

## The Description of Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT) in *Kitab al-Aghani*

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**Abstract:** In Islamic sources, whether interpretive, narrative or historical, the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT) are mostly referred to with high reverence, and graceful trait are attributed thereto. yet, their commemoration in one of the most glorious works of early Arabic literature, namely *Kitab al-Aghani*, is of paramount significance. Attributed to the 10th-century Arabic writer Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (also known as al-Isbahani), it is claimed to have taken 50 years to write the work. Considering that he is a descendant of the Marwanis, mentioning the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT) in this book further highlights their legitimacy, making everyone awe in praise. Further, the claims cited in the work have been mostly backed by referring to other Sunni and possibly Shiite sources. With a descriptive-analytical approach, the purpose of this study was to introduce the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT) in the *Kitab al-Aghani*, while pointing out issues such as the succession of Ali (PBUH), the succession of Imam Hassan (PBUH) and Messianism of Mahdi (PBUH).

**Keywords:** Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT), Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Kitab al-Aghani*

### 1. Introduction

In the present age where spirituality is marginalized, the rational and spiritualistic people are on the quest for true rationality and spirituality, and seek to achieve the transcendent goal of creation, i.e., salvation, by heartfully following the prophets and their true successors to guide them with the illuminating light from darkness to light. In order to guide man to the straight path, God bestowed upon man a divine book, and appointed pure and wise nobles to explain its verses to human beings (Nahl, 44), themselves being a role-model for applying the divine commands (Ahzab, 21). In this tortuous path of salvation, the contentious legitimacy of the Shiite school has been the focal point of many truth-seekers. The leaders that the Shiites have faith in are the right guides who are self-guided themselves. "Is He who guides to the truth worthier to be followed, or he who is not guided unless shown the way?" (Younes, 35)

### 2. Research Methodology

This research is a descriptive-analytical study that employs library archives to collect data. Furthermore, narrative, historical and interpretive sources were used to support the findings

#### Research Background

A brief literature review by the authors revealed that no similar research has been conducted on the subject thus far, even though *Kitab al-Aghani* is one of the most significant historical sources of Arabic literature, which has described events of the Arab history highly regardless of religious bias.

#### Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani

The author of the *Kitab al-Aghani* is Abu al-Faraj Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn al-Muhammad ibn al-Ahmad ibn al-Haytham ibn Abd al-Rahman ibn al-Marwan ibn al-Abdullah ibn al-Marwan ibn al-Muhammad ibn al-Marwan ibn al-Hakam ibn Abi al-'As ibn Umayyah ibn Abd al-Shams ibn Abd al-Manaf Qurashi al-Umawī al-Isfahānī, whose grandfather Marwan ibn Muhammad is the last Umayyad caliph. He is originally from Isfahan, but grew up and studied in Baghdad. A famed genealogist and biographer, he was born in 897 and died in 967 in Baghdad. Although many historians consider his birthplace to be in Isfahan (Zarkoli, 2002: 4/278; Fakhouri, 2004: 745), but some believe that his descent is from Isfahan and he was not born there. Qusay Hussein Mohaghegh Al-Aghani argues that Abu al-Faraj paternal and maternal family both lived in Samarra for at least 50 years before his birth, and that he was not the only man who bore the title of al-Isfahani in his family, as his uncles and ancestors were attributed the same title. Moreover, in *Kitāb Yatīmat al-dahr fī mahāsīn ahl al-'aṣr*, Abū Mansūr al-Tha'ālibī deems him to be of Isfahani origin, without explicitly specifying that he was born in Isfahan. Khatib al-Baghdadi also mentions him as Isfahani, while arguing that he was not necessarily born in Isfahan (Isfahani, 2002). He had many poems, stories and hadiths memorized, in addition to mastering various sciences such as philology, grammar, manners and battles. Historians agree that *Kitab al-Aghani* is unique in its kind and is claimed to have taken 50 years to author. (Ibn Khallekan, n.d.). Although Ibn Khallekan considers Abu al-Faraj to be Shiite, but the Egyptian writer Ziyat considers this expression of Shiism as a matter of Taqiyya, as he grew in a Shiite area, and blossomed thanks to them (Ziyat, 2009: 265). This is while the author of *al-Kamil* considers him a clear-cut Shiite (Ibn Athir, n.d.). Nevertheless, he was a trustworthy narrator, and if it were not for his book, many narrations and citations from the pre-Islam and early-Islam era and the Umayyad Age would have been disappeared (Ziyat, 2009: 266). In addition

to its high historical value, al-Aghani also has an extraordinary artistic value, yet occasionally there are inappropriate reports and narrations therein (Fakhouri, 2004: 746).

### 1-Succession of Ali (PBUH)

One of the issues disputed between Shiites and Sunnis is the issue of guardianship and succession of the Prophet (PBUH). According to the Sunnis, Mohammad (PBUH) intended that the Muslim community pledge allegiance to whomever the council has a consensus on, and in other words, they believe in choice and not appointment. They consider this to be a practice of the Prophet (PBUH) according to the verses of the Qur'an: "whose affairs are a matter of counsel, and who spend of what We have bestowed on them" (Shura, 38) and "consult them in the affairs, and once you are resolved, put your trust in Allah" (Al-Imran, 159). They argue that, according to the early-Islam tradition, Mohammad (PBUH) entrusted the Muslims to choose a suitable person to succeed him, especially that he did not have a male child to succeed him. (Taqush, 2003: 16). Therefore, with the death of the Prophet (PBUH), the Ansar (natives of Medina) gathered on the same day in Saqifah (courtyard) of the Banu Sa'ida clan to discuss his successorship (Thalabi, 2005, 104).

Shiite scholars are of the consensus that the Prophet (PBUH) has specifically appointed Ali (PBUH) as his successor. For example, the cause of the revelation of verse 67 of Surah Ma'idah has been attributed to the official and public announcement of the succession of Ali (PBUH). In this way, on his return from the Hajj, the Prophet (PBUH) took Ali (PBUH) by the hand on the day of Ghadir in Juhafa, addressing the pilgrims: "Whoever I am his mawla, Ali is his mawla; He is Aaron except that there will be no prophet after me" (Ayashi, 2000).

The majority of commentators and narrators have also mentioned the cause of revelation to be pertaining to the Event of Ghadir Khumm and the succession and guardianship of Ali (PBUH). Regarding the verse, Ibn Abi Hatim only comments that it was revealed for Ali Ibn Abi Talib (Ibn Abi Hatim, 1997: 1172). Tabari also cites the story of the warning of the relatives of the Prophet (PBUH) in *Al-Tarikh* regarding verse 214 of Surah Al-Shu'ara and states that he said: "Which one of you will help me in the matter of mission so that he would be my brother, guardian and successor among you?" (Tabari, n.d.: 1/333). Several similar narrations have also been cited by Thalabi (Thalabi, 2002: 4/92).

Abu al-Faraj has hinted at the successorship of Ali (PBUH) in three instances. The Banu Qushir (tribe of Abu al-Aswad's wife) were followers of the Uthmani sect, and they persecuted Abu al-Aswad and insulted Ali (PBUH) in his presence. In response, he said:

The wicked of the Banu Qushir tribe said to me: "Never forget Ali in life"

I said to them: How can I leave the deeds that are my responsibility?

Especially that I highly admire Mohammad, Abbas, Hamza and the Successor

(Isfahani, 2002: 12/699)

As can be seen, Abu al-Aswad mentioned Ali (PBUH) in the third verse with the title of "Successor", in that he should be in charge of the Muslim society after the Prophet (PBUH), as it is not rationally appropriate to leave the position leader of the society vacant.

Referring to the Ghadir incident, Seyed Homiri says:

If I do not keep the will of Muhammad and the commitment on the Day of Al-Ghadir

For as I buy misguidance with guidance. Christianity after piety and conversion

(Isfahani, 2002: 7/189)

With more clarity, he mentions both the title of successor and the story of Ghadir Day, in which the Prophet (PBUH) announced in the presence of a large number of pilgrims the succession of Ali (PBUH).

In the following verse, Seyyed Humairi, who refers to the incident of the Battle of Jamal in the Khoribeh region of Basra (Hamwi, 2000: 2/363), refers to Ali (PBUH) as a "custodian" and defends his position:

I am committed to what custodian condemned, that is, the Day of Khuraybah of the killing of the locals

(Isfahani, 1977: 7/195)

### 2- Ali (PBUH), the best of people

One of the divine blessings of God for Ali (PBUH) was that due to the economic conditions of Aboutaleb, the Prophet (PBUH) took charge of Ali (PBUH) before his prophecy (Ibn Hisham, 2009: 1/197) and thus nurtured by Prophet (PBUH) from the mere age of 6 (Ibn Abi Al-Hadid, 2009: 1/15). According to many narrations, he was the first person to believe in the Prophet (PBUH) and convert to Islam (Nesai, 2012: 20), while he was 9 or 10 years old at the time (Tabari, n. d.: 1/330).

Abu al-Aswad, who is one of the companions of Ali (AS), said in response to Mu'awiyah's request to take allegiance from the people of Basra:

Do not inform Muawiya bin Harb. The eyes of the Syrian cannot read.

In the month of fasting, you calmed us. We were dislocated by the best of people.

He learned Quraysh where he arrived. That you are the best of Quraysh according to our religion (Isfahani, 2002: 12/705).

After the martyrdom of Ali (PBUH) in the month of Ramadan, Abu al-Aswad mournfully addresses those who stained their hands with the blood of that Imam and expresses his deep sorrow for the martyrdom of the best people and states that the Quraysh all know that Ali is superior to all people in terms of religion, so why do some people rejoice in his martyrdom?

### 3- Ali's righteousness

In human life, what is of paramount significance is to be guided to the straight path, a wish which Muslims seek every day in his prayers (Hamd, 6). In this regard, the practice and actions of the religious leaders indicate that ends do not justify the means, and thus Muslims are not allowed to resort to means that are not accepted by religion and may endanger his religion in order to achieve higher ends. For this reason, when Mughirah ibn Shu'bah came to Ali (PBUH) and said "Make Mu'awiyah the governor of Levant and require him to pledge allegiance to you, as if you do not do so and try to remove him, he will go to war with you. Ali (PBUH) replied: "I never seek the help of the misguided ... I swear by God I will never do anything that will ruin my religion to organize my life" (Isfahani, 2002: 16/57).

It goes without saying that the government was a good tool for Ali (PBUH) to be able to implement justice among the people, but to seek help from misguided and misleading people was simply not right, because although this apparently reformed the organization of the Islamic community, it in fact resulted in nothing but the corruption of religion, so human rights like Ali (PBUH) never seek assistance from people like Mu'awiyah to achieve their divine goals.

### 4- Ali (PBUH), whose prayers are granted

According to the Qur'an, whoever practices piety and maintain patience is a proper believer as God does not waste the reward of the virtuous (Yusuf, 90) and since he remembers God, God also remembers him (Baqara, 152) and as he calls God, his wishes are granted (Baqara, 186). According to Mohammad (PBUH), Ali (PBUH) is accompanied with the truth and the truth is centered on him (Ibn Abi Al-Hadid, 2009: 9/42), and thus if has a request from God in prayers, God Almighty answers the request of that Imam. After the murder of Abd al-Rahman and Qutham, the sons of Obaidullah ibn Abbas, at the hands of Busar ibn Artha, Ali (AS) became impatient and cursed Busar, saying that "O God! Strip Busar of his belief and his mind. This prayer was granted and he lost his mind until he died (Isfahani, 2002: 16/182). There is no surprise that Allah will fulfill the request of his servant who has always been on the right path in such a way that he has reached a point where his action is the same as the right.

### 5- Ali (PBUH), the manifestation of Justice

Justice is one of the principles that God orders to (Nahl, 90), because justice is closer to piety (Maeda, 8) and one of the unassailable essentials of justice is fair judgment between the parties to the dispute, even if they are non-Muslims, as God says "When you sit among the people to judge, judge impartially" (Nisa, 58). According to the author of Al-Manar, this verse and the following verse comprise the basis of Islamic government (Rashid Reza, 1910: 5/168).

In expressing the justness of Ali (PBUH), it is stated in *Kitab al-Aghani* that He recognized his armor in the possession of a Jew, saying that "O Jew, this is my armor that was lost on a certain day", a claim which the Jew declined, adding that the armor was his and that they should go before a judge. So, they both went to Shorayh the judge. Ali (PBUH) argued that the armor is his. Shorayh turned to the Jew and asked him to explain: "What do you say in defense? He answered: "The armor is mine and is currently at my disposal". Shorayh said: "O Amir al-mu'minin, you are right and your armor is yours, but you must have a witness." Thus, Ali (PBUH) summoned Ghanbar and Imam Hassan (PBUH) and both of them testified. Shorayh said: "I accept the testimony of Ghanbar for he is your slave but not that of your child. Ali (PBUH) said: "I heard Omar quoting Mohammad (PBUH) that

Hassan and Hussein (PBUT) are the kings of the youth of heaven. Shorayh approved of the narration. Ali (PBUH) said: "Do you not accept the testimony of the kings of the youth of heaven? Then he handed over the armor to the Jew. The Jew was in awe of what he saw, saying that "Amir al-mu'minin went with me to his judge and the judge ruled against him and Ali (PBUH) accepted. You are right, this armor is yours and I convert to Islam. The Jewish man who converted to Islam was constantly in the service of Ali (PBUH) until he was martyred in the battle of Siffin (Isfahani, 2002: 17/429).

It is noteworthy that Islamic civilization is backed by two pivotal elements, namely (1) free law, and (2) tolerant executor (Javadi Amoli, 2910: 19/224). As long as the law is guilty of inadequacy, error and discrimination, or the executor is greedy or intolerant, the Islamic society will never see freedom and justice. The aforementioned narration vividly reveals how the ruler of the Islamic society humbly appears before his subordinate judge and seats in trial with a non-Muslim, and finally the judge appointed by the Imam himself issues a verdict against Ali (PBUH), while he accepts the verdict without any objection. Yet, it is the justice-seeking trait of Ali (PBUH) which strikes the mind and heart of the Jewish man with the truth of Islam, hence converting desirably to the religion of Islam. Imam Sadegh (PBUH) emphasizes a similar point: "Invite people with kindness and not with language, so that they can see perseverance, truth and piety in you" (Koleini, 2005: 389). Ali (AS) also with action His goodness was that he was a preacher of Islam by observing justice, not just by language.

#### **6-Ali (PBUH) as the founder of grammar**

Along with the discussion of guidance, the issue of the scientific authority of the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT) is also noteworthy. Experts agree that Ali (PBUH) is the founder of grammar and he was the one who taught Abu al-Aswad the basics of this science (Zidane, 2012: 3/93). Abu al-Aswad came to the presence of Ali (PBUH) and argued that "The Arabic language has disappeared due to its mixture with non-Arab languages and it won't be long before it is completely diminished." Ali (PBUH) sought the cause of his argument, and Abu al-Aswad quoted the syntactic error of his daughter. Ali (PBUH) then instructed him to prepare a paper, authoring therein that "terms are either name, verb or preposition" (Isfahani, 2002: 12/684). Yet, according to the detailed report of Ibn Anbari and Qifti, Ali (PBUH) had authored some of the rules of grammar in a notebook before Abu al-Aswad visited him, and he built upon his work at the request of Ali (PBUH). (Ibn Anbari, 1985: 18; Qofti, 1986: 1/39). In someplace else, Abu al-Faraj explicitly states that Abu al-Aswad was asked to explain where did he acquire this knowledge [grammar]? he said "I have learned its basics from Ali ibn Abi Talib (PBUH)" (Isfahani, 2002: 12/684).

#### **7-Succession of Imam Hassan (PBUH)**

Shiites believe that after Ali (PBUH), his son Imam Hassan (PBUH) had responsibility to the Imamate. When the news of the martyrdom of Ali (PBUH) was heard by Abu al-Aswad, he recited a sermon on the pulpit, saying that "Ali bequeathed the Imamate to the grandson of the Messenger of God (PBUH) and his son Hassan (PBUH), Pledge allegiance to him, may you be guided" (Isfahani, 2002: 12/705).

According to the Shiites, the position of Imamate is appointed, not elected. Their names are also mentioned by the Prophet (PBUH), detailed with exact order. Mowaffaq Ibn Ahmad Kharazmi narrates from Abu Salami, a servant of Mohammad (PBUH), that he stated the names of his successors as follows: Ali Ibn Abi Talib, Hassan, Hussein, Ali Ibn Hussein, Muhammad Ibn Ali, Ja'far Ibn Muhammad, Musa Ibn Ja'far, Ali ibn Musa, Muhammad ibn Ali, Ali ibn Muhammad, Hassan ibn Ali and Mahdi (Kharazmi, 2007: 146)

Al-Balkhi al-Qunduzi, the author of *Yanabi al-Muwadda*, quotes Jabir ibn Yazid Ja'fi in chapter 94 that he heard from Jabir ibn Abdullah Ansari that the Prophet (PBUH) specified the names of his successors and Muslim imams (Kunduzi, 2009, 553), hence rejecting the notion of counsel in succession.

#### **8-The excellence of Al-Hasanayn (PBUT)**

Imam Hassan (PBUH) and Imam Hussein (PBUH), collectively known as Al-Hasanayn, have a distinct place among the Muslim society and all Islamic sects hold them with high respect and reverence. Many narrations have been reported from the Prophet (PBUH) in expressing their personalities and status, and Abu al-Faraj has mentioned the following two cases. In the first case, Sayyid Humairi heard from a narrator that: The Prophet (PBUH) was prostrating and Hassan and Hussein (AS) rode on his back, Omar said "What a great honor to ride on the back of the Prophet!" The Prophet (PBUH) said in response: "What good riders these two riders are!" (Isfahani, 2002: 7/187) As the phrase of the second caliph expresses the spiritual personality of the Prophet (PBUH), the interpretation of Mohammad is like-wise and indicates the personality and spiritual position of Al-Hasanayn (PBUT), that is, regardless of the sentimentality of a Grandfather for his grandchildren.

Earlier in the discussion of the justice of Ali (AS), it was mentioned that he cited the exact words of the second caliph in introducing Al-Hasanayn (PBUT), stating that "I heard Omar quoting from the Prophet (PBUH) that Hassan and Hussein (PBUT) are the jewels and kings of the youth of heaven (Isfahani, 2002: 17/429), a citation that has been frequently mentioned in several texts (Nesa', 2012: 107). Of course, it is not surprising that according to

the creational resolve of Allah, any regression has been detached from the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH), as they have achieved the highest status of purity (Moslem, 2010, 921). This is in line with the notion that their mother is also the Jewel of the women of heaven (Bukhari, 2011, 652).

### 9-Mourning for Imam Hussein (PBUH)

Among the painful events of history is the battle of Karbala during its climax, Ahura, which since its occurrence, many attempts have been made to smother or dim it, but the divine will has been prevailing against it. As such, the efforts of the poets are worthy of gratitude, who caused the affluence of the Ashura and kept the facts of Karbala alive in the form of poetry. Ali ibn Ismail Tamimi narrates from his father that I was with Imam Sadegh (PBUH) when Sayyid Humairi entered the residence of that Imam, he asked Sayyid Humairi to recite poetry and he started chanting for Imam Hussein (PBUH). At this time, the tears of Imam Sadegh (PBUH) flowed on his cheeks and those present at home screamed and wept (Isfahani, 2002). It is worth mentioning the poets of Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH) were highly valued and praised by them, to the extent that they were more admired than the jurists and scholars of the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH).

For example, Komit Ibn Zayd Asadi (744), one of the prominent and contemporary poets of Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH), lamented in the presence of Imam Sadegh (PBUH) the martyrdom of his grandfather, Imam Hussein (PBUH). Imam Sadegh (PBUH) raised his hands and prayed, saying that "O God, have mercy on the sins of the past and the future, and the hidden and the obvious of Komit, and provide for him until he is satisfied" (Isfahani, 2002). Imam Baqir (PBUH) made the same prayer for Komit and said "O God, forgive the sins of Komit! God forgive the sins of the Komit!" (Isfahani, 2002). Discussing these prayers and intercessions indicate the value of the work of the poets of the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH), as they have not prayed the same even for religious scholars. Of course, the appreciation of valuable poetry can also be seen in the practice of the Prophet (PBUH). The Holy Prophet (PBUH) said about Hassan Ibn Thabit Ansari "May God assist him with the Holy Spirit" (Zaif, 2002, 77). Another case in which poets have been appeased by the Imams (PBUH) again concerns Komit, in that Imam Baqir (PBUH) gave him a thousand dinars and a garment. Komit argued in response that "Your friendship is not because of the world, I admire you for the Hereafter, I do not accept money, but I accept the clothes that have come in contact with your body because of its blessings, so he returned the money and accepted the garment (Isfahani, 2002: 17/304)." This action conveys the roots and validity of blessings and recourse, which itself has Quranic roots, as according to the Qur'an, it was the shirt of Prophet Joseph that restored sight to the blind eyes of his father, Jacob (Joseph, 93).

### 10-Messianism of Mahdi

The belief in the advent of a messiah who acts as the savior or liberator of a group of people is not exclusive to Islam or even Abrahamic religions, as non-Abrahamic religions such as Zoroastrianism have discussed messianism-related concepts. In Zoroastrianism, Saoshyant, an eschatological savior figure who brings about Frashokereti, the final renovation of the world in which evil is finally destroyed (Bayernas, 2009: 476). The foundation of this ancient belief, in addition to the inner desire of every human being craving for the rule of truth and justice, is the promises of divine prophets throughout the history of humanity to the people seeking justice. Messianism is considered a fundamental principle among Muslims and a significant part of the Islamic narrative heritage is devoted thereto. In *Kitab al-Aghani*, it is stated that Seyyed Homayri heard from a man that the Prophet (PBUH) said to Ali (PBUH): "After me, you will have a grand-child who has both my name and nickname" (Isfahani, 2002: 7/170). This issue is also expressed in many Sunni narration books. In *Sunan at- Tirmidhi*, Chapter 52, Hadith 2231, cited from Hasan Sahih, the Prophet (PBUH) is quoted as saying "A man comes from my descendants who is my namesake" (Tirmidhi, n. d., 504). In a similar narration in the *Musnad* of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Hadith 3571, it documented that "The Resurrection will not take place until a man from my descendants comes who is my namesake" (Ibn Hanbal, 1995: 3/491).

### 11- Salvation of the Shiite School

The Qur'an outlines three goals for human-beings, namely worship, piety and salvation. The Qur'an states that the purpose of the creation of man is to worship: "I created the jinn and humankind only that they might worship Me" (Dhariyat, 56). Piety is then introduced as an interim goal "O mankind! Worship your Lord, who created you and those who were before you, so that you may be pious" (Al-Baqarah, 21). Then he considers the supreme and final goal, which is beyond all goals, as salvation, "O ye who believe! Persevere in patience and constancy; vie in such perseverance; strengthen each other; and fear Allah; that ye achieve salvation" (Al-Imran, 200).

In this regard, Da'bal Khuza'i quotes Zabyan Ibn Amer from Imam Sadiq (PBUH), and he from the Prophet (PBUH), that "Only Ali and his Shiites are to achieve salvation" (Isfahani, 2002).

On this account, Ali (PBUH) and his true followers will achieve the ultimate goal of creation, that is, salvation, and whoever wants to achieve this goal must hold on to them and not take a stand against them.

## 3. Results

*Kitab al-Aghani* is one of the rather precious works of Arabic literature, which contains valuable information about the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT). Examining the descriptions stated for the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT) in this book is of paramount value, in that this book is a literary work that, has expressed valuable information about the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUH) without any bias, even though it came clashing with their ideology at times. During the research, various discussions on the traits of the Ahl al-Bayt (PBUT) in a literary work were mentioned, including the specification of the successorship of Ali (PBUH) by Abu al-Aswad Tabei and later by Seyyed Hamiri, his rightfulness and serious concern for the integrity of religion, his divine justice, his pivotal role in founding the science of grammar, the succession of Imam Hassan (PBUH), the value of mourning for Imam Hussein (PBUH) and the need to keep his memory alive, the messianism of Mahdi (PBUH) and ultimately the salvation of the Shiite school.

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