

Shaykh Tusi: Father of Shia Jurisprudence

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Such An Intelligent Youth Whose Fame Regarding His Foresight Would Endure Forever

Muhammad ibn Tusi, famous as Shaykh Tusi is the most well known jurist and Mujtahid of the Shias who lived during the first half of the 5th century A.H. He was originally an inhabitant of Tus and was born there in 385 A.H. He received primary education in his homeland of Iran and

after that he moved to Baghdad for higher studies.

During those times Baghdad was the seat of Abbaside caliphate and a great center of learning in that period. Without any exception the Abbaside rule stretched from Spain and south Arabia to China and from the Mediterranean coast to North Africa. Baghdad was a seat of learning and scholars and intellectuals from all parts of the world flocked there.

The greatest personality of this period was Shaykh Mufid who resided in the Shia neighborhood of Karkh in an opulent atmosphere. He commanded great respect and influence. Shaykh Mufid was a great intellectual personality having knowledge in every field and subject and he was a poet and a literary critic also.

In this period of history the Buwayhid rulers Muizud Dawla Daylami and Azdud Dawla were of Shia faith and they were very powerful and influential; therefore the Abbaside caliphs were in awe of them. They did not dare to take any action against them or engage with them in a martial conflict.

The great scholars and intellectuals of Islam continued to gather in Baghdad and remained engaged in their pursuits of teaching and learning, writing and compilations etc. with absolute freedom. A youth aged twenty-three, whose name was Muhammad ibn Tusi also arrived in Baghdad for higher studies. Since he belonged to the Shia faith he lodged in the Karkh area and enrolled into the classes of Shaykh Mufid.

The powerful thinking of this intelligent youth, his unlimited capabilities and fervor were worth paying attention to. Therefore when he found himself an alien in this city he immersed himself, day and night in the acquisition of knowledge, deep study and research.

Muhammad ibn Tusi remained under the care of Shaykh Mufid for five years and all this time he did not ignore his studies even for a moment. He also attended the lectures of other scholars, like Ibn Abi Junaid Baghdadi, Ibn Sult Ahwazi, Abdullah Ghazaeri and Ibn Abduh, from whom he learnt Islamic jurisprudence, science of narrators and traditions. However, the best training he received was from Shaykh Mufid, whose fame had spread all over the country.

At the age of twenty-five Shaykh Tusi wrote a commentary of Shaykh Mufid's Al-Muqna, a book of religious jurisprudence and Shaykh Mufid expired in 413 A.H. During the lifetime of Shaykh Mufid itself, Shaykh Tusi had completed his book, Taharat and also concluded the commentary on The Book of Prayer. After the demise of his teacher this brilliant youth completed other commentaries and named the collection, Tahzibul Ahkam. At the age of twenty-five, he brought out the volumes of his book, Tahzib in which he had based his arguments on traditions and also explained the method through which he has arrived at a particular conclusion.

Tahzib is a collection of 13590 traditions. In the beginning of this book he writes about the conflicting traditions in Shia collections and goes on to state that Ahle Sunnat people had raised the objection that though Shias initially criticized them for conflicting reports in their books, the Shias themselves are having such traditions.

Replying to the objection Shaykh Tusi says, "Such doubts are entertained only by those who are deficient in knowledge and who are not capable to view the meanings of the words of traditions from different angles. Thus they are unable to understand the type of differences..." "However, it is necessary to collect all such traditions and write them with explanations as such a venture would be a great service to religion and earn the pleasure of Almighty.

A gentleman suggested to me that an exegesis of Shaykh Mufid's Al-Muqna must be composed so that the opponents come to know that the apparently conflicting traditions in Shia texts are not actually conflicting. Rather it is requirement of a manifest religion and they are within the ambit of variable meanings."

A noteworthy point here is that this book is one of the four canonical books of Shias. Jurists and scholars have been using this book since the last one thousand years. We must remember that Tusi wrote this book in his youth. Later this man became famed as Shaykh Tusi and due to his exceptional expertise also was referred to as Shaykh-ut-Taifa. The fact is that all the jurists and intellectuals have considered him their teacher and leader. Thus though we have a long list of scholars and intellectuals but none was ever given the appellation of Shaykh-ut-Taifa.

It is astonishing that from the aspect of his age he is described as a young man while on the basis of his accomplishments he is given the title usually reserved for those senior in age. The fact is that he was unique in having expertise in all fields since his youth. He wrote books on various branches of jurisprudence, principles of jurisprudence, exegesis, traditions, science of narrators; scholastic theology, history and Arabic literature. Among the four canonical books of Shias two are written by Shaykh Tusi: Tahzib and Istibsar. The other two books are Al-Kafi of

Muhammad ibn Yaqub Kulayni and Man La Yahzarul Faqih of Shaykh Sadooq. After the passing away of his teacher, for twenty years, Shaykh Tusi studied under Sayyid Murtada Alamul Huda. After him, he took over the responsibility of imparting knowledge to the Shia world and administration of their religious affairs. In 468 A.H. communal riots erupted in Baghdad. Shaykh Tusi left Baghdad and settled in Najaf al-Ashraf. During that time Najaf was not even worth calling a hamlet. However, gradually it became a center of Shia learning and people flocked from all over the world to obtain religious instruction. Shaykh Tusi also is considered the founder of the first religious college in Najaf al-Ashraf.