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Social Situation

In this part, we will analyze the social situation of the Shi'ites, their status and their leadership authority.

1. Shi'ites' Situation

Although in that period, many cities were Shi'ite-resident centres,[xxvi] Shi'ites' condition could be described as being poor, suppressed, removed from posts and most of all, deprivation from the privilege of being with Imam (A.S) and in fact, reducing the contact with Imam (A.S) to the minimum.

1.1 Minimum contact with Imam (A.S)

Although Imam (A.S) would make contact with his Shi'ites, by any means, strict control of Imam and torture and harassment of those in contact with Imam would lead the contact of Imam with his Shi'ite to be at a minimum. This very matter would lead to adverse consequences; although with Imam's wisdom, those consequences were kept at a minimum, but not completely eliminated.

1.2 Suppression

In that period, Shi'ites were completely suppressed by Abbasid Caliphs. Mutawakkil's offences against Shi'ites varied from the network of the troops of Sh kiriyyah to destroying Imam Husayn's (A.S) shrine. To suppress Shi'ites even more, Mutawakkil commanded the governor of Egypt to exile Talibiy n to Iraq. The governor of Egypt did so; then in 236 A.H. Mutawakkil drove them out to Medina where earlier 'Alaw s (the descendents of Imam Ali) were exiled.1

Mutawakkil also warned residents of Hij z not to make any contact with 'Alaw s or support them financially. Many of them were punished very severely because of disobeying his command. As Isfah n wrote, in this way, Mutawakkil treated 'Alaw s very aggressively in Medina, whereby 'Alaw s were completely segregated from others and deprived of the very basic means of subsistence.

1.3 Dismissal from posts

According to Mas'ūdī, Mutawakkil dismissed Ishāq b. Ibrāhīm, the governor of Samarra and Sirwān in Jabal province, from his post because of being a Shi'ite.2 Many other people also lost their positions because of similar reasons.3 & 4

1.4 Withholding financial aids

Mutawakkil confiscated Fadak estates which belonged to the descendants of Lady Fatimah. According to Sayyid ibn Tawūs' writings, the income of Fadak was more than 24,000 dinars at that time. Mutawakkil gave it to his friend, 'Abdullah b. 'Umar Bezyār.5 And as mentioned before, he warned Hijāz residents not to make any contact with 'Alawīs nor support them financially.
Abu al-Faraj Isfahānī wrote: "Mutawakkil put severe financial pressures on 'Alawīs and officially banned giving any kind of aid to them. He severely punished the offenders."6

2. Social Status and the Influence of Shi'ite leadership

Despite all obstacles put by the government in their way, spiritual influence of Shi'ite Imams (A.S) increased every day. The influence was to such an extent that even extended to Caliphs' courts. Many people were greatly attracted to Imams (A.S); even some ministers and commanders wholeheartedly did believe that the Imams (A.S) were just and right, and knew them as deserving the Caliphate, although they concealed their belief. In this section some examples of Imam Hādī (A.S) and Imam 'Askarī's (A.S) social status will be mentioned.

A) Imam Hādī's (A.S) authority

Here we will mention his influence in the court, among 'Alawīs, people of the Book, Medina residents and the Shi'ites.

1. In the Court

Mutawakkil was suffering from a painful abscess. He was very ill and was dying from pain but nobody ever dared to perform a surgery on it. Mutawakkil's mother (Shujā') made a vow that if her son recovered from the illness, she would send a great deal of money to Imam Hādī (A.S). Fath b. Khāqān – a nobleman very close to him7 – suggested to Mutawakkil to send someone to Abu al-Hassan al-Hādī (A.S) and to ask him about the cure for this illness; for he (A.S) may know the cure for it and give an advice.

Mutawakkil ordered: "Send somebody to him (A.S)" Then his messenger went and came back with an instruction which cured Mutawakkil.8 Also Mutawakkil called Imam (A.S) by Yahya b. Harthamah to Samarra because of slanders against Imam (A.S) in Medina. Imam (A.S) set out for Samarra accompanied by his family. Yahya himself rendered the service to Imam (A.S) and became impressed

by Imam's piety.

The caravan travelled through desert and arrived in Baghdad. Ya'q□b□ said that as soon as Imam (A.S.) arrived in "Y□sir□yih", □sh□q b. □br□h□m the governor of Bagdad met Imam (A.S.). When he saw the eagerness and interest of people toward Imam (A.S), he invited him to stay in Baghdad that night.9

Yahya told Baghdad's governor the story. Baghdad's governor said: "This man is the Prophet's son while you know Mutawakkil's deviation from the Prophet's family; so if you tell him a wrong word about Imam H□d□ (A.S); he will kill Imam (A.S) and on the day of Judgment, the Prophet (p.b.w.h) will be your enemy..."

Yahya answered: "Swear by God, neither did I see anything in him (A.S) but the good, nor anything I disliked..." then they left Baghdad and set out for Samarra. As soon as they arrived, Yahya reached Was□f Turk□ who was a high ranking official in the government and informed him of Imam's (A.S) arrival. Was□f also warned him of telling things that would cause any danger to Imam (A.S) and told him: "O' Yahya! Swear by God, if ever slightest danger faces Imam (A.S), you will be the only person responsible for it..."

Yahya was surprised by the similarity of Ish□q and Was□f's concern about guarding Imam (A.S) and his health.10 Imam's (A.S) popularity was to the extent that upon his arrival in Mutawakkil's court, all courtiers and security guards would stand up before him, involuntarily open the doors immediately without any delay or question and draw aside the curtains.

Once Imam (A.S) was invited to a banquet which was held for a Caliph's son's birthday celebration. When Imam (A.S) entered the party, everyone fell silent treating him out of respect...11

2. Among 'Alaw□s and others

Muhammad b Hassan Ashtar 'Alaw□ said: "With my father, some of 'Abbasids, T□lib□s (descendants of Abu Talib, the father of Imam Ali), some of the army officers and some other people were standing in the doorway of Mutawakkil's palace and suddenly Abu al-Hassan Imam H□d□ (A.S) came and wanted to enter the palace.

All the people who were in attendance got down their mounts and show[ed] him great respect until he (A.S) entered the palace. One person got angry about such homage and tribute and began to complain that: "To whom does all this acknowledgement and courtliness belong? Why do we have to pay this young man this much respect? He is neither higher than us in rank nor older in age! Swear by God, we will not rise for him or come off our mounts at the time of his coming out..."

Abu H□shim Ja'far□ answered him that: "Swear by God, you will respect him (A.S) in the humblest manner!" After some moments, Imam (A.S) came out of palace. The sound of acclamation echoed and all people stood up, showing respect to Imam (A.S); Abu H□shim addressed people: "Were not you who

decided not to respect his holiness?”

They answered: “Swear by God, we could not control our emotions and involuntarily came off our mounts to respect him (A.S).”[12]

Descendants of the Prophet (p.b.w.h) and noblemen were harmonious in respecting Imam (A.S) and all of them had accepted his leadership and preeminence. Zayd b. Mūsa b. Ja'far was among these 'Alawīs known as Zayd al-Nūr who was Imam's (A.S) uncle and was so old and long-lived.

Once when visiting Imam (A.S), he came to the doorway of the Imam's (A.S.) house and wanted 'Amr b. Faraj who was the doorway guard to ask entrance permission from Imam (A.S) for him. Imam (A.S) granted the permission and Zayd came in and sat politely and respectfully before Imam (A.S) who was sitting in the upper part of (assembly) room and doing so, he acknowledged Imam's (A.S) supremacy and leadership.

Another day, Zayd came to see Imam (A.S) but Imam (A.S) was not present in the room and Zayd sat in the upper part of the room; after a few moments, Imam (A.S) entered; as soon as Zayd saw Imam (A.S), he rose from his place and offered the same seat to Imam (A.S) while he himself sat politely in front of Imam (A.S). This happened when Imam (A.S) was so young and Zayd was an elderly man; but Zayd's action was considered as his acknowledgement of Imam's (A.S) leadership and supremacy and it was similar to how all people acknowledged Imam's (A.S) leadership.[13]

3. Among Medina's residents

When people of Medina found out about the mission of Mutawakkil's executive agent, Yahya b. Harthamah, who wanted to take Imam (A.S) to Samarra, they began to cry and weep in such a way that Yahya said: “I had never seen or heard like that, and that was so that I had to calm them down and that did not take effect until I swore by God that no harm would ever come to him.[14]

4. Among People of the Book

Imam's (A.S) authority was not limited to Shi'ites; it included people of the Book as well. They greatly respected Imam (A.S), and when having trouble and difficulty, they used to seek help from him. They even gave him presents.

Hibatallah b. Abū Mansūr said: “Once Yusuf b. Ya'qūb who was Christian and of my father's friends, came to our home in Baghdad. My father asked him the reason for coming. Yusuf said: “Mutawakkil 'Abbūsī has summoned me, but I do not know why. So I have insured myself for one hundred dinars and have come to give them to 'Ali b. Muhammad b. Ali Ridā.”[15]

5. Among Samarra Shi'ites

Mutawakkil would always prevent people from visiting Imam Hādī (A.S). Once Imam (A.S) was in

Mutawakkil's palace, and numerous people were behind the door. The narrator said that: “I asked them why they were gathering there. They answered that: “We are waiting for our lord to see him and salute him and then we will go.” I asked them if they knew him. They answered: “Yes! We all know him”.[16]

B) Imam 'Askar's (A.S) authority

In this part, we will have a short review about Imam 'Askar's social status in the court, among caliphs and ministers, to people of the Book, religious leaders, Shi'ites and others.

1. Among Caliphs

Some of that period's caliphs like Mu'tamid would seek recourse to Imam 'Askar (A.S) when they were in considerable need; and they would ask him for prayer.[17] They would also ask him for help in crises and at key points. For once Mu'tamid ordered to free Imam 'Askar (A.S) from prison temporarily to stand against deviants' perversities and to resolve all doubts and incredulities they had casted on people. Mu'tamid addressed Imam (A.S) and said: “Save your father's religion”!

Another time, he addressed Ja'far, Imam 'Askar's (A.S) brother, when Ja'far asked Mu'tamid to grant him his brother's position; Mu'tamid answered: “Your brother's position was not in our hand, that it was from Allah; and despite our determined attempts in lowering your brother's status, his authority would rise increasingly because of his knowledge and religious practices.”[18]

2. Among Ministers

'Ubayd b. Kh qn was one of the ministers in Abbasid's caliphate who was concurrent with Imam (A.S). He said that: “If none of Abbasid caliphs is anymore caliph, then no one out of the Hashemite deserves caliphate but him (Imam Hassan 'Askar (A.S)). It is only this man who deservs caliphate because of his knowledge, virtue, guidance, self-possession, piety, religious practice and good morals. His father also like him was noble, generous, knowledgeable and well-meaning.[19]

Ahmad b. 'Ubaydillah b. Kh qn who was N sib (anti-Ahlul Bayt), described Imam 'Askar's (A.S) social status and authority like this: “In Samarra, I saw nobody among 'Alawis like Hassan b. 'Al b. Muhammad al-Rida (A.S) in conduct, virtue, magnanimity, generosity, being respected by the family, the caliph and all H shim s. Not only these people, but also all ministers, secretaries, commanders of army and others considered Imam (A.S) superior to all great ones.”[20]

He himself said that: “Anyone among the Hashemite, commanders, secretaries, judges, jurisprudents and other people would consider Imam (A.S) at the highest point of greatness, grandeur and superiority, when I asked them about him (Imam Hassan 'Askar (A.S)); They knew him (A.S) superior to all the relatives, nobles and all others and they would all say that: “He (A.S) is the leader of Shi'ites” and he (A.S) was of great nobility and position before me because everyone would speak of him as benevolent and widely regarded him as great.”[21]

3. Among Commanders

One of the commanders and generals got off his mount as soon as he saw Imam 'Askar (A.S) and showed him respect. Imam (A.S) addressed him and stated: “Return to your place.” He returned while he was showing Imam respect.22

4. Before Mutawakkil's doctor

Bakht sh' – Mutawakkil's personal doctor – was one of the most distinguished doctors of his time. He told one of his pupils to perform phlebotomy for Imam (A.S). He told him: “Ibn al–Rida (Imam Askari) has asked me to send someone to perform phlebotomy for him; I chose you to go, you must know that he (A.S) is the most knowledgeable person living under the sun. So, do not ever neglect his orders or complain”.23

5. Among religious scholars

Imam (A.S) had an absolutely outstanding status among his contemporaneous religious scholars. J hiz was among great writers of that period living in Basra. He met Imam (A.S) when he was a young man of 22 years old, and passed away five years before Imam's (A.S) martyrdom. He said about Imam (A.S): “It has never happened for any of Arab or non–Arab ancestries except T libiy n that all of whom become scholars, virtuous, pious, brave, generous, pure, of a noble nature and some of whom become the Prophet's successor and some others became the nominees of his successors; whose names from fathers to their sons are: Hasan b. 'Ali b. Muhammad b. 'Ali b. M s b. Ja'far b. Muhammad b. 'Ali b. Husayn b. 'Ali”.24

6. Among People of the Book

Some of the nobles and scholars of the Book acknowledged Imam's (A.S) superiority and high status in a way Imam would state about some of them: “Praise be to Allah that made Christians more aware about our right than some Muslims.”25
From among them, some became Muslims, such as An sh Nasr n and the monk of 'qal monastery.26

7. Among common people

People would rush to meet Imam (A.S) from everywhere, and on the very day that Imam was supposed to come to the court, numerous Imam's devotees gathered with tearful eyes on Imam's route to meet him, in a way that the way would get blocked and no one could pass through. The sound of lament and wailing could be heard from everywhere but once Imam (A.S) came out of the door, silence would reign everywhere and everyone would be stunned by his supreme majesty and pave the way for him and stand there waiting for his return.27

Sheikh Sad q quoted from Ahmad b. 'Ubaydillah b. Kh qan – the caliph's deputy in Qom – who was a

N□sib□ and anti-Shi'ite that he said:
“At the time of Imam 'Askar□'s martyrdom, the whole bazaar (marketplace) closed and the Hashemite, all military men, secretaries, other people and my father ('Ubaydillah b. Kh□q□n – Mu'tamid Abb□s□'s minister) attended the Imam's funeral. That day, considering the crowd, and the number of people wailing, was like a shot of the Day of Judgment.”

8. Among Shi'ites

Abu H□shim Ja'far□ who was among the faithful companions of Imam 'Askar□ (A.S) and Imam H□d□ (A.S) had poems about Imam 'Askar□ which described his supreme status among Shi'ites very well. Translation of some of those poems is the following:

“God granted him – Imam 'Askar□ – all miracles of Imamate as He had earlier granted Moses the miracles of splitting the sea, white hand and the stick.
God did not grant any miracles to the Prophets unless He granted Imams the same; and if you doubt about it, you may go and seek for the proof and evidence.”28

1. Refer to Hay□t al-Im□m al-'Askar□, pp. 223 – 232. Among those cities are: K□fa, Baghdad, Neysh□b□r, Qom, □beh, Mad□in, Khur□s□n, Yemen, Rey, □zarb□yj□n, Samarra, Jurj□n, Basra and tens of other cities. (Ibid.).
2. Kend□, Wul□tu Misr, p. 177 (cited in T□r□kh Siy□s□ Gheybat-e Em□m-e Dav□zdahom, pp. 83 & 849.
3. Refer to Al-K□f□, Vol. 1, p. 500.
4. Man□qib, Vol. 4, p. 411; Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, p. 127.
5. Sayyid b. T□w□s, Kashf al-Muhajjah, p. 124.
6. Maq□til al-T□libiyyin, p. 599 (cited in Hayat al-Im□m al-H□d□ (A.S), trans. by Sayyid Hasan Isl□m□, p. 326.)
7. Muruj al-Dhahab, Vol. 4, p. 86; cf. Al-Fihrist, pp. 116 – 117.
8. Al-K□f□, Vol. 1, p. 499; Al-Irsh□d, Vol. 2, p. 302.
9. T□r□kh Ya'q□b□, Vol. 3, p. 209 (quoted from: Hay□t al-Im□m al-H□d□, trans. by Sayyid Hasan Isl□m□, p. 326.)
10. Mir'□t al-Zam□n, Vol. 9, p. 553; Ibn Jawz□, Tadhkirat al-Khaw□ss, p. 359 (quoted from: Hay□t al-Im□m al-H□d□, trans. by Sayyid Hasan Isl□m□, p. 263); Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, p. 203.
11. A'l□m al-War□, p. 346; Man□qib, Vol. 4, p. 407; Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 5, p. 182.
12. Man□qib, Vol. 4, p. 407; A'l□m al-War□, p. 343; Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, p. 137.
13. Ma'□thir al-Kubar□, Vol. 3, p. 94 (Hay□t al-Im□m al-H□d□, trans. by Sayyid Hasan Isl□m□, pp. 25 & 26.).
14. Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, p. 207; Tadhkirat al-Khaw□ss, p. 22 (quoted from Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, p. 201).
15. Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, pp 144 & 145; the rest of the story is: “My father encouraged him. After a while, he left Baghdad and set out for Samarra. Some days later Yusuf came back to our home happily. My father asked him about what had happened. He said: “It was the first time I have been in Samarra and I would like to give my present to Ibn al-Rid□ (Imam H□d□) before going to Mutawakkil. But I found out that Mutawakkil did not let him go out of home and he was always at home. I wondered what to do. If I asked for his address, I would cause myself more trouble. For a while I was looking for a solution before a thought crossed my mind. I got on my animal and let him go wherever he wanted. He passed quarters and markets (bazaars) one after another, until he stopped in front of a house and refused to go farther. I felt that house was Imam's, so I wanted my slave to ask whose house was that. The slave asked and told me it was Ibn al-Rid□'s. “O' My God! Swear by God, It is an obvious sign!” I thought to myself. Suddenly a black slave came out of the house and asked me: “Are you Yusuf b. Ya'q□b?” I said: “Yes”. He told me to get off the animal and I did. Then he guided me through a corridor into the house. I thought to myself he called me by my name, while nobody knew me in that town, so I considered it as another sign. Soon after, the slave came back and said: “Give me those one hundred dinars that you have hidden inside

your sleeve." I gave them to him and thought to myself that it was the third sign. He took them to Imam (A.S), then he came back and let me go in. I went in and saw Imam (A.S) was sitting alone. He gave me an affectionate look and said: "Is not it the time to come to the right way and become guided?" I said: "O' My lord! I saw enough obvious signs and proofs to be guided." But Imam (A.S) said: "Alas! You will not submit to Islam, but your son will soon submit to Islam and will become Sh□'ite. O' Yusuf! Some people think that our love and friendship is not beneficial for ones like you. Swear by God, they are telling lies. Go on to see Mutawakkil and be sure your wish will be fulfilled. Hibatallah added: "After Yusuf passed away, I met his son. He was a Muslim and a real faithful Sh□'ite. He told me that his father had died as a Christian, but he [Yusuf's son] converted to Islam and became one of the real friends of the Prophet's household. He would always say that: "I am the good tiding of my patron – 'Ali al-H□d□ (A.S)".

16. Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 5, p. 148.
17. Man□qib, Vol. 4, p. 430; Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, p. 309; Al-Irsh□d, p. 324.
18. Kam□l al-D□n wa Tam□m al-Ni'mah, p. 479.
19. Kam□l al-D□n wa Tam□m al-Ni'mah, p. 41; Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, p. 327 (quoted from Kam□l al-D□n wa Tam□m al-Ni'mah) To know more about his talk to Ja'far, Imam 'Askar□'s brother in paying respect to Imam (A.S) see cf. Kam□l al-D□n wa Tam□m al-Ni'mah, p. 44; Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, p. 329.
20. Kam□l al-D□n wa Tam□m al-Ni'mah, p. 42; Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, p. 327.
21. Ibid.
22. Mad□nat al-Ma'□jiz, p. 570 (cited in Hay□t al-Im□m al-'Askar□, p. 97).
23. Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 5, p. 261 (cited in Al-Khar□'ij, Vol. 1, p. 422).
24. □th□r J□hiz, p. 235 (cited in Al-Hay□t al-Siy□siyah l□'l-Im□m al-R□d□, p. 403).
25. Saf□nat al-Bih□r, Vol. 1, p. 260 (cited in Hilyat al-'Abr□r, Vol. 2, p. 268 (cited in Hay□t al-Im□m al-'Askar□, p. 98).
26. Bih□r al-Anw□r, Vol. 50, p. 261 (cited in Ibid.) To know more about these two occurrences and Imam's meeting with them refer to above mentioned sources.
27. T□s□, Al-Ghaybah, p. 128; Dal□'il al-Im□mah, p. 226.
28. A'l□m al-War□, p. 372 (cited in Hay□t al-Im□m al-'Askar□, trans. by Sayyid Hasan Isl□m□, p. 64).

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