

## Imām al-Bāqir and Imāmāh

Previously we discussed: The seclusion of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn resulted in the Shī‘ah aligning themselves to other movements and inevitably wandering into the realm of conjecture. The Kaysāniyyah were the pioneers of this thought process but it would no longer be restricted to them only. The stage having been set, the era of Imām al-Bāqir saw a number of new theories being introduced into the Shī‘ī world.

Amongst the Kaysaniyyah were those who believed that leadership had passed onto his son, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad, known as Abu Hāshim. They were called the Hāshimiyyah. Upon the death of Abu Hāshim again they became divided as they did on the demise of Muhammad ibn Ḥanafīyah, and four theories emerged:

1. Abū Hāshim has died and his brother, ‘Alī, is the Imām and his successor.
2. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mu‘āwiyah ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far is the Imām and his successor.

This group became known as the Ḥārithiyyah because ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥārith promoted it.

3. Muhammad ibn ‘Alī ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās is the Imām and his successor.

They became known as the Rāwandiyyah.

4. Abū Hāshim is the promised Mahdi.

These were the followers of Bayān al-Nahdī, and were thus dubbed the Bayāniyyah. Bayān al-Nahdī later claimed to be a Nabī and even wrote to Imām al-Bāqir forewarning him not to deny his Prophethood.<sup>1</sup>

The Shī‘ah who ascribed to each of these sects would become further sub-divided, their followers either claiming them to be the Mahdī in occultation, believing in the succession of the son, or ‘bestowing’ upon them divinity and claiming prophethood for themselves.

Al-Nawbakhtī writes in detail about the formation of these sects within the Shī‘ah and also documents their extremist beliefs which had not existed previously. It is ironic however that many of those beliefs which he deemed extremist became part and parcel of present-day Twelver Shi’ism. The underlying reason for this assimilation into mainstream Shī‘ism is that the deviants and founders of these sub-sects make up the core of the Twelver Shī‘ī tradition.

While the bulk of the Shī‘ah were justifying the leadership for ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥanafīyah, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mu‘āwiyah, Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-‘Abbāsī, or for the claim that Abū Hāshim is the Mahdī; a minority group posited another theory that Muḥammad al-Bāqir was the Imām after Zayn al-‘Ābidīn. The advocates of this view attempted to consolidate the Imāmāh for al-Bāqir using the argument of “possessing the weapon of the Nabī صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ”. And so another theory emerged.

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<sup>1</sup> *Firaq al-Shī‘ah* p. 28-30

Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār reports from al-Bāqir:

The position of the weapon to us is similar to the ark of the Banī Isrāʾīl, wherever it is found that will be where leadership will be. So wherever the weapon is found that is where knowledge is.<sup>2</sup>

Even at this point there is no mention of divine appointment, but rather entitlement is being argued on the basis of possessing the sword of the Prophet صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ.

However the adherents of this view were very small in number, the majority of the Shīʿah either following Zayd or Abū Hāshim. Sayed Husain M. Jafri writes in his *The Origins and early development of Shi'a Islam*:

The fact remains unchallenged that after Husayn's death the majority of the Shīʿīs followed Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah and not Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. Though the Tawwābūn, as we have seen, thought of the latter as their prospective Imām, even the remnants of the Tawwābūn who survived the battle of Ayn al-Wardā were attracted by Mukhtār to the side of Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah.<sup>3</sup>

He continues:

Thus the Mahdism of Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah soon became the order of the day among the Shīʿī of Kūfah. And, in course of time, the idea was popularly spread and accepted by the people and developed its own doctrines and dogma, legends and beliefs... **The majority of the Shīʿah** thus in that particular period became the followers of the Mahdi-Imām attached to the person of Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyah, and eclipsed, though only for a short period of time, the Imāms from the line of Ḥusayn.<sup>4</sup>

The pivots of this movement used the possession of the Prophet's sword as proof against the Kaysāniyyah, and its sub-sects of the Hārithiyyah, Rāwandiyyah, Bayāniyyah, and the Zaydiyyah—who claimed the Imāmah for Bāqir's brother Zayd—and even against the Ḥasanids who would later rebel against the Abbasids.

It is alleged that Imām al-Bāqir said, while addressing his rival claimants from the Ahl al-Bayt:

Can't they say with whom is the weapon of the Prophet of Allah? The sign that was on his sword was also on his two sides. If they but know.<sup>5</sup>

A legend was soon brought into circulation of ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn summoning al-Bāqir and officially passing the 'torch' to him. Muhammad ibn Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār, one of the leading Shīʿī scholars of the third century, used to say:

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<sup>2</sup> *Basāʿir* p.172

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 9 p. 167

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* p. 168

<sup>5</sup> *Basāʿir* p. 178

‘Alī ibn Ḥusayn preferred his son, Muḥammad al-Bāqir, at the time of his death with possessing of the shield that contain the weapon of the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم.

Using this argument against the Zaydis—the followers of Zayd ibn ‘Alī—the Shī‘ah created an image of jealousy and rivalry between the members of the Ahl al-Bayt. Al-Ṣaffār reports:

His (al-Bāqir’s) brothers challenged him on it (having sole possession of the sword) and he said to them, “By Allah, you have no right to it. If you had any right, he would not have given it to me.”<sup>6</sup>

The Shī‘ah were willing to portray the Ahl al-Bayt as people constantly complaining, bickering, and vying with one another for power. Uncle is depicted to be against nephew, cousin against cousin, and even brother against brother; each uttering unfathomable condemnation for the other. The reputation of the Ahl al-Bayt was readily sacrificed but not the false notions they ascribed to them.

The observant would have noticed the Shī‘ī doctrine of Imāmah slowly starting to take shape, but it is still far from crystallization. If the Twelver doctrine of Imāmah truly existed and was transmitted by the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his Companions from the Ahl al-Bayt then surely textual evidence would be the weightiest proof against those who opposed this divine line. Even more surprising is that the so-called rival claimants are no longer the likes of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān or even Mu‘awiyah—who are deemed enemies of the Ahl al-Bayt and avidly cursed—but now the enemy has become those very individuals who share the blood of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and form part of his Ahl al-Bayt. If leadership had been declared for these Twelve Imāms why did their own Ahl al-Bayt not hold true to this declaration? Why did their partisans not testify to their Imāmah but rather differed with each other concerning this?

The attitudes of the Shī‘ah and their irreconcilable differences reveal a conflicting portrait of Shi’ism when compared to the sketch of present-day Shi’i literature and the haughty proclamations of Shī‘ī Dā‘is, keenly observed in *Shi’i Islam: A Beginners guide*:

The story told in the Twelver Shi’i history books of an orderly succession of twelve Imāms, each with a large following and believing the same doctrines as present day Twelver Shi’is, is largely a backward projection of the final stage; the past reconstructed in the image of the norms of the present. In so far as we can reconstruct the past, it was probably very different and much more complex than the simple picture told by the later Shi’i historians.

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<sup>6</sup> Basā’ir 180