

The first deputy – Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed al–Amri (r.a.)

Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) was the first special deputy of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.) in Minor Occultation (غيبتِ صغرى). The renowned Shiite scholar, Shaikh Muhammad b. Hasan at–Tusi (r.a.) records in his illustrious book, ‘Ghaibat’ “Among the companions that the infallible Imams (a.s.) considered as virtuous and pious was Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed al–Amri (r.a.). Imam Ali Naqi al–Hadi (a.s.) and Imam Hasan al–Askari (a.s.) have spoken highly of him and he was their most trusted companion.’¹

His Name And Title

‘Uthman was his name and his father Sa’eed. His name in Rijaaal al–Kashi is recorded as ‘Hafs b. Amr’, but other scholars of Ilm al–Rijaaal (science of narrators of traditions) have considered this erroneous. His name is widely recorded as ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed.

He has been attributed with 2 agnomens (Kuniyyat) – Abu Amr and Abu Muhammad. He was called Abu Amr since his grandfather’s name was Amr. He was called Abu Muhammad because of his son Muhammad.

In books of Rijaaal and traditions he is referred to as Abu Amr. However, in Safinatul Behar and Bihar al–Anwar, he is referred to as Abu Muhammad.

Among Shias Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) is known by four titles.

1. Saman / Zayyat (Oil Vendor)

Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) took up the profession of oil–vending to camouflage his more critical duties and responsibilities of deputyship from the masses in general and the tyrant kings of Bani Abbas in particular. In this way, he protected his own life and the lives of Shias from the persecution of the Bani Abbas.

He had a very ingenious way of operating. He would collect all the money and trusts from the Shias for

Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.). Out of fear of the Bani Abbas caliphs, he would conceal all money and trusts in his oil barrels so as to escape the scrutiny of the common masses. In this way, he could safely courier everything to Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.).²

To keep his position of deputyship secret, he used to supply oil and other goods to the army.³

2. Asadi

He was a member of the Bani Asad clan and was therefore also famous as 'Asadi'.

3. al-Askari

He used to reside in Samarra, in a place called 'Askar' which implies a military cantonment.

4. Amri

Scholars are unanimous that 'Amri' was one of his titles. However, scholars of Ilme-Rijaal have given differing reasons for this title. The illustrious scholar Muhammad b. Hasan Shaikh at-Tusi (r.a.) has explained,

'First of all he was referred to as Amri due to his grandfather whose name was 'Amr'. Some scholars have recorded that Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) did not like that the names 'Uthman (name of third caliph) and Abu Amr should combine in one person. That is why he ordered 'Uthman to change his Kuniyyat from Abu Amr to Amri.⁴

Special Deputy of Three Imams (a.s.)

Shaikh at-Tusi (r.a.) records that at the tender age of 11 years, Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.) swore allegiance to Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) and commenced serving Imam (a.s.). Shaikh at-Tusi (r.a.) has discussed the companions of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) in detail. While mentioning about Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.), he says, "He was an oil trader famous as Abu Amr. He was an esteemed and reliable companion in the eyes of Imam (a.s.), and was also Imam's (a.s.) special deputy." The statement of Shaikh at-Tusi (r.a.) makes it clear that he was deputy of three Imams (a.s.).

He further records that he was also a special deputy of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) and enjoyed an elevated and eminent status among the Shias of that period. Likewise, Ibn Dawood al-Hilli in his Rijaal, Marhoom al-Qahyaai in his Majmaul Rijaal and Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Bahrul Uloom (r.a.) in his Rijaal have recorded this fact. This has also been mentioned in several other books of Rijaal like Tanqeehul Maqaal, Qamoos al-Rijaal, Mojam-o-Rijaalil Hadis.⁵

Note

Dr. Jasim Husain in his 'Tarikh al-Siyaasi al-Ghaibat al-Imam al-Dawzdahum (a.t.f.s.)' has reported that Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.) was among the companions of Abu Ja'far al-Saani Imam Muhammad Taqi al-Jawad (a.s.). Likewise Ibn Shahr al-Aashub in 'Manaaqib al-Abi Talib (a.s.)', Shaikh Abbas Qummi (r.a.) in Safinatul Behar and Allamah al-Hilli (r.a.) have recounted this fact.

Ali Ghaffarzadeh in his 'Pazoohashi Piraamun -e-Zindagani Nuwwab-e-Khaas e-Imam -e-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)' has rejected the fact that Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.) was the deputy of Imam Jawad (a.s.). He writes, 'Anyone who is even briefly acquainted with the lives of the Imams (a.s.) and Minor Occultation (غيبتِ صغرى) will know that Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.) was not a deputy nor a companion of Imam Jawad (a.s.). This is not an established fact of history and there is no chain of narration to support such an idea.'

After making this claim, Ali Ghaffarzadeh has outlined the names of scholars who have recorded in their books that Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.) was not a companion of Imam Jawad (a.s.).

- i. Hajj Muhammad Ardabili (r.a.) in his book 'Jaameul Ruwaat'
- ii. Shaikh Abdullah Mamqaani (r.a.) in 'Tanqeehul Maqaal'
- iii. Allamah Shustari (r.a.) in 'Qaamoosul Rijaaal'
- iv. Ayatullah al-Uzma al-Khu'i (r.a.) in 'Mojamul Rijaaal'

After referring to the books of these scholars Ali Ghaffarzadeh concludes that Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.) was not among the companions of Imam Jawad (a.s.).⁶

It is possible that he did spend a few years under the Imamate of Imam Jawad (a.s.), but may have been too young to qualify for companionship.

His (r.a.) Status in the Words of Imams (a.s.)

Ahmed b. Ishaq Qummi (r.a.) narrates, 'I was in the presence of Imam Ali Naqi al-Hadi (a.s.). I said, 'O my master! At times I have the good fortune of meeting you and at times I am deprived of this blessing. It is not always possible for me to be in direct contact with you. Under such circumstances, who should I contact and whose commands should I obey?' Imam (a.s.) informed me,

هَذَا أَبُو عَمْرٍو التُّقَّةُ الْأَمِينُ مَا قَالَهُ لَكُمْ فَعَنِّي يَقُولُهُ ، وَمَا آدَاهُ إِلَيْكُمْ فَعَنِّي يُؤَدِّيهِ

'This man Abu Amr (Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.)) is a reliable and trustworthy person. Whatever he

relates to you is from my side. Whatever he gives to you is from us.’7

Imam’s (a.s.) narration in favour of Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) underlines the level of Imam’s (a.s.) trust and confidence in him. Moreover, it underscores another important fact – Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) performed some critical duties i.e. to convey Imam’s (a.s.) message and commands to the Shias. The duty of the Shias was to accept this communication and implement it.

After Imam Hadi’s (a.s.) martyrdom, Ahmed b. Ishaq Qummi (r.a.) once again approached Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) and repeated his previous query who responded thus:

هَذَا ابُو عَمْرٍو الثَّقَةُ الْأَمِينُ الْمَاضِي وَثَقْتِي فِي الْمَحْيَا وَالْمَمَاتِ فَمَا قَالَهُ لَكُمْ فَعَنِّي
يَقُولُهُ وَمَا آدَى إِلَيْكُمْ فَعَنِّي يُؤَدِّيهِ

‘This man Abu Amr (Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.)) is a reliable and trustworthy person. He was dependable for the previous Imam and is dependable and reliable even for me in my lifetime and even after my death. Whatever he conveys to you is from our side and everything he gives to you is from us.’8

Deputyship of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.)

Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) appointed Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) as the first special deputy of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) in the presence of 40 Shias.

Some Shias like Ja’far b. Muhammad b. Malik al-Fazari, Ali b. Bilal, Ahmed b. Helal, Muhammad b. Muawiyah b. Hakeem, Hasan b. Ayyub b. Nuh have all narrated that they approached Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) specifically to inquire from him about his successor. They recount, “In addition to us, there were 40 other people who were present with Imam (a.s.).

Then Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) rose and asked Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.), “O son of Allah’s Apostle! We wish to ask you a question of which we are sure you are aware.” Imam (a.s.) replied, “O ‘Uthman, be seated.”

All of a sudden the expression on Imam’s (a.s.) face changed and he went out of the room after ordering us to stay in our places and not follow him outside. We did as Imam (a.s.) commanded us. After some time, Imam (a.s.) called out ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed’s (r.a.) name and the latter rose.

Then Imam (a.s.) said, ‘Should I inform you about the reason why you all are here?’ All of us said, ‘O son of Allah’s Apostle! Please inform us.’ Imam (a.s.) revealed, ‘So that you may know who is the Imam after me.’ The members in the assembly replied, ‘Yes. We just saw a young child whose face was beautiful like a part of the moon and looked very similar to you.’

Imam (a.s.) informed, ‘After me, he is your Imam and my successor. Obey him and do not scatter in confusion about him else your religion will be destroyed. After this meeting you shall never see him again until his appointed time. That is why take whatever news you get from ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.).

فَهُوَ خَلِيفَةُ إِمَامِكُمْ وَالْأَمْرُ إِلَيْهِ

‘He is the deputy of your Imam and deputyship is for him alone.’⁹

‘Uthman B. Sa’eed (r.a.) – The Chief of the Deputies

Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) wrote a lengthy letter to Ishaq b. Ismail Nishapouri, stating, ‘Don’t leave the city until you meet ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.). Convey to him my salaam. He is trustworthy, pious and reliable and is most proximate to us.

فَكُلُّ مَا يُحْمَلُ إِلَيْنَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مِنَ النَّوَاحِي فَإِلَيْهِ يَصِيرُ آخِرُ أَمْرِهِ لِيُوصَلَ ذَلِكَ
إِلَيْنَا

‘All the wealth that is collected from various places for us, is first accumulated with ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) so that it reaches us safely.’¹⁰

Imam’s (a.s.) letter emphasises an important point. All cities where the Shias used to inhabit had deputies. These deputies collected money by way of Khums, Zakaat, etc. from the Shias on behalf of Imam (a.s.). These deputies collectively transmitted all this money to Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.), who in turn finally submitted it to Imam (a.s.) himself.

The Religious and Political Scenario of the Time

If one casts even a cursory glance at the political and religious scenario at the time of Minor Occultation (غَيْبَتِ صَغْرِي), he will appreciate the significance of the deputyship of Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.). The government had appointed spies in every nook and corner so as to keep a close watch on the Shias of Imam (a.t.f.s.), especially the trusted and reliable Shias who were known to be proximate to Imam (a.t.f.s.).

As if the government’s persecution was not enough, the differences between the Shias and outbreak of various sects only added to the confusion. Under such trying circumstances, deputyship was an impossible task. However, under Imam’s (a.t.f.s.) constant supervision and guidance, the Shias were rescued from the darkness of doubt and uncertainty and were steered towards the light of guidance and

certainty. Being the special deputy of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.) played a very important role in this regard.

The criticality of his role can never be fully comprehended and appreciated. On the one hand, he had to unite the Shias who had split into many sects. On the other hand, he had to contend with Ja'far ibn Ali Naqi the government's candidate for the role of Shiite leadership. To challenge Ja'far was a monumental task. On the martyrdom of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.), Ja'far usurped the mantle of Imam's (a.s.) successorship, which gave him the right to lead the Shias after Imam (a.s.).

Shaikh Mufid (r.a.) writes in his book 'Kitabul Irshad': 'After the martyrdom of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) when Ja'far b. Ali Naqi saw that their Imam (a.s.) did not have a successor, he usurped his (a.s.) property, imprisoned his (a.s.) maids and the women of the household and said evil things about his (a.s.) companions who were steadfast in their faith that Imam (a.s.) had a son and were waiting for his reappearance. He threatened them but they did not pay attention to him.

Finally, Ja'far approached the Caliph of the time and sought his assistance to claim the position of his brother (Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.)). He paid a huge amount to the government by way of bribe, but failed miserably in his evil plans.'¹¹

Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.) had to face the uphill task of Ja'far's claim of Imamah, his standing to lead the funeral prayers of Imam (a.s.) and creating doubts about the Imamah of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.).

He provoked the government of the time to help him in his cause, he imprisoned the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and persecuted them and sought religious dues (khums, zakat) from the people. Under these grievous circumstances Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.) with the help of Imam az-Zaman (a.s.) humiliated Ja'far and protected the status and Imamah of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.).

When the Shias heard of Ja'far's claim and his usurping Imam's (a.s.) property and seeking help from Bani Abbas, some of them consulted Hazrat 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (r.a.) and requested for a 'Tawqee' from Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) to clarify the matter and remove all suspicion and doubts once and for all. Our readers should find the following incident very interesting.

Ja'far b. Ali wrote a letter to a follower of Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s.), "I am the Imam after my brother and I have the knowledge of the permissible and the prohibited and all other sciences with me." When the companion received the letter, he became sorrowful. He took the letter to Ahmad b. Ishaq, a close confidante of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.).

Ahmad b. Ishaq wrote a letter to Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) enclosing Ja'far's letter. He gave it to 'Uthman b. Sa'eed (a.s.) to be forwarded to Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). Imam (a.t.f.s.) gave a very strong-worded reply and refuted the Imamah of Ja'far. Following is the extract of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) letter:

‘This defrauder (Ja’far) has falsified Allah and has claimed Imamah. We do not know on what basis he has made such a claim. If he claims knowledge in the Ahkam and Fiqh of Allah’s religion, then by Allah, he is not able to distinguish between the permissible and the prohibited. He cannot distinguish between the clear and ambiguous verses of the Holy Quran.

He is not even aware about the limits and timings of namaz. And if he is having certainty about his piety then by Allah he has forsaken namaz for forty days. His claim should be based on a miracle. Let him forward his miracle and if he has proof then he should explain it.’¹²

It was with the representation of Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) that such letters could reach Imam (a.t.f.s.) and Ja’far failed in his nefarious plans. Once in a gathering Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) said, ‘The caliph (Mu’tamid al-Abbasi) thought that Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) left this world without appointing his successor and gave his inheritance to such a person (Ja’far) who did not deserve it. The followers of Imam (a.s.) were patient on it and were vacillating in a state of confusion. Nobody dared to recognise him and help him or to convey something to him.’¹³

Hazrat ‘Uthman B. Sa’eed (r.a.) In Baghdad

After the martyrdom of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.), the first representative of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) came to Baghdad from Samarra on the order of Imam (a.s.). The reason being that the government vigilance and control in Samarra was very strict and it had relatively ignored Baghdad. Samarra was the capital of the Abbasi government.

Mu’tamid was appointed as ruler on 12th Rajab, 256 A.H. Till the end of his rule, Samarra remained the capital. In 279 A.H., the capital was shifted to Baghdad. Till that time Baghdad was the Shiite center.

The migration to Baghdad helped Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) to keep in touch with the Shias residing in different places. In this way, his activities spread to different areas and were not restricted only to Baghdad. If he was in Samarra or if Baghdad had been the capital of the Abbasides, then this would have been very difficult.¹⁴

His (r.a.) Mode of Operation

Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) had appointed some agents in Baghdad who used to coordinate with the other agents of Iraq and other areas. People met these agents in Baghdad, who collected the wealth and accepted the letters and queries from the Shias and forwarded them to Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) and he in turn forwarded the same to Imam (a.s.)

Hajiz bin b. Yazid al-Washsha, Ahmed b. Ishaq Ashari, Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Ja’far Qattaan and Ahmad b. Ishaq Qummi were initially the representatives of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) in Qum, Iran. After the martyrdom of Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) they returned to Baghdad as helpers of Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.).

Muhammad b. Ahmad Qattaan had taken up the work of selling clothes so that nobody could cast any doubt on his real purpose. The other agents delivered the letters and wealth wrapped in a cloth to him and he forwarded it to Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.).

History is replete with such incidents wherein the special representatives employed such ingenious methods to protect Imam (a.t.f.s.) and his Shias. The wealth used to reach Imam (a.t.f.s.) without anybody learning about his (a.t.f.s.) actual abode.

His (r.a.) Demise

The duration of his deputyship and the exact date of his demise has not got wide coverage in books of history and traditions. But it is clear that the combined duration of his own deputyship and that of his son Hazrat Muhammad b. ‘Uthman (r.a.) was 45 years.

Janabe Bahrul ‘Uloom (r.a.) has recorded that Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) expired in 264 A.H. or 265 A.H.

Ali Ghaffarzadeh in his book has narrated from historians and scholars that the death of Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.) took place before 267 A.H.¹⁵

His Grave

He is buried near western Baghdad inside Shaare Maidan in Masjid Zarab.¹⁶

Today there is market near his grave and one has to pass through several small lanes to reach the grave. Due to this, some visitors (Zaaireen) avoid going for his ziyarat. His ziyarat has a lot of merit and is similar to meeting him when one comes to meet Imam (a.t.f.s.), as he was Imam’s (a.t.f.s.) deputy.

Obituary

After the demise of Hazrat ‘Uthman b. Sa’eed (r.a.), Imam (a.t.f.s.) wrote a condolence letter to his son, Muhammad:

“Surely we are from Allah and we will return to Him. We submit ourselves to His command. Your father devoted his entire life to goodness and right till the end. He was praiseworthy. May Allah have mercy on him and include him with His friends and the Imams (a.s.). He continuously endeavoured and struggled in the affairs of his Imams (a.s.) till he met Allah, the High, and the Imams (a.s.). May Allah make his face contented and happy.”¹⁷

1. Ghaibat al-Shaikh at-Tusi, pg. 353

2. Ghaibat al-Shaikh at-Tusi (r.a.), pg. 354

3. Rozgar Rehai Az Kaamil al-Sulaiman, vol. 1, pg. 291
4. Ghaibat al-Shaikh at-Tusi (r.a.), pg. 354
5. Pazoohashi Piraamun-e-Zindagani Nuwwab-e-Khaas al-Imam-e-Zaman (a.s.) by Ali Ghaffarzadeh, pg. 106
6. Pazoohashi Piraamun, pg. 109-10
7. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 51, pg. 344
8. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 51, pg. 344
9. Bihar al-Anwar vol. 51, pg. 346
10. Bihar al-Anwar vol. 50, pg. 323
11. Kitabul Irshad, chap. 34
12. Pazoohashi Piraamun, pg. 128, narrating from Ehtejaaj al-Tabarsi, vol. 2, pg. 468
13. Usule Kafi, vol.2, pg. 121, Persian edition
14. Pazoohashi Piraamun, Pg. 130
15. Pazoohashi Piraamun, pg. 144
16. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 51, pg. 347
17. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 51, pg. 349

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