyin (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1416 AH), p. 414.
8. Ash-Shi'ah fi't-Tarikh, p. 123.
9. 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.
10. Sayyid Muhsin Amin, A'yan ash-Shi'ah (Beirut: Dar at-Ta'aruf Li'l-Matbu'at, n.d.), p. 199.
11. Dr. Samirah Mukhtar al-Laythi, Jihad ash-Shi'ah (Beirut: Dar al-Jayl, 1396 AH), p. 394.
12. Ibid., p. 763.
13. 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. 75.
14. Ibid., p. 79.
15. Ikhtiyar Ma'rifah ar-Rijal (Rijal Kashi), vol. 1, p. 374.
16. Ibid., p. 80.
17. Ash-Shi'ah fi't-Tarikh, p. 123 as quoted from Shaykh at-Tusi, Al-Ghaybah, p. 46.
18. Al-Maqalat wa'l-Firaq, p. 91.
19. When the Commander of the Faithful ('a) was relieved of the Battle of the Jamal, seventy black-skinned persons residing in Basrah came to the Imam and talked to him in their vernacular. 'Ali ('a) talked to them in their vernacular, too. Hence, they started expressing extreme views about the Imam. 'Ali ('a) told them, "I am a servant of God and His creature." They did not believe and even insisted that the Imam is equal to God. So, the Imam asked them to repent to God for holding such a deviant view, but they violently refused to repent. As such, they had been executed. Ikhtiyar Ma'rifah ar-Rijal (Rijal Kashi), vol. 1, p. 325.
20. Shahristani, Kitab al-Milal wa'n-Nihal (Qum: Manshurat ash-Sharif ar-Radi, 1364 AHS), vol. 1, p. 160.
21. Ikhtiyar Ma'rifah ar-Rijal (Rijal Kashi), vol. 2, p. 805.
22. Ikhtiyar Ma'rifah ar-Rijal (Rijal Kashi), vol. 1, p. 325.
23. 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.}
24. Ikhtiyar Ma'rifah ar-Rijal (Rijal Kashi), vol. 2, p. 586.
25. Ibid., p. 577.
26. Ibid., p. 591.
27. Ibid., p. 805.

28. Rijal ibn Dawud (Qum: Manshurat ar-Radhi, n.d.), p. 240.

29. Abu Muhammad ‘Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Sa‘id ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, Jumhazah Insab al-‘Arab, 1st edition (Beirut: n.p., 1403 AH), p. 63.

Source URL:

https://www.al-islam.org/history-shiism-advent-islam-end-minor-occultation-ghulam-husayn-muharrami/part-6-rifts-within-shiism#comment-0