

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

SHI'A DOCTRINE AND LITERARY SOURCES - A BRIEF SURVEY

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CONTEXT

Many Shi'a quote Sunni Ahadith sources to assert legitimacy of their own doctrinal beliefs. As many Sunni Muslims generally remain unaware of the nature of their own sources, the Shi'a arguments seem on the surface quite convincing to the uninitiated and difficult to challenge. After such an exposition by the well versed Shi'a against the Sunni position and sources, a preference is shown by the Shi'a to **their traditions** that have been allegedly transmitted through the family of the Prophet's household (Ahl al-Bayt).

What is often not known to both groups is the weaknesses of the Shi'a sources and the Shi'a theology that rests on them. As arguments are usually posited by the Shia through the Sunni canon as a seemingly cogent expose, the Shi'a theology is never tackled from the perspective of the Quran.

SHI'A DOCTRINE

For the Shi'a, whereas the companions of the Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh) were **fallible** human souls, the 12 Imam's were **infallible** men and remained the righteous authoritative leaders from the Prophet's lineage to mankind.

An Islamic scholar notes:

..."With the growth of a Shi'i doctrine of the imamate, it became firstly established Shi'i dogma that the imam, in whom ultimate religious authority is vested, is by his very nature divinely protected from sin and error (ma'sum), endowed with a virtually limitless knowledge and appointed by an explicit, personal designation, conveying God's will. The

companions, on the other hand, even when no evil, anti-Alid motives are attributed to them, are fallible mortals, whose deficient knowledge and often faulty judgment deprive them of any claim to authority..." [1]

Such a designation of infallibility, knowledge and authority **has not** been granted **to any mortal** in the Quran, let alone unnamed individuals succeeding from the progeny of the Prophet's cousin.

It is significant to note that neither is Imam Ali mentioned in the Quran nor is any indication given of spiritual succession through anyone's progeny. It is apt to question here why a contemporary of the Prophet named 'Zayd' is considered fit for mention by the Quran for the relatively unimportant matter of adoption (33:37), yet the seemingly **crucial matter** of future spiritual guidance in the form of infallible righteous imams **escapes complete mention from the Holy Scripture**. There is not a hint of Imam Ali or the concept of Imamate as understood by the Shi'a in the entire Quran. However, the concept of Imamate **remains** a fundamental **core belief** of the Shia.

Furthermore, the concept of automatic piety based on lineage is **completely negated** by the Quran. Prophet Noah's ^(pbuh) son remained a disbeliever and of evil conduct (11:46; 57:26). Prophet Abraham's ^(pbuh) covenant did not extend to his unrighteous lineage (2:124; 37:113)

(Please see related article [1] below)

THE DEFINITION OF SHIA 'AHL-AL-BAYT' NEGATED BY THE QURAN

The Shi'a refer to a venerated group of the family of the Prophet's household (Ahl al-Bayt). This consists of Prophet Muhammad ^(pbuh) himself, Fatima (Prophet's daughter), Imam Ali (Prophet's cousin), Hasan and Husayn (Prophet's grandchildren). This is collectively known as the Ahl al-Kisa, (People / Family of the cloak).

The Quran gives absolutely **no warrant** to restrict the meaning of 'Ahl-al-Bayt' in the way Shia theology asserts.

The restriction to allow only one daughter in this venerated group (Fatima) is also a clear violation of verse 33:59 which clearly makes use of the Arabic term 'banatika' which refers to the **'daughters'** (plural) of the Prophet as part of his household.

033:059 (part)

"O Prophet! say to your wives and your daughters (Arabic: banatika) and the women of the believers ..."

To assert only one daughter as part of the 'Ahl' of the Prophet is clearly **unsupportable** by the Quran itself. One begs to question the motives of the Shi'a behind the inclusion of only 'one' selected daughter from the prophet's other daughters. The significance of Fatima as a **wife** of Imam Ali as

opposed to the daughter of the Prophet cannot be simply overlooked. After all for the Shia, Fatima was the mother of future spiritual infallible guides. Such veneration seems only appropriate from the lens of the Shia.

However, the Quran provides no sanction for this interpretation.

SHIA SECONDARY SOURCES

One only finds the Shi'a Ahadith development appearing in the literary historical record after the disappearance of the twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (al-Mahdi) and his subsequent occultation (al-ghaybah al-sughra - 872 CE) in which he allegedly undertook a hidden supernatural state. This state has now been in existence for over 1100 years (Major occultation - al-ghaybah al-kubra 941 CE).

Al-Qummi's writings (c.903 CE) are the earliest surviving expressions of the Shiite doctrine which exist in the Basa'ir al-Darajat (Imami book)

Whether any earlier Shi'a books actually ever existed or these amount to claims designed to prove a tradition of collating information that other companions were not privy to, can never be proven.

The main Shiite canon continues in the literary record from the canon works of Muhammad b. Ya'qub al-Kulayni (d.939-41 CE) commonly known as the 'Kitab al-Kafi'. Other works of note are Ibn Babawayh's (d.991 CE) 'Yahduruhi al-faqih' and al-Tusi's (d.1067CE) collections.

These sources are as late as the 10th and the 11th centuries. The Najh al-Balagha (Peak of eloquence) which constitutes attributions to Ali was collected by Sharif al-Radi (a.k.a. Seyyed Razi) in the late 10th century.

The Shiite sources have similar concerns (if not more due to their late transmission) with 'isnad' and 'authenticity' as do the Sunni Ahadith canon. None of them have been transmitted by the pen of the authors that they are attributed to. They are later compilations which have allegedly been transmitted from person to person over the centuries till the point of compilation.

Shia canon sources are even later than the Sunni sources.

As an example, the Sunni sahih canon, 'Bukhari' was allegedly completed as late as 846 CE (approx. 220 years after the Prophet's death). This is in contrast to Ya'qub al-Kulayni's Shiite canon works which don't date until the early 10th century (approx. 300 years after the Prophet's death).

FINAL THOUGHTS

Shi'a doctrine finds no support in the Quran. In fact, verses of the Quran completely negate such a doctrine. Shi'a beliefs seem to be the result of a theology which has been formulated after the alleged occultation of the last imam and an attempt to understand the absence of a physical spiritual guide from the progeny of Imam Ali. Shi'a theology is built on traditions which are of just as questionable authenticity (if not more) as are Sunni sources.

Neither sources find any authority from the Quran.

However, as vociferous arguments are posited from these sources, both major sects continue to wrangle, often culminating in bloodshed. Given historical knowledge and experience, this will most likely set to continue.

Only God knows best.

068:036-38

"What is wrong with you, how do you judge? Or do you have another book which you study? In it, you can find what you wish?"

Related Articles:

- (1) [Appeal to Righteousness Based on Lineage, Relationship, Companionship and Proximity](#)
- (2) [Imamate - A Shi'a Doctrine](#)
- (3) [Nikaah al-Mut'ah - Temporary Marriage](#)

REFERENCES

[1] BEESTON. A.F.L, *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, Cambridge University Press 1983, First published 1983, Shi'i Hadith by E.Kohlberg, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Collection and transmission, Description of the corpus of Shi'i Hadith, Page 300

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