The Ummah Fractures after Holy Prophet

فَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُم بَيْنَهُمْ زُبُرًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ

But people have cut off their affair (of unity), between them into sects: each party rejoices in that which is with itself. (Holy Qur'an, 23:53)

The tumult of the Quraysh group could not leave the Muslim ummah unscathed. Although the popular viewpoint today is that Islam has maintained two sects—Sunni and Shi'a, but the fact of the matter is that virtually hundreds of Muslim religious sects came and went in the past. Nonetheless, the fracture, which has grown into the two main paths (Sunni and Shi'a) cannot be neglected. Many bystanders view the Shi'a aspect of Islam as a deviation from the norm and a split from the "original Islam" because the Shi'a are a minority. However, the Shi'a maintain that their path is actually the original and unaltered version of Islam as taught by the Prophet, and verified and secured by his family (Ahlul Bayt).

When did Shiaism Come About?

Historians vary as to when the term "Shi'a" came into being. Some Sunni sources say that "Shi'a Islam" emerged at the time of the death of the Prophet, while others say that it took form afterwards. Some Sunni historians also differ as to the influence of Shi'a Islam, with some citing a fringe band following a legendary figure named Abdullah Ibn Saba. However, the Shi'a say otherwise and affirm that the concept of "Shi'a" was entitled as the "Shi'a of 'Ali" by the Prophet during his lifetime, and that it was a real force in Islamic history that took form and was shaped by the Qur'an and the sunnah.

Interpreters of the Qur'an assert that when the following verse was revealed to the Prophet, "Verily, those who believe and do good deeds: they are the best of creation," the Prophet then turned and pointed to 'Ali and said, "This man and his Shi'a (followers) are the best of creation."1

As the Muslim community expanded, the Prophet continued to refer to some of the Muslims as the "Shi'a of 'Ali." Al-Suyuti, a Sunni scholar narrates on the authority of Jabir Ibn Abdullah al-Ansari:

We were sitting with the Prophet when 'Ali came. The Prophet said, "By the One who has my soul in His hands, verily this man (he pointed to 'Ali) and his friends (Shi'a) will be the successful ones on the Day of Judgment."2 & 3

This hadith is related in several similar versions in the books of hadith compiled by Sunni scholars. In addition, some Sunni scholars have recorded that during the time of the Prophet,

some of the companions were distinguished from others as being the “Shi’a of ‘Ali.” They included Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, Ammar Ibn Yasir, al-Miqdaad Ibn al-Aswad, and Salman al-Farsi. Therefore, saying that the term Shi’a emerged after the death of the Prophet is incorrect, since the first person to introduce the concept of “Shi’a” was the Prophet himself during his own lifetime.

One of the key differences between the Shi’a and non-Shi’a interpretations of Islam is the right to succession after the death of the Prophet, thus the misconception that Shiaism emerged after the death of the Prophet is understandable. Early Sunni historians, such as Ibn Khaldun and al-Yaqubi, as well as contemporary academics, such as Egyptian scholars Dr. Hasan Ibrahim and Dr. Ahmad Amin, have expressed the following viewpoints on the successorship of the Prophet.

Ibn Khaldun and al-Yaqubi contend that the Shi’a began as a group of companions who were the friends of ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib, and hence supported the claim that the chosen family members of the Prophet, known as Ahlul Bayt have the right of leadership.4 Al-Yaqubi also specifies a group of companions who refused to pay allegiance to Abu Bakr as being: Salman al-Farsi, Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, al-Miqdaad Ibn al-Aswad, and al-Abbas Ibn Abdul Muttalib.5 Dr. Hasan Ibrahim6 and Dr. Ahmad Amin7 focus on the same concept, with Dr. Amin contending that ‘Ali was seen as having the right to leadership on account of his nearness to the Prophet and his own personal merits.

However, Dr. Amin then advances the idea that although Shiaism began with the straightforward disagreement of the first three appointed caliphs, elements from Judaism, Christianity, and the Magians (the religion of the ancient Persians) caused it to deviate. He argues that since the Persians were forced to convert, they left the biggest footprints of their heritage on Shi’a Islam. However, this argument is not warranted.

To begin with, the majority of the new converts including the Persians followed the Sunni interpretation of Islam. Another important point is that it was not until the fifteenth century AD that Persia became a Shi’a nation. It is known that all of the Twelve Imams of the Shi’a are full-blooded Arabs from Quraysh (as the hadith from the Prophet said they would be), and the Shi’a, like the rest of the Muslims, are a mixture of Arab and non-Arab people.

Muslims who come from non-Arab cultures enrich Islam as a whole in their own unique ways; thus, that influence is not limited to Shiaism, and many of the great scholars and narrators of the Sunni tradition, such as al-Bukhari come from non-Arab countries. Hence, the argument that Shiaism developed because of the influence of non-Islamic ideas, is in essence nothing more than a faulty attempt to marginalize the role of Shiaism in the Islamic history.

Some Sunni sources speculate Shi'a Islam emerged in the time between the death of the Prophet and the martyrdom of Imam Husayn in Karbala. Sunni historian Ibn Hazm suggested that Shiaism could have come about during the time of 'Uthman, while another Sunni historian, al-Nawbakhti and others say that Shiaism took form during the caliphate of 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, specifically during the Battle of the Camel in Basra.8 Still, a few others maintain that while the spiritual side of Shiaism developed after the death of the Prophet, the political dimension of Shiaism was born after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.

In contrast, the majority of the Shi'a scholars hold that Shiaism first appeared in Mecca during the early stage of the prophethood of the last Messenger when Allah revealed the verse, "And warn your relatives of nearest kin."9 After this verse was revealed, the Holy Prophet invited forty members of his tribe (Bani Hashim) for a meal with him in the house of his uncle Abu Talib and then he informed them about his prophethood and asked who would support him. None responded except for 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib.

The Holy Prophet repeated the question three times, but still none responded except 'Ali. At that time, the Holy Prophet put his hand on the shoulder of 'Ali and declared, "This is my brother, my legatee, and my successor (khalifah) over you, so listen to him and obey him." The invited relatives laughed and teased the father of 'Ali because the Prophet had ordered him to obey his son.10 Therefore, according to the Shi'a, all Muslims were ordered to follow 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib after the Holy Prophet; therefore, the subtle divide between those who did so willingly, and those who did not, marked the first definition of Shi'a.

Why the Focus on Ahlul Bayt?

Qur'anic Verse on those who Possess Knowledge

Many Muslims often cite the Qur'anic verse - repeated twice - that instructs, "Ask those who possess knowledge if you do not know."11 Since both Sunni and Shi'a commentators explain that "those who possess knowledge" refers to the Prophet, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn,12 hence the Shi'a stance has always maintained that all religious questions and interpretations of the Qur'an must be referred to them.

The Verse of Purity (Ayat al-Tatheerah)

"Allah only wishes to remove all uncleanliness away from you, Ahlul Bayt, and to purify you completely." (c. 33:33)

In his tafseer (exegesis), the reputable Sunni, al-Fakhr al-Razi uses this ayah (verse) to prove that those five individuals (the Prophet, 'Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn) have been purified and immune from any form of sin, both major and minor.

This ayah (c. 33:33) descended in the house of Umme Salamah, one of the wives of the Prophet, which later was referred to as the “Event of the Cloak (Hadith al-Kisa).” When the ayah was revealed, the Prophet, ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn were gathered beneath a cloak, and the Angel Gabriel directed and included this ayah to all of them. Umme Salamah was present and asked the Prophet whether she could join them too, but he softly refused her saying, “Anti ala khayr (You are from the people of good).”

Therefore, the wives of the Prophet were not included as part of the “Ahlul Bayt” in this ayah, as some assume. To prove further, another wife of the Prophet, Lady Aishah narrated herself that the only people concerned in this verse were Prophet Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn.

Although, the beginning verses of 33:33 (ayah) address the wives of the Prophet, the ending verses (ayah) clearly do not, since they refer to “Ahlul Bayt” in the mixed (masculine and feminine) gender, rather than in the strict feminine gender, which is used when referring exclusively to the wives of the Prophet (as it was in the beginning). Since the Qur’an is written in Arabic, the language is extraordinarily rich in its linguistic composition and it uses the precise words, structure, and style to express itself clearly.

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ وَلَا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الْأُولَى وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلاَةَ وَآتِينَ الزَّكَاةَ وَأَطِعْنَ اللّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

*And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former times of Ignorance; and establish regular prayer, and give regular charity; and obey Allah and His Messenger [in Arabic this portion is written in the strictly feminine form]. And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, O members of the Family, and to make you pure and immaculate [this portion is written in the masculine form, implying its direction to a mixed gender].*13

Nonetheless, some still argue that “Ahlul Bayt” also included others; but, according to Shi’a scholars (who are unanimous on this issue) and at least twenty-four prominent Sunni historical references state that this ayah refers exclusively to Prophet Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husayn. The Sunni historians include:

• Sahih al-Muslim, Fadhail Ahlul Bayt 2:368

• Al-Khasais of al-Imam al-Nisa’i, 49

• Sahih al-Tirmidhi, 5:30

• Musnad Ahmad Ibn al-Hanbal, 1:330

• Al-Sawaiq al-Muhraqah, Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, 85

• Al-Estiaab, Ibn Abd al-Birr, 3:37

• Tafseer al-Qurtubi, 14:182

• Ahkam al-Qur'an, Ibn Arabi, 2:166

• Mustadrak al-Hakim, 3:123

• Asbaab al-Nuzul al-Wahidi, 203

• Muntakhib Kanz al-Umal, 5:96

• Al-Bukhari, Al-Tarikh al-Kabeer, 1:69

• Tafseer al-Fakh al-Razi, 2:700

• Al-Seerah al-Halabiyah, 3:212

• Usd al-Ghabah, Ibn al-Atheer, 2:12

• Tafseer al-Tabari, 22:6

• Tarikh Ibn Asakir, 1:185

• Tafseer al-Kashshaf, al-Zamakhshari, 1:193

• Manaqib al-Khawarizmi, 23

• Al-Seerah al-Dahlaniyyah, 3:329

• Tafseer Ibn Katheer, 3:483

• Al-Aqd al-Fareed, Ibn Abd Rabah, 4:311

• Masabih al-Sunnah, al-Baghawi, 2:278

• Al-Durr al-Manthur, al-Suyuti, 5:198

The Verse of Malediction (Ayat al-Mubahilah)

The verse known as the "Mubahilah" (malediction) proposes,

"Say (O Prophet) come, let us summon our sons and your sons and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, and then let us invoke the curse of God upon the liars." (3:61)

The revelation is directed towards the Christians of Najran who disputed the claim of the Holy Prophet's prophethood and the nature of Jesus (whether he was divine or a prophet). After the revelation of this verse, a meeting was arranged between the Muslims and the Christians under the conditions of the ayah in which both sides would solemnly swear to invoke the curse of Allah upon the side that was wrong.

The Christians brought along their hierarchy of priests to the malediction, however when they arrived, they found that the Prophet had brought only himself, his son-in-law and cousin, 'Ali; his daughter, Fatima; and his two grandsons, Hasan and Husayn. No one else, not even his wives were present even though the ayah had said "our women and your women."

Although confident of his prophethood, the Prophet took with him the dearest of all people to

him – his family – because he wanted the Christians to witness the seriousness of the malediction by which he was even ready to put his own family at risk when it came to defending Islam and his message.

Seeing that the Prophet was willing to endanger those closest to him and put them face to face with the wrath of God, the Christians became fearful. The leader of the Christians, Zamakhshari, said, "O Christians! I am beholding such faces that if God wishes, for their sake, He would move mountains for them. Do not accept their challenge for malediction, for if you do, you will all perish and no Christian will remain on the face of the earth until the Day of Resurrection."14

The mutual malediction was aborted and the Christians retreated to Najran, but later returned to embrace Islam.

Status of the Ahlul Bayt

The author of Sahih al-Bukhari narrates that a group of Muslims came to the Prophet and asked him, *"O Messenger of Allah, Allah has ordered us to send our prayers upon you, so how should we send our prayers upon you?"* (Referring to the verse 33:56 in the Holy Qur'an where Allah says, *"Indeed Allah and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who have faith! Invoke blessings on him and invoke Peace upon him in a worthy manner.")*

The Prophet replied, "Say, 'O Allah, bless Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, just as you blessed Ibrahim and the family of Ibrahim, and grant favor to Muhammad and the family of Muhammad, just as you granted favor to Ibrahim and the family of Ibrahim; truly, You the most Praiseworthy and Noble One in the worlds.'"15

Sanctity of the Ahlul Bayt

In the battlefield of the Battle of Uhud, on the day when the Messenger of Allah was hit on his forehead and was injured, he raised his head in supplication and said, "The wrath of Allah increased upon the Jews when they attributed Uzayr to Him and said that Uzayr was the son of Allah; and His wrath increased upon the Christians when they attributed divinity to Jesus and said that the Messiah was the son of God; and His wrath increased upon those people who made my blood flow and those who annoy my family members."16

Ahlul Bayt – According to the Prophet

The Messenger of Allah said, "The parable of my household among you is the parable of the ark of Nuh (Noah); whoever embarked upon that ship was saved, and whoever did not was

drowned (Mathalu ahl al bayti fikum ka-mathali safeenati Nuh).”17
The Messenger of Allah said, “We are members of a family that no one can ever be compared to (Nahnu ahl baytin laa yuqassu binaa ahad).”18

Rafidah (The Rejecters)

In recent years, the term rafidah (rejecters) has been increasingly used to refer to the Shi’a on account of their refusal to recognize the first three caliphs as legitimate. This term “rafidah” dates back to the Umayyah time and was used as a derogatory term to insult the Shi’a.19 Imam al-Shafi’i composed a famous line of poetry regarding this subject in which he said, “If rafidah be the love of the family of Muhammad, then let the jinn (spirits) and mankind bear witness that I am a rafidah.”20

How “Shi’a Islam” Originated

“Shi’a Islam” originated based on love for the family of the Prophet, not the hatred of some around him. Although some Shi’a individuals may have said some unbecoming remarks about the first two caliphs, their comments cannot be taken to represent the views of all Shi’a. In fact, ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib forbade his followers from verbally abusing those who fought him21 and this principle is in line with the Book of Allah which commands, “Abuse yet not those whom they invoke besides God, lest they abuse God in transgression without knowledge; thus have We made fair-seeming to every people their deeds.”22
Nonetheless, despite the exhortations of the Ahlul Bayt, defamation and prosecution against the Shi’a occurred by those who opposed them. Perhaps it was a natural reaction to the conditions set by the Umayyah rule. For instance, Mu’awiyah Ibn Abu Sufyan bribed and forced all the leaders of the Friday Prayer (Salat al-Jumah) to curse Imam ‘Ali, Hasan, Husayn, and Fatima al-Zahra - for over forty years. However, when ‘Umar Ibn Abd al-Aziz came to power, he attempted to stop this practice, but it had become so firmly entrenched that his efforts were futile.
Moreover, asides from having to endure the continuous unjust slandering of the closest family members of the Prophet who are revered by Shi’a and non-Shi’a Muslims alike, the followers of Ahlul Bayt were severely tortured during the Umayyah and Abbasid time for their loyalty.

Abdullah Ibn Saba: Myth or Reality?

Over the centuries, a preposterous idea developed that the Shi’a doctrine originated from a Jewish man who hated Islam and infiltrated the Muslims to destroy them. His name is said to

have been Abdullah Ibn Saba. However, some contemporary Sunni scholars, Shi'a scholars, Western authors, and a logical study of the background of this invented figure all concur that Abdullah Ibn Saba never even existed.

None of the important primary Sunni sources such as al-Baladri and Ibn Sa'd even mention Ibn Saba; only al-Tabari mentions him, but the accounts of Ibn Saba are given on the authority of two extremely unreliable men: Sayf Ibn 'Umar al-Tamimi and al-Sari Ibn Yahya. Sunni narrators, such as Ibn Hayyan, Ibn Uday, and Ibn Muin all confer that Sayf Ibn 'Umar al-Tamimi forged or mistook hadith.

Similarly, in the following books: al-Tahdheeb, Mizan al-Itidal, and Tadhkirat al-Mawdhuat they mention two men referred to as al-Sari (al-Sari Ibn Ismail al-Hamdani al-Kufi and al-Sari Ibn Asim al-Hamdani) who lived during the time of al-Tabari (who is most likely the al-Sari mentioned earlier by al-Tabari), who were renowned for fabricating hadiths.23

However, a different al-Sari, whose hadiths were reliable lived much before them - he died in 167 ah, therefore al-Tabari, who was born in 224 ah could never have met him. Since all of the subsequent sources that discuss Ibn Saba refer back to the history of al-Tabari and the information given by al-Tabari was at best questionable, hence more than likely, the existence of Ibn Saba was concocted by the two dishonest men (Sayf Ibn 'Umar al-Tamimi and al-Sari Ibn Yahya).24

Nonetheless, whether true or fictional, the information that al-Tabari provides regarding Ibn Saba is worth examining.

According to al-Tabari, Ibn Saba was a Jewish man who came from Sana in Yemen. His mother's name was Sawda, and he is said to have become a Muslim during the caliphate of 'Uthman. He traveled throughout the Muslim countries from Hijaz, Basra, Shaam, and Egypt, all the while propagating the notion that just like Prophet Isa will have a second coming, so too will Prophet Muhammad, citing c. 28:85 as a roundabout sort of evidence,

"Indeed He who has revealed to you the Qur'an will surely restore you to the place of return. Say, 'My Lord knows best him who brings guidance and him who is in manifest error.'"

However, some modern historians, such as Muhammad Fareed Wajdi in his encyclopedia Dairat al-Marif, not only added more fiction to al-Tabari's accounts, but also told a slightly different version. Wajdi maintained that Ibn Saba was a close follower of Imam 'Ali and admired him so much that he attributed divinity to him.

According to this fable, when Imam 'Ali heard Ibn Saba's claim he wanted to take his life, but at the advice of Abdullah Ibn Abbas he sent Ibn Saba to al-Madain instead. This reaction is incidentally in complete disagreement with what is known about the behavioral pattern of

Imam ‘Ali, who is recorded to have spared an enemy out of fear that he might be killing him out of anger rather than out of justice.

Al-Wajdi continues that while in al-Madain, Ibn Saba is said to have spread the first notion that ‘Ali was a prophet and later that he was a deity.25 Other contemporary authors, such as Ahmad Atayllah, declare that Ibn Saba wanted to weaken and destroy the caliphate of ‘Uthman, thus he intentionally mixed some Jewish ideas with Islam to form the doctrines about the return of the Prophet (raja) and the knowledge of Imam ‘Ali about the unseen (ilm al-ghayb, which by definition is that which is known by no one).26

By attributing these ideas to Ibn Saba, real or imaginary, these authors not only succeeded in discrediting the Shi’a and presenting the Shi’a ideology as nothing more than imported teachings from another religion (instead of a legitimate and integral part of the history of Islam), but they also shifted the blame for the assassination of ‘Uthman to some unorthodox sectarian incident, rather than on the administrative policies of ‘Uthman, which bred so much resentment that he was killed – not by followers of “Ibn Saba,” but by the companions of the Prophet.

The idea that someone with Ibn Saba’s heretical mentality convinced the Muslims, many of whom were companions and who had seen the Prophet firsthand, is ludicrous. Even more unrealistic is the idea that someone so powerful who was able to bring down the third caliphate, could have existed unmentioned at such a heavily scrutinized time, even well after he had passed away.

It is also unconceivable to believe that ‘Uthman, who severely punished some of the companions of the Prophet, such as Ammar Ibn Yasir and Ibn Masud, over issues unrelated to Islamic doctrine, would overlook such a person, since he could have been a potential threat to topple his power structure.

Furthermore, even the scant narratives regarding Ibn Saba conflict with one another because some people said that he appeared during the time of ‘Uthman, while others said that he appeared during the lifetime of Imam ‘Ali, and still others said that he came on the scene after the death of ‘Ali. Even more, some said that he just revered Imam ‘Ali, while others said that his main goal was to turn popular opinion against ‘Uthman.

For these reasons, the Shi’a scholars, who have studied this subject in depth; as well as many orientalists, such as Bernard Lewis, Wellhausen, Friedlander, and others all agree that Ibn Saba was nothing but a legend fabricated by those who came later on in history.

The myth of Ibn Saba did not develop out of a vacuum. At the time when stories about him first spread, the status quo was threatened by the fact that the beliefs of Shi’a Islam, which are

based firmly on the Qur'an, the sunnah of the Prophet, and the appointment of successors by the Prophet.

Inventing Ibn Saba and attributing the ideas of Shi'a Islam to him in a much-skewed fashion made the Shi'a appear more as a fringe group rather than as part of the Islamic core. As the Egyptian scholar Taha Husayn says in his book Al-Fitnah al-Kubra, *"The opponents of the Shi'a exaggerated the issue of Ibn Saba in order to defame 'Ali and his followers. Ibn Saba was an imaginary figure (shakhsiyah wahmiyah), and the only source that mentioned him was Sayf Ibn 'Umar, and he was a man well known to be a liar."*27

More about Ibn Saba can be found in the book of Taha Husayn or in the thesis of Sayyid Murtadha al-Askari.28

Four Schools of Thought

Another misconception is that Islam, outside of the Shi'a school of thought, crystallized directly into four schools of thought, whereas in reality, the process was more complicated than this. However, through a combination of factors, not the least of which was government supported, these schools coalesced and took on separate identities during the time of the Abbasid Empire (75 ah - 1258).

Hanafi School (Al-Madhab al-Hanafi)

The Hanafi school, founded by Imam Abu Hanifah al-Nu'man Ibn Thabit (80 - 148 ah), was the first to acquire widespread popularity.

The first scholar to pay allegiance to this school of thought was Abul Abbas al-Saffah who was the leader of the revolution against the Umayyah dynasty and the founder of the Abbasid Empire. Other scholars and jurists (fuqaha) also joined him in the hope that a just government would rise and implement the sunnah of the Prophet and save the Muslim ummah from the tyranny of the Umayyah dynasty.

However, Abu Hanifah soon realized that the Abbasid were not sincere in their call to establish the Islamic sharia (law) and Islamic government, and so he distanced himself from the government and refused to accept the formidable position of leadership in the judiciary system (al-qada) during the time of al-Mansur al-Abbasi.

Al-Mansur tried to bring Abu Hanifah to his side, but he refused and was then imprisoned, and according to some accounts even tortured. Some historians have also reported that the Abbasid eventually poisoned Abu Hanifah.

Nonetheless, the Abbasid government succeeded in attracting two of the most prominent

students who had studied directly under Abu Hanifah: Abu Yusuf al-Qadi and Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani. Abu Yusuf joined the Abbasid government during the reign of al-Mahdi al-Abbasi in the year 158 ah. He continued working for them during the rules of al-Hadi and al-Rashid and wrote several works on jurisprudence, one of the most noteworthy being Kitab al-Kharaj, which he wrote at the request of the caliph Harun al-Rashid.

He enjoyed an intimate relationship with the ruling powers, and through this, they supplemented the salary they paid him with gifts and lavish invitations, enabling him to lead an extravagant life for that time.

The other student, Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani, assumed leadership of the judiciary system (al-qada) during the time of Harun al-Rashid. He wrote many thesis in jurisprudence (fiqh), including Jami al-Sagheer, which he narrated from Abu Yusuf al-Qadi, Abu Hanifah, and Jami al-Kabeer.29

Undoubtedly, the government played a central role in promoting the Hanafi school of thought because of Abu Yusuf al-Qadi and Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani, and particularly since the position of judiciary leadership that the latter took, was central in promoting the jurisprudence (fiqh) of a particular school of thought. Regarding this issue, Ibn Hazm says:

Two schools of thought were promoted and spread in the beginning of their emergence by leadership (riyasah) and the government (sultanah). The first was the Hanafi school of thought; since Abu Yusuf al-Qadi was declared the leader of the high court, he employed people only from his school of thought. The second school of thought that was supported by the government was the Maliki school of thought.30

Along the same line, al-Dahlawi says:

Any school of thought whose leaders are famous and who assumed the positions of judiciary leadership (qada) and authority (ifta or the fatwa) will spread among the lands and expand day after day. Conversely, the people will not know any school of thought whose leaders did not assume the position of judiciary leadership and authority, and they will die out in the future.31

From this, it is clear that the expansion of a school of thought at that time, hinged on the government. The government in turn, supported the schools of thought because of their willingness to compromise Islamic principles in favor of the government, and so a reciprocal relationship developed between the government and the propagators of the schools of thought who used the judiciary positions (the position of qadi) that they were appointed to, to spread their ideologies to the masses.

Maliki School of Thought (Al-Madhab al-Maliki)

Once Al-Mansur al-Abbasi failed to sway Abu Hanifah to his side, he turned his attention towards Imam Malik Ibn Anas (93 - 179 ah) and proposed that the body of Islamic knowledge unify under one definitive book and set of guidelines, rather than be split among several schools of thought, as was the case at that time. He encouraged Imam Malik to write al-Muwatta (the book that Imam Malik is well-known for). History says:

Al-Mansur spoke to al-Malik around 150 ah and encouraged him to write Fiqh al-Muwatta. He told him, "Put down this knowledge in writing, and try to avoid the eccentricity (shawad) of Ibn Abdullah al-Masud, the leniency (rukhsah) of Ibn Abbas, and the harshness (shadaid) of Ibn 'Umar. Be moderate in this fiqh and write whatever the majority of the imams and sahabah agree upon, and we promise you that we will bring all the people to follow your school of thought, and your fiqh and your knowledge, and we will spread and promote your book in the provinces and states, and we will ask the people not to oppose it, and they will not give judgments other than those in accordance with your books."32

Imam Malik spent approximately 11 years writing al-Muwatta, and his book eventually became the definitive legal text of the Abbasid state. The Abbasid rulers in turn, exhibited the utmost respect towards Imam Malik to the extent that Harun al-Rashid would stand whenever he saw Imam Malik, and then sit on the floor in front of him to listen to what he had to say. Through his open support of al-Mansur, Imam Malik alienated his teacher Rabiat al-Rai who refused to compromise his principles for the government and then parted company with Imam Malik. Imam Malik continued to support the Abbasid government beyond the reign of al-Mansur into the time of al-Mahdi al-Abbasi. Just like al-Mansur, al-Mahdi al-Abbasi succeeded not in winning over the support of the Hanafi school of thought, but to entice two of Abu Hanifah's most famous students (as mentioned above).

At the same time, as they fostered the growth of the Maliki movement, the Abbasid also attempted to suppress the school of Ahlul Bayt. Not only were the ideas of Ahlul Bayt school threatening, but its leaders were also popular, such as Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq. The sixth Imam of the Shi'a school of thought, who had nearly 4,000 students attending his classes.

Like the other Imams from Ahlul Bayt, Imam al-Sadiq was put under house arrest and later imprisoned. Only after methods of intimidation and coercion to halt the spread of his teachings failed, did the Abbasid attempt to counter his ideas by creating another intellectual entity to compete with him, in this case, the promotion of the Hanafi and Maliki schools of thought. As it is said, people tend to follow the religion of their leaders;33 therefore, the ideological path that the Abbasid government was laying out was rudimentary for the people to follow. Still, like the rest of the imams of Ahlul Bayt, Imam al-Sadiq gave up his life at the hands of the ruling

power for his unwavering resistance to compromise the principles of Islam.

Shafi'i School of Thought (Al-Madhab al-Shafi'i)

From the time of his childhood, Imam Muhammad Ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (150 - 206 ah) immersed himself in the ideas of Imam Malik. He was inspired deeply by him and nearly memorized al-Muwatta. Eventually he procured a letter of recommendation from the governor of Mecca to the governor of Madinah enabling him to meet with Imam Malik, whose status was very high in Madinah during the Abbasid time. There he became a student of Imam Malik until the death of Imam Malik about nine years later.

At that time, Imam Shafi'i fell into poverty and was obliged to return to Mecca.34 There, some individuals concerned about his condition, appealed to the governor of Yemen to find him an official position, and thus Imam al-Shafi'i was made the governor of the state of Najran in Yemen.

However, during the rule of Harun al-Rashid, Imam al-Shafi'i was accused of leaning towards the Alawiyin35 and the school of Ahlul Bayt, and so he was brought to Baghdad, handcuffed. While he was being held as a prisoner, one of his friends, Muhammad Ibn al-Hasan al-Shaybani (who was also one of the primary advocates of the Hanafi school of thought for the Abbasid) interceded on his behalf and testified that al-Shafi'i was not on the side of Ahlul Bayt and was completely supportive of the Abbasid government.

This testimony resulted in the release of al-Shafi'i, and as a result, he became very close to al-Shaybani and studied under him, learning the opinions (araa) of Abu Hanifah in ra'i (opinion) and qiyas (analogy), both of which Abu Hanifah was well known for. However, the two differed regarding Ahlul Bayt - al-Shafi'i was in fact sympathetic towards their cause, while al-Shaybani was not.36

Out of these two influences: the Maliki school (which can also be referred to as the school of athar (text)) and the Hanafi school, was born the Shafi'i school of thought. In 199 ah, Imam al-Shafi'i moved to Egypt along with Ibn Abdullah al-Abbas, the governor of Egypt. There, his school slowly began to spread. Unfortunately, because he differed on some points with Imam Malik, Imam al-Shafi'i incurred the anger of many of the adherents of the Maliki school in Egypt, and they eventually rioted and killed him.

It is worth noting that al-Bukhari and al-Muslim did not narrate any hadith from al-Shafi'i - not because he was inferior in knowledge, but because he had inclinations towards the school of Ahlul Bayt. He said that 'Ali Ibn 'Ali Talib had the right to leadership at the time over Mu'awiyah and his companions,37 who were the group that began the assault on Islam.

He displayed love for Ahlul Bayt and the family of the Prophet and proclaimed, “If anyone who loves the Ahlul Bayt is a rafidi (a rejecter of the three caliphates) then let the whole world witness that I am the first rafidi.” Such statements not only led to his arrest as mentioned before, but also resulted in silencing his books of hadith.

Hanbali School of Thought (Al-Madhab al-Hanbali)

Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (165 - 240 ah) was born in Baghdad. At the age of fifteen, he embarked on journeys to different countries to meet with various scholars. While in Baghdad, he studied under Imam al-Shafi’i, who inspired him considerably, and Abu Yusuf al-Qadi. At the time, there were two competing schools: madrasah al-athar (the school focusing on texts) and madrasah al-ra'i wal-qiyas (the school based on opinion and analogy), and Ibn Hanbal favored the former.

Although like other scholars, he too relocated to Hijaz, however he was not as well known as the leaders of the other schools of thought because most considered him to be a muhaddith (narrator of hadith) instead of a genuine faqih (jurist).

Ibn Hanbal was a strong advocate of the Abbasid government and when al-Mutawakil came to power in 232 ah, he tortured the Alawiyin and fiercely opposed the school of Ahlul Bayt, but he paid Ibn Hanbal a handsome salary of 4,000 dirhams, and invited him to Samarra to obtain blessings from his presence.38

Ahmad Ibn al-Hanbal wrote his famous work Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal under the reign of al-Mutawakil and passed away while al-Mutawakil was still in power. His case was similar to that of Imam al-Malik, whose ideas were also propagated by the Abbasid caliphate, and the Abbasid promoted both of their schools of thought.

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2. Al-Suyuti, Al-Durr al-Manthur, 6:376
3. Inna hadha wa shiatuhu la-hum al-faizun yawm al-qiyamah.
4. Tarikh Ibn Khaldun, 3:364
5. Tarikh al-Yaqubi, 2:104
6. Dr. Hasan Ibrahim, Tarikh al-Islam, 1:371
7. Dr. Ahmad Amin, Fajr al-Islam, 266
8. Firaq al-Shiah, p.16; Ibn al-Nadeem, Al-Fihrist, p.175
9. Holy Qur’an, 26:214

10. Ihqaq al-Haqq, 4:62; Tarikh al-Tabari, 2:117; Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, 1:159; Tarikh Abul Fida, 1:116; Nadhm Durar al-Simtayn, p.82; Kifayat al-Talib, p.205; Tarikh Madinat Dimishq, 1:87, hadith 139 & 143; Al-Hasakani, Shawahid al-Tanzil, 1:420; Muhammad Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, Jami al-Bayan, 19:131; Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, Al-Durr al-Manthur, 5:97; Tafseer Ibn Kathir, 3:350; Al-Baghdadi, Tafseer al-Khazin, 3:371; Al-Alusi al-Baghdadi, Ruh al-Maani, 19:122; Al-Tantawi, Tafseer al-Jawahir, 13:103; Al-Hakim al-Naysaburi, Al-Mustadrak ala al-Sahihayn, 3:135. Other historical sources, such as Sirat al-Halabi, say that the Holy Prophet added, “And he will be my minister (wazir) and inheritor (warith).”

11. Holy Qur’an, 16:43 & 21:7

12. Tafseer al-Tabari, 14:109; Al-Alusi, Tafseer Ruh al-Maani, 14:134; Tafseer al-Qurtubi, 11:272; Tafseer Ibn al-Katheer, 2:570; Al-Hakim, Tafseer Shawahid al-Tanzel, 1:334; Tafseer al-Thalabi

13. Holy Qur’an, 33:33

14. Tafseer al-Kashshaf

15. Allahumma salli ala Muhammadin wa aale Muhammad kama sallayta ala Ibrahim wa aale Ibrahim, wa barik ala Muhammadin wa aale Muhammad kama barakta ala Ibrahim wa aale Ibrahim fil-aalameena innaka hamidun majeed.

16. Al-Muttaqi al-Hindi, Kanz al-Umal, 10:435, hadith 30050

17. Kanz al-Umal 6:216; Mustadrak al-Sahihayn, 2:343; Al-Tabarani, Al-Mujam al-Kabeer, 12:27; Ibn Hajar, Al-Sawaiq al-Muhriqah, 1:86

18. Kunuz al-Haqaiq, 153; Al-Riyadh al-Nadhirah, 2:208

19. Al-Zubaydi, Taj al-Arus, 5:35; Al-Jawhari, 3:1078

20. In kana rafdhan hubbu aale Muhammadin. Fal yashhad al-thaqalan anni rafidahi.

21. Nahjul Balaghah

22. Holy Qur’an, 6:108

23. Lisan al-Mizan, 3:12; al-Ghadir, 8:143

24. Al-Ghadir, 9:218

25. Wajdi, Muhammad Fareed; Dairat al-Marif al-Qarn al-Aishren, 5:17

26. Atayllah, Ahmad; Al-Qamus al-Islami, 3:222

27. Taha Husayn, Al-Fitnah al-Kubra, the chapter on Ibn Saba.

28. His work on Abdullah Ibn Saba is available in English under the title of Abdullah Ibn Saba and Other Myths and has been printed in two volumes.

29. Al-Zarakli, Al-Alam, 6:80

30. Wafayat al-Ayan, 6:144

31. Al-Dahlawi, Hujjat Allah al-Balighah, 1:151
32. Al-Imamah wal-Siyasah, 2:150
33. Al-Nas ala Deen Mulukihim
34. Mujam al-Udaba, 17:287
35. The descendants of the Holy Prophet through Imam ‘Ali.
36. Tarikh Baghdad, 2:178
37. ‘Ali Ibn Abi Talib huwa al-Imam al-Haq.
38. Al-Bidayah wal-Nihayah, 10:350