

Conclusion

The conclusion of the present work can be summarized as follows:

i) The problem of the nature of the *Ghayba* of the Twelfth Imam is an old one in the history of Shi'ism and is closely connected with the question of the *Imama*. From the beginning the Shiites held that the Prophet could not have left his community without a leader to supervise the interpretation of the *shari'a* and its implementation in society.

On the contrary, he had appointed 'Ali as his successor and stipulated that the leadership of the community should pass to al-Hasan and al-Husayn, and thereafter to the eldest son of each subsequent Imam from the line of al-Husayn until the rise of *alMahdi*.

However, the Imams were unable to rule the whole community after the death of the Prophet. Since political power had been usurped by others, the Imams were forced to seek to regain it according to those methods which they felt to be sound and legal, even though the political and economic resources of their opponents were stronger than their own, especially after the martyrdom of al-Husayn.

None of the Imams after al-Husayn involved themselves directly in any obvious political activities or took part in direct incitement to revolt. In fact it seems that they restricted their activities to three major areas:

A) They encouraged the dissemination of Prophetic traditions amongst the people to acquaint them with the right of the People of the House of the Prophet (*Ahl al-Bayt*) to lead the community and to show them that their exclusion from actual political leadership did not mean that they were content to adopt a purely spiritual stance, nor did it imply tacit support of the government of the day.

Indeed they were totally committed to their struggle to regain control, but only when circumstances indicated the probable success of their rebellion, and when they were sure of the support of a sufficient number of faithful followers to aid the revolution and to implement Islam according to the Imamite approach.

B) From the Imamate of al-Sadiq the Imams circulated Prophetic *Hadith* amongst the Imamites themselves concerning the rise of an Imam from *Ahl al-Bayt* who would establish the righteous state.

This Imam would be *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*, who was mentioned in the Prophetic traditions. He would first go into a state of concealment from which he would continue to direct the affairs of the *Imama*. Then he would go into total occultation.

But the majority of the traditions did not specify which Imam this would be, nor did they stipulate a definite date for his uprising. This obscurity allowed some 'Alids to use these traditions to support their own political aims, without heeding the instructions of the Imam as regards the correct circumstances for the concealment and rising of *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*.

A clear example of this is seen in the case of the Isma'ilis, who broke away from the Imamites and continued to carry out their activities secretly between the years 145–296/762–908, until one of them managed to reach power in the year 296/908, claiming the title *al-Mahdi*.

The Zaydites also used these traditions in their attempts to gain control, but lacked the precaution and careful planning of the Isma'ills and the Imamites. In fact the obscurity of these *Hadiths*, related from al-Sadiq was one of the reasons that some Imamites believed that the concealed Imam was Musa al-Kazim, who would rise as *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*. These people were called the Waqifa.

C) The early Imams believed that any of them could be *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi* if the conditions were right but after the failure of their intended revolt in 140/757, they decided that it would be illadvised to fix a particular date for another uprising.

In this way the Imams hoped to encourage their followers in religious activities which would pave the way for more political matters at the appropriate time. At the same time they also secretly encouraged their most faithful followers, who found that they had no option but to rebel against unjust and tyrannical rulers.

One of the results of these policies was the establishment of the *Wikala* during the Imamate of al-Sadiq as a means of supervising the activities of the Imamites and guiding them towards the final aim of the Imams, namely the establishment of a truly Islamic state based entirely upon the *shari'a* as interpreted and implemented by the Prophet and his Household.

D) The 'Abbasid authorities were aware of the danger posed by the Shiites and especially by the Imamites. So they tried to turn the attention of the people away from the rights of *Ahl al-Bayt* (the People of the House) by fabricating Prophetic traditions which stated that the Imam after the Prophet was al-'Abbas and not 'Ali.

Simultaneously, they worked to divide the Shiites internally by appointing men from the *Jaririyya* to certain sensitive posts, so that the *Jaririyya* could investigate the Imamites and spread propaganda against them. After the failure of this policy, from the time of al-Ma'mun the 'Abbasids instituted a new plan which was intended to curtail the revolutionary activities of the Shiites. Part of this plan was to make the Imams their courtiers so that they could watch their every move.

This can be observed in the policy of al-Ma'mun, who brought al-Riḡa from Medina to Merv and appointed him his heir apparent, keeping him under house arrest. Al-Ma'mun followed a similar policy with the ninth Imam al-Jawad. Later the 'Abbasid caliphs followed al-Ma'mun's lead in their attitude towards the tenth Imam, al-Hadi, and his son al-'Askari, both of whom were kept under house arrest in Samarra for most of their lives.

It thus became extremely difficult for the Imams to have normal relations with their followers, except their closest associates with whom they held secret meetings.

It seems likely that the house arrest of the later Imams led them to expand the role of the organization, the *Wikala*, and to entrust the *Saf'ir* with more authority to supervise the Imamites' activities. From the time of al-Jawad onwards, the Imam began to guide the activities of his followers through his *Saf'ir*. The ordinary Imamites found such a situation strange and had to be educated to accept such indirect communication with the Imam.

However the role of the *Saf'ir* during this period is not as obvious as his later position during the first occultation of the Twelfth Imam, because the Imam's whereabouts were well-known and his position clear.

It also seems that the continuation of the house arrest encouraged the Imams to find a means which might release them from its restrictions. From the years 245-250/859-64 onwards statements related on the authority of al-Hadi and al-'Askari, indicating that an unnamed Twelfth Imam would go into concealment, were circulating amongst the Imamites. Furthermore al-Hadi and al-'Askari ordered their close agents to follow the instructions of 'Uthman b. Said al-'Umari and his son Abu Ja'far (i.e. the first and the second safirs).

It appears therefore that outwardly and historically the Imam's first concealment grew from the desire of his fathers to evade the surveillance of the government of the day, so that he could safely perform the duties of the *Imama*.

E) An attempt has been made in this study to prove that the eleventh Imam, al-'Askari, left a single male successor, whose name was Muhammad and who was smuggled by his father from Samarra to Medina in 259/873. He was the Twelfth Imam and his concealment began during the years 260-329/874-941. This was regarded as his first occultation, during which he continued to carry out his activities without disclosing his identity or his whereabouts, except to his four *Saf'irs* and certain select followers.

The first occultation was distinguished by the widening of the role of the *Wikala*. Throughout this period the four *safirs* directed the Imamites' activities. Their names were 'Uthman b. Said al-'Umari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. 'Uthman, al-Husayn b. Ruh al-Nawbakhti and 'Ali b. Muhammad al-Sammari. Baghdad was the centre of activities for the *safir*, who had agents in other provinces, beneath whom were many local agents.

A critical study of this period reveals that the main function of the *Saf'irs* was to perform certain tasks previously undertaken by the Imams so as to save the Imam from the political pressure of the 'Abbasids, which had been directed toward his predecessors from the time of al-Ma'mun.

The split amongst the Imamites after the death of al-'Askari in 260/874 led the first and the second *Saf'irs* to concentrate their efforts upon re-uniting the Imamite ranks by proving the existence of the Twelfth Imam and emphasizing that he was *al-Qa'im al-Mahdi*; that is, he who would undertake the elimination of oppressive government by militant means.

While the Imam was in hiding the role of the *Saf'ir* continued to increase so that by the time of the fourth *Saf'ir*, his statements began to be regarded as the statements of the Imam himself. It seems that the increased role of the *Saf'ir* was the result of the instructions of the Imam himself, who wanted his followers to accept the leadership of the jurists until the moment of his reappearance.

F) On the death of the fourth *Saf'ir* in 329/941 no further *Saf'ir* was appointed and all direct communications with the Imam came to an end, which meant the end of the Imamite *Wikala*. This was also considered the beginning of the second occultation. At this stage the Imamites expected the Imam's reappearance in the near future, and as a result none of the jurists dared to act on behalf of the Imam.

However the prolongation of the occultation led them to attempt to fill the vacuum left by the death of the fourth *Saf'ir*. They turned their attention to theological matters and became the leaders of the Imamites in this field. Gradually they came to be seen as the hidden Imam's indirect deputies, who were leading the community and instructing in the law during his occultation.

Finally the concealment of the Twelfth Imam seems to have been closely connected with two important phenomena:

Firstly, with the occurrence of the second occultation, most of the Shiite revolts, particularly those of the Zaydite and the Imamites, gradually disappeared.

Secondly, when the Imams were openly living amongst their followers, they suffered along with them from the oppression of the government, which was suspicious of their ambitions. But after the second occultation this oppression all but disappeared, and the Imamite jurists (*Fuqaha*) began to carry out their activities without encountering the difficult conditions faced by their predecessors.

This encouraged one to put forward the idea that Imams were throughout their lives trying to recover their usurped right, the political leadership of the Islamic state, by means which they believed to be correct and legal, while after the second occultation this task fell upon the Imamites themselves under the leadership of the *Fuqaha*; a situation which has continued until the present day.

In other words, as long as the Muslims are not ready for such political transformation the rise of the hidden Imam, the expected Mahdi, will be far. During his occultation it is the task of his followers in

particular the *Fuqaha*' to make Muslims ready for this transformation. They should struggle to make them true committed Muslims practicing the *shari'a* in its true sense in their daily life and in all aspects of society.

The *Fuqaha* 'should convince the Muslims that their rightful leader is the hidden Imam, the expected Mahdi, who was divinely appointed and that he acquired this title, the Mahdi, because he will be 'guided' by Allah and will guide men to undertake a spiritual and political transformation of society.

Before the reappearance of the hidden Imam, the *Fuqaha*' can assume political authority in order to disseminate the above tasks and to implement the rules of the *shari'a*.

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