Hesham ibn Hakam: The Founder of the Science of the Fundamentals of Religion

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Hesham is one of the best scholars and authorities of Islam. He was famous for his knowledge and virtue among the learned men of his time. He was a genius and a gifted improviser and due to his good sense of taste and capability he used to be victorious over all of his rivals in debate and speech; the champion who was never defeated. The man whose tongue was sharper than a sword.

Indeed, he is recognized as one of the greatest champions and the most distinguished supporters of Wilayah (trusteeship). It was Hesham who originally put the topics of Imamate and Wilayah (trusteeship) forward on the basis of wisdom and logic; and he proved himself to be fully competent for this task.

Abu Muhammad or Abul Hakam Hesham ibn Hakam Kendi

Although most of the writers have written his name as Hesham ibn Hakam and they know him as the son of "Hakam", an inhabitant of Kufa, in some of the books written by modern writers,[1] the name of his father has been mentioned as Yazid. According to this source Hesham had a brother who was one of the Hadith relaters. His brother had two sons and one daughter; and one of those two sons was very famous in the field of rhetoric. Most of the writers have mentioned Kufa as Hesham's birthplace; so he is known as Hesham ibn Hakam from Kufa. Some mention Baghdad and a few name Waset, near Basra as his birth place. Perhaps this mistake occurred because Hesham passed his early life in Waset and a part of his life in Baghdad.

There is a dispute regarding his descent also. Some have mentioned him as "Maula Bani-Kandah"[2] or "Maula Bani Shayban".[3] As the term "Maula" was used for non-Arabs, so it means that he did not belong to an Arab race. Some think him to be descended from Bani-Khazaya[4]- the largest Arab tribe. Then there would be no doubt that he belongs to an Arab race.

The exact year of the birth of Hesham is also not written in any book, but we understand from different sources that he was born in Kufa,[5] the centre of Iraqi's Shi'as, in the beginning of the second century of Hijra. He passed a part of his childhood in Waset and grew up there.

Afterwards he lived a few years in Baghdad in the Karkh area where he was conducting some .business

The Business Activities of Hesham

It is clear by studying the biography of Hesham that he not only acquired knowledge, fought for the cause of religion and conducted campaigns and debates against the infidels and unbelievers in Wilayah (trusteeship), but also he was active in the business of selling fabrics. As Hesham himself states: One day while he was busy selling the Saberi[6] fabric under a shaded tree, the seventh Imam Musa ibn Ja'far [a] happened to ride by. He turned his face to me and said, "O Hesham, selling something in the shadows is similar to cheating, and cheating [is unlawful in Islam."[7

Characteristics of Hesham

Hesham enjoyed the special favour of the Imams [a]. Those distinguished remarks which have been quoted in the books of great writers in praise of Hesham have not been quoted regarding any other person. The 6th Imam [a] has prayed for him and said: "Hesham, I have said about you that very thing which the Prophet [s] said about Hassan [a] May the Holy spirit assist you always as long as you assist us by the help of your tongue (speech)."[8]

Imam al-Sadiq [a] said, "Hesham is the protector of our cause (right) and the annihilator of the babbling and idle speeches of our enemies. To follow him is just like following us and likewise to be at enmity with him is like being at enmity with us."[9]

One day the Imam said to Hesham, "O Hesham, discuss and argue about religious topics and problems. I am so glad that a person like you were among our Shi'as."[10] Sulaiman ibn Ja'far has narrated when people asked Imam Reza [a] about Hesham, he replied, "May God bless him; he was a benevolent fellow. His fellowmen envied and insulted him."[11]

Hesham, from the very beginning of his life as a Shi'a, was favoured by the Shi'a leaders; all followers of the Prophet's household respected him. The Prophet's household and the religious .leaders looked upon him with respect and honour

Remarks of the Scholars Regarding Hesham

"Hesham ibn Hakam was one of the greatest followers of Imam al-Sadiq [a] and a pious man and an expert on Islamic laws."[12]

Hesham was one of the closest helpers of the 6th Imam [a] and the 7th Imam and had discourses with his opponents on the basic principles and the other religious matters. He was alive for sometime even after the death of the 7th Imam [a].[13]

"Hesham is respected and of a high rank and reliable in quoting Hadith (tradition)".[14] "There was a group of brilliant students of the Holy Family and Shi'a Imams who were outstanding in speculative theology (Ilm-Kalam) due to their skilfulness, proficiency and reasoning power like Hesham ibn Hakam and..."[15]

Hesham has many writings, discourses and books on the topics of Imamate and speculative theology. The contemporary scholars of Hesham have counted him as the greatest defender of "Wilayah" (trusteeship) and the honour of Shi'a (i.e. eye and face). The "eye of the Shi'a" (Ain-al-Taefe) in the sense that he was a watchful and vigilant protector against the deeds of the opponents.

He did not neglect the smallest impudent act of the opponents against the exalted rank of "Wilayah" and did not leave even the least objections unreplied against "Imamate".

He was called "the face of Shi'a" (i.e. Wajh-al-Taefe) in the sense that anyone from among the opponents of the Shi'a who used to confront him either surrendered, converted or became fearful and refused to discuss and argue with him. Hesham used to say, "I wonder why the opponents of the Shi'a chose the man as caliph whose dismissal came from heaven and dismiss the man whose appointment came from heaven; and quoted the story of the verse [Bara'at for justification."[16

Victorious Champion

Hesham, like many others, was fond of virtue and excellence and thirsty for knowledge from the vast ocean of Imam's wisdom [a]. He used to perform Hajj every year and he used to pay a visit to the 6th Imam [a] or his beloved son, the 7th Imam [a] at Mecca or Madina. He benefited greatly from these two honourable personalities and returned very much successful. So it was this very acquired knowledge that gave him strength at the time of debate against his opponents and made him always victorious.

That very year the Imam [a] was at the place of sacrifice and there were groups of learned pupils and famous scholars around him like: Hamran ibn Ain Shaybani. Ghais ibn Maser, Yunus ibn Yaqub and Abu Ja'far Ahwal (Momen Tagh) and a number of other Shi'a brave men who were encircling the Imam [a] like a precious stone around a ring. Hesham, who was still very young, entered Mina and presented himself to Imam al-Sadiq [a].

Imam [a] held Hesham extraordinarily dearer to himself than others. Then because he thought

that this excessive honouring might annoy the others present there, Imam al-Sadiq [a] said: "This young man assists and defends our cause with all of his strength (i.e. with his heart, hand and tongue)."

Then to prove the special intellectual position of Hesham, Imam al-Sadiq [a] asked him a few questions regarding the Exalted Divine names (of Allah) and the formation of names relating to the creator's attributes. Hesham replied to them all correctly and very eloquently and clearly. Then Imam al-Sadiq [a] said: "O Hesham, God has bestowed this versatility and farsightedness upon you because you must repel the evil acts of our enemies."

Then he prayed to God for him and said: "May God reward you for your knowledge and make your foot firm in the path, of God and our way of guidance.

After that, it was due to this blessing bestowed by the Imam [a] that Hesham was always victorious like a champion over his enemies in discourses. He used to say always that he achieved this power in himself and felt a holy light due to the blessing of Imam [a]. "By God, till this day when I am standing here, nobody has defeated me in religious discourses."

Witticism of Hesham

The respected scholar Syed Mohsen Jabal Amili (God bless him) writes in his valuable book A'yan al Shi'a that too many eulogies have been quoted by the two Imams (the 6th Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad and the 7th Imam [a] about Hesham. Then he adds: It is enough to say regarding Hesham's readiness to answer and his impromptu speeches, that one day people asked him whether Mu'awiyah was present in the Battle of Badr or not? He replied quickly: Yes, but on the other side. That is, he was present but was among the opponents and a member of the enemy's army.

Books of Hesham

Hesham is the first man who discussed and deliberated the fundamentals of beliefs and topic of leadership in the Islamic world on the basis of the scientific point of view. He wrote books on those topics and opened the way for research and debate for the coming generations. By using rational and traditional reasoning in his speeches and writings, he made the sublime goal and the benefit of the Shi'a school clear for the other Muslims and foreign scholars. Hesham had many books on different scientific fields but unfortunately, today there is nothing left except their names written in the books. Ibn Nadeem and a group of other great writers have counted his books to be about thirty volumes. Allamah Helli writes: Hesham has

compiled a book against dualists and separatists and another book against "Aristotle", "Shaikh and the Slave" and "Eight Chapters" were among his books.

The Founder of the Science of the Fundamentals of Religion

The late Allamah Syed Mohsen Amili, the writer of A'yan al Shi'a says: Hesham has written the book- Al-Alfaz. So the statement of Jalaluddin Seuti: that the first writer of the fundamentals of Muslim laws, according to the consensus of scholars, is Shafei, "is not correct, because Hesham b. Hakam has been living a very long time before him.

Moreover to emphasize this point it is known that Imam al-Baqer [a] and Imam al-Sadiq [a] used to teach the complete and useful rules of this science from the chapters of etymological arguments and rational proofs to their pupils and followers. A group of scholars have also compiled a few books regarding the traditions quoted from the holy Imams on this very topic.

Furthermore, the respected Allamah also mentions the names of some of the great scholars to prove that Hesham is the first man who has written books on the topic of the science of the fundamentals of speculative theology. Hesham was well informed of the different topics of the fundamentals. Beliefs, philosophical (Divine Metaphysics) discourses and Muslim laws. He was also well-versed in argumentation about the Creator, unity of God, attributes of His Glory and Beauty and God's will.

He was expert at reasoning for Imamate (leadership) and Wilayah, knowledge, chastity, all other qualities of the Imams and also regarding miracles and unusual actions of those pious men. He was well acquainted with the Qur'an, the words of God and the discussion on free will and freedom of human beings. Likewise, he was well versed in the topics of the atom and metaphysics, the materiality of some matter, the reality of human beings, cause of earthquakes, rain and etc., in natural philosophy.

Unfair Accusations

The sensational life and ramming debates of Hesham are known to us and we also know that his decisive speech was just like a sharp sword, but sometimes, he had to use dissimulation in his speeches to save himself from attack by the unjust people and also to get rid of tyrants. So his speeches had double meanings and as a result the enemies used to keep quiet but his short sighted friends could not understand the reality of his speeches.

So people either being aware or unaware of the fact, have accused Hesham unfairly. Thus, according to Allamah Syed Mohsen Amili, (May God bless him), these accusations were due to

some well-wishing as he says: "This was like making a hole in the ship (as Khidr [a] did in the story of the Qur'an) i.e. for the good reasoning."[17]

The learned scholar Mr. Atarodi Ghochani writes: "The shallow narrators and flimsy opponents have unfairly accused Hesham of having beliefs contrary to the ideas of the Qur'an whereas he is the first person who has spoken about the Imamate. And Imam al-Sadiq [a] was extraordinarily attached to him and preferred him over all of his followers.[18]

Then he adds: "Sunni scholars have blamed him (Hesham) for infidelity and dualism and have made unfair accusations against him. However, the Shi'a scholars have given replies to all those unfair accusations and cleared his sacred personality from all those unfair accusations." [19]

He writes in another place: "Shahristani has mentioned a particular sect namely Heshamiyah in his book - al-Melal wa-Nahal- and has counted them as the followers of Hesham-bin-Hakam. He says that this belief of Shahristani has no genuine source and is only a mere accusation. Shahristani has taken his information from the long-time enemies and opponents of Hesham. So for this reason his writings have no value and the sacred personality of Hesham is free from any unfair blame."[20]

Abu Mansur Abdul Qaher Baghdadi has blamed Hesham for believing in the corporeality of God and writes clearly that he believes in the corporeality of God.[21]

In reply to these accusations, Syed Murtaza known as 'Alamul Huda, notes that: "this famous sentence 'God is corporeal but not like other corporal bodies' which Hesham has been accused of saying, has been interpreted in different ways." For example, Hesham was debating with Mo'atazalah group and to defeat them Hesham used their own phraseology. Hesham said to them that suppose you are of the opinion that God is a (material) thing but not like any other things; then you must say He is a body but not like other bodies.[22]

The writer of the book - al-Melal wan-Nahal - has also confirmed this matter, when he writes that Hesham has used this phrase during his debates with the group of Ghulat (exaggerators).[23] Some others have also accused Hesham, saying that he had no belief in the knowledge of God about the happenings and accidents of the future, i.e., Hesham was of the opinion that the knowledge of God about accidental matters is also accidental and His knowledge is apart from His Essence.

The late Syed Murtaza also writes concerning this: The story of the knowledge of God regarding the accidents and happenings is also a creation of Hesham's enemies and is nothing but a condemnation as in this matter there is nothing in the records; neither from Hesham's own works nor has any other reliable and trustworthy person quoted such things regarding

him.[24]

In the same manner, he is blamed for the matter of the visibility of God on the Day of Judgement. As according to the apparent meaning of some of the Qur'anic verses, it is said that the Creator would be seen in corporeal form. So this is also one of the accusations directed against his sacred personality. But the fact is that in the beginning of his career, Hesham was the disciple of Abu Shaker Deisani - the learned materialist. Later on he was for a time one of the followers of Jahm b. Safwan - the fatalist and was also one of his disciples. But the research authorities do not approve of the idea: that if the master deviates from the true path, the disciple will also deviate from it.

Secondly, for a seeker of truth and a researcher of reality, this process of philosophical evolution and transformation of ideas was vital and necessary for his intellectual and spiritual development. For this reason we must not accuse Hesham of deviation and we must not find fault with him. Rather all of this reveals Hesham's evolutionary philosophical endeavour and inclination towards righteousness. Moreover, some writers have recorded that he associated with Deisani in his early life, before he reached the threshold of Wilayah (trusteeship) and met .[with Imam al-Sadiq [a

Notes:

[1] Hesham ibn Hakam- written by: Ahmad Safai, P.14.

[2] "Rejal"- by Abu 'Amr Kashi

[3] "One of the Mawalis of Bani Sheiban, and inhabitant of Baghdad". Al- Fehrist Ibn Nadim.

[4] "Hesham ibn al-Hakam" by Abdullah Na'mah, quoted from - Ketab - Ta'sis al- Shia by Syed Sadr.

[5] Hesham ibn Hakam - by Ahmad Safai, pg.10.

[6] A Kind of delicate and costly silk which was woven in those days in Sabur, Persia, and it was very difficult to distinguish the complete characteristics of that cloth in darkness and shadow.

[7] Al Fehrist of Ibn Nadim Hassan, a poet during the time of the Prophet [s] whose odes including "Ghadirieh", are famous.

[8] Wasail al-Shiah by Sheikh Horr Ameli, vol. 2. Pg. 208.

[9] Ma'alem al-Ulama, by Ibn Shahr Ashob.

[10] "Hazarah e Tousi = Millenery of Tousi", vol. 2. P.142.

[11] Tanqih al-Maqal by Mamghani

[12] Sheikh Mufid, Tanqih al-Maqal- quoted from the writings of Marhum Majlisi.

[13] Khalesah by Allamah Helli.

[14] "Rejal" by Sheikh Tousi.

[15] A'yan a-Shiah by Allamah Syed Mohsen Amili, Part 2. Vol. 1. P.6.

[16] Fehrist Ibn Nadim - (Hesham has indicated in his speech that after the inspiration of the verses of the chapter Barayat, (Immunity) the Prophet should first hand them to Abubakr to take to Mecca and recite at the Hajj gathering. And then by the order of God, Prophet (s.a.w.) was to take the verses back from him and give them to Amir al-Mu'minen, who then took the verses to Mecca and recited them during the Hajj season.

[17] It refers to the story of the meeting of Moses [a] and Khidhr [a] and how they became travel companions. After sitting in the ship, Khidhr [a] started to make holes in the ship. Although it was agreed upon that Moses [a] would not interfere in the work of Khidhr [a] he began to object. Anyhow, Khidhr [a] explained his good intention in doing so and said that a tyrant king usurped the ships from its owners by force at the shore, and this belonged to a group of faithful labourers. I wanted to make a hole in it so that the ship might not attract the king and he would not usurp it from the owners. (Holy Qur'an. Cave 18:60)

[18] Life of Abdul Azim Hasani, chapter, on gnostics and teachers, Pg. 2O2.

[19] Ibid. Pg. 203.

[20] Mohammad b. Abdul Karim Shahristani, the famous speculative theologian and philosopher, is one of the most learned men and philosophers of Islam. His book -Melal wal Nahal- is the most famous among the books on faiths and religions. He actually lived in the town of Sharistan, situated in the north of Khorasan which is now a part of Dargaz. He also died there. According to Yaqut Hamavi, Shahristan was a town in the vicinity of Nesa, and had an unfavourable climate and a large number of people used to die of the plague there every year. Muhammad ibn Abdul Karim was an inhabitant of that place.

[21] Abu Mansour Abdul Qaher ibn Taher Baghdadi (d. 429), writer of the book- Al Farq Bain al-Feraq. In the same way in the book - Melal wal Nahal of the Zaidi sect, learned scholar Al-Imam Ahmad ibn Yahya b. al-Murtaza, has also quoted this: - Hesham ibn Hakam and Hesham Javalighi and all shias except for a small group of them like the sect of Abi al-Ahvas Moatazali believe in the corporeality of God. As you see, this writer has announced with the utmost injustice, Hesham and all other Shia groups as Mojassamah (believers of the corporeal body of God) and Moshabbaha (believers in the similarity of God to other beings). What an injustice!!!

[22] Al-Shafi written by Syed Murtaza (regarding the remedying of the taunt against Hesham, the interested may please refer to vol.13 of Usul Kafi Pg. 337, Raudhat al-Kafi Pg. 379.

Commentaries of Sha'rani).

[23] "Ghulat"- pl. of Ghali, means a group of people who believe in Amirul Mu'mineen as God. (Amid. Persian Dictionary).

.[24] Al Shafi by Syed Murtaza