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Article

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Life

Abu al-Hasan Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Musawi, popularly known as Sayyid or Sharif Razi, lived a brief but highly fruitful life. So great has been his contribution to Islamic sciences that a study of his life and works requires an analysis of almost all works on history, biographies and literature written since the 5th century AH.

The life of Sayyid Razi who was born in 359 AH/970 CE in Baghdad and died in the year 406/1015 in his hometown, coincided with the era of the Buyid dynasty (334-447/946-1056) which had reduced the Abbasid caliphs to mere nominal rulers. It was the golden age of Arabic literature and among his contemporaries mention could be made of the great poets al-Mutinabbi and Abu al- 'Ala' Mu'arri.

Sayyid Razi was born in a prominent household directly descended from the Prophet, as is clear from the epithets of 'Sayyid' and 'Sharif by which he was referred. His father Abu Ahmad Husayn bin Musa was fifth in line of descent from the 7th Imam, Musa al-Kazim (as), and held the prestigious position of the Naqib al-Nuqaba ' of Iraq, a responsibility which required the managing of affairs of the Sadats (Prophet's descendants).

He was given the title of 'Tahir Awhad Dhu al-Manaqib' and died in 396 and was buried in the shrine of Imam Husayn (as) in Karbala'. At his death, Sayyid Razi, who had been acting as his father's deputy since 381, officially became the Naqib al-Nuqaba' and held the position till his own death in 406/1015. His father's genealogy reads: Husayn bin Musa bin Muhammad bin Musa bin Ibrahim Mujab bin Imam Musa al-Kazim (as).

Sayyid Razi's mother Fatimah also traced her lineage to the Prophet and was the daughter of Husayn bin Abu Muhammad al- Hasan al-Utrush bin 'Ali bin Hasan bin 'Umar al-Ashraf the son of the 4th Infallible Imam, 'Ali ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-'Abidin (as). She was a pious and noble lady, and was held in high esteem by scholars and other notables. At her request, the great scholar Shaykh Mufid compiled the book Ahkam al-Nisa' which contains the fiqhi rules for women. Her family had carved out an

independent principality in Tabaristan on the southern coasts of the Caspian Sea. She died in Baghdad in 385 AH.

There is an interesting story how Sayyid Razi and his elder brother 'Ali Abu al-Qasim Sayyid Murtaza started their formal Islamic education.

According to Ibn Abi al-Hadid in Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah, Shaykh Mufid saw a dream that a lady appearing to be the Prophet's daughter Hazrat Fatimah Zahra' (as) entered his mosque in the Karkh locality of Baghdad with two small boys and asked him to teach them fiqh. The Shaykh woke up in a rather perplexed state of mind in view of his own paucity of knowledge when compared to Imam Hasan (as) and Imam Husayn (as). But the next day when Fatimah, the wife of the Naqib al-Nuqaba ', entered the mosque with her two sons and requested him to teach them Islamic sciences, he understood the purport of his dream and accepted her request with great honour.1

The two brothers together soon mastered different branches of Islamic sciences under Shaykh Mufid and other leading scholars of Baghdad, but unlike Sayyid Razi who was more inclined towards politics and literature, Sayyid Mortaza was deeply interested in fiqh.

Sayyid Murtaza, who acquired the epithet of 'Alam al-Huda, was four years older than his brother and died at the age of 81 years in 436/ 1044. He served as Naqib al-Nuqaba' after the death of Sayyid Razi and was considered a master of kalam, fiqh, usul al- fiqh, literature, grammar, poetry and other fields of knowledge. His divan or poetical composition runs into more than 20,000 verses. He authored several books such as al-Shafi fl al-Imamah, al- Dhakh'irah fi Usul al-Fiqh, al-Ghurar wa al-Durar, and al-Tanzih.2

All Shi'ite and Sunni scholars acknowledge that Sayyid Murtaza was the greatest scholar of his era and groomed many outstanding 'ulama' including the famous Shaykh al-Ta'ifah Abu Ja'far al-Tusi, the founder of the celebrated theological Centre of Najaf.

Sayyid Razi's only son Abu Ahmad 'Adnan was also a prominent scholar of his time and after the death of his uncle Sayyid Murtaza, he was entrusted with the post of Naqib al- Nuqaba'. He was given the title of his grandfather 'Taher Dhu al- Manaqeb' by the Buhid ruler and was highly respected for his knowledge and nobility of character. 'Adnan died issueless in 449 and with his death the physical line of Sayyid Razi came to an end. However, Sayyid Razi was destined for lasting fame in view of his valuable works, especially the compilation of the sermons, letters, and maxims of Imam Ali (as) under the title Nahj al-Balaghah.

Teachers and Students

Sayyid Razi's genius flowered in early youth under the celebrated Abi 'Abdullah Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Nu'man known popularly as Shaykh Mufid. Among his other teachers, mention could be

made of the Malikite jurist Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bin Ahmad Tabari, the grammarian Abu 'Ali Hasan bin Ahmad 'Abd al-Ghaffar al-Farsi, Abu Sa'id Hasan bin 'Abdullah bin Marzban al-Baghdadi who was known as Qazi Sirafi, the Mu'tazalite scholar Abu al-Hasan Qazi 'Abd al-Jabbar bin Ahmad al-Baghdadi, the preacher Abu Yahya 'Abd al-Rahim bin Muhammad Fariqi known as Khatib al-Misri, the Qazi of Baghdad Abu Muhammad 'Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Asadi al-Akfani, Abu al-Fath 'Uthman ibn al-Jinni al-Musili al-Baghdadi (d. 392/1002), Abu al-Hasan 'Ali bin Isa Raba'i al-Baghdadi al-Shirazi (d. 420/1029), Abu al-Qasim Isa bin 'Ali bin Isa Dawud bin Jarrah al-Baghdadi, Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Musa al- Khawarazmi al-Baghdadi, the Hanafite scholar Muhammad bin Yahya bin Mahdi Abu 'Abdullah al-Jurjani and Abu Muhammad Sahl bin Ahmad bin 'Abdullah bin Sahl al-Dibaji. 3

As is evident Sayyid Razi studied under scholars of different religious persuasions in order to master the various branches of the sciences and to state with authority his own views and beliefs. Sayyid Razi started holding his own classes at a very young age, by setting up a school near his house in the Karkh locality and named it Dar al-'Ilm. It was a large school consisting of several buildings and halls for convening classes, presenting speeches and holding meetings and academic debates with researchers. It also had resident quarters for eligible students and was equipped with a large library filled with important Arabic and Islamic reference books and sources.

Sayyid Razi, personally administered the school, student affairs and the library. He constantly sought to meet the welfare needs of the students, so that they could go about their studies with a clear mind. As a result, a great number of intellectuals graduated from his school, which had become popular throughout the Islamic lands including Iran and Egypt. Needless to say, these graduates in turn taught and transferred their knowledge acquired through Sayyid Razi to other generations.

Among the students of Sayyid Razi who became outstanding scholars mention could be made of:

1. Abu Zayd Sayyid 'Abdullah al-Kabayiki al-Husayni al- Jurjani.

2. Abu 'Abdullah Shaykh Muhammad bin 'Ali Hulwani.

3. Abu 'Abdullah Shaykh Ja'far bin Muhammad bin Ahmad Duryasti 'Abasi, (d. 473).

4. Abu al-Hasan Sayyid 'Ali bin Bindar bin Muhammad Qazi Hashimi.

5. Hafiz Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman bin Abi Bakr Khuza'i Nayshaburi, (d. 445).

6. Abu Bakr Nayshaburi Ahmad bin Husayn bin Ahmad Khuza'i, (d. 480).

7. Aba al-Hasan Mahyar Daylami bin Marzawayh (d. 428).

8. Qazi Abu Mansur Muhammad bin Abi Nasr 'Ukbari Mu'addil Baghdadi, (d. 472).

Works

Sayyid Razi was an outstanding Arabic poet and a literary genius, and his aesthetic taste could be evinced from his works.Abd al-Latif Shararah says of him:

This great man in his relatively short life as compared to Abu al-'Ala al-Mu'arri, besides keeping pace with important events and political developments, was engrossed in literature, literary research, and the study of rhetorical aspects and fiqh. As the Naqib, he assumed responsibility of the affairs of the Talibiyyin (descendants of Abu Talib) and led the Hajj pilgrimage. At the same time he established the Dar al-'Ilm Academy and wrote a number of books.

His most famous work for which he made great efforts and named it Nahj al-Balaghah, is a collection of the sermons, letters and maxims of Imam 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as), Ibn Abi al-Hadid has written a commentary on this book in 20 volumes while Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh has made it available to the common man in a summarised interpretation. Sharif Razi also devoted himself to research on the rhetorical and linguistic aspects of Arabic, and the fruit of his efforts is the book Talkhis al-Bayan ji Majazat al- Qur'an, which has been researched and published in 464 pages by Muhammad 'Abd al-Ghani Hasan.[4]

Talkhis al-Bayan fi Majazat al-Qur'an

Sayyid Razi had referred to this work many times in his other book Majazat al-Athar al-Nabawiyyah but it was given up for lost for several centuries until the accidental discovery of its manuscript by Sayyid Muhammad Mishkat who published it as a Photostat edition in 1950. It is a detailed study on the metaphorical aspects of the surahs and ayahs of the Holy Qur'an and is considered among the greatest literary treasures of Islam. In the words of the author: "Before me, no one has dealt with this subject so exclusively."

According to Muhammad 'Abd al-Ghani Hasan who researched and published this invaluable work from Cairo in 1955, whatever Abu 'Ubaydah Mu'ammar ibn al-Muthanna[5] (Majaz al-Qur'an in the last part of the 2nd century AH), al-Jahiz (in al-Bayan wa al- Tabyin and al-Hayawan) and his student Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) had written on the subject of majaz (metaphor) in the holy Qur'an was in a very limited sense and was confined to interpretation of certain ayahs, but Talkhis al-Bayan is the first exclusive work with the specific aim of studying the metaphorical aspects and different meanings of the Qur'anic vocabulary as found in the surahs and ayahs of the Book of God. However, Razi's work is not an exegesis of the holy Qur'an and deals with only those ayahs which have a metaphorical import.

Majazat al-Athar al-Nabawiyyah

Prophet Muhammad (S) is considered the most fluent of the Arabs and his speech and words are the most eloquent form and style of Arabic after the Revealed Word of Almighty Allah, the Holy Qur'an.

Since the time of the Prophet, several scholars have diligently recorded, compiled, quoted and written commentaries on his sayings, to the extent that numerous collections, which could fill up libraries, have been published. However, what Sayyid Razi, the literary genius has been able to accomplish in this respect, in the same manner as his unique compilation of Imam 'Ali's (as) literary output under the title of Nahj al-Balaghah, is quite different.

It is clear that this work was undertaken after completing Nahj al- Balaghah, since he often refers to Nahj in Majazat al-Athar al- Nabawiyyah. Sayyid Razi selected 361 sayings of the Prophet which have a metaphorical import, and explained the meaning of each one of them. This book was written before Talkhis al-Bayan and has been published several times in Egypt, Iraq and Iran.

Haqa'iq al-Ta'wil fi Mutashabih al-Tanzil

Ahmad ibn 'Ali Dawudi in his book 'Umdah al-Talib quotes Abu al-Hasan 'Umari as saying:

"I have seen an excellent exegesis of the holy Qur'an, considered to be Razi's work, which is as voluminous or even larger than the exegesis of Aba Ja'far Tabari (or Abu Ja'far Tusi)."[6]

'Allamah Amini in al-Ghadir has stated that Haqa'iq al- Ta'wil, as mentioned in Majazat Athar al-Nabawiyyah, is an exegesis of the holy Qur'an compiled by Sayyid Razi, who in another place has referred to it as 'the great book on Mutashabihat al-Qur'an. Abu al-'Abbas al-Najashi in his al-Fihrist has referred to it as Haqa'iq al-Tanzil, while the author of 'Umdah al-Talib has called it al-Mutashabih fi al-Qur'an.[7]

Ibn al-Jinni, the teacher of Sayyid Razi, in his introduction to this book has stated: "Razi has written a book on the interpretation of the Qur'an which has no parallel."[8] Khatib Baghdadi in his book Tarikh al-Baghdad has quoted his teacher, Ahmad ibn Muhammad (d. 445) as saying: "Razi's book of interpretation of the Qur'an is unique and unparalleled."[9] The purport of writing this exegesis was to prove with convincing argument that the holy Qur'an contains nothing superfluous and every letter has its own place and meaning.

Ma'ani al-Qur'an

This is another work on the holy Qur'an ascribed to Sayyid Razi. Abu al-Hasan al 'Umari (Nassabah) in his book al-Mujdi says that he saw a part of the exegesis of the holy Qur'an ascribed to Razi and found it is as great as Abu Ja'far Tabari's work.

Ibn Shahr Ashub in his Ma'alim al- 'Ulama, has termed it a unique work as mentioned by al-'Umari, while Ibn Khallikan in his Wafayat al-A'yan, is of the opinion that Sayyid Razi in view of his versatility in Arabic literature cannot be equalled in interpretation of the holy Qur'an.[10]

Khasa'is al-A'immah 'Alayhim al-Salam

In his introduction to Nahj al-Balaghah, Sayyid Razi says:

In my youth, I resolved to write a book on the distinguishing qualities of the Twelve Imams (as), their history, their exemplary way of life and their wise sayings. I completed a book on the merits and qualities of Amir al-Mu'minin Imam 'Ali (as), but unfortunately, the countless complexities of daily life and other obstacles prevented me from continuing the work."[11]

This work has been published several times in Iran and Iraq under the title of Khasa'is Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali ibn Abi Talib Alayh al-Salam. The edition published by the Islamic Research Foundation of the holy shrine of Imam Reza (as) in Mashhad in 1406/1986 is considered the most authoritative and has been edited by Dr. Muhammad Hadi Amini with valuable footnotes on the basis of an old manuscript which was confirmed by Sayyid al-Imam al-Faqih Ibn Rawandi (d. 570 AH) and passed down to his student, Fakhr al- 'Ulama' Abu 'Ali 'Ubaydullah Ibn al-Husayn.

Akhbar Quzat Baghdad

According to Qazi Safi al-Din Ahmad ibn Salih Yamani Zaydi's Matla ' al- Buduur vol. 2, this is an account by Sayyid Razi of the judges (Quzat pl. of Qazi) of Baghdad.

Diwan al-Shi'r

The poetical talents of Sayyid Razi blossomed while he was a mere lad of 10 years, and the first qasidah (panegyric) composed by him made the literati of Baghdad spellbound.

Since his days, efforts were made to collect his poems and the last one to compile them as a book was Abu Hakim al-Mu'allim 'Abdullah al-Khayri (d. 476). The diwan of Sayyid Razi consists of 16,300 verses and has been popular since his lifetime. The Buyid Wazir of Iran, Sahib ibn 'Abbad, who was a prominent writer and bibliophile, was so deeply touched on hearing a poem of Razi, that he sent an emissary to Baghdad to procure a copy of the whole diwan.

Interestingly, this happened in 385 when Razi was only 26 years old, and he was so pleased that he composed a qasidah in praise of Sahib ibn 'Abbad and sent it along with the diwan. Another instance of Razi's popularity as a poet is the incident in` 399 when Taqiyyah the daughter of the Hamdanid Amir of Aleppo, Sayf al-Dawlah, sent a special messenger to Baghdad to get a copy of his diwan. Although Razi's diwan is a literary masterpiece containing valuable historical, social, scientific and cultural information and has been published several times, it is yet to be examined in an academic manner in order to realise its proper worth.

Inshirah al-Sadr fi Mukhtarat min al-Shi'r

According to Haji Khalifah in Kashfal-Zunun (vol. I p. 513) this is a selection and compilation of Sayyid Razi's poems by a contemporary scholar.

Al-Hasan min Shi'r al-Husayn

This work is a selection from the bulky 10-volume diwan titled Durrah al-Taj fi Shi'r Abi al-Hajjaj of the versatile Shi'ite poet Abu 'Abdullah Husayn ibn Ahmad Hajjaj al-Baghdadi (d.391). Sayyid Razi arranged his selection of al-Hajjaj's poetry in alphabetical order during the poet's lifetime. According to another, account, Razi named his work al-Nazif min al-Sakhif.

Al-Ziyadat fi Shi'r Ibn al-Hajjaj

Sayyid Razi after compiling al-Hasan min Shi'r al-Husaynl al-Naz'if min al-Sakhif, selected some other excellent poems of Abu 'Abdullah Husayn Ibn al-Hajjaj and gave it the title al-Ziyadat fl Shi 'r Ibn al-Hajjaj.

Al-Ziyadat fi Shi'r Abi Tammam

Abu Tammam Habib Ibn Aws al-Ta'i (d. 230), the leading poet at the Abbasid court, who was known for his humour, witticism and good manners, is said to have memorized 14,000 verses of Arabic poetry in addition to panegyrics and couplets. He had mastery over all styles of poetry but excelled all others in composing elegies, many of which he wrote in the form of moving odes on the blessed Household of Prophet Muhammad (S).

Sayyid Razi edited Abi Tammam's poems, and whatever verses he had deleted as redundant, he compiled them in a separate book, and named it al-Ziyadat fi Shi'r Abi Tammam.

Al-Mukhtar min Shi'r Ab'i Ishaq

According to al-Dhari'ah (vol. 20, p. 168), this work is a selection of the poetry of Abu Ishaq al-Sabi by Sayyid Razi.

Ta'liqah Khilaf al-Fuqaha'

According to Shaykh Tusi in al-Fihrist, this a commentary by Sayyid Razi on his brother Sayyid Murtaza's book Masa'il al Khilaf fi al-Fiqh. But al-Najashi in his al-Fihrist has ascribed Masa'il al-Khilaf fi al-Fiqh to Razi, adding that Ta'1'iqah Khilaf al Fuqaha' is an annotation of his own work.

Ta'liqah 'ala al-Izah

According to Jalal al-Din Suyuti, written by the Persian grammarian Abu Ahmad Fasawi (d. 377), and

Razi while book, added important footnotes to it.

Sirah Walidih al-Tahir

This is a biography of his father Abu Ahmad Husayn ibn Musa who was held in high esteem by the Buyids and given the title of Tahir al-Awhad Dhu al-Manaqib. He was appointed Naqib al-Nuqaba ' five times and held the office intermittently for almost 40 years. Sayyid wrote this work in 379/980-90 when he his age was 20 years.

Ma Dara Baynahu wa Bayna Abi Ishaq

Abu Ishaq al-Sabi, the writer of popular treatises and the official scribe at the court of the caliph, was a very close and intimate friend of Sayyid Razi. They carried on a correspondence in both prose and poetry. Some of these letters were gathered in a book and given the above title.

Al-Rasa'i

Sayyid Razi used to exchange scholarly and literary views with poets and the literati through letters which have been collected and published in 3 volumes.

Nahj al-Balaghah

The masterpiece of Sayyid Razi, not as a writer but as an aesthetic literary compiler, is of course Nahj al-Balaghah, which has ensured lasting fame for him. It is a selection of sermons decrees, letters, maxims and counsels of Amir al-Mu'minin Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as).

Sayyid Razi in his introduction to Nahj al-Balaghah writes:

In my early age at the dawn of youth I commenced writing a book on the characteristics of the Infallible Imams (as) covering the account of their virtues and masterpieces of their expression of words. The purpose of the compilation has been stated by me in the beginning of the book. Therein I completed the portion dealing with the account of Amir al-Mu'minin (as) but I could not finish that part concerning other Imams due to the impediments of the time and obstacles of the days. I divided it into several chapters and sections.

Thus its last section comprised whatever had been related from Imam 'Ali (as) out of his short sayings such as counsels, maxims and proverbs but not long lectures and detailed discourses. A number of my friends and brothers-in-faith, while wondering at its delicate and blossoming expressions, admired the contents of this particular section, and urged me to complete a book which should cover all the forms of the sayings of Amir al- Mu'minin (as) and their diverse forms such as lectures, letters, counsels, aphorisms, etc., as they were convinced that it would comprise wonders of eloquence and rhetoric, brilliant jewels of Arabic language and shining expressions of faith, and this had not been collected in

any other work, nor found together in any other book, because Amir al-Mu'minin (*as*) *was the fountain of eloquence and* (*his expressions*) *the source of rhetoric.*

Through him hidden delicacies of eloquence and rhetoric came to light, and from him were learnt its principles and rules. Every speaker and orator had to tread on his footprints and every eloquent preacher availed of his sayings. Even then they could not equal him so that the credit for being the First and foremost remains with him, because his words are those that carry the reflection of divine knowledge and savour of the Prophet's words.

Accordingly I acceded to their request as I knew that it meant a great reward, a handsome reputation and a treasure of recompense. The object of this compilation is that I should focus on Amir al-Mu'minin's (*as*) *greatness and superiority in the art of rhetoric, which is in addition to his countless qualities and innumerable distinctions, and to show that he was at the highest pinnacle of this attainment, is singular among all those predecessors whose sayings are quoted here and there. His words are an onrushing and irrestible and such a treasure of subtleties in language that it cannot be matched...*

In my view Amir al-Mu'minin's (*as*) *sayings may be divided into three categories; firstly Sermons and Decrees, secondly Letters and Communications, and thirdly Maxims and Counsels. Allah- willing I have decided to compile first the Sermons, then Letters, and then the Maxims and Counsels and have chosen a separate section for each category, leaving blank pages in between each so that if anything has been left out and becomes available afterwards it may be inserted therein, whereas any expression which is routine or in reply to some question or has some other aim and does not fit in any of my divisions should be included in the category for which it is most suitable or to which its subject matter is most akin. In this compilation of mine in some places there is repetition of words or subject matter.*

The explanation for this is that Amir al- Mu'minin's (*as*) *wordings have been related in numerous forms. Sometimes it happened that a particularly saying was found in a particular form in a narration and was taken down in that very form.*

Thereafter the same wordings were found in some other narration either with acceptable addition or in a better style of expression. In such a case with a view to further the subject of compilation and to present a beautiful expression from being lost it was decided to repeat it. It has also happened that a particular wording had appeared earlier but due to remoteness it has been entered again.

This is through omission, not by intent. In spite of all this I do not claim that I have collected Amir al-Mu'minin's (*a*) *wordings from everywhere and that no single sentence of any type or construction has been left out. In fact I do not rule out the possibility that whatever has been left out might be more than what has been collected and what has been in my knowledge unused is far less than what has remained beyond my reach. My task was to strive to the best of my capacity and it was Allah's part to make the way easy and guide me to the goal...* [12]

And, at the end of the book, Sayyid Razi concludes:

This is the end of our selection of the wordings of Amir al- Mu'minin (as), and now, it is time to conclude the selected words of Amir al-Mu'minin (as). We are grateful to Allah the Glorified for having enabled us to collect the scattered sayings and wordings from various sources and to bring together from different places the material that was lying far away... This book has been completed in the month of Rajab in the year 400 AH. May Allah send His blessings on our Master Muhammad, the Last of Messengers and the Guide to the best path, and on his infallible progeny, and his companions who are the stars of conviction.[13]

As its title suggests, Nahj al-Balaghah (Peak of Eloquence) remains an unmatched book in terms of eloquence. It is a treasure trove of wisdom. According to Sayyid Razi, he compiled the sermons, letters and sayings of Imam 'Ali (as) in order to serve as a model for the literati, to embellish the speeches of orators, and to guide the seekers of knowledge. The book proved an instant success and was welcomed by scholars of various religious persuasions. For more than two centuries after its compilation, both Shi'ites and Sunnis wrote elucidative commentaries on the wordings of Imam 'Ali (as) as compiled by Razi. The famous Sunni scholar of Abbasid Baghdad, 'Allamah Ibn Abi al-Hadid Mu'tazili (d. 655) in his renowned commentary on Nahj al- Balaghah, says:

His (Imam 'Ali's) eloquence is such that he is the Leader of the Eloquent and the Chief of Rhetoricians. It is said about his wordings that it is below the Word of the Creator but above the word of all creatures. ..And this very book whose commentary we are writing is enough to prove that (Imam) 'Ali (as) occupied such a high position that no one can keep pace with him, nor can he be paralleled in rhetoric... Numerous portions of this book can be termed miracles of the Prophet (S) because they cover assertions about the unknown, and beyond human capacity.[14]

Over a millennium has passed but unlike the books authored by Sayyid Razi Nahj al-Balaghah has remained a living miracle despite the attempts of certain skeptics to cast doubts over the authenticity of its contents. The first one to question the authenticity of the contents of this book was Ibn Khallikan Irbili (d. 681/1282), the author of Wafyat al-A'yan. In his book written more than 250 years after Nahj al-Balaghah, Ibn Khallikan without referring to any author or source says out of prejudice:

People have different opinions about the compiler of Nahj al-Balaghah, a collection of the wordings of Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (as). There is difference as to whether it was compiled by Sharif al-Murtaza or his brother al-Razi. It is also said that it is not at all the composition of (Imam) 'Ali (a) and that the one who compiled it and attributed it to him made it himself; but Allah knows the truth.[15]

Ibn Khallikan's unsubstantiated claims were later picked up by like, minded scholars, who repeated without citing any proofs, whether documented evidence from earlier traditionalists or the subtleties of Arabic language, when Sayyid Razi's own style be compared to what he had collected of the unsurpassed eloquence of Imam 'Ali's (as) wordings.

These skeptics were Ibn Athir Jazari (d. 739) in Mukhtasar al-Wafayat, Abu Bakr Dhahabi (d. 748) in

M'izan al-I'tiddl; Salah al-Din Safdi (d. 764) in al-Wafi fi al- Wafayat; Yafi'i (d. 768) in Mir'at al Jinan; Ibn Hajar 'Asqalani (d. 852) in Lisan al-Mizan; Ibn al-'Imad Dhahabi Hanbali (d. 1089) in Shadharat al-Dhahab, and some modern scholars such as the Egyptian writer Ahmad Amin; Khayr al-Din Zirikli, the author of al-A'lam; the Lebanese Christian scholar Jurji Zaydan and the orientalist Brockleman.

However, a glance at the list of these skeptics, reveals two flawed concepts in their arguments against the genuineness of Nahj al-Balaghah. First they claim that Sayyid Murtaza is its author, and second they allege that most of the contents of this unique book are forged and falsely attributed to Imam 'Ali (as). On closer scrutiny, these accusations turn out to be wild imaginations of their own clouded minds.

The first point raised by them betrays their ignorance and is disproved by Sayyid Razi's introduction to Nahj al-Balaghah, where he mentions in clear terms that a chapter at the end of his own work Khasa'is provided the incentive for him to embark on collecting and selecting the wordings of Imam 'Ali (as).

Moreover, in his later works such as Majazat al-Athar al- Nabawiyyah (p. 41 and four other instances) and Haqa'iq al- Ta'wil, he has referred to his compilation titled Nahj al-Balaghah. Thus in view of these clear references, any attribution of this book to Sayyid Murtaza is a big question mark on claims to scholarship of these skeptics who did not bother to differentiate between Razi and Murtaza.

The second accusation that the work is a forgery attributed to Imam 'Ali (as) also goes widely off the mark, when a study of Nahj al-Balaghah and the explanatory notes written by Sayyid Razi on some of the sermons, letters and sayings, reveals the sources from where he had copied the wordings of Amir al-Mu'minin (as).

Many of the books to which Sayyid Razi refers were compiled centuries before his birth. It would be too exhaustive and beyond the scope of this article to provide a list of all those who had compiled the wordings of Imam 'Ali (as).

It would be sufficient to say that according to existing documentary evidence, starting from Zayd ibn Wahab al-Juhani (d. 96/715) who wrote Khutab Amir al- Mu 'mimn 'ala al-Manabir fi al-Jumu'ah wa al-'Ayad wa Ghayrih, till the time of Razi's own teacher Shaykh Mufid whose book Kitab al-Irshad contains selected sermons and sayings of Imam 'Ali (as), almost 100 scholars (perhaps more are waiting to be discovered) had exclusive books to their credit or wrote exclusive chapters in their works on this subject including Jahiz (d. 255/869) and the historian Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310/922). 16

An Indian Sunni scholar, the late Imtiyaz 'Ali Khan 'Arshi, has succeeded in tracing the sources of 106 of the sermons in Nahj al-Balaghah as well as 37 letters and 79 sayings.'" 'Azizullah Attarudi of Iran in his recent research has mentioned the names and works of many predecessors of Sayyid Razi including the Imam's companions Harith al-A'war al-Hamdani and Sa'sa'ah ibn Sawhan, who had compiled the sermons, letters and sayings of Amir al-Mu'minin (as).17

In view of these undeniable facts, was it really possible for Sayyid Razi to employ two different styles of

writing, one for his own works and one – a highly eloquent one – for Nahj al– Balaghah, a book which after the holy Qur'an, stands out unrivalled in the history of Arabic literature?

For more information, refer to the following books:

al–Bayan wa al–Tabyin, Jahiz; 'Abqariyyah al–Imam 'Ali, Abbas Mahmud al– 'Aqqad; Sayri dar Nahj al–Balaghah, Murtaza Mutahhari; Pazuheshi dar Asnad wa Madarik Nahj al–Balaghah, Ashna'i ba Nahj al–Balaghah, Partovi az Nahj al–Balaghah, and Amuzesh Nahj al–Balaghah, Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Ja'fari; Masadir Nahj al–Balaghah wa Asaniduh, Sayyid 'Abd al–Zahra' Husayni; Muruj al–Dhahab, 'Ali bin al–Husayn Mas'udi; Tadhkirah al– Khawass Ibn al–Jawzi.

1. Ibn Abi al–Hadid, Sharh Nahj al–Balaghah, vol. I, p. 41.
2. Tusi, Muhammad bin al–Hasan, al–Fihrist, pp. 98–99, Intisharat al–Sharif al–Razi, Qum.
3. Amini, Muhammad Hadi, al–Sharif al–Razi, p.25.
4. Shararah, 'Abd al–Latif, al–Sharif al–Razi, p. 9.
5. Muhammad 'Alawi Muqaddam, Muqayasah–ye Majaz al– Qur'an Abu 'Ubaydah wa Talkhis al–Bayan Sayyid Razi (presentedat the 6th Nahj al–Balaghah Conference held in March 1986 in Tehran).
6. Dawudi, Ahmad bin 'Ali, 'Umdah al–Talib, p. 170.
7. Amini, 'Abd al–Husayn, al–Ghadir, vol. 4, p. 198.
8. Excerpts from the article Sayyid Razi, the Compiler of Nahj al–Balaghah by Hujjat al–Islam 'Ali Dawwani, printed in the book Nahj al–Balaghah and its Compiler, pp. 112–113. This book is published by Nahj al–Balaghah Foundation.
9. Amini, Muhammad Hadi, al–Sharif al–Razi, p. 129.
10. Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al–A'yan, vol. 4, p. 416.
11. Ja'fari, Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi, Partov az Nahj al– Balaghah, vol. I, p. 73.
12. Nahj al–Balaghah, English translation, Sayyid 'Ali Reza,pp. 113–114, published by Centre of Islamic Studies, Qum.
13. Ibid, pp. 63–64.
14. Ibn Abi al–Hadid, Sharh Nahj al–Balaghah, vol. I.
15. Ibn Khallikan, Wafayat al–A'yan, vol. 4, p. 414.
16. Istinad Nahj al–Balaghah, Imtiyaz 'Ali Khan 'Arshi.
17. Gerdawarandegan–e Sokhanan–e Imam Amir al– Mu'minin (A.S.) Qabl az Sharif Razi. Souvenir on the occasion of Nahj al–Balaghah Millennium Congress 1401 AH/I 981, Tehran, Nahj al–Balaghah Foundation, pp. 291–320.

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