

Khilaafat Al-Raashida

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Recently, (on the 6th of September 2008, to be exact) an Egyptian cleric by the name of Sheikh Qardawi, who also has a very popular TV show, which is watched all over the Arabic speaking world with great interest, made some outrageous comments about the Shia Muslims. Among the many things he claimed were things like “although the Shia are Muslims, they are heretics,” and that the Shia are encroaching upon the Sunni societies with an intent to destroy the religious fabric of that society, etc.

After some deeper look at Qardawi's claim, it appears that he has made his claim after the popularity the Hizbullah group acquired across the world Muslim community after their victory over the invading Israeli army back in July 2006. I think Qardawi and his likes are just afraid that a great feeling of empathy and sympathy has been building in the larger Ummah, particularly the youth. It is that fear which has motivated Qardawi's comments.



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Our focus here is Qardawi's claim that “although the Shia are Muslims, they are heretics.” We have neither seen nor heard the original Arabic comments. The only thing that is before us is the English version of the comments. We are fairly certain that the Arabic word used by Qardawi is *rafidhi*. This word has been used for the Shia from the earliest times. In its original meaning it conveys the meaning of someone rejecting some basic truth. This name has been associated with the Shia by their opponents for one basic reason: that is because they reject the legitimacy of the first three *khalifas* after the Prophet of Islam (pbuh) who ruled the Muslim community after his passing away. The fourth khalifa, Imam Ali bin Abi Talib, is the first Imam in Shia theology. These four *khalifas* are collectively called *Khulafa-e-Raashidoon* or “the rightly guided successors.”

There is a debate going on in the modern Muslim intellectual elite as to whether or not the holy Qur'an clearly enunciates a political theory. One group is insistent on upholding the view that the holy Qur'an does give a political theory. The other group

feels that the holy Qur'an is a book of guidance – and specifically religious guidance and no more.

Those who uphold the view that the Qur'an does give a political theory can only present one *aya* from it which advises the Muslims to solve their problems by mutual consultation or *shura*. (Qur'an 42:38) This concept has been extended to justify that the notion of *khilafa* after the Prophet is a part of the basic element of faith in Islam.

We also like to state that the political philosophy of Islam and whether or not it is derived from the holy Qur'an was never discussed by the early scholars of Islam. In fact the first study on this topic did not appear until about 150 years after the Prophet.

Khilafat-e-Rashida

The terms Khilafat-e-Rashida¹ and Khilafat-e-Rashidoon are in common use today in Islamic writings, both by Muslims as well as by nonMuslim writers. It wasn't always so. Let us discuss the historical background of the evolution of these terms in the writings on Islam and Muslims.

Let us first define those terms here, the first four khalifas who came one after the other, after the passing away of the Prophet (pbuh), namely: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman and Ali are *Khilafat-e-Rashida* (or Raashidoon), and their period is known as the Khilafat-e-Rashida. This period is also known as '*Ala minhaj anNuboowah*,' or, the period similar (literally “on the same path”) as that of the Prophethood.

Let us now look at the point in time when the period of the Umayyad rulers was already over, and the Abbasids had fully established their power.

If we go back in history and search for the terms Khilafat-e-Rashida or

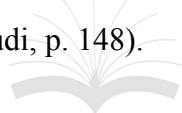
¹ Raashid (masc.) and Raashidah (fem.) both mean 'rightly guided.'

Khilafat-e-Rashidoon, we will not find them in any writings of the pre-Abbasid period. It is extremely difficult to find such writings (those produced before 150 AH) in their original texts. We can, however, deduce this by reading the other sources available and analyzing them in the proper background and context. Here is our view and analysis of the known facts.

If one asks the average Sunni Muslim, he/she would respond with the above mentioned four names for the 'rightly guided khalifas' of the Prophet. However, the Sunni scholars have had to include Hasan bin Ali as the fifth of the 'rightly guided' in most of their works. We said: 'have had to include.' Why? Let us explain.

There is a hadith of the Prophet of Islam which is employed to authenticate the notion of Khilafat-e-Rashida, which goes as follows:

“Khilafat will last in my Ummah for thirty years, and then there are kings².”
(Maududi, p. 148).



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If we separate the period of Imam Hasan, those 30 years cannot be completed. That is why the scholars have had to include the period of Imam Hasan in the terminology of Khilafat-e-Rashida. (The Prophet passed away in Rabi-al-awwal in the 11th year of Hijra. Imam Ali was assassinated in the month of Ramadan of the 40th year of Hijra. That only makes 29 years and six months. Imam Hasan abdicated from worldly rule in the 41st year of Hijra. That makes the remaining six months to complete the 30 years.)

As already stated, after the treaty between Muawiyah and Imam Hasan was signed, Muawiyah ordered people to come and acknowledge him as the sole ruler of the Muslim kingdom, which they did in most areas. That year was coined as the year of Jama'at, and historians write about the Muslim community from that point on as Ahl

² Maududi, *Khilafat-o-Malookiat*, p. 148, he quotes this hadith from *Al-Bidaya Wan-Nihaya* of Ibn Katheer. Maududi adds that this period of 30 years ended in 41 A.H., when Imam Hasan abdicated in favor of Muawiyah.

alSunnah wal-Jama'ah.

Let us examine the origin of the word *sunnah*. There is a very well-known hadith of the Prophet, which is known as the Hadith Thaqaalayn, or the Report of Two Weighty Objects. This report has been preserved by both Shia and Sunni³ scholars, as follows:

I am leaving among you two valuable things (*thaqaalayn*)— Allah's book and my *itrat*; they will not separate from each other until they come to me at the Pond, so if you attach yourselves to those two, never ever shall you go wrong⁴.

This hadith was so well known, that it was causing serious problems to the cause of Banu Umayya. After all, they had taken over the *khilafa* by displacing the Ahlul-Bayt (the *itrat* of the Prophet). The court paid *fugaha* and *qadhees* came to the rescue of the ruling party. A parallel hadith was coined and given currency by the government, as follows:

I am leaving among you two valuable things – The Book of Allah and my Sunnah (*sunnati* instead of *itrati*)⁵....

The word *sunnah* was taken from this distorted version of the hadith and put together with the decree of Muawiyah in which he had proclaimed the “Year Of Jama’at”,

³ The famous Sunni scholar of India, Shah Abdul Azeez, has gone to the extent of saying that anyone who does not accept the Hadith Thaqaalayn is out of the fold of Islam. This assertion would be found in his most celebrated book *Tofha Ithna Ashari*, an exclusively anti-Shi'a book.

⁴ Moderressi, *An Introduction to Shi'a Law*, from which we quote:

‘The Hadith al-Thaqaalayn, a tradition which was handed down by both Shias and Sunnis from the Prophet, according to which the prophet called on Muslims to follow the Qur'an and his own family after him, was along with a number of other traditions, the root and original source of this tendency which was later strengthened by further theologico-philosophical and historical reasonings.’

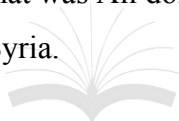
Moderresi quotes the following sources for that hadith – Ibn S'ad, *Tbaqaat*, Vol. II, *Musnad* of Ahmad bin Hanbal, Vol.III, *Sahih* of Muslim, Vol.II, *Jam'i* of Tirmizi, Vol.II, Nasa'i, Darimi, Bayhaqi, Haakim, Baghawi, Khateeb, Tahaawi, Tabrani, Ibn Atheer, Asqalani, Ibn Asaakir, and Suyooti. Additionally, Moderresi refers his readers to the monumental work by Mawlana Hamid Husain Moosawi of Lucknow, India, titled: *Abaqaat al-Anwar*, in which the Mawlana has devoted one whole volume of his book to list some two hundred Sunni scholars of source who have quoted the Hadith of Thaqaalayn.

⁵ While the original hadith of ‘the Book of Allah and My Itrat’ is found in five of the six Most Correct Ones (Sahah Sitta), the distorted version of ‘the Book of Allah and My Sunnah’ is not found in any one of those books. The earliest occurrence of the hadith in the version of ‘the Book of Allah and My Sunnah’ is to be found in the *Muwatta* of Imam Malik. Even there, it is a hadith-mu'allaq (suspended report) because Imam Malik could not find a proper chain of isnad for the report. He has quoted the hadith as hearsay without any references.

to formulate the term Al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah.

During the entire period of the Umayyad rule, the khalifa was just khalifa, so were the first four of them. The term Raashid and Raashidah were never used. In the period of the Umayyad rule, the court-historians had prepared a list of the khalifas of the Prophet. The names of Imam Ali and Imam Hasan were not included in that list, for obvious reasons. In that period, the continuous names were (1) Abu Bakr, (2) Umar, (3) Uthman, (4) Muawiyah, (5) Yazeed, (6) Marwan.

It was common practice that the official pulpits were used to praise these names while abuse was thrown at Imam Ali. How could they include Imam Ali in the list of the khalifas? In fact, the common word in Syria was that Ali was not even a Muslim. When news arrived in Syria that Imam Ali had been assassinated, people asked as to how he was killed. When the answer was given that he was killed inside the mosque, they would ask: What was Ali doing inside a mosque? That was the extent of the anti-Ali propaganda inside Syria.



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The event of Karbala shook the foundations of the Umayyad tyranny. The Abbasids took advantage of the popular sentiment and made political capital out of it. They now became the avengers of the blood of Ahlul Bayt; and with that premise, the Abbasids took over the rule of the state. However, now they faced a unique dilemma.

If they had accepted the legitimacy of the khilafat of Muawiyah and company, their own claim to that seat would be thrown out the window. If they had cancelled the entire concept of Khilafat, then how would they legitimize their own being in the driving seat? If they had done that, they would have to revert to the Qur'anic theory of Imamat, that is, the notion of *imam mansoos min Allah*, which would force their hand to give the khilafat (or the worldly leadership) back to the members of the Ahlul Bayt.

Once again, the court paid political spin doctors, *qadhees* and *fugaha*, to come up with the combined formula of Khilafat-e-Rashida (the period of Abu Bakr, Umar,

Uthman and Ali) and the Khilafat-e-Ghair-Rashida (the Umayyad period). That was the best way to connect the Abbasid rule with that of the Prophet of Islam: going through the khalifas who were rightly guided and cutting those off who were not.

So, in fact, this notion of Khilafat-e-Rashida was an urgent need for the emerging Abbasid dynasty, which, eventually, became the backbone of the Islamic political theory as elaborated by the Sunni Muslim scholars at large.

By the time the great works of *hadith*, *tafsir* and jurisprudence were being compiled (the 2nd and 3rd centuries AH) this notion was widely accepted, even fully embraced by the Muslim world at large. It had become one of the basic tenets of faith in Islam. Even today, when you go to the Grand Mosque in Mecca, you will find those four names inscribed on the pillars of the mosque. There are a total of twelve pillars in the mosque – the four names are repeated three times each.

What we have shown above is that even one of the most widely accepted notions of the popular Islamic political theory that is embraced wholeheartedly by the Sunni institution, is much more of an afterthought than a well-deserved and predefined theory of government. Above all, the theory was formulated a century after the events that had forced the emergence of the theory.

So, basically we have two opposing views about the political philosophy of Islam. One is that upheld by the Shia point of view. In this, the guidance according to Islamic law goes with the Ahlul-Bayt after the Prophet. The second is the Sunni point of view, in which guidance has been given to the larger part of the community in the shape of the institution of *khilafa*. The right of the Ahlul-Bayt to guide the community spiritually as well as politically has been explored in the excellent work entitled: *Succession to Muhammad*, by Wilfred Madelung (Madelung, p. 287). He also explains how the policies of the early Khilafat transferred that right to a larger class of elite in the community, taking it away from the Ahlul-Bayt. Another western author, Duncan B. MacDonald, has spelled it out as ‘recognizing the accomplished fact.’ (MacDonald, p. 13).

We saw above how the term Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah came into use. Let us now explore the use of the word Shia in a similar way. As opposed to the term *sunni*, the word is mentioned in the holy Qur'an in a number of places. Some of them are examples of good; e.g., 37:83, ("...Ibraheem was also among his Shia..."), some are examples of evil dissension, e.g., 6:65, 6:159, and 28:4. Still other usage is of a neutral nature, like that in 19:69 and 28:15.

(... excerpt from the book *Defending The Shia Faith Without Being Defensive*, by Syed-Mohsin Naquvi, Princeton, 2008)



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Citations

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