

A Critical Study on *Ghaybah* of *Imām Mahdi* Concept in *Shī'ah Imāmiyyah Ithnā 'Ashariyyah*

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Abstract

The Sunni and Shī'ah debate over whether the teachings of the Imāmah Shī'ah Imāmiyyah Ithnā 'Ashariyyah are included in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW cannot be avoided. Both saw the need for Imāmah as a substitute for the position of the prophet in managing religion and the world. However, there is a fundamental difference that cannot be tolerated. According to Ahl Sunnah wa al-jamā'ah (the Sunnis), Imāmah is fardhu kifayah, while according to Shī'ah Imāmiyyah, it is one of the principles of faith which must be believed. This Shī'a belief also experienced a deadlock due to the polemic whether Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Ashkari had descendants or not. This deadlock was answered by them by bringing up a new concept in aqidah called Ghaybah. Therefore, the authors see the need to critically examine this concept of ghaybah, because it is the underlying foundation of the Imāmah that is believed. In addition to strengthening the faith of Muslims (the Sunnis), this study will also examine how strong the argument for the concept of ghaybah is. Through a study of library research type with a descriptive-critical analysis approach, it can be concluded that: First, the concept of ghaybah does not have a strong argumentative basis. Second, the figure of Imam Mahdi who they have believed in is only a fictitious figure. Third, the nature of Imam Mahdi's ghaybah contradicts the hadiths of the Prophet SAW and the statements of the Shī'ah scholars themselves.

Ghaybah, Imam Mahdi, Shī'ah Imāmiyah Ithnā 'Ashariyah

Perdebatan Sunni dan Shī'ah terkait apakah ajaran Imāmah Shī'ah Imāmiyah Ithnā 'Ashariyah termasuk ajaran Nabi Muhammad SAW memang tidak bisa dielakkan. Keduanya melihat perlu adanya Imāmah sebagai pengganti kedudukan nabi dalam mengurus agama dan dunia. Namun terdapat perbedaan mendasar tidak dapat ditoleransi, menurut ahl sunnah wa al-jamā'ah (Sunni), Imāmah adalah fardhu kifayah, sedangkan menurut Shī'ah Imāmiyah Ithnā 'Ashariyah, ia merupakan salah satu asas akidah yang wajib diimani. Keyakinan Shī'ah ini pun mengalami kebuntuan akibat polemik apakah Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Ashkari memiliki keturunan ataukah tidak. Kebuntuan ini dijawab oleh mereka dengan memunculkan konsep baru dalam akidah, disebut Ghaybah. Oleh karena itu, penulis melihat perlu untuk menelaah secara kritis atas konsep ghaybah ini, karena ia merupakan pondasi dari bangunan imāmah yang diyakini. Selain untuk menguatkan keimanan umat Islam (Sunni), kajian ini juga akan menguji seberapa kuat argumentasi konsep ghaybah tersebut. Melalui kajian kepustakaan dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analisis kritis dapat disimpulkan; pertama, konsep ghaybah ini tidak memiliki landasan dalil yang kuat. Kedua, sosok Imam Mahdi yang selama ini mereka yakini hanyalah tokoh fiktif. Ketiga, hakikat ghaybah Imam Mahdi banyak bertentangan dengan ḥadits-ḥadits Nabi SAW serta keterangan para ulama Shī'ah sendiri.

Introduction

The Sunni and Shī'ah debate over whether the teachings of the *Imāmah Shī'ah Imāmiyyah Ithnā 'Ashariyyah* are included in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad SAW cannot be avoided. Because both saw the need for *Imamah* (leadership) as a substitute for the position of the prophet in managing religion and the world.¹ However, there is a fundamental difference that is significant (*uṣūl*), so it cannot be tolerated, in that the *Ahl Sunnah wa al-jama'ah* (the Sunnis) sees *the Imamah* as *fardhu kifayah*,² whereas according to the *Shī'ah*

Imāmiyyah Ithnā 'Ashariyyah (the Twelver Shī'ah) it is an obligatory matter that must be believed in.³ Even doubting and denying one of the twelve Imams is the same as not believing in all of the Imams.⁴ This has the consequence of expelling the perpetrator from Islam (*Shī'ah*).⁵ Because the position of the Imam is “*hujjah* (imam) over the inhabitants of the earth.” The absence of an Imam equals no *hujjah* (argument) over the Qur'an,

³Muhammad Riḍā Al-Muzaffār, *Aqā'id al-Imāmiyah* (n.d.), 54; Al-Nu'māni, *Al-Ghaybah* (Iraq: Dār al-Jawādīn, 2011), 129.

⁴Ibid., 128; Muhammad Bāqir al-Majlisi, *Bihāru al-Anwār*, vol. XXIII (Beirut: Dār Ihyā'u al-Turats al-'Arabi, 1983), 9. Ibnu Babawaih al-Qumi, *Kamāluddīn Wa Tamāmu al-Ni'mah* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-'Alami li al-Maṭbū'at, 1991), 377.

⁵Muhammad bin Ya'qub Al-Kulaini, *Uṣulu al-Kāfi* (Beirut: Dār at-Ta'aruf li al-Maṭbū'ah, 1990), 438; Al-Nu'māni, *Al-Ghaybah*, 128. Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru al-Anwār*, vol. XXIII, 89; Al-Muzaffār, *Aqā'id al-Imāmiyah*, 5. Abdullāh Shibr, *Haqqu al-Yaqīn Fī Ma'rīfati Uṣuli al-Dīn*, vol. I (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-'Alami li al-Maṭbū'ah, 1997), 275.

¹Husaini Tahrani Hasyim, *Tauḍīhu al-Murād, Ta'liqah 'alā Syarh Tajrīd al-I'tiqād li al-'Allāmah al-Ḥasan bin Yūsuf bin 'Ali bin al-Muṭahhir al-Hilly* (al-Ḥusaini al-Tahrani, 2016), 672. Ali bin Muhammad al-Māwardī, *Al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah* (Egypt: Dār al-Ḥadīth, n.d.), 15.

²Ibid., 16.

and the Qur'an cannot be a *hujjah* without the presence of one of the twelve *qayyims* (leaders/twelve imams).⁶

In addition, the Twelver Shī'ah believes that the twelve Imams were chosen based on the *naş* from Allah, the Prophet SAW, as well as from the previous imam's word.⁷ For example, the Prophet Muhammad SAW had appointed the companion 'Ali bin Abi Ṭālib RA as the first Imam. Then it continued to the last Imam, Imam Mahdi al-Muntaẓar (the twelfth Imam).⁸ However, this belief is deadlocked due to the polemic whether Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Ashkari (the eleventh Imam) has a descendant or not. This deadlock was answered by the Twelver Shī'ah by bringing up a new concept in the aqidah which they called *Ghaybah*, both *Ghaybah Şughrā* (minor occultation) and *Ghaybah Kubrā* (major occultation).⁹ Both are the concept of aqidah which is believed by the Twelver Shī'ah.¹⁰

Therefore, the authors see the need to scrutinize the concept of *ghaybah Imam* in the Twelver Shī'ah, because this concept is the underlying foundation of the *Imamah* they believe in. In addition, to strengthen the faith of Muslims (the Sunnis) and enrich the knowledge about the concept of *ghaybah*, this study will also test how

strong the argument on the *ghaybah Imam* concept is in the Twelver Shī'ah. The authors' exploration onto previous studies (*al-buḥūth al-sābiqah*) revealed a lot of studies on Shī'ah, both in terms of its concept of *the Imamah*,¹¹ Imam Mahdi,¹² the history of its development in Indonesia,¹³ its thoughts on tafsir and hadith,¹⁴ the problem of *wilāyah al-faqīh*,¹⁵ and so on.¹⁶ However, as far as the exploration suggested, it can be seen that the study of the concept of *ghaybah Imam* in the Twelver Shī'ah is still relatively very limited, especially if this concept is reviewed from the original source of their books and from the books of genuine Sunni scholars or the former authoritative Shī'ah.

Through literature study (*library research*) to a variety of literature, with a descriptive-critical analysis approach, this study tries to answer some important questions: How is the concept of *ghaybah Imam* in the Twelver Shī'ah? Does the concept of *ghaybah* also exist in Imam Mahdi of the Sunnis? And what are the ambiguities in the concept of *ghaybah Imam* in the Twelver Shī'ah? This article attempts to shed some light on these issues.

The Concept of *Gaybah* Imam in the Twelver Shī'ah

In discussing the concept of *Gaybah* Imam in the Twelver Shī'ah, there are at least two

⁶Al-Kulaini, *Uşulu al-Kāfi*, 244.

⁷Al-Muẓaffār, *'Aqā'id al-Imāmiyah*, 55; Muhammad bin al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsi, *Kashfū al-Murād Fi Sharhi Tajrīdi al-I'tiqād* (Qum: Manshūrat Shakūra, 2000), 392-393; Muhammad al-Ḥusain Ālu Kasyif al-Ghita', *Aşlu al-Shī'ah Wa Uşuluhā Muqāranatan Ma'a al-Madzāhib al-Arba'ah* (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', 1990), 145.

⁸Shibr, *Haqqu al-Yaqīn Fī Ma'rifati Uşuli al-Dīn*, 191.

⁹*Ghaybah şughrā* means the occult period of the imam which lasts for a short time. Starting from the birth and the hiding of the son of the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-'Ashkari until the death of the fourth *saḫīr* (deputy occult Imam), 'Ali bin Muhammad al-Samirri (year 255/260 H – 329 H). Meanwhile *Ghaybah kubrā* means the imam's occult period which lasts for a longer time. Starting after the end of the first period until the appearance of Imam Mahdi al-Muntaẓar (Shī'ah version) before the Day of Judgment. See, Al-Sayyid Muhammad al-Şadr, *Tārikh al-Ghaybah al-Kubrā* (Beirut: Dār at-Ta'āruf li al-Maṭbū'ah, 1992), 8-10.

¹⁰Abdullāh Fayyād, *Tārikh Al-Imāmiyah Wa Aslāfihim Min al-Shī'ah Mundzu Nash'ati al-Tashayyu' Hattā Maṭla'i al-Qarni al-Rābi' al-Hijriy* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-'Alami li al-Maṭbū'ah, 1986), 165

¹¹Imam Syafi'i, "Imamah dalam Pemikiran Politik Syi'ah," *Asy-Syari'ah* 5, no. 1 (2019): 35–46.

¹²Muhammad Nuh Rasyid, "Konsep al-Mahdi dalam Teologi Syi'ah dan Sunni," *al-Ikhtibar* 6, no. 2 (2019): 687–713.

¹³Moh Hasim, "Syiah : Sejarah Timbul dan Perkembangannya di Indonesia," *Analisa* 19, no. 19 (2012): 147–158.

¹⁴Muh. Azkar, "Hadits dalam Perspektif Sunni dan Syiah: Sebuah Perbandingan," *Jurnal Hukum Ekonomi Syariah* VIII, no. 1 (2016): 42–70.

¹⁵Muhammad Kholid Muslih, "Mā Ba'da Wilāyah al-Faqīh: al-Nazariyāt al-Siyāsiyah al-Shī'ah al-Mu'āshirah," *Tsaqafah* 13, no. 1 (2017): 205–229.

¹⁶Misalnya, Zulkarnaen, "Syi'ah Itsna 'Asyariyah: Beberapa Prinsip Ajaran," *Miqot* XXXII, no. 1 (2008): 21–31. Muhammad Rikza Muqtada, "Mahdiisme Dalam Hadis-Hadis Mahdawiyyah," *Jurnal Theologia* 30, no. 2 (2019): 239–266. Abdul Hamid, "Syiah Antara Paradigma dan Problematika Masyarakat Madani," *Al-Risalah*, 2014. Muhammad Irfanudin Kurniawan, "Analisis Kritis Gerakan Syiah Zaidiyah dan Rafidhah," *Tasfiyah* 4, no. 2 (2020): 119.

important discussion points that must be explained properly and proportionally, namely the definition and basis of *Gaybah* and the nature of *Gaybah* itself. The detailed discussion is as follows:

First: Definition and Basis of *Gaybah*

From an etymological point of view, the origin of the word *Ghaybah* is *ghayb* which means everything that is invisible, whether it can be felt by the heart or not.¹⁷ While the term *ghaybah* is the term used by the Shī'ah with the intention of hiding the twelfth Imam. Further, they believe that the eleventh imam, al-Ḥasan al-‘Ashkari, had a son named Muhammad bin al-Ḥasan al-‘Ashkari, the twelfth imam. This child was then hidden in a cave in Samarra¹⁸ at the age of five. Then he experienced two periods of *ghaybah*, namely *ghaybah ṣuḡhrā* and *kubrā*.¹⁹ The two periods of *ghaybah* which Imam Mahdi went through had different characteristics. *Ghaybah ṣuḡhrā* is the time when the *sufarā*²⁰ (deputy Imam of the occult) intercedes between the Imam and the Shī'ahs. At this time, the whereabouts of the Imam were only known to the deputy Imam of the occult. The length of the first *ghaybah* was seventy-four years, although this is disputed. While the *ghaybah kubrā* is the period when the Imam actually hides (completely) from the *sufarā*, his special people, and all his followers, into the cave in his father's residence. It is for this reason that the

¹⁷Muhammad bin Mukarram bin Manẓur al-Anshāri, *Lisānu al-Arāb* (Beirut: Dār Ṣadr, 1414), 654.

¹⁸Taken from the previous name *surra man ra'a*, a city between Baghdad dan Tikrit in the East of the Dajlah (Tigris River) of Iraq.

¹⁹Abu Abdurrahmān al-Salafi, *Haqāiq Wa Wathā'iq Min Dīni al-Rāfiẓah* (Kairo: Dār al-‘Alamiyah li al-Nashr wa al-Tauzī, 1433), 77; Al-Ṣadr, *Tārikh Al-Ghaybah al-Kubrā*, 6.

²⁰*Safīr/sufarā* is the servant or representative of the occult imam. They have the right to be obeyed and believed by people who are *tsiqah* in the narration like the imam. See: Muhammad bin al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsi, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah* (Maktabah Nainawa al-Hadits, 2018), 241-244; Syekh Dāwud Al-Maḥi, *Doktrin Shī'ah Imamiyah*, transliterated: Uwais Abdullāh (Solo: Al-Qowam, 2016), 206. The discussion about *sufarā* or the representative of the occult imam will be explained more clearly in the discussion of the nature of *ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi.

people of Shī'ah always gather every night after the Maghrib prayer at the door of the cave. They wailed while shouting the name of the Imam and calling him out, until late into the night.²¹

The Twelver Shī'ah strengthens their belief in the concept of the *ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi with three postulates. These foundations are the verses of the Qur'an (with their interpretation of the version), the narrations of hadiths (most of which are chained to the imam who they consider *ma'ṣum*), and several incidents of previous prophets and pious people. The examples are as follows:

First, some of the verses that they use as arguments for *ghaybah* are like the words of Allah SWT:

وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّى

“And the day when it is bright” (QS. al-Lail: 2)

Regarding the interpretation of the above verse, it is stated in their commentary, *Tafsīr al-Qūmi*, “The meaning of *al-Nahār* (day) is *al-Qā'im* from among our *ahlu al-bait*.”²²

Apart from Surah al-Lail, there are other verses that they also interpret similarly, such as QS. al-Mulk verse 30 and QS. at-Taubah verse 3.²³ And there are many other verses that they use as proof of the Imam's occultation. There are even several books that specifically discuss verses that talk about Imam al-Mahdi al-Muntaẓar, such as the book *Mā Nazala min al-Qur'an fī āhibi al-Zamān*, by Abdul ‘Aziz al-Jalūdi and

²¹Al-Salafi, *Haqāiq Wa Wathā'iq Min Dīni al-Rāfiẓah*, 77.

²²Abi al-Ḥasan ‘Ali bin Ibrāhīm al-Qūmi, *Tafsīr al-Qūmi*, vol. II (Iran: Dār al-Kutub, 1303), 425.

²³It is mentioned in the book *Uṣulu al-Kaḥfi* regarding the words of Allah SWT in Surah al-Mulk: 30, “Say (Muhammad): Explain to me when your water source becomes dry; then who will bring you running water?” He said, “If your Imam disappears, who will bring in a new one?” See: Al-Kulaini, *Uṣulu al-Kāfi*, vol. I, (Beirut: Dār at-Ta'aruf, 1990), 399. As for another verse, al-Taubah: 3, “And one announcement (notice) from Allah and His Messenger to mankind on the day of the Great Hajj...” He said, “The release of Al-Qā'im and his da'wah call to the people to obey his leadership.” See: Muhammad bin Mas'ūd al-Samarqandi, *Tafsīr al-Ayyāshi*, vol. II (Tahran: al-Maktabah al-‘Alamiyah al-Islāmiyah, n.d.), 76.

the book *Al-Manhaj fīmā Nazala fī al-Qā'im al-Hujjah*, by Hāshim al-Bahrāni.²⁴

Second, the narrations of hadiths that they use include those mentioned in *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, by al-Ṭūsi, “Described to me, al-Ḥusain bin ‘Ubaydillāh from Abi Ja’far Muhammad bin Sufyān al-Bazūfari from Ahmad bin Idrīs from ‘Ali bin Muhammad bin Qutaybah from al-Faḍl bin Shādzān al-Naisābūri from al-Ḥasan bin Maḥbūb from ‘Ali bin Ri’āb from Zurārāh, said: *إِنَّ لِلْقَائِمِ غَيْبَةً قَبْلَ ظُهُورِهِ، قُلْتُ: لِمَ؟ قَالَ: يَخَافُ الْقَتْلَ*

“Indeed, *al-Qā'im* will experience *ghaybah* before its appearance. I asked, why? He replied, afraid of being killed.”²⁵

In another narration, it is stated that in fact, *Ṣāhibu al-Amri* (Imam Mahdi) has similarities with Mūsa. I asked, what is it? He replied, always in a state of gripping and hiding (*ghaybah, ed*) from the authorities, until Allah SWT sent down His help. Likewise, Rasūlullāh once hid in the valley, also in a cave, but Amīrul Mukminīn did not claim his rights.²⁶ And there are many other similar hadith narrations that can be found in the book *Itbātu al-Wāṣiyyah*, the work of Sheikh al-Mas’ūdi; *Ikmāludīn wa Tamāmu al-Ni'mah*, by Sheikh al-Ṣadūq; *I'lāmu al-Warā*, the work of Sheikh al-Ṭabarsī, *Bihāru al-Anwār*, the work of Sheikh al-Majlīsī, and many more.

Third, they also make some of the events experienced by previous prophets and pious people as the basis for the argument of *ghaybah*. Like the incident of Prophet Moses who fled from his country due to the pursuit of Pharaoh,²⁷ Prophet Yusuf’s whereabouts were hidden from his father,²⁸ Prophet Yunus left his people and was

swallowed by the fish,²⁹ Prophet Muhammad hid in a cave,³⁰ Prophet ‘Īsa was raised to the sky leaving his people,³¹ and the hiding of Aṣḥābul Kahf in the cave for hundreds of years.³² All these events were deemed as *ghaybah* experienced by the previous prophets and pious people.

It is from these three propositions that the Twelver Shī’ah declares that their belief in the *ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi is correct. At the same time, it is a justification for the concept of *ghaybah* that they built.

Second: The Nature of Ghaybah of Imam Mahdi in Shī’ah

The discussion around the concept of *ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi, and the anticipation of its appearance after the *ghaybah* is the principle of belief (aqidah) of the Twelver Shī’ah.³³ They believe that the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-‘Ashkari, had a descendant who became the forerunner of the twelfth Imam, known as Imam Mahdi al-Muntaẓar. But he kept the birth of his son a secret and hid him in a cave in Samarra’. No one has ever seen it. Even until the death of al-Ḥasan al-‘Ashkari, not many people knew of his whereabouts.³⁴ So, the hiding place of the twelfth Imam (Imam Mahdi) is called *ghaybah*.

Therefore, the concept of *ghaybah* itself is closely related to Imam Mahdi, who is predicted

²⁴Naṣir bin Abdullāh bin ‘Ali al-Qifāri, *Uṣulu Madzhabi al-Shī’ah al-Imāmiyah al-Ithnā ‘Ashariyah*, vol. II (Huququ al-Tab’i Maḥfūzah, 1993), 862-863.

²⁵Al-Ṭūsi, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 208.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Referring to the words of Allah Swt in Surah al-A’raf: 142.

²⁸Referring to the story of Prophet Yūsuf in the Qur’an, Surah Yusuf.

²⁹Referring to the words of Allah Swt in Surah al-Anbiya’: 87. See, Muhammad Riẓā al-Ḥusaini al-Shairāzi, *Limādza Al-Ghaybah?* (Beirut: Dār al-Athar, n.d.), 12.

³⁰Al-Ṭūsi, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 22.

³¹The Twelver Shī’ah considers that Prophet ‘Īsa was the prophet who experienced the longest period of *ghaybah*. More than thousands of years, even alive to this date. They refer to the Sunni *ṣaḥīḥ* hadiths about the descent of Prophet ‘Īsa at the end of time and pray behind the Imam Mahdi. Hadiths on this subject are collected and can be seen in the Shī’ah book. See, Al-Shairāzi, *Limādza al-Ghaybah?*, 11.

³²Referring to the words of Allah SWT in surah al-Kahf verse 25. The author of the book *Limādza al-Ghaybah?* explained, Aṣḥābul Kahf experienced a period of *ghaybah* in a period of 300 years (in Syamsiyah years) or 309 years (in Qamariyah years). Ibid, 13.

³³Fayyād, *Tārīkh al-Imāmiyah Wa Aslāfihim Min al-Shī’ah Mundzu Nash’ati al-Tashayyu’ Hattā Maṭla’i al-Qarni al-Rābi’ al-Hijriy*, 165

³⁴Al-Mufīd, *Al-Irshād Fī Ma’rifati Hujjajillāh ‘ala al-‘Ibād*, 336-337.

to cleanse this earth from injustice and fulfill it with justice.³⁵ In the debate, the scholars of Shī'ah expressed different opinions about when he was born.³⁶ However, of the many opinions that can be found in the many historical works of literature on the birth of Imam Mahdi, there is one opinion that is the strongest. This opinion states that Imam Mahdi was born in the middle of the month of Sha'ban in 255 H.³⁷ It is at this time that the followers of the Shī'ah celebrate the birthday of Imam Mahdi. This data also strengthens that Imam Mahdi in the Shī'ah belief was born in that year.³⁸

It is different from the lineage of Imam Mahdi. There is no debate among the Shī'ah scholars regarding his lineage. In all the literature of the Twelver Shī'ah, it is mentioned that their last Imam was born from the line of Husain AS.³⁹ It is at this point that later will show the fundamental difference regarding the difference between the Imam Mahdi who is believed by the Shī'ah the one believed by the Sunnis. In more detail, Muhammad Sa'īd al-Musawi mentions that Imam Mahdi is a descendant of Rasūlullāh, the son of Fātimah RA from the path of Husain bin 'Ali bin Abi ālib. His father was al-Ḥasan al-'Ashkari bin Imam Ali al-Nāqī bin Muhammad

al-Tāqī bin Imam 'Ali Riḍā bin Imam Mūsa al-Kaẓīm bin Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq bin Imam Muhammad al-Bāqir bin Imam Zainal 'Ābidin 'Ali bin Ḥusain bin 'Ali bin Abi Ṭālib.⁴⁰

Another obvious fundamental difference can be found in the discussion about the figure of Imam Mahdi himself. The hadiths which are believed to be true by the Shī'ah clearly mention several characteristics such as abolishing inheritance,⁴¹ abolishing the *jizya* (payment of tribute),⁴² ruled by the law of the Prophet Dāwud, and Sulaiman.⁴³ Also in one narration, it is believed that Imam Mahdi would one day destroy Ḥarāmāin,⁴⁴ judged the bodies of the two noble companions of the Prophet, Abu Bakr and Umar.⁴⁵ Thus, the figure of Imam Mahdi described above is certainly not following what the Sunnis believe. Moreover, if the belief of the Shī'ah is enforced to justify the similarity of the concept of Imam Mahdi with what is believed by the Sunnis, this will hurt Sunni belief and have the potential to cause great damage.

⁴⁰Al-Muzaffar, 'Aqā'id al-Imāmiyah, 69; Al-Mufīd, *Al-Irshād Fī Ma'rifati Hujjajillāh 'ala al-'Ibād*, 340.

⁴¹It is mentioned in a narration from Al-Ṣādiq that he said, "Allah will bring the souls together under the 'shade', two thousand years before the bodies are created. If Al-Qā'im of our Ahlu al-Bait rises up, he will make a brother inherit his brother who has been a brother of Allah in the 'shade', not a brother from lineage." See: Al-Qifāri, *Uṣulu Madzhabi Al-Shī'ah al-Imāmiyah al-Ithnā 'Ashariyah*, 871; Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru Al-Anwār*, vol. III, 309.

⁴²It is stated in a narration, "And Ṣāhibu al-Amr (Imam Mahdi) will not draw tribute like the Apostle." See, *Ibid*, vol. III, 309 dan 345.

⁴³It is mentioned in a narration that Abu Abdillāh said, "If Al-Qā'im from among the Ahlu al-Bait were in power, he would punish humans according to the laws of Dāwud dan Sulaimān, and do not need evidence and information." See: Al-Mufīd, *Al-Irshād Fī Ma'rifati Hujjajillāh 'ala al-'Ibād*, 384-386; Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitābu Al-Ghaybah*, 283. Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru al-Anwār*, vol. III, 320, 336 & 339.

⁴⁴As narrated in *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, "Al-Qā'im will destroy the Grand Mosque (Masjidil Haram) and the Prophet's Mosque (Masjid Nabawi) to their foundations. He will restore the Ka'ba to its place and build it on its original foundation." See: Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 282; Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru al-Anwār*, vol. III, 338.

⁴⁵*Ibid*, vol. III, 345-346 & 386. It is not enough with the two closest companions of the Prophet SAW, even Aisyah, the lover of the Prophet SAW, was also resurrected to be tried (punished *had*). *Ibid*, vol. III, 314; Al-Qifāri, *Uṣulu Madzhabi al-Shī'ah al-Imāmiyah al-Ithnā 'Ashariyah*, 877-878. For the Twelver Shī'ah, the land of Arabia was a place of *malhamah* (war), the place where the hands of Imam al-Muntaẓar massacred all ethnic Arabs. See: Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 284; Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru al-Anwār*, vol. III, 349.

³⁵Zainuddin Al-Bayadhī, *Al-Shirāt al-Mustaqīm Ilā Mustahiqq al-Taqīm* (Najaf: Al-Maktabah al-Murtadhāwiyah, 1383), 243.

³⁶Among these there are opinions which say that Imam Mahdi was born in 255 H, 256 H, 257 H. See: Abdul Hadi al-Fadhla, *Fī Intidzāri al-Imām* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1979), 11; Al-Muzaffar, 'Aqā'id al-Imāmiyah, 69; Muhammad bin al-Fatal al-Naisābūri, *Rauḍatu al-Wa'izīn*, vol. II (Qum: Manshūrāt Dalīlmā, 2010), 23-24.

³⁷The author of *Fī Intidzāri al-Imām*, Abdul Hādī al-Faḍlā, says that Imam Mahdi al-Muntaẓar was born Samarra', one of the cities in Iraq on the night of the middle of Sha'ban in 255 Hijriyyah. See: Al-Fadhla, *Fī Intidzāri al-Imām*, 11. Sheikh al-Mufīd shared a similar opinion. See: Abi Abdillāh Muhammad bin Muhammad Al-Mufīd, *Al-Irshād Fī Ma'rifati Hujjajillāh 'ala al-'Ibād*, vol. II (Beirut: Mu'assasah Ālu al-Bait li Ihyā' al-Ṭurāts, 2008), 339.

³⁸Mūsa Al-Mūsawī, *Al-Shī'ah Wa al-Taṣḥīhu al-Ṣirā' Bayna al-Shī'ah Wa al-Tashayyu'*, (1988), 61; Shiyām, *Al-Mahdi al-Muntaẓar "Inda Firāqī al-Shī'ah Dirasatan Naqdiyatan Muqāranatan*, 65.

³⁹As stated by Abdurrahmān bin Abi Lailā, "I swear by Allah, Imam Mahdi will forever be from the descendants of Ḥusain 'Alaihis salam." See: Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru al-Anwār*, vol. II, 34-35.

The nature of the concept of *ghaybah* Imam Mahdi in the Twelver Shi'ah will be more clearly seen in opposition to the Sunni when seen from time-division *ghaybah*. In the belief of *ahl sunnah wa al-jamā'ah* (the Sunnis), they do not recognize the concept of *ghaybah* in Imam Mahdi. And of course, they do not believe in the division of the period of *ghaybah*, in contrast to the Twelver Shi'ah who believes that Imam Mahdi experienced two periods of *ghaybah*, *ṣughrā* and *kubrā*.⁴⁶ These two periods of *ghaybah* have their own characteristics and differences.

The period of the first *ghaybah* begins with the birth and entry of Imam Mahdi into the cave or with the death of the eleventh Imam, al-Ḥasan al-‘Ashkari. At this time, the authority of Imam Mahdi in leading his people was represented by the *sufarā`* (deputy Imam of the occult). The *sufarā`* consisting of four people served as intermediaries between the Imam and his followers. The four of them were ‘Uthman bin Sa’id al-‘Amri,⁴⁷ Muhammad bin ‘Utsman al-‘Amri,⁴⁸ Ḥusain bin Ruh an-

Naubakhti,⁴⁹ dan ‘Ali bin Muhammad al-Samarri.⁵⁰ Their position of *tsiqah* is equal to that of the Imam in terms of narrating hadith. Thus, they also have the authority to make new Shari’a, *ma’sum* (preserved from sin), give forgiveness, and take *zakat* and *khumus* like an imam.⁵¹ All the needs of the Imam to his followers or vice versa, at this time, are carried out by deputies of the occult Imam. The death of the *fourth safir* (the deputy of the occult imam), ‘Ali bin Muhammad al-Samarri, marked the end of the *ghaybah sughrā* round.⁵² This period lasted for approximately 70 years. It is calculated from the birth of Imam Mahdi to the death of the fourth *safir*, starting from the year 255/260 to the year 329 Hijriyah.

The death of the *fourth safir* also marks the start of a new chapter of the *ghaybah kubrā* period. That is the disconnection of all forms of interaction between the Imam and his

⁴⁶See: Al-Nu’māni, *Al-Ghaybah*, 175; Al-Ṣadr, *Tārikh al-Ghaybah al-Kubrā*, 6; Al-Mufīd, *Al-Irshād Fī Ma’rifati Hujjajillāh ‘ala al-‘Ibād*, vol. II, 340.

⁴⁷‘Uthman bin Sa’id, his kunyah name was Abu ‘Amr. While his laqab or title was al-‘Amri, ‘Asadi, ‘Ashkari and Sammān. The reason for being called Sammān is because he works as a buyer and seller of oil. In this way he can hide his religious duties so that he can be safe from the dangers of the government. He hid the treasures of the baitul mal and the letters of the Shi’ah in oil bags so that no one would find out. After that he conveyed it to Imam ‘Ashkari. It is not known what year he was born and died. ‘Uthman bin Sa’id is buried in the west of Baghdad in the Darb Mosque. He served as deputy occult imam for 5 years. See: Al-Sayyid Muhammad Al-Ṣadr, *Tārikh al-Ghaybah al-Ṣughrā* (Beirut: Dār at-Ta’āruf li al-Maṭbū’ah, 1992), 396; Al-Ṭūsi, *Kitābu Al-Ghaybah*, 219.

⁴⁸Muhammad bin ‘Uthman bin Sa’id (second representative of Imam Mahdi), his kunyah name was Abu Ja’far. Several titles were bestowed upon him, sometimes called ‘Amri (this is the most frequently mentioned in the books), sometimes also called ‘Asadi, or Kūfi, Sammān, and ‘Ashkari. Imam al-Ḥasan ‘Ashkari clearly states the representative and successor of Muhammad bin ‘Uthman from Imam Mahdi. When a group of the Yemeni Shi’ahs were present in Samarrā` at the side of Imam ‘Ashkari, he brought ‘Uthman bin Sa’id, the father of Muhammad bin ‘Uthman, and emphasized his representation and honesty, and then said, “Behold that ‘Uthman bin Sa’id (first representative) is my representative, and his son, Muhammad bin ‘Uthman (second representative) is my son’s representative, your Mahdi.” Sheikh Al-Ṭūsi in his book *al-Ghaybah* also quotes from Imam al-Ḥasan

‘Ashkari, “Amri (‘Uthman bin Sa’id) and his son (Muhammad bin Sa’id) are both trusted and accepted people. Whatever they tell you is from me and whatever is said to you is from me. Therefore, listen to what they say and follow what they say, for they are both honest and trustworthy.” Served as deputy imam of the occult for 40 years. See: Al-Ṣadr, *Tārikh al-Ghaybah al-Ṣughrā*, 402; Al-Ṭūsi, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 223.

⁴⁹The year of birth of Husain bin Ruh is unknown. His kunyah is Abu al-Qāsim. Among his titles mentioned in the sources are Naubakhti, Rūhi and Qūmi. It is possible that he came from the city of Qum, this is based on his Persian dialectic (lahjah) using the dialectic of the residents of Ābih (near Saveh) and his proximity to the residents there. But in most sources he is more famous with Naubakhti. His reliance on the Naubakhti family is most likely from his mother’s line. Some historians say that he was descended from the Bani Naubakht Qum and during the first representation period he moved to Baghdad. Served as the deputy imam of the occult for 21 years. See: Al-Ṣadr, *Tārikh al-Ghaybah al-Ṣughrā*, 406. Al-Ṭūsi, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 228.

⁵⁰His laqab or title is Samāri or Samūri or Saimāri or Ṣaimāri but the first title is the most popular. The titles Ṣaimāri or Saimāri are rarely found in the *rijal* and hadith sources and the famous one is Samūri. However, some contemporary scholars who wrote his biographies argue that the title Samūri—mim with ḍammah—is more appropriate, because this title is attributed to Samur, one of the Qurra’ Basrah, located between Basrah and Wasith. While Sheikh Agha Buzurg Tehrani recorded it with the Fathah vowel in the letter Mim. Samūri died on 15 Sha’bān in 329 H or 15 May in 941, and his body was buried on Khulanji road in Rubu’u al-Muhawal which is located north of the village of Buratsa west of Baghdad. Served as a deputy imam of occult for 3 years. See: Al-Ṣadr, *Tārikh Al-Ghaybah al-Ṣughrā*, 412; Al-Ṭūsi, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 244.

⁵¹Ibid., 243.

⁵²Al-Ṣadr, *Tārikh al-Ghaybah al-Ṣughrā*, 345.

followers and even the entire human race. During the second *ghaybah*, there was no longer any deputy of the occult Imam. The main cause of the complete disconnection of Imam Mahdi's relationship with his followers is believed to be the result of many human beings breaking off relations with him.⁵³ And since then (according to the belief of the Twelver Shī'ah) Imam Mahdi ordered his *safir* to announce the end of the *ghaybah sughra* period and forbade him to give a will of leadership to anyone after him. The Imam's decree is contained in a letter, which reads;

«يا علي بن محمد السمري! أعظم الله أجر أخوانك فيك. فإنك ميت ما بينك وبين ستة أيام، فاجمع أمرك ولا توص إلى أحد فيقوم مقامك بعد وفاتك. فقد وقعت الغيبة التامة. فلا ظهور إلا بإذن الله تعالى ذكره، وذلك بعد طول الأمد وقسوة القلوب، وامتلاء الأرض جوراً. وسيأتي لشيعتي من يدعي المشاهدة، إلا فمن أدعى المشاهدة قبل خروج السفيناني والصيحة، فهو كذاب مفتر. ولا حول ولا قوة إلا بالله العلي العظيم.»⁵⁴

Six days after the official letter was issued, the fourth deputy occult imam was asked, "Who will be your successor?" He replied, "This matter is the business of Allah, and He is the one who will inform," then died. These are the last words that were heard from the mouth of 'Ali bin Muhammad al-Samarri.⁵⁵ From then on, the period of *ghaybah kubrā* continues to the present day. In fact, it continues even longer until the appearance of Imam Mahdi before the Day of Judgment.⁵⁶ Therefore, the length of the period of

⁵³Ibid., 414-415.

⁵⁴It means, "O Ali bin Muhammad al-Samarri! May Allah SWT reward your brothers for your departure, in six days you will die. Therefore, finish your work and don't beseech someone as your successor, because now comes the second magical turn, and in a long time—where Allah Almighty still wills—he (Imam Mahdi) will not appear until the people are hard-hearted, the world is filled with injustice, and will come to the lovers (people of the Shi'a) those who claim to see me. But know! Whoever claims to have seen me before the rise of Sufyāni and the appearance of *saiḥaḥ*, is a liar and a liar." This is the last conversation of the Imam Mahdi through the intermediary of a special occult deputy priest. And also to be the end of the relationship between him and his followers in the time of *ghaybah sughrā*. *Saiḥaḥ* is a loud voice from the sky shouting Imam Mahdi name."

⁵⁵Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 245-246. Al-Ṣadr, *Tārīkh al-Ghaybah al-Ṣughrā*, 416.

⁵⁶Al-Ṣadr, *Tārīkh al-Ghaybah al-Kubrā*, 8.

this second *ghaybah* cannot be mathematically ascertained how long it will end.

One of the main causes of Imam Mahdi experiencing a period of *ghaybah kubrā* (second) is the Imam's concern over the threat of death against him. This reason is affirmed by many Shī'ah scholars in their literature, one of which is *Sheikh al-Ṭāifah* Abi Ja'far Muhammad bin al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī. He gave a statement regarding this that there was no single most dominant reason why Imam Mahdi had to go into hiding but because of fears of an assassination plot⁵⁷ and other threats from his enemies against him.⁵⁸ Surprisingly, in other narrations, it is also mentioned that an imam is believed to have the ability to know and choose when and in what condition they will die.⁵⁹ Even though it may seem contradictory and ambiguous, it is this reason that the followers of the Twelver Shī'ah have believed from time to time. In other words, the cause of the *ghaybah* was due to the actions of the unjust who threatened the safety of the imam.

Criticism of *Ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi Concept

In this discussion, there are at least three criticisms that will be presented. *First*, criticism of the basis of the *ghaybah* argument. *Second*, criticism of the figure of Imam Mahdi al-Muntaẓar. And *third*, criticism of the nature of *ghaybah* in which the Shī'ah believes. The explanation of each of these criticisms is as follows:

First: Criticism of the *Ghaybah* Underlying Argument

Every concept in theological belief certainly has an underlying argument that is used as a basis. Likewise with the theological concept of Imam Mahdi's *ghaybah* in the Twelve Shiites. The

⁵⁷Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 206.

⁵⁸Ali al-Ḥusain al-Mailān, *Imāmatu Baqiyyatu al-A'immaḥ* (Qum: Markaz al-Abhath al-Aqā'idīyyah, 1420), 44; Al-Syarīf al-Murtaḍā, *Al-Shāfi Fī al-Imāmah*, vol. III (Iran: Dār al-Kutub, 1410), 148.

⁵⁹Al-Kulaini, *Uṣulu al-Kāfi*, vol. I, 258.

arguments they use to build the construction of the concept of *ghaybah* are based on the verses of the Qur'an. For instance; *first*, the second verse in Surah al-Lail. The word "*al-Nahār*" in this surah is interpreted as "al-Qā'im" or their Imam Mahdi.⁶⁰ *Second*, the thirtieth verse in Surah al-Mulk which is interpreted as, "If your Imam disappears, who will bring in a new Imam?"⁶¹ And *lastly*, the *third* verse in the letter al-Taubah which is interpreted as, "The release of al-Qā'im and the call for his da'wah to humans to obey his leadership."⁶² And there are many other similar interpretations that they claim to confirm the truth of the concept of *ghaybah*.

If we analyze in more detail the above three verses which they use as the basic argument for the conception of *ghaybah*, it will be seen that there is a misinterpretation on it. Nasir al-Qifari views this as very excessive coercion. Even to the point of deviating from the verses of the Qur'an.⁶³ They forcibly twisted the three verses from the actual interpretation agreed upon by the Sunni *mufasssir* (expert interpretation). For example, the first basis they took from the interpretation of the word "*al-Nahār*" in the second verse of the letter al-Lail above. They assume that the meaning of the word "*al-Nahār*" is al-Qā'im or Imam Mahdi al-Muntaẓar. This assumption is indeed contrary to one of the narrations in the book *al-Kāfī* (which they say is the most authentic book of hadith) which states that "It is not permissible to call him by his name unless he is an infidel."⁶⁴ One of them asked, "Then how do we call it?" Then it was answered, "Say, *Al-Hujjah* from the descendants of Muhammad *Ṣalawātullāhi wasalāmuhu*."⁶⁵ If examined more deeply, it will be found that "al-

Nahār" is not one of the names owned by Imam Mahdi. To this extent, it is clearly seen how they attempt to interpret a verse to legitimize a conception that was flawed from the start.

The correct interpretations of the three verses above from Sunni's perspective are as follows: *First*, regarding the second verse of Surah al-Lail, the *mufasssirs* such as al-Ṭabari, al-Qurṭūbi, and Waḥbah al-Zuhaili explained that in this verse Allah SWT swears by day and night.⁶⁶ *Second*, regarding the thirtieth verse of al-Mulk, it is mentioned in *Tafsir al-Ṭabari* that this verse tells about the condition of the polytheists who need water due to drought. Then Allah SWT ordered Prophet Muhammad SAW to say to them, 'if the water has dried up and you can't get it, then who else besides Allah SWT will bring you water that flows on earth and is visible to the eye?'⁶⁷ *Third*, regarding the third verse of Surah al-Taubah, it is mentioned in *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* that this verse talks about the grand pilgrimage, namely *yaumu al-nahār* (the day of the slaughter of *udḥiyyah* animals).⁶⁸ Of these three verses, not even one speaks of Imam Mahdi as claimed by the Shī'ah in their books of tafsir.

Apart from the absence of a single verse (which they use as the basis for the argument for the concept of *ghaybah*) that legitimizes the truth of this conception, their efforts are quite inconsistent. This is because since the beginning the Twelver Shī'ah believed that the manuscripts of the Qur'an (which until now have been preserved in absolute terms) have been distorted and many verses have been omitted.⁶⁹ More specifically, Mukromin in his research describes several verses which the Shī'ah considers to have undergone changes (*tahrif*).⁷⁰ For them, the

⁶⁰Al-Qūmi, *Tafsir al-Qūmi*, vol. II, 425.

⁶¹Al-Kulaini, *Uṣulu al-Kāfī*, vol. I, 399.

⁶²Al-Samarqandī, *Tafsir al-Ayyāshi*, 76.

⁶³Al-Qifāri, *Uṣulu Madzhabi al-Shī'ah al-Imāmiyah al-Ithnā'Ashariyah*, vol. I, 863.

⁶⁴Al-Kulaini, *Uṣulu al-Kāfī*, vol. I, 392; Al-Qūmi, *Kamāluddīn Wa Tamāmu al-Ni'mah*, 378.

⁶⁵Ibid., 392; Al-Mufīd, *Al-Irshād Fī Ma'rifati Hujjajillāh 'ala al-'Ibād*, vol. II, 349. A similar history is mentioned in *Bihāru al-Anwār*. Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru Al-Anwār*, vol. III, 373.

⁶⁶Ibnu Jarir al-Ṭabari, *Jāmi'u Al-Bayān "an Ta'wīli Āyi al-Qur'ān*, vol. XIV (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1421), 14.

⁶⁷Ibid., 14.

⁶⁸Abi al-Fidā' Ismā'il bin Katsir, *Tafsīru al-Qur'āni al-'Aẓīm*, vol. II (Kairo: Dār al-Ghad al-Jadīd, 1428), 312.

⁶⁹Al-Kulaini, *Uṣulu al-Kāfī*, vol. I, 241.

⁷⁰Mukromin, "Tahrif al-Qur'an Antara Sunni dan Syiah," *Manarul Qur'an: Jurnal Ilmiah Studi Islam* XV, no. 1 (2015).

perfect manuscript of the Qur'an is what they call the Fathimiyah manuscript.⁷¹ It is said that this manuscript has a perfection (read: thickness) three times that of the Sunni manuscripts.⁷² If so, then why should they base their argument on the concept of *ghaybah* other than the Fathimiyah manuscript? It would be very ironic if a group said that their holy book was not perfect, but in fact, that group took from it a proposition as a basis for the belief that there is no doubt. This inconsistency in holding religious guidebooks is what causes them to appear imposing their will to seek justification, not the truth.

In addition to taking the basis of the argument on *ghaybah* from the verses of the Qur'an, the Twelver Shī'ah also interprets several events experienced by the previous prophets and pious people as evidence of the truth of *ghaybah*. Like the events of the escape of Prophet Moses from the pursuit of Pharaoh, the hiding of Prophet Yusuf from his father, the Prophet Yūnus being swallowed by fish, the hiding of the Prophet Muhammad in the cave, the lifting of the Prophet 'Īsa to the sky, and the hiding of Aṣḥābul Kahf in the cave. However, the Shī'ahs claim that these events were forms of *ghaybah* that were ever carried out by the prophets is not true. Because in reality, the comparison between Imam Mahdi's *ghaybah* and the events experienced by the prophets is not the same.

At least there are some essential things that distinguish between the events experienced by the prophets and Aṣḥābul Kahf with the Shī'ah *ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi. In general, *first*, the hiding experienced by the prophets has been clearly reported by Allah SWT in the Qur'an, while the *ghaybah* experienced by Shī'ah Imam Mahdi is only based on the narrations of the scholars and deputy imam, whose validity is highly doubtful. *Second*, the hiding experienced by the prophets occurred after the people (who lived with him) knew and recognized him, while

their invisible Imams were never seen in both their forms and signs, even their closest relatives denied their existence.⁷³ *Third*, the time and place of the prophets hiding can be known, then they too have returned to meet with their people, while the Imam that the Shī'ah had been waiting for did not appear even though centuries had passed. *Fourth*, the prophets have delivered Allah SWT's *risālah* (treatise) before they are experiencing some of the events above, while the Shī'ah occult Imams have not been heard of conveying His *risālah*. Meanwhile, specifically, the incident that happened to Prophet Yusuf was only limited to being separated from his father and meeting other people. It's like someone who is going from one place to another. The hiding of the Prophet Muhammad in the cave is a war strategy to outwit the enemy. And that only lasted for three days.⁷⁴ So it can be concluded that the events experienced by the prophets and pious people above and the *ghaybah* events experienced by the twelfth Imam of the Shī'ah are very different and cannot be equated as they claim.

Second: Criticism of Shī'ah Imam Mahdi Figure

In the previous review, we have discussed the belief of the Twelver Shī'ah towards the figure of Imam Mahdi. They believe that the eleventh imam, al-Ḥasan al-'Ashkari, had a descendant. The son of this eleventh Imam whom they later believed to be Imam Mahdi al-Muntaẓar. However, because the situation at that time was very tense, his whereabouts had to be hidden. No one knows the birth procession of the twelfth Imam. Even until Imam al-Ḥasan al-'Ashkari died, not many people ever knew about it.

The figure of Imam Mahdi that they believed so far was actually nothing more than a fictional

⁷¹Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru al-Anwār*, vol. XXVI, 42.

⁷²Al-Kulaini, *Uṣulu al-Kāfi*, vol. I, 287.

⁷³Al-Qifāri mentions that the closest person to al-Hasan al-Askari, Ja'far (al-Hasan al-Askari's brother) admitted that his brother (al-Hasan al-Askari) died without having a child and offspring. See, Al-Qifāri, *Uṣulu Madzhabi al-Shī'ah al-Imāmiyah al-Ithnā 'Ashariyah*, 902.

⁷⁴Ibid., 865.

character. This can be proven by the many narrations that state that Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Ashkari (the eleventh Imam) died without a child, different from what they believed so far.⁷⁵ Sayyid Ḥusain al-Mūsawī, a prominent Shī’ah scholar who had converted to Sunnism, revealed a statement he quoted from Ahmad al-Katib⁷⁶ that the nature of the twelfth Imam of the Shī’ah does not exist, does not have existence and form.⁷⁷ Ḥusain al-Mūsawī also said, “How is it possible for him to exist, while the *mu’tabar* books (the admitted ones) state that Imam al-Ḥasan al-‘Ashkari has died and has no sons! They investigated his wives and slave girls when he died, but they did not find any of them who became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy. Look at this in *al-Ṭūsi*’s book *al-Ghaybah* on page 74; *al-Irshād* by al-Mufīd on page 354; *A’lam al-Wari* by Faḍal al-Ṭabarsi on page 380; and *al-Maqālat wa al-Firaq* by al-Ash’ari al-Qūmi on page 102.”⁷⁸ To this point, Sayyid Husain al-Mūsawī has succeeded in proving that the nature of Shī’ah Imam Mahdi has been

fictitious and cannot be justified.

Imam Mahdi’s fictitiousness is also confirmed by several prominent Shī’ah scholars, such as al-Naukhbati and al-Qūmi. They mention in their books that it is true that Imam al-Ḥasan bin ‘Ali (al-Ashkari) had no children until he died. Therefore, there are only two possibilities that they think are true; *firstly*, there was no Imam after the death of al-Ḥasan bin ‘Ali, and *secondly*, the *Imamah* has been severed.”⁷⁹ They also state that at this time we (the Shī’ahs) are in the era of *faṭrah* (emptiness) due to the break of the *Imamah*.⁸⁰ This statement further strengthens the opinion that the Shī’ah Imam Mahdi does not exist, and at the same time refutes the opinion that believes in its existence.

Apart from being directly refuted from the statements of the leading scholars of the Shī’ah themselves, if the existence of Imam Mahdi could indeed be justified as a descendant and successor of the eleventh Imam, then this opinion was refuted on the grounds that he had to go into hiding. Many narrations state that the main cause of *ghaybah* was fear of killing him.⁸¹ This reason according to Nasir al-Qifari is very strange and does not describe the identity of an imam as claimed by the Shī’ah.⁸² Because they believe that a priest is capable of knowing when he will die and will not die except of his own free will.⁸³ An imam also knows everything that

⁷⁵One of them is a narration from the most ṣaḥīḥ Shī’ah book, *Uṣūlu al-Kāfi*, from Ahmad Abdullāh bin Khaqān, he said; “When the people have finished the procession of condolences, the government sent someone to Abu Mūsa bin al-Mutavice to ask him to pray. When Abu Mūsa approached, he uncovered his face and showed him to the Banu Hashim of the ‘Alawiyah and ‘Abbasiyah, as well as the commanders and writers. Then he said, “This is Ḥasan bin ‘Ali bin Muhammad al-Riḍā. He died in his bed.” At that time, Amīr al-Mukminīn’s assistants and confidants were present. Then he cremated his body. After his funeral procession, the government and the people looked for who his son was, so that the houses were checked. They withheld the distribution of his inheritance. Some were assigned to look after their female slaves until it was certain that they were not pregnant. When it was confirmed that she was not pregnant, her inheritance was distributed to her mother and brother, Ja’far.” Al-Kulaini, *Uṣūlu al-Kāfi*, vol. I, 505; Al-Qifāri, *Uṣūlu Madzhabi Al-Shī’ah al-Imāmiyah al-Ithnā ‘Ashariyah*, 900-901.

⁷⁶His real name was Abdu al-Rasūl Abdu al-Razāq Abdu al-Amīr bin al-Haj Ḥabīb al-Asadi. Meanwhile, Ahmad al-Katib was the name he used when he joined the activist organization of the Islamic Movement Rejecting Saddam Husain’s government. He was a Shī’a figure who did a lot of critical research on the existence of Imam Mahdi al-Muntazar. Even so, he persisted in his Shī’ism.

⁷⁷To read this issue in detail, see, Ahmad Al-Katib, *Ṭaṭawwur al-Fikri al-Siyāsī al-Shī’ī Min al-Shūrā Ilā Wilāyah al-Faqīh*, vol. II (London: Dār al-Shūrā, 2005).

⁷⁸Al-Sayyid Ḥusain Al-Mūsawī, *Lillāhi Thumma Li al-Tārikh Kashfu al-Asrār Wa Tabri’atu al-‘Immah Al-Athār* (n.d.), 105.

⁷⁹Sa’d bin Abdullāh Abi Khalaf al-Ash’ari al-Qūmi, *Al-Maqālat Wa al-Firaq* (Teheran: Ḥaidarā, 1331), 107-108; Al-Naukhbati and al-Qūmi, *Firaqu al-Shī’ah* (Dār al-Irshād, n.d.), 102.

⁸⁰Al-Qūmi, *Al-Maqālat Wa al-Firaq*, 108; Al-Qūmi, *Firaqu al-Shī’ah*, 103.

⁸¹Syekh al-Ṭāifāh al-Ṭūsi said, “There is no cause of occultation except for fear of killing him. If not for that, why should he hide. He also bears burdens and suffering. Thus the priests and prophets, their position is exalted because they bear a heavy burden from Allah.”; See: Nasir al-Qifāri, *Mas’alatu al-Taqrīb Bayna Ahli al-Sunnah Wa al-Shī’ah* (Riyad: Dār Ṭayyibah li al-Nashr wa al-Tauzī’, 1413), vol. II, 103. Also see: Al-Ṭūsi, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 206.

⁸²Al-Qifāri, *Uṣūlu Madzhabi al-Shī’ah al-Imāmiyah al-Ithnā ‘Ashariyah*, vol. I, 899.

⁸³In *Uṣūlu al-Kāfi*, Al-Kulaini lists eight ḥadīths or narrations on this issue. Collected in Chapter *Anna al-‘Immah Ya’lamūna matā Yamūtūna wa annahum lā Yamūtūna illa bi Ikhtiyārin minhum*. See: Al-Kulaini, *Uṣūlu al-Kāfi*, vol. I, 313-315.

has and will happen. There is nothing hidden from him.⁸⁴ Supposedly the imam's ability to know the occult and die on his own wouldn't make him worry about death threats. Moreover, it requires him to hide. History also records that several times the Shī'ah was able to establish a *daulah* (government), such as the 'Ubaidiyyah government (Fātimiyah Dynasty), the Buwaihiyyah dynasty, the Safawiyyah dynasty, and even the state of Iran, which still exists today.⁸⁵ So the Shī'ah government should be able to provide security guarantees for the imam from the disturbance of the unjust who wanted to kill him. Further, it should be able to provide an opportunity for the imam to reveal himself from hiding. However, this situation also did not make the figure of the Imam they had been waiting for appear.

In addition, the Shī'ahs also believe that the Imam Mahdi they believe in is the same as that whom the Sunnis believe. It only differs in the time of its appearance.⁸⁶ In reality, however, the characteristics of the imam described in the narrations of the Shī'ah are very different from those of the Sunnis. Prophet Muhammad SAW reported that Imam Mahdi (Sunnī) was born from the descendants of the companion Ḥaṣan bin 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib (not Ḥuṣain),⁸⁷ his father's name and lineage are the same as his,⁸⁸ come bringing peace and blessings,⁸⁹ enforce the Shari'a which he brought,⁹⁰ and became the imam of prayers for

the Muslims. While the characteristics of the Imam Mahdi which is believed by Shī'ah is a man who was born from the descendants of the companion Ḥuṣain bin 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib,⁹¹ his lineage is not the same as the lineage of the Prophet SAW,⁹² came up with abolishing the Shari'a of inheritance and *jizyah*,⁹³ even replaced it with the Shari'a of the Prophet Dāwud and Sulaiman,⁹⁴ destroying Haram Mosque,⁹⁵ will take revenge on the two close companions of the prophet (Abu Bakr and 'Umar) and will massacre all ethnic Arabs.⁹⁶ And there are many other characteristics that are not in accordance with the words of the Prophet SAW regarding Sunnī Imam Mahdi.

From the explanation above, it can be understood that the figure of the Imam Mahdi in the Twelver Shī'ah is nothing more than a fantasy that they made up to cover up the misconception of *ghaybah*. The existence of the imam is refuted by the statements of the Shī'ah scholars themselves. Moreover, the Shī'ah Imam Mahdi is also not the same as what the Sunnis believe. Therefore, from years ago until the end of time, the existence of Shī'a Imam Mahdi will not be proven true.

Third: Criticism of the Nature of Ghaybah of Imam Mahdi

In the previous discussion, it has been explained that the essence of the *ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi in the Twelver Shī'ah is a principle of faith that must be believed. However, this belief has been getting a lot of denial of *ahl Sunnah wa al-jamā'ah* scholars. Among the *ahl sunnah* scholars who clearly describe and then criticize the core concepts in the Shī'ah belief

⁸⁴Ibid., 313-315.

⁸⁵Sulaimān bin Ṣālih al-Khurasī, *As'ilatun Qādat Syabābu al-Shī'ah Ilā al-Haqiqi* (1427), 26.

⁸⁶Al-Qifāri, *Mas'alatu al-Taqrīb Bayna Ahli al-Sunnah Wa al-Shī'ah*, vol. II, 102.

⁸⁷Syamsuddīn Ibnu Qayyim al-Jauziyah, *Al-Manār al-Munif Fī al-Ṣaḥīhi Wa al-Ḍa'īf* (Aleppo: Maktabah al-Maṭbū'ah al-Islāmiyah, 1970), 143; Ismā'il bin 'Umar bin Katsir al-Qurāsyī, *Al-Nihāyah Fī al-Fitan Wa al-Malāḥim*, vol. I (Beirut: Dār al-Jayl, 1988), 50.

⁸⁸Abu Dāwud Sulaimān bin al-Asy'ats, *Sunan Abi Dāwud*, vol. IV (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyah, n.d.), 106; Majduddīn Abu al-Sa'ādāt Al-Mubārak, *Jāmi'u al-Uṣūl Fī Aḥādīthi al-Rasūl*, vol. X (Maktabah al-Halwani, n.d.), 330.

⁸⁹Al-Qurāsyī, *Al-Nihāyah Fī al-Fitan Wa al-Malāḥim*, vol. I, 51; Yusuf bin Abdullāh bin Yūsuf al-Wābil, *Ashratu al-Sā'ah* (Riyad: Dār Ibnu al-Jauzi, 1990), 249.

⁹⁰Al-Asy'ats, *Sunan Abi Dāwud*, vol. IV, 107.

⁹¹Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru Al-Anwār*, vol. II, 34-35.

⁹²Al-Muẓaffar, *'Aqā'id Al-Imāmiyah*, 69.

⁹³Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru al-Anwār*, vol. III, 309 & 345.

⁹⁴Al-Mufīd, *Al-Irshād Fī Ma'rifati Hujjajillāh 'ala al-'Ibād*, 384, 386; Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitābu al-Ghaybah*, 283. Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru al-Anwār*, vol. III, 320, 336 & 339.

⁹⁵Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitābu Al-Ghaybah*, 282. Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru Al-Anwār*, vol. III, 338

⁹⁶Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitābu Al-Ghaybah*, 284. Al-Majlisi, *Bihāru Al-Anwār*, vol. III, 349

is Abdullah bin Ali al-Qifari. In his research, al-Qifari concluded that the concept of *ghaybah* is nothing but confusion. Therefore, none of the evidence, both the nature and history of *the saḥīḥ* that could justify it. Nor can it provide benefits in this world and the hereafter. On the other hand, this belief will only provide great ugliness and damage.⁹⁷ The Twelver Shī'ah base this *aqidah* principle by deliberately changing the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an. They also misinterpret some of the events experienced by the prophets and pious people before. As well as making false narrations of hadith whose chain of transmission stops on their imams only. All of these were done seriously just to find justification for the concept of the *ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi that had been built.

In addition to being built on such a weak foundation, the nature of the *ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi in the Twelver Shī'ah also possesses some confusion. Among them, the Imam Mahdi who was glorified by the Shī'ah did not provide any benefit for religious and world affairs. There is no benefit that the Muslims can take from it, neither with the Shī'ah and others.⁹⁸ Quoted from Sheikh al-Islām Ibn Taimiyyah, it is explained that there is not the slightest benefit in religious or world affairs that one can get from the existence of Shī'ah Imam Mahdi. Because from the moment he was born (if he really exists) to an indefinite period, he has been hiding in the cave. Ibn Taimiyyah also explained that it was the belief of the Shī'ahs towards their imam, that is, either the Imam left them or the figure of Imam Mahdi is fictitious for intelligent people. What is certain is that both of them do not provide benefits to anyone's religion or the world.⁹⁹ Even in practice, today's Shī'ah has replaced the concept of *ghaybah* with the

concept of *wilāyatu al-faqīh*.¹⁰⁰ A new conception of filling the void in the leadership of the Shī'ah was pioneered by *Ayatollah* Khomeini.¹⁰¹ This fact occurred because of their despair with the long wait for the imam to appear.

Another thing that also shows the confusion of this concept is the length of the *ghaybah* period. Even though it has been more than 1180 years this period has taken place,¹⁰² Shī'ah Imam Mahdi has been living in hiding. On the other hand, the Prophet SAW emphasized in one word that no one can remain on this earth after the end of one hundred years.¹⁰³ Or in another narration, he also told that the age range of this *ummah* is 60 to 70 years.¹⁰⁴ So it is impossible for a human being to survive for thousands of years, while death is a real matter for every human being.

Āyatullah al-'Uzmā al-Sayyid Abū al-Faḍl Ibnu al-Riḍā al-Burqa'ī, a scholar (former Shī'ah) author of the book *Kasru al-Ṣanam* (rebuttal to the book *Uṣūlu al-Kāfi*) provides a rebuttal regarding the length of *ghaybah* time. He commented on the seventh *khobar* in *Bab fi al-Ghaybah* which says that “*Commander of the Faithful* (‘Ali bin Abi Talib) said that indeed the *ghaybah* period of *Imam al-Ghā'ib* is six days or six months or six years.”¹⁰⁵ The question is, why does this *khobar* persist after its lies have been exposed more than a thousand

⁹⁷Al-Qifāri, *Uṣulu Madzhabi al-Shī'ah al-Imāmiyah al-Ithnā 'Ashariyah*, vol. I, 899.

⁹⁸Muhammad 'Ali al-Ṣalabi, *Fikru al-Khawārij Wa al-Shī'ah Fī Mīzāni Ahli al-Sunnah Wa al-Jamā'ah* (Kairo: Dār Ibnu Hazm, 2008), 284.

⁹⁹Al-Ṣalabi, *Fikru al-Khawārij Wa al-Shī'ah Fī Mīzāni Ahli al-Sunnah Wa al-Jamā'ah*, 274.

¹⁰⁰That is the ability to appoint a leader from among people who are not ma'ṣūm and are not directly elected based on the determination of Allah SWT and His Messenger, provided that they meet the criteria of al-'ilmu (knowledgeable) and al-'adlu (fair). Ibid., 275.

¹⁰¹M. Kholid Muslih, *Nadhariyah Wilayāh al-Faqīh al-Siyāsiyah Min Wāḥah al-Tandhīr Ila Sāḥah al-Taṭbīq* (Ponorogo: UNIDA Gontor Press, 2019), 43-113.

¹⁰²Count from the start of the first *ghaybah* to the present.

¹⁰³From Sālim and Abu Bakar bin Sulaimān bin Abu Hatsmah it is narrated that Abdullāh bin 'Umar said, The Prophet SAW prayed Isha' with us at the end of his life. After finishing greeting, the Messenger of Allah stood up and said; “Haven't you noticed your night this day? Verily, at the end of every hundred years there will be no one left from the face of this earth.” See: Ibnu Hajar al-Asqalāni, *Fathu al-Bāri Syarhu Ṣaḥīḥi al-Bukhāri*, vol. I (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1420), 285.

¹⁰⁴Muhammad bin 'Īsa bin Saurah bin Mūsa al-Tirmidzi, *Al-Jāmi' al-Kabir Sunan al-Tirmidzi*, vol. IV (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmi, 1998), 144.

¹⁰⁵Al-Kulaini, *Uṣulu al-Kāfi*, vol. I, 397.

years? And why is everyone being forced to accept this *khobar*? They claim that it is part of the destiny of Allah SWT. But Ibn al-Rīḍa al-Burqa'ī has confirmed that it is false *khobar*.¹⁰⁶ Likewise with the eighth hadith in the book of *Uṣūlu al-Kāfi* which describes the figure of the imam as a star in the sky. If one is missing, the other will still be visible. Ibn al-Rīḍa al-Burqa'ī replied that now one star has disappeared (as they say), but after more than a thousand years, another star has not appeared. And why this kind of *khobar* is included in the discussion about religion, even though in reality it is fake.¹⁰⁷ False narrations full of lies like this should not deserve to be included in the book of hadith which they claim to be *ṣaḥīḥ*.

Up to this point, it is very clear that the actual nature of the *ghaybah* which has been in the belief of the Twelver Shī'ah does not deserve to be a theological principle. This is because this belief is not based on clear arguments, as has been discussed above. In addition, it also contains many lies, such as in the division of the period of *ghaybah* and the length of time this period lasts. That is why this belief is so easily refuted.

Conclusion

From the above explanation, it can be understood that the concept of Shī'ah *ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi was not at all well known in the perspective of *ahl sunnah wa al-jamā'ah* (the Sunnis). Because the figure of Imam Mahdi they believe in is very different from what the Sunnis believe. This concept was deliberately created to fill the flaws in the concept of *Imamah* because the eleventh Imam died without having children to replace him. However, both concept constructions were equally destroyed because they were not

built on the right foundation. There are at least three things that make the principle of the *aqidah* of the Twelver Shī'ah refuted. *First*, this concept does not have a valid rationale; *Second*, the figure of Imam Mahdi who they believed was only a fictitious figure; and *third*, the nature of Shī'ah *ghaybah* of Imam Mahdi is much contrary to the hadiths of the Prophet, and even contrary to the hadith and statements of the Shī'ah scholars themselves. Thus, it is very likely that the concept of *ghaybah* Imam Mahdi in the Twelver Shī'ah and their belief in *Imamah* are not true.

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¹⁰⁷Ibid.

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