

The Protectors of Wilayat

Criticizing the scholars has always been a pastime among the masses. Whenever there is a discussion related to them, everybody has something to say against them. Each one has a few ‘interesting’ anecdotes to narrate.

In fact, some people feel that it is their inherent right to criticize them and consider this as a scholarly act. Perhaps they ignore the fact that in this world (with the exception of the infallible Prophets (a.s.) and the Imams (a.s.)) there are several groups of people – good as well as bad.

There are traders, workers, laborers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, students, etc, and each of these has categories of good and bad individuals. In a market we find the original as well as the imitation. The solution to this problem is not criticism but to define a yardstick so as to differentiate the original from the imposter. At this point in time, we may not be able to purge all the evils from society.

Therefore, in order to safeguard ourselves from deception, it is necessary that we act with foresight and devise a benchmark to distinguish good from evil. With a reliable yardstick, we can easily sidestep the perils.

When we glance at Islamic history, we find scholars emanating radiance, who held nothing back in their endeavors to serve the infallible Imams (a.s.). If it weren't for the illustrious defenders of the mastership (ولاية), most people would have deviated from the true religion.

Imam Ali Naqi (a.s.) says regarding such scholars:

‘If in the occultation of our Qa'im (a.t.f.s.), such scholars would not have been there who would invite the people towards their Imam and guided them towards him; if they would have not protected Allah's Religion with the help of irrefutable divine proofs and rescued the weak followers of Allah's religion from Satanic plots, released them from the traps of the mischief mongers and those antagonistic to the Ahul Bayt (a.s.) (ناصبی), then surely all the people would have become apostates (مرتد) i.e. they would have deviated from the religion. But these are the people who protect the weak Shias just as a captain protects his ship. These people enjoy the greatest position in front of Allah. 1

After the martyrdom of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), nay, right from the time when the people were sure that Allah had chosen the Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) to succeed the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) for guidance and that there is no say for anyone else in it, people started devising different ways to deviate the Muslims from the right path.

During the lifetime of the Holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.), their clandestine plans remained restricted to their hearts and were not reflected in their tongues and actions. But immediately after his (s.a.w.a.) martyrdom, their schemes unfolded and were manifested. This fact is evident if we ponder over the incident of Saqifah. The entire episode was not a twist of fate but was staged to hide the plots behind them.

During the life of the infallible guides (a.s.), doubts were raised and in every era scholars were present who countered such doubts and guided the seekers of truth to the right path. Among the notable defenders of the Mastership of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) were Salman (r.a.), Abu Zar (r.a.), Ammar al-Yaasir (r.a.), Meesam al-Tammar (r.a.), Rushaid al-Hujri (r.a.), Hujr b. Adi (r.a.), Zuraarah (r.a.), Mu'min al-Taaq (r.a.), Hisham b. Hakam (r.a.), Fazl b. Shaazan (r.a.), to name a few.

In the year 260 AH., Imam Hasan al-Askari (a.s.) was martyred and the minor occultation of Imam al-Asr (a.s.) commenced. Due to the conduct of the people towards Imams (a.s.), the sun of Imamat disappeared behind the clouds of occultation.

At that time, different types of people grabbed the opportunity and reared their ugly heads to fill the void left by Imam's (a.t.f.s.) concealment. They thought that as Imam (a.t.f.s.) was in occultation, their paths were clear and the Shias were defenseless, as the source of divine knowledge had been severed.

However, they erred in their belief that the occultation of Imam (a.t.f.s.) marked the end of Imam's (a.t.f.s.) contact with the Shias. Certainly the relation continued, only the mode of leadership and guidance changed. The difference in leadership and guidance is for those who believe in limits and restrictions. However, there is no difference for the one who has control over the era and for whom the whole universe is like a coin on the palm. In reality, the source of divine knowledge and recognition is continuing, it depends on the acquirer and how he benefits from it.

In the epoch of occultation, the world was never bereft of pure, ethical and sincere scholars, nor will it be deprived of such personalities in the future. Ameerul Momineen Ali b. Abi Talib (a.s.) in one of his sermons said:

'Lord, I know that knowledge will not be erased, its sources will not discontinue altogether and You will not leave Your earth without Your Proof. The Proof who lives among the people being well known but disobeyed or he is afraid and hidden. You will never keep the earth void of Your Proof otherwise Your Signs will be invalidated and Your Friends would be misled after You have granted them guidance.'

(from here the discussion of scholars commences)

'Where are they and how many are they? They are very few in number but are of great position before Allah, the Majestic. They follow the Holy Imams (a.s.). (They follow) the guiding leaders (Imams (a.s.)), establish in themselves the discipline of the Imams (a.s.) and practice their way of life. In such conditions, knowledge will lead them to the true faith and their souls then accept the call of the leaders of knowledge. The traditions of the Imams (a.s.) that are difficult for others, are easy for them to understand.

(Traditions concerning the virtues, mastership and obedience of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) and especially the traditions about Wilayat al-Takweeni as well as Tashreei of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.), which their opponents deny, are easily accepted by the scholars.)

These scholars acknowledge that following and obeying the Holy Imams (a.s.) is obligatory like following and obeying Allah. They are friends of Allah. They are in dissimulation (تَقِيَّة) because of the fear of enemies. Their pure souls have reached a lofty position i.e. physically they are among the people but spiritually they are away from them. The scholars are hidden and silent in the oppressive government and are awaiting the divine kingdom. Allah will soon establish truth with His Words and banish falsehood.

Glad tidings to them for their patience and forbearance in the period of occultation. I desire to see them in the era of reappearance. May Allah soon bring us together with them in Paradise along with their pious parents, spouses and children.²

Please reflect on this tradition considering the era when there was attack on religious beliefs from all sides and restrictions were imposed on revealing one's creed. Government restrictions were the order of the day. Facilities were few.

To search just one tradition; enormous traveling had to be undertaken. Electricity was an unthinkable concept then. To hunt books and manuscripts entailed immense struggle and perseverance. Also, the books of the bygone era were unlike the present books, which are far neater, more comprehensive and in very good print condition. The layout of old books was such that it was difficult to distinguish between paragraphs.

Moreover, the pages of the books were also not numbered so searching for references and studying them was a frightful task. Keeping in mind the difficulties of the past, we are spellbound when we see the researches of the scholars, their replies to opponents and the references collected.

When we see the number of books written, our intellects fail to comprehend as to when these scholars were studying, when they found the time to rest and when they got down to writing. Also, these scholars were not confined to simply studying and writing in one isolated corner of the house. Rather, they were socially active and were in the forefront in solving the difficulties of the people.

The only conclusion that comes to our mind is that all success (taufiqaat) is from Allah and the special

attention of the Imams (a.s.). Due to this even Ameerul Momineen (a.s.) desired to see these scholars. It is narrated about Shaikh Mufid (r.a.)

ما كان ينام من الليل إلا هجة ثم يقوم يُصَلِّي أو يطالع أو يدرس أو يتلو القرآن

‘He slept in the night for a short period. Then he got up and prayed or he studied or took his class or taught the Quran.’³

Imam Ja’far Sadiq (a.s.) said:

‘Our Shia scholars are facing the attacks of Satan. They are replying to objections of Satan and his followers. They are protecting the weak Shias from the attacks of Satan. They have immobilized the enemies (ناصبى) from overpowering the Shias.’

‘Indeed, whosoever from our Shias reaches this position; he is superior to the soldiers who are fighting the Romans and Turks by a million grades. This is because the scholars are protecting the religion of our friends whereas the soldiers are protecting the physical boundaries.’⁴

The above tradition illustrates the position and worth of the scholars who are protecting the religion of the Shias and imparting religious teachings. They are protecting the weak friends of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) from the objections and doubts of enemies.

The appearance of the Satan’s attacks and his followers has changed over a period of time, but their aim is same i.e. to keep Shias away from religion. Keeping away from religion not only implies that a person becomes irreligious but it also means that even after possessing a religious background, he does not fulfill his religious duties and responsibilities nor does he have a sense of accountability towards it. The aim is to make the Shias soulless whereby even after watching the degradation and destruction in the society, he does not feel his religious responsibility to take up the cause.

Whatever religious fervour that we observe in the society is the result of the endeavours of the scholars. A lot more still needs to be done. We have to still traverse a long distance.

The Imam of the time is the medium and mercy between Allah and His creation. The bounties that we are receiving from Allah are through the medium of Imam (a.t.f.s.). This reality is well-highlighted in Ziaarat al-Jaameah in the following verses:

بِكُمْ فَتَحَ اللَّهُ وَ بِكُمْ يَخْتِمُ وَ بِكُمْ يُنَزِّلُ الْغَيْثَ وَ بِكُمْ يُمْسِكُ السَّمَاءَ أَنْ تَقَعَ عَلَى
الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ وَ بِكُمْ يُنْفِسُ الْهَمَّ-

“Allah has initiated creation through you and through you, He will end it. Through you, He sends down rain and because of you, the sky does not fall on the earth. And because of you sorrow is relieved.”

Besides this Imam Mahdi (a.t.f.s) has pointed towards his special attention in his Tauqee’ (a signed letter) to Shaikh al-Mufid (r.a.):

إِنَّا غَيْرُ مُهْمَلِينَ لِمُرَاعَاتِكُمْ وَ لَا نَاسِينَ لَذِكْرِكُمْ وَ لَوْلَا ذَلِكَ لَنَزَلَتْ بِكُمْ اللَّأْوَاءُ وَ
اصْطَلَمَتْكُمْ الْأَعْدَاءُ

“Surely we are not negligent of your protection nor are we forgetful of your remembrance. If it was so, calamities would have surrounded you and enemies would have crushed you.”⁵

It is due to the grace of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.) that today Shias are protected from most of the calamities. However, whatever little calamities and difficulties we encounter have some divine wisdom behind it. One of the main reasons for these calamities is that due to them we are awake, alert and active. But for the calamities, we would have become negligent.

The scholars have been blessed with the special attention of Imam az-Zaman (a.t.f.s.). On some occasions these blessings are apparent. Such apparent blessings have been recorded in books. However, many of these bounties are ignored and neglected. This is because Imam (a.t.f.s.) is not a worldly leader who chases publicity and wants to be in the limelight.

In this regard, numerous books have been written wherein the meetings of Imam (a.t.f.s.) with the scholars have been recorded. It is very clear that propagation of Shiaism, protection and safeguarding of mastership of Imam al-Asr (a.t.f.s.) is only possible because of his special attention.

However, a complete book has not yet been written on this topic. If someone takes up this topic and compiles the authentic incidents of Imam’s (a.t.f.s.) favors, it will be a great effort in the way of Islam. Its reward will be manifold. It will become a path through which the attention of people will be drawn towards Imam (a.t.f.s.) and pave the way for them to take Imam (a.t.f.s.) as a medium.

We conclude with an incident, which exemplifies the blessings of Imam (a.t.f.s.) on the Shias. When the son of Ayatullah Sayyid Abul Hasan Isfahaani (r.a.) was martyred, he decided to stay away from the leadership of the society. At that time Imam (a.t.f.s.) sent a message to him through Hujjatul Islam wal Muslimeen al Haaj Shaikh Muhammad Kufi Shustari (who had performed 40 Hajj):

قُلْ لَهُ أَرْخِصْ نَفْسَكَ وَاجْعَلْ مَجْلِسَكَ فِي الدَّهْلِيْزِ وَاقْضِ حَوَائِجَ النَّاسِ نَحْنُ
نَنْصُرُكَ

“Say to him, ‘Make yourself available (to the common people). And conduct your gatherings in the drawing room (of your house). And fulfill the needs of the people. We will help you.”⁶

The last sentence of this Tawqee’ (توقيع) ‘We will help you’ needs to be highlighted. If someone fulfills or takes one step in fulfilling the needs of the Shias, either material or spiritual, Imam (a.t.f.s.) will definitely help him.

May Allah give us Taufeeq to do such work which becomes the cause of Imam al-Asr’s (a.t.f.s.) help and support for us!

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1. Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 2, p. 6, tradition 12
 2. Al-Kaafi, Kitabul Hujjah
 3. Tahzeebul Ahkaam, Preface, pp. 32 & 33
 4. Al-Ehtejaaj of Shaikh Tabarsi (r.a.), pg. 8
 5. Al-Ehtejaaj, vol. 2, pg. 323
 6. Inaayat al-Hazrat Mahdi be Ulama wa Maraaje’ Taqleed, p. 110

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