

REVOLUTIONARY BEGINNINGS: REVISITING THE REASONS OF THE FIRST SHIA MOVEMENTS IN IRAN

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Annotation: *Shia Islam is a significant aspect of Iran's religious identity. Understanding the origins and development of the first Shia movements provides a historical context that is essential for appreciating the evolution of Iran over time. Also political interactions between early Shia groups and ruling powers provides insights into the historical political dynamics that have influenced the governance and structure of Iran. Moreover, the historical lessons from the first Shia movements provide insights that can be applied to contemporary challenges, aiding in the development of informed perspectives on issues facing Iran and the broader Islamic world. This creates a basis for evaluating the negative and positive aspects of the result of these actions. The main method of learning about this theme involves multidisciplinary approach, combining historical research, religious studies and cultural analysis.*

Keywords: *Battle of Karbala, Shia- sunni schism, political dynamics Iran, Kaysanites, Zaydis, Shia communities, Historical Roots Shia Islam, Intellectual contributions*

Shia Islam originated from a historical disagreement over the leadership of the Muslim community after the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632 CE. The dispute revolved around the rightful successor, with one group (later known as Sunni) supporting Abu Bakr, the Prophet's close companion, and the other (later known as Shia) advocating for Ali ibn Abi Talib, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law.

(Yusuf, 2017)¹The Shia believed that Ali should have been the immediate successor, emphasizing his close familial relationship to the Prophet and spiritual qualities. The event leading to Ali's eventual leadership is known as the Ghadir Khumm incident, where Prophet Muhammad is said to have declared Ali as his successor.

The leadership dispute led to a series of conflicts and political developments, including the assassination of Ali and his descendants facing persecution. Over time, distinct Shia groups emerged, each with its own beliefs and practices. The largest Shia branch is the Twelver Shia, which believes in the leadership of twelve imams, with the twelfth imam being in occultation and expected to reappear as the Mahdi. Other significant Shia branches include the Ismailis and Zaidis, each following a different line of imams. The historical and theological developments of these branches have shaped the diverse landscape of Shia Islam.

As for the formation of these groups in Iran, this is a clear fact that Shia Islam has a deep historical connection with Iran, and the origin of Shia groups in the region can be traced back to the early centuries of Islam. The roots of Shia Islam in Iran are intertwined with the political and cultural developments that followed the death of Prophet Muhammad. During the early Islamic period, the influence of Shia beliefs gained traction in

¹" Islom tarixi" Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf, 2017

Iran, particularly due to the connection with the family of Ali and their perceived rightful claim to leadership. Also the conversion of Persian elites to Islam played a role in the dissemination of Shia ideas, as they were more inclined towards supporting Ali's descendants.

The Buyids, a Shia dynasty, came to power in parts of Iran during the 10th century. This marked a significant period of Shia rule in the region. The Buyid rulers supported Shia scholars and facilitated the growth of Shia institutions, contributing to the consolidation of Shia identity in Iran.

Moreover, the Safavids (1501–1736) played a crucial role in establishing Shia Islam as the dominant sect in Iran. Shah Ismail I, the founder of the Safavid Empire, declared Shia Islam as the state religion. They implemented policies to promote Twelver Shia Islam, including the conversion of the population. Shia scholarship flourished during the Safavid period, with the establishment of religious schools (madrasas) and the development of theological and juridical doctrines. The cultural and artistic expressions of Shia Islam, including the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, became integral to Iranian identity.

The early Shia movements in Iran were primarily driven by a combination of political, religious, and socio-economic factors. These movements emerged in response to perceived injustices, particularly the martyrdom of Imam Hussein at the Battle of Karbala, and a desire for a just and righteous leadership based on the lineage of Prophet Muhammad.

The first Shia movement was called *Tawwabin Uprising (762-763 CE). The Tawwabin, meaning "Repenters" or "Penitents," were led by Sulayman ibn Surad. That action motivated by a sense of grief and anger over the martyrdom of Imam Hussein and his companions at Karbala.

(Yasin.T, 2014)² The battle is a central element in Shia Islam and revolves around the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad. The conflict had its roots in the leadership dispute after the death of the third caliph, Usman, and the subsequent caliphates of Ali ibn Abi Talib and his son Hasan. Imam Hussein, the younger son of Ali, refused to pledge allegiance to Yazid, the Umayyad caliph, considering his rule unjust and contrary to Islamic principles.

Imam Hussein, accompanied by his family and a small group of supporters, set out for Kufa in response to calls for support from its residents. However, political circumstances led to a blockade, preventing their arrival in Kufa. Imam Hussein and his followers, including women and children, faced a siege by Yazid's forces in the desolate land of Karbala. Despite being vastly outnumbered, Imam Hussein refused to submit to Yazid's authority.

The battle climaxed on the day of Ashura when Yazid's forces denied access to the Euphrates River to the thirsty family of Imam Hussein. In the face of overwhelming odds, Imam Hussein and his companions, numbering around 72 individuals, displayed unwavering courage. Imam Hussein's family members and companions were killed in the fierce battle. Imam Hussein himself, having endured immense hardship, was martyred in

² "The tragedy of Karbala" Yasin.T, 2014

the late afternoon. The brutal aftermath included the desecration of the bodies and captivity of the surviving family members. The tragedy of Karbala is commemorated annually during the month of Muharram, culminating on the day of Ashura, with rituals like mourning processions, majlis (gatherings), and reenactments of the events. The martyrdom of Imam Hussein symbolizes the sacrifice for justice, resistance against oppression, and unwavering devotion to Islamic principles.

(Madelung, 1988)³ Zayd was the son of Imam Ali ibn Husayn, commonly known as Imam Zayn al-Abidin, and thus belonged to the lineage of the Ahl al-Bayt (family of the Prophet). Zayd's uprising was rooted in a call for justice and the restoration of true Islamic leadership. Zayd began his rebellion in the region of Kufa, which had a history of opposition against the Umayyads.

Zayd engaged in armed conflict with the Umayyad forces in the Battle of Kufa. Despite putting up a valiant resistance, Zayd was defeated, and he lost his life in the battle. Zayd's uprising, while militarily unsuccessful, had a profound impact on the early Shia resistance against Umayyad oppression. His legacy inspired subsequent generations of Shia Muslims to stand against tyrannical rulers and uphold the principles of justice.

The third one was The Buyid Dynasty's rule in Iran, which spanned from the mid-10th to the mid-11th century, is notable for its Shia inclinations and support for Shia Islam. While the Buyids were not exclusively Shia, their favorable disposition toward the Shia sect had a significant impact on the religious and cultural landscape of the regions they controlled. The Buyid rulers, particularly the founders Ahmad, Ali, and Hasan, were known for their sympathy toward Shia Islam. The dynasty's rise to power coincided with the weakening of the Abbasid Caliphate, allowing the Buyids to establish their influence with a certain degree of autonomy.

The Buyid rulers provided patronage to Shia scholars, jurists, and theologians. Shia centers of learning, such as Qom and Rayy, saw increased support and became intellectual hubs during the Buyid period:

- Buyid rulers collaborated with Shia religious institutions, fostering an environment conducive to the development of Shia jurisprudence and theology.
- Shia scholars were often welcomed at the Buyid courts, contributing to the flourishing of Shia scholarship.
- The Buyids offered protection to Shia communities in regions under their control. This protection allowed Shia communities to practice their faith more openly, free from the persecution they might have faced under other rulers.

In conclusion, the first Shia movements in Iran played a crucial role in shaping the identity and trajectory of Shia Islam in the region. Rooted in the aftermath of the leadership disputes following the death of Prophet Muhammad, these movements were fueled by a deep commitment to the Ahl al-Bayt and a desire for justice. The Tawwabin Uprising, Zayd ibn Ali's rebellion, and the patronage of Shia inclinations during the Buyid Dynasty collectively contributed to the formation of a distinct Shia identity. (Yasin.T, 2014) Despite facing challenges and varying degrees of success, these early movements established

³"Religious trends in Early Islamic Period" Madelung.W, 1988

enduring themes within Shia Islam, emphasizing resistance against oppression, the pursuit of justice, and unwavering loyalty to the lineage of Prophet Muhammad. The Buyid Dynasty's support for Shia scholars and institutions further solidified the foundation for the growth of Shia influence in Iran.

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