

## The Ismailis as a Minority Group in Afghanistan: A Study of Their History and Contemporary Religious Life

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### Öz

Afghanistan is one of the most complex countries in Central Asia, with its ethnic and sectarian diversity, and these differences have often led to conflicts. The dominant sect in the country is Ahl al-Sunna/Maturidism, embraced by approximately 85% of the population. Shiites, on the other hand, constitute a minority sect, comprising about 15% of the population. The Shiites are divided into Twelver and Ismaili sects. The proportion of Ismailis among Shiites is approximately 2-3%, and they mostly reside in Badakhshan, in the northeast of Afghanistan. The Ismailiyya sect, which has had supporters in the country since early times, has been ostracized by Ahl al-Sunna scholars and Twelver Shiites. They were labeled as worshippers of Imam Ali or Aga Khan, as some believed they considered Hazrat Ali as a deity, while others viewed Aga Khan in the same way. Consequently, both Sunnis and Twelver Shiites have regarded them as heretics. While information about the Ismailis' classical and modern historical periods is available in the literature, their medieval history remains obscure. Additionally, reliable information about their religious life in the modern era has been scarce. This study examines the historical trajectory of the Ismailiyya sect in Afghanistan using the methodological framework of time-space and idea-history connections within the discipline of Islamic sects' history. Furthermore, the religious life of the Ismailis and the perceptions of other sect members about them have been presented through interviews conducted during fieldwork in Afghanistan. The study aims to chronologically trace the historical development of the sect in the country and document the religious practices of its members through their own narratives.

**Keywords:** History of Islamic Sects, Afghanistan, Shia, Ismailism, Twelver Shi'ism, Sunni Islam.

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## Afganistan’da Azınlık Grubu Olarak İsmâîlîler: Tarihleri ve Güncel Hayatları Üzerine Bir inceleme

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### Öz

Afganistan, sahip olduğu etnik ve mezhebî çeşitlik ve sahip olduğu bu farklılıkların çatışmalara dönüşmesi ile Orta Asya’nın en dikkat çeken ülkelerinden birisidir. Ülkedeki hâkim mezhep Ehl-i Sünnet’tir ve yaklaşık %85’lik bir kesim tarafından benimsenmiştir. Şiiler ise azınlık mezhep olup oranları yaklaşık %15’tir. Şiiler İsnâaşerî ve İsmâîlî fırkalardan oluşmuştur. İsmâîlîlerin Şia içerisindeki oranı %2-3 olup çoğunlukla Afganistan’ın kuzey doğusu Bedaşan’da yaşamaktadırlar. Erken tarihlerden itibaren ülkede taraftar bulan İsmâliyye mezhebî, başta Ehl-i Sünnet’e mensup ulema olmak üzere İsnâaşerî Şiiler tarafından da dışlanmıştır. Kimilerince Hz. Ali’yi, kimilerince de Ağa Han’ı ilah kabul ettikleri düşünüldüğü için Hz. Ali’ye veya Ağa Han’a tapanlar olarak isimlendirilmişlerdir. Bundan dolayı hem Sünnîler hem de İmâmî Şiiler tarafından tekfir, tatlîl ve teberrî edilmişlerdir. İsmâîlîlerin klasik ve modern tarihi dönemleri hakkında kaynaklarda bilgi bulunabilirken orta tarihi dönemleri kapalı kalmıştır. Yine modern dönem dinî yaşamları hakkında sağlıklı bilgiler bulmak pek mümkün olmamıştır. Bu çalışmada İslam Mezhepleri Tarihi disiplinin bir metodu olarak zaman-mekân ve fikir-hadise irtibatı çerçevesinde İsmâliyye mezhebinin Afganistan’daki tarihi süreci kronolojik bir şekilde incelenmiştir. Yine İsmâîlîlerin dinî yaşamları ve kendileri hakkında diğer mezhep mensuplarının düşünceleri, Afganistan’a yapılan seyahatlerde yapılan röportajlarla anlatılmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı söz konusu mezhebin ülkedeki tarihi seyrini ve serüvenini kronolojik bir şekilde ortaya koymak ve mezhep mensuplarının dini yaşamlarını bizzat kendilerinin anlatımıyla gözler önüne sermektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İslam Mezhepleri Tarihi, Afganistan, Şia, İsmâliyye, İsnâaşerîyye, Ehl-i Sünnet.

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## Introduction

Afghanistan, currently known as the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, is an Islamic country in the heart of Central Asia, bordering Pakistan to the east and south, Iran to the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north, and East Turkistan to the east. It is estimated that approximately 32.5 million people (2015) live in the country where no census has been conducted since 1979. The majority of the population is Pashtun, followed by Tajik, Hazara, and Uzbek communities.<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan's 2004 constitution recognizes the existence of 14 ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup> Although the majority of Shiites, who constitute approximately 15% of the country, belong to the Hazaras, there are also Shiites among Pashtun and Tajik communities. Although most of the Shiites in question belong to the Twelver branch, a small number of people, around 2-3%, belong to the Ismaili Shiism. Except for a small number, the Ismailis live in Kabul, Bedakhshan, Baghlan (Dara-i Kayān), and Bamyān, far from the city centers and in extreme poverty.<sup>3</sup> The Ismailis, 90% of whom belong to the Hazaras, are of Tajik origin and mostly live in the Bedakhshan region. Most of the Tajik Ismailis are settled in Bedakhshan along the Wahan Corridor from Shignan to the Pamir Mountains and are estimated to number around 200,000. Apart from Bedakhshan and Khazarajat, a small number of Ismailis live in the city of Tahhar.<sup>4</sup>

There are different opinions about the beginning of the history of Shiism in Afghanistan. Generally, the periods of the Ilkhanids (1256-1353) or the Safavids (1501-1736) are generally accepted. However, it is known that the first Islamic conquests took place much earlier during the caliphate of Umar (634-644). Therefore, it was inevitable that Afghanistan, where Islamisation started in the early periods, would not be affected by the Shiite, Karramite, Murjiite, and Kharijite sectarian events that would take place in the future. For this reason, the history of Shiism began much earlier in these lands. In parallel, the history of Zaydism, Ismaililism, and Twelver Shiism also had their own history in the region.

There are very few studies on the Ismailis in Afghanistan in the modern period. One of the first names that comes to mind is Hafizullah Emadi, who has written three different studies on the religious, political, social and cultural aspects of the Ismailis. His article "Struggle for Reconition: Hazara Ismaili Women and Their Role in the Public Arena in

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<sup>1</sup> T.C. Kabil Büyükelçiliği Ticaret Müşavirliği, Afganistan Ülke Raporu (2017), 2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Hüseyin Şeyhanlıoğlu, *Asya'nın Kalbi Afganistan* (İstanbul: KDY Akademi, 2021), 30.

<sup>3</sup> Faruk Mergen, *SSCB'nin İşgalinden Günümüze Afganistan'da Şiilik* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2024), 2; Zahide Ay, "Hazaraların Şiileşmesinde Safevi Etkisi", *Seçuk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi* 47 (2019), 397.

<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Goodhand, "Bandits, Borderlands and Opium Wars: Afghan State-building Viewed from the Margins", *DIIS Working Paper* 26 (2009), 9; Hüseyin Günarslan, *Ağa Hanlar ve Günümüzdeki Faaliyetleri* (Şanlıurfa: Harran Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Doktora Tezi, 2017), 256; "Ismailis in Afghanistan", ts.

Afganistan”<sup>5</sup> is one of the most cited sources in our study. In this study, the author has mostly focused on the political history of the Ismailis, but he has also provided important information about their sectarian status. However, except for zakat, how they specifically practiced the basic acts of worship of Islam such as prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage, and how they viewed other Muslims were not covered in the study. Another researcher is Farhad Daftary, himself a member of the Ismailiyya sect. His “Histories and Teachings of the Ismailis”<sup>6</sup> and “Intellectual Traditions in Islam” are important sources referenced in this article. Although both studies deal with the early history of the Ismailis from political and religious perspectives, their current sectarian status and the geography they live in are not discussed. However, there is valuable information on when and how the Ismailiyya sect entered Afghanistan. Hüseyin Günarslan's doctoral dissertation titled “Aga Khans and Their Activities Today”<sup>7</sup> is extremely important in terms of showing the relations of the Ismailis in Afghanistan with Karim Aga Khan IV, the leader of the Nizari Ismailis in the world. However, in this study, the relations of the Ismailiyya sect with the Sunni Afghans and their religious worship are the subject of this study. In fact, although the history of the Ismailiyya sect has been the subject of various studies so far, its relations with modern Sunni and Twelver Shiite Afghans and their forms of worship have not been specifically studied. As a matter of fact, what makes this study important is that these issues have been observed on the spot in Afghanistan and presented to the reader through interviews with the relevant people.

In this study, the historical process of the Ismailites, one of the minority sects in Afghanistan, from the classical period to the modern period has been explained. In the narration of this historical process, chronology was followed, and the method of time-space and idea-history liaison, which is one of the methods of the history of Islamic sects, was used. In the study, not only the history of a sect was narrated, but also interviews were conducted with the members of the Ismailiyya sect, whom I had the opportunity to visit in Afghanistan, and their current religious life was conveyed without any savings. Moreover, the views of the Ahl al-Sunna, the dominant sect in Afghanistan, and the Twelver Shiites, another minority sect, on the Ismailis have been conveyed directly through interviews with them. This study aims to reveal the historical adventure and current history of the Ismailis in Afghanistan and to convey in a descriptive style how the religious life, which is the requirement of their sect, is practiced in a Sunni Hanafi geography.

## 1. Classical History of Shiism and Ismailism in Afghanistan

Until the mid-18th century, the first Islamic conquests of Afghanistan,<sup>8</sup> referred to as

<sup>5</sup> Hafizullah Emadi, “Struggle for Reconition: Hazara Isma’ili Women and Their Role in the Public Arena in Afghanistan”, *Asian Journal of Womens Studies* 8/2 (2002), 76-103.

<sup>6</sup> Farhad Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs: Their History and Doctrines* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> Günarslan, *Ağa Hanlar ve Günümüzdeki Faaliyetleri*, 256-257, 281-344, 372.

<sup>8</sup> Ali Avcu, *Horasan-Maveraünnehir’de İsmaililik* (İstanbul: Marmara Akademi, 2018), 53; Sayyid ‘Askar Mūsawī, *Tārīkh Farhanq Iqtisād Siyāsāt*, trans. Asaduāllh Shifāyī (Tehran: Intishārāt Mu’assasah Farhanq Hunarī

Khorasan in the sources, took place during the caliphate of Umar (634-644) under the command of Abdullah b. Budayl b. Waraqa (d. 37/657) and the conquest movements in the region intensified during the time of Uthman (644-656).<sup>9</sup> The region of Badakhshan, where most of the Ismailis lived, was conquered at the end of the first century under the command of Qutayba b. Muslim al-Bahili (d. 96/715). According to Jafariyya, Shiism gradually spread throughout the region in the following centuries, and the Alawites fully settled in the region in the fourth century.<sup>10</sup> We can say that the first events that can be considered as Shiism in Khorasan, which became a place of refuge for many people belonging to different sects or religions who were overwhelmed by the oppression of the rulers during the Umayyad and Abbasid periods or who were subjected to prosecution, or who were somehow disturbed by the government and wanted to create a ground for future rebellions, began to take place from the first quarter of the second century. In this context, one of the first rebellions was that of Yahya, the son of Imam Zayd b. Ali Zayn al-Abidin, who fled or was invited to the northern regions of present-day Afghanistan as a continuation of his father's rebellion in Kufa in 122/740. Imam Yahya's attempt resulted in his assassination in Juzjan in 125/742-743, and out of respect for him and his father, all children born that year were named Yahya and Zayd.<sup>11</sup> Some other revolts that took place in the region are as follows:

- The revolt of the Jannahiyya faction: This revolt, which emerged in 129/767-747 under the leadership of Abdullah b. Muawiya b. Abdullah b. Jafar b. Ali b. Abi Talib, was joined by many anti-government opponents, such as Zaydis, Kharijis, Zoroastrians, Mazdakis, and Christians, but ended in failure.<sup>12</sup>

Naksh-ı Simurg, 1379), 23; Husayn 'Ali Yazdāny, *Pojehesh-i der Tārikh Hazārāhā* (İrān: Jābhānh Mahtāb, 1368), 56; 'Abdu'lḥay Ḥabībī, *Tārikh Afghānistān Ba'd az Islām* (Tehran: Dunyāy Kitāb, 1389), 140.

<sup>9</sup> Khalīfah ibn Ḥayyāt, *Tārikh* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1977), 178; Belāzūrī, *Futūḥū'l-Buldān*, trans. Mustafa Fayda (İstanbul: Siyer, 2013), 452-453; Abū al-Faraj Jamāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī ibn Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fi Tārikh al-Mulūk wa-al-Umam*, ed. Muhammed Ata - Mustafa Abdülkadir Ata (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1995), 4/322-323; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, ed. Muhammed-Mustafa Abdülkadir Ata (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1992), 7/127-128, 160; Husayn al-Fāḍilī, *al-Shī'ah fi Afghānistān* (Beirut: Dār al-Şafwah, 2006), 60.

<sup>10</sup> Rasūl Ja'fariyān, *Atlas al-Shī'ah Dirāsah fi Jughrāfiyah al-Diniyah lil-Tashayyu'*, trans. Sayf 'Alī Nāşir al-Ka'bī (Beirut: Markaz al-'Ākdmī lil-Bḥāth, 2015), 527.

<sup>11</sup> Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd al-'Āmwly al-Ṭabarī al-Baghdādī al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh al-Umam wa-al-Mulūk* (Beirut: Dār al-Turāth, t.y.), 7/189; Abū Manşūr 'Abd al-Qāhir ibn Ṭāhir ibn Muḥammad al-Tamīmī al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farq Bayna al-Firaq* (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Sīnā, 1988), 45; Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm ibn Abī Bakr Aḥmad al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa-al-Nihāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1993), 183; Abū al-Hasan 'Alī ibn al-Husayn ibn 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Aşrīyah, 2005), 3/177; Habib Demir, *Horasan'da Şilik* (Ankara: Otto Yayınları, 2017), 72; Ḥājj Muḥammad Akbar Muḥaqqiq, "Naqsh Shī'yān dar Sah Daha Qozashtah Afghānistān", *Pojuheshgah-ı 'Ulūm Insānī wa Muṭāla'āt Farhanq*, Mashhad, 1385, 55; Ja'fariyān, *Atlas al-Shī'ah*, 166.

<sup>12</sup> 'Abd-al-'Azīz al-Dūrī, ed., *Akhbār al-Dawlah al-'Abbāsīyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī'ah, 1971), 251; Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī ibn al-Hasan ibn Hibat Allāh ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Dimashqī al-Shāfi'ī ibn 'Asākīr, *Tārikh Madīnat Dimashq*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn Abū Sa'id 'Umar al-'Amrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), 33/213; Ebū'l-Hasen Alī b. İsmā'il b. Ebī Bişr İshāk b. Sālīm el-Eş'arī el-Basrī Eş'arī, *Makālâtü'l-İslāmiyyin (İlk Dönem İslam Mezhepleri)*, çev. Ömer Aydin-Mehmet Dalkılıç (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2019), 46-49; Ibn

- The rebellion around Abu Muslim al-Khorasani (d. 137/755) that led to the fall of the Umayyads; Yazdani stated that not only those who loved Ahl al-Bayt but also 5,000 Hazaras participated in this rebellion, as well as Kharijis and Zoroastrians.<sup>13</sup> As a result, thanks to the efforts of Abu Muslim, power passed from the Aliids to the Abbasids.

- During the Abbasid (133-656/750-1258) period, in 133/750-751, a revolt with 30,000 people took place in Khorasan under the leadership of Shariq b. Shaykh al-Mehri (d. 133/750-751), but it failed.<sup>14</sup> While gathering people around him, Narshahi stated that Shariq's call was as follows: "We have just escaped from the oppression of the Marwanids, we do not need the oppression of 'Abbas' Ali. We need the children of the prophet who are the caliphs of the prophet."<sup>15</sup>

The main theme of these revolts was characterized by opposition and discontent with the government and love for the Ahl al-Bayt. This is because the people of the region responded to the invitations to revolt with the slogan "al-Rıza min Ali Mohammad." Therefore, the love for Ahl al-Bayt was transformed into teşeyyü'a through the process, and as early as the first quarter of the second century Hijri, the first events that could be recorded in the Shi'ite household took place in the northern and western regions of Afghanistan. It is also known that in the first two quarters of the third century, there were invitations to revolt under the slogan "al-Rıza min Ali Mohammad." For example, a rebellion led by Muhammad b. al-Qasim b. Ali, a descendant of Ali, took place in the city of Talekan, which is also the capital of the Tahhar province of present-day Afghanistan. Muhammad b. al-Qasim, known as Sahib al-Talekan in reference to this rebellion, was defeated in 219/834 with the intervention of the regional ruler, the Tahirids.<sup>16</sup> Yazdani, after giving an account in this vein, states that Shiites constituted the majority of the Muslims in Kabul, which was predominantly Buddhist at this time.<sup>17</sup> With the same slogan, a rebellion led by Yahya b. Umar b. Husayn b. Zayd b. Ali b. Husayn b. Ali b. Abi Talib, a

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Jawzî, *al-Muntaẓam*, 7/286-287.

<sup>13</sup> Yazdāny, *Pojehesh-i der Tāriḫ Hazārāhā*, 36-37; Ḥabībī, *Tāriḫ Afghānistān Ba'd az Islām*, 27-275.

<sup>14</sup> Abū 'Alī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ya'qūb ibn Miskawayh Alhazen ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umam wa-Ta'āqub al-Himam*, ed. Abū al-Qāsim Imāmī (Tehran: Surush Pulication, 2000), 3/3/343; Abū al-Ḥasan 'Izz al-Dīn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Shaybānī al-Jazary Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tāriḫ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī, 1997), 7/39; Abū al-Muẓaffar Shams al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Qizughlī ibn al-Turkī al-Baghdādī Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir'āt al-Zamān fī Tawārīḫ al-A'yān*, ed. Muḥammad Barakāt vd. (Dimashq: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ālamīyah, 2013), 12/18; 'Abd al-Majīd Nāṣirī Dāwūdī, *Tashayyū' dar Khurāsān: 'Ahd TaymūrYān* (Mashhad: Āstān Quds Raḍwa, 1378), 62-63.

<sup>15</sup> Ebū Bekr Muhammed b. Ca'fer b. Zekeriyā b. el-Hattāb b. Şureyh Nerşahî, *Tārīḫ-i Buhārâ*, çev. Erkan Göksu (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2013), 94.

<sup>16</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Tāriḫ al-Umam wa-al-Mulūk*, 9/7-8; Ibn Miskawayh, *Tajārib al-Umam*, 3/3/176-177; Ibn Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam*, 11/41-42; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tāriḫ*, 6/8; Eş'arī, *Makālātü'l-İslāmīyyīn (İlk Dönem İslam Mezhepleri)*, 140-141; al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farq Bayna al-Firaq*, 27; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 10/309-310.

<sup>17</sup> Yazdāny, *Pojehesh-i der Tāriḫ Hazārāhā*, 42; Muḥaqqiq, "Naqsh Sh'yān dar Sah Daha Qozashtah Afghānistān", 55.



member of the Jarudiyya faction of the Zaydi sect, took place in 248/862 but was defeated by the al-Tahiri army under the command of Muhammad b. Abdullah b. Tahir.<sup>18</sup>

From the last quarter of the third century onwards, we can more easily read the course of the Ismaili and Twelver Shiite sects in the region, which had completed their formation. Since the main subject of this study is the Ismailis in Afghanistan, we will talk about some Ismaili figures who were active in the region and their attempts to spread their call. In this context, until the second half of the 3/9th century, Sunnism in Khorasan had been strengthened by the Tahirids (206-260/821-873) and the Samanids (204-396/819-1005), but the Imamids went through an Imam crisis with the death of the eleventh Imam al-Hasan al-Askari in 260/874, which led to the revival of Ismailism through the initiatives of the Qarmatians and, shortly afterward, the Fatimids.<sup>19</sup> In particular, one of the essential factors in the spread of Ismailiism in the region was that the dā'ī Gīyas recruited Husayn al-Marwazi, the ruler of the city of Merv, to the cause, and he brought some of the people of Talekan, Meymene, Herat and Ghur under his rule to the cause. The fact that Muhammad b. Ahmad al-Nasafi, who was appointed as the chief da'i after Husayn al-Marwazi, recruited the Samanid ruler Nasr II (301-331), his vizier Abu Ali Muhammad al-Jayhani, his private clerk Abu Ash'as, and many other courtiers is important in terms of showing the influence of Ismailiism.<sup>20</sup> After the Samanids, the Ismaili da'wah continued unabated under the Ghaznavids and the Seljuks, to the extent that the secret spread of the da'wah became a means by which people accused each other of having jurors in power or of trying to discredit a member of the ruling power, and being accused of being a Qarmati/Ismaili became a cause of death.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps one of the most influential figures in the perpetuation of Ismaili in Afghanistan was Nasir al-Husraw. Although he was primarily known as a poet, Nasir al-Husraw, who was also well-versed in religious sciences, joined the da'wah in Cairo at the suggestion of Ismaili al-Muwayyed-fid al-Din al-Shirazi (d. 470/1078), the chief da'wi of the Fatimids (909-1171), returned to his hometown of Balkh as a da'wi and tried to spread the da'wah. When the Seljuk ruler of the period, Malik Shah (d. 485/1092), took notice of the

<sup>18</sup> Abū al-Faraj 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurashī al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Tālibiyyin*, ed. Sayyid Aḥmad Saqr (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, ts.), 506-508; Abū Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī al-Qurṭubī Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa-al-'Āhwā' wa-al-Nihāl* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Hānji, ts.), 4/137-138.

<sup>19</sup> Ali Avcu, "Karmatiler: Ortaya Çıkışları, Fikirleri, Edebiyatı ve İslam Düşüncesine Katkıları", *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 10/3 (2010), 205.

<sup>20</sup> Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs: Their History and Doctrines*, 121-122; Avcu, "Karmatiler", 223-224.

<sup>21</sup> Abū al-Faḍl Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh Bayhaqī*, trans. Yaḥyā al-Hashshāb- Şādiq Nash'at (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍah al-'Arabīyah, 1982), 194; Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Uṭṭy, *Tārīkh al-Yamīnī* (Cairo, 1869), 2/127; Ebū Alī Kivāmüddīn Hasen b. Alī b. İshāk et-Tûsî Nizāmülmülk, *Siyasetnâme*, çev. Mehmet Kanar (İstanbul: Say Yayınları, 2021), 249-250; Muḥammad Ḥasan 'Abd al-Karīm al'Ibādy, *Khurāsān fī al-'Asr al-Ghaznawī*, ed. Nu'mān Jubrān (Ammān: Irbid al-Urdun, 1997), 264-267; İzzetullah Zeki, *Gazneli Mahmud'un Din Politikası* (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2019), 84; Avcu, *Horasan-Maveraünnehr'de İsmaililik*, 92-93.

situation, Husraw was persecuted and fled to the region of Badakhshan, northeast of Balkh, where he lived a life away from the government's surveillance and continued his da'wah work. The teaching of Ismailism in Badakhshan began with him and he recruited many people in the region until he died in 481/1088. His grave is today in Yemğan in Badakhshan.<sup>22</sup>

The sect became widespread with the introduction of Ismaili doctrine into Afghanistan at the end of the third century of the Hıjr, and its influence gradually declined from the mid-seventh century onwards, that is, after the capture of Alamut by the Mongols in 654/1256. Since then, the history of Nizari Ismailism, which was established in Khorasan with Hasan Sabbah (d. 518/1124), entered a closed phase until the seventeenth century, or reliable information could not be obtained due to the lack of available data. With the emergence of the Nizari Ismaili Agha Khans in the nineteenth century, the activities of the Ismailis in Afghanistan began to gain prominence.

## 2. İsmailiism in Afghanistan in the Modern Era

While the Hazaras come to mind when one thinks of Twelver Shiism in Afghanistan, this is not the case for the Ismailis. In other words, the Ismailis are not a religious community that can be evaluated under a certain tribe-sect pairing. On the other hand, the Ismailis come to mind when names such as Wahi, Qayani are used in relation to the region they lived in. Currently, they are mostly concentrated in Kabul, Badakhshan, Baghlan and the Wazan corridor towards the Pamir.<sup>23</sup> Shortly before their contact with the Agha Khans, the leaders of today's Ismailis, during the reign of the Afghan king Amir Abdurrahman Khan (1880-1901), the majority of the Ismailis, who were subjected to repression like other Shiites within the framework of the centralization policy, defected to Kulyab in Tajikistan under the leadership of his sons Feridun and Sayyid Timur after the death of the Ismaili leader Sayyid Gawhar in 1898. This state of refuge continued until the last years of the rule of Amir Abdurrahman's son Habibullah Khan (1901-1919), and in the last years Timur returned with his family and some of his followers, provided that he did not settle in Qayan. When Timur died, his uncle Nadir Shah Qayani succeeded him as his children were still young.<sup>24</sup> In another work, Emadi describes the transition of leadership between families as follows:

Timur's death sparked a dispute over succession between his son Shuja' and his brother Nadir (Sayyid Kayani). While Shuja was recognized as the legitimate heir to his father's

<sup>22</sup> Mehmed Şerefeddin, "Nâsır-ı Hüsrev", *Darülfünun İlahiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 5-6 (1927), 1-21; W. Ivanow, *Nasir-i Khusraw and Ismailism* (Bombay, 1948); Alice C. Hunsberger, "Nâsır Hüsrev: Fâtımî Entelektüel", çev. Muhammed Şeker, *İslâm'da Entelektüel Gelenekler*, ed. Farhad Daftary (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2005), 131-148; Nihat Azamat, "Nâsır-ı Hüsrev", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (İstanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2006), 32/395-396; Nâsır Hüsrev, *Sefernâme*, çev. A. Naci Tokmak (İstanbul: Demavend Yayınları, 2020), 12-13; Dâwûdî, *Tashayyu' dar Khurāsân: 'Ahd Taymūr Yân*, 95; Ja'fariyân, *Aṭlas al-Shī'ah*, 527.

<sup>23</sup> Jonathan L. Lee, *Afghanistan A History From 1260 to the Present* (London: Reaktion Books, 2018), 33-34; Emadi, "Struggle for Reconition", 80.

<sup>24</sup> Emadi, "Struggle for Reconition", 81.

position, Nader was dissatisfied with his leadership and began to seek ways to overthrow him and seize the Ismaili leadership. When civil war broke out in 1929, King Emanullah abdicated and went to Italy. The Tajik rebel Habibullah seized power in Kabul but failed to consolidate his hold on the country. The Ismaili leader Shuja sided with Habibullah, while Nader supported General Muhammad Nader, who tried to overthrow Habibullah. General Nadir's seizure of power paved the way for the leadership position of the Ismaili Sayyid Nadir Qayan, and Pashaya sent the Ismaili leader Sayyid Husayn Jalalabadi to India to Aga Khan 3 with a petition requesting him to appoint him as mukhi (treasurer). Jalalabadi brought a letter from the Īmām stating that Nadir and Shuja should unite. Nadir seized the opportunity to publicly proclaim himself as mukhi and appointed Jalalabadi as caliph to oversee the religious and social affairs of the Ismailis in Nangarhar in exchange for his services.<sup>25</sup>

According to Emadi's account, the Ismailis in Afghanistan encountered the Aga Khan family at the end of the 1920s. From that time on, the Qayani family assumed the leadership of the Ismailis as well as the position of a proxy who acted as the liaison between the Aga Khan III and the Ismailis in Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, there is the following information on the Ismailis' own website about the Qayani family's becoming mukhis: It is estimated, without official records, that there are more than 200,000 Ismailis in the city of Bedakhshan in Afghanistan. Initially, religious dues were paid to the Kayan mukhis. Later, they chose their own mukhis from different villages, one mukhi<sup>26</sup> for every 20 families.<sup>27</sup> After Habibullah Khan's death in 1919, his son Emanullah Khan, who succeeded him, was overthrown by the pious Afghans under the leadership of Habibullah Kalekani, also known as Beche-e-Saka, a man of Tajik origin, in response to the reforms he was trying to bring about in the country, which prompted the Ismailis to take a stand. The decisive factor was the issuance of a fatwa by Kalekani's government characterizing Shiites and Ismailis as infidels, which led both the Shiite Hazaras and the Ismailis led by Sayyid Nader al-Qayani to position themselves against Kalekani.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of the policy of Nadir Shah (1929-1933), who came to power after Kalekani, not to anger the pious and not to alienate his pro-reform supporters, a period of tranquility began in Afghanistan that lasted until 1979. Although the Ismailis also had better relations with the government than in the past, during the reign of Sayyid Nader Qayani's son Zahir Shah (1933-1973), who succeeded Nader Shah, his own sons were accused of murder and detained for two years and four months in 1966. After Sayyid Nadir's death in 1971, his 38-year-old son Nasir became the head of the Ismailis. However, in 1978, the Qayani brothers

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<sup>25</sup> Hafizullah Emadi, "Praxis of Taqiyya: Perseverance of Pashaye Ismaili Enclave, Nangarhar, Afghanistan", *Central Asian Survey* 19/2 (2000), 259-260.

<sup>26</sup> In Afghanistan, the treasurer is the person in charge of the office where Ismaili Shiites are in contact with the Ismaili Leader Aga Khan and Where Certain Annual Revenues are collected from the followers.

<sup>27</sup> Şeyhanhoğlu, *Asya'nın Kalbi Afghanistan*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> Lee, *Afghanistan*, 503-504.

were again imprisoned by the government of Muhammad Daoud Khan, and in 1979 they were released by the Communist administration headed by Karmal (1979-1986). In 1981, Nasir handed over the leadership to his brother Mansur Qayani, and from this date onwards, a rapprochement between the Communist regime and the Ismailis began. This rapprochement went so far that the Ismailis fought with the mujahideen groups fighting against the regime.<sup>29</sup> Mansour even placed a military force of 13,000 men under the regime's command and positioned them north of the Saleng Tunnel to ensure the easy passage of Soviet aid. Moreover, some Ismaili youth were even sent to Tajikistan for Soviet military training.<sup>30</sup>

The Ismailis' closeness with the communist regime in the face of the mujahideen groups continued in their relations with the new regime established after 2001, so much so that the director of Kunduz Merestoon, H. S., said about them, "The Isma'ili leader Sayyid Qayani sided with the Russians during the Russian occupation. They do not pray, the Isma'ilis are infidels".<sup>31</sup> In the interview we conducted with him in the Wahan Corridor, Ismaili Musafir also said the following about their attitude towards the Soviet and American occupation: "The Russians came to the area where we live, but they did not harm us. They only established military bases in the surrounding hills and patrolled them. The Americans did the same. They already knew that no harm would come to them from us."<sup>32</sup>

At the end of the reign of Dr. Najibullah (1986-1992), the last president of the communist regime, the Ismailis, who were on good terms with the regime, joined the alliance of Massoud (d. 2001), Dostum (b. 1954-), Mazari (d. 1996), and Azad Beg (d. 1997), later known as the "Northern Alliance," and supported Rabbani's government in 1992-1996, although they had no share in the government. During this period, the Ismailis, led by Sayyid Mansoor Nader al-Qayani, fought against Hekmatyar and the Taliban. When the Taliban captured Baghlan in 1998, the Ismaili leader Sayyid Mansour defected to his brother Nasir.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the Ismailis were also affected by the bloody conflicts between the factions in 1992-1996 and many Ismailis were forced to migrate to various countries in Central Asia, especially Pakistan.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Hafizullah Emadi, "The end of Taqiyya: Reaffirming the Religious Identity of Ismailis in Shughnan, Badakhshan-Political Implications for Afghanistan", *Middle Eastern Studies* 34/3 (ts.), 115.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Barfield, *Afganistan Politik ve Kültürel Bir Tarih*, çev. Burhan Yüksekbaş (İstanbul: Vakıfbank Kültür Yayınları, 2021), 354; Oliver Roy, *Afganistan'da Direniş ve İslam*, çev. Mustafa Kadri Orağlı (İstanbul: Yöneliş Yayınları, 1990), 175; Robert L. Canfield, "New Trends Among The Hazaras: From The Amity of Wolves to The Practice of Brotherhood", *Iranian Studies* 37/2 (2004), 245; Emadi, "Struggle for Reconition", 82.

<sup>31</sup> The interview with H. S. was conducted on 16.07.2023 at the Afghanistan Red Crescent headquarters in Kunduz.

<sup>32</sup> The interview with Isma'ili M. was conducted on 18.07.2023 in the Vahan Corridor.

<sup>33</sup> Kubilayhan Erman, *Afganistan'da Sovyet Nüfuzu ve İşgali* (Ankara: AKDITYK, 2017), 303; Emadi, "Struggle for Reconition", 82; Emadi, "The end of Taqiyya", 115.

<sup>34</sup> Mergen, *SSCB'nin İşgalinden Günümüze Afganistan'da Şiilik*, 397; Ay, "Hazaraların Şiileşmesinde Safevi Etkisi", 395-412.

Since then, his political activities followed a passive course until 2001, when the Taliban was overthrown by the US Coalition forces, and he regained visibility with the new Islamic Republic of Afghanistan established in 2001 under the leadership of Hamid Karzai, supported by the US. It can be said that the most significant factor in their good relations with the new regime was Aga Khan 4's close relations with Hamid Karzai to consolidate his contact with the Isma'ilis in Afghanistan. The 48th Ismaili Imam Sultan Mohammad Shah's (Aga Khan 3) close relations with Hamid Karzai, which started during the reign of Sultan Mohammad Shah (Aga Khan 3), continued to increase over time and reached political dimensions with his son Aga Khan 4. In particular, the encouragement of literacy and the participation of women in social life, which started during the reign of Aga Khan III, reached a higher rate compared to other ethnic-sectarian elements in the country.<sup>35</sup> In July 2023, we had the opportunity to observe the importance of Ismaili boys' and girls' education for the community. On the way to the Pamiri of Afghanistan, all the children living in the Wahan Corridor, both in Ismaili M's house and in other villages along the way, were going to school in the village schools, which were about two hours' walk away. Apart from participation in education in large urban centers such as Kabul, it was observed that Ismailis were the most encouraging and demanding community among other ethnic groups. In response to their difficult circumstances, Ismaili families, most of whom are poor, receive cash and in-kind aid from the Aga Khan's offices in their regions. This aid is not only for children's education. One of the things that struck us most on the way to Pamir and back was the difference in the structures of the houses and other compounds in the villages and their sophistication compared to the structures of other Shia and Sunni individuals in the region. Everything built by the Aga Khan Foundation was marked with plaques. Normally, Shiites and Sunnis in the region would go to work in Iran or Pakistan, but the Ismailis received assistance from Aga Khan 4 to prevent them from migrating, even temporarily. The Aga Khan Foundation's aid included schools, healing centers, textbooks and curricula, summer and winter cash aid, and monthly allowances. Even though Kunduz is the fifth largest city in Afghanistan, the number of schools built because the Talibs were strong there could be counted on the fingers of two hands, whereas in the Ismaili areas, schools where almost every two or three villages could jointly send their children were built above average by both the former government and Aga Khan 4. Therefore, the literacy rate among the Ismailis is relatively high. The reason why the former government provided aid to these schools was that the Aga Khan supported the government financially. During the Russian and American occupation period, the Ismailis did not experience any hardship and the places where they lived were not destroyed.<sup>36</sup> Another example of the importance attached to education is the Naser-e-Husraw Cultural Center and the Naser-e-Husraw

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<sup>35</sup> Günarslan, *Ağa Hanlar ve Günümüzdeki Faaliyetleri*, 257.

<sup>36</sup> What was observed in Afghanistan during the journey to the Pamir along the Bedakhshan and Vahan Corridor took place on July 17-22, 2023.

Library in Bedakhshan, built by the Aga Khan IV in 1983 with the financial support of Sayyid Mansur Qayani.<sup>37</sup>

The Aga Khan's relations with the Ismaili communities in Afghanistan were not limited to their support for education. By appointing mukhis (treasurers) and kamadias (deputy treasurers), the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) provided a range of social development assistance such as health, food, and material support to the sectarians.<sup>38</sup> In particular, with the signing of the Development Cooperation Agreement between the Aga Khan 4 and Hamid Karzai on March 23, 2002, which established the operational framework of the AKDN, the Aga Khan's contact with the Ismailis was formalized, enabling both the AKDN and the Ismailis to move more easily in the country. The content of this agreement is as follows:

- The urgency of restoring peace and security and facilitating the reintegration of former combatants into civil society.
- The imperative to build lasting, competent, transparent, and accountable institutions that will foster trust, promote development, and strengthen democracy.
- The need for careful investment in Afghanistan's neighboring countries, which are plagued by poverty, isolation, and lack of opportunity, to help stabilize the region.

Outlining specific initiatives, the Aga Khan stated that rural development, designed to promote food security and kick-start the revival of Afghan agriculture, is a top priority and that the establishment of village organizations to undertake and manage local infrastructure projects such as irrigation works, village roads, schools, and clinics will be central to the long-term sustainability of these efforts.<sup>39</sup> According to one report, AKDN's programs in Bamyan, Baghlan, and Bedakhshan provinces currently benefit approximately 500,000 people. These programs will be expanded, and technical missions will be sent to Tahhar, Kunduz, and Pervan provinces to launch similar programs. Furthermore, the Aga Khan announced that AKDN will provide significant support to the Pedagogical Institute in Kabul and other pedagogical institutes across the country. In addition, he outlined the Network's plan to help rural communities to build their own schools so that education can become a right for all children, whether they live in cities, valleys, or mountains.<sup>40</sup>

### 3. Religious Life among the Ismailis

<sup>37</sup> Fārūq Anşārî, "Aḥzāb wa Jaryān Hāy Sh'yān Afghānistān", *Āshnāy Bā Muselmānān Jihān Islām; Sh'yān Afghānistān* (Tehran: Mu'assasah Andyshh Sāzān Nūr, 1390), 224.

<sup>38</sup> Emadi, "The end of Taqiyya", 119; Günarslan, *Ağa Hanlar ve Günümüzdeki Faaliyetleri*, 256-257.

<sup>39</sup> "Agha Khan and Karzai Sign Agreement in Kabul", ts.

<sup>40</sup> Günarslan, *Ağa Hanlar ve Günümüzdeki Faaliyetleri*, 257; "Agha Khan and Karzai Sign Agreement in Kabul".

The Ismailis, who are not even accepted as part of Shiism by some Twelvers, are often described as heretics or infidels by Sunnis and Twelvers.<sup>41</sup> This may be due to the fact that Ismailis have a more closed life than other ethnic and sectarian communities, as well as their relations with the regime and hostile forces during the Soviet and American occupation. For example, Sayyid Sh. A. H., one of the leading Twelver Shiites in Kunduz, said, “The Ismaili are polytheists. Because they do not believe in the obligation of prayer, they believe in the divinity of the Aga Khan.”<sup>42</sup> while Tajik D. M., one of the teachers of Kunduz Jamiat al-Ashraf al-Madaris, used the following expressions for both Twelver and Ismaili Shiites:

“I cannot call the Shiites disbelievers on an individual basis, but they are the divisors of the Ummah. In fact, in our opinion, all Shiites are disbelievers because they blaspheme Abu Bakr, ‘Umar, and ‘Aisha, while the Ismailis are the akfar al-kāfirîn.”<sup>43</sup>

In an interview with a 52-year-old Ismaili Tajik, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Watan Shah Qaim, a lecturer in Persian Language and Literature at Tahhar University, he said:

‘The Soviet influence was not felt in our country in the way it was felt in Tajikistan. However, with Taraki, the Ismaili people were liberated... Two Ismaili people who became ministers under Taraki government were Hosh Nazar Hemdoush (minister of electricity and water) and Amir Berk Jawan (minister of communications). Apart from these, there were a number of deputy ministries...’<sup>44</sup>

H. S., the director of Merustun in Kunduz, also expressed his opinion about the Ismailis as follows:

The Ismaili leader Sayyid Qayani sided with the Russians during the Russian occupation. They do not pray. Ismailis are infidels.<sup>45</sup>

Although this is the general opinion about the Ismailis, in the interview with the Watan Shah Qaim, he gave answers about their religious/sectarian status and connections with other sects, sometimes superficially and sometimes in a way that ignored reality. The Ismaili Musafir, whom I interviewed, adopted a similar attitude. In this final part of the study, I will first discuss the interview with Musafir and then the questions I posed to Watan Shah Qaim and the answers given.

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<sup>41</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn Khulūṣī, “Rawābiṭ Shy’yān wa-Sāyir Quruhhā Qawmī dar Afghānistān”, *Āshnāy Bā Muselmānān Jihān Islām; Sh’yān Afghānistān*, (Tehran: Mu’assasah Andyshh Sāzān Nūr, 1390), 258; Roy, Afghanistan’da Direniş ve İslam, 88-89.

<sup>42</sup> The interview with Sayyid Sh. A. H. was conducted on 16.07.2023 at the Afghanistan Red Crescent headquarters in Kunduz.

<sup>43</sup> The interview with D. M. was conducted on 15.07.2023 at the Jamiat al-Ashrafi al-Madāris in Kunduz.

<sup>44</sup> The interview with Assoc. Prof. Dr. Watan Shah Kaim took place on 24.07.2023 at the Faculty of Persian Language and Literature of Tahhar University in his room.

<sup>45</sup> The interview with H. S. took place on 16.07.2023 at the Afghanistan Red Crescent guesthouse in Kunduz province.

On 18.07.2024, I met the 67-year-old Musafir, a poor, rural Ismaili living in the Wahan Corridor. When I was a guest in his home, he was not eager to answer our questions about his sect. However, I still had the opportunity to learn some things from him. In the place where they live, they learn Jafari jurisprudence and beliefs in addition to Quranic education. However, when I noticed that they both stated that they were Jaafari and said that they had learned the Jafari creed as a religious content, I repeated my question to confirm this point, and when they realized that I did not believe their answer, they told me that they were Ismaili. The 23-year-old young man who was in the house at the time was studying at a university in Penchshir. When I asked him what they read at school, he first said that they often read Shaikh Zakariyya al-Kandahlawi's (d. 1982) *Fazaili A'mal*<sup>46</sup> and the famous *Qasas al-Anbiya*<sup>47</sup>. However, when I repeated my question, as these two works were among the Hanafi books taught in the Diyoband madrasas, he also mentioned three works of the Ismaili sect called *Dunyayı shigufta Islam*, *Ganjina'i Islam*, and *Hudavand Bozorg ast*. Yet, he insisted on not mentioning the authors of the books. They had a congregation and prayed five times a day. However, when I focused more on the issue of prayer, he avoided answering. Usually, it was the older person who spoke to us and refrained from speaking; he did not want the young to speak and would interfere. He told us that his family had lived in this valley for at least three generations. The area was snowy for 9 months on average. He added that they had exchanged girls with the Jaafaris, as well as Sunnis. However, this was not the case in the past. When I asked him about the Russian and American occupation, he said that even though the Russians and Americans came to their area, they did not harm them. They only set up bases on the surrounding hills and patrolled them, also adding they were a cowardly/timid community anyway. Aga Khan's aid reached them through his offices. Mostly, it was food aid only for people experiencing poverty. This aid is still ongoing. My interview with them was too short and I was not able to obtain enough information due to their refrainment from answering. Other family members, Ismailis, were also reluctant to talk.

Our interview with Watan Shah Kaim was more productive and harmonious. The questions I asked him, and his answers are as follows:

F.M: Could you introduce yourself?

W.S.K.: I am 52 years old, originally from Pamir. However, I was born and raised in the Shignan settlement in the Wahan Corridor, which is also called Pamir. I am an Associate Professor of Persian Language and Literature at Tahhar University.

<sup>46</sup> It is a book that talks about the virtuous behavior in Islam, such as the efforts and sacrifices of the Prophet's companions for the sake of religion and their obedience to him, as well as the virtuous behavior of reading the Qur'an, dhikr, prayer, fasting and other matters.

<sup>47</sup> It is a book in which the life stories of our Prophets are told with instructive stories. However, the existence of such a work by Kandahlawi has not been identified. Probably the interlocutor either inadvertently misquoted him or he himself does not know.



F.M.: What is Islam according to you? What are your relations with members of other sects?

W.S.K.: In my opinion, anyone who says the shahada is regarded as Muslim. According to our sect, anyone who does not believe Allah, the Qur'ān, and the Prophet Mohammad is an unbeliever (kafir). In my 26 years as an academic, no one has ever called me a kafir to my face, but I have heard it said about us through gossip. I have never heard anyone from the Shiites call me a kafir to my face, but I have never seen any disrespect directly from the Jaafari scholars, even though we know what they say about us. We have even exchanged daughters with them. I am from the Shignan region, which is also called Pamir. Shiites also live there, and we have good relations with those families.

F.M.: Can you describe the position and performance of prayer in the Ismaili sect?

W.S.K.: In Ismailism, there are three prayers: morning, evening, and night. Although they are usually performed in congregation halls, it is not compulsory. Men stand in the front, children in the middle, and women in the back. In these prayers, which take the form of prayers, there are five rosaries/prayers, and each rosary is followed by a prostration. The prayers include the following statements respectively:

1. In the first rosary, Surat al-Fatiha and the verse “يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَلَا تَوَلَّوْا” (Surat al-Anfal 8/20) are recited.
2. In the second rosary “يَا أَيُّهَا الرُّسُلُ بَلِّغْ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ رَبِّكَ وَإِنْ لَمْ تَفْعَلْ فَمَا بَلَغْتَ رِسَالَتَهُ وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ” (Surat al-Maida 5/67) is recited.
3. In the third rosary “إِنَّمَا يُبَايِعُونَ اللَّهَ يَدُ اللَّهِ فَوْقَ أَيْدِيهِمْ فَمَنْ نَكَثَ فَإِنَّمَا يَنْكُثُ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ إِنَّ” (Surat al-Fath 48/10) is recited.
4. In the fourth rosary, the verse “يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَخُونُوا اللَّهَ وَالرُّسُولَ وَخَوْنُهُمْ أَمَانَتُهُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ” (Surat al-Anfal 8/27) is recited.
5. In the fifth rosary, Surat al-Ikhlās is recited and the names of the 49 Imams from Hazrat Ali to the present day are said.

F.M.: Can you describe the position and meaning of fasting in the Ismailiyya sect?

W.S.K.: Fasting is not only abstaining from eating and drinking. It is the abstinence of an Isma'ili person from all kinds of bad morals from the time he or she reaches puberty. This is the meaning of fasting for us. The proof of this is that for the last 40-50 years there has not been a single Ismaili person in prison. Fasting in Ramadan is obligatory, but moral evil makes it no longer a fast. It does not have strict rules like the Sunnis.

F.M.: Can you describe the position and performance of the hajj (pilgrimage) in the Ismailiyya sect?

W.S.K.: Hajj is obligatory.

F.M.: Can you describe the position of zakat in the Ismailiyya sect and the places where it is given?

W.S.K.: Zakat is obligatory and is given to the imam at the end of each year, which amounts to one-tenth of the annual income. Part of this zakat is şadaqa (alms), which is at the disposal of the imam, and part of it is the imam's own share. The Imam receives the zakat from the Ismailis through his two emissaries, "Mukhi and Kamadia", who oversee the community houses. The part that the imam disposes of as alms is given not only to the Ismailis themselves but to all members of the religion and sect. There is no provision that it must be given to the Ismailis.

F.M.: Can you talk about the relationship between the Ismailis and the communist regime?

W.S.K.: The Soviet influence was not felt in our country the way it was felt in Tajikistan. However, with Taraki, the Ismailis were liberated. Especially during the Karzai era, Ismaili registries/offices were opened, and services were provided to the Ismaili community and members of other sects through these offices. In fact, in my opinion, Sunnis are now being served more. Hosh Nazar Hamdoush (Minister of Electricity and Water) and Amir Bark Jawan (Minister of Communications) were two Ismaili ministers during Taraki's time. Apart from them, there have also been a number of deputies. Under Karzai, the president's personal bodyguard was composed entirely of Ismailis, with a team of 150.

F.M.: Can you tell us about how the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan treated you during the first and second periods of Taliban rule?

W.S.K.: During the first Taliban period, we hid and retreated before the Taliban came to us. As a matter of fact, the Taliban could not capture Bedakhshan during this period. However, there was no problem in the second period. At that moment, the Taliban entered our places of worship, controlled them and did not cause us any trouble. Therefore, we can go to our places of worship freely.

F.M.: Do marriages take place between you and Sunnis?

W.S.K.: We have exchanged girls with Sunnis many times. Actually, there is no problem with us marrying them, yet Sunnis have a problem with it. [At this point, he listed some places where the Ismaili-Sunni marriages are common.]

F.M.: What do you think is the position and importance of the Ismaili Imam?

W.S.K.: According to us, an imam is a person who shows guidance. He must be a descendant of the Prophet. There are about 180 million Ismailis in the world and they all share the same culture and beliefs. We do not worship the Imam as a god or prophet. We see him as a trustee to whom the religion is entrusted. For us, the Imam is the pillar of religion. Without him, the religion and the world would fall apart. In our view, Hazrat Ali is also an imam, not a caliph.

F.M.: What is the situation of those who do not accept the Ismaili imam according to you?

W.S.K.: Imamate is the essence of both religion and sect. The imam is the owner of the sect and introduces people to the sect. The one who does not accept imamate is a Muslim, but he is not an Ismaili.

F.M.: Is taqiyya permissible?

W.S.K.: Taqiyya in times of hardship is permissible in our opinion, but it is not an essential part of the madhhab.

F.M.: How do you establish your connection with the present-day Ismaili Imam?

W.S.K.: The 49th imam is the Aga Khan. It has a council in Kabul, Afghanistan. Contact with the Ismaili community is maintained through the head of the consul and the books in the provinces. Apart from the northern provinces of Afghanistan, Ismailis have books in Kabul, Bamyān, Jalalabad, and Kandahar. Their population in Afghanistan is likely to be around 500-600 thousand.

F.M.: Thank you for your time.

### **Conclusion**

The Ismailis living in Afghanistan began to make their presence felt in the region towards the end of the 3rd/9th century. The fact that the region was predominantly Ahl al-Sunna, and they were a minority from the beginning caused them to struggle with the Sunnites constantly. It can be said that the basis of this struggle was their sectarian beliefs, the assassinations they carried out in the past, and their siding with the Soviet regime in the modern period and then the Republican regime led by Karzai under the tutelage of the United States. Their contact with Agha Khan III and Agha Khan IV, as well as the fact that this communication continued especially during the Republican period (2001-2021), show that they belong to the Nizari Ismaili sect. Although it is understood from their own statements that they currently live their religious life without any pressure or difficulty, the ethnic and sectarian conflict in the country prevents them from fully expressing themselves. This is evident from Musafir's reserved attitude. Watan Shah Qaim has been working as a faculty member at Tahhar University since the Taliban took control of the country in 2021. The fact that he works at the university as an Ismaili is an indication that they are not subjected to direct physical pressure from the Sunni Taliban. However, the fact that the Ismailis are currently very few in public institutions and organizations and the Musafir's reserved attitude is an indication that the negative perception of them still continues. Indeed, the opinions of the Sunni scholars who were interviewed about the Ismailis also support this. There are two reasons for this. The first is that, as mentioned above, they did not participate in the war since they did not pose a danger to the invaders during the occupation periods and even sometimes fought alongside them, and the second

is the discourses in the religious texts of the Ahl al-Sunnah and Twelver Shiites. The fact that these texts are still taught in Sunni madrasahs in particular is one of the most important reasons for the continuation of the negative perception.

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