



The "Deficiency of Intellect" Sermon in *Nahj al-Balāghah*: An Examination of the Approaches of Commentators and Researchers

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Abstract

Nahj al-Balāghah, the collection of Imam Ali's (AS) sermons, letters, and sayings, has attracted the attention of commentators and exegetes since its compilation. In the contemporary period as well, numerous

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scholars have written commentaries on the entire work or on selected sections. Among its sermons, Sermon 80, commonly known as the "Deficiency of Intellect" sermon, has received exceptional attention because it contains explicit statements criticizing women. The present study investigates the following question: 'How have Muslim commentators and researchers approached this controversial sermon?' If they have defended or endorsed it, or alternatively criticized or rejected it, 'What intellectual assumptions and methodological approaches have informed their positions?' The purpose of this study is not to analyze the content of the sermon itself, but rather to examine the foundations and reasons underlying the diverse interpretive approaches adopted by commentators and scholars toward the sermon and its implications. The significance of this study lies in both its historical and social dimensions. Historically, the sermon has become intertwined with longstanding Sunni-Shi'i debates. Socially, its implications, particularly in the modern era, have become the subject of intense scholarly discussion and controversy. Moreover, given the considerable body of research devoted to this sermon, a systematic analysis of the various interpretive approaches has become increasingly necessary. Using a descriptive-analytical method based on library research, this study first describes how commentators and researchers have engaged with Sermon 80 and then analyzes the intellectual premises underlying their interpretations. The findings indicate a clear distinction between the approaches of classical, traditional commentators, who generally extended the sermon's criticism to women as a whole, and those of most contemporary

researchers. A number of modern scholars have attempted either to question the authenticity of the sermon's chain of transmission or, while affirming the dignity and status of women, to defend its attribution to Imam Ali (AS) by offering contextual and interpretive explanations. The study concludes that classical Sunni commentators, such as *Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd*, although acknowledging that the sermon was delivered in the context of the Battle of the Camel and 'Āyishah's participation in that conflict, nevertheless regarded its criticism of women as consistent with the patriarchal worldview of their own historical context. Some contemporary traditionalists have adopted a similar position. In contrast, many modern scholars, finding the condemnation of women incompatible with their inherent human dignity and rights, have sought to reinterpret the sermon in a manner consistent with contemporary understandings of women's status. Others have rejected attributing the sermon to Imam Ali (AS) altogether, arguing that its content is incompatible with the teachings of the Qur'an.

Keywords: *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 80, Women in the Teachings of Imam Ali (AS), Approaches of Commentators and Researchers, the "Deficiency of Intellect" Sermon.

Introduction

Nahj al-Balāghah, owing especially to its eloquence, depth of meaning, and exceptional authority, has consistently attracted the attention of Muslim scholars and writers. Since the early centuries of Islam, nearly one hundred commentaries have been written on this

work. Among the earliest is that of *Abul Hasan Bayhaqī* (d. 565 AH), while the most celebrated are those of *Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd* (d. 656 AH) and *Ibn Maytham* (d. 679 AH). Ostadi (1992 AD/1316 SH) has identified approximately 400 books, commentaries, dissertations, and articles devoted to *Nahj al-Balāghah* (Ostadi, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 353). Among these, only the published commentaries currently available constitute the corpus examined in the present study.

Among the sermons of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 80, numbered Sermon 79 in some editions and commonly known as the Sermon of the Deficiency of Intellect has received more scholarly attention than any other. The sermon contains statements that criticize women and warn against following them, even in matters regarded as good. Its text and translation are as follows:

"O! People! Women are deficient in faith, fortune, and intellect. The deficiency of their faith is due to their abstention from prayer and fasting during their menstrual periods. The deficiency of their intellect is evidenced by the fact that the testimony of two women equals that of one man. The deficiency of their fortune is that their inheritance is one-half that of men. Therefore, beware of wicked women, and even with the virtuous among them remain cautious. Do not obey them even in what is right, lest they become encouraged to expect obedience in what is wrong."

The issue addressed in this study, one that has occupied the minds of numerous Muslim scholars from the earliest periods until the present and has generated a substantial body of modern scholarship, is

116 the interpretive approach adopted by commentators and researchers

toward this controversial sermon.

Specifically, when some scholars reject either the sermon's content or its attribution to Imam Ali (AS), 'What intellectual assumptions underlie their position?' Conversely, 'When others defend its implications, what methodological and interpretive frameworks shape their defense?'

The principal research question is therefore: 'On what intellectual and interpretive approaches are the responses of classical commentators, modern commentators, and contemporary researchers to Sermon 80 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* based?'

The hypothesis of this study is that the disagreements among commentators and researchers concerning the Sermon of the Deficiency of Intellect stem primarily from differences in their epistemological assumptions, social contexts, and hermeneutical methodologies. Accordingly, these diverse interpretations can be broadly classified into two major trends: a traditionalist approach and a contemporary re-interpretive approach.

The importance of this study is threefold. First, numerous commentaries on Sermon 80 have been published but have not yet been examined collectively. Second, a considerable number of contemporary studies have also appeared on this sermon. The accumulated scholarship has now reached a stage that calls for systematic classification, evaluation, and analysis of both commentaries and modern research. Third, because of changing social realities and evolving conceptions of gender in the modern world, the sermon's content has acquired renewed social sensitivity and

significance, making a comprehensive study of its reception both timely and necessary.

The objective of this study, which is fundamentally concerned with identifying the underlying assumptions and interpretive approaches of commentators and researchers, is to develop a general framework for understanding how different interpretive orientations, such as traditional or text-centered, theological-doctrinal, historical-critical, social or contextual, and modernist or revisionist approaches, influence the interpretation of a representative religious text.

Given the nature of the research, the study employs library-based research for data collection, a descriptive method to present its theoretical foundations, and an analytical approach to interpret and explain its findings. In other words, the research combines documentary investigation with descriptive-analytical methodology. The authors first examine published commentaries and scholarly studies on *Nahj al-Balāghah's* Sermon 80, collecting and classifying all relevant discussions. They then analyze these materials using a descriptive-analytical approach to address the research question.

Regarding the theoretical framework, it should be noted that the primary concern of this study is not to determine the sermon's authenticity or inauthenticity, but rather to identify the interpretive approaches adopted by commentators and researchers in engaging with it. Accordingly, the study's theoretical foundation draws on theories of textual interpretation, hermeneutics, the historicity of understanding, and the influence of social and intellectual contexts on

118 the interpretation of religious texts. In this perspective, commenting

on or interpreting *Nahj al-Balāghah* is not merely a reflection of the text's apparent meaning; rather, it constitutes a process of reproducing meaning across different historical and social contexts. Therefore, analyzing how commentators and researchers have approached Sermon 80 requires careful attention to the factors that influence interpretation. From a hermeneutical perspective, textual understanding is historical in nature and conditioned by the interpreter's intellectual horizon. No interpreter approaches a text free from presuppositions or historical circumstances. On this basis, the differences between traditional commentaries and contemporary studies may be understood as the result of differing historical and social horizons. Traditional commentators interpreted the sermon within a patriarchal cultural environment and in light of the prevailing assumptions of their time, whereas contemporary researchers have approached it in light of modern discussions concerning women's rights, human equality, and critical reinterpretations of religious texts.

Approach analysis focuses not merely on the content of an interpretation but also on the assumptions and factors that shape it. The principal approaches in religious studies include: "The traditional or text-centered approach, the theological-doctrinal approach, the historical-critical approach, the social or contextual approach; and the modernist or revisionist approach."

Each of these approaches entails its own interpretive principles when engaging with religious texts.

According to the sociology of knowledge, the emergence and interpretation of ideas are inseparable from their social contexts, and

religious thought is inevitably influenced by the cultural and social structures of every historical period. Accordingly, traditional commentaries on *Nahj al-Balāghah* should be understood in relation to the social and cultural structures of their own times, while modern reinterpretations should likewise be viewed as products of contemporary intellectual and social developments, particularly the expansion of scholarship on women's rights and gender studies, which has significantly influenced recent readings of Sermon 80.

The theoretical framework adopted in this study integrates historical-social hermeneutics with the analysis of interpretive approaches to religious texts. Within this framework, commentators' and researchers' engagement with Sermon 80 is understood as being shaped by three principal variables:

- The interpreter's epistemological presuppositions, including theological, hadith, juridical, and anthropological beliefs regarding women, religious texts, and the authority of traditions;
- The historical and social context, including cultural conditions, gender structures, social relations, and the prevailing intellectual climate of the interpreter's era;
- The interpretive approach, including traditional textualism, theological apologetics, historical-critical interpretation, and modern revisionist readings.

1. Literature Review

Previous studies on Sermon 80 of *Nahj al-Balāghah* have generally
120 focused on interpreting the sermon itself and resolving its apparent

ambiguities rather than examining how commentators have approached and critiqued it, which constitutes the central concern of the present research. Nevertheless, all previous studies related to the sermon may be regarded as part of the background literature for this investigation.

- Among the earliest works is *Fayḍ al-Islām*'s translation and commentary. In his interpretive translation, *Fayḍ al-Islām* (1989 AD/1368 SH: 1, 179) argues that the sermon primarily concerns *Āyishah* and her supporters.
- Jaʿfari (1997 AD/1376 SH: 11, 240-302), while accepting the authenticity of the sermon, maintains that the three deficiencies attributed to women are incompatible with Qurʾanic teachings. Another group of scholars accepts the apparent wording of the sermon while maintaining that women generally lack the deficiencies described therein and may, in some respects, even surpass men.
- In his article "An Examination of the Status and Role of Women from Imam Ali's Perspective in Social Issues," Janati (2001 AD/1380 SH: 38-44) accepts the notion of women's "Deficiency of Intellect" but argues that it refers only to practical and experiential reasoning within the social conditions of that historical period. He attributes the apparent contradiction to the prevailing social circumstances of the time.
- In "Woman in the Mirror of Majesty and Beauty," Javadi Amoli (2006 AD/1385 SH: 368-373) attempts to provide a logical and convincing explanation for Imam Ali's statement.

- In their article "The Status and Rights of Women in *Nahj al-Balāghah*," Saremi and Majidi (2012 AD/1391 SH: 33-46) emphasize Imam Ali's profound respect for women and therefore reject the attribution of the sermon to him.
- In "The Semantics of Faith in the Tradition "Women Are Deficient in Faith," Tabataba'i Amin (2013 AD/1392 SH: 51-72) argues that the sermon suffers from weaknesses in its chain of transmission and interprets "Deficiency of Faith" as referring not to a deficiency in belief but to a reduction in spiritual tranquility.
- In his article "A New Perspective on Describing Women as Deficient in Intellect," Masjedi (2015 AD/1394 SH: 57-78) offers an alternative interpretation of the sermon and, in defense of women's rights, considers its literal meaning highly improbable.
- In "The Sociology of Language in Explaining Women's Social Status in Sermon 80 of *Nahj al-Balāghah*," Nazarbeigi (2015 AD/1394 SH: 109-121) argues that the sermon contains no insult to women. Even accepting its apparent wording, he contends that it may be understood as referring only to women who have departed from their natural identity.
- In his master's thesis "An Analysis of the Traditions on Women's Deficiency of Faith," Nazemi (2020 AD/1399 SH: 23-42) argues that the concept of women's deficiency of faith is compatible with rational principles and does not conflict with either Qur'anic verses or prophetic traditions.
- In the master's thesis "Women's Intellect from the Perspective of Islam," Saeid (2016 AD/1395: 1-136) argues that most traditions

describing women as deficient in intellect are *Mursal* (having interrupted chains of transmission) and are inconsistent with the apparent teachings of the Qur'an.

- Finally, in the master's thesis "A Critical Analysis of the Foundations, Methodology, and Views of *Amīnah Inloz* on Shi'i Hadith," Sheykhi (2018 AD/1397 SH: 16-165) argues that the sermon applies exclusively to *Āyishah* rather than to women in general.

As noted above, a considerable body of scholarship has been devoted to the Sermon on the "Deficiency of Intellect," and a wide range of interpretations has been advanced. The sheer volume of these studies suggests that the subject has reached a point of scholarly saturation. At the same time, this abundance of research highlights the need for a critical assessment that evaluates and classifies these works according to their underlying interpretive approaches. The present article therefore seeks to offer a fresh and critical perspective by categorizing and analyzing interpretations of this religious text (specifically, Sermon 80) in light of their social, historical, and cultural contexts, while also assessing the interaction between textual interpretation and these contextual variables.

2. Discussion: The Sermon on the Deficiency of Intellect in Commentaries on *Nahj al-Balāghah* and Modern Scholarship

As noted earlier, the corpus examined in this study does not encompass every commentary ever written on *Nahj al-Balāghah*. Rather, it is limited to those commentaries that have been published. Accordingly, unpublished manuscript commentaries fall outside the

scope of this research and are not cited as sources. The published commentaries consulted, together with their treatment of Sermon 80, are presented below in chronological order.

2-1. "*Ma'ārij Nahj al-Balāghah*" by *Abū al-Ḥasan Bayhaqī* (d. 565 AH)

Bayhaqī, who apparently adhered to the Shi'i School, affirmed the authenticity of Sermon 80 and described women as "Ignorant." He regarded the sermon as applying to women in general rather than to a particular individual or circumstance. Considering the sermon's criticism of women to be justified, he confined his commentary primarily to the phrase, "Do not obey them even in what is right," apparently viewing this statement as requiring particular explanation. He interpreted it as a prohibition against men's unconditional obedience to women (Bayhaqī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 2, 154), despite the fact that the wording of the passage is general and contains no explicit qualification.

2-2. "*Sharḥ Minhāj al-Barā'ah*" by *Quṭb al-Dīn Rāwandī* (d. 573 AH)

Rāwandī, a Shi'i jurist and theologian, expressed no doubt regarding the attribution of the sermon to Imam Ali (AS). He even regarded it as originating from a Prophetic tradition. Although he did not mention *Āyishah* by name, he identified the occasion of the sermon as a condemnation of her conduct. His wording suggests that he placed primary responsibility for her involvement in the events on *Talhah* and *Zubayr*, thereby implicitly excusing her to some extent.

124 Nevertheless, by citing a Prophetic tradition similar to Sermon 80,

Rāwandī interpreted its implications as universal rather than restricted to *ʿĀyishah* (*Rāwandī*, 1944 AD/1364 AH: 1, 310). Thus, although he viewed *ʿĀyishah* as the immediate referent of the sermon, he did not limit its application exclusively to her.

2-3. "*Ḥadāʾiq al-Ḥaqāʾiq fī Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*" by Quṭb al-Dīn Kaydarī Bayhaqī (fl. 576 AH)

Kaydarī accepted the authenticity of the sermon and commented only on the statements "Women are deficient in faith" and "Do not obey them in what is right." His explanation of the latter closely resembles that of his fellow townsman *Abū al-Ḥasan Bayhaqī* in "*Maʿārij Nahj al-Balāghah*." (*Kaydarī*, 1955 AD/1375 AH: 1, 375)

2-4. "*Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*" by Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd Muʿtazilī (d. 656 AH)

Among the alleged deficiencies attributed to women, *Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd* devoted particular attention to the notion of deficient faith. He interpreted the sermon as applying to all women and argued that because human actions are manifestations of faith, the incompleteness of women's deeds necessarily implies incompleteness in their faith. However, despite this general interpretation at the beginning of his discussion, he later identified *ʿĀyishah* as the principal referent of the Imam's remarks and considered these deficiencies applicable to her as well. Nevertheless, he maintained that she ultimately repented, was forgiven, and would enter Paradise. He further characterized women as naturally inclined toward excessive desire and regarded this tendency as justification for the injunction against unquestioning

obedience to them, arguing that such obedience would only strengthen these inclinations (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 6, 214-229).

2-5. "*Sharḥ Miṣbāḥ al-Sālikīn*" by Ibn Maytham Baḥrānī (d. 689 AH)

Ibn Maytham, a Shi'i hadith scholar, jurist, and theologian, had no reservations concerning the authenticity of the Imam's words. He made considerable effort to substantiate both the existence of the deficiencies attributed to women and the correctness of the Imam's statements. His commentary makes it clear that he did not regard the sermon as referring to any specific woman; rather, he interpreted it as addressing women in general. Although he acknowledged Islam's respect for women, he nevertheless warned against excessive deference toward them. He interpreted the final portion of the sermon, which advises caution even in one's relations with righteous women, as a practical strategy for avoiding the harmful consequences of excessive intimacy with women and yielding to some of their worldly desires (Baḥrānī, 1950 AD/1370 AH: 2, 480-484). It appears that *Ibn Maytham*'s principal concern was not to criticize *Āyishah* specifically, but rather to defend the text itself through a traditional, text-centered reading that extends the sermon's criticism to women as a class.

2-6. "*Al-Dībāj al-Waḍī' fī Kashf Asrār Kalām al-Waṣī*" by Abū al-Ḥasan Yaḥyā ibn Ḥamzah Ḥusaynī (d. 745 AH)

Yaḥyā ibn Ḥamzah explicitly identified *Āyishah* as the occasion for the sermon. He accepted all the deficiencies attributed to women and

126 endorsed the instruction not to obey women even in matters that are

good, arguing that such caution prevents them from becoming emboldened to urge men toward wrongdoing. He also regarded women's alleged deficiency in faith as implying a diminished spiritual rank before God (Ḥusaynī, 2003 AD/1424 AH: 2, 561-563).

2-7. "*Tanbīh al-Ghāfilīn wa Tadhkirat al-Ārifīn*" by Fatḥullāh Kāshānī (d. 988 AH)

Mullā Fatḥullāh Kāshānī, a prominent Shi'i exegete, concentrated primarily on the issue of the testimony of two women being equivalent to that of one man. He attributed the legal insufficiency of a single woman's testimony to women's greater tendency toward forgetfulness, which he associated with the predominance of moisture in their physical constitution according to traditional medicine. Having accepted the existence of the deficiencies mentioned in the sermon, he regarded the command not to obey women as a necessary consequence of what he described as their flawed judgment, weak intellect, and unsound understanding (Kāshānī, 1958 AD/1378 AH: 1, 340-341).

2-8. "*Al-Muqtaṭaf min Biḥār al-Anwār*" by Allamah Majlisī (d. 1110 AH)

In this abridged commentary derived from "*Biḥār al-Anwār*," Majlisī, the renowned Shi'i hadith scholar and jurist, argued that human actions are directly dependent upon one's faith. Consequently, he maintained that the incompleteness of women's actions necessarily reflects a deficiency in their faith. By the same reasoning, he considered women's reduced testimony and inheritance to be justified by deficiencies in intellect and conduct. Regarding the instruction not

to obey women even in what is right, he explained that the Imam was not prohibiting righteous actions themselves; rather, he meant that good deeds should be performed solely because they are intrinsically good, not merely because women have recommended them (Ansariyan, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 1, 221).

2-9. "*Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*" by *Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduḥ* (d. 1323 AH)

In his commentary, where Sermon 80 is numbered as Sermon 78, *Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduḥ*, like the classical commentators, accepts the deficiencies attributed to women. He explains them by arguing that women are primarily occupied with household responsibilities, family affairs, and childrearing; consequently, God has endowed them with only the degree of intellectual capacity necessary for these responsibilities (ʿAbduḥ, 1893 AD/1323 AH: 1, 126). It is noteworthy that although *ʿAbduḥ* was a jurist and one of the leading religious reformers of modern Egypt, he did not criticize the attribution of deficiencies in intellect, faith, or inheritance to women. Instead, following the classical tradition, he merely sought to clarify the apparently problematic phrase, "Do not obey them in what is right," arguing that it should not be understood as a prohibition against performing righteous deeds, but rather as a warning against unquestioning obedience to women (ibid.).

2-10. "*Minhāj al-Barāʿah*" by *Mīrzā Ḥabīb Allāh Hāshimī al-Khūʾī* (d. 1324 AH)

128 *Mīrzā Ḥabīb Allāh Hāshimī Khūʾī*, known as "*Amīn al-Ruʿāyā*," an

Imami jurist and scholar, entertained no doubt regarding the attribution of the sermon to Imam Ali (AS). Drawing extensively upon Qur'anic verses and traditions from the Prophet (PBUH) and the Imams (AS), he made considerable efforts to demonstrate the validity of the Imam's statements. His commentary relies heavily on that of *Ibn Maytham Baḥrānī*. In defending the three deficiencies attributed to women, he presents detailed arguments grounded in Qur'anic, hadith, and jurisprudential evidence, affirming their legitimacy and religious validity. At the same time, in discussing the honor accorded to women, he cites traditions from the Prophet and the Imams describing the virtues of righteous women. Nevertheless, in explaining the concluding passages of the sermon, which caution against both righteous and unrighteous women, he also cites traditions emphasizing the inadvisability of consulting women in decision-making (Hāshimī al-Khū'ī, 1979 AD/1400 AH: 5, 302-324).

2-11. "Fī Zilāl Nahj al-Balāghah" by Muḥammad Jawād Mughnīyah (d. 1979 AD/1400 AH)

Muḥammad Jawād Mughnīyah, the Lebanese Shi'i scholar and exegete, discusses Sermon 80 (numbered 78 in his commentary) in response to the claim that it merely reflected Imam Ali's hostility toward 'Āyishah following the Battle of the Camel. He offers five responses to this objection. In his fifth and final argument, *Mughnīyah* maintains that the contents of the sermon derive from a Prophetic tradition. He also cites Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh's view that God granted women intellectual capacities proportionate to the needs

arising from their domestic and familial responsibilities (Mughnīyah, 1967 AD/1387 SH: 2, 121-124).vThus, although *Mughnīyah*'s overall interpretive method is educational and attentive to contemporary concerns, his treatment of this sermon reflects a traditional apologetic approach that defends both its authenticity and its content.

2-12. "*Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*" by Sayyid 'Abbās Ali Mūsawī (d. 1413 AH)

The Lebanese Shi'i scholar Sayyid 'Abbās Ali Mūsawī, drawing upon *Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd*'s commentary, interprets the sermon as referring primarily to 'Āyishah. While accepting the notion of women's deficiency in faith, he excludes the impeccable women from this general rule. He further argues that history demonstrates men's superiority in virtually every field of knowledge and achievement, while women's contributions have remained comparatively limited. According to Mūsawī, although women often equal or even outnumber men in population, they nevertheless remain subordinate to men, which he regards as further evidence of their intellectual deficiency. Discussing the Qur'anic laws of inheritance, he justifies women's smaller share by citing several legal obligations imposed on men: women are not required to provide financial maintenance, they receive a bridal gift, and their husbands are responsible for their housing, food, and clothing. Mūsawī also portrays women as especially skilled at deception and therefore considers it obligatory to avoid wicked women. He appeals to Qur'anic passages, particularly those describing the great cunning of women.¹ At the same time, he

130 1. (Surah Yūsuf: 28): "*Inna Kaydakunna 'Azīm.*"

emphasizes the sermon's warning concerning even righteous women, arguing that because women are generally emotional and preoccupied with particular rather than universal concerns, they may become suspicious of their husbands, disclose confidential matters, and even lead them toward ruin (Mūsawī, 1957 AD/1377 AH: 1, 450-452).

2-13. A Light of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Translated and Edited by Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Jaʿfari (b. 1939 AD)

Sayyid Muhammad Mahdi Jaʿfari affirms the authenticity of Sermon 80 by citing earlier sources, including "*Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣ*" by *Sibt Ibn Jawzī* and "*Kashf al-Maḥajjah li Thamarat al-Muhjah*" by *Sayyid Ibn Ṭāwūs*. His work, however, is limited to documenting the sermon's occurrence in earlier sources and providing a translation; he offers no substantive commentary (Jaʿfari, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 1, 704712). His principal concern appears to have been establishing the documentary basis of the sermons rather than interpreting them.

2-14. "*Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāghah*" by Muhammad Taqi Jaʿfari (d. 1998 AD/1419 AH)

Muhammad Taqi Jaʿfari, one of the leading contemporary Shiʿi philosophers and scholars, rejects the notion that Imam Ali (AS) intended to portray women as inherently inferior to men. He considers such a literal reading of the sermon highly improbable, since the Qurʾan consistently presents men and women as equal in their essential human qualities. According to Jaʿfari, the deficiency of faith mentioned in the sermon refers only to the temporary suspension of women's religious obligations during menstruation, not to any defect

in their belief. Thus, the deficiency concerns ritual practice rather than one's relationship with God. During menstruation, women are exempted from prayer and fasting because of the simultaneous physical and psychological burdens they experience, yet they remain capable of remembering God and maintaining their spiritual connection with Him. Once this period ends, they may make up their missed fasts and resume their devotional life. Ja'fari's view, that women do not truly suffer any deficiency of faith even during menstruation, stands in marked contrast to the position of earlier commentators. Similarly, he argues that the expression "Deficiency of Intellect" does not imply any diminution of women's intrinsic worth, particularly given the indispensable and often greater role women play in pregnancy and childbirth. Nor does the legal equation of two female witnesses with one male witness constitute an absolute rule. A man's testimony may itself be invalid if he lacks adequate knowledge, while in certain legal matters a single woman's testimony is fully equivalent to that of a man, for example, in issues that only women can know firsthand, such as identifying the father of the child she carries (*Lā Ya'lam illā min Qibalihā*). Regarding the phrase "Deficiency in Their Share," Ja'fari argues that the Qur'anic inheritance verses¹ are not universally applicable to every circumstance and therefore should not be understood as establishing an absolute principle of inequality. In his view, Imam Ali's primary concern was to address practical aspects of everyday social life rather than to distinguish between the essential humanity of men and women, since attributing such an inherent

deficiency to women would contradict the teachings of the Qur'an. He likewise maintains that the warning to be cautious even of righteous women does not apply to women who possess sound judgment and reason. While affirming the authenticity of the sermon and linking it to the historical events surrounding the Battle of the Camel and 'Āyishah's manipulation by *Talhah* and *Zubayr*, Ja'fari argues that many women possess a false sense of weakness in relation to men. In attempting to overcome this perceived weakness, some women, such as 'Āyishah, may confront men directly in an effort to attain what he describes as an aspiration toward assuming traditionally masculine roles (Ja'fari, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 11, 240-302).

2-15. "Explanation of Nahj al-Balāghah," by Sayyid Muhammad Hosseini Shirazi (d. 1422 AH)

Sayyid Muhammad Hosseini Shirazi, one of the leading Shi'i scholars, begins his discussion by referring to Imam Ali's (AS) general view of the status of women before turning to the role of 'Āyishah in the Battle of the Camel. The commentator argues that women's intellectual constitution is weaker, claiming that modern science has confirmed this assertion. On this basis, he considers it necessary to avoid consulting women on major matters. He further adds that it is no coincidence that, despite worldwide slogans of equality, governmental positions continue to be occupied by women less frequently than by men. According to him, what Imam (AS) meant by the deficiency of women's faith is that, unlike men, women have not attained complete faith. Their lesser material share is likewise the result of their intellectual deficiency and physical weakness (Hosseini Shirazi, 133

2019 AD/1399 SH: 1, 302-304). He further argues that because God created women primarily for managing the household and family affairs, He reduced their rational faculty while increasing their emotional capacity. According to him, women's exemption from prayer and fasting during menstruation is regarded by both the Qur'an and medical science as a consequence of a condition involving hardship and illness, and the wisdom behind suspending these religious obligations may be the reward granted for enduring such hardship (ibid.).

2-16. Imam Amir al-Mu'minin (AS) Message: A New and Comprehensive Commentary on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, by Naser Makarem Shirazi (b. 1926 AD/1305 SH)

Naser Makarem Shirazi, contemporary Shi'i scholars, accepts the authenticity of the sermon but maintains that Imam Ali's address concerns only certain women who, because of their shortcomings, committed wrongful acts (Makarem Shirazi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 3, 275-302). Drawing upon Qur'anic verses that describe human beings as greedy (Surah *al-Ma'ārij*), unjust and ignorant (Surah *al-Aḥzāb*), ungrateful (Surah *al-Zukhruf*), and rebellious (Surah *al-'Alaq*), he argues that these descriptions apply only to those who have not been nurtured by the divine prophets and who have strayed from the right path. Elsewhere, however, the Qur'an honors the children of Adam (Surah *al-Isrā'*), referring to righteous individuals favored by God. Accordingly, the statement that "Women are deficient in intellect" cannot be understood as applying to all women, especially since

134 history presents both exemplary women and profoundly misguided

women who have been sources of great social disorder (ibid: 289).

Makarem Shirazi then offers several explanations for these deficiencies. These include the pathological condition associated with menstruation, which renders women temporarily unsuited for acts of ritual worship; the predominance of emotion over reason, which may increase the likelihood of error and thus explains why the testimony of two women equals that of one man; and men's financial obligations, such as providing maintenance for wives and children, which justify their receiving a double share of inheritance.

Regarding the phrase, "Do not obey them even in what is right," he explains that good deeds should be performed because they are inherently good, not out of unconditional submission to one's wife. Otherwise, women may come to expect compliance with their improper requests. He notes, however, that exceptional women such as Lady *Fāṭimah al-Zahrā* (SA) are excluded from this general rule (ibid: 300).

Concerning the statement, "Beware even of their good women," Makarem argues that "Good" here refers to women who are relatively, not absolutely, good. Truly righteous women should not be regarded with suspicion; rather, their advice ought to be welcomed. As evidence, he cites the Qur'anic verse concerning the weaning of a child: "If they both decide, by mutual consent and consultation, to wean the child, there is no blame upon them." (al-Baqarah: 233)

2-17. "*Nahj al-Balāghah Mirror*," by Sayyid Ali Akbar Qarashi (b. 1928 AD/1307 SH)

According to Sayyid Ali Akbar Qarashi, a Shi'i scholar, Imam Ali's reference to the deficiency of faith should be understood as referring

to deeds rather than belief. He supports this interpretation by citing Surah *al-Baqarah*: 143, where the Qur'an uses the term faith to refer to the Muslims' previous prayers after the change of the *Qiblah*. Classical exegetes understood this verse to mean that God would not allow their previous prayers, their "Faith," that is, their deeds, to be lost. Qarashi therefore concludes that all three deficiencies mentioned in the sermon originate from divine legislation. Since women's natural disposition is more suited to childrearing and household management, God endowed them with stronger emotions and comparatively less rational capacity than men. He concludes by affirming that Imam Ali's sermon was occasioned by *Āyishah*'s conduct during the Battle of the Camel (Qarashi, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 1, 405-407).

In addition to these dedicated commentaries, which constitute independent studies on *Nahj al-Balāghah*, a number of scholars have discussed the Eighth Sermon within broader books or public lectures. Among the most significant are Martyr Mortaza Motahhari, Abdullah Javadi Amoli, and Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei.

Martyr Mortaza Motahhari (d. 1979 AD/1358 SH) in "Women and Judicial Issues," explains the Qur'anic ruling equating the testimony of two women with that of one man by attributing it to women's stronger emotional disposition. He argues that women are more readily influenced by emotions and that heightened emotional responses may lead to inaccurate judgments (Motahhari, 2011 AD/1391 SH: 18). Nevertheless, a broader reading of Motahhari's works shows that he viewed men and women as equal in their human

136 dignity and spiritual perfection. Although he acknowledged natural

differences between the sexes, he considered them equal in honor and intrinsic human worth.

In "Woman in the Mirror of Glory and Beauty," Abdullah Javadi Amoli (b. 1933 AD/1312 SH) argues that equating the testimony of two women with that of one man is unrelated to intelligence or rational capacity. Rather, it concerns memory and recollection. The requirement for two female witnesses does not imply that women possess deficient intellect but reflects the possibility that, because women are often occupied with domestic responsibilities and childrearing, they may forget details of events they have witnessed. Javadi Amoli further states: "The form of intellect that may be more developed in men than in women is political and administrative reasoning. Even if someone possesses greater practical wisdom in political or executive affairs, this does not indicate greater nearness to God." (Javadi Amoli, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 368-373)

Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei (b. 1939 AD/1404 SH) also addressed¹ the Eighth Sermon in response to a question asking whether the tradition describing women as "Deficient in Intellect" contradicts women's freedom. While affirming the authenticity of the narration, he explained that it does not imply that women lack the capacity for understanding. Indeed, many women possess levels of intelligence and insight far superior to those of many men. He further suggested that the deficiencies mentioned by Imam Ali (AS) may not

1. Remarks in the question-and-answer session held on 26 June 1981 (06/04/1360) at Abuzar Mosque in Tehran, during which, in the course of the same speech, the bombing and assassination attempt against Ayatollah Khamenei took place.

arise from women's innate nature but rather characterize women shaped by the oppressive culture of their time. According to him, during Imam Ali's era, women throughout the world, including non-Arab societies, were subjected to systemic oppression and were generally denied access to education, public life, and political participation (Khamenei, 1981 AD/1360 SH).

It may be inferred from Ayatollah Khamenei's remarks that he does not consider the meaning of the sermon to be universally applicable to all historical periods. By restricting the deficiencies mentioned in the sermon, he regards them as specific to societies and eras in which corrupt cultural norms foster such shortcomings. In contrast, the early commentators, when referring to women, did not impose any temporal limitation; instead, they employed general and unrestricted expressions such as "Concerning the condemnation of women."

3. Analysis and Classification of the Commentators' Approaches to the *Nahj al-Balāghah*

The approach of the early commentators toward the Eighth Sermon remained largely unchanged until approximately the middle of the fourteenth century AH and was predominantly text-centered. During the classical period, commentators generally presented their own independent interpretations of the sermon, although they occasionally quoted one another. For example, *Quṭb al-Dīn Kaydarī*'s (d. 576 AH) discussion of the injunction not to obey women in matters recognized as good closely resembles the commentary in "*Ma'ārij Nahj al-*

138 *Balāghah*" by his fellow townsman *Abul Ḥasan Bayhaqī* (d. 565 AH).

Kaydarī attributes the prohibition to the dominance of women's appetitive faculty over their intellect and to their alleged ignorance, precisely the same explanation found in *Bayhaqī*'s work (*Kaydarī*, 1955 AD/1375 AH: 1, 375).

In more recent commentaries, however, the commentators' treatment of the sermon has changed noticeably, reflecting broader social transformations. This shift in perspective has several causes, as evidenced by the diverse approaches adopted toward the Eighth Sermon. One contributing factor was the introduction of new concepts into Muslim societies and into the intellectual vocabulary of modern scholars and commentators. The Constitutional Revolution, together with subsequent cultural developments and women's increasing participation in political, revolutionary, scientific, and intellectual spheres, presented a new image of women within society. A deeper understanding of women's personalities and their various capacities encouraged commentators to distance themselves, at least partially, from the views of earlier authorities and gave them the confidence to propose interpretations that differed from those of the classical commentators. Consequently, some modern commentaries directly contradict traditional interpretations. From the perspective of its literary structure, the content of the Eighth Sermon may be divided into two broad sections. In the first section, Imam Ali (AS) describes women, referring to them as "Deficient in Intellect" and "Deficient in Faith." In the second section, which appears to present the practical implications of the descriptive section, the Imam issues directives concerning interaction with women, warning his audience against

associating with them and instructing them not to follow women even in matters regarded as good.

Most text-centered commentators found nothing incompatible between the descriptive portion of the sermon and reason or religion. Instead, they devoted greater attention to the prescriptive statements. It appears that, in their view, attributing these characteristics to women was natural and acceptable; what required explanation was the instruction not to obey women even in righteous matters. Given the large number of commentaries and scholarly studies devoted to the Eighth Sermon of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, as well as the diversity of interpretations and viewpoints, it is necessary to classify these approaches systematically. Although such classifications may be arranged chronologically to illustrate the historical development of scholarly perspectives, this alone is insufficient. On the one hand, many early and contemporary scholars hold remarkably similar views; on the other hand, the sheer number of interpretations and the variety of perspectives make a thematic classification more useful.

Such a classification may be based on several criteria. Among the most significant factors influencing commentators' approaches are:

- Acceptance or rejection of the authenticity of the sermon.
- Commitment to the literal meaning of the sermon versus allegorical or esoteric interpretation.
- Restricting the sermon to a specific historical referent while simultaneously extending its implications more broadly.
- Generalizing the sermon without identifying any specific referent.

- 140** – Restricting the sermon exclusively to a particular individual or event.

- Extending the sermon to all historical periods versus limiting it to the circumstances of its original utterance.
- The influence of theological affiliation and the requirements of particular legal and doctrinal schools.
- Interpretations of the injunction, "Do not obey them in what is right."

3-1. Acceptance or Rejection of the Authenticity of the Tradition

Early commentators such as *Quṭb Rāwandī* (d. 573 AH), Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd (d. 656 AH), and Ibn Maytham Baḥrānī (d. 689 AH), as well as later scholars including Mulla Fathullah Kashani, Shaykh Muhammad ‘Abduh, Mirza Habibullah Khoei, Mortaza Motahhari, Muhammad Jawad Mughnīyah, Sayyid Muhammad Husseini Shirazi, Muhammad Taqi Ja’fari, Naser Makarem Shirazi, Ali Akbar Qarashi, Abdullah Javadi Amoli, and Ayatollah Khamenei, explicitly state that this sermon was delivered after the Battle of the Camel. By doing so, they implicitly affirm both the historical authenticity of the sermon and the reliability of its attribution to Imam Ali (AS).

In contrast, Sa’id (2015 AD/1395 SH: 1-136), in his master’s thesis *Women’s Intellect from the Perspective of Islam*, argues that most traditions describing women as deficient in intellect are transmitted through incomplete chains and are inconsistent with the apparent meaning of the Qur’an. Since the Qur’an nowhere explicitly refers to women as intellectually deficient, he concludes that men and women possess equal intellectual capacity.

3-2. Emphasis on the Literal Meaning of the Sermon versus Allegorical or Esoteric Interpretation

Classical commentators generally accepted that the sermon had a

literal meaning. This acceptance is evident from their commentaries, all of which are based upon the authority of the apparent wording of the tradition. Their explanations largely conform to the literal text, while they sought to support individual passages of the sermon through citations from the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions, and both internal religious reasoning and rational arguments (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 6, 214-229).

A particularly notable example of strengthening the sermon through Qur'anic evidence may be found in "*al-Dībāj al-Waḍī'*," where Hussein (2003 AD/1424 AH: 2, 561-563) extensively supports the sermon's content with Qur'anic verses.

3-3. Emphasis on the Literal Meaning of the Sermon versus Allegorical or Esoteric Interpretation

Among later and contemporary scholars, some have adopted different views, holding that Sermon Eighty possesses both an outward (literal) and an inward (esoteric) meaning. Qarashi, Muhammad 'Abduh, Hashemi Khoei, Ja'fari, Musawi, and Mughnīyah did not object to the literal sense of the sermon; rather, they explained and elaborated upon its statements in accordance with their apparent meaning. For example, Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh did not see any contradiction between the literal and deeper meanings of the sermon. Regarding the alleged deficiency of women's intellect, he argued that because women are primarily occupied with household affairs and domestic responsibilities, God endowed them with intellectual capacity

142 proportionate to their needs. Similarly, Qarashi interpreted the sermon

in accordance with its literal wording, although he understood "Deficiency of Faith" to mean a deficiency in religious practice rather than in belief itself. Adopting a sympathetic attitude toward women, he regarded the deficiencies attributed to them as divinely ordained wisdom intended for their own benefit (Qarashi, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 1, 405-407). Hashemi Khoei substantiated every phrase of the sermon with Qur'anic verses and traditions, thereby effectively endorsing its literal meaning (Hashemi Khoei, 1979 AD/1400 AH: 5, 302-324). In "A Light of *Nahj al-Balāghah*," Ja'fari affirmed the authenticity of the sermon by citing sources such as "*Tadhkirat al-Khawāṣ*" and "*Kashf al-Mahajjah li Thamarat al-Muhajjah*." (Ja'fari, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 1, 704-712) Another group of scholars accepted the literal wording of the sermon while maintaining that women do not, in reality, possess the deficiencies mentioned therein and may even surpass men in certain respects. Contemporary scholars such as Muhammad Taqi Ja'fari, Abdollah Javadi Amoli, and Naser Makarem Shirazi offered alternative interpretations that differed from the text's apparent meaning. Muhammad Taqi Ja'fari, for example, argued that "Deficiency of Intellect" does not imply any diminution in a woman's intrinsic worth. Concerning the phrase "Deficiency in Shares," he maintained that the relevant Qur'anic verse concerning inheritance is not universally applicable, and that interpreting women's deficiency in its conventional, commonly understood sense would contradict the Qur'an (Ja'fari, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 11, 240-302).

Javadi Amoli likewise sought a rational explanation for Sermon **143**

Eighty. He proposed that intellectual deficiency should be understood as a memory deficit rather than a deficit in reasoning or intelligence (Javadi Amoli, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 368-373). Makarem Shirazi, after discussing the dignity and significance of women in Islam, argued that the sermon does not encompass all women, just as the Qur'anic descriptions of humanity as ungrateful, unjust, or doomed to loss do not apply universally to every human being. In effect, he sought to present an interpretation that transcends the literal wording of the sermon, portraying women as equal to men rather than inferior to them (Makarem Shirazi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 3, 275-302).

Masjedi rejected the literal interpretation altogether. Even assuming the sermon to be authentic, he interpreted women's "Deficiency of Faith" as referring to a temporary reduction in inner tranquility rather than any deficiency in heartfelt belief (Masjedi, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 94, 57-78). By contrast, Nazemi regarded the notion of women's deficiency of faith as fully compatible with reason, accepted the sermon's stated justifications, and explicitly argued that the content of Sermon Eighty does not conflict with the Qur'an (Nazemi Ashani, 2019 AD/1399 SH: 7, 23-42).

3-4. Particularization with Identification of a Specific Referent Combined with Generalization

Among the early commentators, some adopted an approach that combined specification with generalization. They maintained that the sermon's primary referent was *Āyisha*, while simultaneously holding that its statements applied to women in general. *Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd*, for

144 example, considered Sermon Eighty to have been directed primarily at

‘Āyisha but nevertheless understood its message as applying to all women (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 6, 214-229). Similarly, *Quṭb Rāwandī*, without explicitly naming ‘Āyisha, regarded her as the principal subject of the sermon while also affirming that it constituted a condemnation of women generally (Rāwandī, 1985 AD/1364 SH: 1, 310). *Ibn Maytham* likewise considered ‘Āyisha responsible for the Battle of the Camel but interpreted the sermon as addressing women as a whole (Baḥrānī, 1950 AD/1370 AH: 2, 480-484).

3-5. Generalization without Identifying a Specific Referent

Some early commentators, such as *Quṭb al-Dīn Kaydarī* (d. 576 AH) and *Bayhaqī* (d. 565 AH), adopted a purely generalizing approach. They made no reference to ‘Āyisha or any other individual and understood the sermon as referring to women in general (Kaydarī, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 1, 375). Likewise, although later commentators occasionally mentioned ‘Āyisha, most did not consider the sermon restricted to her. Qarashi, for instance, regarded the deficiencies attributed to women as applying to all women (Qarashi, 2006 AD/1385 SH: 1, 405-407). *Muhammad ‘Abduh* and *Mughnīyah*, despite their reformist inclinations, likewise interpreted Imam Ali’s statements as referring to women generally (‘Abduh, 1893 AD/1323 AH: 1, 126).

3-6. Particularization

Fayḍ al-Islām (1989 AD/1368 SH: 1, 180), the translator of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, restricted Sermon Eighty exclusively to ‘Āyisha. Likewise, Sheykhi (2017 AD/1397 SH: 16-165), in his M.A. thesis "A Critical

Analysis of the Foundations, Methodology, and Views of Amina Inloz on Shi'i Hadith," argued that 'Āyisha was the exclusive referent of the sermon. By contrast, scholars such as Mortaza Motahhari, Muhammad Taqi Ja'fari, Javadi Amoli, and Ayatollah Khamenei made no explicit reference to 'Āyisha as the intended subject of the sermon.^v Makarem Shirazi, however, adopted a middle position. He argued that the descriptive section of the sermon does not refer to all women but only to "Certain Women" whose personal shortcomings had led them to commit wrongful acts. While advocating this qualified form of particularization, he nevertheless identified 'Āyisha as one of the sermon's intended referents (Makarem Shirazi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 3, 275-302).

3-7. Extending the Sermon's Meaning to All Historical Periods versus Restricting It to Its Original Context

Whether the content of Sermon Eighty and the deficiencies attributed to women were intended only for the historical period in which the sermon was delivered, or whether they continue to apply universally, has also been a matter of discussion among commentators and researchers. Most early commentators referred to women in general without imposing any temporal limitation, using broad expressions such as "Concerning the condemnation of women." Although commentators such as *Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd*, *Rāwandī*, and *Ibn Maytham* referred to 'Āyisha, they nevertheless did not restrict the sermon to her historical context.

Rather, they understood Imam Ali's statements as applying to women of all ages. Their reliance on a similar Prophetic tradition also

indicates that they regarded these alleged deficiencies as having been recognized since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. The approach of later scholars to this issue appears particularly significant, given the considerable historical distance from the sermon's delivery. Some, such as Hashemi Khoei, adopted views similar to those of the early commentators, maintaining that the deficiencies mentioned in Sermon Eighty apply to women generally and imposing no temporal limitation on the sermon (cf. above; Hashemi Khoei, 1979 AD/1400 AH: 5, 302-324).

Others likewise regarded the sermon as possessing universal temporal applicability. For example, *Muhammad Jawād Mughnīyah* argued that the sermon has no connection with Imam Ali's hostility toward 'Āyisha; otherwise, the Imam would also have censured Ṭalḥa and Zubayr, who were the principal instigators of the Battle of the Camel (Mughnīyah, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 2, 121-124).

In contrast, Ayatollah Khamenei treated Sermon Eighty as historically conditioned. He argued that the deficiencies attributed to women were specific to the period in which the sermon was delivered, when women generally lived under oppressive social conditions and were deliberately kept in intellectual and social deprivation (Khamenei, 1981 AD/1360 SH).

According to Nazarbeigi, Imam Ali's statements may instead be understood as applying to all women who have become alienated from their natural identity (Nazarbeigi, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 1, 109-121). Likewise, Jannati (2001 AD/1380 SH: 160, 38-44) accepted the existence of a deficiency in women's intellect but confined it to practical or experiential reasoning within the particular circumstances

of that historical period. He attributed these deficiencies to the prevailing social conditions of the time, when women rarely participated in public or social activities.

3-8. Sectarian Affiliations and the Requirements of Jurisprudential and Theological Traditions

From a religious-affiliation perspective, the commentaries on *Nahj al-Balāghah* may be divided into two broad categories: "Those written by Shi'i scholars and those by Sunni scholars. Most commentators, regardless of sectarian affiliation, have expressed no doubt concerning the authenticity of this sermon." Both the Shi'i commentator *Qutb Rāwandī* (d. 573 AH) and the Sunni Mu'tazili commentator *Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd* (d. 656 AH) introduce Sermon Eighty with the phrase: "Among his sayings (AS), delivered after the conclusion of the Battle of the Camel, concerning the condemnation of women." (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 6, 214-229; see also the discussion of *Rāwandī* above) This common introduction itself reflects their agreement regarding the historical setting in which the sermon was delivered.

With respect to their treatment of 'Āyisha, who was regarded as the principal figure behind the Battle of the Camel, sectarian differences become more apparent. Among Sunni scholars, *Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd*, despite identifying 'Āyisha by name as the Prophet's wife, absolves her of ultimate deviation, considers her among the repentant, and describes her as one of the inhabitants of Paradise (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 6, 214-229).

148 By contrast, the Shi'i commentator *Ibn Maytham* indirectly refers

to *ʿĀyisha* as the instigator of the Battle of the Camel and holds her responsible for the destruction and loss of Muslim lives (Baḥrānī, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 2, 480-484). Other commentators, such as *Yahyā ibn Ḥamzah*, a Zaydi scholar, merely allude to *ʿĀyisha* without further discussion (Hosseini, 2003 AD/1424 AH: 2, 561-563). Among contemporary Sunni and Shi'i scholars alike, *ʿĀyisha* is generally regarded as the primary target of the sermon's criticism.

3-8. An Analysis of the Command "Do Not Obey Them in What Is Right"

One of the most important interpretive challenges that has occupied commentators from both the classical and modern periods concerns the command: "Do not obey them in what is right."

At first glance, this statement appears problematic because it seems to discourage obedience even in matters that are good and commendable, whereas performing good deeds constitutes a fundamental principle of Islamic teaching. Some early commentators, including *Bayhaqī* and *Kāshānī*, argued that men should not obey women in any matter whatsoever, even in matters that are objectively good, and should instead oppose them (Bayhaqī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 2, 154; Kāshānī, 1999 AD/1378 SH: 1, 340-341).

Other classical commentators maintained that Imam Ali's intention was not to prohibit the performance of good deeds themselves. Rather, they interpreted the statement as prohibiting unconditional obedience to women. Accordingly, one may perform a good action because it is inherently good, but not merely because a woman has instructed one

to do so (Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 6, 214-229; see also Baḥrānī, 1991 AD/1370 SH: 2, 480-484).

Later commentators adopted this latter interpretation. They argued that the phrase should not be understood as a command to refrain from doing well but rather as a warning against unquestioning obedience to women (cf. ‘Abduh, 1893 AD/1323 AH: 1, 126).

Musavi, citing Qur’anic verses, contrasted the Qur’an’s description of Satan’s scheme as weak with its characterization of women’s stratagem as formidable, and on this basis argued against obeying women (cf. Musavi, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 1, 450-452). Among contemporary scholars, figures such as Javadi Amoli and Makarem Shirazi maintain that the prohibition concerns only certain women and, even then, is directed against absolute and unconditional obedience rather than all forms of compliance (Makarem Shirazi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 3, 275-302).

Conclusion

Sermon Eighty of *Nahj al-Balāghah*, which censures women by attributing to them deficiencies of intellect and faith and warns believers against following women even in matters regarded as good, has been the subject of scholarly discussion from the earliest centuries to the present.

In addressing the principal question of this study, namely, how Muslim commentators and researchers have approached this controversial sermon, the authors first surveyed the contents of the

150 principal commentaries and modern studies, then classified the various

interpretive approaches and their underlying assumptions. The study concludes that the differences among commentators stem primarily from factors such as the historicity of interpretation, the influence of social and intellectual contexts on the understanding of religious texts, and differing commitments to textual literalism and to the authority of the apparent meaning of the text.

One group of commentators, adopting a text-centered approach, defended the sermon's literal implications. Others rejected the apparent meaning of the alleged deficiencies, preferring allegorical or interpretive readings that did not extend the sermon's judgments to all women.

Regarding the sermon's prescriptive section, particularly the command "Do not obey them in what is right," some early commentators adopted a strict position, arguing that men should refrain altogether from obeying women. Nevertheless, the majority of both classical and modern commentators maintain that Imam Ali (AS) did not intend to prohibit the performance of good deeds; rather, his purpose was to discourage absolute and unquestioning obedience to women.

A number of contemporary scholars, finding the condemnation of women incompatible with human dignity and the essential nature of human beings, have sought to defend the status of women by offering interpretations that are more consistent with contemporary social realities and respectful of women's dignity. Some have gone further still, rejecting the attribution of the sermon to Imam Ali altogether on the grounds that its content is incompatible with the teachings and principles of the Qur'an.

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