THE CONCEPT OF IMĀMATE

With Special Reference to
Nizārī Ismā'īlimism

By

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ABSTRACT

The world has usually heard about the Nizârî Ismâ‘îlis under the guide of the wealthy Muslim leader, the Aga Khan and of his followers who regard him as their İmám.

The İsmâ‘îlis derive their name from Ismâ‘îl, the sixth lineal and direct descendent of the Prophet through his son-in-law 'Alî ibn Abî Ṭâlib.

In the sixth century A.H./tenth century A.D. there was a split in the sect on the question of İmâmate. One group adhered to the İmâmate of Must'alî ibn Mustanşîrbîl'lah and the other clung to Nizâr ibn Mustanşîrbîl'lah. The latter party came to be styled as Nizâris. Presently, the Nizâris are also known as Agâ Khânîs for their adherence to their forty ninth İmâm Karîm Agâ Khân.

According to this sect, the divine guidance is an ancient and perpetual institution.
Since the creation of this world, a living guide
has always remained on earth to guide mankind towards God. There was no such time when this living Guide was absent from the world. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad were all divinely illumined, for the guidance of people. After Muḥammad's death, the divine guidance continued in his progeny through his daughter Fāṭima and her husband 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. This divine leadership i.e. Imāmate will never extinguish.

This work is an attempt to give the concept of Imāmate in the Nizāri Isma'īlim. To the fullest possible extent the concept of Imāmate in some major sects of Islam namely the Sunnī, the Khāriji, the Twelver Shī'ā, and the Zaydī Shi'ā are also discussed for the comparison with that of the Nizāri concept of Imāmate.

For the primary sources, I have mainly used the works of W. Ivanow and Dr. S.N. Makarem to whom I am very grateful.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................. 1

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ........................................ 1
Etymology of the Word Imām .......... 1
The Concept of Imāmate in Sunnism .. 6
The Imāmate in the Khāriji Sect .... 34
The Concept of Imāmate in Shi'ism... 48
a) The Imāmate in the Twelver Shi'ism 57
b) The Imāmate in the Zaydiyya Sect 66

II. IMANATE IN ISMĀ'ILISM ...................... 70
The Concept of Evolution in Ismā'ili-
ism .................................................. 70
The Cycle of Adam ......................... 84
The Cycle of Noah ......................... 88
The Cycle of Abraham .................... 89
The Cycle of Moses ....................... 92
The Cycle of Jesus ....................... 93
The Cycle of Muḥammad ............... 96
The Cycle of Smaller Resurrection ..102
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IMĀMATE IN ISMĀ'ĪLISM</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Faith as the First Pillar of Ismā'īlism</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. Relation of Faith to Walaya</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iii. The Concept of Imāmate in the Nizārī Sect</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Etymology of the Word Imam

The word Imam is derived from the Arabic verb amma, i.e. "he tended, repaired, betook himself or directed his course to, or towards, himself; aimed at; sought; purposed it or endeavoured after". ¹

Imama is the infinitive noun of the verb amma bihim or amma-hum. It means 'he preceded them; went before them; led them so as to serve as an example or an object of imitation'. ² It follows that Imam means a leader or an example.

Cl. Huart, agreeing with the above definition of the word Imam, gives further meanings

²Ibid.
for the word in his article "Imām". He says that Imām means an army leader, or a caravan leader who guides a column of camels. He adds, "Imām is also a synonym of hādī, i.e. a person or a thing who serves as a guide, e.g. a teacher to a pupil in school".

According to al-Fayruzābādī, the Imām is a righteous man, combining all good qualities, who follows true religion, holding or doing what is different from, or contrary to, all other religions. Al-Zubaydī agrees with al-Fayruzābādī and states further that Imām signifies the learned man of his age or time who is singular in his learning, and who is alone in respect of religion.

E.W. Lane, quoting from Ibn Durayd, author of al-Jamāhara, gives the following definitions of

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3Al-Zubaydī, Taj al-'Arūs (Cairo: 1306 A.H.).
the word Imam. ¹ "Imam is the manager or rectifier of anything. Imam is the synonym of umm which signifies the source, origin, foundation, basis of a thing; or anything to which other things are collected together or adjoined; the main or chief part of a thing and that which is the compriser or comprehender of things and hence the head or chief of a people or company of men. Because others collect themselves together to him".

According to the "Muhkam", ² Imam is a learned man whose example is followed or imitated. Further, according to the same source, "Imam means an exemplar or object of imitation to a people or company of men, such as a head, a chief or a leader or some other person whether they be following the right way or be erring therefrom".

Al Fayyumî in al-Misbah ³ uses the word Imam in the sense of an exemplar. He calls the Prophet Imam al-Umma (the exemplar of the Community); the

¹ E.W. Lane, op.cit.
² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
Caliph as Imām al-Ra‘iyya (the exemplar of the Subjects), and the Qur‘ān as Imām al-Muslimīn (the exemplar of the Muslims).

In the Qur‘ān, the word Imām is used in various senses, such as the Scripture, the Preserved Tablet, a manifest road, an example, a leader, and a prototype.

Since the rise of Islam, the term Imām has been applied to the person who indicates the ritual movements of each prostration to the assembled mass, which those who stand behind him copy.

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1XVII: 71.
2XXXVI: 11.
3XV: 79.
4II: 124.
5XXV: 74.
6XXI: 73.
The jurists of Islam give the title Imām to the chief of the Muslim community, the spiritual and the secular head of the nation, usually called Caliph in his quality of the successor to the Prophet.\(^1\) Accordingly, the Imām leads the divine service and consequently decides the fate of the social body of which he is the chief.

Imām sometimes signifies an official of a town, as he has also to supervise the morals and order of the quarter where his mosque is.\(^2\) In the Turkish Empire, he also had the office of making out certificates required for the conveyance of property, the determining of the civil status, etc.\(^3\)

Imām has also become an honorary title of

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\(^3\)Ibid.
all scholars who have founded schools.¹

The rulers of Yemen were given the title of Imām as well, because they were the descendants of the Prophet in the line of Faṭīma, his daughter.² It follows that the descendants of the Prophet are sometimes called Imāms as well.

From the above definitions of the term Imām, we may conclude that Imām signifies a leader in any field; a guide; a teacher; a learned and a righteous man of his time; a prototype; a model; a manager or a conductor and a right disposer, or an orderer or a rectifier of anything; the leader in prayer; and the spiritual and the secular head of the nation.

The Concept of Imāmate in Sunnism

Great movements usually split into sects and schisms. Rival interpretations of its aims

¹Cl. Huart, "Imām", Encyclopaedia of Islam, old ed.

and beliefs and disputes concerning the best way to implement them destroy the original unity of the church or party or community. Islam was no exception.

Under the dynamic and expert leadership of Muḥammad, Islam achieved an amazing success in a relatively short time. At his death in 12 A.H./632 A.D., most of Arabia had sworn allegiance to him.¹

With the death of Muḥammad, the infant Muslim community was confronted with a severe crisis. The Ummah (the Community) felt lost and confused with their temporal and religious leader gone; the majority did not believe that Muḥammad had left any explicit testament for the succession.

The old separatist tendencies, and the allegiance to tribal authority, which the Prophet had partially suppressed but not extirpated, began to reassert themselves.² These divisive tribalistic


tendencies divided the Muslim World into two factions—Sunnī and Shīa.

The Sunnīs are those who follow the precepts of the Qurān and the Traditions.\(^1\)

At the demise of the Prophet, the institution of the Sunnī historic Caliphate was inaugurated. The majority of the Ummah did not believe that the Prophet had designated his heir explicitly, Abū Bakr’s election to the Caliphate took place on the ground that the Prophet in his last illness had ordered him to lead the public worship.\(^2\) Moreover, Abū Bakr was one of the most influential persons of his time.\(^3\) The influence he had over the Arabs eased his succession to the Prophet.

Abū Bakr remained in the office of Caliphate


for two years. Before his death he nominated 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb as his successor.¹ 'Umar in his turn, entrusted the task to a tribural of six leading men² to choose one from amongst them as the Caliph after his death.³ Thus 'Uthmān was elected Caliph. Subsequent to the murder of 'Uthmān, 'Alī ibn Abī Talib was elected as the fourth Caliph.⁴ With the death of 'Alī in 41 A.H./661 A.D. the Orthodox Caliphate came to an end.

The founder of the next dynasty was Mu'āwiya, from the house of Umayya.⁵ The Umayyad dynasty fell when it had exhausted all possibilities of further

²The council of 'Umar consisted of Talḥa, al-Zubayr, Sa'd ibn Waqqās, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'āwfi, 'Alī ibn Abī Talib, and 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān.
exploitation. Racial discriminations, class interests, aristocratic ways and luxurious tastes weakened the moral basis of the Umayyad dynasty. Taking advantage of the widespread discontent and posing as defenders of the true faith, the descendants of al-'Abbās, the uncle of the Prophet, soon became the champions and leaders of the anti-Umayyad movement. In 127 A.H./749 A.D. they overthrew the Umayyad dynasty and installed Abū al-'Abbās surnamed al-Saffāḥ, a great great grand-son of al-'Abbās, as the first Caliph of the new dynasty.¹

The 'Abbasid Caliphate lasted for five centuries. Towards the end of its destruction it had waned to such an extent that the blow dealt by the Mongols in 636 A.H./1258 A.D. was but to a phantom kingdom. The Caliph at that time was al-Musta'ṣim bi-llāh. He, together with his sons and family, perished in the general massacre. Only those members of his family who were away from the city or


For five centuries the right of Caliphate was vested in the house of al-`Abbās. It is said that a member of this family Abū al- Qāsim ʿAbd al-Qāsim Ahmad who had evidently escaped the Mongol massacre, was invited to Cairo by the fourth Mamluk ruler, Baybars with a great pomp as a Caliph in 639 A.H./1241 A.D. and given the title of al-Mustaṣir bi-LLāh.\footnote{P.K. Hitti, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 489.}

The `Abbasid Caliphate, thus established in Cairo, lasted for over two centuries and a half.

Around the end of the ninth century A.H./fifteenth century A.D. the star of Selim I of the Turkish house of Osman, generally known as Ottoman, arose in the horizon.\footnote{Eversley, \textit{The Turkish Empire}, abridged by S.A. Rashid, (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1958), p. 52.} The popular belief is that
al-Mutawakkil the ‘Abbāsid Caliph at Cairo made a formal transfer of his office to Selim the Ottoman Sultan. This was after the latter’s conquest of Egypt in 895 A.H./1517 A.D. However, there is no contemporary evidence of this transfer. The Caliphate remained in the house of Osman till 1924 A.D. Following the defeat of Turkey in World War I and the rise of Mustafa Kemal to power, the Turkish leaders turned their back to the institution of Caliphate with the assumption, that "the Caliphate was not a religious duty but merely an ancient custom and a mark of honour and distinction." The last Caliph of the house of Osman was Wahīd al-Dīn who was deposed in November 1924. Thus the Sunnī Caliphate came to an end.

During the period of the ‘Abbāsids, Baghdad became the centre for all the intellectual activities of Islam. Here the rules and regulations appertaining to the Caliphate were systematised by Sunnī jurists. The original basis of all juristic


2Ibid., p. 217.
activity was given by the injunctions that were in the Qurān and the Sunna. As a result, the early doctrine of the duties and functions of the Caliph-Imām was ethical. The justification of this doctrine and its reconciliation with the principles of Sharī'a were accomplished through a gradual process. The Sunni jurists defended the historical development of the Caliphate. They held that the Umma was based upon the Sharī'a and that its historical development, because it "will never agree upon an error," was divinely guided. According to the jurists’ concept, allegiance was not to the Caliph-Imām but to Sharī'a. The institution of the Caliphate was upheld simply because through it the Sharī'a was trans-


lated from the sphere of potentiality into the sphere of actuality. From the fourth century A.H./tenth century A.D. onward a number of Sunnī jurists pro-
pounded the theory of Caliphate-Imamate in order to justify, on the basis of Shari'ā, the selection of Abū Bakr and his successors by the Umma.

Al-Baqillānī (d. 403 A.H./1013 A.D.) was one of the earliest jurists to formulate this theory. Since his doctrine according to S.K. Bakhsh, represents the general Sunnī view we shall summarize it in what follows:

1. Method Whereby the Imamate is Established:

According to al-Baqillānī there were two methods whereby the Imamate was established: selection and designation. There was no disagreement

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that one of the method was sound.\footnote{H.A.R. Gibb and H. Bowen, *Islamic Society and the West*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), Vol. I, p. 27.} Refuting the Shī'ite doctrine of 'Alī's designation by the Prophet, he said:

(a) If the Prophet really wanted to designate 'Alī as his successor he should have openly announced this designation, so that the whole community would hear it. This is because the issue of Imamate was as important as the Five Pillars of Islam. Since the Prophet did not do this, it was impossible that he insisted on 'Alī to be his successor.

(b) It is illogical that the Umma recognized minor appointments made by the Prophet like those of judges and commanders while it neglected such an important issue as the appointment of his successor (Khalīfa) as accused by the Shī'a.

(c) The traditions sponsored by the Shī'a on the designation of 'Alī were not based on authoritative information. Al-Būqillānī refuted a number of Shī'ite Traditions regarding the designation of
'Alī. One of the Traditions was, "whoever recognizes me as his mawlā will know 'Alī as his mawlā". ¹

Al-Baqillānī argued that the word mawlā did not necessarily mean Imam as the Shi'a maintained. He said that "Philologically mawlā means a 'supporter', 'defender', 'ally', 'assistant', 'neighbour', 'son-in-law', 'paternal cousin', 'manumitter', 'patron', and 'client'." ² Hence, the Prophet's assertion that "'Alī is the mawlā of the Muslims" could mean the 'supporter', the 'defender', or the 'ally' of every Muslim, because 'Alī was explicitly and implicitly a true believer. Moreover, if the Prophet had really meant Caliph by mawlā he would have made it so clear that no disagreement would follow after his death. Hence the above Tradition could not be taken as the proof of 'Alī's designation.

¹A.J. Wensinck, op.cit., p. 15.

2. On the Means Whereby the Imāmate is Established:

According to al-Bāqillānī, the Imām should be appointed to his post by means of selection because it avoided conflict.¹

3. On the Number of Actual Electors of the Imām:

The number of electors was not limited in the Sharī'a, hence the contract for the Imamate could be validly contracted by one or more electors, e.g. Abū Bakr contracted the Imamate of 'Umar, whereas 'Umar referred it to a tribunal of six. Once the contract was signed in the favour of a candidate, the Umma had no right, according to the Sharī'a, to invalidate that contract without any cause that called for his deposition.²

4. On the Bay'a:

Homage (Bay'a) was a sacred tie linking the sovereign to the people. Once the election

²Y. Ibish, op.cit., p. 90.
was effected, it was incumbent to give the oath of allegiance to the elected Imām.\(^1\)

5. On the Number of Imāms at One Time:

If a contract of Imamate was made in favour of a number of individuals of different countries, and if all were fit for Imamate, then the prior Imām would be considered valid. If priority, however, could not be established the contract would have to be renewed in favour of some one else.

Thus Al-Baqillānī agreed on having one Imām at a time. Accusing the Shi'īa and the Khawārij of deviating from the true path, he insisted that Imamate belonged to the orthodox Muslims alone, because the rest had deviated from the right path.

6. On the Qualities of the Imām:

The Sunnī Imām was supposed to have the following prerequisites:

1. He should be from Quraysh. This was based on a Tradition, "The Imāms are from Quraysh".ⁱ According to al-Bāqillānī, the Muslims of Madīna surrendered to the succession of Quraysh on the occasion of Abū Bakr's election on the basis of the above Tradition.²

Here al-Bāqillānī argued against the Khārijī and Shī'a claims. According to the former the Imamate belonged to any upright Muslim. The latter believed that Imamate belonged to the House of 'Ali. Therefore, he was obviously defending the actual experience of the Islamic State, i.e. the Sunnī's support of Abū Bakr and the rest of the Caliphs who were from Quraysh.

2. The Imām's second qualification is the juridico-theological knowledge. This entitles him to be a chief qādī.

3. The Imām should possess ability to make

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sound judgments in matters of warfare and management of armies in order to protect the Umma from the enemies.

4. In dealing with the affairs of the Umma and in matters of administration, the Imam should have sound judgments.

5. He must be courageous in war and decisive in dealing with the affairs of his subjects. ¹

7. On the Empeccability of the Imam

An Imam did not have to be sinless. He was given the office to see that the Sharī'a was forced upon the people and that it was known to all. The Sharī'a is considered to have preceded him in terms of time to which he was subject. Only the overt behaviour of the Imam was to be taken into account. If he conformed with the rules of Sharī'a, he would maintain to hold his office in accordance with the regular order. If he deviated from the principles, then the community would either impose upon him to return to the right path or they would turn away from him and give alleg-

iance to another Imam. ¹

The above argument was also against the Shi'a doctrine which asserted the impeccability of the Imam.

8. On the Necessity of Imam:

Al-Baqillani asserted that an Imam was always needed;

(a) to defend the Umma against the enemies;
(b) to restrain the oppressor and to redress the grievances of the oppressed;
(c) to enforce and maintain law;
(d) to divide the revenues of the conquest;
(e) to secure pilgrimage; and
(f) to despatch troops against the enemies of the Muslims. ²

¹Y. Ibbish, op.cit., p. 98.
9. On the Reasons that Call for the Deposition of the Imam:

The circumstances that called for the forfeiture of Imamate were:

(a) Loss of probity by reason of heresy or evil conduct or injustice;

(b) The physical and mental infirmities that affected his capacity to carry out his duties as Imam;

(c) Loss of mental faculties;

(d) Deafness and muteness;

(e) Old age due to which an Imam would be unable to perform his duties; and

(f) Loss of liberty through captivity or being taken as a prisoner by the enemies.¹

It is worthy of note that Al-Baqillani gave reasons for the deposition of an Imam, but he did not state how this could be achieved.

In order to justify the Caliphate of the

¹Y. 'Ibīsh, op. cit., p. 109.
first four Orthodox Caliphs in their chronological order, al-Baqillānī stated that amongst the companions of the Prophet, the most prominent were those to "whom the paradise was promised". ¹ (They were called al-'Ashara al-Mubashara). ² Among the ten in turn, the most prominent ones had been the first four Caliphs in succeeding the Prophet. ³
Abū Bakr's election to the Caliphate was genuine because 'Ali and al-'Abbās as well swore allegiance to him, and they agreed to be guided by his leadership and to rally under his banner. They addressed Abū Bakr as "O Caliph of the Apostle of God." ⁴

Furthermore, those who had contracted his

¹Ibid.
²During the last pilgrimage, when the Prophet entered the Ka'ba, ten companions entered with him. Those ten companions were: Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Talḥa, al-Zubayr, 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn 'Awf, Sa'id ibn Abī Waqqās, Sa'id ib Zayd, Abū 'Ubayda ibn al-Jarrāḥ. The Prophet said to them, "As such shall we enter the Paradise together." See A.J. Wensinck, "al-Ashara al-Mubashshara", Encyclopaedia of Islam, new edition.
Imamate had been the companions of the Prophet and hence were to be regarded as reliable people.\(^1\) Abū Bakr was the most distinguished person of his time. The proof was found in the desire of the Prophet during his last illness to have him lead the prayer in his stead. This proved his eminence to succeed the Prophet.\(^2\) In this way, al-Bāqillānī discussed the rest of the three Orthodox Caliphs, trying his best to prove in the end that they were the best in terms of their chronological order.\(^3\)

It is apparent from al-Bāqillānī’s discussion of the first four Caliphs, that he, being a Sunnī jurist, tried hard to justify the right of the first four Caliphs to the Caliphate, with the corollary that the community could never agree upon an error.

From al-Bāqillānī’s doctrine of Imamate,

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\(^1\)Y. Ibish, _op.cit._, p. 110.


\(^3\)Y. Ibish, _op.cit._, p. 10.
it can be concluded that he had systematically re-

duted a number of Shi'ite doctrines:

(a) Of the designation of 'Alī as Imām;

(b) The Imamate is in the house of 'Alī;

(c) The possession of secret knowledge by the Imām and the occult interpretation of the Qur'ān;

(d) The Imām's being sinless and infallible.

All these prove that he sought to justify the community's accomplished act in the election of the first three Caliphs, against the Shi'a's accusation that those Caliphs were usurpers and that 'Alī should have been the first Caliph—Imām according to the designation of the Prophet.

In 417 A.H./1037 A.D. 'Abd al-Qāhir al-
Baghdādī, another Sunnī canon lawyer propounded his own theory of Caliphate along similar lines to that of al-Bāqillānī, but he accommodated it more as to be in accordance with fresh precedents. The difference between the doctrines of al-Bāqillānī and al-Baghdādī was the following:

(a) Al-Baghdādī accepted the existence of two
Imāms simultaneously, if the existence of a sea separated and prevented the supporters of each one from being rivals and trying to gain victory over one another;

(b) The Imām, according to al-Baghdādī, should possess the qualifications of a mujtahid;

(c) The Imamat passed through the laws of inheritance was, according to al-Baghdādī, legitimate but not obligatory. This could be illustrated in the fact that Abū Bakr had bequeathed it to 'Umar with the approval of the other companions of the Prophet. However, al-Baghdādī continued stating that it would also be lawful for the Imām to leave it to the consultations of a few selected persons following his own death, as had been the case with 'Umar.¹

Al-Māwardī, another eminent Sunnī jurist and theologian added more to the theory advanced

by his predecessors:

(a) He asserted that the Imam might nominate two or more persons and prescribe the order of preference for their succession.

(b) He maintained that it was not necessary that all the people should know the Caliph in person.

(c) The person elected must be a male with a good reputation and must have led an honest upright life. He must have the insight necessary for sound judgment and be able to make decisions and choose between right and wrong.\(^1\)

Subsequently, the 'Abbasid Caliphs became so weak that a number of princes relying on military power snatched away territories from the 'Abbasid kingdom. This was an obvious usurpation which al-Mawardī regarded as "Amirate by usurpation",\(^2\) but in al-Mawardī's juristic theory of


Imamate, this too was accepted. He stated two reasons for this: (i) that necessity dispensed with stipulations which could not be fulfilled; (ii) the fear of injury inflicted upon public interests justified a relaxation of conditions.\footnote{Ibid., p. 19.}

Al-Mawardi continued to assert that in certain cases authority was to be given to the semblance of right.\footnote{S.K. Bakhsh, Politics in Islam, op. cit., p. 119.}

With al-Ghazzali (d. 505 A.H./1111 A.D.) the whole juristic structure collapsed. The reason was that al-Ghazzali propounded that even if a Sultan who snatches away a part of the territory of the Caliph, is evil and barbarous but supported by military force, obedience should be rendered to him; because an attempt to depose him may cause civil strife. Moreover, he must be recognized as Sultan if he shows allegiance to the Caliph by mentioning his name in the Khutba, and on the coinage. This relaxation of the doctrine
of Sunnī Imamate proved that though the Caliphate was stripped of all its political power yet, by whomsoever it was held, it continued to represent the supremacy of the Shari'a.  

Ibn Khaldūn (D. 794 A.H./1406 A.D.) made other admissions which showed that he was validating the actual state of affairs. According to him the solid basis for the empire was religion. And that man had been put into this world to perform the duties imposed upon him by religion in preparation for the life hereafter. In order to secure happiness one needed to know the divine law as well as a prophet and a successor to that prophet to guide him. Ordinary kingship was a human institution based upon reason. Its laws were for well-being in this world. The Caliph’s role was to guide his subjects according to the divine laws that led to happiness in this world as well as in the next.  

1 A.H. Siddiqi, op.cit., p. 164.

2 G.W. Arnold, op.cit., p. 74.
version, tried to indicate the necessity of an Imam in accordance with revelation.

By propounding the necessity of a Caliph, Ibn Khaldūn seemed to attempt to revive this institution and to strengthen the position of the Caliph who had been reduced to a mere puppet in the hands of the local rulers.

The above doctrine of Caliphate propounded and advanced by various Sunnī jurists and theologians shows their endeavour to adapt this doctrine to the contemporary circumstances. It also demonstrates an apologia against the charges of the Shī'ā and Khārijī oppositions. The attempt of the Sunnī jurists and theologians to refute massa and to reject the doctrine of the Imam's impeccability is directed against both Twelver and Ismā'īlī Shī'ā. While their emphasis on the Prophet's saying, "the Imāms are from Quraysh", is directed against the Khārijī doctrine which asserted that any upright Muslim could be a Caliph.

It seems that in order to prove their cause, the Sunnī jurists have paid no heed to the other Tradition which clearly stated, "hearken and obey
even if a slavering negro be set over you."\(^1\) Also 'Umar I is supposed to have said, "If Salim the client of Hudhayfa were alive I would have made him the ruler."\(^2\)

Al-Baghdādī accepted the admissibility of two Imāms existing simultaneously if their territories were separated by water. This too is the acknowledgement of the accomplished facts. It applies to the 'Abbāsid Caliphate ruling simultaneously with the Umayyads in Spain.

Al-Māwardī's and al-Ghazzālī's acceptance of the rule of the Sultan is again the justification for the historic process of the time when the Caliphs had become relatively weaker and the Sultans ruled independently snatching away the territories of the 'Abbāsid kingdom. The above jurists have tried to defend the supremacy of the Caliph.

A number of deductions could be made from the Sunnī jurists' views on the Sunnī Caliphate.

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\(^2\) Ibid.
(a) As a result of Shi'ite and Khārijī accusations of the Sunnīs of deviating from the right path by acknowledging the election of Abū Bakr as lawful; the jurists had a tendency towards arguments for self defence to validate the actual historic event.

(b) The jurists could not accept any principle which might lead them to arrive at a conclusion that the community had erred and sinned by electing Abū Bakr as Caliph. Consequently the theories developed by the Sunnī jurists were in contrast with the theories of Imamate developed by the Shi'a and the Khawārīj.

Almost every generation left its mark upon this doctrine. As fresh precedents were created the theory was accommodated accordingly.

In conclusion, it is understood from the juristic account that the Sunnī Caliph was representing the giver of the religious law (Muhammad) in maintaining religion and governing the Muslim World. The office might be referred to as either Caliphate or Imamate indifferently. When the
Caliph was called Imam, he was being compared to the leader whose movements while praying were to be followed by the whole community of believers. He was called Caliph because he succeeded or represented the Prophet. Imamate was a duty incumbent on the community, because the appointment of an Imam would establish judges and executives. He guarded the political frontiers, lead the armies in raids, apportioned the booty among the soldiers and vindicated the wronged ones among the evil-doers. The method of conferring Imamate on the Imam was either election or designation. In order to be able to become an Imam one must be from Quraysh. (This prerequisite was given up after the transfer of Caliphate in the house of the Ottoman Turks.) He must be a learned man with the knowledge and skills of administration regarding religious as well as State affairs. Also he must have a sound character, and be sound in all his mental and physical faculties. He must be a mature male Muslim. The Imam could not be sinless, he did not have any spiritual powers. He guided the people in
terms of the Shari'ah which preceded him in time and to which he was subjected.

The Imamate in the Kharijî Sect

The Kharijîtes are generally stated to have their origin in a movement of disapproval against the Caliph 'Alî (36-40 A.H./656-660 A.D.). 'Alî's rule was over all Muslim territories except Syria, which had remained loyal to its ambitious Neccan Umayyad governor, Mu'awiyah, an appointee of 'Umar, the Second Orthodox Caliph. ¹ He refused to recognize 'Alî. He gathered forces and established his camp at Siffin, near the Euphrates. Upon the arrival of 'Alî in command of his Iraqi force, the fighting ensued (in 37 A.H./657 A.D.). The battle seemed to be going slightly in 'Alî's favour. A diplomat of great skill, Mu'awiyah

maneuvered 'Alī into a situation where he felt obliged to accept arbitration. At this, many of 'Alī's followers who had approved of 'Uthmān's death deserted 'Alī's party after returning to Kufa from Siffin. They accused 'Alī of repudiating the Qur'ān where they found, "If one party rebels against the other, fight against that which rebels". Since 'Alī had in this way apostacized, they maintained, all who continued to follow him were infidels.

Because they deserted 'Alī's party, they came to be termed as Khawārij, i.e. 'goers out' or 'seceders'. They were also known as Ḥarūriyya for having encamped at Ḥarūra, not far from Kufa, after their departure from 'Alī's party.

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2LIX: 9


The term Kharijî has a Qur'anic origin where it is stated, "Those who go forth (yakhrujûn) from their homes as emigrants (muhājirûn) to God and his Messenger". ¹ So the word Kharijî may refer to the one who left his home among the unbelievers for the sake of God. Another word which may refer to them, as R.A. Nicholson ² points out, is likewise Qur'anic in origin, viz. Shurāt (plural of Shārî) literally "sellers", i.e. those who sold their lives and property in order to secure the entance to Heaven.

Ibn Ḥazm defined Kharijî as one who (a) rejected the arbitration made after the battle of Siffin, (b) revolted against the Imām who erred, (c) damned the sinners, (d) accepted the view that any Muslim and not only those from Quraysh could become a Caliph. ³

¹IV: 100.
Although the Khawārij were devout and sincere Muslims, they were too dogmatic to be reconciled with the other Muslims. Hence they were considered by the Orthodox Muslims as condemned heretics.

The Necessity of an Imam:

The fundamental question in the Khārijī doctrine was whether Imamate was necessary. If so, whether it was demanded by work of reason or through utilitarian motives. According to the Sunnīs it was necessary with respect to revelation.

The Muʿtazila believed in the necessity of Imamate on the basis of reason. For the Shiʿites it constituted the lutf (kindness) of God. The Khawārij refused to acknowledge the necessity of Imamate on the basis of both reason and revelation. For them the genuine enforcement of the Shariʿa was the most important factor which accounted for the necessity of Imamate. Like the majority of the Muslims, the Khārijites also believed that authority was derived from divine source, i.e. God
Who was the Law-Maker.\(^1\)

Muḥammad enunciated God's Laws which were revealed to him. After his death revelation ceased. The *Sharī'a* might be enforced either by the *Imām*, the *qādi* or by the community at large. The Khawārij argued that if the people could exercise the function of the delegation of divine law on their own, then there would be no need for an *Imām*.\(^2\) If the people could not solve their problems, then they should appoint an *Imām*.\(^3\) Thus the Khawārij justified both the presence and the absence of an *Imām* according to the degree of moral sanctity that prevailed in the community at any particular time.

The Khawārij gave the following four reasons why *Imamate* was not always needed:


1. The Imam might not be able to maintain contact with his subjects.

2. The Caliph or Imam had to possess certain qualifications. It was quite probable that at one time a qualified candidate could not be found and a problem might thereby arise. The problem would be the election of a Caliph who might not be able to fulfill the conditions thus disobeying the laws of the Qur'an.

3. The Caliphate might give rise to civil war.

4. It was not certainly known whether the Prophet had made any provisions for the Caliphate because the Qur'an was silent on that.\footnote{1}

Later on, the Kharijites realized that the Caliphate was not necessary because of religious obligation, but to maintain order in the community and to achieve development. They called their Imam the commander of the believers; Imam, Khalifa, \textit{Kalib-al-hagg}, i.e. the seeker of truth; \textit{'Imam of Resistance'}, etc.\footnote{2}

\footnote{1}Ibid.

\footnote{2}Ibid., p. 54.
Means Whereby an Imam is Instituted:

The Imam is instituted by means of election. He was duly elected as an Imam by certain notable leaders under the presidency of a more able leader who debated on the merits of the various candidates for the office of Imamate. He who had the greatest number of merits was elected to the position. The candidate duly elected was given allegiance by the electors. He was then proclaimed an Imam. Consequently the assembled crowds in turn gave their allegiance.

Bay'a (the pledge of allegiance) was of great importance to the Khawarij. It not only instituted the Imam but it also instituted the rule of God. To them it was God who governed through the Imam. ¹

Number of Imams at One Time: According to the Khariji doctrine of Imamate, even two Imams at one

¹Ibid.
time could hold the position of Imamate, one to lead in prayer and the other in war.¹

Race or Tribe of the Imam: The Khawārij believed in the awarding of Imamate to the best man, 'let him be an Abyssinian slave'.² They acknowledged the Imamate of any one who would act justly and avoid tyranny and would not change his manners and depart from truth. According to them the Imam could be anybody regardless of his race or tribe, provided that he was worthy of it. Hence the Imamate of a tyrant was not approved.³ Thus, on one hand, they asserted their non-conformity, i.e. the obligation on the part of the believers to proclaim as illegitimate the Imam who had gone off the right path. On the other hand they accepted any individual morally and religiously irreproach-

¹Ibid.


able, capable of being raised to the position of an Imam even if he were a black slave.

It follows that unlike the Sunnis, according to whom 'the rule belongs to Quraysh', the Kharijites rejected the Quraysh descent as a condition for Imamate. They argued that on what grounds should Quraysh be given priority over the rest? Was it because of their relation with Muhammad? Then what about Abu Lahab? They concluded that Imamate should only be accorded on the basis of piety and personal merit.¹ Professor E. Salem in his book The Political Theory and Institutions of the Khawarij states that the Khawarij being primarily of Bedouin stock were embittered against Quraysh and watched them with growing jealousy.² By this he meant that due to the above reason the Khawarij disowned the Quraysh supremacy. However, this was not the


²E. Salem, op.cit., p. 56.
only reason. The Khārijites believed in the democratic spirit of Islam which did not justify the superiority of Quraysh over the rest. They believed in the equality of all followers. The one who followed the dictates of the Qur'ān and the Sunna was entrusted with the office of Imamate no matter whether he was from Quraysh, a non-Arab (mawla) or a son of a slave. They tolerated the mawla or the son of the slave as Imam on the basis of the Prophetic Tradition, "O man, obey God even though He sets over you as your ruler a mutilated Abyssinian slave."¹

The inclusion of the right of the mawla in the post of Imamate was against the Bedouin spirit. According to this spirit, the leadership was entrusted to those with seniority of age and nobility of birth. In the first century of the Hijra, none of the Imams of the Khawārij was a mawla. They all were from pure Arab stock. This inclusion of the mawla was justified on the grounds

¹T.W. Arnold, op.cit., p. 49.
that a large number of mawāli joined their camp due to the Khārijites' preaching of equality in treatment.¹

Qualifications of an Imām: The Imām was required to have the strictest devotion to God and fulfil all the religious duties. The necessary qualification of an Imām was piety. The Imām was supposed to lead a blameless life both in official and private capacity.² Furthermore, he was required to have sufficient knowledge of religion and was supposed to rule in conformity with the Qurān and the Sunna.³

Apart from this, knowledge of the law and courage in war were the other necessary qualifications for an Imām of the Khawārij.

As for impeccability, it was not one of

¹E. Salem, op.cit., p. 56.


³P. Smith, op.cit., p. 285.
the qualifications of the Khārijī ʿImām. But if he committed a major sin, he was regarded as a Kāfīr and was punished severely.

The Khawārij maintained that an ʿImām should be a mature male—one whose sex was doubted was debarred from the office. He also should be free from all physical infirmities. According to the Shaʿbīyya (a Khārijī branch) a woman might become a khalīfa.¹

The Khawārij opposed the Shīʿa theory of allocating Imamate to a child. They questioned the capability of a chiād to administer and defend the state when he had no power even over himself.

On the Inheritance of the Office of ʿImām: The Khawārij were strongly opposed to the hereditary succession of Imamate. Their ʿImāms were chosen from different families. But they gave the right to the ʿImām to nominate his successor if he wished

¹W.N. Hegggog, op. cit., p. 194.
to do so, provided the nominee was neither a father nor a son. ¹

Duties of an Imam: The power of the Khārijī Imam was not limited to a charter. The Khawārij said that an Imam should be given the full power to declare war and apply justice. He should enforce the law directly and refuse to arbitrate. The Imam should lead the troops personally in war and share their fortunes. He should lead in prayer and appoint tax-collectors and governors. He should be the personal representative of the poor; and the poor should be provided for through him from the state treasury. Property without an owner should be given away by him for the benefit of the state. His duty was to prevent the spread of the heretic ideas of desenterers who might endanger the pure doctrine.²

Thus the duty of the Khārijī Imam was two-fold. He was responsible to the people and respon-

¹E. Salem, op.cit., p. 59
²Ibid.
sible to God. If he failed in his duty, the people had the right to depose him in theory and in practice.

They, unlike the Sunnis, held that one could not obey the Imam who deviated from the Law of God. They believed that leadership was instrumental in directing the man's efforts toward the moral goals. So, if the Imam violated the Will of God, he and his followers would seal their doom in the next world. Eternal salvation depended upon the choice of the Imam, for if the leader was just and pious his people would follow his example and save their souls.

From the above discussion it follows that the Khawarij represented the extreme left — if

1 Ibid.

2 Ibid., p. 55.

3 It seems necessary at this point to clarify what was meant by 'extreme leftist concept'. With respect to the necessity of the institution of Imamate the position taken by the orthodox Muslims was the middle, in that they accepted the Caliph to be the religious head who would see to it that the principles of Shari'a were abided. The Shi'a were right if the Sunnis, in that they were more concerned with the spiritual powers and the metaphysical aspects of the Imam and his absolute necessity for the Muslims. Whereas the Khawarij were at the polar extreme rejecting the view that Imamate was absolutely necessary.
we can say so - of the Muslim political theory. Instead of confining the office of Imamate in any one family or tribe, they held that any pious Muslim was eligible for this office even if he were a black slave. They further separated themselves from the other Muslim sects by upholding that Imamate was not a matter of religious obligation and that the community could do without an Imam and fulfil all the religious obligations. On the other hand they also upheld that when under peculiar circumstances it might be found convenient or necessary to have an Imam, then he might be elected and he should have certain qualifications. But, if he were found in any way unsatisfactory or did not fulfil the precepts of their stern religious creed, then he would be deposed or put to death.

The Concept of Imamate in Shi‘ism

The Arabic word Shi‘a signifies 'a party' or 'a group of followers'.

According to Ibn Ḥazm, the Shi‘a (originally the Shi‘a of ‘Alī) are those who believe that the right of succession to the Prophet belongs only to his progeny (ahl al-bayt). They follow the family of the Prophet as their source of inspiration and guidance for the understanding of the revelation revealed by the Prophet.¹

It is a historical fact that after the death of Muḥammad, Abū Bakr was elected as the first Caliph while ‘Alī was engaged in the funeral ceremony. Although the majority of the Muslims swore allegiance to Abū Bakr, there was a small group of men like Salmān al-Fārisī, Abū Dharr al-Ṣḥifārī and al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad who sided with ‘Alī.²

During the reign of the first three Caliphs (Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān), ‘Alī's


followers led a quiet life. When ‘Alī was appointed as the fourth Caliph, the Shi‘a (party) of ‘Alī became crystallised.¹ It follows that Shi‘ism was not a late revolt against the established Orthodoxy.

There is no evidence that Muḥammad left a written will regarding his successor. It was said that on his death-bed the Prophet expressed a desire to prepare a will but ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb had objected to it by saying, "Surely the man talks nonsense², sufficient for us is the book of God".³ The Shi‘a maintain that the testament, had it been written, would have included a reference to the Prophet’s successor. But, that ‘Umar prevented such a happening because he feared that the Prophet would designate ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (a


²This is Merric’s translation of the Arabic verb yakūnhū which means ‘he speaks unconsciously due to illness’.

cousin to the Prophet). ¹

Moreover, ʻAlī had a powerful enemy in ʻA'isha, the favourite wife of the Prophet. She hated ʻAlī because of his insinuations against her chastity.² Since she had been present during her husband's last illness, it was justifiably presumed by the Shi'a that she had an opportunity to suppress any declaration from the Prophet regarding ʻAlī as his successor.³

¹Ibid.

²Once ʻA'isha accompanied Muḥammad in an expedition against Banu al-Mustalik. On the return from the expedition, at a halt before Medina, ʻA'isha who had gone a little way from the camp to satisfy a natural need, dropped a necklace. She spent some time searching for it. Before she could arrive, the whole caravan moved off. Eventually, she was escorted back byṢafwān ibn Mu'aṭṭal al-Sulamī. In the circumstances of the time, this was highly improper. Gossip was magnified. A number of companions of the Prophet including ʻAlī doubting the chastity of ʻA'isha, advised Muḥammad to divorce her. At length Muḥammad received a revelation (Qur'an, XXIV:ii ff.) implying her innocence. From that time onward ʻA'isha always bore grudge against ʻAlī. For reference see, W.M. Watt, "ʻA'isha", The Encyclopaedia of Islam, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960), Vol. I.

If the hereditary right had been taken into account, 'Alī would have had the right to claim the office of Imamate. But the Arab custom never allowed the right to succession through heredity.

Prior to Muhammad's death, Abū Bakr and 'Umar were stated to have made a league, the first article of which was to set aside 'Alī.1 The weight of the opposing faction which had the majority was too strong for 'Alī and the rival party turned the scale in his favour.

The Proofs of the Designation of 'Alī as Imam:

According to the Shī'ā, Imamate was fundamentally a matter of the foundation of the religion of Islam which the Messenger may not neglect

or overlook or leave to the assembly of people to decide.¹

The Prophet cared so much for his followers that he taught them the things regarding purification and impurity, and other things of very little importance. It is impossible to conceive that being so wise he overlooked the most important matter such as that of Imamate.²

The Shi'a argue that the Prophets who came to the world to guide humanity would not leave the world before designating their successors. So how could Muḥammad leave his people without appointing a successor?³

Some explicit proofs of the Prophet's nass⁴


²Ibid.

³Al-Majlisî, op.cit., p. 19.

⁴The doctrine of the divinely inspired appointing of 'Alī and his descendants is called nass.
(designation) on 'Alī are pointed out by the Shī'ā. According to a Tradition, when the Prophet was returning from his last pilgrimage to Mecca, he alighted at the pool (Ghadīr) of Khumm at noon. There, taking 'Alī's hand he said to the assembled mass, "Let whoever owns me as his master (mawla), own 'Alī as his master (mawla)". The Shī'ā interpret mawla as lord, consequently.

The Sunnī jurist al-Bāqillānī has refuted the above Tradition by interpreting mawla as a neighbour, or a releaser of a slave or an ally. According to the Shī'ā, it is impossible to conceive that the Prophet should stand in that time of excessive heat and call the people and inform them of the things which did not have any value for them such as, 'whoever was his neighbour or releaser of his slave, etc. was 'Alī's likewise'. So the refutation of the above Tradition by al-Bāqillānī seems to be the justification of the fait

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2 Al-Hillī, op.cit., p. 75.

3 Supra, p. 16.
accompli of the Sunnis of divorcing 'Alī from his right to succeed the Prophet.

On the same occasion the Prophet is supposed to have said, "I am leaving two things behind me: the Book of God and my descendants. They are tied with a long rope and cannot be separated till the Day of Judgment. Verily if you cling to them you will never go astray".¹

Furthermore, once on the occasion of the feast of 'Ashūrā the Prophet confirming 'Alī's succession after him announced, "You are my brother and successor in the affairs of my family and the qādī (judge) in my religion".² One of the most significant characteristics of an Imam was righteousness of judgments in accordance with the commands of God.³ This is gathered from the Qur'ān, "O ye who believe! Obey God and obey the Apostle and


²Al-Ḥillī, op. cit., p. 76.

³Ibid.
those charged with authority among you”. The authority mentioned in the above verse was the right to judge and decide. It could be safely said that by declaring 'Alī as his Qādī the Prophet had actually meant that 'Alī was to succeed him.

One of the often cited proofs in the favour of 'Alī is: After returning from the Tabūk expedition in 9 A.H./631 A.D. the Prophet is supposed to have said, "Thou hast the same position from me which Aaron had from Moses, except that there is no Prophet after me." The position which Aaron received from Moses was that of being his successor though he predeceased Moses. Since 'Alī lived after the death of Muḥammad, his succession was confirmed.

From the above discussion it follows that the Shī'a confirmed the designation of 'Alī by the Prophet as the Imām after him.

1IV: 59.


3Al-Hillī, op.cit., p. 76.

4Al-Hilli, op.cit. p. 76.
Imamate in Twelver Shi‘ism

The 'Twelvers' are that branch of the Shi‘a who believes in twelve Imams, (in Arabic, Ithma‘ 'Ashariyya). The twelve Imams were not a group of contemporaries, but supposedly it was Muḥammad who had designated the first one, and after that each one designated his successor. The chronological list of these Imams is the following: 1

1. 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib ... 11-40 A.H./632-660 A.D.
2. Al-Hasan ibn 'Alī ... 40-49 A.H./660-669 A.D.
3. Al-Husayn ibn 'Alī ... 49-61 A.H./669-680 A.D.
4. 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn ibn al-Husays ... 61-92 A.H./
5. Muḥammad al-Baqir ibn 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn ...
   92-114 A.H./ 681-732 A.D.
6. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq ibn Muḥammad al-Baqir ... 114-
   148 A.H./732-765 A.D.
7. Mūsā al-Kāzim ibn Ja'far ... 148-183 A.H./
   765-799 A.D.
8. 'Alī al-Ridā ibn Mūsā al-Kāzim ... 183-203 A.H./
   799-817 A.D.


10. Ṭalī al-Naqī ibn Muḥammad al-Taqī ... 220-254 A.H./835-868 A.D.


12. Muḥammad al-Muntaẓar ibn al-Ḥasan ... 260 A.H./868 A.D.

A variety of views are given concerning the twelfth Imām: (a) he was born in the year that his father died; (b) he was born after his father's death; (c) he was five years old more or less, when his father died.¹ According to Ibn Ḥazm, al-Ḥasan, the eleventh Imām left no children.² The generally accepted view is, the twelfth Imām disappeared from a cellar in Samarra.³

The Twelvers believe that the twelfth Imām whom they referred to as the Mahdī (the di-

¹J.N. Hollister, op.cit., p. 92.


³Samarra is a small principality situated north of Baghdad.
vinely guided), and the Muntazar (the awaited one), has not died but is existing. He has concealed himself in order to escape from his enemies; but will appear on the Day of Judgment.¹

Through a period of seventy years (260–329 A.H./875–940 A.D.) their Imām was represented by four agents (wukalā', sing. wakīl). This period is spoken of as the "Lesser Concealment" (al-Ghayba al-Sughrā). The fourth wakil had declined to name anyone as his successor. The period since then has been known as the "Greater Concealment" (al-Ghayba al-Kubrā).²

The Twelvers accepted Muhammad as the last Prophet and his descendents as the true Imāms. They assumed that the Reality which Muhammad possessed was inherited by his successors (the true Imāms)¹. The Reality of Muhammad has been referred to as the 'Muhammadan Light'.³ According to

¹J.N. Hollister, op.cit., p. 92.
²Ibid., p. 95.
³S.H. Nasr, op.cit., p. 162.
both Sufism and Shi'ism there is a Prophetic Light which has existed from the beginning within the being of every prophet from Adam downwards. It is the source of all prophetic knowledge and is identified with the Muhammadan Reality.  

Elucidating this "Light" De Boer stated, "This light is to be thought of in the sense of the Religious knowledge, of the truth which God communicated through his Prophet to his creature. This Light emanated through Adam via Muhammad into the family of 'Alî'. It follows that Muhammad's progeny inherited the Muhammadan Light. So, as far as the religious knowledge was concerned, the position of the Imam and that of the Prophet was equal. The Twelvers stated it very clearly through linking Muhammad with the Imam, e.g. "Allah did not create any created thing more excellent than Muhammad and the Imam."  

1S.H. Nasr, op. cit., p. 162.


of creation for the Prophet and for the people of his house (ahl al-bayt)\textsuperscript{1}

The Imām and the Prophet were placed on equal footing because of the presence of the 'Light' but they differed in their function. The Prophet's task was to divulge the plain revelation (tanzīl) to the people, whereas the Imām was allotted with the function of interpreting the plain revelation (taʿwīl). This could be assumed from the following citation: "The office of the Imām is like that of the Prophet in that each has the function of complete authority over all the followers of the faith in matters of the religion and of the state."\textsuperscript{2}

The Necessity of the Imām

The Twelvers maintained that without an Imām the religion would perish,\textsuperscript{3} because, through

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid.


the Muhammadan Reality in him, he could guard the Law revealed by the Prophet and protect it from alternation or misinterpretation and from modification.¹

Imamate was an actual necessity for God Himself.² One of the attributes of God was kindness, and therefore He willed that people should forsake evil and turn towards Him. The most appropriate person for guiding the people to this Will of God was the Imam, who, due to his divine powers, knew everything.³ Thus he would be the most appropriate person for guiding others.

In accordance with the above mentioned necessities an Imam could never disappear completely from the world. Even if he concealed himself temporarily for reasons best known to him, the people benefitted from him in the same way they benefitted from the sun when it was concealed by a cloud.⁴

¹Ibid.
²Al-Majlesi, op.cit., p. 1
It is understood from this that even if the Imam was hidden, he never ceased showering his blessings upon his followers.

The qualification of the Imam

One of the qualifications of the Imam was immunity to sin.¹ The Twelvers argued that the Imam was needed to guard the Law and restrain the oppressor from oppression. If he were not immune to sin, there would be no security against addition and loss, or changes in the Law. And he would not be able to restrain the oppressor from oppression because, everyone who is not immune to sin is unjust (zālim), and nothing unjust is proper for Imamate.²

Secondly, an Imam should be a descendant of the Prophet through Fatima and 'Ali because God had devolved a mass (designation) on them (Imams).³

¹Al-Hilli, op.cit., pp. 64-66.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 68.
Thirdly, it was necessary that the Imam be the best among the people of his period, because he took precedence over all.¹

The duties of the Imam were: to interpret Law to the people; to guide them to obey the Law; to teach them to follow the right path and to intercede on behalf of the people on the Day of Judgment.²

Thus Imamate according to the Twelvers Shī'a is a divine office specified by God to guide mankind. The Imam who inherited the Muhammadian Reality from the Prophet could be installed in office by the Prophet only. The first Imam appointed by the Prophet in his turn appointed his successor according to the Will of God. Hence Imamate passed from father to son by nass (designation). Secondly the Imam should be infallible and impeccable. So, neither an ordinary fallible person could be raised to the office of Imamate, nor could he be

¹Ibid.
²Al-Hilli, op.cit., p. 68.
elected as Imam because the infallibility of the Imam could be known only to an infallible person. Finally, religion perishes without the existence of an Imam. So he will always be present in the world. Sometimes he conceals himself but even in concealment, his followers benefit from him, as it was stated above.

The Zaydiyya Sect

As early as 92 A.H./710 A.D. the Shi'a were divided into a number of branches. One of the offshoots was the Zaydiyya. The sect derived its name from Zayd ibn 'Alī Zayn al-'Abidīn. Al-Baqir was designated as Imam by his father 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn. Al-Baqir's brother Zayd seceded from him as a result of an argument in which Zayd had asserted that the Imam was obliged to justify his cause by the force of arms if necessary. Due to the refusal of his challenge by al-Baqir, Zayd drew

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away from his side and took up arms at Kufa against the 'Umayyad government (122 A.H./740 A.D.) declaring his claim to the Imamate. He was killed in the revolt. After his death, the Zaydiyya claimed the Imamate, for his son Yahyà who was commonly known as 'the Pure Soul' (al-Nafs al-Zakiyya).\(^1\)

Imamate in the Zaydiyya sect continued up to the present day. Today the Zaydiyya are chiefly found in Yemen adhering to the Imamate of Muhammad al-Badr ibn Ahmad ibn Yahya who is one of the descendants of the Prophet.

The Concept of Imamate in the Zaydiyya Sect

Strothmann calls the Zaydiyya "the practical group" of the Shi'a because it does not confine the Imamate to one family.\(^2\) The Zaydiyya maintain that Imamate is permissible in all the descendants of 'Alî, as far as they go forth

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appealing to the Book and the Sunna and carrying a sword with them.  

They do not distinguish between the sons of al-Hasan and al-Husayn but they stipulate that the candidate for the Imamate must be a descendant of 'Ali ibn Abi Ṭalib and Fāṭima.  

It follows that they reject the principle of nass (designation). Hence it is assumed that they do not believe in the hereditary succession of the Imāms.

The Zaydiyya maintain that the candidate who proves his skills to be a warrior in both offensive and defensive combat, achieves the pontifical seat.

Moreover, the Zaydi Imam cannot claim allegiance unless he claims his Imamate publicly. It follows, therefore, neither can a child nor can a concealed Mahdi (guide) be considered as an Imam. The insistence on the ability to fight means

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1 I. Friedlaender, op.cit., p. 74.
2 J.N. Hollister, op.cit., p. 323.
3 M.W. Watt, op.cit., p. 169.
a stronger warrior may displace an already recognized Imam. The Zaydiyya agree with the above view, and assert that if the former (the stronger warrior) can oust his predecessor, the latter's deposal or abdication is recognized as legal. In case of any turn in the tide, the deposed Imam can return. 1

The Zaydiyya consider their Imam to be God's Caliph or Viceroy. His duty is to know and administer the set of rules revealed by God. 2

The necessary qualifications for the Imam are: He must be "a male, freeborn, a tax-payer, sound in mind and in possession of all his senses, sound in limb and free from all physical blemishes, just, pious, generous, possessed of administrative ability, of the family of `Alî (cousin of Muḥammad and his son-in-law), of the family of Fāṭima, (daughter of Muḥammad and `Alî's wife), brave and a militant jurist". 3

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1 R. Strothmann, op.cit.
The Zaydiyya admit the possibility of two Imams at the same time if Geography requires it to be necessary.\footnote{A.S. Tritton, \textit{The Rise of the Imams of San'a}, (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), p. 125.} According to Strothmann, the Zaydiyya recognize the existence of several Imams at one time. They have an Imam of war in addition to one of knowledge.\footnote{R. Strothmann, \textit{op.cit.}}

Since the Zaydiyya do not recognize the principle of nass (designation), it is presumed that they will always have some one among the descendants of the Prophet to adhere to as their Imam.
CHAPTER II

IMAMATE IN ISMĀ’ĪLISM

The Concept of Evolution in Ismā’īlism

Ja’far al-Ṣādiq was the fifth lineal descendant of the Prophet. At his death in 148 A.H./765 A.D. his followers could not agree upon his successor to the Imamate. One party upheld his son Abdallāh known as Ismā’īl.¹ The other party said that Ja’far al-Ṣādiq had made a second nomination and that he had chosen his fourth son Mūsā to succeed him.² Those who upheld Ismā’īl as the rightful Imām and after his death recognized his son Muhammad as the next Imām were called


Ismā'īlīs. ¹

The Ismā'īlīs assert that God is necessary by Himself and hence He is not in need of another for His existence. He is unique by His essence. Nothing is like Him, He has no opposite or equivalent. ² "God has by His own nature a Volition. This Volition necessarily exists by virtue of the existence of God". ³ This Volition is also known as the Word (Kalima) or the Will of God. ⁴ It is said in the Qurʾān, "Verily when He intends a thing, His command is 'Be and it is'". ⁵ The word 'Be', according to the Ismā'īlīs, is the Divine Will. All the creations that came into existence were through the creative Volition of God. God became conscious of Himself as a Creator; this


²Qurʾān, CXII.


⁵XXXVI: 82.
fact necessitated the existence of creation.\(^1\)

The first being that came into existence through the Word of God was the First Intellect (al-\('\text{Aql al-Awwal}\)). It is also known as the Universal Reason. "The First Intellect was brought into being not through emanation but through \(\text{ibdā'}\) an act of complete creation at once having no previous similitude to itself".\(^2\) Al-Kirmānī one of the Fātimid savants states, "It is in the nature of the emanating being that it is of the same kind as that from which it has emanated. Consequently, God would be plural not one. Secondly, the emanating being would be simpler than that from which it emanated, i.e. than God, for the emanating being would be one thing, whereas that from which it emanated would be, before emanation took place, two things: namely, that which would emanate, and that from which it would emanate. Now, what is

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simpler and less in plurality is more genuine (ashraf). Therefore, the emanating being would be prior to that from which it emanated; for the former would not be plural, while the latter would be. Thirdly, emanation can take place only if that from which the emanating being has issued was complete." God - according to the Isma'ili belief - has no attributes. He is beyond sense, beyond time. In Nasir-i-Khusraw's words, "He is above existence or non-existence".

The First Intellect preceded every creation, because "it came into existence directly by the creative Volition without any intermediary". From the First Intellect emanated the Second Intellect which is called al-Nafs al-Kulliyya (the Universal Soul). From the Second Intellect the


3 N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 6.

Third Intellect emanated. In this way the rest of the seven Intellects successively emanated one from the other making ten Intellects.\footnote{W. Ivanow, "An Isma'\'\i\'litic Work", \textit{The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society}, 1931, p. 542.}

In the physical world each of these Intellects manages the affairs of one celestial sphere. The First Intellect manages the affairs of the Sphere of spheres; the Second Intellect of the sphere of the Fixed Stars; the Third one of the sphere of Saturn; the Fourth one of the sphere of Jupiter; the Fifth one of the sphere of Mars; the Sixth one of that of the sun; the Seventh one of the sphere of Venus; the Eighth one of the sphere of Mercury; the Ninth one of the sphere of the moon; and the Tenth one manages the affairs of the Terrestrial World.\footnote{N. \=Tus\=\i, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 10. See also S. Makarem, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 172.} The Tenth Intellect is the material cause of the World. It is the cause of the realm of nature which comprises the minerals, plants, animals and human beings.
The Ismāʿīlīs believe that from the evolution point of view the lowest created realm is that of the minerals. In minerals the excellence culminates in coral. It belongs to both minerals as well as plant. "It resembles minerals by its petrification and plants by being a tree that grows in the depth of the sea having roots and stretched branches".¹ Thus coral deserves the highest rank in the realm of minerals and the lowest in the realm of plants.

Next to the minerals come the plants. They have an intermediary position between minerals and animals; that is, they are above the inorganic state which characterizes the minerals but they do not possess complete sensitivity and motion which characterizes the animals.² The characteristic which is common in both plants and animals is the power of growing. Among plants, the date-palm has the highest rank because the characteristic of the


²S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 192.
animal realm (i.e. the distinct division into male and female) is found in it.¹ The Prophet is sup-
posed to have said honouring the above tree,
"Honour your paternal aunt, the date-palm, for she
was created from what remained of Adam's clay".²
These characteristics in the date-palm represent
the acme of perfection in plants and the beginning
of contiguity with the animal region.

The common characteristics shared by both
plants and animals are the accretive and sensitive
souls.³ In addition to those characteristics the
animals possess the power of movement.

The excellence culminates in the schooled
horse and falcon. Because after training the mere
observation of action suffices as instruction for
these (horse and falcon) animals. Thus when they

¹S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 64; and see
also N. Ṭūsī, Akhlāq-e-Nasirī, trans. by G.M. Wickens,

²N. Ṭūsī, op.cit., p. 45; see also S.N.
Makarem, op.cit., p. 193.

³Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Rasā'il Ikhwān Al-Ṣafā',
see a thing they perform the like of it by mimicry.¹
This is the utmost of the animal degrees, and the
first of the degrees of Man is contiguous therewith.

Thus, in the Terrestrial World, i.e., the
Earth, the most perfect production of the process
is Man, who comprises all the characteristics of
minerals, plants and animals, and in addition to
that, "the imaginative and rational souls."² In
Man there are various gradations. The highest
rank amongst men is of those who, without the in-
termediary of bodies, by revelation and inspiration,
receive knowledge of truths and laws from the Divine
Majesty.³ To this category belong the Proclaimers
(al-Nuṭaqāʾ) of the religions of the world. Thus
the evolution which begins from mineral, culminates
in Man.

¹N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 46.
²Al-Kirmānī, Rahat al-ʿAql, p. 337, cited
in S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 194.
³N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 46.
According to the Ismāʻīlī eschatology, the evil-doers after death are decomposed both in body as well as in soul in the grave from which they rise in the form of vapour. This vapour returns to the earth and is changed in the plants which are then eaten by the animals. Thus from the realms of plants they are transformed to the realm of animals. The evil-doers who deserve greater punishment are transformed into the minerals after their decomposition in vapour.\(^1\) On the other hand if a man receives influence from the Ṣātiq, he is brought in association with the Kalima (the Divine Word).\(^2\) In this way the original union is re-constituted.

Thus, in order to distract mankind from evil and reconstitute the original union, the Ismāʻīlīs believe that the knowledge of God was given


to man in stages.\footnote{S.N. Makarem, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 183.} This belief is based on the Qur'\textsuperscript{ā}nic verse:

"Man we did create from a quintessence (of clay); Then we placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest firmly fixed; Then we made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; Then of that clot we made a (foetus) lump; Then we made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; Then we developed out of it another creature."\footnote{XXIII: 12-14, see also S.N. Makarem, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 183.}

Corresponding to the six stages in the creation of a human-being according to the above verse of the Qur'\textsuperscript{ā}n (clay, sperm, clot of congealed blood, foetus, bones clothed with flesh, and the creature), there have been six cycles or stages (sing. \textit{dawr}, plu. \textit{adwar}) by which humanity received the knowledge of God. Those six cycles are: the cycles of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Mu\textsuperscript{ḥ}ammad. The creation of religion came to completion in the sixth cycle. After the end of the sixth cycle, Mu\textsuperscript{ḥ}ammad ibn Ismā\textsuperscript{ā}l inaugurated the cycle of
"Smaller Resurrection." The function of the Imāms of that cycle (of the Smaller Resurrection) was not to preach new knowledge to mankind but to prepare them for the "Greater Resurrection". ¹

In the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlī hierarchy, the Naṭiq (Proclaimer) is compared to the First Intellect ² which was the first creation from the Divine Will. It should be noted that the motive of the Fāṭimid doctors who propounded the theory of the Ten Intellects which was made to fit Ptolemy's (beg. IIC.A.D.) System of the Universe was only to show the importance of the religious hierarchy of the Fāṭimid Ismāʿīlīs. According to that hierarchy, the Naṭiq is given the position of the First Intellect in the Intelligible World, and the Sphere of spheres in the physical world. The Naṭiq is known by various titles, e.g., the Preceding (al-Sābiq); the Apparent (al-Zāhir); the Re- vealer (al-Munazzil). ³ The Naṭiq's function is to

¹S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 184.

²S.N. Makarem, "The Philosophical Significance of the Imām in Ismāʿīlism", to be published in Studia Islamica.

teach the plain revelation. This belief is based on the Qur'an, "O Prophet truly we have sent thee as a Witness, a Bearer of glad tidings and Warner".¹

The Bearer of glad tidings and a Warner' signify the plain teaching of the commandment of God. The Nātīq gives the plain revelation only because mankind is not yet ripe enough to appreciate the wisdom contained in transcendent realities.²

Every Nātīq is accompanied by a Wāsī (regent or the executor of the Will). He too is known by various titles, e.g. the Foundation (al-Asās); the Universal Soul (al-Nafs al-Kulliyya), the Second Intellect (al-'Aql al-Thānī), the Silent (al-Sāmit).³ The designation of the above titles to the Wāsī points out his functions: to interpret the plain revelation (al-Ta'wīl), and to carry

¹XXXIII: 45


³The Wāsī is known as Sāmit (silent) because he does not function during the time of the Nātīq. See, Abū Ishāq Quhistānī, op.cit., p. 32.
on the religious teaching of the Nātiq without making any changes. The office of the Wāsī always remains with the descendants of the first Nātiq. The basis of this belief is the Qur‘ān, "God did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham and the family of 'Imrān above all people, offspring one of the other...".

The Imām possesses the third rank in the Fātimid Isma‘īlī hierarchy. His task is to carry on the interpretation of the revelation given by the Wāsī and to lead the Community. The above three ranks, i.e., the Nātiq, the Wāsī and the Imām are in reality three functions of one single rank namely that of Imamate in its broader sense. In order to assist the Imām in carrying on the interpretation of the revelation and attract the proselytes, there are Missionaries who are all neatly arranged in a gradation. The highest posi-

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1 Ibid.

2 III: 33-34.

3 S.N. Makarem, Ash-Shāfiya, op.cit., p. 197.
tion amongst the Missionaries is called the Gate (al-Bāb). After that comes the Proof (al-Hujja); the third one is the Missionary of the Message (Dā'ī al-Balāgh); The fourth one is the Missionary-General (al-Dā'ī al-Muṭlaq) and the fifth one is the Limited Missionary (al-Dā'ī al-Maḥdūd).¹

Every Nātiq has opponents and enemies open and hidden who try to extinguish his religion as well as try to destroy him physically.²

The period before Adam was the stage of Revelation when the divine knowledge was actually revealed to the people. The period of Revelation was terminated by the period of Concealment after the proclamation of Adam as the first Nātiq of the period of Concealment. According to the Nizārī Ismā'īlī belief, this period of Concealment will end in 360,000 years after which the Qā'īm will manifest himself. That will be the Day of Resurrection. On that day God will become visible to all; so no one will need indirect information

¹S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 198.

through others. The period of Concealment which consists of seven cycles is known as Aeon (*kawr*) which is a period from Adam to the Resurrection.2

**The Cycle of Adam:**

According to the Ismā'īlī belief there was no such time when man did not exist. Tūsī argues that when a new period begins in the history of the world the whole constitution of the people and their ways of living including their religion change. All the people who live during that period are called after the founder of that period.3 So, Adam being the first creation means he was the first one to proclaim the religion of Concealment.

Adam was the last *Imām* of the cycle of Revealing (*Kashf*) which preceded his (Adam's) cycle.

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1Abū Isḥāq Qūhistānī, *op.cit.*, p.39.
3*N. Tūsī, op.cit.*, p. 39.
of Concealment. When Adam was appointed as the Nātiq of the new cycle he was ordered by God not to divulge the wisdom of truth to anyone. The religion of Adam which consisted of the formal prescriptions of the new Sharī'a was found difficult for the disciples of the Qā'im. Hence the opposition started. The disciples were made silent by God's command, (saying), "I know what you know not".

All the disciples accepted this command except Ḥārith ibn-Murra, i.e. Iblīs, who was one of the dā'īs (preacher) during the period before Adam. He (Iblīs) rejected the command saying, "I know the essence and substance of the da'wa


2Al-Qā'im was the Nātiq of the cycle of Revealment which preceded that of Adam. See, N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 69.

3Qurʾān, II: 30.

(mission) which Adam is carrying, and have no need of putting my neck under the yoke of obedience."

Adam's fall mentioned in the Qur'an and the Old Testament seems, for the Ismā'īlīs to be an allegory. The tree which Adam was not supposed to touch symbolized the knowledge of the Resurrection. Adam was not supposed to divulge this knowledge to anyone till the destined time. Adam, lured by the words of Ḥārith ibn Murra, revealed the secret of the Resurrection to the people, i.e. he ate the fruit of that tree. Because of this disobedience, he fell into the abyss of the punishment of Qā'im. But Adam acknowledged his sin, so his apology and repentence were accepted. The paradise in which Adam lived symbolized the mission work. Adam was in the highest grade of the mission work which was

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1N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 69.

2II: 36.

3Gen., 3.

4B. Lewis, op.cit., p. 693.
called Taʿyīd (divine assistance). His fall means his subsequent relegation to the lower rank of Taʿlīm (teaching). ¹

Adam's commitment of the sin and his repentance happened at the end of the cycle of Revelation. The cycle of Concealment had not started as yet. ²

During Adam's cycle, Abel (Adam's son) was appointed by God as Adam's wasī. After the murder of Abel by his brother Cain, Seth (Adam's son) who was Adam's Asas (foundation) assumed the office of Imamate after Adam's death. ³ After the death of Seth, the Imamate continued in his descendants. The rest of the Imam of the cycle of Adam after Seth were: Enosh, son of Seth; Kenan, son of

1Ibid.


Enosh; Mahalalel, son of Kenan; Jared, son of Mahalalel; Enoch, son of Jared; Methuselah, son of Enoch; and Lamech, son of Methuselah.  

As stated before, every Nātiq had an adversary. Adam's adversary was Ḥūrīth ibn Murra (Iblīs).  

The Cycle of Noah

With the death of Lamech (son of Methuselah) ended the cycle of Adam. The initiator of the second cycle to teach the plain revelation to the people was Noah, the son of Lamech. The famous deluge took place during Noah's period when he was ordered by God to build an Ark. The Ark symbolises the knowledge of religion which Noah was sent to teach. His Asās (foundation) was his son Shem. After the death of

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1 S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 201; the names of Adam's descendants are also mentioned in Gen., 5:29.
2 Qur'an, II:36; N.Tūsī, op.cit., p. 151.
3 Gen., 5:29.
6 Abū Ishāq Qūhistānī, op.cit., p. 32.
Shem, the Imamate continued in his descendants. The Imāms after Shem were: Arpachshad, son of Shem; Shelah, son of Arpachshad; Eber, son of Shelah; Peleg, son of Eber;⁠¹ Reu, son of Peleg; Serug, son of Reu; Nehor, son of Serug; and Terah, son of Nehor.⁠²

The opponent of Noah was Og, son of Anak.⁠³ He was the king of Bashan.⁠⁴

The Cycle of Abraham

The inaugurator of the third cycle was Abraham. After Abraham's death the position of Prophethood and Imamate were separated and each was assumed by one for the two branches of Abraham's family.⁠⁵ Imamate was separated from Prophethood

⁠¹ Shem's descendants up to Eber are mentioned in Gen., II:10-26.

⁠² S. N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 90.

⁠³ Ibid.,

⁠⁴ Joshua, Bible, 12:4-5.

⁠⁵ N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 151.
due to the "occurrence of a period of stagnation at the time of which the true Imam (Mustaqarr)\(^1\) would go under concealment and entrust the Imamate to a Trustee Imam (Mustawda').\(^2\) It is presumed from this that the people at this period were not fit to digest the inward knowledge of religion preached by the Nātiq. Hence Imamate and Prophethood were separated.

Abraham's son Ishmael, and his descendants were entrusted with the Imamate\(^3\) which dealt with the inward knowledge of religion. Thus Ishmael and his descendants came to be known as the Permanent Imāms (al-Mustaqarrūn). Abraham's son Isaac and his descendants were entrusted with

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\(^1\) The word Mustaqarr is derived from the verb Istaqarra which means to settle down. Mus-taqarr is the noun of place. It means the place where something settles down. Therefore, the Mustaqarr Imam means the Imam in whom the Will or the Word of God has settled down, see S.N. Makarem, op.cit., pp. 150-151.


\(^3\) N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 151.
Prophethood which dealt with the outward knowledge of religion. Hence, Isaac and his progeny came to be known as the Trustee Imāms (al-Mustawda'īn). 1

The Permanent Imāms after Ishmael’s death were: Kedar, son of Ishmael; 3 Hamal, son of Kedar; Salāmān, son of Hamal; Nabat, son of Salāmān; al-Humaysaʿ, son of Nabat; Udad, son of al-Humaysa; and Udd, son of Udad. 3

The Trustee Imāms of Abraham’s cycle were:
Isaac, son of Abraham; Jacob, 4 son of Isaac;
Joseph, 5 son of Jacob; Benjamin, son of Jacob;
Jonah, son of Bējamin; and Shuʿayb. 7

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1 Ibid., pp. 150-151.

2 S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 208. He is also mentioned in Gen., 25:13.


4 He is mentioned in Qurʿān, XIX:49.

5 Ibid., XII.

6 Ibid., XI.

7 Ibid., VII:85-93; XI:84-95; XXVI:176-189; see also S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 209.
The opponent of Abraham was Nimrod. He was the son of Cush, son of Ham. Nimrod claimed to be God and did all he could to make the people pay divine honours unto himself. His claim to be God and his persecution of Abraham are mentioned in the Qur'ān.

The Cycle of Moses

Moses was the Nātiq of the fourth cycle. He was the first Nātiq who was endowed only with Prophethood. Imamate continued in the progeny of Ishmael. Moses was the descendant of Isaac in whose progeny Prophethood continued.

The Foundation (Asās) of Moses was his brother Aaron. He died during the lifetime of

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1N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 151.

2Gen., 10:8-12.


4II:258.

5R. Levy, op.cit., p. 529; Abū Ishāq Quhistānī, op.cit., p. 32.
Moses, so Joshua, the son of Nūn was appointed as the Trustee Regent to Aaron's Posterity.¹ The Trustee Regents who succeeded Joshua were: Job, Ezra, David, Solomon and Zachariah.²

The Permanent Imāms (al-Mustaqarrūn) of the cycle of Moses were: 'Adnān, son of Udd; Ma'add, son of 'Adnān; Nizār, son of Ma'add; Mudar, son of Nizār; Ilyās, son of Mudar; and Mudrika, son of Ilyas.³

The Cycle of Jesus

Jesus inaugurated the fifth cycle. The last Permanent Imām of the cycle of Moses was Mudrika, son of Ilyas. Khuzayma ibn Mudrika was the first Permanent Imām of the cycle of Jesus. The Ismā'īlīs believe that Mary, the mother of

¹N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 150.
Jesus was appointed as a Proof (Hujja) of Jesus by Khuzayma. She was entrusted with the task of preparing the proclamation of Jesus as the fifth Nātiq.¹

The Ismā'īlīs believe that Jesus was the son of Joseph the Carpenter.² This seems to be quite contrary to the established version in the Qur'ān according to which Jesus had no father. The authors of Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā,³ elucidating this point illustrate that the teacher is the father of one's soul. Just as the parent gives the physical form the teacher gives the spiritual form. He nourishes the soul with knowledge and feeds it with wisdom. Hence, Jesus having no father means, he had no tālimī father (teacher).

The Foundation (Asās) of Jesus was Simon Peter. He is also called Sham'ūn al-Ṣafā.⁴ He

¹S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 213.

²Tabṣirat al-‘Avāmī, cited in B. Lewis, The Origin of Ismā'īlism, (Cambridge: W.Heffer and Sons, 1940), p. 44.

³Cited in, B. Lewis, op.cit., p. 46.

⁴N. Ṭūsī, op.cit., p. 150; Abū Ishāq Qūhistānī, op.cit., p. 32.
was the first Trustee Imam of the cycle of Jesus. The Trustee Imams who followed him successively were: John, Abd Saba', Shanūch, Ṭālib, Salama Bahīrah.¹ Bahīrah is the same famous monk of Baṣra who is supposed to have predicted the rise of Muhammad to Prophethood.²

The Permanent Imams of the cycle of Jesus were: Khuzayma, son of Mudrika; Kināna, son of Khuzayma; Al-Nadr, son of Kināna; Mālik son of al-Nadr; Fihr, son of Mālik; Ghālib, son of Fihr; Lu'ayy, son of Ghālib; Ka'b son of Lu'ayy; Murra, son of Ka'b; Kilāb, son of Murra; Qusayy, son of Kilāb; 'Abd Manāf, son of Qusayy; Hāshim, son of 'Abd Manāf; 'Abd al-Muttalib, son of Hāshim; and Abū Ṭālib, son of 'Abd al-Muttalib.³

¹S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 126.
³S.N. Makarem, op.cit., p. 128.
The opponent of Jesus was Pontius Pilate who is also known as Yahūdha.¹

The Cycle of Muḥammad:

Muḥammad inaugurated the sixth cycle of Concealment. Muḥammad's cycle is considered to be the last great cycle. The Shari'a was completed during his period. As mentioned before,² God sent knowledge to human-beings by stages. The sixth cycle was the final one in which the religion was completed. The Qur'ān says, "This day I have perfected your religion and completed my favours on you and have chosen Islam as a religion for you".³ The influx of plain revelation was over after the period of Muḥammad. The task of the Imāms after Muḥammad was to interpret the plain revelation.

The Imāms of the cycle of Muḥammad were:

¹N. Ţūsī, op.cit., p. 151.
²Supra, p. 79.
³V:3.
'Alī, son of Abū Ṭalib; al-Husayn, son of 'Alī; Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, son of al-Husayn; Muḥammad al-Bāqir, son of Zayn al-‘Ābidīn; Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, son of Muḥammad al-Bāqir; and Ismā'īl, son of Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.¹

There has been a great controversy regarding the Imamate of the last Imam of the cycle of Muḥammad. On account of that problem, there was a split in the Shi'a sect.

The fifth Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq designated his son Ismā'īl as the Imam after him in accordance to the principle of Divine designation of Imamate (nass). It was said that Ismā'īl was addicted to drink, therefore, his father revoked the designation and appointed Mūsā al-Kāzim.² The followers of Ismā'īl argue that when a father Imam designates his son to Imamate he fulfills the command of


God. Hence Ja’far’s appointment of Ismā’īl as Imam was in accordance with the command of God. His revoking of the designation implied that God had changed His mind. This however is contrary to the Islamic doctrine of the Perfectness of God. Thus it could be concluded that the designation was not revoked.

The other allusion concerning Ismā’īl is that he predeceased his father. In Ismā’īlī circles his death is considered to be merely a precautionary ruse against the ‘Abbāsids, the ruling dynasty at that time who were always ready to persecute the ‘Alids.

The Ismā’īlīs’ refusal to believe that the death of Ismā’īl preceded that of his father is based on the following incident of which Idrīsī Imād al-Dīn gives an interesting account in Zahr al-Ma‘ānī. According to him Ismā’īl pretended

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3 Idrīsī Imād al-Dīn, op.cit., p. 234.
illness so the people started visiting him. His father (Imām Ja'far) watched the visitors and noted their presence. When the death of Ismā'īl took place (in appearance), he was kept lying covered for three days. While his father noted the presence of those who came to pay him condolences.

Before burying Ismā'īl, Ja'far asked his visitors whether they would testify to his son's death. It was only after they replied affirmatively that Ismā'īl was buried. When the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Mansūr (ruled, 136-158 A.H./755-774 A.D.) came to know of this he was very pleased. The same author further says that after the news of Ismā'īl's death had been confirmed, he (Ismā'īl) appeared in Basra where he performed a number of miracles.

From Ja'far's anxiety about the testimony concerning his son's death it could be surmised that Ja'far had tried to save his son from the clutches of the 'Abbāsid Caliph in a very diplomatic way and Ismā'īl's appearance in Basra proved the fact.

Husayn F. Hamdāni gives a revealing infor-
mation from al-Fara'īd wa Hudūd al-Dīn by Dāʾī Jaʿfar ibn Mansūr regarding the successor of Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq. ¹ He states that Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq had four sons: Muḥammad, Mūsā, 'Abdallāh and Ismāʿīl. The 'Abbāsīd Caliphs during Jaʿfar's period were so powerful that the latter did not reveal the name of his successor—Imām— to all of his followers. A few from among his followers knew that he (Jaʿfar) had designated 'Abdallāh as his successor. Since the enemies of the 'Alīds were powerful, the Imāms descending from Jaʿfar adopted esoteric names to conceal themselves. These esoteric names were: Proof (Hujja), Auspicious (Mubārak), Blessed (Maymūn), Happy (Saʿīd), etc. Likewise, 'Abdallāh the heir-designate of Jaʿfar was called Ismāʿīl. It follows that Ismāʿīl who is supposed to have died prematurely was actually the fourth son of Jaʿfar and not the third one who was the successor—Imām.

The Imamate continued after the death of

'Abdallāh (Isma'īl). The next Imam after 'Abdallāh was his son Muhammad.¹ With Muhammad ended the sixth cycle.

The Trustee Imāms (Mustawdaʿūn) of Muhammad's cycle were: Al-Hasan ibn 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭalib and Muhammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya. Unlike the belief of the Twelvers (Ithnā 'Ashariyya) and other branches of the Shi'a, the Isma'īlīs consider al-Hasan as a Trustee Imām.² Muhammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya the other Trustee Imām³ of Muhammad's cycle was the half brother of al-Husayn ibn 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭalib. Muhammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya was appointed by al-Husayn as the Trustee Imām over his (al-Husayn's) son Zayn al-'Ābidīn who became the Permanent Imām (Mustaqarr) after al-Husayn's death.

The opponent of the Prophet Muhammad was Abū Lahab, his uncle.⁴

³Ibid.
⁴N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 151.
The Cycle of the Smaller Resurrection

Muhammad was the Nātiq of the last great cycle. The Sharī'a (religious laws) was completed with the end of his cycle. The last Permanent Imām of his cycle was Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl. After the cycle of Muhammad began the Cycle of the Smaller Resurrection. The Imāms of that cycle were to reveal the knowledge of God potentially and thereby prepare mankind for the Great Resurrection which would occur when the seventh Nātiq will appear to reveal the Divine Will. According to the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs, this cycle of the Smaller Resurrection and Imamate will continue till the last day when 350,000 years have elapsed.¹

Until the present day Imamate has continued in the progeny of Adam. In The Ever Living Guide, K. 'Alī compiled the genealogical chart of the Imāms of the Nizārī Ismā'īlī branch² which is as follows:

¹Abū Ishaq Quhistānī, op.cit., p. 39.
'Abdallāh (al-Wafī Ahmad, son of Muḥammad ibn Ismāʿīl).

Ahmad (al-Taqī Muḥammad)

Husayn (al-Rādī Abdallāh)

al-Mahdī Muḥammad

al-Qā'im

al-Mansūr

al-Muʿizz

al-ʿAziz

al-Hākim

al-Zāhir

al-Mustansir Bī' llāh I

Nīzar

al-Hādī

al-Muhtadī

al-Qāhir

'Alā dhikrihi al-Salām

'Alā Muḥammad

Khud Jālal al-Dīn Ḥasan

'Alā al-Dīn Muḥammad

Rukn al-Dīn Khūrshāh

Shamsh al-Dīn Muḥammad

Qāsim Shāh
Islam Shāh
Muhammad
al-Mustansir bi'llāh II
'Abd al-Salām
Gharīb Mirzā
Abū Dhārr 'Alī
Murād Mirza
Dhū al-Fiqār 'Alī
Nūr al-Dīn 'Alī
Khalīl Allāh 'Alī I
Nizār II
Sayyid 'Alī
Hasan 'Alī
Qāsim 'Alī
Abū al-Hasan 'Alī
Khalīl Allāh 'Alī II
Shāh Hasan 'Alī (Aga Khān I)
Shāh 'Alī Shāh (Aga Khān II)
Sultān Muhammad Shāh (Aga Khān III)

The present Nizārī Imām is Karīm Agā Khān IV who is the grandson of Agā Khān III. With the exception of him, all the Imāms have succeeded each other from father to son.
Some doubts have been shed on the Imamate of al-Mahdi the eleventh Nizari Isma'ili Imam. According to the author of Ghayat al-Mawalid, al-Mahdi was not the Permanent (Mustaqarr) Imam. He was in reality Sa'id al-Khayr. Secondly, al-Qa'im was not the son of al-Mahdi but the son of the third Imam of the second heptad and al-Mahdi or Sa'id al-Khayr was his Regent (Mustawda').

It is difficult either to approve or disapprove these statements because the Isma'ili history at this period is camouflaged. However, some Isma'ili savants have tried to throw some light on the above problem. Idris 'Imad al-Din states that al-Mahdi was the fourth Imam of the second heptad. According to the genealogy of the Nizari Imams recited by the Nizari Isma'ilis in their daily prayer, Regents have not been included in the list of the Imams of the progeny of the Prophet Muhammad.

1 Al-Khattab ibn Hasan, op.cit., pp. 22-23.

2 Idris 'Imad al-Din, op.cit., p. 260.

From this we may conclude that al-Mahdi who was the fourth Imam of the second heptad could be a Permanent Imam. Husayn ibn Ahmad as well elucidates this problem by stating that Sa'id al-Khayr was the guardian and Trustee Imam of al-Mahdi.\(^1\)

It follows that al-Mahdi and Sa'id al-Khayr were two different persons: the former was the Permanent Imam and the latter was the Trustee Regent.

According to the Isma'ili belief therefore, God has always sent Imams to guide mankind towards Him. For this purpose, six Natiqas were sent to divulge to mankind their divinely revealed knowledge of God, and the teachings of these Natiqas were continued by the Imams who possessed the divine power to interpret this Revelation. Plain revelation ceased to be divulged after the cycle of the sixth Natiq. With the beginning of the cycle of Smaller Resurrection, the Imams revealed potential knowledge of God. This cycle will continue until the seventh Natiq appears to reveal the Divine Will to mankind.

CHAPTER III

The Significance of Imamate in Ismā'īlism

1. Faith as the First Pillar of Ismā'īlism

The Agā Khān III¹ in his address delivered to the Ismā'īlya Mission Conference beautifully shed light on one of the principal fundamental obligations of the Ismā'īlīs. He stated, "Islam and Ismā'īlism are built on İmān and Muʿmin. İmān means faith and Muʿmin means one who has faith."²

Islam, according to the Ismā'īlīs, is based on seven pillars which are: Faith (İmān), Prayer (Salāt), Poor Tax (Zakāt), Fasting (Šawm),

¹ Agā Khān III (according to the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs) was the 48th descendant of the Prophet through his daughter Fātima and the head of one of the principal Ismā'īlī sects commonly known as 'The Agā Khānī Sect'.

² "Extracts from the Address by Hazrat Imam Mowlāna Sultan Muhammad Shah at the Ismā'īlya Mission Conference held in Dar-es-Salamm in July 1945", contributed: M.H. Rashid, Wa'ezin Digest, May, 1961, p. 106.
Pilgrimage (Hajj), Holy War (Jihād), and Ritual Purification (Tahāra). Faith (Imān) is given the formost importance in Ismā'īlism. As stated by the Agā Khān, it is the basis of Ismā'īlism.

Al-Qādī al-Nu'mān, in his celebrated book Dā'ī'im al-Islām gives the following definition of Faith (Imān); "Faith (Imān) is to witness that there is no god but God and Muhammad is His servant and Messenger; to believe in Paradise and Hell, in Resurrection and the Last Day; to believe in the Messengers of God and His Prophet (Rasūl); to believe in the Imāms; to know and acknowledge the Imām of the time; to yield to God's commands; and to obey the Imām".  

In another passage the aforementioned author gives the difference between Islam and Imān. He says, "Imān is accompanied by Islam while Islam may not be accompanied by Imān ....... Islam is

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acknowledgement (Iqār), whereas ʿImān is both acknowledgement (Iqār) and knowledge (Maʿrifah).

Whoever recognizes God, His Prophet and the ʿImām, and asserts this, he is a Muʿmin."  

II. Relation of Faith to Ṫalāya

The same author also calls Faith Ṭalāya which means allegiance or devotion. Ṭalāya to the ʿImāms is considered to be the foremost duty of the Ismāʿīlī creed without which all other pillars and obligations of Faith become invalid. It follows that the foundation of Faith is allegiance (Ṭalāya) to the ʿImān. Shihābud-dīn Shāh clearly states this, "The foundation of Faith is

1The acknowledgement (Shahāda) in Urdu language is referred to as Kalāma. It is the doctrinal formula of the Muslim creed. This profession of faith is, "There is no god but God, Muḥammad is the Apostle of God".


4P.J. Vatikiolīs, op.cit., p. 51.
devotion for the Imam".  

The necessity of Walāya as a fundamental tenet of Faith derives from the fact that the Ismā'īlīs consider allegiance to the Imam the same as allegiance to God.  

The Ismā'īlīs base the above consideration on the verses of the Qur'an, such as, "O ye who believe, obey God, and obey the Apostle, and those charged with authority (Ulū al-amr) among you".  

Ja'far al-Ṣādiq ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥāṣim was asked, "Who are Ulū al-amr?" He replied, "The Imāms from the progeny of Muḥammad".  

It follows that obedience to God is realized only through obedience to the Imam.

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1 Shihabuddin Shāh al-Husaynī, Risāla dar Haqīqati Din, trans. by W. Ivanow, (Bombay: A.A.A. Fyzee, 1933), p. 34.

2 See, Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, op.cit., p. 34.

3 IV: 59.

Further, the Ismā'īlīs believe that God will not accept the prayers of a believer who did not worship Him through his devotion to the Imam of the time even though the believer had worshipped God completely.²

From the belief of the Ismā'īlīs in Walāya, it can be deduced that true Faith emerges from Walāya. And, according to the author of al-Majālis al-Mustansirīyya, Faith becomes perfect only by knowing the Imam of the time.³

It follows that love and obedience of the Imam are the pivots of the Ismā'īlī creed. Let us scrutinize the fact why the Ismā'īlīs attach so much importance to the Imam.

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¹Imām of the time means, the current Imām.

²Al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, Kitāb al-Himma, p. 35.

³Cited in S.N. Makarem, op.cit.
III. The Concept of Imamate in the Nizārī Sect:

Al-Mustansir bi'llāh the sixth Fatimid Caliph had two sons, Nizār and al-Musta'li. After al-Mustansir's death in 487 A.H./1094 A.D., his followers were divided into two factions. The advocates of Nizār stated that he was designated as Imām by his father. Al-Mustansir's death was sudden, and Nizār was not in Cairo. Before he could arrive, al-Afdal, the father-in-law of al-Musta'li, had allegiance sworn to the younger son al-Musta'li.¹ The partisans of Nizār came to be known as Nizārīs.

According to the Nizārī Ismā'īlī belief, the ultimate aim of the entire created world is the recognition of God.² Since God is transcedental, He is beyond human comprehension. But God has by His own nature a volition which exists by virtue of the existence of God.³ This voli-


³S.N. Nakarem, Ash-Shāfiya... p. 167.
tion which is known as the Word or the Will, is the source of all creation. This is stated by Pir Imām Shāh, an Isma'īlī missionary of the tenth/sixteenth century who wrote in Gujrati language: "Aad Thākī ek Suna nipāyā, tāre Suna mān thī Shabda nipāyā."¹ (In the beginning there was nothing, then God created His Word).

The Word or the Will therefore, was the first cause and the first origination. Through it al-‘Aql al-Kullī (the Universal Reason) came into existence. Since al-‘Aql al-Kullī came into existence without any intermediary, it is considered futile to separate al-‘Aql from the Word except in name just as the light of the sun.² It follows that al-‘Aql is both the cause and the caused because its original cause is inherent in it. Therefore, both the Word and al-‘Aql which was the first origination, form one existence.


There does not seem to be any difference between the Origination and the Originator i.e. God and al-‘Aql al-Kulli (The Universal Reason). Because, "by saying Origination we imply that it is one thing, and by that which was originated we imply that it is two things, namely Origination and that which became Originated by the act of Origination, for the act is one thing and the result of the act is another thing; and since it is absurd that anything could be prior to Origination would become like matter which receives it, and this would lead to an existence which is not issued out of Transcendental Quiddity, may He be praised, and consequently, to an existence out of which the existence of both would be issued; and this is absurd, therefore, the Originator (The Source of Origination) is both the Originated and the Origination".\(^1\) It follows that the Originator i.e. God, and the Origination i.e. the Word or the Universal Reason are both the same except they

\(^{1}\text{Al-Kirmānī, Fāhat al-‘Aql, cited in S.N. Makarem, "The Philosophical Significance..."}
both are known by different names.

Since Man is the most perfect production in the Terrestrial world as mentioned before,\(^1\) the Ismā'īlis believe that for the enlightenment of mankind the Word has manifested itself in the human form. The human-being in whom dwells this Word is called the Imam.\(^2\) The Imam therefore, is the manifest form of the Word or the First Intellect (al-'Aṭā' al-Awwal) which is, as aforementioned, the same as God. The above belief is clearly known from the Nizārī literature. Once the Nizārī Imam al-Mustansir bi'llah II (868-880 A.H./1463-1475 A.D.) admonishing his followers said, "It is obligatory and necessary for the true believer to recognize his Creator Who is manifest in this world in the form of a human-being, and see Him here".\(^3\)

\(^1\)Supra, p. 77.


J'afar al-Ṣādiq the fifth Nizārī Imām once replied to a man who asked him whether it was true that on the Day of Resurrection God would become visible to all? "Yes," said he, "He is visible even before that Day. Do you not see Him?" The man who asked the question then replied, "O my Lord, I see thee! Give me permission to tell this (to others) on thy authority." The Imām replied, "Do not tell this to anybody, because people are stupid and ignorant, they shall believe your regarding this as impiety (kufr)."¹

From the collection of Gujrati Hymns by the Nizārī Isma'īlī missionary Fīr Ṣadr al-Dīn (755 A.H./1354 A.D.) we get further proofs of the Isma'īlī concept of Imām. The Fīr says,²

"That which had no colour or form or per-

²The Gujrati text of this hymn is:

Jene rang ne rūp nahi'n,
Nahin Kuchh nām ne thām,
So gupt pargat bhāva.
sonality, name or place, from this Hidden Absolute Being, He became manifest."\(^1\)

In another verse, the same Pīr says,\(^2\)

"God took incarnation for His devotees (His seekers), and creating this universe, established into it. Verily God is indeed the Creator."\(^3\)

For their belief in the manifestation of God on earth, the Ismā'īlīs rely on the Qur'ān which says, "O ye people, verily Proof has come to you from your Lord and we have sent you Manifest Light (nūr Mūbin)"\(^4\). The 'Manifest Light' is interpreted as the Imām.\(^5\) This proves that


\(^2\)The Gujarati text of this hymn is: Bhakt Karan Hari Āviya, Āpe dhari avtar, Rāchna rachhī na vaso vasiyā, Āpe jug kilatār.

\(^3\)Pir Sadr al-Dīn, op.cit., p. 29.

\(^4\)IV: 174.

the Ismāʿīlīs have always cultivated a sense of personal seeking for God in the world Who becomes intelligible in the Imām. There is no higher rank than the Imām. Because God reveals Himself completely in the Imām, whose attributes are the attributes of God and his word is the word of God. He is great by the greatness of God by whose wish a feat impossible by ordinary mortals is made possible. Thus it is possible for him to say, "I am the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, knowing everything".  

Therefore, Nizārī Ismāʿīlism elevates the Imām above the Prophet. Accordingly, the Prophet is equated with al-Nafs al-Kulliyya (The Universal Soul) which emanated from al-ʿAql al-Kullī (The Universal Reason). Hence al-Nafs is subordinate to al-ʿAql from which it emanated. The Prophet's function is to divulge the plain reve-

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1N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 127.

2Qurʾān, LVII: 3

3N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 119.
lation (tanzīl) to his followers. Hence he is both a pupil and a teacher at the same time. He is a pupil because he receives Divine knowledge from al-ʿAql; a teacher because he conveys that message to his followers. Thus the Prophet prepares the people with the knowledge of words (plain revelation) before they could attain the knowledge of the meanings. The elevation of ʿAlī could be judged from the following Traditions cited by the Ismāʿīlīs: 'O, Muḥammad, if not for thy sake, We would not have created this world'.

This means that all was created and came into existence only for Muḥammad's sake. And in another Tradition it is said, "If there were no ʿAlī, We would not have created thee (Muḥammad)".

So, the Imām is at the apex of the Religious hierarchy. He is equated with al-ʿAql al-kullī whereas the Prophet is given the second rank in the Religious hierarchy and equated with

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1 Shihabuddin Shāh, op. cit., p. 8.

2 Ibid.
al-Nafs al-Kulliyya. While the mission of the Apostle of God is intermittent, and is confined to the preaching of canon law only, the Imam is the real Spiritual guide of humanity, the guardian of the Supreme Divine Truth. The Prophet is an ordinary mortal who receives inspiration from al-'Aql (i.e., Imam), whereas the Imam is the inspiration itself and the manifest form of the Divine Volition religiously expressed by the creational command "Be". So the deification of the Imam becomes complet. He becomes consubstantial to God. Thus the Isma'ili see perfection in their Imam.

In order to illuminate the human souls with Divine Light, and make them attain perfection, the Imam must exist at all times.¹ According to the Isma'ili belief, true Imamat is perfect and will never go astray or deteriorate. It will always be preserved in the posterity of 'Ali.²

¹Abū Ishaq Qūhistānī, op.cit., p. 6.
²N. Tūsī, op.cit., p. 130.
Hence, according to Nizārī Ismāʿīlism, there will always be an Imām to guide mankind in an uninterrupted chain. Therefore, the Nizārī Ismāʿīlīs believe that if an Imām dies without leaving a successor, it can only mean that not only he personally, but some of his ancestors were not true Imāms. This being so, one obviously has to look back to the occasion on which a dispute on the succession had taken place. The Nizārīs believe that the Imām-Father by his super-human wisdom knows which of his sons is destined to be his successor and pronounces his irrevocable nass. This act prepares the way for the "Light" (nūr) which is apparently transferred upon the new Imām the moment the previous Imām dies. This is clearly revealed by the Agā Khān IV, who is the present head and Imām of the Nizārī Ismāʿīlī Sect. He said, "Since my grandfather, the last Aga Khān died, I have been the bearer of the Noor (a word which means Light). The Noor

1"The Followers can't sack Aga Khan", South Africa Post, Feb, 1966.

has been handed down in direct descent ..."¹ How this is done, and what is the nature of that "Light" about this there is no information.

The Ismā'īlis identify 'Alī and the current ʿImām as one single light substance,² because all of them possess the same Divine substance. Just as the electric bulbs may be red, blue or green, but the electricity in them remains exactly the same. So there is no great or weak ʿImām. All the ʿImāms of the past, the present and the future are accepted as being of equal standing.

Thus Imamate has always existed in the progeny of Adam since the time of creation. Each ʿImām before his death entrusted the 'Light' or the Word to the next ʿImām, and it will continue to be so till eternity. The Qur'ān says, "And


God created the 'Word' to remain everliving in his progeny.\(^1\) By this perpetual line of succession to the Prophet, generation after generation, the Faith is ensured to remain living forever with development in the path of achieving its ultimate aims. Since the current Imam is all absorbing, by recognizing him a man can acquire supernatural knowledge.

We deem it necessary to clear something at this point. After the death of Shamsh al-Dīn Muhammad (28th Nizārī Imam) there was a split in the Nizārī sect on the question of Immate. One party adhered to Qāsim Shāh ibn Shamsh al-Dīn Muhammad. Hence they came to be known as Qāsim Shāhī. As their Imam is popularly known now as Agā Khān, they are also referred to as Agā Khānīs. In India, Pakistan and East Africa these Ismāʿīlīs are popular as 'Khojas' a Gujrati term which means businessmen.

\(^1\)XLIII: 28.
The other party clung to Shams al-Dīn's other son, Muʿmin Shāh, so they were called Muʿmin Shāhī. According to the version of W. Ivanow,¹ there is practically no difference in the concept of Imamate in these two Nizārī branches. The minor difference lies in the fact that the Qāsim Shāhīs' or Agā Kānīs' emphasize on the continuous existence of the Imam whereas the Muʿmin Shāhī's cannot claim that because their Imamate had become extinct probably by 710 A.H./1310 A.D. The extinction of the spiritual leadership proved, according to the Qāsim Shāhī point of view, that the Muʿmin Shāhī line of Imamate was not genuine.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The faith of Islam revealed to Muhammad in the seventh century A.D. endeavoured to transform the face of Arabia. After his death, the Muslims were rent by dissensions and split into factions on the question of the successor to Muhammad. The reasons for the disagreement were the following:

a. Muhammad was not explicit over his successor. That is to say, he did not appoint clearly his successor after him. He only mentioned some sayings that were interpreted later on by some Muslims to have meant an appointment of a successor such as, the saying: "Ali is the mawla of those whose mawla I am". Others, as it was mentioned previously, interpreted such sayings in another way. They interpreted, for example, the word, mawla to mean a 'supporter', 'defender', 'ally', 'assistant', 'neighbour',

- 125 -
'son-in-law', 'paternal cousin', 'manumitter', 'patron', and 'client', instead of meaning master.

b. This disagreement was aggravated by political, tribal and personal motives.

Each of these factions supported a claimer to the Caliphate or Imamate. The necessity of an Imām was at that time admitted by almost all the Muslims. This necessity was based on reason as well as revelation. No social order is possible unless those limits are observed. Therefore, a leader was required to guard and restrain mankind and compel them if necessary to obey the Law. Also, they felt the necessity of an Imām because it was mentioned in the Qur'ān such as, "O ye who believe! Obey God, and obey the Apostle, and those charged with authority".¹

One of the major disagreement among the five major sects of Islam, namely, the Sunnīs,

¹IV: 59.
the Khawārij, the Twelver Shī'a, the Zaydī Shī'a and Ismā'īlīs, was the concept of Imamate.

To sum up the concept of each of these sects that were discussed lengthily in this work, we can say that to the Sunnīs the Caliph is an ordinary mortal who is elected to enforce the Sharī'ā in the Community. He must be from Quraysh. The institution of Caliphate is not necessarily hereditary. It requires the consent of the Community. The Caliph for the Sunnīs is merely the executor of the Sharī'ā who enforces the Law and makes sure that the Sharī'ā is observed. He also administers the political affairs of the State. He does not function in really substantial spiritual matters. He, therefore, neither occupies any special place with regard to God or Muhammad, nor does he possess any spiritual powers. He only is the leader of the Community.

To the Khawārij, the Imam resembles in many respects the Sunnī concept. Their concept of Imamate differs, however, in two important matters. (a) For the Khawārij, the Imam is not
supposed to be necessarily from Quraysh. (b) He is required to be highly pious and competent.

As for the Zaydi concept of Imam, it also does not differ much from the Sunni concept. However, it differs also in two important points. (a) He should be a descendant of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Fatima. (b) He should prove to be competent, against any one among the descendants of 'Ali who tries to overthrow the existing Imam and instal himself as Caliph.

The Twelver Shi'a concept of Imam is completely different from the above mentioned sects. The Twelver Shi'i Imam is not merely an executor of the Shar'a that was revealed to Muhammad, but he is in charge of interpreting this revelation, i.e. he is in charge of finding the inner meaning of this revelation. Thus, the Imam is the one who points out and teaches, with the help of officials, the inner meaning of the revelation. He is not satisfied with the external meaning of the revelation. The Prophetic reality for the Twelver Shi'a has two meanings, the outer and the inner.
The Prophet was in charge of giving the outer meaning to his people so that they would profit from it. But this does not mean that an inner and deeper meaning of this Sharī'a is not found. It is for the Imām to point out and realize this inner meaning. As the outer dimension of this prophetic reality was exemplified in this world in the person of the Prophet Muhammad, the inner dimension of this Prophetic reality was also exemplified. It was exemplified in the person who was closest to Muhammad, i.e., in the person of 'Alī ibn Abī Tālib who was the first Imām.

However, the Twelver Shī'a believe that Muḥammad himself was both a prophet and an Imām or a wālī, or in other words he had in himself both nubuwwa (prophethood) and walāya (Imamate). Professor H. Corbin explains this by saying, "If we figure these three concepts, i.e., walāya, nubuwwa, and risāla (mission) by three concentric circles, walāya would be represented by the central circle because it is the esoteric meaning of Prophethood. Whereas, prophethood would be represented by the middle circle since it is the
esoteric or the inner meaning of the mission (risāla) of the messenger. This latter would be represented by the outer circle. Every messenger (rasūl) is equally a prophet (nabī) and a wali. As for the wali, he is only a wali. Because wa-la-aya is the heart or the inner meaning. It is more eminent than the outer or the esoteric meaning because the outer meaning is innate in the inner one. Thus, as the mission (risāla) of the messenger of God presupposes the spiritual condition of the nabī, the condition of prophecy in its turn presupposes the wa-la-aya. It follows that wa-la-aya which is the spiritual quality of the wali (friend of God) is more eminent than the quality of the prophet. And this quality of the prophet in its turn is more eminent than the quality of the risāla which is the exterior circle of this reality. The risāla is therefore, like the outer peeling of a fruit, the nubuwwa is like the core, while the wa-la-aya is like the oil derived from this core which constitutes its essence.

But when the Twelver Shi'ā thus affirm the superiority of wa-la-aya over nubuwwa, they do
not mean that the person of the *wali* as such is superior over the person of the *nabi* (Prophet) or that of the *rasul* (messenger). But, they maintain, that these three qualities were present in the same person, namely in the person of the Prophet Muhammad. In such a case *wala*ya had the precedence, since it was the source and the foundation of the other two qualities. However, even though *wala*ya has the precedence over the other two qualities, Muhammad is more superior because he has in his person all the three qualities together. He is a *wali*, a *nabi* and a *rasul*. The disagreement between the Twelver *Shiite* doctrine of Imamate and the *Nizari* *Ismaili* doctrine of Imamate starts from this very point.

In the *Nizari* *Ismaili* sect which is a branch of the *Shi'a*, Imamate is hereditary in the direct and lineal descendants of the Prophet through his daughter Fāṭima and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. According to this sect, the Imamate has continued

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since the time of the creation of the world in the direct descendants of Adam and it will always remain perpetual. The Imam is the manifest form of the 'Word' or the 'Will' of God. This 'Word' has been handed down from father to son according to nass since the time of Adam. The Nizari Imam resembles very much to the Platonic idea of Good. That is to say, of prototype ideal model, after which every kind of being or thing is created. The existence of every kind or series depends on that ideal model. The Nizari Imam belongs to this supermundane and supernatural world. Hence, he is the perfect being on earth. On account of being the manifest form of the 'Word', he is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. Thus, for the Nizaris, the Creator has manifested Himself in the Imam.

It is worthy of note that for the Nizaris, the Imam - the man is not God, but it is the 'Word' of God residing in him that represents God. Therefore, the Nizari Imam is superior over the Prophet.
Moreover, the Nizari Imam is an authoritative interpreter of the Qur'an, especially when on certain questions, revelation is unclear.

An important aspect of Nizari Isma'iliism is: It has always been fluid. The Aga Khans do not have any cut-or-dried rules. Their Holy Laws are directions as to the method and procedure and not the detailed orders about the results to be obtained. Nizari Isma'iliism is in a way a revolt against the static Shar'a.

Thus, unlike the other sects of Islam, on account of the 'ever living guide', the Nizariims celebrate exceptionally long Imamate. By obeying the Ulū al-Amr, according to the Qur'an, their faith is ensured to remain living, developing along with science, knowledge, art and industry. Hence, the belief in the current Imam has made them abnā' al-waqt, i.e. children of the time.

If we compare the Nizari concept of Imam with that of the four sects discussed in this work, we find the following things:
(a) The Nizārī ʾ Imām is the manifest form of the 'Word' of God. Whereas, the Sunnī, Khāriji and Zaydī ʾ Imāms are ordinary mortals and the Twelver Shiʿī ʾ Imām is the most perfect being on earth.

(b) The Nizārī ʾ Imām is both a legislator as well as an executor of the Law. But the Sunnī, Khāriji and Zaydī ʾ Imāms are only executors of the Law which is already revealed. And the Twelver Shiʿī ʾ Imām is an executor and an interpreter of the Sharīʿa.

(c) Both, the Nizārī and the Twelver Shiʿī ʾ Imāms are appointed to the office of ʾ Imāmate by the previous ʾ Imām. Khāriji and Sunnī ʾ Imāms achieve ʾ Imāmate on the consensus of opinion. But the Zaydī ʾ Imām gets the pontifical seat if he displays his valour.

(d) The Nizārī, the Zaydī, the Sunnī and the Khāriji ʾ Imāms have to be physically present to guide their followers. Whereas, this condition is not obligatory for the Twelver Shiʿī ʾ Imām.
To the Ismāʾīlī (Nizārī) community itself the concept of Imamate has been beneficial in several ways, for example, (a) socially, the far scattered community of approximately 25 million souls has remained integrated and self-sufficient under one ever living guide. (b) philosophically, the mystic element in the concept of Imam has made the community a mystic order where the members are obliged to obey and respect their head in every walk of life. (c) religiously, the Ismāʾīlī faith seems to be dynamic and fluid according to the changed time and circumstances.

As far as general Islam is concerned, the Ismāʾīlī concept has helped politically by the foundation of the Fātimid State. The period of the Fātimid state is considered to be one of the glorious epochs in the history of Islam.

It could be possible that the revivalist movement in Islam in the 19th century led by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī and followed by Muhammad Abduh, indicating at modernizing Islam according to the changed time, took idea from the Ismāʾīlī con-
cept of Imām.
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C. Articles


