



Abdulbosit MELIBOYEV^a 

^aFirst-year Master's Student,

Imam Bukhari Tashkent Islamic Institute

Employee, Tashkent Islamic Institute

THE EMERGENCE OF IMAMIYYA SHIISM, ITS DOCTRINAL VIEWS, AND ITS DIVISION INTO SECTS

Abstract. *This article presents a scholarly and comparative analysis of the historical emergence, doctrinal principles, and internal sectarian divisions of the Imamiyya (Twelver Shi'a) tradition, which developed between the seventh and ninth centuries as the largest branch of Shiism. The study examines the theory of the Imamate as the central pillar of Imamiyya doctrine, the line of the Twelve Imams descended from Ali ibn Abi Talib, and their perceived role in Islamic society. It also discusses key elements of Imamiyya theology, including the infallibility of the Imams (ismah), divinely granted knowledge (ladunni knowledge), extraordinary phenomena, the doctrines of occultation (ghaybah) and Mahdism, the principle of taqiyyah, mut'ah marriage, and beliefs concerning the "Mushaf of Fatimah," drawing on religious and historical sources. The article analyzes the causes behind the emergence of groups associated with the broader Shi'i and Imamiyya milieu, including the Kaysaniyya, Zaydiyya, Isma'iliyya, Musawiyya, Waqifiyya, and Ithna Ashariyya, and highlights their principal doctrinal differences. It further outlines the Imamiyya approach to the sources of Islamic law the Qur'an, Sunnah, ijma, reason, and ijthihad. Finally, the article summarizes Sunni scholarly critiques of Imamiyya doctrines, historical assessments of the movement, its modern geographical distribution, and aspects of its socio-political influence.*

Keywords: *Imamiyya, Shiism, Imamate, Twelve Imams, ghaybah, taqiyyah, Ithna Ashariyya, Ahl al-Sunnah, sects, mut'ah marriage.*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, numerous sects and schools emerged, some of which have survived to the present day. One such group is the Imamiyya branch of Shiism, which took shape between the seventh and ninth centuries. Imamiyya adherents regard Ali ibn

Abi Talib as the person most entitled to succeed to the caliphate and, in this respect, give him precedence over Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman. The principal reason they are called “Imamiyya” is that they regard the question of the Imamate leadership over religious and worldly affairs as the central and overriding issue of their creed.

Today, Imamiyya Shiites constitute the largest part of the Shi‘i community. Indeed, when the term “Shi‘a” is used without qualification, it frequently refers to the Imamiyya. At present, Imamiyya communities are especially widespread in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Azerbaijan. The purpose of this study is to analyze the historical emergence of Imamiyya Shiism, its doctrinal foundations, its approach to the sources of Islamic law, and the causes of its internal divisions.

MAIN BODY

Throughout history, many sects and schools arose, some of which have continued to the present day. Among them is the Imamiyya branch of Shiism, which emerged between the seventh and ninth centuries. Its adherents regard Ali ibn Abi Talib as the person most entitled to inherit the caliphate and give him precedence over Abu Bakr, Umar, and Uthman. They are called “Imamiyya” because they place the Imamate the governance of people in both religious and worldly affairs at the center of their creed (al-Jurjani, 2018:53).

The twelve Imams recognized by the Imamiyya are listed as follows: (1) Ali ibn Abi Talib, the fourth Rightly Guided Caliph and the son-in-law of the Prophet, who was killed following an attack by Abd al-Rahman ibn Muljam in the mosque of Kufa on 17 Ramadan 40 AH / 24 January 661 CE; (2) Hasan ibn Ali (3–50 AH / 624–670 CE); (3) Husayn ibn Ali (4–61 AH / 625–680 CE); (4) Ali Zayn al-Abidin ibn Husayn (38–95 AH / 658–714 CE); (5) Muhammad al-Baqir ibn Ali Zayn al-Abidin (57–114 AH / 676–733 CE); (6) Ja‘far al-Sadiq ibn Muhammad al-Baqir (83–148 AH / 702–765 CE); (7) Musa al-Kazim ibn Ja‘far al-Sadiq (128–183 AH / 746–799 CE); (8) Ali al-Rida ibn Musa al-Kazim (148–203 AH / 765–819 CE); (9) Muhammad al-Jawad ibn Ali al-Rida (195–220 AH / 811–835 CE); (10) Ali al-Hadi ibn Muhammad al-Jawad (212–254 AH / 827–868 CE); (11) Hasan al-Askari ibn Ali al-Hadi (232–260 AH / 847–874 CE); and (12) Muhammad al-Mahdi ibn Hasan al-Askari (born 256 AH / 870 CE) (al-Juhani, 1999:51).

The Imamiyya today form the largest Shi‘i community, to such an extent that the unqualified use of the word “Shi‘a” often points directly to the Imamiyya (Rustam, 2005:216). They are particularly concentrated in Iran, with a substantial population in Iraq. Communities also exist in Pakistan and Lebanon. In Syria, although their numbers are smaller, the source cited in the original article notes relations with the Nusayris, whom it classifies among extremist Shi‘i currents (al-Juhani, 1999:56).

In a terminological definition, the Shi‘a are described as the supporters of Ali who say that he was the Imam after the Prophet and who maintain that the Imamate should not pass outside Ali and his descendants (al-Jurjani, 2018:171).

Principal Ideas and Doctrines

1) Imamate. In the Imamiyya view, the Imamate is one of the foundations of religion, and faith is considered complete through belief in it. It is regarded, like prophethood, as a divine favor granted by God. In every age there must be an Imam who guides humankind and functions as the Prophet’s successor in guiding people toward goodness and felicity (Rustam, 2005:45). The Imam, like the Prophet, is understood to possess general authority over people, to administer their affairs and interests, establish justice, and remove oppression and hostility. Accordingly, the Imamate is viewed as a continuation of prophethood, and the same reasoning used to establish the necessity of sending prophets is applied to the appointment of an Imam after the Messenger (Rustam, 2005:241).

The term *asl* means a foundation upon which other matters are built (al-Jurjani, 2018:45).

The Shi‘i scholar Muhammad Rida al-Muzaffar states that the Imamate is one of the pillars of religion and that faith is completed by belief in it. He further argues that it is not permissible to imitate one’s forefathers, family members, or teachers in this matter, regardless of their stature; rather, just as reflection is required in questions of divine unity and prophethood, it is also required in the question of the Imamate (al-Muzaffar, n.d.:54).

According to Imamiyya doctrine, the Imamate can be established only through an explicit *nass*. In other words, the previous Imam must directly designate the next Imam as a specific person, rather than merely describing the qualities of a possible successor. In terminology, *nass* is defined as wording that makes the speaker’s intended meaning explicit and is sometimes described as wording that does not admit of interpretation (al-Jurjani, 2018:309).

From the preceding views, it is clear that the Imamiyya regard the Imamate as one of the most important questions in Islam. They maintain that the Prophet could not have left the community without a leader and in a state of disagreement, but must have designated a person to whom people could refer and on whom they could rely. To substantiate this claim, they argue that on the day of Ghadir Khumm the Prophet openly declared the Imamate of Ali ibn Abi Talib (al-Muzaffar, n.d.:64). However, according to the original article, Sunni hadith scholars and historians have not treated this event as conclusive evidence for that specific meaning (al-Juhani, 1999:54).

The Imamiyya further claim that Ali ibn Abi Talib appointed his sons Hasan and Husayn as Imams after him. Thus, in their doctrine, each Imam designates the next Imam through a testament. Persons so designated are referred to as *awsiya'* (legatees or successors).

Ismah (infallibility). In Imamiyya belief, the Twelve Imams from the Ahl al-Bayt are considered completely protected from error, forgetfulness, and the commission of major or minor sins (al-Muzaffar, n.d.:56).

2) Ladunni knowledge. According to Imamiyya belief, each Imam received special knowledge from the Prophet enabling a perfect understanding of the Sharia. This is described as *ladunni* knowledge, and the Imam is said to differ from the Prophet only in not receiving revelation. They maintain that the Prophet entrusted the secrets of the Sharia to the Imams, who then explain this knowledge to people in a manner suitable to the needs of each age (al-Muzaffar, n.d.:56–58).

3) Extraordinary phenomena. Imamiyya sources hold that events outside ordinary natural patterns may occur at the hands of the Imams, and these are described as “miracles.” If there is no explicit *nass* from the preceding Imam identifying the next Imam, such an extraordinary event is viewed as a means of establishing the latter’s Imamate.

4) Al-Ghaybah (occultation). The Imamiyya maintain, on rational and religious grounds, that the earth can never be devoid of God’s proof. On this basis, they claim that the twelfth Imam entered occultation. They divide occultation into the Minor Occultation (*al-ghaybah al-sughra*) and the Major Occultation (*al-ghaybah al-kubra*) (Rustam, 2005:255). The source cited by the original article evaluates these views critically and characterizes them as legendary conceptions (al-Juhani, 1999:54).

5) Taqiyyah. The Imamiyya regard taqiyyah as a major religious principle. In the presentation cited by the original article, abandoning taqiyyah is treated as comparable

to abandoning prayer. Taqiyyah is considered obligatory until the appearance of al-Qa'im (the awaited Imam), and a person who abandons it beforehand is viewed as departing from the religion as understood by the Imamiyya.

They cite the Qur'anic phrase, "except when taking precaution against them" (Qur'an 3:28), as evidence (Muhammad Yusuf, 2008:315). They also transmit a report attributed to the fifth Imam, Abu Ja'far: "Taqiyyah is my religion and the religion of my forefathers; whoever has no taqiyyah has no faith" (al-Muzaffar, n.d.:75). Imamiyya authors interpret the notion of taqiyyah very broadly.

6) Mut'ah marriage. The Imamiyya regard temporary marriage (mut'ah) as a legitimate practice and, in some presentations, as a meritorious act. They cite the Qur'anic phrase, "For whatever you enjoy [of marriage] from them, give them their due compensation as an obligation" (Qur'an 4:24) (Muhammad Yusuf, 2008:450).

The original article then presents the Sunni position that Islamic law prohibited marriage limited to a fixed term and that Sunni scholars consider an intention of continuity to be a condition of marriage. It further states that, because temporary marriage may produce negative social consequences, its prohibition is supported on both legal and social grounds (al-Juhani, 1999:54).

Twelver Imamiyya Shiites also believe in the existence of a separate text called the "Mushaf of Fatimah." In al-Kafi, al-Kulayni transmits a report from Ja'far al-Sadiq stating that they possessed the Mushaf of Fatimah. When asked what it was, the report describes it as a text three times the size of the Qur'an and states that it did not contain even a single letter from the Qur'an (al-Juhani, 1999:55).

Sources for Deriving Legal Rulings

The Imamiyya sources for deriving legal rulings are presented as follows: (1) the Qur'an, which contains clarification of all matters and is regarded as the definitively transmitted word of God; (2) the Sunnah, in which mutawatir reports are accepted without dispute, whereas solitary reports are accepted as authoritative only when transmitted from one of the infallible Imams; (3) ijma, which is not authoritative in itself but becomes authoritative when it reveals the position of an infallible Imam, because the statement of the infallible Imam is regarded as the underlying proof; (4) reason, which is used as evidence when no proof is found in the Qur'an, Sunnah, or ijma; and (5) ijtihad, which is permitted during the absence of the Imam because every event is understood to have an established legal ruling (Rustam, 2005:263).

Sects Associated with the Imamiyya and the Wider Shi'i Tradition

In the history of Shiism, the multiplication of sects was largely connected with disputes over the Imamate. After the death of each Imam, disagreement over who should succeed him often led to the formation of a new group. Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari states that the greatest disagreement among the Shi'a concerned the Imamate, resulting in their division into numerous sects (al-Ash'ari, 2005:65).

Imamiyya representatives held that, after the Messenger of God, the caliphate and religious leadership belonged exclusively to Ali ibn Abi Talib and his descendants. However, divergent views arose over the identification of the Imams after Ali, and several independent groups consequently appeared within the broader Shi'i environment (Abu Zahra, 1996:45).

Al-Shahristani relates the division of Shi'i groups to disagreements concerning Hasan, Husayn, and the succession of later Imams. According to his account, whenever an Imam died, some followers accepted the next Imam, while others recognized a different person or waited for the deceased Imam to return (al-Shahristani, 1993:146).

The Kaysaniyya

The Kaysaniyya consisted of Shiites who followed Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah, a son of Ali. They regarded Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah as superior to Hasan and Husayn and believed him to be the true Imam after Ali (al-Shahristani, 1993:148).

Some Kaysaniyya adherents claimed that Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah had not died but was concealed on Mount Radwa and would return at the end of time as the Mahdi. This idea is presented as one of the factors that later contributed to the development of theories about a hidden Imam (al-Baghdadi, 1988:52).

Over time, the Kaysaniyya divided into several branches. Al-Baghdadi mentions groups such as the Harbiyya, Hashimiyya, and Bayaniyya within the Kaysaniyya (al-Baghdadi, 1988:54).

The Zaydiyya

The Zaydiyya is one of the oldest and comparatively moderate Shi'i traditions. It is associated with Zayd ibn Ali (d. 122 AH / 740 CE), the grandson of Ali ibn Abi Talib and the son of Husayn ibn Ali. Zayd ibn Ali revolted against Umayyad rule, and his supporters later formed a distinct sect (al-Shahristani, 1993:154).

Although the Zaydis restrict eligibility for the Imamate to the descendants of Ali, Hasan, and Husayn, they do not consider a special nass a divine or prophetic designation

to be a necessary condition. In their view, any descendant of Fatimah who possesses knowledge, piety, and courage and rises against oppression may become Imam (Abu Zahra, 1996:58).

This position differs substantially from Twelver Imamiyya doctrine, which fixes the number of Imams at twelve and holds that each Imam is divinely designated as successor to the previous Imam (al-Nawbakhti, 1936:39).

Because the Zaydis did not absolutely reject Abu Bakr and Umar, they have often been described as closer to Sunni Islam than other Shi'i groups. Al-Shahristani notes that Zayd ibn Ali did not deny the caliphates of Abu Bakr and Umar, and that some of his supporters separated from him for this reason (al-Shahristani, 1993:155).

The Zaydiyya later divided into such branches as the Jarudiyya, Sulaymaniyya, and Butriyya. The Jarudis held that the Imamate of Ali was established by nass, while the Sulaymaniyya and Butriyya adopted a more flexible position on this question (al-Baghdadi, 1988:34–36).

The Isma'iliyya

The Isma'iliyya is among the best-known groups to have emerged from the broader Imamiyya milieu. It arose after the death of the sixth Imam, Ja'far al-Sadiq (d. 148 AH / 765 CE). Following his death, his followers disputed whether the succession belonged to his son Musa al-Kazim or to his other son, Isma'il ibn Ja'far. One group recognized Isma'il as the true Imam, thereby giving rise to the Isma'iliyya (al-Nawbakhti, 1936:67).

For the Isma'ilis, either Isma'il or his son Muhammad ibn Isma'il is regarded as the seventh Imam. They continued the line of the Imamate through the descendants of Isma'il rather than through Musa al-Kazim (al-Shahristani, 1993:167).

One important feature of Isma'ili doctrine is esoteric interpretation. Isma'ilis maintain that, in addition to the outward meanings of the Qur'an and hadith, there are hidden inward meanings. For this reason, the Isma'iliyya has also been associated with the designation "Batiniyya" (al-Shahristani, 1993:167).

Over the course of history, many groups emerged from the Isma'iliyya itself, including those associated with the Fatimid state, the Qarmatians, the Nizaris, and the Musta'lis. The Fatimid state in particular ruled for a long period in North Africa and Egypt (al-Baghdadi, 1988:265).

Sunni scholars criticized Isma‘ili esoteric interpretations. The original article cites al-Baghdadi and Ibn Hazm as scholars who regarded some of these views as incompatible with Islamic doctrine (Abu Zahra, 1996:71).

The Musawiyya

The Musawiyya recognized Musa al-Kazim, the son of Ja‘far al-Sadiq, as the seventh Imam. The principal body that later developed into the Twelver Imamiyya emerged from this line (Ibn Hazm, 1985:181).

Musawiyya adherents claimed that Ja‘far al-Sadiq had appointed Musa al-Kazim as Imam after himself. On this basis, they distinguished themselves from the Isma‘ilis, who recognized Isma‘il and his descendants as Imams (al-Nawbakhti, 1936:73).

Once the Imamate of Musa al-Kazim was accepted, the succession continued through his descendants. Thus Ali al-Rida, Muhammad al-Jawad, Ali al-Hadi, Hasan al-Askari, and Muhammad al-Mahdi were recognized as Imams (Abu Zahra, 1996:82).

Because the Musawiyya provided the historical foundation from which the Ithna Ashariyya later developed, it occupies an important place in the history of the Imamiyya.

The Waqifiyya

The Waqifiyya was one of the groups that appeared among the Imamiyya after the death of Musa al-Kazim (d. 183 AH / 799 CE). This group denied his death and believed that he was the Mahdi who would return at the end of time. Because they stopped the line of the Imamate at Musa al-Kazim, they became known as the Waqifiyya, “those who stop” (al-Nawbakhti, 1936:79).

Historical sources also mention financial and political factors in the formation of the Waqifiyya. It is reported that some of Musa al-Kazim’s agents did not wish to hand over funds collected in his name to the next Imam and therefore denied his death (al-Baghdadi, 1988:67).

According to al-Nawbakhti, Waqifiyya adherents held that Musa al-Kazim had entered occultation and would return in the future as the Mahdi. They did not accept the Imamate of Ali al-Rida (al-Nawbakhti, 1936:80).

Al-Shahristani counts the Waqifiyya among the important Imamiyya groups and notes that their doctrines influenced, to some extent, later theories concerning the occultation of the twelfth Imam.

Over time, the Waqifiyya weakened, and most of its adherents joined the Ithna Ashariyya or other Shi‘i groups.

The Ithna Ashariyya (Ja'fariyya)

The Ithna Ashariyya (Arabic: الاثنا عشرية), meaning “Twelvers,” is today the largest and principal branch of the Imamiyya. Its adherents recognize as rightful the twelve Imams beginning with Ali ibn Abi Talib and ending with Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Askari (al-Shahristani, 1993:176).

According to Ithna Ashari doctrine, the Imamate is an office appointed by God, and each Imam identifies his successor through nass. The Imams are regarded as protected from sin and as incapable of error in religious matters (Abu Zahra, 1996:84).

The Twelve Imams are: Ali ibn Abi Talib, Hasan ibn Ali, Husayn ibn Ali, Ali Zayn al-Abidin, Muhammad al-Baqir, Ja'far al-Sadiq, Musa al-Kazim, Ali al-Rida, Muhammad al-Jawad, Ali al-Hadi, Hasan al-Askari, and Muhammad al-Mahdi (al-Mufid, 1413 AH:38).

One of the most important elements of Ithna Ashari doctrine is the theory of occultation. According to this belief, the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, disappeared in 260 AH and will return near the end of time to fill the world with justice (Tabataba'i, 1975:174). Today this tradition is widespread especially in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, and several other countries.

Sunni scholars have criticized doctrines such as the infallibility of the Imams, their designation through nass, and the theory of occultation. They argue that such claims are not established by unequivocal evidence in the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah (al-Saduq, 1405 AH:320).

Differences Among the Imamiyya-Related Sects

The principal point of disagreement among the groups discussed above concerned the succession of the Imamate. The Kaysaniyya recognized Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah as Imam; the Zaydiyya held that the Imamate could belong to any qualified descendant of Ali and Fatimah; the Isma'iliyya accepted Isma'il ibn Ja'far after Ja'far al-Sadiq; the Waqifiyya stopped the succession at Musa al-Kazim; and the Ithna Ashariyya continued the line through Muhammad al-Mahdi (al-Shahristani, 1993:146–178).

Significant differences also existed regarding the status, infallibility, occultation, and religious authority of the Imams. The Isma'iliyya showed a stronger inclination toward esoteric interpretation, whereas the Zaydiyya adopted a comparatively more moderate position on these issues (al-Baghdadi, 1988:22–75).

Sunni Scholarly Approaches to Imamiyya Sects

Throughout history, Sunni scholars produced many works on Shiism and its various groups. Abu al-Hasan al-Ash‘ari, Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, Ibn Hazm, al-Shahristani, Ibn Taymiyyah, and others analyzed the doctrines of Imamiyya-related groups (al-Ash‘ari, 2005:65–90).

While acknowledging the virtues of Ali and the elevated status of the Ahl al-Bayt, these scholars did not accept the view that the Imamate is divinely designated, that the Imams are infallible, or that a hidden Imam remains in occultation (Ibn Hazm, 1985:170–190).

Al-Shahristani, in a comparatively descriptive style, provides information on Shi‘i sects and discusses their historical development (al-Shahristani, 1993:145–180).

In summary, the Imamiyya and related Shi‘i groups divided into numerous sects over disputes concerning the Imamate. Many of these groups were active only during certain periods and later disappeared. In the modern period, the Ithna Ashariyya is the largest surviving representative of the Imamiyya tradition.

Studying the history of Shiism contributes to a deeper understanding of Islamic sectarian history, the formation of doctrinal ideas, and the political-religious relations that developed within Muslim societies.

Causes of the Emergence of Sects among the Imamiyya

The proliferation of Shi‘i sects was not accidental but resulted from a range of political, social, and doctrinal factors. After the death of the Messenger of God, questions of state governance and leadership became among the most important issues facing the Muslim community. These disputes later contributed to the formation of Shiism and the emergence of numerous groups within it (al-Baghdadi, 1988:22–75).

Researchers identify three principal factors in the emergence of Shi‘i sects:

First, the political factor. Views concerning the position of Ali ibn Abi Talib in relation to the caliphate gradually acquired doctrinal significance. Consequently, some groups began to assert that Ali had a stronger claim to the caliphate than others (al-Ash‘ari, 2005:65–90).

Second, doctrines concerning the Imamate. Disagreements over who should succeed each Imam after his death led to the formation of new sects. The emergence

of the Isma‘iliyya and Musawiyya after the death of Ja‘far al-Sadiq is a clear example (al-Shahristani, 1993:145–180).

Third, ideas of Mahdism and occultation. Some Shi‘i groups denied the death of their Imams and believed that those Imams had gone into occultation and would return in the future as the Mahdi. This pattern is particularly visible in the Kaysaniyya and Waqifiyya (Ibn Hazm, 1985:170–190).

The Place of the Theory of the Imamate in Imamiyya Doctrine

The Imamate is one of the central themes of Imamiyya doctrine. Whereas Sunni thought generally treats the caliphate and political leadership as matters of jurisprudence and political order, the Imamiyya treat the Imamate as one of the foundations of belief (al-Shahristani, 1993:145–180).

Imamiyya authors regard the Imamate as a continuation of prophethood. In their view, after the Prophet, responsibility for governing the community and correctly interpreting religion was entrusted to infallible Imams. Accordingly, they view the Imams not merely as political rulers but as divinely guided representatives (al-Ash‘ari, 2005:65–90).

According to Shaykh al-Mufid, the Imamate is not a matter left to human choice but an office determined by God (Ibn Hazm, 1985:170–190). For this reason, Imamiyya scholars reject the idea that Imams can be selected through election or consultation.

Sunni scholars, by contrast, do not accept this position. They argue that the Qur’an and Sunnah contain no unequivocal nass appointing particular individuals as Imams or caliphs, and therefore maintain that the caliphate was established through the consensus and consultation of the Companions (Ibn Hazm, 1985:170–190).

The Question of the Infallibility of the Imams

One of the most important features of Imamiyya doctrine is the belief in the infallibility of the Imams. The Imamiyya hold that, like prophets, the Imams are protected from sin and error (al-Baghdadi, 1988:22–75).

Imamiyya scholars reason that if an Imam could commit sin or error, people could not follow him completely. Therefore, they maintain that God protects His proofs from error (al-Shahristani, 1993:145–180).

Sunni scholars, however, maintain that infallibility in this absolute sense is specific to prophets. In their view, the Companions, Successors, and great Imams may be virtuous, but they are not absolutely infallible (al-Ash‘ari, 2005:65–90).

The Doctrine of Occultation and Mahdism

The doctrine of occultation occupies a special place in Twelver Imamiyya belief. According to this doctrine, the twelfth Imam, Muhammad ibn Hasan al-Askari, disappeared while still young and will return near the end of time (al-Baghdadi, 1988:22–75).

The Imamiyya divide occultation into two stages: the Minor Occultation and the Major Occultation. During the Minor Occultation, the Imam is believed to have communicated with his followers through special representatives; during the Major Occultation, this form of communication is considered to have ceased (Ibn Hazm, 1985:170–190).

This doctrine became significant in Imamiyya history because, after Hasan al-Askari, no visible Imam was present; the theory of occultation therefore enabled the continuation of the Imamiyya line of authority (al-Baghdadi, 1988:22–75).

Sunni scholars have criticized this theory on historical and hadith-based grounds, arguing that the belief in a hidden Imam living for more than a millennium is not established by reliable evidence (al-Ash‘ari, 2005:65–90).

Contemporary Imamiyya Shiites

Today, the great majority of Imamiyya Shiites belong to the Ithna Ashariyya. They live mainly in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Azerbaijan, and parts of the Persian Gulf region.

In the twentieth century, new developments also appeared in Imamiyya political thought. In particular, the theory of Wilayat al-Faqih advanced by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini became one of the principal currents of modern Imamiyya political thought (al-Shahristani, 1993:145–180).

According to this theory, until the return of the hidden Imam, Muslim society may be governed by jurists and mujtahids. This conception played an important role in the formation of the political system of the Islamic Republic of Iran (al-Ash‘ari, 2005:65–90).

The history of Imamiyya sects shows that most of these groups emerged as a result of disagreements over the succession of the Imamate. Debates over who should assume leadership after the death of each Imam gave rise to new doctrinal currents.

Although the Kaysaniyya, Zaydiyya, Isma‘iliyya, Waqifiyya, and Ithna Ashariyya all occupied important places in the history of Shiism, today the Ithna Ashariyya remains the dominant surviving Imamiyya tradition. These groups are important for the study of Islamic theology, political thought, and sectarian history.

DISCUSSION

The emergence and development of the Imamiyya were closely connected with three principal factors: political struggles, doctrinal interpretations of the Imamate, and ideas of Mahdism and occultation. Sunni scholars such as Abu al-Hasan al-Ash‘ari, Abd al-Qahir al-Baghdadi, Ibn Hazm, al-Shahristani, Ibn Taymiyyah, and others analyzed Imamiyya teachings and offered textual and rational critiques of their fundamental doctrines.

In particular, Sunni critiques addressed the infallibility of the Imams, designation through nass, taqiyyah, mut‘ah marriage, and the doctrine of the hidden Imam. According to the Sunni theological position presented in the original article, absolute infallibility is a characteristic of prophets alone. The article also presents critical assessments of claims concerning the “Mushaf of Fatimah” and esoteric interpretation. It further cites Mani‘ ibn Hammad al-Juhani, who argues that Shiism began as a political movement and later developed into a distinct doctrinal form under the influence of various internal and external factors.

RESULTS

The analysis produced the following conclusions:

1. The Imamiyya regard the Imamate not as a secondary matter of Islamic law, but as a fundamental condition for the completeness of faith and as a pillar of religion.
2. During the course of historical development, disputes concerning the succession of the Imams led to the emergence of numerous groups, including the Kaysaniyya, Zaydiyya, Isma‘iliyya, Waqifiyya, and Ithna Ashariyya.
3. By the modern period, most of these groups had disappeared or lost their earlier prominence, while the Ithna Ashariyya (Ja‘fariyya) remained the principal representative of the Imamiyya.
4. In the twentieth century, the theory of Wilayat al-Faqih advanced by Ayatollah Khomeini became a modern Imamiyya conception for regulating political authority and state governance during the occultation of the Imam.

CONCLUSION

Mani‘ ibn Hammad al-Juhani concludes, in the source cited by the original article, that Shiism initially began as a political tendency asserting that Ali ibn Abi Talib had

a stronger claim to the caliphate. He argues that it later developed into a doctrinal and political sect and that various forces gathered around it for political and religious purposes.

The cited author further maintains that a researcher surveying Islamic history can scarcely find a rebellion, separatist movement against central authority, or doctrinal controversy in which Shi‘i groups did not participate either directly or indirectly. On this basis, he portrays Islamic history as having been marked by repeated uprisings and divisions.

He also claims that the problem continued because certain hidden elements among Muslims benefited from sustaining conflict. In his polemical assessment, tashayyu‘ came close to becoming a religion distinct from Islam. He further argues that Western circles and Orientalists exploited these internal disagreements to portray Muslims as mutually antagonistic sects and groups, even comparing this condition to the division of Christianity into numerous denominations (al-Juhani, 1999:56).

Nevertheless, one should avoid rushing to a final judgment, because numerous books have been written and published about the Shi‘a, especially the Imamiyya, and these works differ in their assessments. The present article has briefly discussed the Imamiyya and several beliefs that its author regards as erroneous, while also summarizing Sunni responses to them. More extensive information concerning their origins, scholars, geographical spread, doctrines, jurisprudence, and Sunni critiques can be found in specialist works, where disputed questions are treated through both transmitted and rational arguments.

Islam is a religion of moderation. Excess and negligence alike may lead people away from a balanced path. Historically, many sectarian deviations have been attributed to the failure to maintain such moderation and to the adoption of excessive positions. The original article argues that the Imamiyya granted reason a role beyond its proper measure and placed it above transmitted revelation, thereby falling into error and leading others into error, while judging Sunnis who did not follow them as misguided. The article illustrates this point with a poetic maxim to the effect that perception depends on the light one carries within oneself.

The Imamiyya and its various branches occupy an important place in the history of Islam and in the study of sects. Their formation began with political views concerning the caliphate but gradually developed into a theoretical and doctrinal system. Studying

Imamiyya doctrines together with source-based Sunni critiques is significant for understanding the development of Islamic theology, the history of sects, and the religious-political dynamics of Muslim societies.

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