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The Concept of Leadership in Sunni and Shia Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the differences and similarities in the concept of leadership from Sunni-Shia perspectives, considering both its sociological and political aspects. The research utilizes a historical research method, which involves analyzing past realities and implementing them in contemporary life. The data collection process involves gathering all relevant sources needed, focusing on scholarly literature, historical documents, and other writings related to the article. The study reveals that there are significant differences in the concept of leadership from Sunni and Shia perspectives, both theologically and sociologically. However, regarding matters of muamalah or social-political interaction, there are no differing views between Sunni and Shia perspectives

Keywords: leadership, sunni, shia

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji perbedaan dan persamaan konsep kepemimpinan dalam perspektif Sunni-Syiah ditinjau dari aspek sosiologis maupun politiknya. Artikel ini menggunakan metode penelitian sejarah, yaitu menganalisis realitas yang terjadi di masa lalu dan kemudian mengimplementasikannya dalam kehidupan saat ini. proses pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan mengumpulkan seluruh sumber atau yang relevan data yang dibutuhkan, yang berfokus pada literatur ilmiah, dokumen sejarah dan tulisan lain yang berkaitan dengan artikel ini. Dalam penelitian ini ditemukan bahwa terdapat perbedaan cukup signifikan mengenai konsep kepemimpinan dalam perspektif sunni dan syiah baik secara teologis maupun

sosiologis, namun menyangkut masalah muamalah atau interaksi dalam bidang sosial-politik, tidak terdapat pandangan yang berbeda baik dalam pandangan sunni maupun syiah.

Keywords: *Kepemimpinan, Sunni, Shia*

INTRODUCTION

The Sunni-Shi'a differences trace back to a disagreement regarding the successorship following the demise of Prophet Muhammad. His followers held conflicting views on matters of succession and authority. Following the Prophet's passing, divergent perspectives emerged regarding his successor, whether it should be based on familial ties or knowledge of his life and teachings. Advocates for Muhammad's descendants, particularly his cousin and son-in-law, 'Ali, clashed with supporters of Abu Bakr, the Prophet's closest male companion. Ultimately, Abu Bakr prevailed, assuming the role of successor (Caliph) and assuming religious and political leadership responsibilities. Succession continued through Umar, Uthman, and 'Ali. Subsequent struggles ensued between 'Ali's sons, Hasan and Hussein, and the Umayyad family. With Hussein and his followers slain at the battle of Karbala, the Caliphate then passed through multiple generations of the Umayyad dynasty.

Sunni Islam and Shi'ism solidified their present configurations in the ninth century, subsequent to the compilation of the Hadith and the cessation of the line of living Shi'a Imams. Despite the prevalence of Sunni leadership post the battle of Karbala, Shi'a dynasties rose to prominence in the tenth century, exerting control over significant portions of the Islamic realm. This included Persia and Iraq, where their influence has endured.

At different historical junctures, geopolitical factors and ethnic dynamics have shifted the Sunni-Shi'a divide from primarily theological-ideological differences to ones of significant political consequence (Bruner, 2004). This transformation is most evident during the Fatimid-Abbasid and Ottoman-Safavid rivalries, wherein sectarian identities aligned with political affiliations. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 represented a parallel event, rekindling a revolutionary Shi'i movement challenging Sunni Arab states collectively, and particularly confronting staunchly Sunni monarchies across various nations worldwide.

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1923 marked not only the demise of the Ottoman dynasty but also the demise of the aspiration for a unified Sunni Muslim polity. Despite occasional challenges to its leadership, notably by groups like the Wahhabis of Arabia, who viewed the Sultan's brand of Islam as deviant, the Ottoman state consistently asserted its leadership over the Sunni world. The Sultan held the prestigious title of Caliph, inherited from the Mameluks after Sultan Selim I's conquest of Egypt. Although the legitimacy of the Mameluke claim was questionable, the Ottomans persisted in upholding the concept of Muslim unity.

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire obliterated any semblance of the unity ideal. The remnants of the empire were partitioned into several independent successor states, thereby rupturing the longstanding political cohesion that had characterized the heart of the Islamic world since the early sixteenth century. Adding to the distress of Muslim intellectuals was Mustafa Kemal's decision to abolish the caliphate in 1924, a move lamented even by figures

like Osama bin Laden. Kemal's action effectively shattered the notion of Muslim unity, leaving Muslims in a state of confusion and disorientation. In response, there was a renewed emphasis on striving for unity.

Nonetheless, Sunni and Shi'a Muslims share an acknowledgment of the centrality of the Qur'an. While both adhere to the same text, it is not uncommon for Sunnis to allege that Shi'as rely on a distinct, corrupted version. Furthermore, both groups refer to narratives of the Prophet's sayings (Hadith), albeit favoring different collections. Additionally, both Sunni and Shi'a Muslims uphold the five pillars of Islam. Despite these similarities, the two sects differ in their views on religious authority and the significance of the Prophet's descendants. Sunnis prioritize the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad and the traditions derived from his life. While Shi'as also acknowledge Muhammad's prophetic role, they elevate the status of his cousin, Ali, as well as his descendants, Hasan and Hussein. Despite comprising only between 10% and 13% of the worldwide Muslim population, Shi'a Muslims constitute the majority in five countries: Iran, Bahrain, Azerbaijan, Iraq, and Lebanon.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of leadership concepts in Sunni and Shia Islam is highly intriguing and dynamic, making it an enduringly significant topic for discussion. One such study is conducted by Ibrahim Kalantari, focusing on "A comparative study of the theory of velayat al-faqih from the perspective of Shia and Sunni." This research endeavors to identify and extract common scientific and theoretical elements within Islamic traditions, particularly in the realm of political jurisprudence, with a specific focus on the jurisprudential domain. It presents a framework based on religious principles within the Shia jurisprudential tradition. However, there remains a gap in Sunni jurisprudence regarding a coherent and systematic theory of political governance. Therefore, there is a need for exploration and development of a theory grounded in Sunni jurisprudence, which can partially address this deficiency and provide a model for the political system.

As time has passed, various interpretations of the nature and essence of the political leadership and authority of the jurist (Faqih) from the perspective of Shia jurisprudence have emerged. This article focuses on two concepts: "Nasb" (appointment) and "Niaybat" (representation), in order to elucidate the characteristics and attributes of the ruler. It explores a certain conformity and resemblance between the thoughtless Shia and Sunni approaches in the realm of Islamic governance. Undoubtedly, the legitimacy and political authority of the jurist based on the concept of "Nasb" cannot be substantiated in Sunni jurisprudence. However, the concept of "Niaybat," which in Shia jurisprudence signifies the representation of the infallible Imam and holds a firm position, has been accepted by some Sunni jurists as representing the Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, in the view of many Sunni jurists, conditions such as "Ijtihad" (independent reasoning), justice, and foresight are deemed necessary for a ruler, while similar conditions are emphasized in the theory of "Velayat-e Faqih" (Guardianship of the Jurist) based on the perspective of Shia jurists for the ruler, making justice a fundamental principle of legitimacy.

Based on the aforementioned, it can be concluded that the theory of velayat-e faqih in Shia jurisprudence exhibits some degree of proximity and similarity, at least according to the

perspectives of certain Sunni jurists, to the political theory of Sunni jurisprudence regarding governance. However, there exists a complete distinction between the Shia and Sunni perspectives on governance, although some Sunni jurists who do not consider *ijtihad* and justice as essential elements of governance may share differing views. (Ibrahim Kalantari, 2017)

The subsequent study, conducted by Jalil Dara (2020), focuses on "The Ideal Model of Governance from the Perspectives of Imam Khomeini and Sayyid Qutb." Imam Khomeini and Sayyid Qutb, prominent thinkers representing the Shia and Sunni traditions respectively, shared common viewpoints on governance and resistance to their contemporary circumstances. They advocated for the rejection of both Eastern and Western colonialism, the denouncement of American hegemony, the struggle against Zionism, the establishment of an Islamic government as the ultimate salvation for humanity, jihad against oppressors, the pursuit of comprehensive justice within Islamic governance, and the promotion of freedom, particularly for other monotheistic religions. These points reflect significant ideological convergence between the two thinkers. Nonetheless, differences exist between them, notably in terms of their distinct theological and religious backgrounds.

Imam Khomeini's ideological framework is deeply rooted in Shia religious principles and beliefs, exhibiting significant robustness across various intellectual and spiritual realms. Within Shia theology, the fusion of two fundamental tenets, namely the Quran and the Prophet's Household, mutually reinforce each other. In contrast, Sayyid Qutb's ideological groundwork is exclusively grounded in the Quran, devoid of interpretive reliance on the Prophet's Household or, to some extent, the Companions, whose righteousness holds substantial significance for Sayyid Qutb. While the notion of an Islamic government serves as the envisioned governance model encompassing ethical, economic, political, and socio-cultural domains, its primary conceptualization is fundamentally rooted in jurisprudence based on precise Shia principles. Imam Khomeini, benefiting from the wealth of Shia jurisprudential sources and possessing specialized knowledge and expertise endorsed by Shia scholars, formulates his proposed model of governance through meticulous scholarly scrutiny. His theory of *Wilayat al-Faqih* is structured upon theoretical jurisprudential frameworks and principles. In contrast, Sayyid Qutb lacks comprehensive jurisprudential resources and expertise within the Sunni tradition, leading to oversight of critical challenges within his ideology and instances of inadequacy. Notably, Sayyid Qutb has not authored any jurisprudential works, and his followers have not received formal jurisprudential education from him. Conversely, Imam Khomeini serves not only as a theoretician and government architect but also as its ideological, leadership, and managerial figure. His tenure in leadership and administrative roles over a decade provided him with the opportunity to test his theories under diverse temporal and spatial conditions, thereby reinforcing their robustness, efficacy, and legitimacy.

The subsequent study on "Wilayat Al-Qadi and its Malpractice in Iran, Egypt, and Jordan" authored by Al Hajjaji (2019) seeks to redefine the theory of judicial power in Islam, primarily drawing from two key lessons derived from the Quran and Sunna: (1) with the exception of the Prophet, the people serve as the ultimate source of legitimacy for Islamic judges; and (2) while Islamic judges are obliged to seek expert counsel, they must remain accountable to the public rather than to private factions. A comparative analysis of judicial practices in Iran, Egypt, and Jordan reveals a departure from these fundamental principles.

Despite Ayatollah Khomeini's efforts to establish a theocratic regime, his authoritarian rule undermines the Iranian people's will. Similarly, Egypt's courts and Jordan's Constitutional Court exhibit flawed appointment procedures and lack robust mechanisms to safeguard judicial independence from executive interference.

To align contemporary Islamic societies more closely with the principles of governance by the judiciary, they should adhere to the Prophet's early traditions. This entails direct public involvement in appointing supreme judges and holding them accountable, with judges assuming responsibility for administering justice and ensuring self-regulation in line with Islamic values. Furthermore, safeguards must be implemented to preserve judicial independence, shielding judges from arbitrary disciplinary actions or impeachment. Considering previous research endeavors, the present study conducted by the researcher holds novelty as it delves deeper into examining leadership from the Sunni and Shia perspectives. (Alhajjaji, 2018)

METHOD

This research contends that Muslim scholars have developed two theories of government over time. While Islamic scholars, both Shia and Sunni, concur on the requirement for the highest level of legal knowledge in any member of the Islamic government, they diverge on the legal classification of these members: whether they are judges or jurists (Shaidzadeh, 1992). On one hand, Shia scholars have embraced the theory of the guardianship of the jurist (Wilayat al-Faqih in Arabic, or Vilayat e-Faqih in Farsi). A prominent example of this theory is the Iranian practice of the Guardianship of the Jurist Theory. In contrast to Sunni scholars, the Shia have developed a pragmatic approach to implementing their theory of government in practice (Shevlin, 1998).

However, Sunni scholars adhere to the theory of government by judiciary (Wilayat Al-Qadi). Prominent Sunni figures such as Hasan Al-Basri and Abu Bakr al-Razi endorsed this theory. It posits that members of the government serve as judges, stemming from the belief that Prophet Muhammad functioned as a judge with specific executive powers, including the collection of Sadaqat (state financial revenue), military authority, and representation in foreign affairs. Despite its theoretical foundation, this concept has not been implemented since the demise of the Prophet's first four successors.

The conducted research is qualitative in nature, utilizing documentation analysis and other scholarly sources such as books and articles generated from research as analytical materials. The choice of research methodology serves as a key instrument in conducting effective investigations, ensuring valid and reliable outcomes. Exploring the concept of leadership from the Sunni and Shia perspectives represents a topic that has been extensively researched by scholars. However, given that this theme pertains to leadership conception and relates to the theories of two mainstream Islamic sects, the research inherently presents novelty and significant interest.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The prevailing assumption in Islamic discourse is that the disparity between Sunni and Shia sects primarily revolves around a political divergence concerning the rightful successor to the Prophet. Engaging in a comparative analysis of Sunni and Shia theories of governance holds significant merit within Islamic scholarship (Adam Oler, 2016). Notably, from the perspective of prominent Sunni scholars, there exists no prohibition against utilizing Shia jurisprudence, particularly Twelver Imami-Ja'fari jurisprudence. Sheikh Mahmud Shaltut (1893–1963), the Grand Imam/President of the University of Al-Azhar, issued a renowned fatwa affirming the reliability of Twelver Imami-Ja'fari jurisprudence. Additionally, Ayatollah Khamenei, a Shia Islamic scholar and the Supreme Leader of Iran, has sanctioned Shia Muslims to pray behind a Sunni Imam. He further issued a significant fatwa aimed at resolving a longstanding dispute between Sunni and Shia communities regarding the position of the Prophet's companions and his wife, Aisha. Both Ayatollah Khamenei and the Iranian constitution have prohibited the defamation of Sunni scholars. Consequently, there exists no religious impediment to conducting a comparative analysis of these two theoretical frameworks.

The two theories share three common features. Firstly, the Prophet assumes the role of the ultimate arbiter among Muslims, rather than a sovereign with unrestricted authority. According to Assuyuti (1991), the primary function of the Prophet is to adjudicate disputes among Muslims, thereby establishing him as their supreme judge. The Quran provides various descriptions of the Prophet, some of which are unique to him, emphasizing his divine nature as the final Prophet and messenger of God, while others highlight his earthly characteristics. As the supreme judge, the Prophet is endowed with specific executive powers, including the collection of state financial revenue, military command, and representation in foreign affairs. Consequently, the Quran stipulates that belief in God is contingent upon accepting the Prophet's role as a judge, whose rulings derive from divine commands.

The Quran provides various descriptions of the Prophet, some of which are unique to him, while others delineate his general characteristics. Among the former descriptions is the recognition of the Prophet's divine nature, emphasizing his status as the final Prophet and messenger of God. Conversely, the latter descriptions highlight his earthly attributes. As the ultimate arbiter, the Prophet wielded specific executive powers, including the collection of state financial revenue, military command, and representation in foreign affairs. Consequently, the Quran establishes that belief in God is contingent upon accepting the Prophet's role as a judge, whose decisions are derived from divine mandates.

Secondly, Islam holds a negative perspective on the judicial profession. The Prophet Muhammad discouraged Muslims from pursuing careers as judges due to the potential regret they may experience for their decisions on the Day of Resurrection. He distinguished between three categories of judges, with only one of them destined to be saved on the Day of Resurrection. The judge who adheres to righteousness and renders judgments accordingly will attain salvation, while the one who is aware of what is right but acts unjustly will face damnation. Similarly, those who adjudicate without proper knowledge will also face condemnation. Consequently, Muslims are advised to refrain from pursuing the judicial profession as a career path.

Thirdly, Islam delineates between two tiers of judicial legitimacy. The first tier encompasses the Prophet's authority as the ultimate arbiter, along with that of any other senior

or supreme judge. God designated the Prophet as the supreme judge for Muslims, and adherence to Islam necessitates recognition of the Prophet's authority in this regard. However, individuals are granted the freedom to choose their own judges if they do not acknowledge the Prophet as the supreme judge. The second tier pertains to the legitimacy of senior and junior judges, which is derived from the consensus of the Muslim community as stated in the Quran. If Muslims collectively agree on a particular individual, it constitutes consensus (Ijma) on their path.

Nevertheless, the scope of Muslims' consensus is limited to senior judges. In the Sunna, God appointed the Prophet, and Muslims assented to God's choice. However, the Prophet also appointed junior judges such as Mo'az ibn Jabal and Ali ibn Abi Talib without seeking the people's consent or consensus. The purpose of distinguishing between the two tiers of judges serves a dual function. Firstly, it aims to shield junior judges from becoming embroiled in the political arena. Secondly, it aims to select the most qualified junior judges irrespective of potential political influences that may arise during the appointment process. (Jr. Fox, 1953) Therefore, the legitimacy of judges in Islam varies depending on the rank of the judge.

One of the narrations highly esteemed by Shiite Muslims is the Hadith of Ghadir Khum, which recounts an event occurring on the 18th of Dzulhijjah in the 11th year of the Hijri calendar. Following the completion of the final pilgrimage (hajj al-wada), Prophet Muhammad journeyed from Mecca to Medina alongside approximately 120 thousand Muslims, pausing at a site known as Ghadir Khum. During a sermon delivered at this location, the Messenger of Allah grasped the hand of Ali ibn Abi Talib and proclaimed, "Whoever acknowledges me as their Maula, Ali is also their Maula" (repeated up to three times). The Prophet then implored, "O God! Love those who love him and oppose those who oppose him. Aid those who support him. Safeguard those who safeguard him, and uphold the truth through him wherever he may be.

In the annals of Islamic civilization, the Sunni sect began to take shape in the Khurasan region, emerging as one of the factions distinct from the Shia Ahlussunnah group. Its prominence and consolidation occurred during the 3rd century of the Islamic calendar, coinciding with the decline of the Umayyad dynasty and the advent of the Abbasid rule. This historical trajectory is intricately linked to the context of a fragmented era dominated by various theological schools of thought, including the Shia, Khawarij, Mu'tazillah, and Murji'ah, all of which had established affiliations with different political entities. The Ahlussunnah movement was spearheaded by a prominent theologian, Abul Hasan 'Ali Asy'ari, renowned for his contributions to ushuluddin (theology). In matters of jurisprudence (fiqh), the Ahlussunnah adhered to the teachings of Imam Syafi'i, while in the realm of Sufism, they followed the guidance of Imam Ghazali.

The emergence of Sunni ideology stemmed from apprehensions regarding viewpoints propagated by factions that sought to undermine the stature of the Prophet's companions, with some factions accusing them of treachery. From the Shia perspective, the election of Abu Bakr, followed by the leadership of Umar and Usman, represented a grave violation of Allah's commandments and the directives of Prophet Muhammad. They perceive Ali Bin Abi Talib as the most suitable candidate to succeed the Prophet, not only due to the Ghadir Khum incident but also because they firmly believe that the bloodline of the ahl bayt, flowing through Ali and his progeny, guarantees the purity of heart and mind essential for leadership. For the Shia sect,

the preservation of the purity of the Quran, hadith, the equilibrium of the universe, and the safety of Muslims at large can only be ensured by Ali and his descendants.

In essence, one of the pivotal principles distinguishing Shia from Sunnis lies in the Shia belief that Ali and his descendants, later known as the Imams, inherited *kema'suman* (infallibility) from Prophet Muhammad, thereby necessitating the perpetuation of spiritual and political leadership through Ali and his lineage. Conversely, Sunnis argue that leadership following the Prophet's demise was open-ended and not confined to the Ahl Bayt. Regardless of the rationale, suitability and competence determine eligibility for leadership.

Several crucial junctures mark the onset of discussions concerning the history of Islamic politics, commencing with the demise of Prophet Muhammad without a designated successor and the subsequent negotiations at Saqifah Bani Saidah. The implementation of Shura, which occurred for the first time to select a successor to Prophet Muhammad, and the Tahkim incident (arbitration) between Ali and Muawiyah are also noteworthy events. The multifaceted impacts and analyses of these occurrences led to an undeniable reality for Muslims: the polarization of power within the ummah.

Sunni political thinkers typically exhibit a tendency to align with existing authorities. Their perspectives and arguments often serve as a means of legitimizing the power of the Caliph during their era. For instance, Al-Mawardi's portrayal of the concept of caliphate in his book *Al-Ahkam as-Sulthaniyah* posits that the caliph's role extends beyond mere leadership to encompass a surrogate prophetic function. This conceptualization enables rulers to justify their actions under any circumstances. (Mun'im, 2020)

A notable and pivotal aspect of Sunni doctrine is the absence of a formal procedure for deposing a caliph. Their pragmatic and inherently legalistic approach stands in contrast to the metaphysical theory of Imamah upheld by Shi'ah adherents and certain philosophers. The Sunni perspective on the caliphate was further refined by followers of as-Syafi'i, particularly Abu Hasan Al-Mawardi. This endeavor aimed to bridge the pronounced gap between religious authority and coercive power by re-establishing the connection between the *de facto* rulers, such as sultans and emirs, and the Abbasid caliphate.

State and governmental structures serve as a surrogate for prophetic duties in upholding religious principles and managing societal affairs. The selection of a leader to guide Muslims is deemed obligatory by *ijma'*. If assuming leadership in this capacity is deemed obligatory, it falls under the category of *kifayah*, akin to jihad and pursuit of knowledge. Should individuals possessing the requisite qualifications emerge to assume leadership roles, the obligation is shifted to them. Conversely, in the absence of suitable candidates, this obligation is divided among two distinct groups: those vested with the authority to elect a head of state for the Muslim community, and individuals possessing the competency to govern the nation, enabling them to nominate one among them to fulfill this role.

The selection of the head of state (caliph) stands as a crucial and pressing matter for the survival of the state. Nevertheless, Islam did not establish a framework for the succession of leadership, leading to divisions within the Muslim community.

CONCLUSION

This paper has scrutinized the Concept of Leadership from Sunni and Shia Perspectives. The findings of this research shed light on the significant differences between Sunni and Shia views regarding the characteristics of a leader in Islamic perspective. Following the demise of Prophet Muhammad, the foremost challenge encountered by Muslims was political discord. This discord stemmed from a leadership vacuum arising after the Prophet's passing, as he had not explicitly designated a successor prior to his demise.

Of all the disparities delineated between Sunni and Shia concepts, leadership is undoubtedly the most debated. However, it is often misconstrued and placed within an erroneous framework. Firstly, it is frequently depicted as though *ushuluddin* is exclusive to Shia beliefs, leading some to hastily brand Shia individuals as infidels for not adhering to *ushuluddin*, which includes leadership principles, without recognizing that the essence of leadership lies within *ushul al madhab*, not *ushuluddin*. Secondly, the portrayal of leadership in Shia ideology is often juxtaposed against the concept of caliphate in Sunni tradition, which is an ontologically flawed approach. This is because leadership pertains to guiding the people, or in religious contexts, while caliphate concerns political leadership.

Even Caliph Umar, during his reign, remained supportive of Sayyidina Ali's role in religious and communal matters. Conversely, the caliphate refers to political leadership, which Sayyidina Ali acknowledged *de facto* and continued to support the previous three caliphs, even expressing a desire to become the fourth caliph. Thirdly, the doctrine of *imamah* is erroneously believed to necessitate animosity towards the Prophet's companions, his wives, and individuals outside the priesthood and their followers. However, this misconception arises from a flawed ontological perspective. In reality, Shia belief in *imamah* does not inherently entail disrespect towards the Prophet's companions, his wives, or individuals outside the imam and his followers. *Imamah* primarily concerns leadership matters in a vertical dimension, rather than horizontal interpersonal relations among people.

According to Sunni doctrine, leadership following the passing of Prophet Muhammad was unrestricted and not exclusive to the *ahl Bayt* alone. Regardless of one's lineage, if considered capable and qualified, they could be nominated for leadership. Therefore, the selection or designation of a caliph as the legitimate ruler hinges upon the particular attributes exhibited by the potential leader.

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