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CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM DURING EARLY ISLAMIC CIVILISATION: A CRITICAL STUDY OF SELECT CONCEPTS

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Abstract

This paper reviews the thought of early Muslim sectarians, especially extremists, which generated controversy over the Islamic doctrine of Tawhīd. Applying qualitative content analysis, the author explores works by Muslim scholars who studied these ideas. Malicious interpretations shaped various dimensions of Islamic thought that still influence contemporary discourse regarding the nature and transcendence of divine power. Among these are [1] Ḥulūl (incarnation), [2] Tanāsukh (metempsychosis), [3] Badā' (appearance, God's change of mind), [4] Tashbīh (anthropomorphism), and [5] Ta'wīl (elucidation). Since these elements quickened Islamic polemics then and even now, the author brings an in-depth analysis highlighting the harm invoked by ideas that deviate from a proper understanding of God's nature and attributions.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, elucidation, extremism, incarnation, transmigration.

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Introduction

When we examine the essential elements of key Islamic concepts, we more readily perceive the extremism that comes with sectarian disputes. Controversies and unnecessary religious thought complexities ensue, especially regarding creedal and doctrinal matters that challenge or dilute monotheism. These debates often explore the claims to truth made by various factions that transgress reasonable limits and cause severe crises. Many extremists borrow specific ideations from other religions and traditions. As such, we trace whether or not they consciously resort to extrinsic belief systems or are carried away by an emotive sub-consciousness that kindle the inner dimensions of religious sentiments.

Critical elements of extremism bred much harm by challenging the concept of God's unity and eternal attributes that reflect divine transcendence. A few sources are foundationally identifiable, and for each one, be it theological or intellectual, certain ingredients constituting elements in conflict with the fundamental spirit of Islam are discussed. Such misunderstandings continue to shape dimensions of Islamic thought that still influence contemporary malcontents. Primary extremist ideas are five: [1] *ḥulūl* (incarnation), [2] *tanāsukh* (metempsychosis), [3] *badā'* (appearance, God's change of mind), [4] *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism), and [5] *ta'wīl* (elucidation). Since they birthed polemical religious discourse that implicitly influences the present, an in-depth discourse is warranted to clarify their deviation from authentic comprehension of God's divine nature and attributions.

We apply qualitative content analysis to writings taken from Islam's early theological schools and authors, in particular al-Shahrastani, Ibn Hazm, Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Baghdadi, al-Mu'arri, al-Isfara'ini, al-Mufid and others. We hope to expose readers to extremist elements in early Islamic civilisation that produced harmful outcomes. Our approach unerringly discloses controversies that definitively direct a dangerous path in contemporary Muslim civilisation.

The Concept of *Ḥulūl* (incarnation)

Ḥulūl means incarnation. From an Islamic creedal perspective, it is categorised as an irrational doctrine that leads to a belief that God incarnates as a human. Proponents have different views, however. Some believe *ḥulūl* occurs partially or fully. For example, the partial incarnation is the ‘sunrise’, and a complete incarnation is an angel or devil appearing as a human.² Another deviant element is *tanāsukh* (metempsychosis or transmigration of the soul: *re-incarnation*), which attends the doctrine of *ḥulūl*. Both concepts are used interchangeably in the theological and scholastic discourse, occasionally in the same sentence and with the same connotation. Al-Shahrastani wrote, “*The soul of God transmigrated and even incarnated into him, and eventually he claimed lordship and prophethood together.*”³ Al-Shahrastani used both *tanāsukh* and *ḥulūl* with the same meaning, indicating a synonymous relation. Al-Mu‘arri said that the *Ḥulūliyyah* (an incarnation sect) had a close connection with the *tanāsukh* sect (transmigration).⁴ However, there are discernible differences when applying these terms so that *ḥulūl* or *rūḥullāh*, for example, means the soul’s transmigration from Him (God) into anything else, especially into a human body. At the same time, *tanāsukh* infers human soul transmigration from human to human or animal.

The concept of incarnation is one of the oldest superstitions found in Indian religion. Their adherents call it *Samsara* (per Sanskrit). However, al-Mu‘arri says it is rooted in Firaunic (Pharaonic) philosophy. Similar ancient beliefs were transmitted from one age to another and eventually gave rise to negative implications within the Muslim circles. Firaun (Pharoah) believed in incarnation and claimed to be the ‘lord of power.’⁵ Abū Said

² Abu al-Fath Muhammad ibn Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, *Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Nihāl, taḥqīq*: Muhammad ibn Fathullah Badran, vol. 1 (Al-Qahirah: Matbaat al-Azhar, 1947), 202–3.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Abu al-Ala Ahmad ibn Abd Allah ibn Sulayman ibn Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Mu‘arri, *Risālat al-Ghufrān, taḥqīq*: Bint al-Shati, (Al-Qahirah: Dar al-Maarif, 1961), 395.

⁵ Ibid.

Nishwān traced this idea to Persian Dualism and said that a proponent of *tanāsukh*, Bazrajamhar of Persia, agreed to the concept of a Creator while negating anthropomorphism and also viewed the world as everlasting.⁶

The root of this concept (incarnation/*re*-incarnation) is indeed traced to dualistic creeds. People transgressed the limit concerning Caliph Ali's status and revived this ancient belief by linking it with the evolution of light and fire in various dimensions, a doctrine which stems from ancient Persia with foundational premises from various creedal systems.⁷

The concept might have emerged from an understanding that the sole power of creating the universe belongs to one God, and from Him, the soul transmigrates throughout creation via a process called *ḥulūl*. We find al-Shahrastani linking *ḥulūl* to Judeo-Christian beliefs. Ibn Khaldūn had endorsed al-Shahrastani's linkage of *ḥulūliyyah* with Christianity and said the idea that God incarnated as a human being is a Christian belief regarding Jesus.⁸ He considered the birth of *ḥulūl* concurrent with the concept of monotheism and argued their confusion emerged with incarnationism and transmigrationism, which closely resemble Jewish and Christian beliefs.⁹

Incarnation and Extremist Sects

Most extremist sects applied *ḥulūliyyah* to their speculations. From the outset, they attributed the doctrine to prophets. They said God's soul was in Adam's body which then migrated to Shith and later to prophets and finally to their *imāms* after resting in Caliph Ali and his descendants.¹⁰ They even cited the Quran to justify this claim for leaders whom they preferred: "*When I have fashioned him (in due*

⁶ Abu Said Nishwan ibn Said ibn Nishwan al-Humayri, *al-Ḥūr al-'In, taḥqīq*: Kamal Mustafa, (Al-Qahirah: Matbaat al-Saadah, 1948), 146.

⁷ Abd al-Muhammad Jabir, *Ḥarakāt al-Shī'ah al-Mutaṭarrifin wa Atharuhum fī al-Ḥayāt al-Ijtimā'iyyah wa al-Adabiyyah*, (Al-Qahirah: Matbaat al-Sunnah al-Muhammadiyyah, 1954), 41.

⁸ Abd al-Rahman ibn Muhammad ibn Khaldun al-Hadrami, *al-Muqaddimah*, (Bayrut: al-Matbaat al-Adabiyyah, 1900), 198.

⁹ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 363.

¹⁰ Al-Shatibi, *al-I'tisām*, vol. 3, 66–7.

proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit...”^{11, 12} The Khaṭṭābiyyah transgressed the limit by using this verse to pass the concept of ‘lordship’ from God to Prophets. They believed the *ulūhiyyah* was the light that incarnated and established prophethood. This same light was transmitted to their *imāmah*, and that the universe would never be isolated from such impacts, illumination and effects.¹³ Thus, we find the *saba’iyyah* teaching of the soul of God incarnated in the prophet then trans-located from one to another,¹⁴ eventually living in their *imāms* as well.

Hulūl is a core element used to subvert three fundamental Islamic creedal concepts of (‘*aqīdah*): (i) lordship (*ulūhiyyah*); (ii) prophethood (*nubuwwah*); and (iii) leadership (*imāmah*). The Isma’iliyyah sect made *hulūl* a requirement for all *imāms* to complete the mission of the respective *imāmah*, claiming that the lordship of an *imām* is a type of *hulūl*. Some consider the *imāmah* incomplete without the *hulūl* lordship. Hence, when an *imām* dies, his soul, via *hulūl*, migrates to the next *imām* so that he also attains the required state of perfection.¹⁵

Ibn Hazm wrote that some believed the spirit of God incarnates into human beings in general. Others believe the soul of God also incarnates in humans other than *imāms*. For example, Hallaj and others experienced this as *hulūl*.¹⁶ Ibn Taymiyyah upheld these extremists’ existence and discussed their awkward relegation of God to human conditions, so there remained no difference between God and humans. He says, “Those people believe in an absolute incarnation... so that even when any one of them was ordered to fight an enemy, they objected by saying ‘how can I fight God! I am not able to fight God’.”¹⁷ Hence, due to a belief in unconditional

¹¹ The Quran, *al-Hijr*: 29

¹² *Al-Ḥūr al-‘In*, 166; Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Ismail, *Maqalāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf li al-Muṣallīn, taḥqīq*: Muhammad Muhy al-Din Abd al-Hamid, (Al-Qahirah: Matbaat al-Saadah, 1954), 76.

¹³ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milāl wa al-Niḥal*, 380–1.

¹⁴ Ronaldson, ‘*Aqīdat al-Shī‘ah*, (Al-Qahirah: n. p, 1946), 58–9.

¹⁵ Ibn Khaldun, *al-Muqaddimah*, 139.

¹⁶ Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Said ibn Hazm, *al-Faṣl fī al-Milāl wa al-Ahwā’ wa al-Niḥāl*, vol. 2 (Al-Qahirah: Al-Matbaah al-Adabiyyah, 1320 AH), 114.

¹⁷ Abu al-Abbas Taqī al-Din ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘at al-Rasā’il wa al-Masā’il*,

incarnation added to monotheism elements, extremists eliminated the necessity for the office of prophethood, including all conditions, processes and requirements deriving from it, by which they made the institution invalid. Likewise, some advanced the theory of God's existence in humans and left off any differentiation between such god-men and God. Thus, they repudiated prophethood entirely and contextually, extracting the office from human history and replacing it with the 'Selfhood of God' being sufficient manifest within human beings, thus ending any need for prophets.

Several such mischievous elucidations of peculiar extremist beliefs in early Islam continue to influence people and even cause contemporaries to reject the Sunnah as a foundational source of Islam's legal code. We notice individuals and organisations questioning its need by raising doubt regarding the authenticity of Hadith literature. In the past, extremists outrightly rejected the institution of prophethood and prophets because they believed God generally incarnated in human beings, so that His very Selfhood was present, thereby leaving no need for any prophet because God Himself was guiding the exceptionally fortunate creature.

Although people do not subscribe to beliefs from the past, many are influenced by the rejection of prophethood and doubt the Sunnah, while some champion anti-Hadith movements. Many postmodernist writers argue there is no need to regard the Sunnah as relevant and raise questions regarding its early preservation. Advocating Orientalist perspectives, they try to destroy the prophethood institution, which is integral to the Muslim creed, regardless of sectarian compartmentalisation of ideals and fundamentals.

Extremists believe in complete or partial or unconditional forms of incarnation and are divided into Sabaism, Bayanism, Janahism, Khattabism, Namirism, Muqnayism, Razamism, Barkukism, Halmanism and Hallajism.¹⁸ Al-Baghdadi said every

tahqīq: Muhammad Rashid Rida, 1st ed. (Al-Qahirah: Matbaat al-Manar, 1341 AH), 98.

¹⁸ Abu Mansur Abd al-Qadir ibn Tahir al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq Bayn al-Firqah wa Bayān al-Firqah al-Nājiyyah Minhum*, *tahqīq*: Muhammad Zahid al-Kawthari, (al-Qahirah: Nashr Izzat al-Attar, 1948), 241–2.

sect aims to obliterate genuine concepts of monotheism, especially regarding God and *Tawhīd*, by infecting religion with some form of *ḥulūlism* to destroy the significance of its most fundamental pillar. If destroyed, the creed collapses on itself.

The Concept of *Tanāsukh*

Tanāsukh (metempsychosis) is a branch of *ḥulūlism* that refers to the transmigration of a soul from one body to another.¹⁹ As a concept, *ḥulūl* leads to the ancient Hindu view of *tanāsukh*²⁰ rooted in the people of Sumaniyyah, worshippers of idols and multiple deities who embrace and expound on transmigration.²¹ It is also entrenched in dualism and Greek doctrine. Al-Nashshar argues that Monism was added to the Sumaniyyah system and that eastern religions are mainly based on the transmigration of souls. Muslim scholars learnt of it by studying their religious teachings. Even so, philosophers had it handed down from the Greeks such as Pythagoras, Plato and Socrates.²² Ibn al-Jawzi had traced it to an Egyptian sect that emerged during the time of Prophet Moses and Pharaoh.²³

Tanāsukh is classically regarded as a mischievous principle of extremism that embraces the souls' transmigration from person-to-person and even to animals.²⁴ Its proponents claim that souls transmigrate much like a book's transmission from one person to another.²⁵ This impish ideation was purposed to destroy belief in the hereafter life, the third principle of the Islamic creed. They assert that there is neither *qiyāmah* (doomsday) nor *ākhirah* (resurrection). Souls will transmigrate to better life situations if they are righteous

¹⁹ Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn Abd Allah ibn al-Husayn ibn Ali ibn Sina, *Risālah Adhawiyyah fī Amr al-Ma'ād, taḥqīq*: Sulayman Danya, (Al-Qahirah: Matbaat al-Itimad, 1949), 58.

²⁰ Al-Mu'arri, *Risālat al-Ghufrān*, 397.

²¹ Abu Abd al-Malik Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Yusuf al-Khawarizmi, *Mafātīh al-'Ulūm*, (Al-Qahirah: Matbaat al-Sharq, n.d.), 25.

²² Ali Sami al-Nashshar, *Nash'at al- Fikr al-Falsafī fī al-Islām*, (Al-Qahirah: n.p, 1962), 207–8.

²³ Jamal al-Din Abu al-Faraj Abd al-Rahman ibn Ali ibn al-Jawzi, *Naqd al-'Ilm wa al-'Ulamā' aw Talbīs Iblīs*, (Al-Qahirah: al-Matbaah al-Muniriyyah, 1347AH), 85.

²⁴ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, vol.1, 202–3.

²⁵ Al-Khawarizmi, *Mafātīh al-Ulum*, 25.

and will face no pain or suffering.²⁶ They, therefore, deny the Day of Judgment and say that an award or punishment is assigned through the process of transmigration.²⁷

Kinds and Stages

Tanāsukh is categorised with significant features. Some claim transmigration occurs in any growing body, whether tree or animal, while others allow only animals. Still, others say that human souls transmigrate solely to humans on two conditions:

1. Transmigration continues for bad people until they complete, prepare for and finally strip themselves of substance.
2. Transmigration occurs for bad and good souls into turbulent bodies/conditions or pleasant circumstances, respectively.²⁸

Some argue that souls are singular, even so, *tanāsukh* has four stages: *naskh*, *maskh*, *faskh*, and *raskh*.²⁹ Transmigration from human-to-human is '*naskh*'; an animal is '*maskh*'; a heinous animal is '*faskh*'; and a tree or plant is '*raskh*'.³⁰ Of these, *naskh* and *maskh* are employed by extremists to promote their agendas and even use the Quran to justify their position. This verse, "*There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth or a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you,*"³¹ has been employed to infer that animals have components of human souls with power similar to incarnate humans.³² They strengthen this argument with another verse, "*Until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle,*"³³ by saying that a sinful soul keeps transmigrating from one to another until forced to place itself into the smallest insect for its misdeeds.³⁴

²⁶ Al-Ashari, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 114.

²⁷ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, vol 1, 202–3.

²⁸ Ibn Sina, *Risālat al-Adhawiyah fī Amr al-Ma'ād*, 41.

²⁹ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 37.

³⁰ Al-Husayni, *Bayān al-Adyān*, 29.

³¹ The Quran, *al-An'ām*: 38.

³² Ibn Sina, *Risālat Adhawiyah fī Amr al-Ma'ād*, 58.

³³ The Quran, *al-A'rāf*: 40.

³⁴ Ibid., 42.

Consequences

Al-Mufid described *tanāsukh* thus: "... some proponents of *tanāsukh* claim that souls continue to transmigrate from one to another of various figures and structures and never undergo extinction but survive forever. It is the worst of stupidity and far from a rational view."³⁵ Proponents of *tanāsukh* demoted God to human status through incarnation. Starting with Adam till today, they believe every surviving soul (*al-arwāḥ al-'azliyyah*) keeps undergoing transmigration. When the Creator assumes the position of a creature, that creature becomes its Creator.³⁶

Consequently, proponents of *tanāsukh* say that the souls of good-doers enter more righteous bodies and enjoy greater pleasure after death. Sinful souls find a place in evil bodies subject to misery and suffering.³⁷ It obliterates the concept of *ākhirah*. They claim neither resurrection nor hereafter but only that souls undergo constant transmigration, from one form of life to another, forever.³⁸ Ibn Hazm describes how they allocated rewards and punishments based on *tanāsukh*. The soul of a sinful man transmigrates to the lowest of animals and lives in dustbins. However, there are different views on doers of good-deeds, with some claiming they move into angelic bodies.³⁹ Abu Said Nishwan said one sect believed that a man's soul is transformed into an animal to punish his sins. They believed that righteous souls have great transmigrations, and evil souls are forced into domestic animals to undergo degradation and indignity forever on earth.⁴⁰ Transmigration advocates do not confine themselves to human borders and offer the service to God's soul in a human body. Abu Said said they admitted the spirit of God was incarnated in Adam, became diluted in Adam's existence, and finally integrated the whole of Adam. Eventually, Shiites worshipped him

³⁵ Al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *Sharḥ 'Aqā'id al-Ṣudūq aw Taṣḥīḥ al-I'tiqād*, (n.p: n.d), 36–7

³⁶ Al-Majlisi *Bihār al-Anwār*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Tabah Hijriyyah, 1303-1315AH), 235.

³⁷ Ibn al-Jawzi, *Naqd al-'Ilm wa al-'Ulamā' aw Talbīs Iblīs*, 85.

³⁸ Al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 114.

³⁹ Ibn Hazm, *al-Fayal Fī al-Milal wa al-Ahwā' wa al-Nihāl*, vol. 1, 91–2.

⁴⁰ Abu Said Nishwan, *al-Ḥūr al-'In*, 243–44.

and believed in the eternity of this world while denying the hereafter.⁴¹

Extremists did not maintain silence but advanced the incarnation doctrine to destroy Islam's concepts of God, prophethood, the *imāmah* and other essential doctrines. They turned to metempsychosis to add energy to their operations. In this regard, al-Ash'ari stated they believed that human souls transmigrated and that God's spirit entered the body of Adam via metempsychosis to become Adam, whom they finally claimed as God and prophet, while also denying life in the hereafter.⁴²

Extremists know that Islam comprises belief and practice, so they were not silent on the religion's practical aspects. Hence, based on the transmigration thesis, they validated drinking wine, eating dead meat, fornication and other prohibitions while also abandoning *ṣalāh*.⁴³ So outrageous were their distortions of monolithic Islam, they had God incarnating into five noble humans: Muhammad, Ali, Hasan, Husayn and Fatimah; all of whom they regarded as gods. They conveniently argued there were five opponents also: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Muawiyah and Amr ibn al-As.⁴⁴

Refuting proponents of *tanāsukh* regarding the eternity of the soul, al-Mufid argued this claim was blameworthy and rejected⁴⁵ it because it is contrary to the Quran: "*All that is on earth will perish: and there will remain (forever) the Face of thy Lord, full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour.*"⁴⁶ Al-Majlisi summarised various extremist objectives that attempted to validate *tanāsukh* but instead produced confusion and methods that led folks astray. They claimed the sky was empty and devoid of dynamics attributed to it, that God assumed the form of a human; they also denied *Jannah*, *Jahannam* and the resurrection. For them, hereafter life was of a soul migrating from one form of life to another and another, with outcomes proportionally

⁴¹ Ibid., 160–1.

⁴² Al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 67.

⁴³ Nishwan, *al-Ḥūr al- 'In*, 160–1 and 167.

⁴⁴ Al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 84.

⁴⁵ Al-Mufid, *Sharḥ 'Aqā'id al-Ṣudūq*, 36–8.

⁴⁶ The Quran, *al-Raḥmān*: 26; 27.

dependent on good or evil inputs. They also acknowledge no obligation for *ṣalāh*, *ṣiyām* and any form of worship.⁴⁷

The Concept of *Bada'*

Bada' means 'to appear' or 'become obvious' (verbal noun: appearance). Al-Mufid defined *bada'* as 'appearance' because God says: "*But something will confront them from Allah, which they could never have counted upon!*"⁴⁸ — Which is to say they will encounter something beyond their imagination: "... *for the evils of their deeds will confront them...*"⁴⁹ The term *bada'* in both verses indicates 'manifestation' or 'appearance'. It can also refer to a changing of will or commitment, depending on the contextual change of knowledge.⁵⁰

Arabs believe good deeds 'appear' from men, as does eloquent speech.⁵¹ However, *bada'* became an extremist concept that served extremist attempts to validate various misdirecting concepts. For example, as 'change in knowledge', *bada'* might indicate that God redacted former knowledge and replaced it with an opposing edict. Thus, *bada'* as a divine directive might later command the contrary.⁵² However, such an interpretation indicates an imperfection of God's will. It directly interferes with the 'Self-hood' of God, thereby causing doubt, destroying another premise of monotheism for weakened minds.

Stages of *Bada'*

Two classes of *bada'* are "*bada'* accepted" and "*bada'* unaccepted", with the latter used by extremists. The first type relates to the abrogation of a Quranic verse, although God says: "*None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We*

⁴⁷ Al Majlisi, *Bihār al Anwār*, vol. 2, 235.

⁴⁸ The Quran, *al-Zumar*: 47.

⁴⁹ The Quran, *al-Zumar*: 48.

⁵⁰ Hashim al-Hasani, *al-Shi'ah bayn al-Mu'tazilah wa al-Ashā'irah*, (n. p: n. d), 269.

⁵¹ Al-Mufid, *Sharh 'Aqā'id al-Ṣadūq*, 25.

⁵² Muhammad ibn Abd al-Karim Shahrastani, *Muslim Sects and Divisions*, AK Kazi & JG Flynn (trans), (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), 121.

substitute something better or similar.”⁵³ Thus, authentic *bada'* from God is particularistic and not conditional in terms of *qadar*; neither does it change one decision to another, nor does God shy from firm confirmation, as claimed by radicals.⁵⁴

Extremist *Bada'*

Extremists use *bada'* to distort, divert or criticise pure Islamic precepts. Their first act was to identify relevance while exploiting what appeared to be ambiguous verses to justify their beliefs. Thus, referring to the verse, “*Allah does blot out or confirm what He pleases: with Him is the Mother of the Book,*”⁵⁵ they argued that God decided one thing, but if anything appeared differently, He would change His decision accordingly.⁵⁶ They expanded this interpretation by claiming *bada'* happened with every action of God.

Their distortions had God changing His decisions from one to another, which figuratively laid a seed of destruction to the core concept of Lordship, thus, giving license to switch practical applications over specific issues. Mukhtar ibn Abu Ubayd al-Thaqafi claimed the office of prophethood and justified his claim by using *bada'*. Al-Shahrastani said Mukhtar subsequently became a strong proponent of *bada'*, claiming knowledge of events by revelation or by messages received from an occulted *imām*. Therefore, when prophesying an event that finally occurred, he said it was evidence of his prophethood, if not, he simply said God had changed his mind. He did not differentiate between *naskh* and *bada'* and asserted that if *naskh* (abrogation) was possible in rulings, so was *bada'* (change) in foretelling future events.⁵⁷ In addition to prophethood, Mukhtar moved his political decisions and parties from one to another, using *bada'* as justification. Mukhtar, a Kharijite, became a Zubayrite, then Shiite, and finally a Kaysaniyyah by attributing all this *bada'* to God.⁵⁸

⁵³ The Quran, *al-Baqarah*: 106.

⁵⁴ Al-Mufid, *Sharḥ 'Aqā'id al-Ṣadūq*, 25-6.

⁵⁵ The Quran, *al-Ra'd*: 39

⁵⁶ Al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 109.

⁵⁷ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, vol. 1, 198 (European edition)

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, 197-8.

While explaining Mukhtar's position on *bada'*, al-Baghdadi explored the reason. It lay in the fact that when Ibrahim ibn al-Ashtar heard Mukhtar claiming prophethood, he withdrew his assistance and took power in *al-Jazirah*. When Musab ibn al-Zubayr learned that Ibrahim ibn al-Ashtar did not assist Mukhtar any longer, he became eager to subdue him. Al-Baghdadi says Mukhtar prepared an army to fight al-Zubayr by declaring *bada'*. When Mukhtar heard of al-Zubayr's expedition, he ordered his general, Ahmad ibn Shamit, to fight and gave him his best three thousand soldiers, telling them that victory would be theirs if the *wahy* returned to him. The armies fought, Mukhtar was defeated, and Shamit and others were killed. The very few who returned to Mukhtār asked him: "*Did you not promise victory*"? He said: "Yes, so was the revelation from God. However, a difference then appeared." He referred to the verse: "*Allah does blot out or confirm what He pleases.*"⁵⁹ So afterwards, the Kaysaniyyah conveniently advocated *bada'*.⁶⁰

We then observe how dangerous *bada'* was and still remains. It attacks core doctrines (*ulūhiyyah* and *nubuwwah*) and gives room for mischief-makers to navigate in any direction they like by opening a door for the sub-human penchant to lie. Al-Shahrastani narrated: "*When (anything came to his mind) he had declared that victory and authority would belong to them. However, when he had realised that the event was taking a different course, this was what appeared to God; he twisted his promise.*"⁶¹ Justifying this haphazard application, they attributed different meanings to *bada'* whereby God's command kept changing due to obvious divine shortcomings, hence, they subsumed God's perfect and ultimate sovereignty with demented whimsy, sufficiently destroying God's eternal characteristics.

The Concept of *Tashbīh* (Anthropomorphism)

Tashbīh means anthropomorphism. It attributes human characteristics to God, an animal or an object.⁶² It is a means used by extremists to

⁵⁹ The Quran, *al-Ra'd*: 39

⁶⁰ Al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, 35–6.

⁶¹ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 316–7.

⁶² <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/anthropomorphism>

attack Islam and distort any reasoned imagination of Godhood. An example is the attribution of divinity to their *imāms*. However, another degrades God by likening Him to His creatures while granting divine attributes to men.⁶³ Thus, anthropomorphism has two definitions, transgression and degradation.

Extremists began depicting God in any manner they wished, eventually viewing humans and God as analogues with tangible hands, legs and face that can be seen and touched. Al-Shahrastani rejected their interpretation as being based on misconceptions allowing even for organs (physical and spiritual) that permitted God's movement from place to place, coming down from the sky (for instance), climbing and sitting firmly to settle down. Thus, they believed sincere Muslims could touch their God in this world and the hereafter.⁶⁴

Physicalising God also means limiting Him to inherent human limitations, which Islam rejects, saying: "*There is nothing whatever like unto Him.*"⁶⁵ Since extremists believed in the notion of anthropomorphism, they also made God intimate with humankind. The Mughīriyyah sect claimed, "*God has a form and a body, having parts as letters of the alphabet do; His form is that of a man-made of light upon whose head is a crown of light, and from whose heart wisdom springs forth.*"⁶⁶ The Hishāmiyyah viewed God's body as long, wide, deep and leveled with starlight shining in all directions. They also gave God colour, taste and olfaction while sitting over seven spans of His own on a throne that enclosed Him.⁶⁷

Equating God sometimes with humans and others, along with an ingot of gold or silver, invited a new form of idol worship. By granting Him different powers represented by symbols, they began worshipping those symbols and devoting themselves to ungodly imaginations. By establishing such grounds for anthropomorphism, extremists trampled on monotheism's immutability by attributing the existence of God (divinity) to many forms. They invented numerous

⁶³ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥāl*, 363.

⁶⁴ A.K. Kazi, 152.

⁶⁵ The Quran, *al-Shūra*:11

⁶⁶ A.K. Kazi, 152.

⁶⁷ Al-Shatibi, *al-I'tiṣām*, 68.

idols to represent God in heaven and on earth, thus, characterising anthropomorphism as neo-polytheism. The Bayāniyyah, Hishāmiyyah, Mughīriyyah and Jawāriyyah had projected God as human and seemingly approved His incarnation by worshipping men. So did Khaṭṭābiyyah, Rizāmiyyah and Mubīdah too, that practically speaking they became idolaters.⁶⁸

Some were prompt to apply anthropomorphism and elevate prophets to Godhood. Shiites were obsessed with relating their *imāms* to Godhood and asserted their *imāms* were more than prophets, as deities and sons of God (Hasan and Husayn) with Jaafar also qualifying for God-hood.⁶⁹ The Mansuriyyah claimed this for Ali,⁷⁰ saying, ‘... *The piece falling from heaven is God Himself*.’⁷¹ They also claimed Abu Mansur (the sect’s founder) ‘... *had been taken up to heaven to see God, Who stroked His head with his head then said, ‘O my son, go down and make my message known.*’⁷² Attributing anthropomorphism in this manner demeaned the position of Ali, humiliated Hasan and Husayn, and violated the Omnipotent nature of God, as described in Quran: “Say: *He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah the Eternal, Absolute; He begets not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him.*”⁷³

Another fierce sect, the Hishāmiyyah, accepted anthropomorphism and argued, “*God is in the form of a man. His upper part is hollow, and the lower part is solid. He is a bright, radiant light, and besides five senses, he has hands, feet, nose, ears, eyes, mouth and black hair, which is a black light. He is not, however, flesh and blood.*”⁷⁴ Through promoting the concept of anthropomorphism, they advocated a plurality of gods; a god for good, a god for evil. They also unimaginably believed in God’s death.

⁶⁸ Abu al-Mazfar Muhammad ibn Tahir al-Isfarayini, *al-Tabsīr fī al-Dīn Wa Tamyīz al-Firqah al-Nājiyyah min al-Firqah al-Hālikīn*, *tahqīq*: Muhammad Zahid ibn al-Hasan al-Kawthari, (Al-Qahirah: Maktabt al-Khanji, 1955), 70.

⁶⁹ Al-Shatibi, *al-I’tisām*, vol. 3, 68.

⁷⁰ Al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq bayn al-Firqah*, 34, 5.

⁷¹ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 378.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ The Quran, *al-Ikhlāṣ*: 1-4.

⁷⁴ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 399.

Every extremist sect adopted unique approaches to the promotion of its agenda. Some used anthropomorphism to distort prophethood. One, for example, claimed that prophethood and messenger-hood were separate states and that prophethood was neither a miracle nor revelation, nor was a prophet infallible. They said if anyone attained such qualities, God would be obliged to send him to creation. Whenever He had sent someone, He forthwith became a sender, an office He did not hold before.⁷⁵

They classified likening God into two types: likening His existence to other beings and likening His attributes to His creatures' qualities.⁷⁶ Anthropomorphism was the oldest instrument used by extremists to distort Islam's message, and the Saba'iyyah were the first to transgress by attributing Godhood to Ali. The Bayāniyyah were next by claiming their Deity was light and structured like a man with organs that would perish, except for His face. Gradually, the Mughīriyyah, Manṣūriyyah, Khaṭṭābiyyah and others followed.⁷⁷

Anthropomorphism and Incarnation

Extremism is a living phenomenon interwoven with numerous ideas that cause the deterioration of its proponents. A close connection exists between anthropomorphism and *re-incarnation*. Among anthropomorphists, some are inclined towards the latter, believing God appeared in human form as an Arabic Saracen named Gabriel, or as a man to inspire Mary as stated in the hadith: '*I have seen my Lord in the best of forms.*' It had been narrated on the authority of Moses, "*I had talked with Allah, and He told me so and so*"⁷⁸. Thus, incarnationists claimed God incarnated in the best of forms, and so, when they saw any beautiful feature or creature, they prostrated. Major anthropomorphists were the Muqanniyyah and Hishāmiyyah sects. They glorified their deity and placed it above all human beings. The relationship between anthropomorphism and *re-incarnation* is evident. Both concepts appear to have been designed to reduce God's

⁷⁵ Al-Isfarayini, *al-Tabsīr fī al-Dīn Wa Tamayiz al-Firqah al-Nājiyyah min al-Firaq al-Hālikīn*, 68.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 70.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 69-70.

⁷⁸ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 179.

divine status to that of creature-hood, which in turn, elevates the latter beyond its estate.

Anthropomorphism with other than God

Originally, anthropomorphism appeared to reveal relations between God and man or vice versa. However, by removing prophets, *imāms* and Muslims from their due positions, extremists expanded this by ascribing them attributes that in no way belonged to them. The Mughīriyyah held a peculiar view of ‘the holy soul in Muḥammad’: “*Whom Isā ibn Mūsā had killed in Madinah but which was a Devil who had assumed the figure of Muḥammad. And certainly, he had not been killed.*”⁷⁹

When the Saba’iyyah claimed God’s incarnation as Ali, they gave him attributes befitting Olympian status. They believed Ali appeared in the clouds, that the thunder was his voice and lightning his smile. Indeed, he would soon come down to earth.⁸⁰ By imputing such an exalted position, they humiliated Ali’s revered dignity. The Bāzighiyyah claimed that Jaafar the Truthful was God or that God appeared in his form.⁸¹ The Ismailites practised anthropomorphism by granting divine attributions and circumstances to the Prophet and Ali. They also believed that God appeared as different persons. When after the Messenger’s death, there was no one better than Ali and, after him, his progeny, they allowed God to appear in their forms, talk with their tongues, and receive oaths with their hand, imputing divinity to them.⁸²

The Gharrābiyyah, using anthropomorphism, invalidated authentic prophethood and imamate. They said Muḥammad resembled Ali more than a crow did another crow, so that consequently, Gabriel mistook Muḥammad for Ali.⁸³ The Janāhiyyah said Abd Allah ibn Muawiyah was Lord and that

⁷⁹ Al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, 232–33.

⁸⁰ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 365–66.

⁸¹ Ibid., 382–383.

⁸² Ibid., 409.

⁸³ Al-Khawarizmi, *Maḥāṭib al-‘Ulūm*, 168–69.

knowledge sprang forth from his heart as grass and crops grew from soil.⁸⁴

Popular Sects of Anthropomorphism

Extremist sects generously used elements of anthropomorphism to formulate subversive views more frequently than other forms of deviation. Nonetheless, characterising these sects as *ahl al-tashbīh* is sensible to include Hishāmiyyah, Mughīriyyah, Yamaniyyah, Muqātiliyyah, Karrāmiyyah and Jawāribiyyah as some of the leading sects.⁸⁵

The Yamaniyyah said God existed in human form and that every part of His body would perish except His Face.⁸⁶ Bayan ibn Saman, the founder of the Bayāniyyah, offered this theory. The Yamaniyyah, per Maqdisi, was an expanded version of the Bayāniyyah. Still, others like the Jawāribiyyah and Muqātiliyyah were of paramount seditious influence. The first claimed that God had two-dimensional appearances: first from face-to-breast, which was hollow; and second from chest-to-nether parts, which was solid. They also claimed that God had a physical appearance like any flesh and blood creature and that he had seven spans by His Span. The Karrāmiyyah claimed God had a body that differed from created bodies adjacent to the Throne.

Al-Baghdadi added there were still more anthropomorphist sects based on the observations provided by al-Maqdisi. The Yūnusiyyah transgressed limits by absurdly teaching that bearers of God's Throne carry Him but He was more potent than them because His chair stood on the support of its two feet, which was stouter than their feet. They argued this based on the verse: "*And the angels will be on its sides, and eight will that Day bear the Throne of your Lord above them.*"⁸⁷ They also believed that God sometimes bore the Throne Himself when angels got tired, relating a Prophetic tradition that angels sometimes get tired because of Allah's Greatness on the

⁸⁴ Abu Said Nishwan, *al-Ḥūr al-'In*, 160.

⁸⁵ Abu Zayd Ahmad ibn Sahl al-Balkhi, *al-Bad' wa al-Tārīkh*, Traceable to al-Mutahhir ibn Tahir al-Maqdisi, vol. 5 (Paris: n.p, 1899), 139–41.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 139–141.

⁸⁷ The Quran, *al-Hāqqah*: 17.

Throne.⁸⁸ Al-Shaytānīyah or al-Nu‘mānīyah believed Allah was Light in the form of a divine human being. The Bayānīyyah claimed that their God was shaped in the form of a human being, organ-by-organ, part-by-part.⁸⁹

The concept of anthropomorphism is the worst of doctrinal deviations and most extremist groups rely on it to establish their positions. Ahmad ibn Fatik describes its dangers:

*“... Hallaj says: whosoever thinks that divinity is blended with temporality or vice versa commits kufr. Certainly, God is exclusive with His Existence and all the Attributes from that of His creations. In no way, therefore, He will be compared with the creation, and neither creation should be likened to Him. How can the resemblance between the sempiternal and temporal existence be justified? He who claims that the Creator stands in any place like ours or rests on any space or is adjacent to any location... is viewed to have committed an association with God.”*⁹⁰

Thus, Hallaj’s explanation on the dangers of anthropomorphism to the fundamental premise of Islamic monotheism.

The Concept of *Ta’wīl*

Ta’wīl means elucidation or an esoteric exposition of probable conclusions regarding the objectives of a given text. When a text is illustrated via probable evidence like *khavar āḥād* (traditions narrated by a single companion), it is *ta’wīl*; but if by definitive evidence, it is *tafsīr*, which is more specific. *Tafsīr*, on the other hand, is definitively clear in meaning.⁹¹

Ibn Taymiyyah says *ta’wīl* navigates facts aimed according to immediate or direct indications, of which are interpretations provided by classical scholars. This tool applies semantic notions to navigate

⁸⁸ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥāl*, 408.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 403–4.

⁹⁰ Ali ibn Anjab, *Kitāb Akhbār al-Hallāj*, (Dimashq: Dar al-Talīh al-Jadīdah, 2004), 47.

⁹¹ Thanawi, *Kashf al-Iṣṭilāḥāt al-Funūn*, vol. 1, 89.

substantial probabilities rather than weak prospects while pleading a case for related proof(s).⁹² However, *ta'wīl* is seen negatively by deviant ideations that are eventually formed, ever since the early stages of revelation. Proponents of this position even site a specific locus in the history of exegesis. The Quran says: “*He it is Who has sent down to you the Book; in it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meanings); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord and searching for its hidden meanings...*”⁹³

Extremists alter meanings by using *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* in sophisticated but conflicting ways. Their discourses, though few and disorganised, initiated the early sources of much controversy. They emphasised select passages and relied on lexical interpretations to promote hostility. Muhammad Jabir described this convoluted exegesis by saying it was aimed to revive ancient Iraqi religions by giving a specific form to the science of *tafsīr* and was one of the worst movements witnessed by second century Islam.⁹⁴

Tafsīr and *ta'wīl* hold great significance in furthering Islamic knowledge and are regarded as gateways to Islamic sciences. Thus, extremists used them to refer to the Quran and justify their views. They initially argued that anything God created has an inner, esoteric dimension⁹⁵ so that every line of revelation consists of a *ta'wīl* secret. They twisted verses such as: “*Eschew all sin, open or secret...*”⁹⁶ Say, things that my Lord has indeed forbidden are shameful deeds, whether open or secret.”⁹⁷ Their arguments attempted to establish that *Sharī'ah* held secret aspects of key consideration, claiming that reality is not manifest except when inner meanings contrast with disordered or even contradictory external

⁹² Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān Muwāfaqah Šārīh al-Ma'qūl li Šaḥīḥ al-Manqūl*, (n. p: n. d), 5–6.

⁹³ *The Quran, Āl 'Imrān*: 7.

⁹⁴ Muhammad Jabir Abd, *al-Ḥarakāt al Shī'ah al-Mutaṭarrifīn*, 40.

⁹⁵ Muhammad ibn Malik al-Yamani, *Kashf Asrār al-Bāṭiniyyah wa Akhbār al-Karāmita*, 193.

⁹⁶ The Quran, *al-An'ām*: 120.

⁹⁷ The Quran, *al-A'rāf*: 33

meanings.⁹⁸ They claimed it was easy to understand the exoteric but the esoteric required exceptional perception.⁹⁹

Stages of *Ta'wīl*

Ta'wīl is understood in stages. Initially, it deals with issues not related to fundamental precepts of '*aqīdah*', the basis of Islam and its approach, which is acceptable. Al-Ghazali wrote that if *ta'wīl* were not concerned with principles of '*aqā'id*' and derivatives, there would be no *takfīr*. Thus, *Sufī* scholars considered Ibrahim's star gazing by saying that when he saw the stars, moon and sun, it remained unclear that they were radiating substance, arguing that Ibrahim was beyond such thinking and believing that natural substance could be God and even be seen with the naked eye. If these substances did not disappear, should he then have accepted them as his god (?), although the impossibility of physical appearance for god was yet unknown.¹⁰⁰

Al-Ghazali argued that *ta'wīl* can be accepted for issues not related to '*aqīdah*' but is, however, also conditional and applies where external meanings are not possible. The first criterion is the existential understanding. If proven, then the whole can be included. If not, then comes an accurate understanding. If this step fails, rational understanding can be considered if not allegorical. However, without proof it is not permissible to depart from the initial steps and proceed.¹⁰¹

Al-Ghazali said that every group of scholars somehow or other follows *ta'wīl*. However, Ahmad ibn Hanbal distanced himself from figurative *ta'wīl* explanations of texts to rational allegorical understanding. Hadith scholars say that he had applied *ta'wīl* to explain only three hadith. Therefore, we conclude that *ta'wīl*, which is acceptable, can be applied out of necessity when confronted by text

⁹⁸ Goldziher, *al-'Aqīdah wa al-Sharī'ah fī al-Islām*, Trans: Muhammad Yusuf Musa, Ali Hasan Abd al-Qadir, Abd al-Aziz Abd al-Haqq, (Al-Qahirah: n. p, 1946), 242.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 242.

¹⁰⁰ Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Fayṣal al-Tafarruqah bayn al-Islām wa al-Zandaqah, taḥqīq*: Sulayman Danya, (Al-Qahirah: Dar Ihyā' al-Kutub al-Arabiyyah, 1961), 13-14.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 11.

that is not clearly understood but appears to conflict with other texts or basic premises of *Shari'ah*.¹⁰²

The second aspect of *ta'wīl* occurs when proponents transgress limits to conclude a matter. It is considered extremist (deviation) and is the most destructive. Al-Ghazali said:

*He who applies ta'wīl without established evidence or solid proof to deny punishments in the Hereafter based on whims and desires, is kāfir... so is a ruling regarding any individual or group who believe Allah knows nothing except Himself; knowing only collective aspects of substances but not the portions thereof that concern individuals or other creatures.*¹⁰³

It shows that transgression vis-à-vis *ta'wīl* in matters related to fundamental principles of *'aqīdah* had established the basic premises which extremists used to reduce God from Omnipotent Divinity to mere human stature. It also allowed them to introduce a multiplicity of gods and provided room to attribute changes, even 'evolution' to God. This transgression, this perverse *ta'wīl*, functioned as a vehicle for many extremist groups.

Some sects adopted another tool or '*ta'wīl of ta'wīl*', most especially the Ismailiyyah, and used it to establish whims. Goldziher writes that they asserted the following:

Certain verses of the Qur'ān are easy and lucid. However, there exists a secret meaning behind the obvious sense of words. This second meaning (secret input) engenders a third upon which well-versed scholars are confused and consequently consider them blameworthy. But there is also a fourth meaning known only to God. In this way, one can reach seven different entangled meanings... so each stage of understanding has a close connection with an immediate superior level based on a forwarded premise that considers underpinning interpretations far more subtle and

¹⁰² Ibid., 9–10.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 14.

critical. In fact, they altogether volatilised exegesis and its content, which is the pivotal premise of Islamic science from the beginning."¹⁰⁴

By applying these seven types or levels of meaning, they stripped the Quranic verses of its intended meanings and distorted the text.

***Ta'wīl* and its Proponents**

Historically, *ta'wīl* was appropriately utilised in the orthodox manner prior to and following the emergence of extremism associated with various deviations ranging from *ḥulūl* to *tashbīh*. The Khabitiyyah, for example, an offshoot of Mu'tazilites, misinterpreted verse 6:38: "*There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies with its two wings, but forms communities like you*"...¹⁰⁵ and *there never was a people without a warner having lived among them (in the past).*¹⁰⁶ By overgeneralising the meaning of 'ummah', they concluded that every community had its own Prophet, including them. In this way, they permitted messenger-hood for animals and humans including people of other faiths, a notion altogether irrational.

The *Azāriqah* sect misinterpreted the following verse: "*There is a type of person whose speech about this world's life may dazzle, and he calls God to witness about what is in his heart; yet is he the most contentious of enemies,*"¹⁰⁷ as being revealed concerning Ali.¹⁰⁸ The Kaysāniyyah had misconstrued the concept of *Din*, saying it references loyalty to a person and so expanded it, claiming that *ṣalah*, *ṣiyām* and *zakāh* refer to persons.¹⁰⁹ The Hāshimiyyah adapted the verse, "*On those who believe and do deeds of righteousness there is no blame for what they ate (in the past) when they guard themselves from evil*"¹¹⁰ to mean that if anyone confessed his sins to Ali, no blame was to be imputed for what he ate and that he could then reach

¹⁰⁴ Goldziher, *al-'Aqīdah wa al-Sharī'ah*..., 243.

¹⁰⁵ The Quran, *al-An'ām*: 38.

¹⁰⁶ The Quran, *Fāṭir*: 24.

¹⁰⁷ The Quran, *al-Baqarah*: 204.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 209–210.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 280.

¹¹⁰ The Quran, *al-Mā'idah*: 93.

perfection.”¹¹¹ This same sect believed the earth would never perish and persisted in validating unlawful behaviour by making wine and dead meat lawful, also arguing the same verse.¹¹² The Bayāniyyah said, “*Everything will perish except His Face*”, so that God will also perish, literally, except for His Face.¹¹³ Bayān, the head of this sect, said the phrase *hādha* in ‘*hādha bayan li al-Nas*’ meant ‘Him’.¹¹⁴

Let’s look at the explanation of the verse used by the Mughīriyyah: “*We did indeed offer the Trust to Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but the human being undertook it; he was indeed unjust and foolish*.”¹¹⁵ They said God’s offer meant the burden of Ali to the Heavens, Earth and Mountains which were refused, after which God offered Ali to the people. Also, that Umar ordered Abu Bakr to accept the offer but took a separate promise from him that he would deny Ali and then assist him in betraying Ali and give him the caliphate after ‘Ali’s death. Thus, his acceptance and denial of Ali pertained to “... *the human being undertook it; he was indeed unjust and foolish*.”¹¹⁶ They then taught that a succeeding verse was revealed regarding Umar:¹¹⁷ “*Their allies deceived them like the Evil One, when he says to the human being, “Deny Allah”: but when he denies Allah, (the Evil One) says, I am free of you: I do fear Allah, the Lord of the Worlds!*”¹¹⁸

The Manṣūriyyah sect claimed that the legacy of Allah’s messengers never ends and that *Jannah* is a man we were all ordered to ally with as the imām of a given time. They taught that *Jahannam* was/is Ali’s adversary towards whom we were ordered to cultivate hostility. They further construed that all prohibitions were persons towards whom we were to direct hostility. Specific ‘actions’ were also real people to whom we were to render friendship and alliance. These interpretations threw darts at the caliphate, especially Abu

¹¹¹ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 293.

¹¹² Ibid., 296.

¹¹³ The Quran, *Āl ‘Imrān*: 138.

¹¹⁴ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 296.

¹¹⁵ The Quran, *al-Aḥzāb*: 72.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 376.

¹¹⁸ The Quran, *al-Ḥashr*: 16.

Bakr and Umar, as a device to destroy the institution of the *imāmah* and played such a significant role after the Messenger's death.¹¹⁹

Abu Said Nishwan reiterated their purposeful destruction of Islam's entire set of fundamental principles. He narrates that Abu Mansur al-Ajali, the founder of the Manṣūriyyah, claimed that dead meat, blood, wine, and gambling were *ḥalāl*. Al-Ajali also invalidated *farā'id* (laws of inheritance). Al-Ash'ari said Abu Mansur depended on *ta'wīl* to allow the destruction of Islam's pillars for *Sharī'ah*, saying such orders were names of specific people, using verse 93 of *Sūrat al-Mā'idah*.¹²⁰ The Khaṭṭābiyyah understood *ulūhiyyah*, *nubuwwah* and *imāmah* in a warped manner, teaching that *imāms* were prophets and gods bearing *ulūhiyyah* light.¹²¹ By dint of *ta'wīl*, they said *Jannah* referred to blessings and luxuries in this world and that suffering thereof were hellfire. They prohibited the lawful and abandoned *farā'id*. They said revelation came to every believer and that they would not die but rather rise to the world of angels.¹²² They went even further to mandate the worship of their *imāms*. They based such a distortion on *ta'wīl* regarding this verse: "When I have fashioned him (in due proportion) and breathed into him of My spirit, fall you down in obeisance unto him."¹²³ They worshipped Abu al-Khattab as their god.¹²⁴

Al-Ash'arī says the Khaṭṭābiyyah claimed the *imāms* were prophets, messengers of God and proof of His creation. Advancing a further distortion, they professed there would always be two messengers, one explicit and the other implicit. Muḥammad became the explicit Prophet and Ali the implicit Messenger.¹²⁵ The Umariyyah said this world would not perish, that *Jannah* is a place of enjoyment and blessing for people on earth. *Jahannam* represents agonies and miseries suffered in the present life. They legalised wine, adultery and other prohibitions and rejected *ṣalāh* and *farā'id*.¹²⁶ The

¹¹⁹ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 378–79.

¹²⁰ Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 75.

¹²¹ Al-Shahrastani, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 380–81.

¹²² Al-Shatibi, *al-I'tisām*, vol. 3, 67–68.

¹²³ The Quran, *al-Ḥijr*: 29.

¹²⁴ Abu Said Nishwan, *al-Ḥur al-'In*, 166–67.

¹²⁵ Al-Ash'ari, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 75–76.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 382.

Bāzigiyyah targeted *nubuwwah* and reinterpreted its characteristics to destroy it. They claimed that God sent revelation to every believer and based their explanation on: “*nor can a soul die except by Allah’s leave,*”¹²⁷ somehow extracting that meaning.¹²⁸ Historically, Ismā’iliyyāhs used *ta’wīl* more actively than other sects by postulating ‘a secret meaning for every word’¹²⁹ and purposely targeting Islam’s monotheist state for destruction.¹³⁰

When enemies of Islam failed to separate people from the Quran and Sunnah, they turned them away from authentic interpretation, thereby rubbishing two holy sources. Had they negated these directly, they could have been prosecuted. So they proposed, for example, that *janābah* meant *ghusl* for an adulterer who could then renew his agreement, meaning *zinā* throws the sperm of hidden knowledge into a soul with whom no prior agreement had been made. *Ṣiyām* implies refusing to disclose the secret; that *Ka’bah* is the Prophet. The door is Ali; that deluge means a flood of knowledge in which a recipient of allegory is drowned, and that Gog and Magog are proponents of appearance/externalism.¹³¹

Among Ismā’iliyyah distortions, we note *tafsīr* for the beginning of *Sūrat al-Tīn*. They thought that *tīn* means intellect or the faculty of understanding; and that *zaytūn* implies the soul with all its subtlety by comparing it to the thickness of *zaytūn* and its seed; and that the valley of *Sina*’s spokesman is Muhammad, likened to a high mountain who talked to people by the sword and whose inner substance was rich with mineral wealth like a mountain. The safe city (*al-balad al-amīn*) is Ali who fashioned *Sharī’ah* and by which people avoided digression. They said the Prophet was the father of believers and Ali their mother and that the Prophet had transmigrated into Ali to impart all of his prophetic wisdom and knowledge, thus granting access to hidden knowledge.¹³²

¹²⁷ The Quran, *Āl ‘Imrān*: 145.

¹²⁸ Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Mīlāl wa al-Niḥāl* 383.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 326.

¹³⁰ Al-Shatībī, *al-I’tisām*, vol. 3, 68.

¹³¹ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs Iblīs*, 114.

¹³² Al-Husaynī, *Bayān al-Adyān*, 42.

Abu Said Nishwan commented on the dangers of improperly applying *ta'wil* and that explanations could easily be based on whims and desires (bias) to function as a basis for deviation.¹³³ Al-Asadabadi said such dangers start with critics who specifically target Islam's basis in the Quran and Sunnah. When they remove the Quran from the realm of understanding, they begin referring to antecedent of 'secret knowledge' that is often impossible to understand without evidence. Thus, they close the door of understanding Islam with calumny.¹³⁴ Al-Baghdadi warned of the dangers of deviant forms of *ta'wil*, saying the Bāṭiniyyah implicitly invites people to Zoroastrianism.¹³⁵

Conclusion

Our discourse allows us to conclude that elements of extremism existed from the early days of Islamic civilisation. These assaults on orthodoxy included: [1] incarnation, [2] metempsychosis, [3] God's changing His mind, [4] anthropomorphism, and [5] sundry elucidations that birthed theological and polemical debates that still fuel scholastic discourse and cause people to deviate from a proper understanding of the nature and attributes of God. This review also revealed that Muslim sectarianism emerged after borrowing principles and concepts from other religious traditions.

A type of this mischief is the concept of incarnation, used by extremists to advocate God's reduction to human form. This belief led to another deviant theme, especially considering God's incarnation as a man to guide humanity because then there was indeed no need for prophet or messenger-hood. By advocating this theory, extremists attempted to eliminate prophethood from Muslim minds. This belief led modern liberals and organisations to propagate the rejection of prophethood by inviting scholars to apply the western methodology to the study of sacred scriptures and religions. This activity catalysed campaigns of anti-hadith movements and the rejection of Muhammad as a lawmaker for the *ummah*.

¹³³ Nishwan, *al-Ḥūr al-'In*, 236.

¹³⁴ Abd al-Jabbar al-Asadabadi, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-'Adl*, *taḥqīq*: Amin al-Khuli, (Al-Qahirah: Matbaah Dar al-Kutub, 1960), vol. 16, 363.

¹³⁵ Al-Baghdadi, *al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, 170.

Metempsychosis was another doctrine advocated by the extremists after borrowing it from Indian religions, although some people remark it stems from Pharaoh's philosophy. Extremists of the past believed the soul of sinful men transmigrates to the lowest classes of animal life as a form of punishment and that good souls find their place in righteous bodies and useful lives as a reward. By advocating this belief, they obliterate *Jannah*, *Jahannam* and the resurrection because, according to them, people are either rewarded or punished through metempsychosis. Likewise, life on earth continues forever, which implies no hereafter. It disturbs people's understanding and affects the principles of their creed.

Another theory propounded by extremists was 'God's change of mind.' The paper discussed it at length. Extremists believed God changed his mind frequently, which is a sign of uncertainty in His decision-making abilities. Accordingly, change in knowledge means God may attain knowledge that opposes former knowledge, also indicating a change in the will, implying God might discover the opposite of what He formerly willed and decreed to be correct. Thus, a change in command meant God was a bit unreliable and arbitrary at times. By advocating such concepts, extremists portrayed God as imperfect. This belief destroys the concept of God's omnipotence and all-knowing attribution, hence, implying God's need for assistance.

Anthropomorphism is yet another concept invented by extremists by which they attributed human characteristics to God, animals or objects. Our discussion disclosed this as fatal ideation advanced by extremists to attack Islam and distort the concept of Godhood. By advocating anthropomorphism, they also attributed divinity to *imāms* to God, thus, likening God to one of His creatures. They equated God with a man or an ingot of metal, especially gold or silver, an invitation to idol worship in a new form. Based on anthropomorphism, extremists attempted to dismantle monotheism, transcendence and the absolute unity of God's selfhood, then distributed His existence and divinity to many forms. They then created many idols to represent God in heaven or earth.

The study also discussed the abuse of scriptural elucidation by extremists, going beyond the bounds of explaining the text via probable evidence. They then changed meanings in a sophisticated,

conflicting manner, and their discourses were regarded as sources of controversy. They placed much effort in misinterpreting verses and relied on lexical meanings to promote vain desires aligned with their objectives. Our study further disclosed that, historically, the concept of elucidation was applied before and after the emergence of extremist ideations. The latter was associated with every element of extremism, ranging from incarnation to anthropomorphism. The Azāriqah, the Kaysāniyyah, the Hāshimiyyah, the Bayāniyyah and the Mughīriyyah are examples of extremist sects that abused the concept and process of elucidation.

Having summarised the discourse, the author offers recommendations: First, Muslims must acknowledge that extremism elements in early Islamic civilisation made unprecedented challenges to the Muslim creed's sustainability. Second, Muslims should not resort to mesmerism by extremist innovations and should not attempt to apply theories of the past to contemporary contexts that result in questioning or criticising the validity and necessity of the institution of prophethood and the role of Sunnah. Contemporary Muslim communities should apply moderation and not become dissension centres by fabricating God's role, His nature or attributions. Fourth, they should not treat every interpretation coming from unknown quarters as acceptable or useful but instead promote a healthy *'ilm al-kalām* (the science of discourse) in countering extremist and radical interpretations of religious terms and concepts. Fifth, Muslims must cultivate and nurture the behaviour of analysing and evaluating religious thoughts and ideations derived from unrecognised sources, and must teach the community to refer to authentic qualified scholars and reliable think tanks to clarify misconceptions and misunderstandings. Lastly, a culture of verification and avoidance of fake news must be instilled among innocent Muslims not to fall prey to radicalisation.

AL-SHAJARA

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