

AL- SHAHRASTĀNĪ'S EXPOSITION OF SELECTED
SHĪ'A DOCTRINES: AN ANALYSIS

BY

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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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TOHIRU ABDULWAHAB AFOLABI

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for
the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and
Heritage in Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion

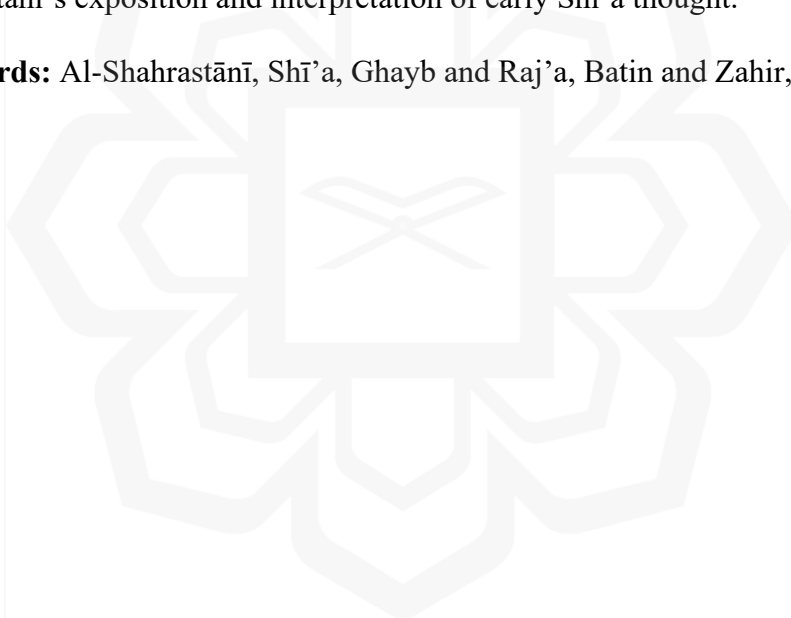
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ABSTRACT

Al-Shahrastānī (479-548 AH/1086–1153 CE) was a prominent Persian philosopher, theologian, historian of religions, and heresiographer who made significant contributions to the understanding of religions and Muslim sects. Employing historical, analytical and comparative approaches, this study examines the life and scholarship of al-Shahrastānī, focusing on how the political, religious, as well as intellectual milieu of the later ‘Abbāsīd era influenced his writing about religions and sects - particularly al-Milal wa al-Niḥal and Nihāyat al-Iqdām fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the development of Shī’a doctrines during the fifth and sixth centuries AH, which grabbed al-Shahrastānī’s interest and led him to engage critically with the doctrines. Subsequent discussion focuses on examining three selected doctrines of Shī’a: 1. the doctrine of ghayb (concealment) and raj’a (return), 2. the doctrine of bātin (esoteric) and zāhir (exoteric) interpretation, and 3. the doctrine of the bay’ah al-Imām (allegiance to an Imām). These analyses serve to better understand al-Shahrastānī’s exposition and interpretation of early Shī’a thought.

Key words: Al-Shahrastānī, Shī’a, Ghayb and Raj’a, Batin and Zahir, Bay’ah



خلاصة البحث

كان الشهرستاني (479-548هـ / 1086-1153م) فيلسوفًا فارسيًا بارزًا، وعالمًا بعلم الكلام، ومؤرخًا للأديان والفرق. وقد أسهم إسهامًا ملحوظًا في فهم الأديان والفرق الإسلامية. تتناول هذه الدراسة حياة الشهرستاني من خلال اعتماد مناهج تاريخية وتحليلية ومقارنة وإسهاماته العلمية، مع التركيز على الأجواء السياسية والدينية والفكرية في أواخر العصر العباسي التي أثرت على تكوينه الفكري وكتابات في موضوع الأديان والفرق، لا سيما في مؤلفيه: الملل والنحل ونهاية الإقدام في علم الكلام. كما تقدّم هذه الدراسة قراءة شاملة لتطور عقائد الشيعة خلال القرنين الخامس والسادس الهجريين، وهو ما استرعى اهتمام الشهرستاني ودفعه إلى تناول هذه العقائد بالنقد والتحليل. وتركز المناقشة التالية على دراسة ثلاث عقائد مختارة من عقائد الشيعة، وهي: عقيدة الغيبة والرجعة، وتأويل معاني النصوص المقدسة الباطنية والظاهرية، وقضية الولاء للإمام (البيعة). وتهدف هذه التحليلات إلى فهم أعمق لعرض الشهرستاني وتفسيره للفكر الشيعي في مراحل الأولى.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Heritage in Usul al-Din and Comparative Religion.



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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To My beloved mother, the late Alhaja Zainab Ayinke Alguniyanwy,

As I write this dissertation, I am overwhelmed by a profound sense of loss and longing- feelings that have become deeply ingrained in the very fabric of my academic journey. You were not just my mother; you were my anchor, my guiding light, and the greatest source of inspiration. Your unwavering love, tenacity, and wisdom are etched deeply into my heart, shaping the person I have become and imbuing every step of this journey with meaning and purpose.

It was in September 2019 that the world lost a remarkable soul, a woman whose kindness, compassion, and relentless pursuit of knowledge left a lasting impact on all who knew her. You celebrated education not merely as the accumulation of facts, but as a pathway to enlightenment, understanding, and personal growth. Your steadfast belief in my dreams fuelled my desire for higher learning and guided me to intricate paths of Arabic and Islamic studies, culminating in my graduation from Al-Azhar University in Cairo. The joy of my academic achievements was always intertwined with the hope of reuniting with you- to share my experiences, my progress and to make you proud.

However, the harsh reality set in soon after my return: I was met not by your laughter, but by your silence; not with the warmth your embrace but with the stillness of your grave. Each step towards home reverberated with bittersweet memories - of our shared laughter, your wise council, and the dreams we once envisioned together. The hope of our reunion was shattered, replaced by an aching heart and an unshakeable resolve to honour your legacy in all that I pursue.

With every page, I dedicate this work to you, Alhaja Zainab Ayinke Alguniyanwy. May Almighty Allah in His infinite mercy, grant you eternal peace. Your legacy of love and resilience will forever guide me, and I carry your memory in my heart as I journey through life.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The emergence of early sects within the Muslim community has long been a subject of scholarly interest. Muslim scholars in particular have dedicated significant oeuvres that address emergence of sects from various dimensions. It is believed that the Ḥadith of the Prophet (PBUH) pertaining the division of the Muslim Ummah in the future into several sects and denominations was one key catalyst that significantly sparked the interest of scholars to delve into the area.¹

Early scholars such as Abu al-Ḥasan al-‘Ash‘arī (d.936 CE), al-Baghdādī (d.1037CE), al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153 CE) and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064 CE), alongside modern scholars like Muḥammad Abū Zahrah (d. 1974), ‘Alī Mustafā al-Ghurābī, ‘Irfān H. Fattāḥ and many others, have diligently undertaken the task of identifying and documenting various sects that evolved throughout different historical epochs. Among the notable sects that grabbed their attention are the Khawārij and Shī‘a, both of which arose from political conflicts. In addition, they examined sects grounded in theological disputes, such as Qadarites, Jabarites, Mu‘tazilites, Murjiites, Ash‘arites, and Maturidites. These scholars meticulously traced the development of each sect, analysed their doctrines, and offered scholarly insights into theological nuances that define them.

Indeed, scholars have adopted diverse approaches in dealing with sects and analysing their doctrines within the Islamic intellectual tradition. Some favour a polemical approach, often marked by biased and judgmental assessments of rival sects, aiming to refute their doctrines while promoting their own beliefs.² Others employ a

¹ The Hadith is translated as: “The Jews split into seventy-one sects, and the Christians split into seventy-two sects, and my Ummah will split into seventy-three sects; seventy-two will be in the Fire, and one will be in Paradise”. See: Abū ‘Īsā Muḥammad Ibn ‘Īsā al-Tirmidhī. (2007). *Jāmi` al-Tirmidhī*. Lahore: Darussalam, 2007. Vol. 5, Book 38, Hadith no: 2640. This hadith also mentioned in: Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, Hadith no: 3228.

² Abū Mansūr al-Baghdādī (d.429 H) in his *al-Farq Bayn al-Firq* for example lays out seventy-two misguided sects and ends by explaining the beliefs of one saved sect (*al-firqah al-nājjiah*) in 15 points. See: Al-Baghdādī, ‘Abd al-Qāhir Ibn Tāhir Ibn Muhammad Ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Baghdādī al-Tamīmī al-Isfarayīnī Abu Manṣūr. (n.d.). *Al- Farq Bayn al-Firq*. Tahqiq: Muḥammad ‘Uthmān al-Khisht. Maktabah Ibn Sīnā,,

theological approach emphasising on intra-sect theological discussions, interpretations of the Quran and Hadith and responses to philosophical challenges.³ A third tendency is a descriptive historical approach, which presents the views of various sects and figures in a neutral and objective manner, allowing the historical trajectories and narratives of each sect unfold and speak for themselves. This approach refrains from offering critiques or imposing personal judgements, aiming to provide an objective and factual account of the emergence and evolution of each sect.⁴

One notable figure who exemplifies this latter approach is Tāj al-Dīn Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm Ibn Aḥmad al-Shahrastānī (479-548 AH/1086–1153 CE), known as al-Shahrastānī, a notable Persian Sunni scholar, philosopher, heresiographer, and theologian of the sixth century Hijra. His scholarly endeavours devoted, among others, on the study of sects and religions. Philip K. Hitti, recognised al-Shahrastānī as one of 'the distinguished historians of religions,⁵ while Eric J. Sharpe acknowledged him as a pioneer in the field of *religionswissenschaft* (the scientific study of religion). Sharpe aptly remarked: “The honour of writing the first history of religion in world literature seems in fact to belong to the Muslim al-Shahrastānī, whose work on *Religious Parties and Schools of Philosophy* describes and systematises all religions of the then known world, as far as the boundaries of China.”⁶ While several treatises have been attributed to him, al-Shahrastānī’s principle contribution to the study of Muslim sects lies in his encyclopaedic work *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*. Meanwhile, his *Nihāyat al-Iqdām fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām* is also closely related to this area and is often regarded as a complementary sequel to *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*.

In both *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* and *Nihāyat al-Iqdām fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, al-Shahrastānī devoted considerable attention to the discourse on Shī’a, examining its historical development, and doctrinal positions alongside other sects. In *al-Milal*, he dedicated Chapter Six of his work to a comprehensive treatment of the Shī’a, outlining five primary branches of Shī’a and their respective sub-branches. Notably, al-

³ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d.1209CE\606AH). (n.d.). *‘I’tiqādāt fīraq al-Muslimīn wa al Musyrikīn* represents this approach. See: Al-Rāzī, Abu ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad Ibn ‘Umar, *‘I’tiqādāt fīraq al-Muslimīn wa al Musyrikīn*, taḥqīq: ‘Alī Samā al-Nashhār. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyā.

⁴ *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al Muṣallīn* by Abu al-Ḥasan al-‘Ash’ari and *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* by al-Shahrastānī, both are respectively representing this tendency.

⁵ Philip K Hitti. (1974). *History of the Arabs: from the Earliest Times to the Present* (London: The Macmillan Press. 139.

⁶ Eric J. Sharpe. (1991). *Comparative Religion: A History*. 2nd edition. La Salle, IL: Open Court.p.11

Shahrastānī adopted a non-polemical style and employed a methodical, almost scientific approach in presenting the views of the Shī'a and other sects in this work. However, his approach shifted in *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*, where he engaged with Shī'a doctrines through thematic analysis. The discussion in this text is framed to evaluate the furthest philosophical conclusions reached by thinkers of his time, evaluating the extent to which Shī'a tenets align with or diverge from Aḥl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah.⁷

In contemporary contexts, a comprehensive understanding of Shī'a- as a surviving and influential sect necessitates a close examination of its origin and the historical trajectories that shaped its evolution. Assessing first-hand insights from scholars who engaged with Shī'a during its formative period holds significant importance. In this regard, the writings of al-Shahrastānī, stand out as a crucial source, representing one of the earliest systematic treatments of Shī'a thought, and thus warranting a careful analysis. This study aims to illuminate the scholarly contributions of al-Shahrastānī within the broader discourse on Muslim sects, with a specific focus on his treatment of Shī'a. It seeks to explore his writings, and critically analyse his perspectives on selected Shī'a doctrines, namely: the doctrines of *ghayb* (concealment) and *raj'ā* (return), the *bāṭin* (esoteric) and *ẓāhir* (exoteric) interpretation, and the doctrine of the *bay'ah al-Imām* (allegiance to an Imām). These doctrines were embraced across the Shī'a subsects, including the *Kaysāniyyā* (such as the *Hāshimiyya* and *Bayāniyya*), the *Zaidiyya* (including the *Jāradiyyah* and *Sulaimāniyya*), the *Imāmiyya* (Twelvers), and the *Ghāliyya* (such as the *Sabaiyya* and *Kāmiliyya*).

1.2 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

As noted earlier, the writings on Muslim sects in general, and the Shī'a in particular, has long captured the interest of early scholars. Among the pioneers in this field was al-Shahrastānī, who devoted significant attention to the study of sects within the Muslim community during their early period. While extensive studies have examined al-Shahrastānī's intellectual legacy, most have emphasised on his general methodology in dealing with different sects and denominations.

⁷ See: Alfred Guillaume. (1934). *The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastani Kitab Nihayatul Iqdam fi 'ilm al-Kalam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, London: Humphrey Milford. Introduction, p. ix

However, his specific treatment of individual sects particularly the Shī'a and its doctrines - has not been sufficiently explored. There remains a pressing need for a more detailed abridgement that addresses key dimensions such as the framework he employed, the sources he referenced, the theological arguments he articulated, and other pertinent aspects of his engagement with the Shī'a thought.

Thus, this study attempts to abridge the existing lacuna by examining al-Shahrastānī's exposition of Shī'a with a particular focus on three selected doctrines: concealment and return, the esoteric and exoteric meanings of sacred texts, and the doctrine of allegiance to an Imām. Through an in-depth analysis of al-Shahrastānī's treatment of the Shī'a, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical development of Shī'a doctrines. Moreover, it will critically examine claims of alleged Shi'ism attributed to al-Shahrastānī, as suggested in certain scholarly writings. It may be argued that this study is classical in nature, owing its focus on a classical scholar and its analysis of Shī'a doctrines during their formative period. However, it is important to recognise, that contemporary Shī'a doctrines and current discourses surrounding them cannot be fully comprehended in detachment from their historical origins and foundational development. A thorough engagement with the genesis, and evolution of these doctrines provide critical context for interpreting their present-day significance. Therefore, this kind of study remains both relevant, and valuable in contemporary scholarship.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Who is al-Shahrastānī, and how does the scholarship of al-Shahrastānī on Muslim sects develop within the historical landscape of Islamic intellectual tradition?
2. How did al-Shahrastānī perceive the emergence and development of Shī'a during his time and, later reflect them in his writings?
3. How were selected doctrines of Shī'a, their framework, sources, theological arguments, and interpretations expounded by al-Shahrastānī?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To situate the scholarship of al-Shahrastānī in Islamic intellectual history and his legacy on Muslim sects.
2. To trace the growth and development of Shī'a before and during the time of al-Shahrastānī and his narratives of the respective sect in his treatise.
3. To evaluate the selected Shī'a doctrines expounded by al-Shahrastānī, from different dimensions.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study of al-Shahrastānī and his exposition of selected Shī'a doctrines is a qualitative study that involves a combination of historical, textual, and comparative methods. Materials on the scholarship of al-Shahrastānī, the development of Shī'a during his time, as well as selected Shī'a doctrines were obtained through extensive library and website searches.

Charting al-Shahrastānī in the historical development of Islamic thought required reviewing, and tracing the broader historical trajectories and trends of the political, social, and intellectual context of the twelve centuries of Hijra that may have influenced his perspectives. These required historical methods. Textual analysis, on the other hand, was employed to engage with al-Shahrastānī primary works on Shī'a, particularly those that focus on selected Shī'a doctrines in *al-Milal* and *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*.

It will contribute to understanding in detail the key argumentation of al-Shahrastānī, doctrinal points, theological framework, and overall structure of his exposition. Comparative analysis was adopted to compare the exposition of Shī'a doctrines between al-Shahrastānī and other scholars, including Shī'a scholars. The comparative analysis is expected to highlight areas of convergence and divergence in different scholarly writings on Shī'a and its doctrines.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study undertaken is important due to the following justifications:

- It will contribute to further apprehending of historical triggers that impacted, and shaped the intellectual life of al-Shahrastānī and his scholarship on Shī'a. It is worth mentioning that the 6th century of Hijra was a crucial period of Islamic intellectual history when various sects and theological movements were evolving. Al-Shahrastānī's work offers valuable insights into the early historical backdrops of these sects, including Shi'a beliefs, shedding light on the intellectual and social context of his time.
- The present study will expose different approaches by al-Shahrastani in the treatment of sects between al-Milal and Nihāyat al-Iqdām. While the former exposes different sects and denominations objectively and as they are without any refutation, the latter, on the other hand, tends towards theological refutations of the doctrines of sects, thus portraying another intellectual approach of al-Shahrastānī that needs to be fully comprehended. Acknowledging a variety of approaches from scholars is imperative, as it enriches intellectual discourse, deepens understanding of complex matters, and prevents rigid adherence to a single approach.
- The study of al-Shahrastānī's work enables comparative appraisal, allowing the doctrines of different sects, including Sunnī and Shī'a, to be examined side by side. This comparative approach facilitates identifying the convergences and divergences between diverse Islamic traditions. In the long run, it will reveal an insight into how far the doctrines are astray from the authentic teachings of Islam.

1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The initial focus of this study will centre on exploring the life and intellectual formation of al-Shahrastānī. Placing him within the broader context of the 6th century of Hijra, this research aims to highlight the various influences- political, social, cultural, and intellectual – that continuously shaped his scholarly perspective. Special attention will

be given to how conversations with these triggers contributed to his understanding of different sects of his time, with particular emphasis on Shī'a.

This study will then shed light on a general overview of Shī'a, encompassing its origin, development, branches, and doctrines as articulated in al-Shahrastānī's works, al-Milal and Nihāyah al-Iqdām. Subsequent discussion will narrow down to a detailed analysis of three specific doctrines within Shī'a: the doctrines of concealment and return, the esoteric and exoteric sacred texts, and the allegiance to an imam. These doctrines have been selected due to their recurring significance across various branches of Shī'a.

Analyses of these selected doctrines will involve a thorough examination of frameworks such as the origin, development, proponents, theological argumentations, controversies, as well as refutations related to the selected doctrines. Furthermore, this study will establish comparisons between al-Shahrastānī's analyses and the interpretations, as provided by other scholars, thereby enriching the understanding of the diversity of perspectives on these doctrines.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been devoted to dealing with al-Shahrastānī and his legacy. Siti Syamsiyatun's thesis entitled *Al-Shahrastani and the Shi'as Doctrine of Imāma: An Analysis of the Views Expressed in His al-Milal wa al-Niḥal and Nihayat al-Iqdām fi 'ilm al-Kalām*⁸ explores a different methodology employed by al-Shahrastānī in two of his treatises. According to the author, al-Shahrastānī in al-Milal acts as a 'historian of religion', demonstrating objectivity and avoiding judgement in his treatment of the doctrine of the Imama of Shī'a. On the other hand, in Nihāyah, he presents himself as a 'theologian' and openly criticises views that differ from his own, including the doctrine of imama. The highlights by the author are beneficial for understanding the diversity of approaches employed by al-Shahrastānī, and his treatment of the issue of Imama. However, the focus of the study was only on the doctrine of *imama*, leaving other important doctrines to be fully abridged.

⁸ Siti Syamsiyatun. 1998. *Al-Shahrastani and the Shi'is Doctrine of Imāmā: An Analysis of the Views Expressed in his al-Milal wa al-Niḥal and Nihāyat al-Iqdām fi 'Ilm al-Kalām*. Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University Canada.

Muhammed Azizan bin Sabjan' s *Early Heresiographical Scholars in Comparative Religion: Muḥammad 'Abdul Karīm al-Shahrastānī and his al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*⁹ acknowledge al-Shahrastānī (479/1086-548/1153) as one of the early scholars who has contributed immensely in studying the traditions of other religions. The author argued that al-Shahrastānī, throughout his al-Milal wa al-Niḥal was the first scholar who developed a typology of religion. The study substantiated the fact that the question of religious recognition and respect, as well as tolerance, can be observed from the concept of religious typology as established by al-Shahrastānī. Despite the depth and breadth of Muhammad Azizan's highlights on the scholarship of al-Shahrastani in al- Milal, the focus of his study was on the traditions of other religions, and not on the particular sects, that this study aims to examine.

Emily J. Cottrell's *al-Shahrastani, Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm Abul-Faṭḥ Muḥammad al-Shahrastani*¹⁰ provided a biographical sketch of al-Shahrastānī and introduced him as a theologian (*mutakallim*), cum a historian of religions. Al-Shahrastānī was born in northern Iran and lived under the last Seldjuks of Khurāsān. According to Cottrell, al-Shahrastānī authored commentaries on the Qur'an and a monumental history of religions, remains an authoritative reference for scholars to this day. Scholarship of al-Shahrastānī continued thriving when he was a scholar at Nizāmiyya in Baghdād and was considered a Sunni scholar until modern scholarship attempted to associate him as Crypto-Isma'ili. The analysis by Cottrell is beneficial in highlighting the biography of al-Shahrastānī. However, other dimensions, such as al-Shahrastani's exposition of Shī'a in his works require further characterisation.

A comparative study between al-Shahrastānī and others also grabbed the attention of several scholars. Andreas Lammer's work on *Two Sixth/Twelfth-Century Hardliners on Creation and Divine Eternity: al-Shahrastani and Abu al-Barakat al-Baghdadi on God's Priority over the World*¹¹ is an example of that comparison. The article was an attempt to investigate the theological discourse on the issue of creation and eternity from the 6th A.D or 12th A.H century scholarly lens of al-Shahrastānī and

⁹ Muhammad Azizan bin Sabjan. 28th April, 2022. *Early Heresiographical Scholars in Comparative Religion: Muhammad Abdul Karim al-Shahrastani and his al-Milal wa al-Nihal*.

¹⁰ Emily J. Cottrell. 2011. *Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm Abul-Faṭḥ Muḥammad al-Shahrastani*, Encyclopaedia of Medieval Philosophy. Dordrecht.

¹¹ Andreas Lammer.2018. *Two Sixth/Twelfth-Century Hardliners on Creation and Divine Eternity: al-Shahrastani and Abu I-Barakat al-Baghdadi on God's Priority over the World*. Bonn University Press and V&R Unipress.

Abu al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī. Lammer highlighted both scholars have displayed their in-depth mastery of philosophical materials of their own time, as well as their capacity to engage with earlier opinions, and converse with established theories with ease and self-confidence. As reflected in the title of the work, the analysis was on the theological issue of creation and eternity, and no analysis of Shi'a doctrines or al-Shahrastani's approach to those doctrines was carried out.

*Philosophical Schools as Viewed by Some Medieval Muslim Authors: Doctrines and Classifications*¹² by Charles Genequand, highlights the classification of people in perceiving realities. According to Genequand, al-Shahrastānī, in his second part of his *Kitab al-Milal wa-l- Nihal*, addressed clearly those classifications in the following narratives.

1. Those who acknowledge neither sensible nor intelligible realities; they are the Sophists. 2. Those who acknowledge sensible, but not intelligible realities are the naturalists. 3. Those who acknowledge both sensible and intelligible realities but neither rules nor laws (hudūd wa ahkām); they are the Dahriyyūn. 4. Those who acknowledge sensible and intelligible realities, rules, and laws, but neither sharia nor Islam; they are the Sabaeans with their prophets Hermes and Adhimun. 5. Those who acknowledge the same as (4) plus a sharia and a submission (Islam); but not the sharia of our prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are the Magians, the Jews, and the Christians. 6. Those who acknowledge all this—that is, the Muslims. Notwithstanding Genequand's valuable highlights of al- Shahrastani, it is important to note that his primary focus is on al-Shahrastānī's view of philosophical schools, and not on the sects that emerged within the early Muslim community.

John McHugo's work, *A Concise History of Sunnis and shi'is*,¹³ analyses the great division that occurred in the history of Islam. The author argued that the split in Islam between Sunni and Shi'a is often traced back to the question of who should have led the Muslim community after the death of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) in 632 AD. Failure to resolve that question to the satisfaction of all resulted in a great scandal: a civil war among Muslims over the leadership of the community. Despite the extensive

¹² Charles Genequand. 1999. *Philosophical Schools as Viewed by Some Medieval Muslim Authors Doctrines and Classifications*. Oxford University Press

¹³ John McHugo. 2017. *A Concise History of Sunnis and Shi'is*. Great Britain: Saqi Books

account of the history and development of both Sunni and Shī'a, the study of the detailed doctrines of Shī'a remains insufficient.

Carole Med. Cusack et.al wrote *Introduction: Islamic Sects and Movements*¹⁴ in presenting an overview of the variety of religious groups. The work covers movements such as the Sunnī, Shī'a and Ṣūfī groups. It also analyses movements that were born in the Islamic world but were no longer considered themselves as part of the Islamic community (for example, Bahā'ī), and movements that consider themselves Islamic but are rejected as such by many Sunnī and Shī'a Muslims (such as the Aḥmadiyya Muslim Jamā'at). The authors also deliberated on the Khārijites and Mu'tazilites, portraying the movements that are outside of mainstream Islam, the general overview of movements in Islam, as well as historical development of sects, but led to insufficient detailed analyses of individual sects in Islam, especially Shi'a and its doctrines.

The article by Mohd Hasrul Shuhari et.al *An analysis of Shiite Interpretations of the Quran from the Sunnite Perspective*¹⁵ highlights interpretations of the Quran by Shī'a scholars and evaluates them in the light of Sunni understandings. The article argues that the majority of Muslims base their understanding of the Quran on the interpretations of Sunni scholars. It is believed that their scholarly interpretations are the most accurate at facilitating Muslim understanding of the Quran. The article reveals that the interpretation of the Quran by Shiite scholars is different from that of the Sunnites. Many irregularities were found in the Shiite interpretations of the Quranic verses from the Sunnite perspective. However, the article is not focusing on irregularities in the doctrine of Shī'a, which is the focus of this study.

*Shi'i Islam: An Introduction*¹⁶ by Najam Haider offers a description of differences in interpretation of Islam between the two major branches: Sunnis, that represent 80% of the Muslim world population and Shī'a is which constitutes about 20%. The author mentioned that the major differences between Sunni and Shī'a are encircled around the doctrine of Imama or leadership. The Sunni interpretation of the succession of the Prophet as a leader is based on the election of Abu Bakr, the father-

¹⁴ Carole M. Cusack and M. Afzal Upal. 2021. *Introduction: Islamic Sects and Movements*. distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license

¹⁵ Mohd Hasrul Shuhari et.al. 2018. *An analysis of Shiite Interpretation of the Quran from the Sunnite perspective*. Malaysian Journal for Islamic Studies. Vol 2, Bil 2, 2018. Fakulti Kontemporari Islam, UNISZA

¹⁶ Najam Haider. 2014. *Shi'i Islam: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

in-law of the Prophet as the rightful caliph of the Muslim community, followed by ‘Umar, ‘Uthman, and ‘Alī. Whereas the Shī‘a interpretation argues that the Prophet’s intention had always been for his son-in-law, ‘Ali to succeed him and that this was the divine designation. The study by nature is a descriptive study of Shī‘a and meant for beginners. Therefore, no substantive discussion on selected Shī‘a doctrines was conducted by the author.

*What is Shi'a Islam?*¹⁷ by Farhad Daftary *et.al.* elucidates how the historical construction of the worldwide Muslim community have resulted in a significant range of diversity that reflects a rich intellectual, spiritual, and institutional heterogeneity. The article states that Muslims have developed perspectives coalescing around different interpretations of the core message of the Qur’an and the example of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). One such perspective is that of Shi’a Islam. The authors discussed the shi’ism of Zaydis, Ismaili’s and Twelvers with their doctrines and practices respectively. However, the in-depth analysis of the selected doctrines of Shī‘a remains to be fully characterised.

*A Shiite Creed*¹⁸ by Sheikh al-Saduq clarifies that understanding Islamic creed requires not only investigation of the “Sunnite” element but also of its Shi’ite dimension. The benefits of such a holistic study are many; it would answer many historical questions related to divergences of thought in Islam; shed light on theological controversies, and help resolve the issue of legal distinctions that confound scholars. Additionally, the author emphasised that information about the Shi’ite faith comes from three well-known heresiographers: al-Baghdadi (d.429/1038), Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1054) and al-Shahrastani (d.548/1153), whose writings are widely accessible. According to the author, al-Shahrastani is the most well-known, due to his early publication on sects, including Shī‘a. All of the heresiographers were devout Sunnis who were aware of errors made by the Shī‘a rawafid (those who rejected the legitimacy of the first three caliphs). Even though the author identified al-Shahrastani as one of the heresiologists with regard to understanding Shi’ite faith, analysis of the doctrines of Shī‘a in the light of al-Shahrastani’s understanding has not been delved into.

¹⁷ Farhad Daftary *et.al.* n.d. *What is Shi'a Islam?*. London, United Kingdom: Aga Khan Centre

¹⁸ Shaykh Saduq, 1982. *A Shiite Creed*. Translated by: Asaf A. A. Fyzee. Tehran: World Organization for Islamic Services.

Syed Husain M. Jafri in his book *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*¹⁹ addressed the rise and development of Shī'a Islam. The author mentioned that the fundamental questions related to the origins and early growth of Shī'a Islam, has received insufficient attention. He approached the subject using the works of heresiographers such as al-Baghdādī, Ibn Ḥazm, and al-Shahrastānī. He critically examined the origins and the development of Shī'a Islam, tracing down and reconstructing the early trends and concepts that gave Shī'a Islam its distinctive character. His discussion also focuses on the question of religious leadership, from its origins among a group of early Muslims, until the Imamate of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. The study offers a valuable insight on Shī'a and its development, as well as paves several ways to understand basic doctrines of Shī'a from a Shi'ite perspective.

Christopher M. Blanchard's comparative study on Sunni and Shī'a reflected in his work entitled *Islam: Sunnis and Shiites*.²⁰ According to the author, the majority of Muslims worldwide practise Sunni Islam, whereas 10–15% of all Muslims practise Shiite Islam (also known as Shi'ite, Shi'a, or Shia). The historical context of the Sunni-Shiite's division is also covered in his piece, along with an analysis of the distinctions and commonalities among the various Islamic sects' religious practices and beliefs. Nevertheless, his research did not examine how al-Shahrastani expounded on the particular Shī'a teachings that are examined in this study.

A specific study on the doctrine of Shī'a has been carried out by many scholars. Douglas S. Crow's article *Ghaybah*²¹ clarifies the nuance of ghaybah according to Shi'a understanding. He mentioned the use of the term "ghaybah/concealment," to describe the state of one or more imams who vanished rather than died and whose life was extended (either in God's presence or in a paradisiacal state) until their predetermined return as Mahdī (the Expected Deliverer), to begin the eschatological drama that would end history. The Kaysānīyah made a clear comparison between a "docetic" interpretation of Christ's passion and their imam's eventual hiding and return. The conjecture regarding the imam's hiding was linked to the concept of return (al-raj'a) in relation to a physical resurrection that occurs prior to the end of time, carrying out

¹⁹ Syed Husain M. Jafri. 27th August 1976. *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*. Beirut: American University of Beirut.

²⁰ Christopher M. Blanchard. 2006. *Islam: Sunnis and Shiites*. CRS Report for Congress, December 11, 2006.

²¹ Douglas S. Crow. 1987. *Ghaybah*. (encyclopedia.com)

eschatological retribution on the wicked, and triumph and justice for the good. Although the author discussed the idea of concealment, he was unable to examine the concerns, offer potential refutations, and convey al-Shahrastani's perspective on it, which will be carried out in this current investigation.

Jassim M. Hussain's book, *"The Occultation of the Twelve Imams: A Historical Background,"*²² provides a comprehensive examination of the Imami-Shi'ite movement, spanning from the period of Ja'far al-Sadiq, the Sixth Imam, to the conclusion of the Twelfth Imam's lesser occultation. The author emphasised that the enduring religious truth underlying this movement is evidenced by a doctrine that has sustained and strengthened the faith of millions of Shi'ite Muslims. Throughout history, there has been a belief in Imamite tradition that one Imam from the Prophet's descendants would go into hiding, preparing for the eventual emergence as al-Qa'im al-Mahdi to establish justice in the world. The study delves into the significance of concealment (al-Ghayba) as an indicator of the real al-Qa'im al-Mahdi, both before and after the Twelfth Imam's occultation in 260/874. Notably, the author's focus was exclusively on the Twelve Imams of Shia Islam, with no exploration of other Shia sects, beliefs, or al-Shahrastani's explanation of them, which is the focal point of this current study.

Karim H. Karim wrote an article titled *A Semiotics of Infinite Translucence: The Exoteric and Esoteric in Ismaili Muslim Hermeneutics*²³. The study focuses on Ismā'ili Muslim theology. He elaborated that Isma'ili theology was shaped out of continuous interplay between the outer, exoteric (ẓāhir) and the inner, esoteric (bāṭin) dimensions of human life. He stressed that historical and contemporary Ismaili thought has expressed a similar inter-relationship of other dyadic concepts such as Qur'anic revelation/ Qur'anic hermeneutics (tanzil/ta'wil); signifier/signified (mithal/mamthul); concealment/unveiling (satr/kashf); and material world/spiritual life (dunya/din). Even though the community's institutions have engaged intensely with modernity and with the public spheres of Eastern and Western countries where they are located, they have generally maintained a separation between the external and the communal, the public

²² Jassim M. Hussain. n.d. *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background*. London, UK: The Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain & Northern Ireland.

²³ Karim H. Karim. 2015. *A Semiotics of Infinite Translucence: The Exoteric and Esoteric in Ismaili Muslim Hermeneutics* Canadian Journal of Communication.

and the private. However, these distinctions are centred on Isma'ili Shī'a sects only, leaving behind other Shia sects, doctrines and the exposition of al-Shahrastani.

Bay'ah (Allegiance) by al-Muntazar²⁴ explains the literal and conventional meaning of the word 'Bay'ah'. According to the author, the word 'Bay'ah' is derived from 'Bayee', which means to put one's hand upon that of the other person at the time of an agreement. Later, it was used to mean to agree upon the obedience of someone, i.e., when a person wanted to declare the obedience and fealty of someone, he would do the 'ba'yah' to him. It also mentioned the incidents regarding bay'a in the Holy Quran. Two incidents are very famous; the Quran has mentioned two 'bay'ahs', namely the 'Bay'ah-e-Ridwan' and the Bay'ah al-'Aqabah taken from women on the conquest of Mecca. However, the writer focused on the literal and the conventional meaning of the word 'bay'at' without exploring other Shī'a sects, doctrines and exposition of al-Shahrastani.

The last luminary and ways to delve into the light by Sayyid Ridha Husayni Mutlaq²⁵ explains the meaning of pledging allegiance to an Imam. The author mentioned that fulfilment of the promise necessitates a person not to show any remorse or regret if one needs to help the Imam with his life or wealth. The study also expresses the conditions that must be observed in this pledge of allegiance: 1. A person making the allegiance must have the intention in his heart to obey the Imam and must promise that he will help him. In addition, a person must not show remorse if he has to give up his life or wealth to maintain this pact. 2. The pledge of allegiance is intended to help the Imam and initiating this firm covenant must be done verbally. He added that it is not permissible to make this kind of pledge to anyone else! During the period of occultation, no one has been designated by the Imam to accept the pledge of allegiance, thus this form of allegiance cannot be performed with any person, and it is actually forbidden even if the person to whom the pledge is being made to is a scholar.

John Calvert's *Shi'ism: What Students Need to Know*,²⁶ primarily focuses on the various Shī'a sects present in the world today. It highlights that Shiism is the second-

²⁴ *Al-Muntazar Magazine*. September 3, 2020

²⁵ Sayyid Ridha Husayni Mutlaq. 2008 *The last luminary and ways to delve into the light* the Islamic Publishing House

²⁶ John Calvert, (May 2010) *Shiism: What students need to know* The Newsletter of the Watchman Centre. Vol. 15, No. 2.

largest denomination in Islam, following Sunni Islam, constituting approximately 10% of the global Muslim population. The most prominent Shī'a group is the "Twelvers," named after the 12 Imams they hold in reverence. Notably, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon have significant Shī'a populations with Iran holding the highest concentration at 89%. Other regions, including the Arab Gulf, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, also have substantial Twelver Shī'a communities. The book, however, doesn't delve into the ideological aspects, controversies, or refutations within Shī'a Islam. Additionally, there is no discussion on al-Shahrastani's exposition on Shī'a ideology, which is the central focus of this current investigation.

Ayatollah Saafi Golpaygani's article, "*Did Imam Ali Give (Allegiance) to Abu Bakr?*"²⁷ addresses the question of whether Imam 'Ali pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr. The focus of the article is on verifying this historical inquiry. Golpaygani highlighted that the reluctance of Imam 'Ali and a group of others to swear loyalty to the caliphate is a historical fact that cannot be refuted. He underscored the widespread acceptance and indisputability of this refusal, noting that Mu'awiyah mentioned in one of his letters to Imam 'Ali. In response, 'Ali did not deny the refusal to give the oath of allegiance. Instead, he asserted the righteousness and legitimacy of his denial, along with the oppression he faced. 'Ali wrote: "You also want to taunt me by saying that when I refused to accept the caliphate of the First Caliph, I was dragged like a camel with a rope round my neck, and every kind of cruelty and humiliation was levelled against me." (*Nahj al-Balagha*, letter 28). This quote from 'Ali's own words highlighted the challenges and mistreatment he endured due to his refusal to accept the caliphate during the time of the First Caliph.

The thesis titled *Religions According to al-Shahrastani, a Comparative Critical Analytical Study*²⁸ authored by Yethrib Hiwad al-Sayyid Ahmad Mahmud concentrates specifically on the Christianity, Judaism, and Magian sections of al-Shahrastani's book, *Kitab al-Milal wa al-Nihal*. The primary objective of the study is to explore al-Shahrastani's methods for examining other religions. Through analysis, it was found that the predominant theme of al-Shahrastani's book is the utilisation of a reporting or

²⁷ Ayatollah saafi Golpaygani, (December 8, 2009) *Did imam Ali give(allegiance) to Abu- Bakr?*

²⁸ Yethrib Hiwad al-Sayyid Ahmad Mahmud. May 2002.*Religions according to al-Shahrastani, a Comparative Critical analytical study.*

storytelling technique to comprehend Christianity and Judaism. However, departure from this approach was noted in the section on Magian, where al-Shahrastani shifted his focus in providing more critique and comments. The study goes on to revise historical facts and definitions, aiming to offer a comprehensive and impartial discussion on the beliefs in Christianity, Judaism, and Magian according to al-Shahrastani. Notably, the author intentionally excluded any discussion of Shi'a doctrines, issues, or refutations in this work. The thesis seeks to condense the study specifically to al-Shahrastani's perspective on religious beliefs, focusing solely on the mentioned religions, and excluding Shi'a from its scope.

Nada Haroun Rashid, in her thesis titled *Imām Abu al-Fath al-Shahrastānī (d. 548 AH), and his approach in his book, Nihāyat al-Iqdām fi Ilm al-Kalām*²⁹ highlights the period during which Imam al-Shahrastānī lived, spanning from the Seljuk era to the Buyid era. This time frame is characterised by political instability, which significantly influenced the personality of the esteemed scholar. Despite the challenges posed by political unrest, the era also experienced notable scientific development and knowledge prosperity. During this period, several prominent scholars emerged, including al-Isfarāyīnī, al-Juwaynī, and others. The coexistence of political turmoil and flourishing intellectuality shaped the context in which al-Shahrastani conducted his scholarly pursuits. The thesis aims to explore not only the historical circumstances of the era but also how these factors may have influenced al-Shahrastani's approach, particularly in his work *Nihayat al-Iqdam fi 'Ilm al-Kalam*. The intertwining of political instability and scientific advancement provides a rich backdrop for understanding the intellectual environment in which al-Shahrastani lived and worked.

In *Spirituality and prayer in Shiite Islam*,³⁰ Muhammad K. Shaker provides an exploration of the literal and technical meanings of Shi'a emphasising the fundamental principles of Shiite Islam. These principles include belief in: (i) *tawhid* (oneness of divine unity); (ii) *nubuwwah* (prophecy); (iii) *ma'ad* (resurrection); (iv) *imamah* (the imamate, i.e. belief in the appointed Imams as successors of the Prophet); (v) *'adl* (divine justice). Shaker contends that Shiism did not experience divisions during the

²⁹ Nada Haroun Rashid. November 3, 2022. *Imam Abu al-Fath al-Shahrastani (d. 548 AH), and his approach in his book, Nihayat al-Iqdam fi Ilm al-Kalam*.

³⁰ Muhammad K. Shaker, *Spirituality and prayer in Shiite Islam* RERC Second Series Occasional Paper 42 (February 2005)

imamate of its first three imams, namely ‘Ali, Hasan and Husayn. However, the later development of Shī‘a witnessed the emergence of various subbranches. The author identified Isma‘ilites and Zaidites as significant sects alongside the majority ‘Twelvers’. The Isma‘ili sect shares the first six Imams with Twelvers and is associated with esoteric and gnostic religious doctrines. Despite discussing aspects of Shi’ism, the author did not delve into selected doctrines, specific issues or al- Shahrastani’s exposition on these matters, which are the focal points of this current study. This highlights a potential gap in the coverage of the thesis concerning the detailed examination of particular Shī‘a doctrines and their associated discussions.

Hamid Enayat, in his book *Modern Islamic Political Thought*³¹ opens with an outline on the way in which the traditional Islamic heritage has impinged on the development of modern thoughts. The author highlighted the revival of the Sunni and Shī‘a political thought in the current age, which focused on four basic themes: breaking the spell of the sanctity of the status quo, rejecting the corrupting realism of medieval writers, historical criticism, and salvaging the democratic and socialist elements of the past. In the first chapter Enayat studied the differences between the political theory of the two main sects in Islam-Shi’ism and Sunnism-and the twofold process of conflict and concord between them, from confrontation to cross-sectarian fertilisation. In the following chapters, he dealt with the concept of the Islamic State, from the time it was revived after the abolition of the Caliphate in Turkey in the 1920s and late 1970s and the Muslim response to the challenge of the alien, modern ideologies of nationalism, democracy and socialism. In the final, maybe most valuable chapter, he reviewed three further examples that relate specifically to the development of Shi’ism in modern times, the new phase of Shī‘a dynamism. Despite the focus of the author on the political thought of Shī‘a and Sunni, he was unable to establish interest in the three selected doctrines of Shī‘a.

³¹ Hamid Enayat. 1982. *Modern Islamic Political Thought*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

CHAPTER TWO

AL-SHAHRASTĀNĪ: LIFE AND SCHOLARSHIP

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The discussion about the political, intellectual, and religious milieus of the 6th century A.H./12th C.E. fall within the era of the ‘Abbasid caliphate. This era can be divided into three main periods: The early ‘Abbasid era (750-861 CE); the Middle ‘Abbasid era (861-936 CE); and the later ‘Abbasid era (936-1258 CE). Since the current study’s focus is on al-Shahrastānī, from his birth in 1086 CE until his death in 1153 C.E, the later Abbasid era will be the attention to examine the political, intellectual as well as religious milieus that have impacted on the scholarship of this figure.

2.2 THE POLITICAL MILIEUS OF LATER ‘ABBASID ERA (936-1258 CE)

The year 1075 C.E, just over a decade before al-Shahrastānī was born (in 1086 C.E.), was characterised as a critical period in Islamic history. It was due to intensifying political fragmentation, Sunni revival movements, and the rise of the Seljuk empire.

By 1075, the ‘Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad had experience about political authority. The caliph al-Muqtadī (r. 1075–1094) was the nominal spiritual head of the Muslim world, but real power was in the hands of the Seljuk Turks, who ruled as Sultans. The ‘Abbasid Caliphate remained a religious symbol, but political control had shifted. This separation of religious and political authority set the stage for tensions between the ‘ulama’, caliphs, and military rulers.

During al-Shahrastānī’s early childhood, Baghdad witnessed a political and religious riot between the Hanbali traditionalists and the Ash’arī theologians. The conflict happened when Abū Naṣr Ibn al-Ustadh Abi al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, a prominent Ash’arī scholar arrived in the city to take up a teaching post at the Nizāmiyya madrasah¹, the college founded by Nizām al-Mulk. His appointment provoked outrage among the

¹ Hanne Eric, “The Banu Jahir and Their Role in the Abbasid and Saljuq Administrations”. *Al-Masaq*: 2008, pp. 29–45.

Hanbalis, who viewed 'Ash'ari theology with suspicion, thus leading to widespread unrest and clashes in the city.

During those riots in Baghdad, the life of Mu'ayyad al-Mulk, the son Nizām al-Mulk was endangered.² Nizām al-Mulk blamed the chalipal vizier, Fakhr al-Dawlā for failing to control the situation. As a consequence, in 1078 CE Nizām al-Mulk sent his envoy, Gohar-A'in to the 'Abbasid caliph, al-Muqtadī (r. 1075–1094) demanding Fakhr al-Dawlā's dismissal.³ Al-Muqtadī was initially reluctant to comply,⁴ but Gohar-A'in threatened to attack the caliphal palace if the demand was not fulfilled.⁵

Given that 'Abbasids no longer maintained their own military force, al-Muqtadī had little choice but to yield to Seljuk pressure.⁶ Fakhr ad-Dawlā resigned (instead of being fired), and al-Muqtadī had him placed under house arrest by his order.⁷ When al-Shahrastānī was eight years old, al-Muqtadī died in 1094 C.E at the age of 37 or 38. He was succeeded by his 16-year-old son, Aḥmad al-Mustazhir (r. 1094–1118 C.E).

Putting these historical facts together, the researcher concludes that these events laid a solid foundation for al-Shahrastānī's early intellectual formation, enabling him to comprehend the ongoing instability of the 'Abbasids military power and the series of political fragmentation that happened within this period.

2.3 RELIGIOUS MILIEU OF 12TH CENTURY C.E

During the 'Abbasid Caliphate- particularly under the reigns of al-Muqtadī (1075–1094 CE), al-Mustazhir Billāh (1094–1118 CE), al-Mustarshid Billāh (1118–1135CE), al-Rashīd Billāh (1135–1136 CE), and al-Muqtafi li-Amr Allāh (1136–1160CE), the Islamic world was characterised by significant religious diversity. This era witnessed the presence of various Muslim sects and theological schools, as well as other religious

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibn al-Athir; Richards, *The Annals of the Saljuq Turks: Selections from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh of Ibn al-Athir*. (4 April 2014). 195–7, 203, 210.

⁶ Hanne, Eric, "The Banu Jahir and Their Role in the Abbasid and Saljuq Administrations". (*Al-Masaq* 2008) 29–45

⁷ D.S. Richards. (4 April 2014). *The Annals of the Saljuq Turks: Selections from al-Kamil fi'l-Ta'rikh of Ibn al-Athir*. London: Routledge. p.195–7, 203, 210.

communities coexisting within the empire. The following provides an overview of the religious landscape during this period:

a. Sunni Islam:

Sunni Islam was the dominant sect and enjoyed official backup from the ‘Abbasid caliphs who were recognised as both political and religious leaders of the Sunni Muslim community. Despite their symbolic authority, the caliph’s power was frequently challenged by rival groups and movements, particularly in regions where ‘Abbasid control was weak and nominal.

b. Shī’a:

The Shī’a, particularly the Twelver and Ismā’ili branches, held considerable influence during this period. The Ismā’ili Fatimid Caliphate, based in Egypt was a major rival to the ‘Abbasids and actively promoted Shī’a Islam. Within the Isma’ili faction, the Nizārī Isma’ilis – often referred to as the Assassins- rose to prominence during the reign of al-Mustazhir Billāh, establishing their strongholds in Persia and Syria. Meanwhile, the Twelver Shi'a maintained a significant presence in Iraq, particularly in key cities, such as Kufah and Baghdad.

c. Kharijites:

Kharijites, although smaller in number, were a militant sect that rejected the authority of both Sunni and Shī’a leadership. They advocated for a more egalitarian model of Islamic governance and remained active through sporadic uprisings.⁸

d. Sufism:

Sufi orders began to gain prominence during this period, emphasising mysticism and personal devotion. Sufis often transcended sectarian boundaries and were influential in both Sunni and Shia communities.⁹

e. Other Religious Communities:

⁸ Hugh Kennedy. 2016. *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates: The Islamic Near East from the Sixth to the Eleventh Century*. 3rd ed. Routledge. pp.307–310.

⁹ Marshall Hodgson. 1974. *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*. University of Chicago Press. Vol. 2, pp. 60–65

The ‘Abbasid Caliphate was home to a variety of religious communities. Christians, including Nestorians, Jacobites (Syriac Orthodox), and Melkites (Greek Orthodox) often held important administrative roles and were active participants in the intellectual life circles of the Caliphate. The Nestorian Church was influential in Baghdad and maintained a strong presence in the eastern provinces.

Jews also flourished under ‘Abbasid rule, particularly in Baghdad, where they were involved in trade, medicine, and scholarship. During this period, the Gaonate- the central institution of Jewish religious authority- was based in Baghdad.

Zoroastrians though diminished in number, remained a significant religious group, particularly in Persia. Sabians, a small religious community based in Ḥarran, known for their astrological and philosophical traditions, were recognised as "People of the Book" and enjoyed legal protection under Islamic rule.¹⁰

This rich religious and intellectual environment significantly influenced al-Shahrastānī, particularly in his works *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* and *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*, where he was exposed directly to various religions and sects.

2.4 THE INTELLECTUAL MILIEUS OF 12TH CENTURY C.E

The Islamic Golden Age was a period marked by remarkable scientific, economic and cultural advancement. It is traditionally dated from the 8th century to the 13th century C.E.¹¹ This era is commonly understood to have begun during the reign of the ‘Abbasid caliph, Hārūn al-Rashīd (786 - 809 C.E), particularly with the establishment of the Bayt al-Ḥikmah (House of Wisdom) in Baghdad.¹² The institution became the major

¹⁰ Richard Bulliet. 1994. *Islam: The View from the Edge*. Columbia University Press. p 120–125

¹¹ Saliba, George. 1994. *A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam*. New York University Press. pp. 245, 250, 256–257.

¹² The first prominent institution for higher learning in Islamic history was the House of Wisdom (Bayt al- Ḥikmah), founded during al-Ma’mūn’s caliphate. The House of Wisdom served not only as a translation bureau but also functioned as an Academy and Public Library. It contained observatory connected to it. which sprang up during this time due to the spread of astronomy teaching and learning. Hospitals also made their first appearance at this period and served as centres for medical studies. See: Khedr, A.A. 1989. *Bayt al-Hikmah fī ‘Aṣr al-‘Abbāsiyyīn*. 3rd ed. Cairo, Egypt: Dār al-Fikr al-‘Arabī. A new record says that Al-Ma’mūn (786-833 AD) was the one who named the place that contained this large collection of books as well as maps and manuscripts The House of Wisdom (Bayt al-Ḥikmah. According to Aḥmed Amīn the name was given because besides books on religion there were even more different documents and publications of foreign origin, whether translated or bought from other countries, including sizeable collection of books and documents on philosophy or wisdom. See: Amānullah, K. 1962. *Al-Makmūn and His Bayt Al-Ḥikmat*. Lahore, Pakistan: Time Publishers

intellectual hub, attracting scholars from across the Muslim world who gathered to translate and preserve classical knowledge from Greek, Persian, Indian, and other civilisations into Arabic and Persian.¹³ Baghdad by then was the largest city in the world, and served as a centre for cross-cultural exchange and scholarly activity.

A key contribution of the 'Abbasid dynasty in the history of Islamic civilisation- unlike the Umayyad dynasty which focused primarily on political expansion- was its strong patronage of science, philosophy and intellectual pursuit. Many 'Abbasid caliphs were known for their deep appreciation of knowledge and actively supported scholars, institutions, and translations of classical works.¹⁴ The intellectual flourishing reached its peak during what is now referred to as the Islamic Golden Age. Traditionally, this period is considered to have ended with the collapse of the 'Abbasid Caliphate following the Mongol invasions and the devastating Siege of Baghdad in 1258.¹⁵

From the 8th to the 12th century CE, the Muslim world indeed experienced a period of unparalleled intellectual and cultural flourishing. This era marked a phenomenal rise in Muslim thought, characterised by remarkable achievements in various fields of knowledge. Motivated by a deep religious commitment to the pursuit of knowledge, Muslims developed a great passion for learning. Scholars travelled extensively across many regions in search of knowledge, engaging deeply with natural phenomena, observing the world with precision, and conducting rigorous experimentation. This intellectual vitality propelled Islamic civilisation to its zenith, positioning Muslims as global leaders in scientific discovery and philosophical inquiry.¹⁶

During the first few centuries of Islam, educational settings were largely informal. However, beginning in the 11th and 12th centuries, ruling elites began to establish formal institutions of higher religious learning known as *Madrasah*, aiming to gain the support and cooperation of the 'ulama(scholars)¹⁷. These Madrasah quickly

¹³ Gutas, Dimitri. 1988. *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)*. London: Routledge. p.19

¹⁴ Maqdisī, Tāfīr: *Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* (2023) Vol. 4, 2

¹⁵ Taylor & Francis, *Islamic Radicalism and Multicultural Politics*. (1 March 2011).p. 9

¹⁶ Mümtaz A. Kazi, Challenge facing the world of Islam. *Journal of Islamic Academy of Sciences* (1994) vol 7,no1, 1-4,

¹⁷ Jonathan Berkey, "Education". Richard C. Martin (ed.). *Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Muslim World*. (MacMillan Reference USA 2004).203

spread throughout the Islamic world, facilitating the dissemination of Islamic knowledge beyond major urban centres and contributing to a shared intellectual and cultural identity among diverse Muslim communities.¹⁸ A notable example is the Nizāmiyyah school.¹⁹

In addition, throughout the 11th and 12th centuries, institutions of higher learning mushroomed across the Muslim world, with major centres emerging in Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, and Cordoba.²⁰ This era witnessed a remarkable surge in scholarship, with influential contributions from eminent scholars including 'Umar Khayyām (1048-1131 C. E), al-Bīrūnī (973-1048 C. E), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1149 or 50-1209 or 1210 C. E), Ibn Sīnā (980-1037 C. E), al-Ṭabarī (839-923 C. E), Ibn Bājjah (1085-1138 C. E), and Ibn Rushd (1126-1198 C. E).

From the 12th century onward, many of the classical works of Islamic scholarship- along with earlier preserved Greek texts were expanded upon by Muslim scholars, then translated into Hebrew and Latin. These translations were instrumental in shaping the early phases of the European intellectual awakening, which coincided with the gradual decline of the Muslim scholarly dominance.²¹

Towards the end of the 12th century, however, intellectual progression in fields such as modern science, the social sciences and the humanities began to stagnate. This decline was not solely the result of external geopolitical events, such as the Mongol invasions. Rather, it was deeply inherent in an increasingly restrictive ideological worldview fostered by the political, cultural and psychological conditions prevailing among the late 'Abbasid leadership. This environment contributed to the erosion of the

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ Nizamiyyah institute were among the first well organised institutions of higher learning in the Muslim world. The quality of education was among the highest in the Islamic world, and they were even renowned in Europe. They were supported financially, politically, and spiritually by the royal establishment and the elite class. Some scholars have suggested that the establishment of the Nizamiyya madrasas was in fact an attempt to thwart the growing influence of another group of Muslims, the Ismailis, in the region. Indeed, Nizam al-Mulk devoted a significant section in his famous *Siyasatnama* (*Books of Politics*) to refuting the Ismaili doctrines. See: Virani, Shafique N. *The Ismailis in the Middle Ages: A History of Survival, A Search for Salvation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 73.

²⁰ Sharifah Munirah Alatas, *Intellectual Rigour in Islamic History: A Lesson for 21st Century Malaysian Muslims*. (15 Jul 2019) <https://karyawan.sg/>

²¹ R. Murray Thomas, Josephina Zoraida Vazquez, *Aims and purposes of Muslim education*. (Encyclopaedia Britannica June 17, 2025)

once- thriving spirit of inquiry and critical thought- a trend that, to some extent, continues to affect parts of the Muslim world today.²²

In conclusion, the 12th century marked a period of remarkable intellectual growth in the Muslim world, driven by a vibrant culture of scholarship, translation, and interfaith engagement. Scholars such as al-Shahrastānī thrived in this dynamic intellectual milieu, producing works that reflected the era's rich in diversity of thought and openness to multiple perspectives.

2.5 AL-SHAHRASTĀNĪ: A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

2.5.1 Birth of al- Shahrastānī

Al-Shahrastānī's full name was Abu al-Faṭḥ, Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdul Karīm Ibn Aḥmad Tāj al-Dīn al-Shahrastānī. His honorific title (*kunya*) was Abū Muḥammad, yet he is widely known by the name al-Shahrastānī.²³ The name "al-Shahrastānī" is a *nisbah* (attribution) referring to Shahrastān, a town situated between Naishābūr and Khwārizm, in the Persian province of Khurāsān.

There is no consensus among sources regarding the exact date of al-Shahrastānī's birth, as four different dates have been reported.²⁴ One of the more frequently cited accounts came from Ibn Khallikān (d. 682 H/1282 CE), who recorded the year of al-Shahrastānī's birth as 467 H/1074/5 CE. Ibn Khallikān based his report on information provided by Abū Sa'ad 'Abd al-Karīm al-Sam'ānī, who stated: "Al-Shahrastānī was born in 467/1074-5 as I find it written in my own rough notes, though I do not recall when I wrote it".²⁵

Likewise, 'Omar Reḍa Kakhālā (d. 1987 CE) states in *Mu'jamul Muallifīn* that al- Shahrastānī was born in 467 H/1074 CE.²⁶ However, Carra De Vaux, in his article

²²Sharifah Munirah al-Attas. 15 Jul 2019. *Intellectual Rigour in Islamic History: A Lesson for 21st Century Malaysian Muslims*. <https://karyawan.sg/>

²³ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdul Karīm al-Shahrastānī. 1997. *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*. ed.by Amīr 'Alī Mahnā and 'Alī Ḥaṣan Faur. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifāh. Vol 1, p.11.

²⁴ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī. 1984. *Muslim Sects in Kitab al Milal wa al-Nihal*. trans.A.K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn.London: Kegan Paul International. p 1.

²⁵ Ibn Khallikān, *Kitāb Wafayāt al-A'yān*. 1842. trans.Bn. Mac Guckin De Slane. Paris: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland. vol. 2, p.675.

²⁶ 'Omar Reḍa Kakhala. n.d. *Dictionary of Authors*. Beirut: al-Muthanna Library, Beirut: Dar Revival of Arab Heritage. Vol.10, p.187

on al-Shahrastānī', placed his birth year at 469 H/1076 CE,²⁷ a date that was also affirmed by Yaqūt al-Hamawī (d.1229H) in *Mu'jam al-Buldān*.²⁸ According to al-Subkī, in *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubrā*, Ibn al-Sam'ānī, a contemporary of al-Shahrastānī, reported meeting al-Shahrastānī in Naisabūr and asking him directly about his birth year. Al-Shahrastānī replied that he was born in 479 H/1086-7 CE.²⁹ Meanwhile, Khayr al-Dīn al-Zarkalī (d.1396H) in his biographical dictionary *al-A'lām* records the year of birth as 489 H.³⁰

In conclusion, 479 H is the most credible and acceptable year of al-Shahrastānī's birth, as it is based on the direct report from al-Shahrastānī himself, transmitted through a reliable chain via Ibn al-Sam'ānī, a contemporary who personally inquired about it.

2.5.2 Educational Journey

Al-Shahrastānī began his educational journey under the guidance of his father before travelling to Naisābūr and Khawarizm to further his studies. The subjects he studied included Qur'anic recitation and exegesis (*Tafsīr*), *Ḥadīth*, *'Ulum al-Ḥadīth* (Sciences of Hadith), *'Ilm al-Kalām* (Islamic theology), *Fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence), *Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (Principles of Jurisprudence), *Taṣawwuf* (Sufism) and the teachings related to *Ahl al-bayt* (the Prophet's household).

According to Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Abū Sa'dah, the phase of al-Shahrastani's intellectual development began when his parents taught him Qur'anic recitation and tafsīr.³¹ This early stage of learning reflected a widespread educational custom in Muslim societies: beginning a child with the Quran, a practice universally accepted

²⁷ Carra De Vaux, "al-Shahrastani" in: *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed. n.d vol. 4, 263.

²⁸ Yaqūt al-Hamawī. 1977. *Mu'jam al-Buldān*. Beirut: Dār Ṣādir. Vol.3, p.377

²⁹ Abū Naṣr 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn Taqīy al-Dīn al-Subkī. n.d., *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah al-Kubra*. Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Husayniyyāt al-Miṣriyya. vol. 4, p. 7

³⁰ Khayr al-Dīn al-Zarkalī. 1986. *Al-A'lām*. Beirut Lebanon: Dar al-A'lām li al-Malāyīn. vol, 7, p.215

³¹ Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Abū Sa'dah. 2002. *Al-Shahrastānī wa Manhajuhū al-Naqdiy: Dirāsah Muqāranaḥ ma'a Ārā' al-Falāsifah wa al-Mutakallimīn*. Beirut: al-Mu'assasah al-Jam'iyyah li al-Dirāsāt wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī'. 1st edition. p. 21-22.

across the Islamic world.³² This method of learning, known as *Kuttāb*,³³ positions his father as an elementary-level teacher.

Al-Shahrastānī continued his education by progressing from learning under his father to receiving instruction at a nearby mosque. At that time, mosques commonly serve as centres of learning, particularly for the more mature children. However, this stage of education was distinct from early childhood instruction. Aḥmad Shalaby (d.2000) noted, "...regarding the place where this type of *kuttāb* was held, it was recommended that children should not be educated in mosques, as they are not careful about keeping the mosque quiet and clean".³⁴ This suggests that while mosques were key educational spaces, its use was generally reserved for students of a more mature age, capable of observing proper decorum.

Later, al- Shahrastānī was encouraged by his father to pursue further education.³⁵ At this juncture, he was already well equipped with elementary studies, which prepared him to seek advanced knowledge. He subsequently travelled to Naisabūr and Khawarizm. In the field of Ḥadīth, he studied under Abu al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ibn Aḥmad al-Madīnī. However, sources differ on the location where this instruction took place- some suggest it was in Khawarizm, while others point to Naisabūr. One account stated that at a very young age, al- Shahrastānī travelled to Khawarizm, where he remained for some time and studied Hadith, primarily under al-Madīnī (d. 394/1100 CE).³⁶

Meanwhile, according to another source, al-Shahrastānī studied Ḥadīth and ‘*Ulūm al-Ḥadīth* (the sciences of Hadith) in Naisabūr under ‘Alī Ibn Aḥmad al-Madīnī (d. 494 H/1100 CE).³⁷ He also pursued ‘*Ilm al-Kalām* (theology) in Naisabūr, though under different teachers.³⁸ In the field of Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), his studies were

³² Aḥmad Shalaby. 1954. *History of Muslim Education*. Beirut. p. 23.

³³ The curriculum of the elementary school Kuttāb, centred upon the Qur’ān as a reading text book. See: Aḥmad. Shalaby. *Ibid*.p. 29.

³⁴ *Ibid*,21

³⁵ After memorising the Qur’an before his tenth birthday, his father sent him to study under few *Shaykhs* in Khurasān who had a better collection of religious books for studying Qur’anic exegesis. See: Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Abu Sa’dah. 2002. *Al-Shahrastānī wa Manhajuhu al-Naqdiyy*, pp 21-22.

³⁶ Muḥammad Ibn Faṭḥ Allab Badrān. 1956. "Introduction" to his edition of *Kitāb al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥa li al- Imam al-Shahrastani*. Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlu al-Miṣriyyāh. Vol.p. 1,5.

³⁷ Muḥammad Ḥusaynī Abū Sa’dah, *Al-Shahrastānī wa Manhajuhu al-Naqdi*,. *op.cit*.p 21-22.

³⁸ Abu al-Qāsim Sulaymān al-Anṣarī (d. 512 H\1118 CE) and Abū Naṣr al-Qushayrī (d. 514 H/1120 CE) See: *Ibid*

likewise based in Naisabūr .³⁹ Regarding *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) and *taṣawwuf* (Sufism), it is well established that he studied these disciplines under the renowned Imām Abū Naṣr al-Qushayrī (d. 514 H/1120 CE).⁴⁰

Al-Shahrastānī later continued his intellectual journey from Naisabūr to Khawārizm. There, he studied under As'ad Ibn Abī Naṣr al-Mayhānī (d. 527 H/1129 CE) and Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Khwārazmī (d. 568 H /1172 CE). During this period, his intellectual maturity led him to engage deeply with philosophy and its various schools, a subject that would later become one of his central interests. He remained in Khawārizm for ten years.⁴¹

Consequently, there were different accounts regarding Al-Shahrastānī's travels after his time in Nīshābūr. Some sources stated that he continued his intellectual journey to Khwārazm, where he studied under As'ad Ibn Abī Naṣr al-Mayhānī (d. 527/1129) and Muḥammad Ibn Maḥmūd al-Khwārazmī (d. 568/1172).⁴² Other sources, however, suggest that he travelled to various cities in Iran, including Baghdād, Sijistān, Jurjān, and Tirmidh.⁴³ At this juncture, it can be inferred that al-Shahrastānī had completed his formal education and had reached the level of an independent scholar (*ʿālim*). He was now intellectually mature, well-versed in multiple disciplines, and capable of engaging critically with philosophy and its schools. He began to teach, drawing students to his scholarly assemblies, and contributed to the intellectual discourse of his time.⁴⁴

2.5.3 Intellectual Activities

In the year 510 H/1116-7 CE, when he was in his thirties, al-Shahrastānī travelled to the holy land of Mecca to perform the pilgrimage (hajj).⁴⁵ During the same year, he journeyed to Baghdad where he began teaching theology at the prestigious Nizāmiyyah

³⁹ Aḥmad Al-Khwaṭī (d. 500 H/1106 CE). See: *ibid.* See also: Abu Naṣr al-Qushayrī (d. 514/1120).

⁴⁰ See: *ibid.* Also see: Muhammad Ibn Faṭḥ Allaab Badrān, "Introduction." vol. 1, "Introduction," p.12.

⁴¹ Muḥammad Ḥusayni Abū Sa'dah, *Al-Shahrastānī wa Manhajuhu al-Naqdiyy.* p.23.

⁴² *ibid*

⁴³ Hilman Latief, Comparative Religion in Medieval Muslim Literature. *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (Oct 1, 2006). P.36.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

⁴⁵ Ibn Khallikan. 1842. *Kitāb Wafayat al-A'yan*, trans.Bn. Mac Guckin De Slane. Paris: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland. Vol. 2, p.675.

Madrasah.⁴⁶ He devoted the next three years to lecturing and preaching at the institution, establishing himself as a respected scholar. Al-Bayhaqī illustrated a vivid account of the audience that attended al-Shahrastānī's scholarly (*majālis 'ilmiyya*), stating: : "The learned people of Baghdad joined me to attend his (al-Shahrastānī) lectures. Among them were al-Imām Abū Maṣṣūr, al-'Ibādī, Aḥmad al-Laythī, and Shihāb al-Dīn al-Wā'iz."⁴⁷

Al-Shahrastānī frequently delivered religious teachings to his audience, drawing upon his extensive memorisation of Prophetic traditions.⁴⁸ Upon his return to Iran in 514 H/1120 CE, the Seljuk ruler, Sandjar had just assumed the title of Sultan and his capital Merv had become a vibrant centre of al-Shahrastānī's scholarly and political activity. Al-Shahrastānī was appointed *nā'ib* (deputy) of the chancellery and emerged as one of the most trusted confidants.⁴⁹

2.5.4 His Death

Al-Shahrastānī returned to his hometown in Persia around 514 H/1117 CE and remained there until his death in 548 H/1153 CE. He was buried in the family burial ground, known as the Qushayrī mausoleum.⁵⁰ However, the exact cause of his death is not clearly documented in the historical sources.

2.6 AL-SHAHRASTĀNĪ'S INTELLECTUAL INCLINATION

Al-Shahrastānī's intellectual inclination can be best understood through an examination of his school of thought and enduring legacy.

⁴⁶ Emily J. Cottrell. 2011. Al-Shahrastani, Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm Abul-Fath Muhammad, *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy, Dordrecht*, (2011) vol.1,p.1188.

⁴⁷ Muhammad b. Fath Allaab Badrān, "Introduction. Vol. 1,5.

⁴⁸ Ibn Khallikān. 1842. *Kitāb Wafayāt al-A 'yān*. vol. 2, p. 675.

⁴⁹ Emily J. Cottrell, al-Shahrastānī. 2011. Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm Abu al-Fath Muḥammad. In: *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, Dordrecht. vol.1, p.1188.

⁵⁰ Ibn Khallikān, *Kitāb Wafayāt al-A 'yān*, vol .2, 154- 155.

2.6.1 Al-Shahrastānī's School of Thought

The question of al-Shahrastānī's theological tendency has long been a subject of scholarly debate. While traditionally regarded as an 'Ash'arite, serious doubts have been raised – both historically and in modern scholarship – regarding his affiliation.⁵¹ He was also been accused of heretical views and of exhibiting strong Shī'a tendencies, especially in support of Ismā'īlī doctrines. This section will explore both perspectives in detail, in the hope of arriving at a clearer understanding of al-Shahrastānī's true theological affiliation.

According to Emily J. Cottrell, traditional Islamic textbooks often follow medieval sources in presenting al-Shahrastānī as an Ash'arite. However, scholars such as Wilferd Madelung and Marvin Meyer argued that while al-Shahrastānī may be considered "Sunnī" in terms of his social and communal identity, his core theological and religious beliefs reflect significant Shī'a and, particularly Ismā'īlī influences.⁵²

Carra De Vaux, on the other hand, remarked that al-Shahrastānī studied Islamic theology and jurisprudence under the guidance of prominent scholars from the Ash'arite and Shafī'ī schools. According to her, it is unsurprising that figures such as Ibn Khallīkan and al-Subkī regarded al-Shahrastānī as belonging to these schools of thought.⁵³ Wilfred Madelung stated that al-Shahrastānī was born and educated as a Shafī'ite Sunnite. He continued to identify with the Sunnite community and followed the Shafī'ite rituals and legal practices to the end of his life. Yet, his concept of Sunnism evidently diverged from the orthodox understanding of it, evolving to encompass Shi'ite reverence for the Prophet's family and the recognition of the religious authority of the Shi'ite Imams⁵⁴. Similarly, another observation stated that, "...despite his nominal affiliation with Sunni Ash'arī theology, al-Shahrastānī espoused doctrinal and methodological positions that reveal Ismā'īlī sympathies and influence."⁵⁵

⁵¹ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects in Kitāb al Milal wa al-Nihal*.p.2

⁵² Emily J. Cottrell. "Al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm Abu al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad". In: *Encyclopaedia of Medieval Philosophy*. vol.1,1188.

⁵³ Carra De Vaux, *Al-Shahrastānī*, p. 263.

⁵⁴ Al-Shahrastānī. 2001. *Struggling with the Philosopher: A Refutation of Avicenna's Metaphysics*. trs. Wilferd Madelung and Toby Mayer. London: I.B. Tauris in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

p. 3-4.

⁵⁵ Mustapha Shah. 2020. *Theological Discourses and the Legacy of Kalām Gestation, Movements and Controversies*. Berlin, Germany: Gerlach Press.vol.1, p.6.

Al-Khawarizmi remarked that, "...al- Shahrastānī could have been a Sunnī imām had he not tainted his thought with the innovative teachings of the Ismā'ilis"⁵⁶ Similarly, Ibn al-Sam'anī, a contemporary of al-Shahrastānī, observed that he had either adopted or at least shown a clear inclination toward Isma'ili teachings. This view is further supported by Ibn Ṣalāh in his *Ṭabaqāt* as cited by al-Subkī. Nevertheless, despite the allegations concerning al-Shahrastānī's doctrinal inclinations, al-Subkī ultimately included him among the scholars of the Shaf'ite school.⁵⁷

Al-Ṣafadī, in *al-Wafī li al-Wafayāt*, affirmed that al-Shahrastānī as having studied under Shafi'ite-Ash'arite scholars, himself becoming a theologian of the Ash'arite (Sunnite) school, and was recognised as a distinguished imām and faqīh.⁵⁸ Furthermore, there is nothing in the text of al-Shahrastānī's two major published works that clearly suggest Isma'ili tendencies; but rather the contrary. The phrase 'the view of our Shaikh al-Ash'ārī' appears frequently in *Nihāyah al-Iqdām*, a work that evidently defends Ash'arite theology. Even in *al-Milal*, where he strives for an objective and inclusive presentation of all sects, his sympathies toward orthodox Sunni positions are unmistakable. In the same work, al- Shahrastānī explicitly dissociates himself from Shī'a's doctrines.⁵⁹

Based on the available evidence, al-Shahrastānī can be identified as an Ash'arite for several reasons. First, he studied under some of the most prominent scholars of the Ash'arites and Shafi'i schools. Second, he remained committed to Shafi'i rituals and legal practices throughout his life. Third, his frequent references to "our Shaikh Ash'ari" and his evidence of Ash'arite theology further confirm his alignment with Ash'arite thought.

However, claims of his association with Isma'ilis are also present in historical records. These claims are based on several observations: that he showed a particular interest in the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the family of the Prophet) ; that some of theological and methodological positions reflect Isma'ili influence; and that contemporary scholars

⁵⁶ Al-Subkī, Abū Naṣr, 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn Taqī al-Dīn. 1964/1976. *Ṭabaqāt al-Shafi'yya al-Kubrā*. ed. Maḥmūd al-Tanāhī & 'Abd al-Fattāh M.al-Ḥulwī. Cairo: Matba'at al-Ḥusayniyya al-Miṣriyya.vol.5, p.78

⁵⁷Ibid.78

⁵⁸ Muḥammad Ibn Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī. *Muslim Sects in Kitāb al Milal wa al-Nihal*.p.2

⁵⁹ ibid

such as al-Khawarizm and Ibn Sam'ānī reported that he had either adopted or leaned toward Ismā'īlī doctrines.

In conclusion, a close examination of the available evidence indicates that Ismā'īlism did not constitute the core of al-Sharastānī's thought. He did not consistently adhere to Ismā'īlī doctrines throughout his life, and while some contemporaries accused him of showing sympathy toward Ismā'īlī's teachings, there is no clear trace of such influence in his two major works. On the contrary, both *Nihāyah al-Iqdām* and *al-Milal* affirm his alignment with Ash'arite theology. Therefore, he may be regarded as a representative figure of the Ash'arite tradition. Meanwhile, al-Shahrastānī's relationship with al-Ash'arī's legacy reflects both continuity and innovation. While rooted in Ash'arite theology, his engagement with Avicennian philosophy demonstrates a significant intellectual synthesis. This integration marks him a pivotal figure in the evolution of Ash'arism, showcasing the school's capacity to respond to the philosophical and theological challenges of the post- classical period.

2.7 AL-SHAHRASTĀNĪ'S LEGACY

Al-Shahrastani's contribution to the history of religion, as well as his influential role at the Nizamiyyah institution, are widely acknowledged. Eric J. Sharpe asserted that the honour of writing the first history of religion belongs to a Muslim scholar, al-Shahrastānī,⁶⁰ recognising his seminal work *al-Milal* as groundbreaking in its objective and comprehensive treatment of various religious and philosophical texts.

Al- Shahrastānī lectured at the Nizamiyyā for three years with immaculate success. The Nizamiyya of Baghdad, founded by Nizām al-Mulk in 1065, played an important role in promoting and safeguarding Sunni orthodoxy.⁶¹ It offered a structured and well- organised educational program rooted in Sunni legal and theological principles, aimed at preparing future lawyers and jurists. Among its most outstanding scholars were Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazzālī and 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, alongside al-Shahrastānī himself.⁶² Al- Shahrastānī was widely acknowledged for his unwavering

⁶⁰ Ghulam-Haider Aasi. Muslim Contributions to the History of Religions, in: *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (1991) Vol. 8, No. 3

⁶¹ Wiet, Gaston. Baghdad, Metropolis of the Abbasid Caliphate. (Norman, Oklahoma: the University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).110

⁶² Ibid

commitment to both teaching and preaching, which earned him the prestigious appointment as *Nā'ib Dīwān al-Rasā'il* (Vice Chancellor of the Bureau of Correspondence) at the institution.

Other groundbreaking contributions of al-Shahrastānī includes Islamic jurisprudence, theology, Qur'anic exegesis, and philosophy. His scholarly output reflects both breadth and depth, although the exact number of his written works remains uncertain. The available information concerning this matter is fragmentary and can be gleaned from scattered references- either from al-Shahrastānī's own statements within his writings or from later biographical sources. Nevertheless, his extant works can be systematically categorised into three main areas, as follows.

Edited and Published Works	Manuscript Works	Lost Works
1. <i>Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal</i>	1. <i>Risālah fī l'tirāḍāt al-Shahrastānī 'alā Kalām Ibn Sīnā</i>	1. <i>Al-Irshād ilā 'Aqā'id al-'Ibād</i>
2. <i>Niḥayat al-Iqdām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām</i>	2. <i>Risāl il Muḥammad ah ā al-'llāqi</i>	2. <i>Asrār al-Bada</i>
3. <i>Muṣar'āt al-Falāsifā</i>	3. <i>Risāl il Muḥammad ah a Sahlānī</i>	3. <i>Al-Aqtār fī al-Uṣūl</i>
4. <i>Tārīkh Ḥukamā</i>	4. <i>Qiṣṣat Sayyidinā Yūsuf</i>	4. <i>Tārīkh al-Hukamā</i>
5. <i>Maglis fī al-Khulq wa al-Amr</i>	5. <i>Al-Manāhij fī 'ilm al-Kalām</i>	5. <i>Talkhis al-Aqsām li Madhhab alAnām</i>

6. <i>Al-Madhab al-Ismā'īlī</i>		6. <i>Daqāiq al- 'Awwām</i>
7. <i>Maḥāṭih al-Asrār wa Maṣābīh al-Abrār</i>		7. <i>Risālah fī al-Mabda' wa al- Ma'ād</i>
		8. <i>Shubuhāt Burqulus (Proclus) wa Aristu (Aristotle) wa Ibn Sīna wa-naqduhā</i>
		9. <i>Al-Shajarah al-Ilāhiyyah</i>
		10. <i>Al- 'Uyūn wa al-Anhār</i>
		11. <i>Ghayāh al-Marām fī 'ilm al- Kalām</i>
		12. <i>Qiṣṣat Mūsā wa al- Khiḍir</i>
		13. <i>Majlis fī Uṣūl-al-Ḥikmā</i>
		14. <i>Majlis f al- al Taqaddu ī Anwār - māt</i>
		15. <i>Majlis fī Qiṣṣat al- Sayyidina Mūsā</i>
		16. <i>Munāẓarāt ma'a al- Ismā'iliyah</i>
		17. <i>Nihāyat al-Ahaam al- Ḥukama al-Ilahi</i>

CHAPTER THREE

SHĪ'A: THE ESSENCE, ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

3.1 SHĪ'A: THE MEANING AND ESSENCE

The word Shī'a is derived from the verb *syā'a*, which means 'to emerge and to spread', and from *syāya 'ā* that means 'to follow', 'to accompany' and 'to support'.¹ Literally, Shī'a refers to a group or sect that supports certain ideas, or individuals.² The term is generally used for people united in a cause, and more specifically, denotes the group of Muslims who are united in their love for 'Alī and his family, and who acknowledge his legitimate right to leadership.³ Ibn Manẓūr defined Shī'a as those who love what the Prophet's descendent loves, and are loyal to them.⁴

In English lexicon, Shī'a is defined as a name of a particular party [or sect]; being predominantly applied to all who took 'Alī and the people of his house as their friends, or a name for those who followed 'Alī, saying that he was the [rightful] Imām after the Messenger of God, and believing that the office of an Imam should not depart from him and his descendants: they are an innumerable people, who are innovators.⁵

In exposition of the technical meaning of Shī'a, al-Nawbakhti (d. 917 or 918 CE), mentioned that the term refers to the party of 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, known as *Shī'atu 'Alī* (followers of 'Alī), both during the lifetime of the Prophet (PBUH)- and after his death. They were distinguished by their support for 'Alī and their believe in his leadership.⁶ In this regard, al-Nawbakhti seemed to relate the emergence of Shī'a as earliest as the time of the Prophet (PBUH), with the existence of certain individuals that support and became his loyalist.

¹ Ibrāhīm Anīs, *et.al.* (n.d). *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*. Vol 1-2, p.503-504

² Ulvah Nur'aen, *The Emergence of Shi'a Sect as an Implication of the Development of Thought and Politics Journal of Islamic and Social Studies (JISS)* (2024) Vol. 2,101.

³ Ibrāhīm Anīs, *et.al.* (n.d). *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasīṭ*. Vol 1-2, p.503-504

⁴ Ibn Manẓūr, Muḥammad Ibn Mukarram. *Lisān al-'Arab*. Vol 8, p. 189

⁵ Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (April 03, 2016) part 4-8.1650.

⁶ Abū Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Musa al-Nawbakhti. *Shia Sects Kitab Firq al-Shi'a*, Trans. Abbas K. Kadhīm (ICAS Press 2007) 60.

According to Thomas Patrick Hughes (1838-1911 CE), Shī'a refers to the followers of 'Alī, the first cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) and the husband of his daughter, Fāṭimah. The Shī'a maintain that 'Alī was the first legitimate Imam or Khalifah (successor) to the Prophet, and therefore reject the legitimacy of Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthmān, regarding them as usurpers. The Shī'a are also known as Imāmiyyā, due to belief that true knowledge lies with the Imam, the rightful leader of the faithful. They are further referred to as the Ithnā 'Ashariyyah (Twelvers), in reference to believe in the succession of twelve Imams.⁷

Sunni Muslims often refer to the Shī'a as Rāfiḍah, meaning "those who forsake the truth". In response, the Shī'a s strenuously assert that they are the truly "orthodox" Muslim, and like the Sunnis, claim the title '*al-Mu'minūn*' (the true believers).⁸ Moojan Momen (b.1950CE) stated that Shī'a Muslims are "those who believe that the leadership of the community rightfully belongs to the family of the Prophet".⁹ Meanwhile, Ṭabāṭabāī (d. 1981 CE), elucidated that Shī'ism centres on the divinely appointed office of Imamate, viewing 'Alī and his successors as infallible guides.¹⁰ It is obvious from the above discussion that the element that constitute Shī'a as a sect is the acknowledgement and allegiance to 'Alī as the Muslim leader and successor after the death of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). 'Alī's appointment is believed to be divinely inspired, and there is no other than him that deserve the post. Therefore, Shī'a in general are the followers of 'Alī and those who agreed with the essential belief described previously.

Shī'a is one of the major Muslim sects, alongside Sunni, and is further divided into several subsects. According to prominent scholars of *Firaq*, there appears to be a general consensus on the criteria used to distinguish the main divisions within Islam. Al- Nawbakhti, al-Ash'arī, and al-Baghdādī agreed on a similar scheme, classifying Muslims into four principal sects: Shī'a, Mu'tazila, Murji'a, and Khawārij- although al-Baghdādī refers to the Mu'tazila as Qadariyya. Ibn Ḥazm later retained these four groups but introduced a fifth: Ahl al-Sunnah. Likewise, al-Shahrastānī, sought to

⁷ Thomas Patrick Hughes, *A Dictionary of Islam* (1885).572.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Momen Moojan, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*. (Yale University Press, 1985). 1.

¹⁰ Ṭabāṭabāī, 'Allāmah. 1975. *Shi'a Islam*, Trans, Seyyed Hossein Nasr.SUNY Press.p. 34–35.

synthesise the classifications of his predecessors. Later development appears in the work of Fakhr al- Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1212) who added Sufism as a distinct sect in his classification.¹¹

Taking the sects of the Shī'a as an example, al-Ash'ari classified them into three major branches, each of which further divided into numerous subsects.¹² Al-Baghdādī identified four major Shī'a sects: Zaydiyyā, Kaysāniyya, Imamiyya and, Ghulāt. Al-Shahrastānī adopted the same four main sects listed by al-Baghdādī, however, he differs in his enumeration and classification of Shī'a subsects.¹³

3.2 THE ORIGIN OF SHĪ'A

This section will examine the historical context surrounding the emergence of Shī'a, while also considering the diverse theories on its genesis offered by Shī'a, Sunni, and modern scholars. It will then evaluate the interplay of political, theological and, social factors that contribute collectively to the formation and development of the Shī'a identity.

Historians differ on the starting point or emergence of Shī'a. Their views can be summarised as follows:

¹¹ Abū Muhammad al-Hasan Ibn Mūsā al-Nawbakhti, *Shī'a Sects Kitab Firaq al-Shī'a*, trans. Abbas K. Kadhīm (ICAS press 2007) 20

¹² The *Ghulāt* has twelve minor sects (Bayāniyya, Janāhiyya, Harbiyya, Mughiriyya, Manṣūriyya, Khattabiyya, unnamed sects, Shurā'iyya, Numayriyya, Sabaiyya, and another unnamed sect). The Rafida has fifteen minor sects (Qat'iyya, Kaysāniyya, Mughiriyya, Rafida [I], Rafida Husayniyya, Rafida Muhammadiyya, Nāwūsiyya, Rafida [II], Qaramita, Mubarakiiyya, Sumaytiyya, mariyya/Fathiyya, Waqifa/Mamtūra, and two other Rafida sects). And the Zaydiyya has six minor sects (Jārūdiyya, Sulaymaniyya, Butriyya, Nu'aymiyya, Zay-diyya, and Ya'qūbiyya). The minor sects also branch out occasionally. The Khattabiyya minor Ghulāt sect has five sub-sects (Khattabiyya, Mu'ammariyya, Buzay-ghiyya, 'Umayriyya, and Mufaddaliyya); whereas the Kaysaniyya minor Rafida sect has ten sub-sects (Kaysāniyya I; Kaysāniyya II; Kaysāniyya III; Kaysāniyya IV; Kaysāniyya V, (there is no Kaysāniyya VI) Kaysāniyya 'Am- Razamiyya, and Abu Muslimiiyya, Harbiyya, Bayāniyya, and Kaysaniyya XI). See: Ibid 21

¹³ For him, the Kaysaniyya are five minor sects (Mukhtariyya Hashimiyya, Hārithiyya, Bayaniyya, and Razamiyya). He lists three Zaydiyya minor sects (Jarudiyya, Sulaymaniyya, and Salihiiyya, Butriyya). The Imamiyya are listed in a completely different way (Baqriyya and Ja'fariyya Nasuwiyya, Aftahiyya, Shumaytiyya, Mūsawiiyya and Mufadaliyya, Ismailiyya, Al-Isna'ashariyya) Then he lists eleven sects after Imam al-Hasan al Askari almost in the same way they are described by al-Nawbakhti, who mentions fourteen sects with much more detail. The Ghulat are listed in eight minor sects (Saba'iyya, Kamiliyya, 'Albāiyya, Mughiriyya, Manṣūriyya, Khattabiyya, Kayyāliyya, and Hishamiyya). He differs with al-Baghdadi on the status of the Kamiliyya and the Hishamiyya, by considering them to be among the Ghulat. See Ibid 22-23

a. The origin of Shī'a during the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH);

According to Aḥmad al-Wāilī (1940s–1960s), a prominent Shī'a scholar, there is substantial evidence indicating that Shī'a began to take shape during Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH)'s lifetime. Al-Wāilī cited the Quran 26:214: "*And warn all, starting with` your closest relatives`*". According to him, upon the revelation of this verse, 'Alī was the first to accept the Prophet's call, indirectly indicates that 'Alī is the successor of the Prophet (PBUH). Al-Wāilī also referred to a narration in which the Prophet (PBUH) addressed his family, saying: "He ('Alī) is my brother, my heir, and my caliph among you, so listen and obey" Based on this narration, al-Wāilī argued that the roots of Shi'ism were established from the moment the Prophet publicly proclaimed his mission, thus suggesting that the Shī'a identity emerged organically during this time.¹⁴

b. The immediate aftermath of the Prophet's death.

Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406 CE), Ahmad Amin and Bernard Lewis said Shī'a emerged after the demise of the Prophet (PBUH). According to them, the *ahl al-bayt* and some of the companions believed that 'Alī was the rightful successor to the Prophet (PBUH).¹⁵

c. After the assassination of 'Uthman, the third caliph, and during the time of 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalib's rule as the fourth caliph.

The assassination of the third caliph, 'Uthmān Ibn 'Affān, had a profound impact on 'Alī'. Mu'āwiyah Ibn Abī Sufyān, a relative of 'Uthmān sought to avenge his death, leading to the Battle of Ṣiffīn. The conflict lasted for about six months and ended with a proposal for arbitration (*taḥkīm*), initiated by Mu'āwiyah due to the prolonged nature of the war. 'Amru Ibn al-'Āṣ represented Mu'awiyah, while Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī as 'Alī's representative. During the taḥkīm, both sides initially agreed to depose their respective leaders. However, the outcome turned out to be disappointing to 'Alī and his supporters.

¹⁴ Ulvah Nur'aen , *The Emergence of Shi'a Sect as an Implication of the Development of Thought and Politics, Journal of Islamic and Social Studies(JISS)*, Vol. 2No. 2(2024) .p.103.

¹⁵ Ibid

This event resulted in a major split: the Shī'a who remained loyal to 'Alī, and the Khawarij, who rejected the arbitration and separated from Ali's camp.¹⁶

Considering scholarly theories regarding the origins of Shī'a, historians such as Wilferd Madelung (1930-2023) presented his argument from a political point of view. He contended that the succession crisis following the Prophet's death was fundamentally political, with 'Alī's supporters resisting the dominance of the Quraysh elite.¹⁷ This interpretation aligns, in part, with the views of Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) who criticised Shī'a doctrines as *bid'ah* (religious innovations) and maintained that legitimate leadership should be based on Shūrā (communal consultation).¹⁸

Additionally, al-Ṭabarī (839–923 CE) portrayed the early Shī'a not as a distinct theological sect, but as a theological faction opposing Umayyad rule. Similarly, Syed Ḥusayn Jafri (d.2019) argued that the division between Sunni and Shī'a Islam has commonly been explained in terms of political, rather than theological differences. According to him, the origins of Shī'a lie in the political partisanship concerning the rightful leadership of the Umma – the dispute that escalated into open conflict during the civil war between 'Alī and Mu'āwiyah. This war not only solidified Umayyad's power, but also marked the advent of Shī'a as a distinct religious movement diverging from the mainstream Muslim community.¹⁹ Both al-Ṭabarī and Jafri thus framed Shī'a primarily as a political development that later acquired a religious dimension.

Based on the theory of the conception of sanctity, Shī'a sentiments and inclinations can be traced to the special status that 'Alī held in the eyes of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). The Prophet, who was deeply aware of his family's religious heritage and esteemed lineage, is believed to have shown particular regard for 'Alī on several occasions during his lifetime. One of the most frequently cited events in this context is the incident at Ghadir Khumm,²⁰ where the Prophet was reported to have

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Wilfred Madelung, *The succession to Muhammad A study of the early Caliphate* (Cambridge University Press 1997).309.

¹⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah*. (Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah (n.d.)). Vol. 1,45.

¹⁹ Syed Husain M. Jafri, *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (American University of Beirut 27th August 1976)6

²⁰ Approximately seventy days before his demise, as Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) was returning to Medina following his final pilgrimage to Mecca, he stopped at a place called Ghadir Khum near Juhfa. This occurred on the 18th of Dhul-Hijjah in the year 10 AH (March 15, 632 AD). By this point, the Prophet (PBUH) had conveyed all divine commandments to Muslim community, except for one final and crucial declaration - the formal and public appointment of his divinely designated successors. According

publicly said "...for whomever I am his *mawla* (leader), 'Alī is his *mawla* ". This event is often interpreted by Shī'a scholars as a direct designation of 'Alī as the Prophet's successor, reinforcing the sanctity and legitimacy of his leadership.²¹

This is similar to al-Shahrastānī's report, which recounts an incident during the Prophet's lifetime. On one occasion, the Prophet (PBUH) initially dispatched Abu Bakr to publicly recite *Sūrat al-Barā'ah* (al-Tawbah, Chapter 9 of the Qur'an) to the people. However, he later reversed the decision and instead sent 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalib to carry out the task, assigning him as his direct emissary. According to the account, the Prophet's change of decision was prompted by divine instruction through the angel Jibrīl, who said, "O Muhammad, no one can deliver your message to the people on your behalf except 'Alī."²² This event, in the eyes of the Shias, indicates the Prophet's preference over Abu Bakr.²³ In Shi'i interpretation, this event is also viewed as a clear indication of the Prophet's preference for 'Alī over Abu Bakr, reinforcing the notion of 'Alī's unique and divinely sanctioned position.

In light of the socio-religious reaction theory, the emergence of Shī'a during the Umayyad era (66–750 CE) can be understood as a response to prevailing political and social inequalities. Various Shī'a groups - including both Arab Muslims and newly converted non-Arabs (*mawali*), rallied behind different claimants to the Imamate, seeking leadership that challenged the legitimacy of the Umayyad rule.²⁴ This perspective aligns with the views of Moojan Momen (b. 1950), who argued that marginalised groups, including non-Arab converts, found empowerment in Shī'a narratives that centred on justice, resistance to tyranny, and the defence of the

to Shi'a tradition under the command of Allah, the Prophet (PBUH) stopped at Khum, and assembled a large group of returning pilgrims. There he delivered what he considered his final sermon. In this sermon, he completed the conveyance of the divine message, declaring the religion perfected and Islam fully established in the sight of Allah. Central to this sermon was the Prophet (PBUH) proclamation that 'Alī Ibn Abi Ṭalib (PBUH) had been appointed by Allah as the *wali* (guardian), *mawla* (the master), *Imām* (the leader), and the *Amīr* (commander) over all believing men and women. See: Vahid Majd. 2005. *The Sermon of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH&HF) at Ghadir Khum / Introduction and Translation*. Tehran: Naba Organization, (2005). 3

²¹ Jafri, S.H.M. 1979. *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*. Longman.p. 28.

²² Al-Shahrastānī, Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-. *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, ed. Muhammad Sayyid Kaylad. (Cairo: Shirkat Maktaba wa al-Matba'a Mustafa al-Bibi al-jadi wa Awladihi, 1961) vol.1,144

²³ Siti Syamsiyatun, *Al-Shahrastani and the Shi'is Doctrine of Imama: An Analysis of the Views Expressed in his al-Milal wa al-Nihal and Nihayat al-Iqdam fi 'Ilm Al-Kalam* Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University Canada (1998).78

²⁴ Farhad Daftary and Azim Nanji, *what is Shi'a Islam?* (The institute of Ismailis studies n.d).3.

oppressed.²⁵ As such, the socio-religious reaction theory provides a valuable framework for tracing the origins of early Shi'a within a broader context of political resistance and social identity.

3.3 SHĪ'A: ITS GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT UNTIL THE SIXTH CENTURY OF HIJRA

Al-Shahrastānī's Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal (The Book of Religions and Sects), written in the 6th/12th century, provides a systematic account of various Muslim sects, including the Shī'a. This section seeks to explore how his discussion was influenced by historical and theological developments of Shī'a, up to that period. It also aims to examine how al-Shahrastānī's categorisation and analysis were deeply impacted by the evolution of Shī'a thought, sectarian divisions, and political dynamics preceding the sixth century AH.

By the 6th century H, Shī'a had fragmented into several major branches, including the Zaidites, Imāmīs (Twelvers), and Ismā'īlīs, each with distinct theological and political doctrines. These distinctions are clearly reflected in al-Shahrastānī's work, where he systematically highlighted the differences in the conceptions of the Imamate. He devoted specific sections to each group, outlining their unique perspectives. For instance, he described the Zaidites as adopting an activist approach, asserting that a legitimate Imam must openly rise against injustice and be a descendant of Fatima. Al-Shahrastani noted, "...A further point of disagreement was Zaid's opinion that an imam must rise up in revolt to be an imam".²⁶

Al-Shahrastani also discussed the Twelver Shī'a, offering a key example to their doctrine of *ghayb* (the occultation) of the 12th Imam, al-Mahdi, a belief that became established by the 4th and 10th centuries. He stated: "*Hasan al 'Askari al-Zaki was followed by his son Muhammad the Qa'im, the Awaited One, who disappeared at Samarra and is also the twelfth imam*".²⁷ Furthermore, al-Shahrastani distinguished the Ismaili doctrine of the imamate from other Shī'a sects by noting their belief in the

²⁵ Momen Moojan, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam*. (Yale University Press, 1985). 45.

²⁶ Muhammad b. Abdal –Karim shahrastani, *Muslim Sects in Kitab al Milal wa al-Nihal*. trans.A.K. Kazi and

J.G. Flynn, (London: Kegan Paul international 1984) 134.

²⁷ Ibid ,145.

Imamate of Ismail, the eldest son of Ja‘far al-Sadiq, who was the first to be explicitly designated for the imamate.²⁸

Al-Shahrastānī offered a more systematic analysis of sectarian thought, continuing the tradition of earlier heresiographers such as al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037). His classification of Shī‘a into three main groups - Rāfiḍa (Twelvers/Zaydīs), Ismā‘īlīs, and Ghulāt (extremists) – reflects the developments in post-concealment Shī‘a thought. Unlike many of his predecessors, al-Shahrastani deliberately avoided a polemical tone, striving instead for objectivity and neutrality.²⁹ He wrote: *“I impose upon myself the obligation of giving the views of each sect as I find them in their works without favour or prejudice, without declaring which are correct and which are incorrect, which are true and which are false; though, indeed, the glimpses of the truth and the odour of lies will not remain undetected by minds versed in intellectual matters. And God will be our help”*.³⁰ This shift in tone and method aligns with the intellectual climate of the sixth and twelfth centuries, when increasing theological complexity and inter-sectarian debate called for more precise and nuanced classifications.

Al-Shahrastānī’s engagement with Shī‘a thought was also shaped by his grounding in al-Ash‘arī theology. Al-Ṣafadī (1296 – 1363 CE) in al-Wāfi notes that, *“...al-Shahrastānī, having been a disciple of Shafi‘ite-Asha‘arite teachers, himself became a theologian of the Asha‘arite (Sunni)school”*.³¹ This theological orientation is evident in his critique of certain Shī‘a sect, such as the Kaisaniya. His comment on their doctrine of obedience to a man reflects broader Sunni concerns, as he remarked: *“If one believes that religion consists in obedience to a man, and finds none, that one has no religion. May God protect us from this confusion and bewilderment! Lord, guide us in the right path”*.³² Nevertheless, al-Shahrastani’s relatively balanced and non-polemical treatment- especially when compared to earlier figures like Ibn Ḥazm (994–1063), indicates the effects of Shī‘a doctrinal articulation by the sixth century.

²⁸ Ibid, 163.

²⁹ Steigerwald. 1997. *Al-Shahrastānī’s Contribution to Medieval Islamic Thought*. p. 215.

³⁰ Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects and Divisions- The Section on Muslim Sect in Kitāb al Milal wa al-Niḥal*. trans. A.K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn. 1984. London: Kegan Paul International. p. 12.

³¹ Ibid, introduction. 2

³² Ibid, 126

In conclusion, al-Shahrastānī's analysis of Shī'a in *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* echoes the historical and theological development of the sect up to the sixth /twelve century. His methodology and Sunni-oriented perspective were shaped by a combination of factors, including the rise of the Ismā'īlī political authority, the Twelver theology, and the established heresiographical tradition. Despite his Ash'ari background, al-Shahrastani's relatively balanced approach marks a significant contribution to the study of Muslim sectarianism. His work remains an essential source for understanding the complexity of intra Muslim doctrinal divisions during the early period.

3.4 SHĪ'A DOCTRINES ACCORDING TO AL-SHAHRASTĀNĪ'S GENERAL TREATMENT

The Sunni scholar and renowned heresiographer al-Shahrastānī examined Islamic sects both objectively and subjectively. His objective, neutral and systematic presentation is most evident in *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, where he endeavoured to convey each group's beliefs as found in their own sources. In contrast, his more personal, critical assessments were expressed in his *Nihāyat al-Iqdām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, which reflects his theological inclinations and judgements. Below is a summary of al-Shahrastānī's general treatment of key Shī'a doctrines, organised according to the major sects he discussed.

In *al-Milal*, al-Shahrastānī begins his discussion of Shī'a, following the method that he describes in the introductory chapter of the book, namely using the names of individuals and founders of sects as headings, and to give their views on every question.³³ The following are selected expositions of Shī'a and its subdivisions as presented in the work of al-Shahrastānī. This discussion will focus on two subsects in Shī'a, namely Kaisāniyyā and Imāmiyyā whose specific doctrines will be analysed in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis.

³³ Ibid., p. 12. See also : Siti Syamsiyatun. 1998. *Al-Shahrastani and the Shi'is Doctrine of Imama: An Analysis of the Views Expressed in his al-Milal wa al-Nihal and Nihayat al-Iqdam fī 'Ilm Al-Kalam*. Canada: Institute of Islamic Studies McGill University. p.75

3.4.1 Kaisāniyyā

According to al-Shahrastānī, the Kaysāniyyā are the followers of Kaisān, a *mawlā* of ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, and also said to have been a pupil of Muḥammad Ibn al-Hanafīyyah. The common belief of Kaisāniyyā is that religion is centred on obedience to a particular individual, Kaisān. Kaisan’s knowledge in the views of his followers embraced allsciences; that from his two master’s he had learned all secrets, including the power of allegorical interpretation and insight into the esoteric; that he had the knowledge also of the heavens and of the souls of men.

Acts such as prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage were interpreted as forms of obedience to certain individuals. According to al-Shahrastānī, some members of the sect went so far as to disregard core religious duties if they believed obedience to their chosen leader rendered such acts unnecessary. Furthermore, al-Shahrastani noted that, certain Kaysāniyya abandoned belief in the resurrection in favour of doctrines such as reincarnation and metempsychosis. A segment of the group maintained unwavering allegiance to a single figure, believing he would not die, or could not die until he returned from concealment.³⁴

Al-Shahrastani reported that Kaisaniyya themselves divided into four sub-divisions, namely, *al-Mukhtāriyyā*, *al-Hāshimiyyā*, *al-Bayāniyyā* and *al-Rizāmiyyā*, each with their distinctive doctrines.³⁵ Three of these sub-divisions will be selected for discussion, due to their close relevance with the doctrines that will be analysed in this study.

a. The Mukhtāriyyā:

The followers of Mukhtār Ibn Abū ‘Ubayd al-Thaqafī- believed in the Imamate of Muḥammad Ibn al-Hanafīyyā, the son of ‘Alī, following Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. One of his followers, al- Himyarī is said —according to Mukhtariyya- to have taught that Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafīyya is still alive, living in occultation on Mount of Raḍwā. He was said to be protected by a lion and a leopard, with two springs nearby- one

³⁴ Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects*. p. 126.

³⁵ Ibid. 126-131

flowing with water and the other with honey. According to this belief, he would eventually return from his concealment to establish justice on earth, correcting its current state of injustice. Al-Shahrastānī identified this as the earliest appearance of the Shī'a'' doctrine of concealment (*ghayba*) and the eventual return (*raj'a*).³⁶

b. The Hāshimiyyā:

The followers of Abū Hāshim Ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyyā, and another subdivision of Kaysāniyyā, subscribed to the doctrine of *ta'wīl* (allegorical interpretation) and *bāṭin* (esoteric knowledge). Al-Shahrastānī reported that the Hāshimiyyā believe that after the death of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyyā, the Imamate passed to his son Abū Hāshim. His followers attributed to him extraordinary intellectual and spiritual capacities, often in exaggerated terms. They claimed that Abū Hāshim had been taught the knowledge about heavenly spheres and souls, the meaning of revelation through mastery of allegorical interpretation, and to grasp the correlation between the exoteric and the esoteric. It is the belief of the Hāshimiyyā that beneath the exoteric, *ẓāhir*, there is esoteric, *bāṭin*, that every individual has a spirit, that every revelation has an interpretation, that for every type in this world there is a prototype in the other world.³⁷

c. The Bayāniyyā:

This refers to the followers of Bayān Ibn Sam'ān al-Tamīmi. According to al-Shahrastani, this sect espoused the doctrine of incarnation. According to Bayan, a divine particle became incarnate in 'Alī and was embodied in him. By virtue of this divine particle, 'Alī knew the unseen, and hence, when he foretold the outcome of battles, the event was as he had said. It was the virtue of the same divine particle that he fought the infidels and gained the victory over them.

The Bayaniyya also believe that 'Alī will reappear. They interpreted God's words, "Do they wait that Allah should come to them in the shadows of the clouds?" as a symbolic reference to 'Alī,' envisioning him appearing amidst canopies of clouds, with

³⁶ Ibid, 128.

³⁷ Ibid, 126

thunder representing his voice and the lightning as his smile. Furthermore, Bayan claimed that divine essence had been passed to him through metempsychosis (transmigration of soul), which in his view, legitimised his claim. He further asserted that it was this same divine essence that had made Adam worthy of the angel's prostration.³⁸

3.4.2 The Imāmiyya

Al-Shahrastānī defined the Imāmiyya as those who believe that, after the Prophet (PBUH), the imamate belonged to 'Alī because of a clear designation and unambiguous appointment from the Prophet- an appointment made, not by referring to him through description, but by indicating him in person.³⁹

The Imāmiyya argued that in religion, the appointment of an *Imām* holds a central place, as it ensured the Prophet leave this world with peace of mind in regard to the future of the Muslim community. Since the Prophet was sent to resolve conflicts and disputes, and foster harmony, it would be inconceivable for him to depart without securing the community's leadership. Leaving this important matter untended would lead to division. Therefore, it was essential for him to appoint a successor- someone the people could rely on and trust. According to the Imāmiyya, the Prophet (PBUH) did indeed designate 'Alī as his successor, sometimes by allusion and at other times by open declaration.⁴⁰

The Imāmiyya, according to al-Shahrastānī's exposition in *al-Milal*, go even further in their theological stance by slandering the leading companions, accusing them either of disbelief, or at the very least, of injustice and enmity.⁴¹ Al-Shahrastānī challenged this view by citing Quranic verses that affirm the integrity and virtue of the Prophet's (PBUH) companions, and expresses God's approval of them. He referred specifically to the verse: "God also said in praise of the Immigrants and Helpers, and those who followed them in sincerity of spirit, 'The first and foremost of those who left their homes, al-Muhajirun, and of those who helped them, al-Ansar, and those who

³⁸ Ibid,130.

³⁹ Ibid, 139.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 139

⁴¹ Siti Syamsiyatun, *Al-Shahrastani*. p.84.

followed them in a true spirit, God is well pleased with them and they with him”.⁴² Furthermore, he invoked a well-known prophetic tradition in which the Prophet (PBUH) was reported to have said, "*Ten of my companions are in Paradise: Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Ṭalhā, Zubayr, Sa'd Ibn Abī Waqqās, Sa'īd Ibn Zayd, 'Abd al-Rahmān Ibn 'Awf and Abū 'Ubayda Ibn al-Jarrāh*".⁴³

In *Nihāyah*, al-Shahrastānī focused on two major Shī'a doctrines: anthropomorphism – discussed in the context of Divine attributes-, and the concept of *Imāmah*. The Ghāliyah (extremist) fraction of Shī'a became his primary concern as far as those ideas were expounded. The Ghāliyah (from the Arabic 'ghuluw', meaning exaggeration or excess) were extremist groups within Shī'a that went far beyond the mainstream doctrines.

According to al-Shahrastānī, the Ghāliyah denies God the "Beautiful Names" and uses anthropomorphic terms instead to describe Him. They believed that names and their meanings were inseparable, and since every name has an opposite, - such as 'wise' versus 'ignorant' - they feared that by calling God 'wise' will imply He could also be associated with 'ignorant'. So, in their view, attributing any name to God risks assigning an imperfection. Because of this logic, they feared attributing even positive names to God, since those names (they believed) inherently opened the door to associating their opposites.⁴⁴

However, al-Shahrastānī responded that while the names may be common, their real meanings differ, and the names of God come to us only through divine revelation. He added that Ghaliya likened the Creator to His creation, claiming that a certain person was God, or that a part of God was incarnate in him - thus blindly following the beliefs of Nazarenes and other incarnationists sects in various religious communities.⁴⁵

With regards to the concept of *imāma*, al-Shahrastānī's exposition in *Nihayah* presents *imāmah* as both necessary and religiously binding. This necessity, according to Shi'a Imamiyya is grounded in both rational ('*aqlan*) and legal ('*syar'an*) considerations. They regard the need for an *Imām*, as similar to "the intrinsic necessity

⁴² Al-Quran 9:100

⁴³ Al-Tirmidhī, Sunan al-Tirmidhī, Hadith no: 3478

⁴⁴ Al-Shahrastānī. 1934. *Nihāyah al-Iqdām fī Ilm al-Kalām*, Edited with Translation by Alfred Guillaume. Oxford-London: University Press. p.103.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 103.

of the prophetic office, which is justified both logically (*'aqlan*) and scripturally (*sam'an*)".⁴⁶ In their view, people require a divinely appointed leader to safeguard religion, uphold the law, and maintain social order - a leader whom the community can rely on and follow.⁴⁷

In conclusion, the works of Al-Shahrastānī's, particularly *al-Milal wa al-Nihāl* and *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*, remain essential for anyone interested in studying classical Shī'a theology. His systematic theological descriptions and thorough classifications represent a scholarly effort to document intra-Islamic diversity, even though his Sunnī viewpoint, is occasionally apparent. His deliberations highlight the theological and doctrinal distinctions among various sects, while underscoring the central role of the Imamate in Shī'a thought.



⁴⁶ Ibid, 484.

⁴⁷ Ibid

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF AL-SHAHRASṬĀNĪ'S EXPOSITION ON SELECTED SHĪ'A DOCTRINES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153 CE) was a seminal Persian scholar. His exposition on key Shī'a doctrines —such as the concealment (*ghayb*) and return (*raj'a*), the distinction between esoteric and exoteric interpretations of sacred texts, and allegiance to the imam —is notably embedded in his major works, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* and *Nihāyah al-Iqdām fi 'Ilm al-Kalām*.

This chapter aims to critically assess his explanation of the afore-mentioned Shī'a doctrines from multiple perspectives. It compares his analysis with those offered by other scholars and examines the theological arguments, disputes, and counterarguments surrounding the doctrines in question.

4.2 THE DOCTRINE OF GHAYB (CONCEALMENT) AND RAJ'A (RETURN)

4.2.1 The Meaning of Ghayb (Concealment) and Raj'a (Return)

The word *ghayb*, is derived from the Arabic root '*ghāba*', which means 'to be absent', 'to hide' or to 'disappear'. It is the opposite of "*ḥaḍara*" meaning 'to be present'. The term conveys a sense of separation, distance, or concealment. For example, it is used to describe someone who disappeared, or become hidden from sight, much like the sun when it sets and disappears.¹ More broadly, *ghayb* refers to that which is unseen or not witnessed- whether physically absent or concealed in meaning. It can also imply speaking about someone in their absence, especially in reference to faults or matters they seek to keep hidden.²

The term *ghayb* corresponds to the English words concealment and occultation. In essence it refers to something that is present yet hidden from perception - much like

¹ *Al-Munjid fi al-Lughah wa al-A'lām*. 1984. Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq .p. 563

² *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasīf*. 2011. General Administration of Dictionaries and Heritage Revival Republic of Egypt. Fifth Edition, Egypt: Al-Shorouk International Library. p. 690

the “sun behind the clouds”.³ The English term ‘*occultation*’ is derived from ‘*occult*’, meaning hidden from view, or concealed.⁴ Therefore, there is no significant difference between concealment and occultation; both are used interchangeably in scholarly discourse to describe Shī’a doctrines of *ghayb*. However, for the sake of consistency and in line with common usage in the literature, this discussion will use the term ‘concealment’ to refer to the doctrine of *ghayb* within Shī’a doctrines.

Moreover, the term *raj’a* in Arabic means ‘to return’, ‘to come back’, or ‘to turn back’. It can describe physical movement or a shift in position or state – for example, ‘he returned from his journey’ or ‘he turned away’.⁵ The Quran uses the term in this context, as in Sūrah al-Taubah (9:83): “*If God returns you to a group of them and they ask your permission to leave*”.⁶

In theological discourse, *raj’a* refers specifically to the return of an individual to the present state of existence.⁷ It is important to distinguish between *raj’a* and *tanāsukh*. *Raj’a* signifies the return as the same individual or as himself, maintaining his identity and consciousness. *Tanāsukh* by contrast, refers to the return of the soul in a different body or form, often as part of a cyclical understanding of existence. While the two concepts may appear side by side in some esoteric traditions, they are fundamentally distinct in meaning and implication.⁸ To conclude, *ghayb* refers to the concealment or hidden state of a certain imām, while *raj’a* simplifies his eventual return to this worldly life in his original form. Together, these doctrines form a cornerstone of Shī’a eschatological belief.

4.2.2 Shī’a’s Perspective on *Ghayb* (Concealment) and *Raj’a* (Return)

In Shī’a, the doctrine of *ghayb* in general refers to the eschatological belief that the Mahdī- a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH)- has already been born but

³ Mohseni and Mohammad Sagha. 2022. *The Hidden Imam and the End of Time A Primer on the Mahdi, Islamic Theology, and Global Politics*. Payam, United States of America.p 9

⁴ *The American Heritage dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. 2000. Houghton Mifflin Company p.1215

⁵ *Al-Munjid fi al-Lughah wa al-A’lām*. p. 250

⁶ *Al-Mu’jam al-Wasit*. p 343

⁷ Israel Friedlander. 1908. *The Heterodoxies of the Shiites in the Presentation of ibn Hazm*. In: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*(1908) , Vol. 29, p.23

⁸ Ibid 26

was subsequently concealed from public eye. According to their understanding, the Mahdī will eventually re-emerge at the end of time to establish justice and peace on earth.⁹

Shī'a distinguishes between two types of concealment: The lesser (or minor) concealment and the greater (or major) concealment. According to Twelver Shī'a, their twelfth Imām, Muḥammad al-Mahdī, entered concealment but remains alive. During the minor concealment (874–941 CE), it is believed that the Imam maintained communication with his followers through four successive agents,¹⁰ collectively known as the four deputies (*al-nuwwab al-arba'ah*).¹¹ These deputies served as intermediaries conveying the Imām's guidance and instructions to the Shī'a community. During the Major concealment (*Ghaybah al-Kubrā*) – which began in 941 CE until the present- the Hidden Imām is believed to be alive in his physical body though no longer accessible through appointed agents.¹² His continued concealment is interpreted as a test of faith and endurance, with his reappearance awaited at the end of time to restore justice and divine order.¹³

The concept of *raj'a* (return) is closely connected with the doctrine of *ghayb* (concealment), with both seen as signs of the true al-Qāim (he who will rise).¹⁴ Within some early Shī'a sects, there was a belief that 'Alī was concealed within the clouds, and would one day return to earth.¹⁵ This idea was particularly associated with the Rāfiḍah (also known as Rawāfiḍ),¹⁶ a term historically used for certain Shī'a groups who rejected the legitimacy of the first three caliphs.

⁹ Sobhani, Ja'far, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam*. Trans. Shah-Kazemi, Reza. I.B. Tauris (2001).116

¹⁰ Nanji, Azim; Daftary, Farhad "What is Shiite Islam?". (Greenwood Publishing 2006) Vol. 1.223-4

¹¹ Sachedina, Abdulaziz Abdulhussein. *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdī in Twelver Shī'ism*. (Suny press 1981)96

¹² Nanji, Azim & Daftary, Farhad. 2006. "What is Shiite Islam?". Greenwood Publishing. Vol. 1. pp.223-4

¹³ Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali. 2007. *The Concept of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism*. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* Vol. 14. 136–143

¹⁴ Jassim M. Hussain. n.d, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background*. Tehran: Bunyad Be'that.p. 3

¹⁵ Israel Friedlander. 1908. *The Heterodoxies of the Shiites in the Presentation of Ibn Ḥazm*, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Vol. 29, p.25

¹⁶ The term "*Rafīḍa*," originally used as a pejorative appellation, was quite early interpreted by the Imamis as an honorific signifying "Those who rejected evil." The term "Rafida" has accompanied the history of Shi'ism from a very early period. Its origins go back to the abortive uprising of Zayd Ibn 'Ali against the Umayyads. after having gone through several changes of meaning, the term "*Rafida*" became a popular

The belief in the return of ‘Alī’s son, Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā¹⁷ was central to the teachings of Kaisāniyyā, an early and now-extinct Shī’a sect. This group considered Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā to be the Mahdī who have gone into concealment and would return in the future. Two of the most prominent proponents of these beliefs were the poets Kuthayyir and al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī, both of whom described the belief in the *raj’a* concerning Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā. Their writings reflect how this belief was seen as a hallmark of Rawāfiḍ doctrine during their time.¹⁸

The event of 941 CE (329 AH) was the pivotal event that marked the transition from minor to major concealment. It was associated with the death of the fourth and final Deputy, ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad al-Samarri. According to traditional accounts, six days before his death, a communiqué (*al-tawqī’*) was issued by the Hidden Imām, addressed to al-Samarri. This letter is the definitive document that announced the beginning of the major occultation. The text states:

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. O ‘Alī ibn Muhammad al-Samarri, may God grant great rewards to your brethren concerning you [i.e., for the loss of you], for indeed death will overtake you in six days. So, put your affairs in order and do not appoint anyone to take your place after your death. For the second occultation has now commenced, and there shall be no appearance until after a long time, when God grants His permission. And appearances shall occur only after a long period of time and when hearts have hardened and the world has become filled with tyranny. And there will come to my partisans those who claim to have seen me. Beware! Whoever makes such a claim before the rise of al-Sufyani and the [heavenly] cry is a liar and an imposter.¹⁹

pejorative appellation of the Imāmiyya, it was intended to recall two major sins: for the Zaydiyyā, the sin of rejecting Zayd, and for the Sunnis, that of rejecting the first two caliphs. See: Ethan Kohlberg.1979. *The Term "Rafida" Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99.4, 678

¹⁷ Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (b. 16/637-8 - d. 81/700-1), the son of ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalib and Khawla al-Hanafīyya (the daughter of Ja’far b. Qays), was among the first group of Tabi’un. He was born during the time of the caliphate of ‘Umar b. al-Khattab and passed away when he was sixty-five during the time of the caliphate of Marwan. See: wikishia.net. The mother of Muhammad, the son of Ali, belonged to a tribe named Bani Hanafiya and on this account he was called Muhammad bin Hanafiya. He was a magnanimous, brave and pious person. Although Kaisaniyya sect considered him to be an Imam he himself believed in the imamate of his brother Imam Hasan after his father Imam Ali, and thereafter in the imamate of his second brother Imam Husayn and then in the imamate of his nephew Ali bin Husayn. He was a distinguished person among the Ahlul Bayt and showed great valour in the battles fought by Imam Ali the Commander of the Faithful. See: Ibrahim Ayati, *A probe into the History of Ashura, Islamic Seminary Publication*. p.42

¹⁸ Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects*. p.128

¹⁹ Al-Ṭabarsi, Abū Maṣṣūr Aḥmad Ibn ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalīb. (1966) *Al-Ihtijāj ‘ala Ahl al-Lajāj*. Najaf Vol.2, p 297

Many scholars have examined the concealment of the twelfth Imām ²⁰ from a theological point of view.²¹ For example, Jassim M. Hussain (b 1979 CE) reported that the last Safīr, Abu al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad al-Sammāri²² announced on his deathbed in 941 CE that the twelfth Imam had decided not to appoint a successor, thus initiating a state of complete concealment. This declaration marked the beginning of the twelfth Imām 's second and greater concealment, which according to Twelver Imāmi's belief, continues to this day. As a result of this second concealment, the line of Imams was understood to have concluded with twelve,²³ hence solidifying the foundational doctrine of Twelver Shī'a.

In addition, the Imāmiyyā (Twelver Shī'a) believe that the Twelfth Imām is al-Qā'im whose advent was foretold by the Prophet (PBUH). According to traditions, the Prophet (PBUH) is said to have predicted that a descendant of his daughter Fāṭimah would rise with the sword and fill the world with justice and equity. Based on this prophecy, the Imāmiyya maintain that the Twelfth Imām remains alive, but is in a state of concealment, awaiting the divinely appointed time of his return, when he will emerge to fulfil his eschatological role.²⁴

4.2.3 Al-Shahrastani's Exposition on the Doctrine of (Ghayb)Concealment and (Raj'a)Return

A. Al-Ḥimyarī's Report as a Basis of Reference

In al-Milal wa al-Nihal, al-Shahrastānī's exposes the doctrine of concealment and return based on al-Sayyid Ismā'īl al-Ḥimyarī's report. Al-Ḥimyarī was born in 105 AH/723-724 CE in 'Ammān, and later grew up in Baṣra. He descended from the Ḥimyar

²⁰ Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-'Askari is the twelfth Imam of the "Imamates" or "Twelve-Imam Shi'ites", al-Ithna Ashariyya, who form the second largest denomination in Islam after the Sunnis. He appears to have been born in 256 A.H./869 A.D. Four years later, after the death of his father al-'Askari, the eleventh Imam, he was hidden from the authorities of the 'Abbasid caliphs as a precaution. His whereabouts were disclosed only to a very few of his followers. See: Jassim M. Hussain. n.d., *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background*. Tehran: Bunyad Be'that.p..3

²¹ Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occultation*. p.3

²² Abu al-Ḥasan ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad al-Sammāri, according to al-Kulayni, the Twelfth Imam divulged to him in a letter that his death would occur in 280/893, when it actually occurred. Al-Sammari died on the 15th of Sha'ban 329/15th May 941 and was buried in al-Khaljani street in the quarter of al-Muhawwal.see:Al- islam.org.

²³ Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occultation*. p.3

²⁴ Ibid. p.2-3

tribe of Yemen, a non-Qurashi Arab lineage. His grandfather was Yazīd Ibn Ziyād- also known as Ibn Mufarriq (d. 69/688- 9 CE)- who was a well-known poet of his time, and al- Ḥimyari himself became one of the most prominent literary figures to advocate Shī'a doctrines, especially those relating to the *raj'a* of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā.

Al-Sayyid Ismā'il al-Ḥimyari was neither a Fāṭimid nor an 'Alawī by lineage. The title "Al-Sayyid" was simply part of his name and did not signify lineage from the Prophet's family. He was however, among the most prominent Shī'a poets, widely recognised for his extensive poetic contributions in defence of Shī'a beliefs. His literary output was so vast that no complete compilation of his works has yet been achieved. To date, approximately 2300 of his Hashimiyyat poems- those composed in praise of the Prophet's family and advocating Shī'a doctrines- have been collected.²⁵

Based on al-Ḥimyari's report, Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā had not died, but was instead in concealment on mount of Raḍwā, guarded by a lion on one side and a leopard on the other, and accompanied by two springs —one flowing with water, the other with honey. According to this belief, he would one day return from his concealment, to fill the earth with justice, just as it had previously been filled with injustice. According to al- Shahrastānī, this account marks one of the earliest recorded expressions of the Shī'a doctrine of *ghayb* (concealment) and *raj'a* (return). Over time, this doctrine eventually became deeply rooted as a religious tenet and even regarded as a foundational pillar of Shī'a. Following the death of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā, the Kaisāniyyā sect- who considered him the rightful Imām- became internally divided over the proper succession of the imamate, ultimately fragmenting into various sub-sects.²⁶

Rather than offering a personal critique or theological judgement on the doctrine, al-Shahrastānī chose to report the view of al-Ḥimyari, with only a minimal commentary. As he noted: "*It was a doctrine that continued to be held by the Kaisāniyya after the death of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā; they became divided, broke up into various schools*".²⁷ Al- Shahrastānī himself clarified the scope of the work by stating: "...I do not charge myself in this book (Nihāyah) to reveal all that was discussed in the

²⁵ See: Ibn Shākir Kutbī, Muhammad, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt*, vol. 1, p. 189.

²⁶ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects*.p.128

²⁷ Ibid

science of theology. I limit myself to the task of discussing the difficulties related to intellectual matters and explaining the furthest point theologians can reach, not matters dependent on tradition”.²⁸

It is evident from the aforementioned statement that al-Shahrastānī, neither commented on the al-Himyari’s report nor engage in an extensive discussion of the doctrines of concealment and return. Rather, he committed to an objective and unbiased account of the Muslim sects. It is in line with his stance, asserting: “I made myself a rule, that I will describe the doctrine of each sect by the manner I found it in their books without any favouritism to them on my part, and without any bias against them. This will be done without any attempt to distinguish what is sound in it from what is corrupt, or to distinguish the truthful in it from the false. However, the flashes of truth and the odour of falsehood will become manifest to the intelligent mind in the realms of rational proofs”.²⁹

B. The Status of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā and the Twelfth Imām

Al-Shahrastānī reported that, “... *al-Himyari also believed that Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā had not died*”. This general statement is associated with the Kaisāniyyā, one of the early sects in Shī’a whom advocate concealment and return. They believed that Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā was still alive yet had entered the state of concealment. However, al-Shahrastānī did not specify whether this concealment was of the lesser (*ghayba ṣuḡhrā*) or greater (*ghayba kubrā*). Given the absence of any mention of *saḡīrs* (intermediaries) or communication with the community, it may be inferred that al-Shahrastānī was referring to the greater concealment, wherein the Imām remains hidden and inaccessible until his return.

Al-Imāmiyya al-Qaṭ’iyyā³⁰ also believed that their Imām had not died. They actively engaged in extensive propaganda efforts to prove both the existence of the

²⁸ Alfred Guillaume. 1934. *The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastani Kitab Nihayatul Iqdam fi ‘ilm al-Kalam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, London: Humphrey Milford. p. 496-497

²⁹ Al-Shahrastani, *Al-Milal*, p. 23

³⁰ The Qaṭ’iyyā: followers of the second Saḡīr (representative) in Imāmiyyah Shī’a (Muhammad b. ‘Uthman b. Saīd al-‘Umari). His kunya was Abu Ja’far. see: Jassim M. Hussain. n.d. *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background*. Tehran: Bunyad Be’tat. p. 12. This faction constituted the greater portion of the Imamites. They believed that al-’Askari had died and left a son to succeed him, but

Twelfth Imām, Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Mahdī, and the theological necessity of his concealment. However, they refrained from specifying the exact time of his reappearance, maintaining instead that the matter lies solely within the knowledge of God. As they emphasised: "*concerning the release from suffering (i.e. the rise of the Imām) it is in the hand of Allah and those who try to fix certain times for it are liars*".³¹

The Twelver Ja'farī Shī'a Muslims believe that the Hidden Imām is the Twelfth Imām, Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Mahdī, entered the minor concealment (*al-ghaybah al-ṣuḡhrā*) in 874 CE. During this period, he maintained communication with the Shī'a community through four successive representatives (*sufarā'* or *nawwāb*). In 941 CE, he entered the major concealment (*al-ghaybah al-kubrā*), during which any direct or mediated contact with the Imām ceased entirely. Twelvers maintain that the Imām remains alive and concealed until his divinely appointed reappearance.

Similarly, other branches of Islam hold parallel beliefs regarding Hidden Imāms. For example, the Musta'li Ismā'ilīs and the Ismā'ilī Druze believe their respective Imāms entered concealment in the twelfth and eleventh centuries. The Nizārī Ismā'ilīs also acknowledge periods in history when their Imāms remained hidden, maintaining the continuity of Imamate through esoteric means.³²

It is evident that al-Ḥimyarī's view on the continued existence of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya bears resemblance to the doctrines of al-Imāmiyya al-Qa'īyya and the Twelver Ja'farī Shī'a, particularly in their shared belief concept of major concealment (*al-ghaybah al-kubrā*) of the Imām. However, it is important to note a fundamental distinction: while al-Ḥimyarī and the Kaysānīyya believed in the concealment of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya, the Imāmiyya and Twelver Ja'farīs affirm the concealment of the twelfth Imām, Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Mahdī.

Both groups refrained from assigning a specific date for the Imām's return, asserting that this is known only to God. The main differences lie in the identity of the Hidden Imām and the timeline of the concealment: The Twelver Ja'farīs assert that the

they differed about the day of his birth, his name, and whether or not he was al-Qa'im al-Mahdi. See: Sad al-Ash'ari al-Qummi. 1963. *Kitab al-Maqalat wal-Firaq*. p.14

³¹ Al-Ṭabarsī, Aḥmad Ibn 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭalīb (d. 548/1153), *al-Ihtijāj*, vol.2, p.283.

³² Mohseni and Mohammad Sagha. 2022. *The Hidden Imam and the End of Time A Primer on the Mahdi, Islamic Theology, and Global Politics*. USA: Payam. p. 9

Major concealment began in 941 CE, while the Musta‘lī Ismā‘īlīs and the Druze believe their respective Imāms entered concealment during the twelfth and eleventh centuries.

Furthermore, regarding the major concealment and the continued existence of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya, he was also regarded as the Mahdī by the Shī‘a Rāfiḍah. Unlike other groups, they specified the date of his anticipated reappearance. They believe that Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya was the first official Mahdī, endowed with the divine charisma (*barakah*) necessary to deliver his followers from oppression and to establish justice and equity. This messianic role was asserted as early as the year 66/685 CE.³³

Apart from the Shī‘a, numerous Sunni scholars have also held the belief that the promised Mahdī is none other than the Twelfth Imām—referred to as al-Qā’im and Ṣāḥib al-Zamān (“the Master of the Age”). The titles al-Qā’im and al-Mahdī are often understood to refer to the same individual. He is called al-Mahdī because he will guide people to hidden truths, and al-Qā’im because he will rise after death to fulfil a divinely appointed mission.³⁴

Among the Sunni scholars who upheld this view is the well-known historian and preacher Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1256 CE), who recorded traditions identifying the Twelfth Imām as the Qā’im, the Ṣāḥib al-Zamān, and the awaited Mahdī. Similarly, the renowned mystic Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 1240 CE) is reported to have believed that the Mahdī is the Twelfth Imām.³⁵ Other notable Sunni scholars who affirmed this position include Ṣadr al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥammū’ī (d. 1322 CE) and Sulaymān b. Ibrāhīm al-Kundūzī al-Balkhī (d. 1877 CE), among others.³⁶

Within the Sunni ḥadīth corpus—including the *Ṣiḥāḥ Sittah* (the six canonical collections)—there are numerous authentic traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) concerning the coming of the Mahdī. Among these, several narrations affirm that the Mahdī will be from the lineage of Fāṭimah, the daughter of the Prophet (PBUH). For instance, a ḥadīth recorded in *Sunan Abī Dāwūd* states: “*The Mahdī is from my family, from the descendants of Fāṭimah.*” Such narrations provide significant grounds

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Tusi, *Ki’tāb al-Ghayba* (Najaf: Maktabat al-Sadiq, 1965), 282.

³⁵ Mohseni and Mohammad Sagha. 2022. *The Hidden Imam and the End of Time A Primer on the Mahdi, Islamic Theology, and Global Politics*. USA: Payam Copyright.p. 13

³⁶ Ibid, p. 13-14

for the belief in the Mahdī across both Sunni and Shī‘a traditions, although the specific identity and role of the Mahdī differ between the sects.³⁷

Unlike Twelver Shī‘a, the belief in a concealed Imam is not a doctrinal pillar within Sunnis. While the concept of the Mahdī is acknowledged in Sunni tradition—rooted in numerous ḥadīths—the identity of the Mahdī remains a subject of uncertainty and theological caution. Sunni scholars historically and contemporarily differ regarding who exactly the Mahdī will be. The prevailing mainstream Sunni position maintains that although the Mahdī will certainly be a descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), specifically from the Ahl al-Bayt,³⁸ his exact identity remains unknown and undisclosed. This contrasts sharply with Twelver Shī‘ism, which identifies the Mahdī unequivocally as the Twelfth Imām, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-‘Askarī, currently in concealment.

4.2.4 Analysis of al-Shahrastānī’s Exposition

In analysing al-Shahrastānī’s exposition on the doctrines of concealment and return, this study will focus on three major points:

Firstly: Al-Shahrastānī, in his exposition on the Shī‘a, stated that, “Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya had not died.” This view according to him is associated with certain early Shī‘a groups, particularly the Kaisāniyya, who believed in his concealment and expected his return as the Mahdī.

However, this belief contrasts with historical reports found in other classical sources. For instance, Ibn Sa‘d, in his *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, recorded that Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya died in 81 AH / 700–701 CE at the age of 65, which suggests he was born around 16 AH / 637–638 CE. Furthermore, al-Shahrastānī also mentioned that the al-Hāshimiyya, the followers of Abū Hāshim b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya, held a different view—namely, that Muḥammad had indeed passed away and that the imamate was transferred to his son Abū Hāshim.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid, p.13

³⁸ Ibid. p.14

³⁹ Muhammad Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects*. p. 128

A related report from ‘Alī al-Nawbakhtī, who—although did not explicitly mention the death of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya—did state that some early groups believed the Twelfth Imam (Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Mahdī) had died during his concealment. According to this view, the imamate was then transferred to his son and would continue within his progeny until God resurrects the original Twelfth Imam.

This perspective implies the possibility that an Imām may indeed die during concealment. If such a possibility is acknowledged for the Twelfth Imām, then logically, the death of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya during his concealment is also conceivable. Nevertheless, many adherents of the Kaysāniyya sect rejected this notion. They steadfastly denied Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya’s death and instead upheld the belief that he had gone into hiding (ghayba) and would return to establish justice and equity on earth, just as it had once been filled with injustice and oppression.⁴⁰

Apart from Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, almost all the Imām s were proclaimed to be the Mahdi after al-Ṣadiq (the sixth imam), and their return was awaited; Their death was interpreted as concealment, until the line reached the twelfth Imamate Imām Mahdi.⁴¹ For example, following the death of Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya in 145 AH \ CE 762, the Mughiriyya split into factions. One group refused to believe that he had died, arguing that a devil had been killed in his place. This faction argued that Muhammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyya had gone into concealment in Mount Hagir, from which he would someday reappear as the messiah. This belief reflects the impact of the Karibiyya⁴², who taught that Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyya had gone into concealment in Mount Radwa.⁴³

Notably, the death of any Imām shouldn’t have caused any confusion. Allah says: "Every soul shall taste death. (al-Imran 4:185)." Ibn Kathīr, in his commentary about this verse, said: “Allah issues a general and encompassing statement that every living soul shall taste death.” In another verse, Allah says: “Whatsoever is on it (the

⁴⁰ Al-Mas’ud, ‘Alī b, al-Husayn b. ‘Alī. *Muruj al-Dhahab wa Ma’adin al-Jawhar*! Ed... and tr. into French C.'Barbier de. Meynard et al. (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1891)181

⁴¹ Abdul-Aziz Abdul hussein Sachedina, *The doctrine of Mahdism in Imami Shi'ism*, (National Library of Canada Cataloguing Branch Canadian Theses Division Ottawa, Canada 1976). 19

⁴² Among several groups of Shī’a who believed that after the death of Ḥusayn, the Imamate passed to Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya, claimed that the latter did not die but was concealed on a mountain seven days' journey from Medina. See: Neal Robinson.1992. *Christ in Islam and Christianity*. Albany: State University of New York Press Albany.p.52

⁴³ W. F. Tucker. 1975. *Rebels and Gnostics: Al-Muhgira Ibn Sa'id and the Mughiriyya* .p, 38

earth) will perish. And the face of your Lord full of majesty and honour will remain forever” (al-Rahman 27: 26-27). Therefore, Allah alone is the Ever Living who never dies, while the jinn, mankind, and angels, including those who carry Allah's Throne, shall die.⁴⁴

Similar to the previous verses, Allah says, “And for every nation is a [specified] term. So, when their time has come, they will not remain behind an hour, nor will they precede [it]” (al- ‘Araf 7:34). Allah have set a specific moment for every people (Imāms, scholars, prophets, and companions) to die, and once that time has come, they will never be able to postpone it or wait an hour or less. It is therefore undeniable that Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanafiyya died; to believe that he is still alive would be to postpone and hope for another lifetime following a genuine death, which is not feasible.

Secondly: Al-Shahrastānī also reported that Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyyā “... *was on the mount of Radwa, protected on either side by a lion and a leopard, with two springs nearby pouring out an abundance of water and honey*”.

Radwa Mountain undeniably exists and it is regarded as one of the mountains bearing symbolic meaning in the Islamic culture, especially the Shī’a culture.⁴⁵ Therefore, the report of Muḥammad Ibn Ḥanafiyya residing on it during his concealment may be accepted as a symbolic narrative within this context. This study concurs that he could have lived there in concealment but disagrees that he remains alive until today and has never died.

The reports mentioning lions and leopards guarding him is also seen as plausible, given that such animals can serve as protectors if properly trained. Similarly, the claim that spring water could flow abundantly is considered possible. However, the claim that spring honey flows in abundance is rejected, as this is only described as a feature of paradise. Allah says: “*The description of the Paradise promised to the righteous is that in it are rivers of fresh water, rivers of milk that never changes in taste, rivers of wine delicious to drink, and rivers of pure honey,*” (Muhammad 47: 15).

⁴⁴ Ibn Kathīr. 2003. *Tafsir al-Quran al’Azim*, Vol.2. p.337

⁴⁵ Khani H. Radwa; *The Symbolic status of Mountain in the Islamic Culture*, Journal: Pazhuhesh Name-ye Quran Va Hadith (Year:2006) | Volume:1 | Issue:1, 131-142

Thirdly: Al-Shahrastānī also mentioned that Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā “... *would return from his concealment, and fill the earth with justice, as now it is full of injustice.*”

This statement offers a simplified representation of the doctrine of *rajʿa* (return), which was discussed earlier in Chapter 4.1.2. However, this present study will further analyse the statement by critically examining the claim regarding the return of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya. The notion of his return can be explored from two principal perspectives:

1. His return as a messianic figure, and
2. His return as al-Mahdī.

The messianic facet of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyya has long been emphasised for in the Bamyan Valley of Northern Afghanistan, where the site is dedicated to the “dragon slayer” Ḥazrat-i ‘Alī. According to local belief, Emir (Shahzāda) Hanafiyya - the son of ‘Alī- is concealed in an underground passageway, awaiting his eventual reappearance. It is said that he will return to restore peace, accompanied by his horse and his beloved wife, Bībī Ḥanīfah.⁴⁶

The attribution of the title al-Mahdī to Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafīyyā originated with certain Shīʿa sects who believed that he had not died, but was in a state of concealment, residing in the mountains and would soon return in a second coming.⁴⁷ This belief was not unique to him; various factions within Shīʿa held similar convictions about their respective Imāms, expecting each to be in a messianic role to address their grievances and the growing political turmoil of the period.⁴⁸

For example, following the death of Jaʿafar al-Ṣādiq (148H/765- 766CE), a Shīʿa faction known as al-Nawūsiyyah⁴⁹ proclaimed him to be the awaited al-Mahdī.

⁴⁶ Majid Daneshgar. 2018. *New Evidence on the Origin of the Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyyah*. Association Archipel.p.80.

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Abdul-Aziz Abdul Hussein Sachedina. 1976. *The doctrine of Mahdism in Imami Shi'ism*. Ottawa, Canada: National Library of Canada Cataloguing Branch Canadian Theses Division Ottawa, Canada. p.20-21-22

⁴⁹ These are the followers of a man called Nawus, though according to some accounts they belonged to the village of Nawusa. They believe that Ṣadiq is still alive, and that he will not die till he reappears, and at his reappearance he will be triumphant. Ṣadiq is the qa'im and the mahd. see: Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm shahrastani, *Muslim Sects*. p. 143

Similarly, the al-Musawiyyah⁵⁰ group claimed that Mūsa al-Kāzīm, who died in 183H/700- 43 701CE, was the true Mahdī. Al-Nawbahktī recorded numerous sects that upheld the Mahdism of al-Kāzīm. Other groups directed their messianic expectations toward Ismā'il, another son of al-Ṣādiq, while some went further by proclaiming Ismail's son, Muḥammad, as the Mahdī. The belief in a returning messianic figure did not end with the Twelfth Imām, as many claimants continued to be identified as al-Mahdī throughout Shī'a history.⁵¹

Muḥammad Ibn al-Hanafīyya, while respected as a noble member of the Prophet's family and a devout figure in early Islam, was not a prophet. Claims of his concealment and return as a messianic figure have no scriptural foundation. In contrast, the return of Prophet 'Īsā is unique and divinely ordained, as seen in the Quran: "*And indeed, he (Jesus) will be a sign for the Hour, so be not in doubt of it, and follow Me. This is a straight path.*" (al-Zukhruf 43:61).

This verse, along with many authentic Hadith, confirms that Prophet 'Īsā's return is a sign of the Hour and holds eschatological significance. No such scriptural basis exists for Muhammad ibn al-Hanafīyya or any other historical figure who is not a prophet. Thus, assigning to him a messianic role equivalent to that of Prophet 'Īsā is both speculative and inconsistent with Islamic theology. Ibn Kathir, in his Tafsir of this verse, explains: "One of the signs of the Hour will be the appearance of 'Isa son of Maryam before the Day of Resurrection."⁵² Similar narration from Abu Hurayrah, Ibn 'Abbas, Abu Al-'Aliyah, Abu Malik, 'Ikrimah, al-Ḥasan, Qatādah, al-Ḍahhāk, and others.

Many Mutawatir Hadiths report that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said that 'Isa will descend before the Day of Resurrection as a just ruler. (*Therefore, don't doubt it.*) means, do not doubt that it will surely come to pass.⁵³ In addition, the phrase (And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): therefore, do not

⁵⁰ The Musawiya believe in the imamate of Musa b. Ja'far who had been designated by name when Sadiq said, 'Your seventh imam is your qa'im. (Or he may have said; 'Your master is your qa'im'). He is the namesake of the one who received the Torah.' See: Ibid p144

⁵¹ Abdul-Aziz Abdul hussein Sachedina, *The doctrine of Mahdism in Imami Shi'ism*, (National Library of Canada Cataloguing Branch Canadian Theses Division Ottawa, Canada 1976).20-21-22

⁵² Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Quran al-'Azīm*, (Lebanon: Darussalam global leader in Islamic books, 2003). Vol.8. p. 655

⁵³ Ibid

doubt about the Hour) indicates that Prophet Isa shall descend to the Earth at the End of Days and that he shall be a sign of its ushering.⁵⁴

Numerous authentic Hadiths from the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) affirm the descent of Prophet ‘Isā (PBUH). Imam Anwar Shah al-Kashmiri dedicated an entire work to this subject titled “*al-Taṣriḥ fīma Tawātara fī Nuzūl al-Masīh*.” (A Clear Declaration on the Mass-Transmitted Reports of the Descent of the Messiah). Among the most well-known narrations are the hadith reported by al-Bukhārī and Muslim on the authority of Abū Ḥurayrah, who said that Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) stated: “By Him in Whose Hand is my soul, the son of Maryam shall descend among you as a fair judge. He will break the cross, kill the pig, abolish the (Jizyah), and wealth will become so abundant that none would accept it. At that time, a single prostration will be better than the world and all in it.”⁵⁵ This hadith and others clearly establish the return of ‘Isa, as a divinely ordained event, supported by prophetic tradition.

Muhammad Nasser al-Din al-Albani mentioned: “I am convinced that the Hadiths concerning the false Messiah (Dajjal) and the descent of Isa (PBUH) are authentically transmitted via verified chains of narrations, and belief in them is obligatory.⁵⁶ In conclusion, the above points affirm the messianic return of prophet Isa (PBUH). In contrast, Muḥammad Ibn al-Hanafīyyā was not a prophet, and there exists no textual evidence from the Quran or Sunnah affirming his return; therefore, any assertion assigning him a messianic role is entirely unsubstantiated.

The traditions related to the return of Mahdi do not specify the name of a particular individual.⁵⁷ They mention that al-Qa’im al-Mahdi (“he who will rise”), will

⁵⁴ Ali Mohammad al-Sallabi, 2020. *The Messiah Isa Son of Maryam the Complete Truth*, trans. Alai Mohammad Awwad, 1st Edition. Istanbul: March 2020. p. 348

⁵⁵ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (3448), Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim (155), Musnad Aḥmad (7913), and Sunan Ibn Mājah (4077).

⁵⁶ Al-Albani, “*Tamaam al-Minnah fīl Ta’aleeq ‘Aala Fiqh al-Sunnah*”, 3rd Ed, (al-Rayah House, Riyadh, 1409h). p.79

⁵⁷ (i) We, the family of ‘Abd al-Muttalib, are the Masters of the inhabitants of Paradise: I, Hamza, Ja’far, ‘Ali, al-Hasan, al-Husayn and al-Mahdi. See: *ibn Maja, Sunan*, II, 1368.

(ii) Al-Mahdi is from my progeny. His name is similar to mine and his epithet is similar to mine. In his physique and character, he looks exactly like me. He will be in a state of occultation and there will be confusion (Hayra) in which people will wander about. Then he will come forth like a sharp, shooting star to fill the earth with justice and equity as it was filled before with injustice and inequity. Al-Tirmidhi mentioned the tradition on the authority of Ibn Mas’ud without any details concerning the occultation of the Mahdi. See: *Al Tirmidhi, IV, 505-6; al-Darimi, Sunan, IV, 151*.

(iii) Al-Mahdi is from my family (‘itra) from the sons of Fatima. It is worth mentioning that this tradition was reported on the authority of Umm Salama by ‘Ali b. Nufayl, who died in 125/742. see: *Ibn Maja, Sunan, II, 1368; al-Musannaf, XI, 372*.

be from the progeny of the Prophet (PBUH). However, there are other traditions attributed to the Prophet that suggest the al-Mahdi will be the Twelfth Imām. These reports⁵⁸, particularly those found in Sunni sources, only indicate that twelve successors would succeed the Prophet. They do not reveal that the Twelfth would enter concealment, or that he would be al-Qa'im al-Mahdi. On the other hand, the Zaydite and Imamate narrators transmit similar traditions, often with added phrases indicating that the Twelfth Imām is indeed al-Qa'im al-Mahdi.⁵⁹ The Sunni stance on this matter is more plausible, as these traditions neither name a specific Imām nor establish a clear timeframe for the beginning of any concealment. This ambiguity has led many Shi'ites to apply such traditions to various Imāms.⁶⁰

The reasons cited for the concealment of the Twelfth Imām are not directly related to his return as the Mahdi. Imāmi's sources provide three main reasons for his concealment, which reflect the evolving strategies of the Imāms in navigating both religious and political challenges.

Firstly, Imām Ja'afar al-Sadiq is reported to have said that al-Qa'im would go into concealment before reappearing, due to fear of being killed.⁶¹

(iv) On the authority of Ibn 'Abbas, the Prophet is reported to have said, "How shall Allah destroy a nation whose beginning is myself, whose end is Jesus and whose very centre is al-Mahdi, who will be from my family?"

(v) The name of al-Mahdi's father is similar to the name of my son al-Hasan. See: al-Haythami, *al-Sawa'iq al-Muhriqa*, 100.

⁵⁸ Note: The Sunnite books of tradition report three Prophetic traditions pertaining to the twelve Imams who would be the successors of the Prophet. These were narrated on the authority of seven companions of the Prophet, namely Jabir b. Samura, 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ud, Anas b. Malik, 'Umar b. al-Khattab, Wa'ilah b. Asqa', 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar and Abu Hurayra.

i) Jabir b. Samura narrates that he heard the Prophet say, "There will be after me twelve Amirs. Then he mentioned something which I did not hear, so I asked my father, who was sitting beside me, who said, "All of whom will be from Quraysh." see: *al-Bukhari, al-Sahih (Cairo, 1355), IV, 175; M. Sahih, III, 190-3; al-Tirmidhi, IV, 501*

ii) 'Umar b. al-Khattab reports that he heard the Prophet say, "The Imams (al-A'imma) after me will be twelve, all of whom will be from Quraysh." see: al-Kharraz, *Kifayat al-Athar*, quoted by al-Galbaygani, *Muntakhab al-Athar*, 28.

iii) 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ud was once reciting the Qur'an in the mosque in Iraq, when a young man came and asked him if the Prophet had informed them about the number of his successors. Ibn Mas'ud replied, "The Prophet informed us that his successors will be twelve caliphs, whose number is similar to the number of the leaders (al-nuqaba) of Banu Isra'il." see: Ibn Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, I, 398

⁵⁹ Al-Nu'mani, Muhammad b. Ibrahim, *Kitab al-Ghayba*, (Tabriz, Maktabat al- SibS, 1963.)48-9;

⁶⁰ Jassim M. Hussain, *The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam: A Historical Background* (Publisher: Buniyad, Be'that Tehran, Iran) 5.

⁶¹ al-Saduq, Muhammad b. 'Ali, *Ilal al-Shara'i*, Najaf, (1385/1966).243-4.

Secondly, according to a report attributed to the Twelfth Imām, he informed his follower Ishaq Ibn Ya'qub that, unlike his forefathers who had pledged allegiance to oppressive rulers, he chose to remain in hiding so that he could rise in armed resistance, without having made any such oath.⁶²

Thirdly, the reason is found in the works of al-Kulayni, who stated that the concealment served as a divine test, intended by Allah to distinguish those who would remain steadfast in their belief in the Imamate of the Twelfth Imām from those who would waver.⁶³

In conclusion, Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyyah cannot be identified as the Mahdi, as the traditions concerning the return of the Mahdi do not specify any individual by name. Furthermore, the reasons given for the concealment of the Twelfth Imām in the early Imām's sources are not directly related to the concept of his return as the Mahdi. These points collectively undermine the claim that Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyyah could return in this role.

Fourthly, this marks the earliest appearance of the Shi 'ite doctrine of concealment (ghayb) and return from concealment (raj'a).

The findings indicate that after Ja'afar al-Sadiq (the sixth Imām), nearly all subsequent Imams were proclaimed to be the al-Mahdi, and their return was eagerly awaited. Their death was interpreted not as final but as a form of concealment. This belief is continued up to the twelfth Imām, Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan al-Mahdi.⁶⁴ The line of Imāms includes; Musa Ibn Ja'far (744-749 CE), Ali Ibn Musa (765- 817 CE), Muhammad Ibn Ali (810-835 CE), Ali Ibn Muhammad (827-868 CE), Hasan ibn Ali ibn Muhammad (Al-Askari) (846-874 CE) and Muhammad ibn al-Hasan Al-Mahdi born in (869 CE) who entered concealment in (878 CE). Meanwhile, Muhammad ibn Hanafiyya, who died around (700-701CE), is believed by some to have also entered concealment.

⁶² Al-Nu'mani, Muhammad b. Ibrahim, *Kitab al-Ghayba*, (Tabriz, Maktabat al- SibS, 1963.), 101

⁶³ al-Kulayni, Muhammad b. Ya'qub, *al-Kafi fi 'Ilm al-Din*, Tehran edition (published by Dar al-Kutub al- Islamiyya). vol. I, 336.

⁶⁴ Abdul-Aziz Abdul hussein Sachedina, *The doctrine of Mahdism in Imami Shi'ism*, (National Library of Canada Cataloguing Branch Canadian Theses Division Ottawa, Canada 1976)19

Overall, the findings of this study of al-Shahrastani's perspective on the doctrine of concealment and return are as follows: After examining his views in *al-Milal* and *Nihayah*, it was found that al-Shahrastani relied heavily on the account of al-Himyari. His treatment of the subject in *al-Milal* was objective yet brief, and in *Nihayah*, he was unable to elaborate on the doctrine of concealment and return as extensively as he did on other theological issues. Therefore, this study deemed it necessary to verify his report on al-Himyari's views, given al-Shahrastani's dependence on them.

Furthermore, this study identifies two main groups regarding the belief in the concealment and return of Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyya; The first group maintains that Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyya had not died, but rather entered concealment, and that his return is anticipated. The second group holds that he did die and thus rejects both the notion of his concealment and the expectation of his return. After analysing and comparing the views of both groups, this study finds it necessary to critically refute the belief in the concealment and return of Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyya through textual analysis and evidential proofs.

4.3 THE DOCTRINE OF EXOTERIC AND ESOTERIC INTERPRETATION

4.3.1 The Meaning and Origin of the Concepts

The term exoteric corresponds to the Arabic word “*ẓāhir*”, which is derived from the verb ‘*ẓahara*’, meaning to appear, to manifest, or to be evident. In linguistic usage, *ẓāhir* denotes the apparent, outward meaning, as opposed to the hidden or concealed (*bāṭin*).⁶⁵ Classical Arabic lexicons further elaborate that ‘*ẓahara*’ can signify dominance or ascendancy, as in the phrase ‘*ẓahara ‘alā*’ (to prevail over) or *ẓahara ‘alā ‘aduwwihī*’ (to overcome one’s enemy).⁶⁶ In Islamic tradition, the *ẓāhir* represents the external dimension of religious practice, encompassing explicit rulings, collectively termed as *Sharī’ah*.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ *Al-Munjid fī al-Lughah wa al- A’lām*. 1984. Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq p. 482

⁶⁶ *Al-Mu’jam al-Wasit*, p. 599

⁶⁷ *Ibid*

Meanwhile, esoteric is known as *bāṭin* in the Arabic language.⁶⁸ Derived from the verb “*baṭana*,” meaning ‘to be concealed’ or ‘inward’,⁶⁹ *bāṭin* signifies the inner or spiritual meaning of a sacred text.⁷⁰ The related term “*Bāṭiniyya*” translates broadly as “esotericism,” reflecting a tradition of seeking hidden truths through symbolic interpretation. Historically, *bāṭin* and *bāṭiniyyā* have carried a range of connotations - positive, neutral, and pejorative, depending on context, often concerning esoteric exegesis (*ta’wīl*) and the pursuit of metaphysical knowledge.⁷¹

It is widely believed that both —esotericism (*bāṭin*) and exotericism (*ẓāhir*)— were already present during early Islamic period, with the Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) alluding to them shortly after the revelation of the Quran. As such, both dimensions are rooted in the scriptural exegesis of the earliest Muslim generations, forming a foundational aspect of Islam. Notably, the unique richness, nuance and expressive depth of the Arabic language significantly contributed to both esoteric and exoteric interpretations of the sacred text.⁷²

The discourse on esoteric and exoteric dimensions continues to evolve within Islamic intellectual tradition. With regard to esotericism, its most systematic articulation is found in *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (“Reviving the Religious Sciences”) by the renowned theologian and mystic Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (c. 1056–1111CE). Al-Ghazzālī addressed the concept and the context of teaching creed (*‘aqida*) where he underscores the paramount importance of adhering to the *ẓāhir* (the outward or the apparent) as it is a divinely mandated obligation. At the same time, access to the *bāṭin* (the inward or the hidden) requires spiritual discipline (*riyāḍa*) and striving (*mujāhada*), through which one may attain hidden knowledge and divine illumination. Furthermore, al-Ghazzālī identified esotericism with its own nomenclature, *‘ilm al-bāṭin*, (the science of the

⁶⁸ Sloten, R. *Exoteric and esoteric modes of apprehension. Sociology of Religion* (1977), vol.38(3), 185-208.

⁶⁹ *Al-Munjid*. p.42

⁷⁰ Leaman, Oliver. 2008. *The Qur'an: an Encyclopaedia*. Routledge. p. 94

⁷¹ Liana Saif, *what is Islamic Esotericism? Journal for the Study of Esotericism* (2019) 19

⁷² Seyyed Mohammad Musavi Moqaddam and Ali Rad, *Isma’iliyyah and the Esoteric Exegesis of the Quran Medwell journal* (2015). 2127

esoteric), and refers to those who possess this knowledge as *ahl al-bāṭin* (the people of the esoteric, or esotericists).⁷³

The exoteric (*zāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*) dimensions are complementary and interdependent. According to Imam al-Ghazzālī these two concepts can neither exist meaningfully without the other.⁷⁴ One cannot practice Islam fully by focusing only on outward forms (*zāhir*) without understanding their inner purpose (*bāṭin*). Similarly, seeking inner truths without following the external law can lead to misguidance. In fact, he argued, it is supported by the religion itself.⁷⁵

Al-Ghazzālī quoted the esoteric scholar Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896) who stated : “The scholar may obtain three types of knowledge: the knowledge of the *zāhir*, which he shares with those concerned with the external; the knowledge of the *bāṭin* (*‘ilm al-bāṭin*), which he discloses only to the esoteric community (*ahl al-bāṭin*); and a knowledge that exists solely between him and God, which he reveals to no one.”⁷⁶

Scholars agreed that, in certain circumstances, esoteric interpretations of the Quran are acceptable. One key criterion is that these interpretations must not go against the literal meaning of the text. Al-Taftazānī (d. 1390) believed that true spiritual knowledge and perfection of faith are possible when the subtle allusions of the Quran are in harmony with its literal message.⁷⁷ Similarly, al-Suyūṭi (d. 1505 CE) emphasised the need for careful and thorough exegesis to avoid misunderstanding. In addition, al-Ghazzālī outlined five key conditions for valid Islamic esotericism:

- These matters are subtle and profound, grasped only by the spiritual elite (*khawāṣṣ*), who are entrusted with keeping such insights hidden from those unprepared and unworthy.
- They involve truths so weighty that even prophets and the righteous chose not to disclose them openly, fearing their potential harm to the general, just as the

⁷³ Al-Ghazzālī, Abū Ḥāmid. 2007. *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-dīn*. Edited by Muhammad al-Dālī Balṭa. Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya. Vol.1:138–39

⁷⁴ Arfah Ab Majid. 2022. The Integration of Exoteric and Esoteric: Towards a More Holistic Islamic Practice, in: *Sains Insani* . Vol. 7 No 2: 57

⁷⁵ Al-Ghazzālī, Abū Ḥāmid, *Iḥyā’*. p.139.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 140.

⁷⁷ Mahmoud M. Ayoub. 1984. *The Qur'an and its interpreters*. New York: Albany State University. p.34

sunlight, though life-giving, can blind the eyes of bats.

- Such truths are best expressed through allegory and symbolism, which not only preserve their depth but also move the heart of the listeners with greater impact and benefit.
- True understanding begins with perceiving a thing in its general form and then deepens through mystical realisation and intuition (*taḥqīq* and *dhawq*), until the whole and its details merge into a single, unified vision - just as the husk relates to the kernel, or the *ẓāhir* to the *bāṭin*.⁷⁸
- The use of verbal expressions to convey spiritual states- through *lisān al-maqāl* (the language of speech), and *lisān al-ḥāl* (the language of inner states), so that those with limited understanding grasp only the *ẓāhir*, while those endowed with spiritual insight perceive the *bāṭin*.⁷⁸

In conclusion, the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Islam, known respectively as *ẓāhir* (outer) and *bāṭin* (inner), are reflected in various ḥadīths and Qur'anic exegesis. A true accomplished scholar, well-versed in Arabic and the Islamic sciences, is capable of applying both dimensions in theological discourse. However, he must do so by the established standards and principles outlined earlier, ensuring both depth and fidelity to the tradition.

4.3.2 Shī'a's Perspective on Exoteric and Esoteric Interpretation

While Sunnī, Ṣūfī, and Shī'a traditions each offer esoteric interpretations of the Quran based on their respective theological frameworks,⁷⁹ this study concentrates specifically on the Shī'a perspective. Among the various Islamic sects, Shī'a Islam presents some esoteric understandings of the Quran - particularly in relation to questions of religious authority, where the concept of Imāmah occupies a central and defining role.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Al-Ghazzālī, Abū Ḥamid, *Iḥyā' Ulum al-Dīn*, p.140-144

⁷⁹ Boylston, Nicholas. "Qur'anic Exegesis at the Confluence of Twelver Shiism and Sufism: Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī's *al-Muḥīṭ al-a'ẓam*". *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*. Edinburgh: (Press, February 2021): 1–35

⁸⁰ Godlas, Alan; Steigerwald, Diana *The Blackwell companion to the Qur'an*. Wiley-Blackwell (2008). 350–400

In Shī'a Islam, 'esotericism' is rooted in "imamology,"- the belief that the imams, whose ontological reality embodies the esoteric truths (*bāṭin*) of the Qur'an, serve as custodians of a concealed wisdom that transcends the exoteric dimensions of Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) sharī'a. Consequently, Shi'a esotericism encompasses not only theological and hermeneutical dimensions but also a socio-political imperative, as the Imam's authority shapes communal structures and history.⁸¹

Among the Shī'a, the Ismā'ilis are particularly noted for their consistent emphasis on the inner dimensions of revelation through esoteric interpretation.⁸² Isma'ili theology is fundamentally shaped by the dynamic relationship between the outer, exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and the inner, esoteric (*bāṭin*) dimensions of human experience. These two levels are not viewed as oppositional, but rather as complementary pathways to realisation of truth.⁸³

Rather than rejecting the exoteric in favour of the esoteric, the Ismailies enriched the Qur'anic text by interpreting it as a continuous interplay between exoteric and esoteric realities and forms of knowledge.⁸⁴

The Ismā'īlī jurist al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 974)⁸⁵ provided insight into the nature of exoteric obligations. He explained that exoteric teachings are the first to be taught to a child and are gradually perfected over time. In contrast, the *bāṭin*'- the inner, esoteric dimension- is subtler, conveyed through symbols and allusions. These nuanced expressions stimulate the child's developing senses, guiding them toward a deeper understanding and ultimately, wisdom.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Liana Saif, *What is Islamic Esotericism?* Published by Correspondences: *Journal for the Study of Esotericism* (2019) 35

⁸² Karim H. Karim, *A Semiotics of Infinite Translucence: The Exoteric and Esoteric in Ismaili Muslim Hermeneutics*, *Canadian Journal of Communication* Vol. 40 (2015) 13

⁸³ Ibid 11–28

⁸⁴ Liana Saif, *What is Islamic Esotericism?* Published by Correspondences: *Journal for the Study of Esotericism* (2019) 24

⁸⁵ Al-Qadi Abu Hanifa, al-Numan b. Muhammad b. al-Mansur b. Ahmad b. Hayyun al-Tamimi (d. 363/974) was an eminent Fatimid-Isma'ili jurist, scholar, chief judge, and agent of their religio-political mission. He served the Fatimids for forty-nine years under the first four imam-caliphs—al-Mahdi (r. 296–322/909–34), al-Qaim (r. 322–34/934–46), al-Mansur (r. 334–41/946–53), and al-Mu'izz (r. 341–65/953–75), see: "*al-Qadi al-Nu'man*" By Tahera Qutbuddin, (Published by Encyclopaedia of Islam 2024).p.75

⁸⁶ Liana Saif, *What is Islamic Esotericism?* Published by Correspondences: *Journal for the Study of Esotericism* (2019) 24

As successors of ‘Alī, the Ismā‘īlī Imams are regarded by their followers as having the authority to provide esoteric (*batin*) interpretations of Qur’anic passages. Al-Qādī al- Nu’mān (d. 974) described the Imams “as bearers of the divine illuminating substance (*nūr*), and as recipients of divine support (*ta’yīd*), and inspiration (*ilhām*)”.⁸⁷ Within Isma‘ili doctrine, access to the inner (*bātin*) meaning of revelation is not possible without the guidance of an Imam. Therefore, it is believed that there must always be a living Imam present among humanity, and this is the lineage, starting from ‘Alī, which is expected to continue until the Day of Judgment.⁸⁸

The Ismā‘īlī scholar, Ja’afar Ibn Mansūr al-Yaman, narrated a series of dialogues that show how a student is gradually introduced to the esoteric teachings of the faith. These stories highlight the need for both intellectual and spiritual readiness and the private nature of the relationship between master and disciple. The esoteric knowledge (*batin*) shared in this process is meant to remain within the Isma‘ili community; Only those who have been properly taught and comprehend the significance of this esoteric knowledge can truly value it. A disciple’s understanding of the *batin* depends on their spiritual readiness- each person can only grasp as much as their current levels allow. This knowledge is revealed in stages and continues to develop throughout one’s life. For outsiders, the *batin* is not only difficult to understand, but it could also be spiritually harmful.⁸⁹

On the other hand, the Isma‘ili tradition has extended its esoteric interpretive approach to a wide range of phenomena. Many of these interpretations depart from conventional linguistic principles, the apparent meanings of the Quran, and the established traditions of the Prophet. In numerous instances, meanings are assigned to Quranic verses without regard for logical coherence or recognised exegetical methods.⁹⁰ For example, in their exoteric reading of Surah Nur (24: 35), the phrase: ‘*the lamp enclosed in glass*’ is interpreted as referring to the spiritual status of Imam Husayn (AS) within the womb of Lady Fatimah (AS), symbolised by the ‘glass’.⁹¹ Such

⁸⁷ Karim H. Karim, *A Semiotics of Infinite Translucence: The Exoteric and Esoteric in Ismaili Muslim Hermeneutics*, *Canadian Journal of Communication* (2015) Vol. 40, 16

⁸⁸ Ibid 17

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ Ibid p.2127

⁹¹ Ibid p.2128

interpretations reflect the symbolic framework of Isma'ili thought but are often viewed as incompatible with mainstream exegetical approaches.

4.3.3 Al-Shahrastani's Exposition on Exoteric and Esoteric Interpretation

In *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, al-Shahrastani discusses several Shī'a sects known for their intense engagement in both exoteric and esoteric interpretations of religious teachings. These sects include the Bayānīyya, Hāshimīya, Ismā'īliya, Kaisānīyya, and the Ghālīya Saba'iya.

1. **The Kaisānīyya:** al-Shahrastani highlighted the beliefs held by the followers of Kaysan, a *mawla* of the Commander of the Faithful, 'Ali Ibn Abu Talib, in whom they had unwavering faith. They believed that 'Ali possessed comprehensive knowledge across all disciplines, had access to hidden secrets, and was endowed with the ability to comprehend allegorical meanings and esoteric insights. Furthermore, they maintained that he had knowledge of the heavens and the inner realities of human souls.⁹²

2. **The Hāshimīya:** al-Shahrastani reported that the Hāshimīya uphold the belief that beneath the exoteric (*zahir*) dimension of the religious text lies the deeper esoteric meaning (*batin*).⁹³ He also cited the esoteric interpretation of 'Abdullah Ibn 'Amr Ibn Harb regarding Surat al-Maidah (5:93): "*No sin shall be imputed to those who believe and do good works for what they may have eaten, if they are mindful of their duty to God.*" According to 'Abdullāh, this verse implies that whoever recognises and affirms the Imam is absolved of guilt in what they consume and thus attains spiritual fulfilment.⁹⁴

3. **The Ismā'īliya:** According to al-Shahrastani, this group is most commonly known as al-Batiniyya. Their designation arises from their central belief that for every *zahir* (exoteric) aspect of revelation, there exists a corresponding *batin* (esoteric) meaning. This emphasis on inner interpretation for every scriptural text and revelation

⁹² Muhammad b. Abdal –Karim shahrastani, *Muslim Sects in Kitab al Milal wa al-Nihal*.trans.A.K. Kazi and

J.G. Flynn, (Kegan Paul international London 1984) p.126

⁹³ Ibid p129

⁹⁴ Ibid P 130

is what characterises and names the group.⁹⁵

4. The Bayānīya; al-Shahrastani reported the esoteric interpretation offered by Bayan, the founder of the Bayānīya sect, concerning the Surah al-Baqarah (2:210) “*Are they waiting for Allah ‘Himself’ to come to them in the shade of clouds, along with the angels? ‘If He did’, then the matter would be settled ‘at once’. And to Allah ‘all’ matters will be returned ‘for judgment’*”. According to Bayan’s interpretation, the Divine statement, ‘Do they wait that Allah should come to them in the shadows of the clouds?’ alludes to ‘Ali himself’. ‘Ali is portrayed as the one who will come in canopies of clouds with thunder representing his voice and lightning symbolising his smile.⁹⁶

5. The Ghālīya Saba’īya: al-Shahrastani attributed to Abdullah Ibn Saba’, the founder of the Saba’īya sect – classified among the extremist groups- an esoteric interpretation of Surat al-Baqarah (2:210): “Are they waiting for Allah (Himself) to come to them in the shade of clouds, along with the angels?” Ibn Saba’ interpreted this verse as referring to ‘Ali, claiming that it is ‘Ali who comes in the clouds, with thunder as his voice, and lightning as his smile.⁹⁷

Al-Shahrastani pointed out that the sects discussed above are all interested in esoteric interpretations of the Quran, with the Ismā’īlīya being the most dedicated to this approach. He mentioned the beliefs of Kaisānīya and gave examples from the Hāshimīya, Bayānīyya and Saba’īya, especially their interpretations of Surah al-Maidah (5:93) and Surat al- Baqarah, (2:210).

However, it is clear that al-Shahrastani did not go into much detail about this doctrine. Instead, he gave a brief summary without deeper explanation. What stands out is that some of the esoteric interpretations, he reported, are questionable or problematic. Because of this, the following analysis will focus on examining these interpretations more closely.

⁹⁵ Ibid P 165

⁹⁶ Ibid . p.130

⁹⁷ Ibid . p. 150

4.3.4 Analysis of Al-Shahrastani's Exposition

The statement by al-Shahrastānī; “...that Kaisan also had knowledge of the heavens and the souls of men,” warrants a preliminary discussion on the Islamic perspective of the heavens and the soul. While an in-depth exploration of these theological concepts falls beyond the scope of this paper, a brief overview will provide a necessary context to better understand the implications of the statement. This will be followed by a focused textual analysis, along with a critical examination of the nature and extent of Kaisan's purported knowledge.

Firstly: The Understanding of Heavens and the Souls of Men

Heaven in the Islamic tradition refers to that which is above, such as the sky, clouds, or a celestial roof. The Quran mentions the singular form *samā'* (heaven) approximately 120 times and its plural *samāwāt* (heavens) around 190 times.⁹⁸ These terms are used in a variety of contexts, reflecting a broad and multifaceted context. As such, the notion of heaven in the Quran is not limited to a single interpretation but rather encompasses different meanings depending on the verses and intended themes.

1. Heaven, as the upward direction above the earth it is often used to denote elevation or height, as seen in the verse: *Hast thou not seen how God has struck a similitude? A good word is like a good tree -- its roots are firm, and its branches are in heaven.* (Ibrahim 14:24). Here, heaven symbolises elevation and nobility.
2. Heaven as a distant region, such as the cloud-bearing sky. In this context, it refers to the source of rain and sustenance: *And We sent down out of heaven water blessed, and caused to grow thereby gardens and grain of harvest* (Qaf 50:9).
3. Heaven as a protective layer surrounding the earth- It is also portrayed as a shield or barrier: *And We set up the heaven as a roof well-protected.* (Al-Anbiyā' 21:32)

⁹⁸ Roya Khalili Doabi, *Quran and Heavens*, *GJSR Journal* (2016). Vol.4,41

The plural form, *samāwāt* " (heavens), appears frequently in the Quran, often to emphasise the structured and layered nature of the cosmos created by God." They are:

1. "So, He formed the heaven into seven heavens in two days, assigning to each its mandate. And We adorned the lowest heaven with 'stars like' lamps 'for beauty' and for protection. That is the design of the Almighty, All-Knowing" (Fussilat 41:12). This verse highlights the creation of seven distinct heavens, each with a specific role, and mentions the adornment of the lowest heaven with stars for both aesthetics and safeguarding.
2. "Allah is the One Who created seven heavens 'in layers', and likewise for the earth. The 'divine' 'command descends between them so you may know that Allah is Most Capable of everything and that Allah certainly encompasses all things in 'His' knowledge". (Al- Talāq 65:12). Here, the structure of the heaven's parallels that of the earth, emphasising the descent of divine command and the encompassing knowledge and power of Allah.
3. "Do you not see how Allah created seven heavens, one above the other". (Nūḥ 71:15).

This verse draws attention to the vertical ordering of the heavens, inviting reflection on the grandeur and deliberate design of the divine creation.

Based on the various interpretations and contexts in which heaven (*sama'*) and the heavens (*samāwāt*) appear in the Qur'an, it is evident that these terms do not carry a single, fixed meaning.⁹⁹ Rather, their meanings shift depending on the thematic and linguistic context of each verse. Consequently, it is not possible to assert a uniform interpretation of these terms across the entire Qur'anic text. Moreover, the collective examination of these verses suggests that the true nature and scope of *heaven* and *the heavens* extend far beyond the bounds of human comprehension, underscoring the vastness and mystery of divine creation.¹⁰⁰

When discussing the concept of "*Rūḥ*" (soul) in Islamic theology, it alludes to two distinct meanings. The first refers to a material-like entity, often described as a life

⁹⁹ Roya Khalili Doabi, *Quran and Heavens*, *GJSR Journal* (2016). Vol.4, 46

¹⁰⁰ Ibid 47

force residing in the heart, which animates the body, and causes the body to vibrate with life. The second meaning pertains to the Being that distinguishes the living from the dead- this is the *rūḥ* in its metaphysical sense. When the Prophet (PBUH) was questioned about the nature of the *rūḥ*, he responded by referring to divine revelation. The Qur'an addresses this in Surah al-Isra' (17:85): *'And they will ask about (the nature of) divine inspiration (rūḥ). Say: 'This inspiration (comes) at my Sustainer's behest; and (you cannot understand its nature, O men since) you have been granted very little of (real) knowledge''*. (Qur'an,17:85).¹⁰¹

It is important to note that, since the nature of Kaisan's knowledge is not explicitly defined, it is unlikely that this study will align with his views regarding the knowledge of heaven and the human soul. His perspective could be rooted in either Islamic or non- Islamic cosmological frameworks. However, Islamic cosmology distinctly acknowledges the reality of non-physical realms while not disregarding the physical universe. It also encompasses a wider scope of rational and metaphysical inquiry.¹⁰² If the primary objective of such knowledge is to understand the signs and creations of Allah, then it is indeed considered valuable and worth pursuing. Therefore, this study supports that objective. On the other hand, if Kaisan's views are based on un-Islamic cosmology, then this study does not support his claims. This corresponds to the saying of the Prophet:

Ibn 'Abbas (r.a) reported that the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said, *"Reflect deeply upon the creation, but do not reflect upon the Essence of the Creator. Verily, His essence cannot be known other than to believe in it"*.¹⁰³

This narration emphasises the importance of contemplating the signs of Allah in the creation while maintaining humility regarding the unfathomable nature of the Divine essence. It underscores a foundational Islamic epistemological principle, that human knowledge has limits, especially regarding the essence of God, where faith (iman) rather than speculative reasoning is the appropriate response.

¹⁰¹ Al-Ghazali, Abū Ḥāmid Muhammad. *Iḥyā' Ulūm-al-Dīn*, Vol.3,p.5

¹⁰² Mohamed Mihlar Abdul Muthaliff, Islam and cosmology (2022) usim.edu.my/islam-and-cosmology/

¹⁰³ Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'* 5/64; Al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Asmā' wa al-Ṣifāt* 2/304; Al-Daylamī, *Musnad al-Firdaws* 3/430 (#5375).

Secondly: Refutation on the Esoteric Interpretation of Al-Maidah (5:93)

The verse in Surah al-Maidah (5:93) states: “*There is no blame on those who believe and do good for what they had consumed before ‘the prohibition’, as long as they fear Allah, have faith, and do what is good; then they believe and act virtuously, then become fully mindful ‘of Allah’ and do righteous deeds. For Allah loves the good doers*”. (Quran, 5:93). However, al-Shahrastani reported that ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Amr Ibn Harb al-Kindi¹⁰⁴ interpreted in the sense that “*whosoever finds the imam and acknowledges him is free from guilt in whatever he eats and reaches his fulfilment*”.¹⁰⁵

It is important to explore the exegesis of this verse to understand its exoteric meaning. According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.606 AH), it is narrated that when the verse prohibiting alcohol was revealed, the companions said: “Our brothers drank alcohol on the day of Uhud and were then killed. What is their status?” This verse was then revealed, meaning there is no sin upon them for that, because they drank it while it was permissible. This verse is similar to the Almighty’s statement regarding the abrogation of the direction of prayer (Qibla) from Jerusalem to the Kaaba: “And Allah would never let your faith go to waste” [Al-Baqarah: 143].¹⁰⁶

Then God Almighty said, “And He loves the doers of good.” The meaning is that when God Almighty made doing good a condition for the removal of sins, He clarified that the effect of doing good is not only in the removal of sins, but also in God loving him. There is no doubt that this is the most honourable of degrees and the highest of stations. The explanation of God Almighty’s love for His servants has already been given.¹⁰⁷

Therefore, this verse addresses the believers who, before the prohibition, consumed certain things that were later deemed impermissible (such as wine). It reassures them that if they now possess faith, exhibit piety, and perform righteous deeds, they are not to be blamed for what occurred before the command was revealed. In

¹⁰⁴ Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn Harb Al-Kindi is a member of the Hashimiyah, a Kaisaniya subsect. These are Abu Hashim b. Muhammad b. al-Hanafiya's adherents. They maintain that Muhammad's son Abu Hashim inherited the imamate after his death. Abu-Hashim appointed 'Abdullah b. 'Amr b. Harb al-Kindi after his death, according to a group, and as a result, the imamate was passed from Abu-Hashim to 'Abdullah, into whom Abu-Hashim's spirit moved. See: al-Shahrastani, *Muslim Sects* .p.128-129

¹⁰⁵ Al-Shahrastani, *Muslim Sects* , p. 130

¹⁰⁶ Al-Rāzī, Fakhrudīn. 2000. *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabir*. Beirut-Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah vol. 3.p.69

¹⁰⁷ Ibid vol.6. p.71

addition, Sayyid Qutb explained that those who consumed intoxicants before their prohibition has no blame upon them, as they did not violate any divine law at the time. Their actions were not considered sinful, as there was no revelation forbidding such behaviour. These individuals feared God, performed righteous deeds, and lived with moral consciousness, knowing that Allah was aware of their intentions and actions. Therefore, their behaviour cannot be regarded as disobedience, nor what they consumed be considered unlawful in hindsight."¹⁰⁸ It is important to note that Abdullah's interpretation is problematic and misleading, as it diverts from the clear meaning intended by the Quranic text. For this reason, a set of refutations is necessary to clarify the correct understanding. These are as follows:

1. The reason for the revelation of this verse contradicts the interpretation of 'Abdullah. When the verse prohibiting gambling and intoxicants was revealed, some people raised concerns regarding their previous actions, either committed before the revelation or by those who lived in remote areas and had not yet received the new ruling. In response, this verse was revealed to alleviate their concern, affirming that there is no blame upon those who had believed, performed righteous deeds, and engaged in such practices before the prohibition. The verse states: "*On those who have Faith and do good deeds, there is no sin with what they ate (before prohibition) ...*" (al-Maidah 5:93).

However, this forgiveness is conditional: the verse continues by emphasising that such individuals must be virtuous, maintain Faith, and continue performing good deeds.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, the verse addresses a historical and legal concern.

2. His esoteric interpretation disconnects from the literal and idiomatic meaning of the verse. The verse neither illustrates anything about finding an imam nor acknowledges the existence of one. Importantly, a key criterion for valid interpretation is that it must not contradict the literal meaning of the Quran. Al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505 CE) emphasised that exegesis should be rigorous to avoid misunderstanding. Similarly, al-Taftazani (d. 1390) argued that true spiritual

¹⁰⁸ Sayyid Qutb. 1999. *In the shade of the Quran*, Trans. Adil Salahi & Ashur Shamis. Leicester: The Islamic Foundation. p. 251.

¹⁰⁹ Sayyid Kamal Faqih Imani. *An Enlightening Commentary into the Light of the Holy Qur'an* Trans. Mr. Sayyid Abbas Sadr-Ameli (The Scientific and Religious Research Center. N.d) vol. 5. p11

insight and perfection of faith can only be achieved when the subtle allusions of the Quran are harmonised with its literal meaning.¹¹⁰ There are no synonyms for the word "*imam*" in this verse when interpreted literally, nor is the term knowledge used in any different sense. This suggests that Abdullah interpreted the verse according to his interests and priorities, rather than its actual linguistic and contextual meaning. Allah says:

Have you seen 'O Prophet' those who have taken their own desires as their god? 'And so' Allah left them to stray knowingly, sealed their hearing and hearts, and placed cover on their sight. Who then can guide them after Allah? Will you not then be mindful? (Surah al-Jathiyah, 45:23)

3. His esoteric interpretation undermines the core principles of Islam. The primary message of the verse is that there is no sin in what people consumed before the prohibition was revealed, not that forbidden things remain permissible afterwards. However, Abdullah interprets the verse to imply that even after a prohibition is established, consumption may still be allowed. Furthermore, Islamic esotericism does not negate the core principles of Islam, even when it appears to diverge from certain exoteric interpretations.¹¹¹

Proof: The Quran and the hadiths of the Prophet (PBUH) clearly define what is lawful (*halal*) and unlawful (*haram*) beyond any doubt. Allah says:

He has already explained to you what He has forbidden to you, except when compelled by necessity? Many 'deviants' certainly mislead others by their whims out of ignorance. Surely your Lord knows the transgressors best. (Surah al-An'am 6:119)

Similarly narrated by al-Nu'man Ibn Bashir, the Prophet (PBUH) stated: "*Verily, the lawful is clear and the unlawful is clear, and between the two of them are doubtful matters about which many people do not know*".¹¹² Scholars maintain that the

¹¹⁰ Mahmoud M. Ayoub. *The Qur'an and its interpreters*. (Albany: State University of New York Press. (1984)34

¹¹¹ Liana Saif, *What is Islamic Esotericism?* Published by Correspondences: *Journal for the Study of Esotericism* (2019) 29

¹¹² Al-Bukhārī (no. 50, 2051, 6652), Muslim (no. 1599), Al-Tirmidhī (no. 1205), Al-Nasā'ī (no. 5711), Ibn Mājah (no. 3984), and Aḥmad (no. 17680).

vast majority of actions fall clearly into the categories of either lawful or unlawful. Only a small number belong to the category of doubtful matters. These are situations in which a Muslim might face uncertainty in daily practices. The hadith offers crucial guidance for navigating such ambiguity, emphasising caution and adherence to established principles.¹¹³

In conclusion, the esoteric interpretation of Surah Al-Maidah verse 93, as presented by Abdullah Ibn ‘Amr Ibn Harb al-Kindi, is not accurate. This verse was revealed in a context that does not support his interpretation. His explanation was not only departing from the verse’s literal and idiomatic meaning but was also at odds with the fundamental tenets of Islam. As such, it cannot be considered a valid interpretation within the bounds of sound Islamic exegesis.

Third: Analysis on the Esoteric Interpretation of Surah al-Baqarah (2: 210)

Are they waiting for Allah ‘Himself’ to come to them in the shade of clouds, along with the angels? ‘If He did’, then the matter would be settled ‘at once’. And to Allah ‘all’ matters will be returned ‘for judgment’. (Surah al-Baqarah 2:210)

According to al-Shahrastani, Bayān Ibn Sam’ān al-Tamīmī interpreted this verse esoterically, claiming that it refers to ‘Ali (r.a). He described ‘Ali (r.a) as the one who comes in canopies of clouds with thunder in his voice and lightning in his smile. However, before presenting a refutation of his interpretation, it is important to first examine the established exoteric meaning of the verse to understand its intended message and context.¹¹⁴

According to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d.606 AH), there are different interpretations in His saying, “And do they await anything, but that God should come to them?” First, the intended meaning is, "Do they await anything, but that God should come to them?" meaning the signs of God. So, the coming of the signs is made to be God's coming, to magnify the importance of the signs, just as it is said, "The king came,"

¹¹³ Jamal Ahmed Badi, *Commentary of Forty Hadiths of An-Nawawi* (2002)37 fortyhadith.com

¹¹⁴ Al-Shahrastani, *Muslim Sects*, p.130

when a great army comes from his direction. Since the purpose of the verse is only admonition and warning, it is necessary to imply in the verse the coming of the form.

The second, in the intended meaning, is, “And do they await anything, but that God should come to them?” (meaning, God’s command). The crux of the matter in this chapter is that when God Almighty mentions an action and attributes it to something, if that is impossible, then it must be interpreted metaphorically, as the scholars said regarding His saying, “Those who wage war against God” [Al-Ma’idah: 33], meaning they wage war against His allies, and His saying, “And ask the town” [Yusuf: 82], meaning ask the people of the town. Similarly, His saying, “God should come to them,” means God’s command should come to them. There is nothing in it except the omission of the noun being modified and the noun being substituted for it.¹¹⁵

In Sayyid Qutb’s commentary, this verse marks a rhetorical shift in Surah al-Baqarah, adopting “a different approach to emphasise its previous warnings.” Speaking in the third person, the verse declares: "Are they waiting for God to reveal Himself to them in the shadows of clouds, together with the angels? The case will have been settled then. To God shall all things return." Qutb explained that the verse condemns those who hesitate to submit to divine guidance and remain obstinate in their disbelief. It challenges their motives and questions whether they will persist in their defiance until the Day of Judgement arrives, when God, along with the angels, comes in majesty. The verse thus alludes to the final moment of accountability, when all decisions are sealed, and no further opportunity for repentance remains. By doing so, it underscores the urgency of faith and submission before it is too late, reminding the reader that ultimately, "to Allah shall all things return".¹¹⁶

4.3.5 Refuting Bayan’s Esoteric Interpretation

Bayan Ibn Sam’an’s esoteric interpretation of Surah al-Baqarah (2:210) presents a serious theological problem. His claim that the verse refers to ‘Ali (r.a) – describing him as the one who “comes in canopies of clouds with thunder in his voice and

¹¹⁵ Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din, al-Tafsir al-Kabir. Vol 3, p. 182

¹¹⁶ Sayyid Qutb, *In the shade of the Quran*, Trans. Adil Salahi & Ashur shamis, (published by The Islamic foundation 1999), 309-310.

lightening in his smile” - stands in stark contradiction to both the literal (exoteric) meaning of the verse and the core principles of Islamic theology.

1. This interpretation contradicts the verse's clear reference to Allah and the Day of Judgment, where divine presence and ultimate accountability are emphasised. The verse speaks of Allah's majesty and final judgement, not of any human figure, no matter how revered.
2. Bayan's interpretation violates a fundamental principle of sound esoteric exegesis— namely, that esoteric meanings should never involve matters that the prophets and righteous predecessors refrained from describing or speculating about. In this case, interpreting the word *Allah* as referring to 'Ali is not only theologically unsound but also dangerously misleading. Most critically, such an interpretation verges on *shirk*¹¹⁷ (associating partners with Allah), by elevating a created being to the status of the Creator. To conflate a servant of Allah with Allah Himself is a direct violation of Islamic monotheism (*tawhid*), which is the foundation of the faith.

In conclusion, Bayan's interpretation lacks both textual support and theological soundness. It not only deviates from the intended message of the verse but also contradicts established Islamic doctrines on the nature of God and the limits of interpretation. Consequently, Bayan's view of identifying 'Ali with Allah constitutes both the first and second forms of shirk as outlined in the discussion above. Whether or not he is fully aware or convinced that 'Alī is deserving of such a status, he effectively attributed a partner to Allah in His essence and attributes.

Allah says: *He who made for you the earth a bed [spread out] and the sky a ceiling and sent down from the sky, rain and brought forth thereby fruits as provision*

¹¹⁷ There are three different stages or forms of Shirk, and they are all of which are strictly forbidden (haram).

- (1) Major Shirk: Believing that something other than Allah is deserving worthy of worship- such as a tree, idol, person, jinn, etc. This is the most common form of shirk practiced by the people during the Jahiliyya (pre-Islamic ignorance).
- (2) Belief in Independent Power: Believing that a being other than Allah has the ability to create or control certain aspects of the universe independently, even if one does not consider that being a deity.
- (3) Riyā (Ostentation): Performing acts of worship to be seen or praised by others rather than seeking Allah's pleasure. This is also considered a form of shirk.

for you. So do not attribute to Allah equals while you know [that there is nothing similar to Him. (Al- Baqarah: 2:22)

3. Bayan's interpretation bears resemblance to the Christian belief that Jesus is God.

Allah says: *"Those who say, 'Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary,' have certainly fallen into disbelief. The Messiah 'himself' said, "O Children of Israel! Worship Allah—my Lord and your Lord." Whoever associates others with Allah 'in worship' will surely be forbidden Paradise by Allah. Their home will be the Fire. And the wrongdoers will have no helpers". (Al-Maidah 5: 72). The Messiah, son of Mary, was no more than a messenger. 'Many' messengers had 'come and' gone before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They both ate food. I See how We make the signs clear to them yet see how they are deluded 'from the truth'! (Al- Maidah 5:75)*

Overall, the findings of this study verified that the terms exoteric and esoteric correspond to *zāhir* (outside) and *bātin* (interior), respectively. Both levels of interpretation are found in certain hadith and Qur'anic exegesis. A qualified scholar, well-versed in Arabic and Islamic sciences, is permitted to apply both, provided he adheres to established principles and interpretive guidelines. Al-Shahrastani stated that certain sects are particularly inclined toward esoteric interpretations of the Quran, with the Isma'iliyah being the most prominent among them.

As for Kaysan, the nature of knowledge is unclear; it could involve either Islamic cosmology or non-Islamic cosmological knowledge. If his knowledge aligns with Islamic sources, this study affirms the earlier claim regarding its theological legitimacy. However, if it stems from non-Islamic cosmological thought, the study contradicts that assertion.

Furthermore, the esoteric interpretation of Surah al-Maidah verse 93, attributed to 'Abdullah Ibn 'Amr Ibn Harb al-Kindi, is deemed inaccurate. His explanation contradicts the core principles of Islam and diverges from both the literal and idiomatic meanings of the Quranic text.

Lastly, Bayan's identification of Allah with 'Ali falls under both the first and second categories of shirk as discussed earlier. Regardless of whether he consciously believes 'Ali deserves such a distinction, his claims assign a partner to Allah in His essence and attributes, thereby violating the fundamental doctrine of Tawhid.

4.4 THE DOCTRINE OF ALLEGIANCE TO AN IMAM

4.4.1 The Meaning of Allegiance

Allegiance or *bay'ah* means to make a covenant: It is said, “They pledged allegiance to him for the caliphate”. Pledging allegiance to the caliphate is when the notables of the country hold the hand of the one they appoint as the caliph, as a sign of their acceptance of him and their pledge to obey and submit to him. It also means to take over something or resume to an office.¹¹⁸ The obedience which every subject or citizen owes to the government of their country.¹¹⁹

Historically, the act of pledging allegiance (*bay'ah*) to a person of authority evolved into its practical meaning within Islamic tradition. Initially, the *bay'ah* was offered by the Prophet (PBUH) himself. After his death, it became a formal mechanism of legitimising the authority of subsequent leaders, particularly the caliph, the Prophet's successors in political affairs and in upholding Islamic rule. Ideally, this pledge of allegiance to a caliph was given through the process of election, though it could also be established through appointment by his predecessor.¹²⁰ *Bay'ah* symbolises a mutual agreement between the leader and the community, reflecting a shared commitment to uphold justice, Islamic principles, and ethical governance. Because it encompasses both spiritual and ethical dimensions, abandoning one's *bay'ah* is legally regarded as a serious transgression in Islam. As such, this concept has played a crucial role in maintaining political stability and advancing Islamic goals within Muslim societies.¹²¹

Allah the Almighty emphasises the significance of allegiance in various verses. Allah says: *those who swear allegiance to you swear allegiance to Allah. The Hand of Allah is above their hands.*¹²² Likewise, it is also stated: “*Allah was pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you under the tree, and He knew what was in*

¹¹⁸ *Al-Munjid fi Al-Lughah wa al-A'lam*. p.57.

¹¹⁹ *Encyclopaedia Dictionary of the World*. 1989. Editors: Angelo S. Rapoport R. F. Patterson, John Dougall

. New Delhi: Akashdeep Publishing House vol.1, p.113

¹²⁰ Joas Wagemakers, *The Concept of Bay'a in the Islamic State's Ideology*, (Published by: Terrorism Research Initiative August 2015), Vol. 9, No. 4. 98-99

¹²¹ Stanekzai, Parwiz, *Allegiance (Bay'ah), its types, and forms in Islamic law* (May 1, 2024).1

¹²² Al-Quran 48:10

their hearts. Therefore, He sent down tranquillity upon them and rewarded them with a victory close by".¹²³

These verses underscore the fact that Allah the Almighty places great importance on the concept of allegiance. Pledging allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH) is, in essence, an act of allegiance to Allah Himself. Those who honour and fulfil this commitment are promised the mercy and reward from Allah. In (60:12), Allah mentions: "O Prophet, when believing women come to you and swear loyalty to you upon the condition that they will not associate anything with Allah, and will not steal, nor commit adultery, nor slay their children, nor fabricate slander between their hands and their feet, nor disobey you in any honourable thing, supplicate to Allah for forgiveness for them, Allah is the Forgiving and the Most Merciful."¹²⁴

The legitimacy of allegiance is also established through the Sunnah. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "*Whoever dies without giving allegiance dies the death of ignorance.*"¹²⁵ This hadith clearly demonstrates that allegiance is both encouraged and strongly emphasised, with a stern warning issued to those who abandon it. The Prophet (PBUH) further reinforced its importance in another saying: "*Whoever separates from the community by the length of a span has removed the noose of Islam from his neck.*"¹²⁶ This emphasises the importance of remaining united with the Muslim community and avoiding division.

Moreover, regarding the prohibition of revolting against legitimate authority, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "*Whoever sees something from his leader that he dislikes, let him be patient, for no one separates from the community by the length of a span and dies except that he dies the death of ignorance.*"¹²⁷ This hadith highlights the serious consequences of violating allegiance and rebelling against appointed leadership, stressing the Islamic principles of loyalty and obedience to the appointed authority for the sake of communal harmony and religious integrity.¹²⁸

¹²³ Al-Quran 48: 18

¹²⁴ Stanekzai, Parwiz, *Allegiance (Bay'aht), its types, and forms in Islamic law* (May 1, 2024).4

¹²⁵ Muslim, Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Imarah, hadith no: 1851

¹²⁶ Abu Daud, Sunan Abi Daud, hadith no: 4758

¹²⁷ Al-Bukhari, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, Kitab al-Fitan, Hadith no: 7053/7054. See also ;Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Hadith no: 1849

¹²⁸ Ibid.pp4-5

Within the Islamic tradition, there are two forms of bay'ah. The first, known as the absolute pledge (*al-bay'ah al-mutlaqah*), the irrevocable and applies exclusively to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). According to Islamic belief, the prophets and messengers of Allah are characterised by absolute integrity, truthfulness, wisdom, and divine guidance. They are protected from committing acts that violate the laws of Allah (*ma'sum*). This ensures that the bay'ah pledged to the prophet cannot be misused or lead to actions that violate religious doctrines.

The second form of bay'ah, known as the conditional pledge (*al-bay'ah al-muqayyadah*), is given to individuals who are not prophets or messengers of Allah. This pledge is governed by the principle found in the hadith: "*There is no obedience to the creation if it involves disobedience to the Creator*".¹²⁹ As such, this form of bay'ah is not absolute and may be revoked if it entails actions that go against Allah's commands or contravene Islamic principles. Allegiances pledged to various leaders, groups or emirs- including caliphs- fall under this category. In addition to these two primary forms, there is also a concept known the greater pledge (*al-bay'ah 'uzma*), which refer to a lasting and enduring commitment, in contrast to a temporary or situational allegiance.¹³⁰

It is important to note that bay'ah can be categorised into two distinct categories corresponding to historical periods: the bay'ah of pre-Islamic Arabia and that of the Islamic period. In the former, bay'ah primarily entailed political, and to some extent, social significance. In contrast, the later encompassed religious as well as socio-political dimensions, reflecting Islam's holistic worldview that does not endorse a rigid dichotomy between the sacred and the temporal. With the establishment of the Islamic state in Medina, bay'ah evolved into a more comprehensive institution, embodying religious, socio-political and economic expressions.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, hadith no: 1327

¹³⁰ Carlos Igualada and Javier Yagüe, *The Use of Bay'ah by the Main Salafi-Jihadist Groups* (Published by: Terrorism Research Initiative February 2021), Vol. 15, No. 1 ,39- 40

¹³¹ Muhammad Nazeer, Bay'a and its political role in the early Islamic state, (AUTUMN 1981), Vol. 20, No. 3, 227-238

Additionally, it is worthy to note that allegiance during the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and in subsequent periods took various forms, among which the following are particularly significant:

1. Allegiance through handshaking: The most common form of allegiance to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through the act of handshaking. This mode of bay'ah signified a solemn and binding commitment. A notable example is the Bay'ah al-Ridwān, which is referred to in the Quran: *"Indeed, those who pledge allegiance to you, [O Muhammad] - they are pledging allegiance to Allah. The hand of Allah is over their hands..."* (al-Quran 48:10) This physical gesture symbolised a firm and sincere promise, akin to the expression, "I gave my word to so-and-so to do this."
2. Allegiance through verbal agreement without handshaking: This form of bay'ah was typically reserved for circumstances in which physical contact was not appropriate or permissible- such as when with women or individuals who were ill pledged allegiance. In particular, physical handshaking with non-mahram was not permitted in Islamic practice. A narration from Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) states: "Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) reported: The Prophet (peace be upon him) would take the pledge of allegiance from women by their word, saying to them, 'Do not associate anything with Allah,' and he would not touch their hands. Aisha said, 'the hand of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) never touched the hand of a woman, rather he would accept their allegiance verbally.'" ¹³²

This hadith clearly indicates that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) refrained from physical contact with women during the pledge of allegiance, opting instead for verbal acceptance. Similarly, another narration from Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) narrated: recounts an instance involving a man afflicted with leprosy: "The Prophet (peace be upon him) took the pledge of allegiance from a man who was suffering from leprosy, by saying, 'I have accepted the allegiance of this man who has been sent to me, so gather around him and give him your allegiance. This further illustrates the Prophet's consideration of health and legal-ethical boundaries in the process of bay'ah,

¹³² Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Kitāb al-Ahkām, Hadith no: 4891

reinforcing the flexibility and inclusivity of the practice within the framework of Islamic ethics.

3. Allegiance in writing and confirmation: This type of allegiance became clearer and more evident during the allegiance of Najashi, who wrote to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) saying: "In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. To the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) from Najashi, Al-Asham bin Abjar. Peace be upon you, O Messenger of Allah, and the mercy and blessings of Allah. From Allah, besides whom there is no deity worthy of worship, who has guided me to Islam. After this: Indeed, the letter has reached me, O Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), in which you mentioned the matter of Esa (Jesus) until you said... I have pledged allegiance to you, and I have pledged allegiance here with the son of my uncle and his companions, and I have submitted to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, by the hand of the son of my uncle." It's also confirmed that Abdullah bin Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) conveyed his allegiance to Abdul-Malik bin Marwan in a similar manner:

"In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Most Merciful. After this, to Abdul-Malik bin Marwan, the Commander of the Believers, peace be upon you. I testify that there is no deity worthy of worship except Allah, and I affirm to your obedience according to the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger, to the best of my ability."

There are various documented forms of allegiance throughout Islamic history, some of which include those observed during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Some of these practices incorporated solemn phrases resembling oaths or even conditional statements akin to divorce declarations, reflecting the seriousness with which allegiance was undertaken. Despite their variations, such forms of bay'ah are generally considered as valid, as they trace their legitimacy to precedents established during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the rightly guided caliphs. However, individuals such as al-Ḥajjāj Ibn Yūsuf, an infamous and oppressive governor known for his harshness and political opportunism, introduced exaggerated and coercive elements into the practice. His approach marked a deviation from the prophetic and caliphal model, as he

sought to consolidate power through allegiance that often served more to flatter rulers than to uphold justice.¹³³

Before arriving at a conclusion, it is necessary for this present study to clarify the identity of the Imam to whom allegiance (bay'ah) is pledged. This clarification is essential because the term Imam carries multiple meanings within the Islamic tradition. For instance, the Imam al-Ratib is the individual assigned to lead the five daily prayers in a mosque. While the Imam al-Jāmi' is responsible for delivering the Friday sermon (khutbah) and leading the Friday prayer. The term Imam may also be used as an honorific title, such as in the case of al-Imām al-Ghazzālī. More significantly, it can refer to the supreme leader of the Muslim community (ummah). Thus, distinguishing between these categories is crucial in determining the specific type of Imam to whom bay'ah is directed.

In Sunni Islam, the Imām is understood as the supreme political authority of the Muslim community, commonly referred to as the Caliph (khalīfah). He succeeds Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in administering the political, social, and executive affairs of the ummah, though not in prophetic or religious authority. The Caliph is appointed through the consensus of the community and, while not infallible, is to be obeyed as long as he upholds the principles of Islam. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, served as the fourth Caliph in this succession.

In Shī'a, 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib is regarded as the first leader to hold both political and spiritual authority (imāmah) over the Muslim community after the death of Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH). The political dispute concerning the rightful successor to 'Alī following his death in 661 CE/40 AH gave rise to a distinct Shī'a conception of leadership. This divergence led the supporters of 'Alī—later known as the Shī'a—to uphold and advocate for the continuation of legitimate leadership within the Prophet's family, specifically through the descendants of 'Alī and Fāṭimah, collectively referred to as *Ahl al-Bayt*.

In light of this background, this present study now turns to the concept of allegiance to the Shī'a Imām. While the doctrine of imāmah is intimately connected to this subject, it does not constitute the primary focus of this investigation. Instead, it

¹³³ Stanekzai, Parwiz, *Allegiance (Bay'ah), its types, and forms in Islamic law* (May 1, 2024)14-15

serves as an essential framework through which the practice of allegiance can be more accurately understood.

4.4.2 Shī'a's Perspective on the Allegiance to an Imam

Allegiance, or bay'ah, to an Imam is one of the most influential doctrines in Shī'a after Imamah. It represents both a spiritual and social cornerstone of the Shī'a belief system. From the Shia perspective, it signifies loyalty to a divinely appointed leader and reflects a deep theological commitment in seeking true guidance through the Imams, who are considered the rightful successors of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This study explores the origins of the concept of allegiance in Shī'a, with particular focus on the Shī'a stance regarding Imam 'Ali's bay'ah to the first three caliphs- Abu Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthman.

The origin of allegiance in Shī'a Islam can be traced back to the formative period of the Shī'a community, a period when key doctrines were established, many of which had lasting implications for the broader Islamic world. One such doctrine is Imamah, which holds particular significance as it not only marks a fundamental difference between the Shī'a and the Sunni majority, but also contributed to internal divisions within the Shī'a community itself.¹³⁴

Notably, from the Shī'a perspective, allegiance to an imam is closely intertwined with the doctrine of *imama*, as the legitimacy of Imam 'Ali's authority for the imamate following the death of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is seen to rest, in part, on the pledge of allegiance made to him. However, this study will focus specifically on the issue of allegiance to 'Ali rather than a broader discussion of his imamate.

The debate regarding Imam Ali's allegiance to Abu Bakr can be best examined by considering both perspectives that affirm and those that challenge this claim. From the perspective that supports the view that Ali gave allegiance, Sunni historical sources suggest that during the lifetime of Lady Fatimah (*r.a.*), Imam Ali did not pledge to Abu Bakr, out of respect for her position and in light of her opposition. However, these

¹³⁴ Vivienne S.M. Angeles, *The development of the Shia concept of the Imamate, Asian studies, Journal of critical perspective on Asia* n.d.146

sources also report that after her passing, approximately six months later, when public support for Ali diminished, he eventually pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr.¹³⁵

On the other hand, critical reflections raise significant questions: If ‘Ali had indeed given his full support, why did he consistently oppose the political methods of the caliphs, even rejecting the caliphate when it was later offered to him under their terms? Furthermore, why did no one later challenge Ali’s (a.s.) refusal to conform to their policies, despite his alleged prior allegiance? These questions, when examined impartially, suggest that Imam ‘Ali neither pledged allegiance nor approved of the governing approach of the early caliphs.¹³⁶

To further support this point, the refusal of Imam ‘Ali and a group of his supporters to pledge allegiance to the first caliphate is a well-established historical fact that cannot be denied. This event is so widely acknowledged that even a renowned Egyptian poet known as the “Poet of the Nile” Hafiz Ibrahim (b.1872-d,1932) referenced it in his poetry. He said: “Injustice was rampant among us, but its edges were refined until it became organised injustice” (please mention the name of the poet and reference) The refusal to give the oath of allegiance is also evident in the correspondence between Imam Ali and Muawiyah. In one of his letters, Muawiyah attempted to criticise Imam ‘Ali by mentioning that he initially rejected the caliphate of the first caliph. Imam Ali does not deny this. Instead, he affirmed the legitimacy of his position and described the oppression he faced. In *Nahj al-Balagha*, letter 28, he wrote: “*You also want to taunt me by saying that when I refused to accept the caliphate of the First Caliph, I was dragged like a camel with a rope round my neck, and every kind of cruelty and humiliation was levelled against me.*”¹³⁷ This powerful statement not only confirms the historical reality of his refusal but also underscores the suffering he endured for standing by his principles.

To clarify the aforementioned statement, Imam Ali took an oath of allegiance because he was concerned about his own and his family's lives, and his uncle Abbas was able to identify this fear or concern. His uncle encouraged him to take the pledge

¹³⁵ Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, *Ali Ibn Abi Talib (a.s.) and Allegiance*, (Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project 1995-2025) Al-islam.org, 5

¹³⁶ Ibid p.6

¹³⁷ Ayatollah Saafi Golpaygani, *Did Imam Ali Give Allegiance to Abu Bakr?* (December 8, 2009).3

of allegiance because if he were to be slain, Islam and the Muslims, who at the time were in dire need of information and enlightenment, would have suffered a loss.

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that allegiance (*bay'ah*) to an Imam hold significant doctrinal weight in Shī'a Islam. Its origin can be traced back to the formative period of Shī'a thought, during which key theological and political doctrines emerged – many of which profoundly influenced Islamic society at large. However, the allegiance of 'Ali to Abu Bakr remains a contested issue, with scholars divided into two camps; those who affirm it and those who reject it. This present study does not seek to pass judgement on the matter, as doing so would involve critiquing the Prophet's companions, a stance that Islamic tradition discourages. As the Prophet (PBUH) said, *"Do not abuse my companions for if any one of you spent gold equal to Uhud (in Allah's Cause) it would not be equal to a Mud or even a half Mud spent by one of them"*.¹³⁸ Even though there was disagreement between them on this motion, it is by the wish of Allah. He said: *"Had your Lord so willed, He would have certainly made humanity one single community 'of believers', but they will always 'choose to' differ"*. (Hud verse 118)

In Shī'a theology, bay'ah is not merely a political agreement but a religious duty. It represents a covenant between the leader (Imam) and the community, emphasising spiritual and moral obligations. Shī'a Muslims believe legitimate authority begins with God. The Quran repeatedly emphasises that sovereignty belongs solely to Allah: "Indeed, authority belongs to no one but Allah." (Quran 12:40). Tabatabai in *Nihayat al-Hikmah* argued that bay'ah embodies the concept of leadership (Wilayah) sanctioned by divine authority. He stated that: "The Imam is appointed by God, and the bay'ah to him carries the weight of divine command."¹³⁹

In the early Islamic period, bay'ah was initiated during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and later became of profound importance during leadership transitions after his death. The first notable instance of bay'ah was during the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage when he established the framework for leadership among his followers. According to Shī'a beliefs, the Prophet appointed Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor at

¹³⁸ *Al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 3673; *Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 2541; *al-Tirmidhī, Sunan*, no. 3858; *Ibn Mājah, Sunan*, no. 161.

¹³⁹ Tabatabai, Muhammad Husayn. 1997. *Nihayat al-Hikmah*. Qum: Ansariyan Publications. vol. 2, p.364

Ghadir Khumm, where the Prophet reportedly stated: “For whomever I am his master (mawla), Ali is his master.”¹⁴⁰

In conclusion, this pivotal moment in Shī‘a history signifies the divine appointment of Ali and the obligation of the Muslim community to acknowledge his authority through bay'ah by synthesising historical context and theological implications. This exploration of bay'ah illustrates its centrality in Shi'a thought and practice.

4.4.3 Al-Shahrastani’s Perspective on the Allegiance to an Imam

To understand al-Shahrastani’s perspective on allegiance to an Imam as presented in al-Milal, this study examines his accounts of the practice within the context of the following Shia sects.

1. The Imamiyyah:

They uphold the believe that the imamate rightfully belonged to ‘Ali Ibn Abī Ṭālīb immediately after the Prophet’s death. They assert that his succession was established through explicit designation (*al-nass*) : a direct unambiguous appointment — an appointment made, not by referring to him through a description, but by indicating him in person.¹⁴¹

Furthermore, al-Shahrastani records in his discourse that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sought a pledge of allegiance from his followers. He declared: “When the Prophet inquired, ‘Who will swear allegiance to me at the price of his wealth?’ several individuals responded affirmatively. He next asked, ‘Who will swear allegiance to me with his life’s breath? The one who does so shall be my successor, and take over this charge after me.’ No one responded to this until at last ‘Ali, Commander of the Faithful, extended, and swore allegiance to him with his life’s breath, an oath to which he always remained faithful. After this incident, the Quraish used to taunt Abu Talib with the words: ‘Muhammad has appointed your son to rule over you’.”¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Amini, Abd al-Husayn. 1983. *Al-Ghadir*. Tehran: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah vol. 1, p. 45

¹⁴¹ Al-Shahrastani, *Muslim Sects* p.139

¹⁴² Ibid p.139

From the aforementioned report, it's obvious that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) sought allegiance from his followers in two distinct aspects: allegiance at the cost of one's property and allegiance at the cost of one's life. While the former was undertaken by many, the latter was solely fulfilled by Ali. Al-Shahrastani expressed this incident as a significant piece of evidence upon which the Imamiyah sect base their claim that 'Ali was designated as the Imam and rightful successor to the Prophet (PBUH).

2. The Jarudiyya:

This group consists of the followers of Abu al-Jarūd Ziyad Ibn Abī Ziyād. In one account, al-Shahrastāni reported, "According to some of them, the imamate continued in succession from 'Alī to Ḥasan, from Ḥasan to Ḥusayn, from Ḥusayn to 'Alī Ibn al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn, from 'Alī Ibn al-Ḥusayn to his son Zayd Ibn 'Alī, and, lastly, to the Imām Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdullah Ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn al-Husayn Ibn 'Ali Ib. Abi Talib, in whose imamate they firmly believed. Abu Hanifa pledged allegiance to Muhammad and became one of his followers."¹⁴³

3. The Bayāniyya:

They are followers of Bayan Ibn Sam'ān al-Tamīmi, whom they claim received the imamate upon the death of Abū Hāshim. Bayān was known for his extremist views including his belief in the divinity of 'Ali.¹⁴⁴ Al-Shahrastani reported that "...a number of followers gathered around Bayān, pledged allegiance to him and embraced his teachings".¹⁴⁵

4. The Kāmiliyya:

Al-Shahrastāni recorded the stance of Abū Kāmil's followers in response to the refusal of the companions to pledge allegiance to 'Alī. He said: "*These are the followers of*

¹⁴³ *Ibid p 135*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid p 130*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid p 131*

*Abū Kāmil who declared that all the companions were unbelievers for not swearing allegiance to ‘Ali’.*¹⁴⁶ This position reflects the Kāmiliyya’s profound devotion, emotional attachment, and strong allegiance to Ali, to the extent that they went to declare the companions as unbelievers for not swearing allegiance to Ali’s leadership.

5. The Sulaimāniyyā:

This sect comprises the followers of Sulayman Ibn Jarīr, who maintained that the imamate is a matter to be determined through the deliberation (syūra) of the Muslim community. Sulaymān acknowledged the legitimacy of the caliphates of Abu Bakr and ‘Umar, asserting that their authority was validated by the choice of the community and derived from ijtihad [independent reasoning].¹⁴⁷ However, Shahrastani reported somewhat more sceptical views regarding Sulayman’s position on allegiance, suggesting ambiguity or inconsistency in his stance towards certain figures and events. According to al-Shahrastani: *“He used sometimes to say, nevertheless, that the community was in error in giving allegiance to them while ‘Ali was present, though the error did not amount to a sin, it was an error of judgment, khata’ fil ijtihad”.*¹⁴⁸

6. Al- Ismā’iliyyah:

Al-Shahrastani reported that among the core beliefs of the Isma’iliyyah is the conviction that *“whoever dies in ignorance of the imam of his time dies a pagan; likewise, anyone who dies without having pledged allegiance to an imam shares the same fate.”*¹⁴⁹

In conclusion, al-Shahrastani’s perspective on allegiance to an Imam was based on a comprehensive collection of reports. These reports, however, revealed different forms and manners of allegiance. The Imamiyyah, al-Jarudiyah and al-Bayaniyyaa sects shared the same form of oral allegiance, differed in their manner: The first two sought allegiances while the last received it.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid p 151

¹⁴⁷ Ibid p. 136

¹⁴⁸ Ibid p. 136

¹⁴⁹ Ibid p .165

By contrast, the reports concerning the nature of allegiance among the Kāmiliyyā, Sulaimāniyya, and Isma’iliyya sects were largely shaped by their respective criticisms of established practices of allegiance. For instance, the Kāmiliyyā criticised the companions for failing to pledge allegiance to ‘Alī, viewing this as a significant deviation. The Sulaimaniyya held that the Muslim community had erred in offering allegiance to leaders other than the rightful one. Meanwhile, the Isma’iliyya maintained that anyone who dies without pledging allegiance to an Imam, dies a death of ignorance, thereby emphasising the absolute necessity of allegiance to a divinely appointed leader.

4.4.4 Analysis of al-Shahrastani’s Exposition

Abu Kāmil's assertion that all the companions were unbelievers for not swearing allegiance to 'Alī, along with the Ismā’iliyya claim that whoever dies without knowing the Imam of his time is a disbeliever, are both significant claims that warrant critical analysis in the following section of this study.

Firstly, “*Abū Kāmil, who declared that all the companions were unbelievers for not swearing allegiance to ‘Alī*”¹⁵⁰

Abū Kāmil is credited with founding the Kāmiliyya sect, known for its extreme beliefs, particularly concerning the companions of the Prophet (Ṣaḥābah) and the legitimacy of the caliphate. Among his most radical views is the assertion that all the companions were unbelievers (*kuffār*) for not pledging allegiance to 'Alī. Beyond the Kāmiliyya, the Rāfiḍah (a sect within Shi‘ism) are also known for their enmity toward the most virtuous companions, openly expressing hatred and curses against them. These claims, however, stand in stark contrast to mainstream Islamic thought that uphold the integrity and honour of the companions, whose righteousness is affirmed in both the Quran and Sunnah.

In the Quran, Allah says: “As for the foremost—the first of the (Muhajirin) Emigrants and the (Ansar)Helpers and those who follow them in goodness, Allah is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him. And He has prepared for them

¹⁵⁰ Ibid p 151

Gardens under which rivers flow, to stay there forever and ever. That is the ultimate triumph”. (al-Quran 9:100).

The aforementioned Qur’anic verse clearly demonstrates that Allah Himself affirmed His pleasure with the companions who pledged allegiance at al-Ḥudaybiyyah. Thus, any statement that labels them as disbelievers contradicts divine testimony. In his Tafsīr, Ibn Kathir reports that al-Sha'bī identified the foremost of the Muhājirīn and Anṣār were those who participated in the pledge of *al-Ridwān* during the year of Ḥudaybiyya. Alongside Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), there were prominent companions such as 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭab, 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar, 'Uthman Ibn Affan, al-Zubayr Ibn al-'Awwām, Ṭalhah Ibn Ubayd Allah, Abu Bakr, 'Ali, and many others.¹⁵¹

Al-Tirmidhi narrated: Abdul Rahman bin 'Awf said: The Prophet (PBUH) said: Abu Bakr in Paradise, Omar in Paradise, 'Uthman in Paradise, Ali in Paradise, Talha in Paradise, al-Zubayr Ibn Al-'Awwam in Paradise, Abdul Rahman bin 'Awf in Paradise, Saad bin Abi Waqqass in Paradise, Saeed bin Zaid, and Abu 'Ubaida bin Al-Jarrah in Paradise.¹⁵²

Furthermore, the ten companions who were assured Paradise undisputedly held deep faith in Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), which was clearly manifested in their *iman*, *Islam* and *ihsan* (transliterate). They exemplified true belief and righteous conduct, making them deserving of Paradise.¹⁵³

According to the Science of Rijal al-Hadith (the science of evaluating hadith narrators), the chain of transmission (*isnad*) for the hadith reported in Sunan al-Tirmidhi is sound, it contains no questionable narrators, nor any indication of transmission error. This is elevated in status due to its origin with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and its recurrent mention across multiple reliable transmissions. It reaches the level of *tawatur*, as the names of the companions – starting from Abu Bakr al-Siddiq and 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattab onward- were repeatedly cited by various narrators. Such mass transmissions

¹⁵¹ Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Quran al-Azim*, Vol.4, p. 503

¹⁵² Al-Tirmidhi, *Sunan*, ḥadīth 3747, kitāb al-manāqib, bāb manāqib al-'asharah; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, p. 193; al-Hākim, *al-Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 306; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*, vol. 1, ḥadīth 1024.

¹⁵³ Siti Rohani Bte Muhd Ariffin Leong, *Sciences of Hadith about the 10 Companions* (January 2013) p.7.

preclude the possibility of collective fabrication or error. Given its authenticity and strength, the hadith holds authoritative legal and theological weight, comparable in its certainty to that of the Qur'an.¹⁵⁴

In conclusion, the Quranic verses and hadith of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) affirm the obligation to honour and respect the companions who played a vital role in supporting and spreading Islam during the Prophet's lifetime and after his death. Their virtues and contributions earned them divine commendation and the promise of Paradise. Although they were not infallible and may have erred in judgment or action, such shortcomings do not constitute grave sins that would nullify their faith or exclude them from the ranks of the righteous.

Secondly, the Ismā'ili belief that whoever dies without recognising the imam of their time, or without pledging allegiance to an Imam, dies as a pagan.

This belief reflects a doctrinal stance specific to the Ismā'ili theological framework and is not supported by the core tenets of mainstream Islamic creed. In light of the above, it can be inferred that the Ismā'ili misread, as well as misinterpret the hadith reported by 'Abdullah Ibn 'Umar, "*Whoever dies without having given the oath of allegiance (bay'ah), dies the death of the time of jahiliyya (pre-Islamic times)*".¹⁵⁵

The Ismā'ili usage of the comparative phrasing such as "so as" reveals a deliberate attempt to equate the death of someone unaware of the imam of their time with that of the person who dies without having pledged allegiance, portraying both as equivalent to a *mītah jāhiliyyah* (pagan death). However, this present study aims to analyse this interpretation based on the following points:

1. The Understanding of the Phrase "Death of Jahiliah" in the Hadith.

It is a misinterpretation to assume that the hadith stating: "*Whoever dies without having pledged allegiance (bay'ah) dies a death of Jāhiliyyah*", implies that such a person dies as an unbeliever (*kāfir*). The commentary of Ibn Hajar al-'Asqallānī in his *Fath al-Bārī*, offers a significant clarification regarding the hadith. He explained that the "*bay'ah*"

¹⁵⁴ Ibid p.3

¹⁵⁵ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 7054; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ḥadīth 1851.

referenced in the hadith pertains to allegiance given to a legitimate Muslim leader - the Imām who upholds the laws of Allāh and safeguards the unity of the Muslim community.

As for the phrase, “Dies the death of Jāhiliyyah”, Ibn Hajar asserted that it should not be understood literally as a declaration of disbelief. Rather, it denotes a state of disobedience (ma‘ṣiyah) resembling the societal disorder and ignorance characteristic of the pre-Islamic era (Jāhiliyyah). That era was marked by tribalism, political fragmentation, moral decay and the absence of a centralised authority governed by divine law. Therefore, to die without acknowledging or pledging allegiance to a rightful Imam signifies a condition akin to the chaos and lawlessness of that time, not an actual state of disbelief.

Ibn Hajar further emphasised; *"Indeed, likening the death who does not recognise the Imam to a death in the time of ignorance is, in this case, only metaphorical. It indicates that although he is living in the time of ignorance, he dies in a state similar to it"*.¹⁵⁶

This interpretation is supported by several classical scholars and commentators, including al-Shawkānī, al-Nawawī, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, al-Manāwī, Ibn al-Mughīnī, Muḥammad Jawād, Shaykh Sayyid Sābiq, Dervish, and Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Razzāq. Their collective views reinforce the understanding that the hadith warns against social and political disunity, not disbelief, and that the concept of *mītah jāhiliyyah* is figurative rather than literal.¹⁵⁷

2. Ignorance of the Imam of one’s time or failure to pledge allegiance is not among the core pillars of Islamic belief.

Ignorance of the Imām of one’s time, or the failure to pledge allegiance to a specific Imām, is neither among the five pillars of Islam nor part of the six articles of faith that constitute the foundation of the Islamic creed. This is clearly illustrated in the well-known ḥadīth narrated by ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar (r.a), in which Prophet Muḥammad

¹⁵⁶ Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalānī. 2005. Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī. *Faṭḥ al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. 1st Ed. Riyadh: Dār Ṭayyiba lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī‘Riyadh. Vol.13, 7.

¹⁵⁷ Seyyed Hossein, Seyed Mousavi and Hassan Shojae Bahar. 2016. *The Blasphemy by Death of Ignorance, Based on Acknowledgement Hadith, Medwell journals* p. 757

(PBUH) said: "Islam is built upon five pillars: bearing witness that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muhammad is Allah's Messenger. To offer the (compulsory congregational) prayers dutifully and perfectly. To pay Zakat (i.e., obligatory charity). To perform Hajj. (i.e., Pilgrimage to Mecca). To observe fast during the month of Ramadan".¹⁵⁸

"It is narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayra that the Messenger of Allah said: Ask me (about religious matters), but they (the companions) were in awe of asking him. Then came a man, and sat near his knees and said: O Messenger of Allah, what is al-Islam? So, he (the Holy Prophet) replied: That you do not associate anything with Allah, and establish the prayer, pay the alms (Zakat), and fast Ramadan. He said: You (have) told the truth. He said: Messenger of Allah, what is al-Iman (Faith)? He said: That you affirm your faith in Allah, His angels, His Books, His meeting, His Apostles, and that you believe in Resurrection and that you believe in Qadr (Divine Decree) in all its entirety. He (the inquirer) said: You have told the truth".¹⁵⁹

Generally, the hadith are not merely records of the daily actions and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH); they also play a crucial role in elucidating many doctrinal matters that are central to Islam, whether Sunni or Shī'a traditions. Chief among these doctrines are the Five Pillars of Islam and the Six Articles of Faith. While the Qur'an is the primary source for both, it is through the lens of the hadith that these Pillars and Articles are made clear, explained in detail, and their practical applications clarified.¹⁶⁰

Without the complementary role of the hadith, the Quranic references to these foundational elements would lack sufficient precision for practical implementation. In this regard, the hadith provides the essential elaboration and normative guidance by which Muslims understand and observe the core tenets of their faith.¹⁶¹

In conclusion, based on the hadith discussed above, it is evident that -whether one identifies as a Sunni or Shī'a the Five Pillars of Islam and the Six Articles of Faith constitute the foundational, non-negotiable tenets of the religion. These principles are divinely ordained and cannot be increased, diminished or altered in any way. A

¹⁵⁸ Sahih al-Bukhārī (8), Muslim (16), al-Tirmidhī (2609), and al-Nasā'ī (5001)

¹⁵⁹ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, no. 48 Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, no. 8; Sunan al-Nasā'ī, no. 4990.

¹⁶⁰ Faruq Sherif, *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'an* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985), 1

¹⁶¹ Edgar, Scott. "The Five Pillars of Islam in the Hadith." *Studia Antiqua* 2, no. 1 (2002). 74

Muslim's belief in, and adherence to these core doctrines form the essential criteria that distinguish faith from disbelief. Neglecting or rejecting them may place one at risk of dying in a state akin to that of *Jāhiliyyah* (pre-Islamic ignorance), not because of sectarian allegiance but due to a departure from the universally agreed-upon fundamentals of Islam.

3. Related hadiths clarify that a “Death of Jahiliyyah” does not mean a pagan death.

Several related ḥadīths demonstrate that the phrase “*mītatan jāhiliyyah*” (a death of Jāhiliyyah) is not to be understood literally as dying in a state of disbelief or paganism. Rather, it refers to dying in a manner resembling the disorder, disunity, and moral chaos characteristic of pre-Islamic times.

The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: “Whoever parts from obedience, and splits away from the Jama’ah and dies, then he has died a death of Jahiliyyah. Whoever rebels against my Ummah, killing good and evil people alike, and does not try to avoid killing the believers, and does not pay attention to those who are under a covenant, then he is not of me. Whoever fights for a cause that is not clear, advocating tribalism, getting angry for the sake of tribalism, and he is killed, then he has died a death of Jahiliyyah”.¹⁶²

In another narration from Ibn ‘Abbas, the Prophet (PBUH) said: “*One who found in his Amir something which he disliked should hold his patience, for one who separated from the main body of the Muslims even to the extent of a hand span and then he died would die the death of one belonging to the days of Jahiliyya (pre-Islamic times)*”.¹⁶³ On the authority of Abu Hurayra, the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) said: “*One who defected from obedience (to the Ruler) and separated from the main body of the Muslims—if he died in that state—would die the death of one belonging to the days of Jahiliyya (pre-Islamic times)*”.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Muslim (1848), Aḥmad (18595), and al-Nasā’ī (4107).

¹⁶³ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Aḥkām*, Hadith 257;

¹⁶⁴ *Saḥīḥ Muslim*, hadith 185, *musnad* hadith 5411, *sunan abi-dawud* .Ḥadīth 4267

These ḥadīths consistently use the term “*death of Jāhiliyyah*” to describe those who abandon lawful Muslim authority, incite disunity, or engage in tribalistic conflicts. None of them interpret such a death as a literal death in disbelief. Instead, the phrase conveys a death in a state of rebellion, anarchy, or disobedience resembling the moral and political disorder of the pre-Islamic era—not a rejection of faith itself.

The ḥadīth related to the one in question, namely, “*Whoever dies without having given the oath of allegiance (bay’ah), dies the death of the time of jahiliyya (pre-Islamic times)*”¹⁶⁵, clearly indicates that the Prophet (PBUH) intended a metaphorical meaning. As discussed earlier in Ibn Hajar al-‘al-Asqalani’s *Fath al-Bari*. This ḥadīth does not imply that such a person becomes a pagan upon death. Rather, it refers to dying in a state similar to that in pre-Islamic ignorance (*Jahiliyya*) characterised by disunity, tribalism, and the absence of a central leadership. During that period, each tribe ruled independently and often engaged in conflicts with one another. Islam in contrast, places great emphasis on unity and loyalty to a single leadership for the sake of the greater communal harmony and the collective well-being of the Ummah. The ḥadīth, therefore, underscores the importance of maintaining allegiance and obedience to rightful leadership, not that the disobedient person becomes pagan.

Overall, the concept of allegiance or *bay’ah* in Islamic tradition fundamentally signifies entering into a covenant or pledge. Specifically, pledging allegiance to a caliph involves the leading members (*ahl al-ḥall wa al-‘aqd*) of the community affirming their support by placing their hands in the hand of the appointed leader. This act symbolises their commitment to obey and submit to his legitimate authority.

Historically, the act of pledging allegiance (*bay’ah*) to a person of authority evolved from its origins during the time of the Prophet (PBUH) who personally accepted pledges from his followers. After his death, *bay’ah* evolved into a formalised institution used to legitimise the authority of Muslim rulers, particularly the caliph. It became an essential part of the political process in early Islamic governance, serving both as a public declaration of support and as a means of conferring legitimacy upon the leader.

¹⁶⁵ *Sahīh Muslim* (1851) *Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Imārah (The Book of Leadership), ḥadīth no. 1851; see also: *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī), vol. 3, 1478.

There are two recognised forms of *bay'ah* in Islamic tradition; *al-bay'ah al-mutlaqah* (the absolute pledge), and *al-bay'ah al-muqayyadah* (the conditional pledge). Shī'a allegiance (*bay'ah*) to an Imam holds profound doctrinal significance, originating from the formative period of Shī'a theological development. Al-Shahrastani's treatment of the subject reflects a broad examination of various Shi'a sects, including the Imamiyyah, al-Jarudiyah, and al-Bayaniyya. His exposition illustrates how different interpretations of *bay'ah* were grounded in distinct theological foundations.



CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The study “Al-Shahrastānī’s Exposition of Selected Shī’ā Doctrines: An Analysis” seeks to highlight al-Shahrastānī’s scholarship within the broader landscape of Islamic intellectual history and to underscore his lasting influence on discussions concerning Muslim sects. It aims to trace the historical growth and development of Shī’a thought prior to and during al-Shahrastānī’s time, while critically examining his treatment of selected Shī’a doctrines from different dimensions.

Chapter One serves as an introduction and provides the background of this study. It lays the foundation of the research, defines the problem statement, describes the objectives and research questions, as well as explains the rationale for undertaking the study. The chapter also situates the work within the broader field of existing scholarship, highlighting previous studies and demonstrating how the present study contributes to, expands upon, or diverges from the current body of knowledge.

Chapter Two examines the life and scholarly contributions of al-Shahrastānī. It explores the political, intellectual, and religious milieus of the later Abbasid period in the 6th century AH, and analyses how these contexts shaped his thought. The discussion includes a biographical sketch of al-Shahrastānī, his theological affiliations—particularly his association with Ash‘arī theology and Shāfi‘ī jurisprudence—and the enduring legacy in comparative theology and heresiography.

Chapter Three traces the development of Shī’a from its inception to the time of al-Shahrastānī. It outlines the historical emergence and evolution of Shi‘ism, highlighting its major phases and transformations up to the 6th century AH. The chapter also surveys various Shī’a doctrines as documented by al-Shahrastānī, offering an overview of his presentation of key beliefs and sectarian divisions within Shi‘ism.

Chapter Four forms the core of this study, providing an in-depth analysis of al-Shahrastānī’s exposition on selected Shī’a doctrines. It focuses on three primary theological concepts: the doctrine of **concealment and return (al-ghaybah wa al-raj‘ah)**, the concept of **exoteric and esoteric interpretation (zāhir, and bāṭin)**, and the notion of **allegiance to the Imām (bay‘ah li al-imām)**. Each doctrine is critically

examined in light of al-Shahrastānī's methodology, sources, and broader intellectual context.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

1. Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (479–548 AH / 1086–1153 CE) was a distinguished Muslim theologian, historian of religions, and philosopher, best known for his seminal work *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* on religious and philosophical sects. Born in Shahrastān, Persia, he received his early education from his father before studying in Nīshāpūr and Khwārazm. He later became associated with the prestigious Nizāmiyyah institution and served as a close advisor and deputy (*naʿib*) under the Seljuk Sultan Sanjar. Although some speculated about his inclination toward Ismāʿīlism, scholarly consensus affirms his Ashʿarite theological orientation. His works reflect a commitment to objective and systematic analysis of religious doctrines, establishing him as a pioneering figure in Islamic heresiography and comparative religion.
2. The defining element of Shīʿa identity is allegiance to ʿAlī as the rightful successor to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This study highlights Shiʿism as one of the major sects in Islam, comprising several subgroups. It notes that classical scholars like al-Nawbakhti, al-Ashʿarī, al-Baghdādī, and Ibn Hazm traditionally classified Muslims into four or five major sects, a framework continued by al-Shahrastānī. The research traces the emergence of Shiʿism from the Prophet's era through the caliphate of ʿUthmān, demonstrating how the evolution was shaped by early political tensions and subsequent doctrinal development. This study also shows that al-Shahrastānī examined Shiʿism both objectively (notably in *al-Milal*) and subjectively (particularly in *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*), offering a nuanced understanding influenced by the theological debates and sectarian dynamics of his time. His analysis reflects a Sunni perspective while recognising internal Shia diversity, especially regarding imamate, divine attributes, and theological authority.
3. Al-Shahrastānī's perspective on the doctrine of concealment and return—particularly in *al-Milal* and *Nihāyah*—draws primarily on reports from al-Ḥimyari. While his treatment in *al-Milal* is objective, though limited, his

discussion in *Nihāyah* is comparatively brief and lacks analytical depth. This study identifies two main groups: those affirming the concealment and anticipated return of Muhammad Ibn al-Hanafiyya, and another rejecting these claims. After reviewing the sources and arguments, this study concludes that the doctrine lacks strong textual and rational evidence, and therefore, warrants critical analysis.

4. This study confirms that *ẓāhir* (exoteric) and *bāṭin* (esoteric) represent two valid layers of Qur'ānic interpretation, both supported by hadith and classical exegesis when applied by qualified scholars using sound methodology. Al-Shahrastānī identified the *Ismā'īlīs* as the group most associated with esoteric interpretation. This study further finds that the nature of Kaysānī teachings remains ambiguous and must be evaluated based on their origins: Islamic sources may grant them theological legitimacy, whereas foreign influences do not. Additionally, this study refutes Ibn Ḥarb al-Kindī's esoteric reading of Qur'ān 5:93 as theologically unsound and classifies Bayān's deification of 'Alī as a violation of *tawḥīd*, constituting *shirk* in essence and attributes.
5. Bay'ah is a covenantal act rooted in Islamic tradition, evolving from a prophetic practice into a formal mechanism for legitimising leadership, particularly the caliphate. Two primary forms were identified: unconditional (*al-bay'ah al-muṭlaqah*) and conditional (*al-bay'ah al-muqayyadah*). In *Shī'a* theology, bay'ah to the Imam carries significant doctrinal weight, originating during the early formation of Shi'ism. Al-Shahrastānī's analysis draws on diverse sectarian sources, including the *Imāmiyyah*, *al-Jārūdiyyah*, and *al-Bayāniyyah*. This study confirms that Quranic and prophetic texts emphasise respect for the Prophet's companions, contradicting *Ismā'īlī* reinterpretations of the hadith concerning death without allegiance. This study concludes that such distortion of the hadith's intended meaning and unjustifiably equating it with disbelief is akin to pre-Islamic ignorance.

5.2 RECOMMENDATION

Although al-Shahrastani's scholarship has been studied, many aspects remain insufficiently explored. This study recommends that future research undertake a broader and more detailed examination of his thought through the following avenue:

- a. Comparative Methodological Analysis: Conduct a comparative study of al-Shahrastānī's heresiographical method alongside scholars such as al-Baghdādī, Ibn Hazm, or al-Nawbakhtī, to better assess methodological tendencies, biases and approaches to objectivity.
- b. Deeper Study of al-Nihāyah: While this study touched on *al-Nihāyah*, a more detailed analysis of this work is recommended, especially regarding his subjective critiques and theological engagements with Shī'a or other sects, in regard to metaphysics, eschatology, and divine attributes.
- c. Reception of Al-Shahrastānī in Later Shī'a and Sunni Thought: An exploration of how later Sunni and Shī'a scholars interpreted, cited, or critiqued al-Shahrastānī could shed light on his long-term influence and contested legacy.
- d. Doctrinal Study Beyond the Selected Three: Future research may investigate al-Shahrastānī's treatment of other Shī'a doctrines such as Ismah (infallibility), Taqiyyah (dissimulation), or Wilayah (guardianship) to provide a more comprehensive doctrinal analysis.
- e. Interdisciplinary Approaches: Incorporate sociological and political theory to examine how al-Shahrastānī's writings reflect socio-political tensions among sects under the Seljuk and Abbasid influence.
- f. Translation and Critical Edition: Produce modern annotated translations and critical editions of al-Shahrastānī's lesser-known works- particularly *Nihāyat al-Iqdām*- to enhance scholarly access and clarity of his theological positions.

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