The Shi'i Theory of Political Authority from Occultation Onward

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the historical development of Shi'it theory of political authority from occultation onward. The procedure of development, very succinctly, is divided into four periods which are: a) Buyid period (945 - 1055), b) post-Seljuq and Ilkhanid era (12th - 14th), c) Safavid era (1501 - 1786) and d) Qajar and post Qajar period. The characteristic of these periods is discussed through the degree of Jurists' cooperation with the contemporary ruler in that they were not allowed, on one hand, to compromise their central doctrine of Imamate and on the other hand they attempted to actualise their political ideas in order to make a strong political tie with the rulers. This, further led to the establishment of the Shi'it states. This political development for the Shi'it started from Occultation.

KEY WORDS: Occultation. Political authority, Shi'it, political development.

INTRODUCTION

The occultation is divided chronologically, into two epochs; the lesser concealment started 869 AD till 940 AD. There were four designated agents who acted for the twelfth Imam as the successive leaders of his community. This was originally in two ways: firstly, Imamate jurists should respond to the Buyid Kingdom concerning the legitimate authority of the Buyid; secondly, religiously they were not allowed to compromise the central doctrine of Imamate in that the Imam is a merely leadership. Consequently, Shi'it Jurists, to avoid the pressure of the Sunni authority, started to address new matters such as temporal authority coming to an accommodation with Shi'it Buyid Kingdom. In this approach, Shi'it jurists rejected the view which accepted the unrighteousness of any government pending the return of the twelfth Imam. To better appreciate this Shi'it's claim, one can divide the growth of Shi'ism according to political position of jurists into four historical periods.

The historical periods of Shi'i authority development

The first period commenced with the Shi'it Buyid Dynasty (945-1055) in Persia which seized effective power of Sunni Caliphate of Baghdad. They did not remove Sunni Caliph from office but permitted him to remain merely as caliph without power. The most important Shi'it scholars in this period were Ibn Babuyah al Sadduq (991), Shaykh Muhammad al Mufid (1022), Sayyid Murtaza (1044), Shaykh Taifah al-Tusi (1067) whose famous "Istibsar" and Tahzib al-Ahkam. together with "Usul al Kaffi" of Jafar Muhammad Ibn Yaqub al-Kulayni (940) and the "Man La Yah Zarul Faqih" of Saduq are called as "The four books" (al-Kutub al-arbaa) in Shi'it.

During this period, the issue of Imamate political authority began to be addressed in jurisprudence through the institution of the office of the deputyship of the Imam. Thus Shi'it jurists, who encouraged the Buyid to come to power, became, practically, representative of the hidden Imam. The reasons that contribute the claim of encouragement of Buyid by Shut's jurists are: a) the Buyids used their temporal power to protect the faith and to promote religious and intellectual Shi'it activities. These could be seen in their attempts to establish the first college for Shi'it in Baghdad where before this time, the Shi'it were afraid to announce their faith under the Abbasid caliphate, b) Buyid encouraged public Shi'it festivals as well as Shi'it theological writer to express their doctrines of Imamate, c) The "Imami theologians of Baghdad had a very close ties with the Buyid in Iran".

1. The Imam in shi'it is considered the supreme political and religious leader of community. However, undertaking the political function is conditioned on allegiance of people, particularly his followers who should struggle against those usurpers during the Imam's rightful political leadership.

2. Even so the specific deputyship was not peculiar to the merely al-Mahdi rather it had started from al-sadiq the sixth Imam of shi'it whose special deputyships were in widely separated area like Iraq and Iran.

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(Arjomand, 1989, p.10). When Alud Dawlah Dailami, the founder of buyid in Iran in 983 assumed a secular title of Kingdom which revived the Persian title of Kingship, the jurists did not raise the question that the term kingdom is not in accord with the notion of Imam in the way Ayatollah Khomeini did in order to discredit Mohammad Reza Shah (1943-1980). Ayatollah Khomeini argued that the term king of kings contradicted the sayings of the Prophet. Moreover, the reason given by the Jurists to support Buyid was that enjoining the good and prohibiting the evil, could be implemented in the light of Buyid rulers. Though, this quramic order was ignored during Abassld Dynasty, d) the philosophy of positive Intizar in Shi’it, apparently, was an influential contributing factor in the establishment of Shi’it Buyid to provide the ground for al-Mahdi.

To sum up, the political position of the jurist in this period was introduced under the guidance of Mufid and his Baghdad school.

The judicial works indicated that they assumed the leadership of Shi’it community, not only as "a logical extension of the Imamate during the hidden Imam but also that the necessity to do so was legal". Consequently, they "witnessed the establishment of an Imamate temporal authority under the Buyids" which was not regarded by the Shi’it as contradictory to "classical theory of Imamate"(Sajedin,1987, p. 232)

The second historical period of Shi’it is identified with the post-Seljuq and the Ilkhanid era (twelfth-fourteenth century). The exercising of Welaya by a well qualified Jurist in the administration of justice and related matters was a significant development in this period. The Shi’it jurists were tied to the temporal authority of Ilkhanid. A prominent Shi’it scholar Nasir al Din Tusi (1201-1274) assumed a political function in the service of Mongol rulers including Ghazan Khan, Uljaito who destroyed completely the Abbasid Caliphate as well as Sunni saljuq authority. ( Sajedin,1987, p. 233) Following the destruction of Abbasid, Shi’it jurists took the views that "the existence of a Shi’it political authority (other than that of the Imam) to consider the Implementation of Shariah"(Sajedin,1987, p. 233) was necessary to fulfil the obligation of "enjoining the good and forbidding the evil". The necessity to preserve public order led to the development of a "justice" administration. Consequently, the Shi’it Hilli School, successor to the Baghdad Shi’it School, paid great attention to the administration of justice in its role in preserving public order as well as in the popular sense, universal justice. More explicitly from this period. Justice (al-qada) "became the most fundamental aspect of the growing political power of the Jurists who in their position as the lawful administrators of justice, were regarded as the protectors of the people against the unjust behaviour of those in power" This was in conformity with the promulgation that the shariah legitimates.

The most prominent Jurists in this period were: al-Muhaqqiq al-Hilli (1205-1277). Allama Hilli (1250-1352) whose works on jurisprudence and theology are still important. Consequently, the function of justice by the jurist in this period could be considered as the first step for Imamate scholars to undertake the wide role of the functional Imam in subsequent period.

The third political period of the development of shi’it commenced with Safavid era (1501-1786). Shi’it scholars in this period accepted the existence of King on the ground of public order which he protected. In other word. Shi’it jurisprudence became similar to the sunni whose scholars following the termination of the "correctly guided caliphate" had rationalised the existence of the Sultan for his protection of public order. Moreover, the Sultan or King as the "shadow of God", a heritage from Sasanian era before Islam in Persia, came to be firmly established.

Thus one could find a close similarity between the concept of "shadow of God" to justify the Sultan in the third period and the Wali Faqih who took the title of the "sign of God" in the fourth period in current Islamic Iran. However, from the point of view of legitimation, they were different from each other. The "shadow of God" became popular in the Safavid era when Ismaiel Safavi was amidst "political chaos and turmoil in predominantly sunni Iran, who conquered a considerable part of Iranian plateau" ( Sajedin,1987, p. 234) and was crowned the Shah of Iran. Within a decade, his Qizilbash soldiers and fervent Shi’it followers established the first Shi’it empire-state. Ismaiel in order to combine the Persian kingship with Shi’ism, invited many outstanding Shi’it scholars from both Bahrain and Jabal Amil in present day Lebanon to transform Iran into a complete Shi’it land.

These prominent Shi’it scholars were: Shaykh Ali Ibn Muhaqqiq al Karaki (1530) and Zayn al Din Ali al-Amili al Shahid al Thani (1559) who wrote a very well organised commentary on al-lumatal dimashqiyah of Muhammad Ibn Makki known as shahid al Awal (1384) who belonged to the period between Ilkhanid and Safavid. Muhaqqiqal Sabzawari and later Muhammad Taqi Majlesi (1659) and his son, Muhammad Baqir.

Majlesi "participated in Safavid government, supported their rulers and encouraged the faithful to pay taxes and cooperate with Safavid state authorities" From Safavid onward, all kingdoms in Iran have ruled under the name of Shi’ism. More precisely, "since the Persian monarchy began some 2,550 years
ago, Iran has had more than 350 Kings
dand only from the Safavid kingdom onward, Shi'ism was the official religion of the empire, preached in the mosques, taught in the schools and administered in the courts. These were carried out by the Ulama who propagated the law as well as applied it. Consequently, these Ulama legitimated the kingdom of Safavid in Shi'ite's eyes for the management of the affairs of the Imamate Community, particularly for carrying out the obligation of "enjoining good and forbidding the evil". This was regarded as the "main revelational justification for the existence of any government (Sajedina,1987, p. 233) such as safavid during the occultation.

The Ulama, under the Kingdom, had two main functions: a) "the supervision and administration of the religious endowments and distribution of their revenue" to the students and clerics and to charitable undertaking and, b) the "supervision of the administration of the sacred law as the Chief Judiciary authority of the state" (Arjomand, 1984, pp 123-163).

It seems that these two fold functions were based on the prescription written by the twelfth Imam when the jurists are requested to undertake the responsibility of the execution of Islamic Laws. In this regard, when the Wetaya of the Shi'ite jurists exercised authority, it had the same legal validity as the authority of a Sunni sultan to maintain public order. Therefore, in this period, due to the Welaya of the Ulama, Shi'ite thought was institutionalised through the religious sermons: "depicting mostly the tragedy of Karbala or "rawzah-khani" during Muharram. the taziyah or passion play, the religious feast or sufrah, religious processions, visits to tombs of holy men, in addition to the daily prayers, the pilgrimage and the fasting, all of which still comprise the main day to day religious activity of Iran".

The fourth period started from Qajar era onward (late eighteenth to early twentieth century) particularly with establishment of Institution of Marja Taqlid after a long debate between the Akhbari and Usuli thoughts on Shi'ism. Consequently, there was a fundamental change in the role of the Shi'i religious scholars concerning the social and political life of Iran (Hossein Nasr, 1974, pp 271-8). The Ulama, and particularly Marja Taqlid as an independent existence, changed their status from the senior partner in governing the state, as it happened during the second and the third period, to that of the state's counter balance often acting as the force of opposition. In other word, the Institution of Mujtahid became very powerful in a sense that it was observed as an important political force, serving as a check on the power of the shahs, the activities of foreigners in Iran and the "modernising tendencies of the elite" (Nasr, 1989, p 192). The prominent Shi'ite scholars in this period were; Bihbani. Bahraini, Shirazi. Ansari, Muhammad Kazim Yazdi. Muhsin al-Hakim. Ayatollah Kashani, Ayatollah Khomeini. Ayatollah Khomeinei and A. Golpayegani as well as other modern jurists who define and "set the political authority of the jurists on the firm theological basis of the general deputyship of the hidden Imam". However, there is an ambiguity in their views concerning the political authority of jurists. This will be discussed in following pages. In this period the mujtahids were often advocates and protectors of the people against the tyrannical rulers. The more the monarchs respected the clergy and ensured that state laws conformed to the Shariah, the more they enjoyed the legitimization conferred on them and the cooperation of the Ulama. In contrast, the more the Shah differed from the ulama. the more he found resistance. This occurred in the reign of Nasir al Din Shah (1848-96), the second King of Qajar Dynasty, the Ulamas headed by Mirza Mohammad Hassan Shirazi (1895) led a revolution, called "tobacco revolt". The Shah was forced to retreat from his position concerning tobacco concessions to Great Britain (Reja event). There was also the confrontation between the Monarchy. Mozaffardin Shah (1896-1907) and the Ulama headed by M.Tabatabaie and Behbahani as the leaders of Shi'ite nation, in the constitutional revolution of 1905-06. Consequently, according to the Article 2 of constitution of 1906, which was added by the rebellious Ulamas. all parliamentary legislations were supposed to be subjected to the ratification by a committee of five mujtahids of the highest rank. From this period, the Ulama. although ambiguously, put their authority over the shah's authority in a way similar to when Naraqi or Kashifal Ghita (1812) authorised Path AM Shah, the second King of Qajar, to conduct the jihad against the Russians (1807-1813) on behalf of the Imam of the age (Hidden Imam). More precisely. Kashifal Ghita explained that "his power to authorise the King rested on the mujtahid's collective office of general Vice-regency (Niyabati Amma). Consequently, in the subsequent half century of Pahlavi rule which marked the introduction of a modern system of administration, modern education and modern values, Shi'ite Ulamas, particularly Ayatollah Khomeini developed the concept of Welayate Faqih in a way that the Ulama became opponent to the Kingdom because of his failure to uphold Islamic justice and his acceptance of US's colonial-like policy of domination and his practical tyrannical behaviour intertwined with brutalisation. torture and execution. In this way. Shah showed his antagonism to the Shi'ite Ulama. Thus the ulama claimed the power to replace a corrupt ruler. They claimed general permission from the twelfth Imam who had allowed the jurists to have more power than the monarch in the exercise of

\textsuperscript{1}. A Mujtahid is the one who run the Institution of source of imitation.
welayat al amma in the name of hidden Imam pending his return. Furthermore, the learned jurists enjoy the confidence of the faithful as their religious guide, whereas the monarch did not. This privilege of the ulama became apparent as the result of centralisation and institutionalisation of the position of Marja Taqlid after a long period of debate between Usuli/Akhbari thought in Shi’ism.

Conclusion

The Shiit’ theory of political authority has been gradually developed during four periods from occultation onward. In the first period, means; Buyid dynasty, Religious Jurists like, Moqid attempted to actualize their political ideas through making a strong political tie with the Rullers.

In the second historical period, means Ilkhanid era, Jurists like Nasir al-Din Tusi helped the temporal Ruller by assuming a judicial function and ministerial administration in the service of Uljaito (a mongol ruller) to destroy the Abbasid Caliphate as well as Saljuq authority.

Shiite Jurisprudence in third political period of development, means Safavid era, became similar to the Sunni whose scholars had rationalized the existence of the Sultan for his protection of public order. The Scholars had two main tasks: the supervision and administration of the sacred Law as the chief Judiciary authority of the state.

In the fourth period; from eighteenth to early twenties, religious scholars in Shiism established the institution of Marja Taqlid after along period debate between Akhbari and Usuli. This led to the government of the Just Ruller in Shiit under the name of Velayate Faqih which underlines Iran’s conduct.

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