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*New Vistas in the Study of Religious
and Non-religious Belief*

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Karrāmīyya Relations with Other Islamic Sects in the Third to Sixth Centuries AH: A Glance on Its Relationship with Sufism

Hamidreza Sanaei and Robabeh Jafarpour

Abstract

The Karrāmīyya sect was prevalent in the vast land of eastern Islamic world, especially Khurāsān, during the third to sixth centuries AH. The asceticism and piety of the Karrāmites and their ease in converting people to Islam were conducive to converting people there to Islam in the eastern regions of the Islamic world. However, some of their creeds, such as the incarnation (Tajsīm) of God and perhaps their conflicts with other sects, led many Al-Milal wa al-Nihal sources to adopt a hostile attitude towards them and to call them heretics. Their description of Karrāmīyya is such that the nature of this sect and its relationship with other sects of Islam were obscured. The connections and distinctions of Karrāmīyya with the theological schools and Sunnī jurisprudence are not completely clear. In addition, some scholars have linked this sect to Sufism (Taṣawwuf) due to its ascetic tendencies. This study tries to show the relations of this sect with other sects and religions, especially with Sufism, by examining various sources. The results indicate that although some Karrāmites abided by the Ḥanafī jurisprudence, the sect itself can be considered as an independent sect in terms of theology and jurisprudence. Not only did the Karrāmīyya and Karrāmites have no connection with Sufism and Sufis, but also there were many differences and sometimes conflicts between them. In addition to the main focus of this study, by exploring the characteristics of the Karrāmīyya, the authors find out many similarities between them and the Ṭālibān, one of the contemporary political-religious movements.

Keywords

Karrāmīyya – *zuhd* – Sufism – Khurāsān – Nishābūr – Ṭālibān

1 Introduction

Karrāmīyya was one of the prevalent Islamic sects in the eastern regions of Iran and in particular Khurāsān, which had attracted numerous followers in the

cities of Nishābūr and Herāt. This sect spread Islam among the lower classes in some areas such as Ghūr and Gharchistān, east of Herāt. Their construction of *khānqāhs* as one of the first centers for Islamic education before the establishment of Nizāmīyyah schools has been significant. They found many supporters not only in Iran but also in the western regions of the Islamic world. Their success reached its peak in the fifth century AH, concurrent with the beginning of Ghaznavīd rule in Nishābūr, which is a city of economic, social and cultural prominence. They appointed their two leaders to the superintendency of this city (Sanaei and Bādkūbih Hazāvīh, 2012: 18). Despite its significance in the social and cultural life of the eastern regions of Iran, especially Khurāsān during the third to sixth centuries AH, and owing to the differences of the materials concerning it, the Karrāmīyya sect remained mysterious in respect to its creeds, jurisprudential and theological views (See: Sanaei, 2016: 119–121).

In the study of this sect, we can refer to sectarian and historical sources, including *Maqālāt al-Islamīyyīn wa ikhtilfā al-Musallīn* by Al-Ash‘arī (d. 330 AH), *al-Farq bayn al-Firaq* by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (D. 429 AH), *Kitāb al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa-al-ahwā wa-al-niḥal* of Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 AH), *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* of Ash-Shahrastānī (d. 548 AH), and *I’tiqādāt Firaq al-Muslimīn wa-ī-Mushrikīn* by Fakhr ad-Dīn Ar-Rāzī (d. 606 AH), who often excommunicated the Karrāmīyya and called them a heretical sect. These works are our primary sources because their authors were contemporaries of the Karrāmīyya movement. However, owing to their hostile attitude towards the sect, their reports must be treated with caution. As Muḥammad-Rizā Shafī‘ī Kadkanī says in his article “*Sukhanān-i Nuw-yāftih-yi Digar az Muḥammad b. Karrām*,” what the scholars say about Muḥammad b. Karrām (d. 255 AH) and his followers is in fact slanders made by his opponents (Shafī‘ī Kadkanīm, 2006: 5–14).

Some historical and geographical sources such as *Al-Bad‘ wa-l-Tārīkh al-Muṭahhar* by Ibn Ṭāhir Al-Maqdisī (d. 355 AH) and especially *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm* by Shams al-Dīn Al-Maqdisī (d. 380 AH) are among the most important primary sources about the Karrāmīyya.

2 The Basic Idea of Research on Theology: Asceticism or Sufism

In addition to the dubious information about the Karrāmīyya sect by their opponents, and the texts written by the leaders of this school, information about the nature of their sects also provides necessary messages. Once again, the information in these sources should be viewed with caution. It is not unlikely for them to deny some of the accusations in order to acquit themselves and to refute them. Despite many studies by western and Muslim scholars about this

sect, many of their books have been destroyed or remained unpublished, and scholars have often compiled a number of texts from their leaders or followers. In his article “Texts on Karrāmīyya: A Collection of Unused Materials and Sources on Karrāmīyya”, Van Ess, a prominent German scholar on Islamic studies, has quoted an excerpt from the writings of Muḥammad b. Karrām in the two books of *ʿAzāb al-Qabr* and the *Kitāb al-Sir* through the book of *Tabṣarat al-Awām fī Maʿrifah Maghālāt al-Ānām* by Ibn Daī, a sixth century writer (1992: 34–118). In addition, he has introduced the book *Sharḥ-i ʿUyūn al-Masaʿil* by Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī (d. 494 AH), which remains as a manuscript, providing new opinions about Ibn Karrām and his sect. Ess emphasized their asceticism.

Bartol'd also introduced the Karrāmīyya as a sect inclined to asceticism and piety (worship); but his attention is more attached to the power of the Karrāmīyya in Nishābūr (Bartol'd, 1352: 611–12). Bosworth seems to have conducted the first independent study on the Karrāmīyya. In his article “The Rise of the Karrāmīyya in Khurāsān,” he disagreed with Bartol'd's argument that the Karrāmites were ascetic. After examining the political, social, and economic situation of Karrāmites in the Khurāsān region, Bosworth considered them an extremist sect that had been very active in persecuting its opponents (Bosworth, 1367: 127–39). In his opinion, the nature of this sect was theological and jurisprudential (ibid: 129).

Another group of scholars believes the asceticism of the Karrāmīyya to be identical to their Sufi tendency and considers them in line with the Sufis. In the section “Sufism and the Karrāmīyya” of the book *Religious Trends in Early Islamic Iran*, Madelung argues that the Karrāmīyya were advocates of Sufism and should be exempt from being regarded as irrational and extremist. According to him, it was after the weakness and destruction of this sect that Sufism became a popular movement (Madelung, 1377: 71–81).

In “Karrāmīyya and Sufism,” Ḥusaynī and ʿIlmī examined the Sufi dimension of the Karrāmīyya sect through the interpretations of al-Fuṣūl, Al-Surabādī, and Al-Mabānī. They believe that the sectarians have ignored the Sufi aspect of the Karrāmīyya sect, and have turned its theological and doctrinal aspect upside down (Ḥusaynī and ʿIlmī, 2011: 22). The reasons given by these writers for calling the Karrāmīyya as Sufi seem untenable. For example, they believe that the quote of Shaykh-i Jām (d. 536 AH) from Muḥammad b. Karrām in *Uns al-Tāʾibīn* indicates the devotion of the Shaykh to him and the spiritual and prominent figure of Ibn Karrām to the Sufis of Khurāsān until the end of the sixth century AH (ibid: 35). This article claims (without providing citation) that the sources have described Muḥammad b. Karrām as a Sufi. Nevertheless, it is surprising that the authors also mention Muḥammad b. Karrām's enmity

with Sufism (ibid, 24). Another contradictory statement is made in this article about Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Maḥmashāhẓ (d. 421 AH), the head of Nishābūr around 402 AH and during the reign of Maḥmūd Ghaznavī. The writers have rightly mentioned the great strictness of this great leader of Nishābūr on the city's Sufi community, and especially on the famous Sufi, Abū Sa'īd Abū l-Khayr. They have considered him a Sufi in a strange claim (ibid, 24).

In "Sufism and Rival Movements in Nishābūr," Melchert lists Malāmatīyya along with Karrāmīyya, among the Sufi sects. He believes that these two Sufi sects entered Khurāsān from Iraq and Syria (Melchert, 2001: 237). Aron Zysow, who paid special attention to the jurisprudential position of Karrāmīyya, has mentioned the extreme asceticism of Karrāmīyya and believes that the Malāmatīyya followed the style of Karrāmīyya's demonstrative clothing (Zysow, *Elr*). But in the end, the teachings of Malāmatīyya in Sufism were taken into consideration and Karrāmīyya faced failure. Berger confirmed the mystical aspect of Karrāmīyya in the third edition of the Encyclopedia of Islam. He believes that the Iraqi school of Islamic mysticism in Khurāsān encountered forms of asceticism and local mysticism (Malāmatīyya and Karrāmīyya), which then merged into the tradition of Sufism. In his opinion, however, that the Karrāmīyya movement was left out of the mainstream history of Khurāsān mysticism was to a larger extent due to its differences with the Shāfi'īs and the Malāmatīyya. However, it played a great role in the layers of Islamic mysticism (Berger, *El2*) because it had the two characteristics of demonstrative asceticism and active propaganda among non-Muslims.

An overview of these studies draws attention to this question: What category of Islamic sects should they really be classified in, and what is their relationship with asceticism, Sufism and worship (*'Ibādah*)? This article tries to review the image and nature of this sect by examining the links and differences between the sect and other Sunnī and Shī'ī sects in Khurāsān, and especially their interaction with Sufis. In addition, a comparative study of the beliefs of Muḥammad b. Karrām and his followers with other sects would be conducted. To achieve this, the authors will first address the sect's position in sectarian categories by Muslim scholars. They will explore the sect's interactions with other sects and finally the differences between the Karrāmīyya and the Sufis.

3 The Status of Karrāmīyya in the Classification of Islamic Sects

Based on the concept of sect (*Firqa*), the Karrāmīyya are often considered among the Islamic sects. The word *Firqa* is derived from the root *Firaq* and

means separation, and in the literal sense refers to a group that has separated itself from the general public (Al-Iṣfahānī, 1412: 632).¹ This term is often used to refer to groups that are theologically and doctrinally distinguished among the owners of works in the field of *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*. Hence, the term has not been used for jurisprudential *madhhab*. The term religion (*madhhab*) deals with obligatory and conventional verdicts and jurisprudential features in general, whereas the term sect is placed in the field of theology and beliefs (Ṣābirī, 1383: 17).

In dealing with each of the Islamic sects in general, especially in the case of the Karrāmīyya sect, one should pay attention to some points. In many classifications of Islamic sects based on a *hadīth* from the Prophet Muḥammad, Muslims are divided into seventy-three sects. As the sects are categorized, their number will reach the aforementioned number. For this reason, the classification of sects has led to the merging of them into some more general categories, and the Karrāmīyya sect is no exception. Some sources consider the Karrāmīyya as one of the main independent sects and others consider it among the other sects or their branches. While ‘Abd-ī-Qāhīr Al-Baghdādī (d. 429 AH), Al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 471 AH), and Fakhr ad-Dīn Ar-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) considered Karrāmīyya as an independent sect (Al-Baghdādī, 2003: 19; Al-Isfarāyīnī, N.d.: 23; Ar-Rāzī, 1413: 65), Abū-ī-Ḥasan Al-Ash‘arī (d. 330 AH) and Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 AH) considered it a Murji‘ah branch (Al-Ash‘arī, 1400: 141); Because Ibn Karrām, like Murji‘ah, believed that linguistic faith was sufficient and that there was no need for heart knowledge along with it (Al-Subkī, n.d.: 2/53). Another main belief of Ibn Karrām was incarnation (*Tajsim*) (Al-Subkī, *ibid*) and therefore, Abū ‘l-Ma‘ālī Ḥusaynī and al-Muṭahhar Ibn Ṭāhīr Al-Maqdisī considered it as a Mushabaha sect (Abū ‘l-Ma‘ālī, 1376: 44; Al-Maqdisī, n.d.: 5/145). In addition, al-Muṭahhar Ibn Ṭāhīr, like Al-Ash‘arī and Ibn Ḥazm considered it as a Murji‘ah (Al-Maqdisī, *ibid.*). In a seemingly different division that ash-Shahrastānī (d. 548 AH) presented of the sects, he divided them into four main Islamic sects. He believes that the Karrāmīyya originated from the “Ṣafātīyya.”² However, he also counts the followers of this sect as Mushabaha (Ash-Shahrastānī, 1364: 1/45, 124).

Although Karrāmīyya seemed to be a theological sect at first glance, there are reports in the sources that highlight its relationship with the jurisprudential

1 The term “Maqālāt” is also used; As Ash‘arī Qumī (d. 301 AH) and ‘Abulḥasan Ash‘arī (d. 330 AH) have chosen the titles of Maqālāt for their sectarian books.

2 The Ṣafātīyya included the Ash‘arites, the Karrāmītes, and the Mushabaha. They considered the attributes of action, power, will, hearing, sight and word to be “eternal” for God, and in this regard, they opposed the Mu‘tazilites who denied the attributes of God and proved them for God (see: Mashkūr, below “Ṣafātīyya”, 301–302).

sects. In this regard, a different classification was presented by al-Maqdisī (d. 380 AH), who was a geographer in the fourth century AH. During the second half of the fourth century AH, the activities and social presence of the Karrāmīyya in Khurāsān reached their peak. Al-Maqdisī had many contacts with them during this time and through his travels. He obtained useful primary and direct information about this sect and its followers. In classifying denominations of Islam and its sects, al-Maqdisī described the Karrāmīyya as a jurisprudential-theological sect like the Khawārij, Shīʿites and Bāṭinīs (Al-Maqdisī, 1411: 37). What is more, while discussing the Karrāmīyya of Biyār in Qūmis, al-Maqdisī considers the Karrāmīyya to be followers of the school of Abū Ḥanīfa (Al-Maqdisī, Ibid: 365) However, in a study on the schools of Nishābūr in the 4th–6th centuries AH, which also implicitly spoke about the religions of Nishābūr in this period, the Karrāmīyya was mentioned along with the Ḥanafīs and Shafīʿīs as one of the three parallel Sunnī sects (against the Shīʿites, not against the Ahl ar-Raʿy, not in the sense of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth) in Nishābūr during this period. The independent schools of these three cities, besides the conflicts and war cities³ (Ibn Funduq, 1361: 268) of the followers of some of them have been discussed with regard to each other (Sanaei, 119–120). Therefore, when discussing the relationship between the “Karrāmīyya” and the “Ḥanafī,” at least in Nishābūr, it is not possible to speak definitively about the fact that the Karrāmīyya of this city are Ḥanafī.

Another important issue is the relationship between Karrāmīyya and the Ahl Sunnah wa l-Jamāʿah. According to Ibn Daī al-Ḥasanī in the 6th century AH, who quoted excerpts from books attributed to Muḥammad b. Karrām in *Tabṣarah ul-Avwām* (Van Ess, 1992: 39), the Karrāmīyya attributed themselves to the Ahl Sunnah wa l-Jamāʿah. Despite such a claim, Ibn Daī considered this religion as a branch of the Ḥanafī religion (Ḥasanī Rāzī, 1364: 91). The question here is what is the relationship between the “Ahl Sunnah wa l-Jamāʿah,” the Ḥanafīs, and the Ḥanafī religion. At first glance, it seems that the Ḥanafīs of Ahl ar-Raʿy and *qīyas*, unlike the Shāfiʿīs, Mālikīs, and other sects of *hadīth* jurisprudence have no relation with the Sunnīs (Ahl al-hadīth) and the Jamāʿah. Around the beginning of the 5th century AH, ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429 AH), who himself was in Nishābūr, the place of the prominent presence of the Ahl Sunnah wa l-Jamāʿah (Shāfiʿī Ashʿarites) and the Karrāmīyya and Ḥanafīs, said this about Abū Ḥanīfa: He was a follower of Ahl al-Ḥadīth (Sunnah wa l-Jamāʿah) in most theological matters (except for two cases) (Al-Baghdādī, 2003: 245). In addition, in the second half of the 5th century AH, Abū ʿl-Maʿālī Ḥasanī (d. After 485 AH) has answered that question more clearly in *Bayān al-Adyān*. After mentioning

3 Ibn Funduq called the urban and neighborhood conflicts “war cities.”

the Sunnī sects wa l-Jamā'ah, although he implicitly opposed the "Ahl ar-Ra'y," he states that the Ḥanafī jurists of Khurāsān follow the Sunnah wa l-Jamā'ah in Kalām (*uṣūl*) unlike the al-Mu'tazilah Ḥanafī jurists of Iraq (Abū 'l-Ma'ālī, 1376: 45–47). In general, the presence of Karrāmīyya in the 3rd–6th centuries AH around Khurāsān can confirm this report. Therefore, the Karrāmīyya of Khurāsān could have been both Ḥanafī and Sunnah wa l-Jamā'ah at the same time. In reality, their wide and deep differences with the Shāfi'ī Ash'arites (as a symbol of the Sunnah wa l-Jamā'ah) in this region, and especially in Nishābūr, can challenge this view to some extent. Nevertheless, in early time, an article explored the root of these differences in issues other than religious controversy (See: Sanaei, 2016: 117–143).

The second point in dealing with sectarian sources is related to the type of attitude their authors adopt towards theological sects. The sect writers who often belonged to the Sunnī majority's accepted theology viewed the followers of the opposing theological sects negatively, considering them a separate group from the Muslim mainstream. This is also true about the Karrāmīyya. Many sectarian sources often viewed this sect as heretical and presented a negative view towards it (Al-Baghdādī, 1408: 203–214; Al-Isfarāyīnī, N.d.: 93–98; Ash-Shahrastānī, 1364: 1/124–131). The authors deemed them non-believers due to the misleading beliefs of the Sunnah wa l-Jamā'ah, such as the belief in the incarnation (*Tajsīm*) and similitude (*Tashbīh*) of God to special human beings. They have been mentioned with titles such as "Ḍāl," "Jāhil" and "Āmī" (Ḥalabī, 1376: 236). It is worth mentioning that some attributes of God in the Qur'an, which are similar to the physical characteristics of human beings, provided the basis for the emergence of theological debates and different opinions in this field among the scholars and theologians of the first centuries of Islam and consequently various sects. The Karrāmīyya along with the Ḥashwīyya, become known as Ahl Tajsīm or Tashbīh.

Thirdly, given that the authors of these sources belong to the theological views accepted by the majority of society, and that they opposed to the views of opposing sects such as the Karrāmīyya, it is not possible to ascertain to what extent they were impartial in recording their views or whether they were influenced by their sectarian backgrounds. The books of *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal* are often written by the Shāfi'ite who had hostile relations with the Karrāmīyya, and from this point of view these sources should be viewed with caution. Among the various views of the sources in this period about the Karrāmīyya, the view of al-Maqdisī, which has been expressed with some caution is considered to be moderate. By implicitly referring to the beliefs of his contemporaries about the heresy of the Karrāmīyya, he apparently tried to acquit them of this title. However, with the conditions he enumerated for the heretics, he implicitly

placed them in the circle of heretics. Perhaps because al-Maḡdisī did not want to openly call Karrāmīyya heretics, he enumerated some beliefs consciously and without any explicit reference to calling them heretics. Al-Maḡdisī considers the action of the heretics as an exaggeration in Muʿāwīya's love and Tashbīh of God to a creature. This lack of clarity probably goes back to what he said: "And I am determined not to open my mouth about the nation of Muhammad and not to testify against their misguidance; I did not find any way for it after [hearing] this noble *hadīth: haddathana*" (Al-Maḡdisī, 1411: 365). The earlier books of the sect among the Shīʿites, such as *al-Maḡālāt wa l-Firaq* of al-Ashʿarī al-Qumī (d. 301 AH) and the *Firaq al-Shīʿa* by al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. 310 AH) did not mention the Karrāmītes or Muḥammad b. Karrām, notwithstanding their implicit attention to the Sunnī religions and their founders.

Al-Hākīm al-Jushamī (d. 494 AH) in *Sharḥ Uyūn al-Masāʿil*, which he wrote about the beliefs of the Muʿtazilah, addressed some of the theological views of the leader of the Karrāmīyya and called him Mushabaha and Qadārīyyah. All the scholars called him an innovator (Van Ess, 1992: 44–48). Van Ess believes that the texts he has studied about Karrāmīyya mostly refer to the jurisprudential aspects of Karrāmīyya and include differences over the necessity of Ṭahāra and especially about the details of the rules of prayer and sexual acts. This indicates that Ibn Karrām considered the laws of revelation as irrational and established a separate jurisprudential system for himself, so that he could think more freely through it (ibid: 43).

However, some of the views of the Karrāmītes, such as imagining a place for God and attributing creatures' characteristics to Him, differed significantly from the beliefs of other Islamic sects. From the jurisprudential perspective, Karrāmītes practiced the appearances of the Qurʾān and Sunnah in order to practice the rules of Sharīʿa. This practice was similar to that of al-Ḥanbalī and Zāhirī schools, which were prevalent in the third and fourth centuries AH,⁴ while the Karrāmītes were very similar to the Murjiʿah in belief to the concept of faith and the believer. The Companions of Ibn Karrām such as the Murjiʿah considered a believer to be someone who merely testified, even though he did not believe in it with all his heart and soul (Al-Ashʿarī, 1400: 141). Furthermore, they did not consider the actions of individuals as reducing or increasing their faith. They considered the hypocrites as believers, as well, and their faith as the faith of the prophets and angels (Ibn Ḥazm, 1416: 3/6).

4 For more information on the apparent ideas of Karrāmīyya, see: Fahīmih Gulpāyigānī, "Reflection of Karrāmīyya's monotheistic beliefs in the view of story verses with emphasis on the interpretation of Surābādī," *Theological Knowledge*, 10, Vol. 2 (Winter 1398), 135–152.

4 Relations of Karrāmites with Other Sects

The tolerance of the Karrāmites in the matter of faith and the concept of the believer converted many people to Islam in East Khurāsān and the regions of Ghūr and Gharchistān and especially in the city of Nīshābūr. Ibn Karrām was from Sīstān and emigrated to Nīshābūr at a young age (Al-Samʿānī, 1382: 11/60). His apprenticeship with Aḥmad b. Ḥarb (174–234 AH), the prominent ascetic at that time (Al-Samʿānī, *ibid.*: 11/61), deeply influenced him. Despite many disagreements with him (Al-Subkī, n.d.: 2/304) he decided to establish a sermon and education assembly in Nīshābūr like his Shaykh. His work was successful and he was able to attract many Nīshābūrītes to his teachings. With this fortune, he divided the people into two large groups of believers and critics. His followers in rival sects in Nīshābūr – albeit in small number – were present in later generations. According to the writings of al-Hākīm Nīshābūrī, one of the great scholars of *Hadīth*, and Ahl ar-Raʿy (Ḥanafī) in Nīshābūr, both Ibn Khuzaymah (d. 310 AH) and Abū Saʿīd Abdul Raḥmān Ibn Ḥusayn the ruler (d. 309 AH) praised him (Al-Subkī, *ibid.*: 2/54). Al-Hākīm Nīshābūrī's statement about the views of these scholars in this regard is full of strangeness and surprise. The reason for his luck resulted from an ascetic life which he preached alongside his teachings and opinions. According to the sources, he showed a lot of “tanassuk,” “taʿlluh,” “taʿabbud” and “taqashshuf.” In practice, Ibn Karrām seduced everyone with his ascetic life and it seems that this asceticism as well as his piety resulted from his release after eight years of imprisonment, executed by Muḥammad b. Ṭāhīr, the ruler of Ṭāhīryān in Nīshābūr, as the ruler of Sīstān had previously refused to kill him for the same reason (Al-Subkī, n.d.: 2/ 53–54).

Ibn Karrām spread his doctrines in different parts of Khurāsān and the borders of Ghūr, Gharchistān and Herāt. After his release from captivity, he departed to the borders of the Sūrīyā in Filistīn. Although the Karrāmites had a large presence in some cities of the Ghūr region, Ibn Karrām's main activities were held in Khurāsān and especially Nīshābūr (Bosworth, 1367: 128). From the third century AH to about the sixth century AH, Nīshābūr became a stronghold of Karrāmites' communities whose followers were from the lower classes of society. Their ascetic life attracted a large number of villagers and the poor to this sect. For more information on the living standards of the Karrāmites (See: Sanaei, 2016: 121–123).

In previous pages the position of the Karrāmīyya sect among other Islamic sects was discussed. As it turned out, some of them are considered as followers of the Ḥanafī religion and some of them are among the sects of Murjiʿah

and Ṣafatīyya. In reality, the prevalent situation in the society of that day challenged these theoretical classifications in the sources of *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*. The views of these writers on Karrāmīyya were particularly challenging in the sectarian disputes and conflicts in Khurāsān and especially in Nīshābūr. As mentioned earlier, the Karrāmites were considered distinct from the Ḥanafīs in the social scene of Nīshābūr at that time. One such example is the report of ‘Abd al-Ghāfir al-Fārsī Nīshābūrī (d. 529 AH) about the schools of different sects in Nīshābūr, which spoke in parallel to the schools of the three sects of Shāfi‘ī, Ḥanafī and Karrāmīyya in this city (Ibn al-Athīr, 1385: 11/ 272; Al-Fārsī, 1384: 133, 323; Al-Fārsī, 1362: 86, 460; Ibn Abi al-Wafā, n.d.: 1/358). In addition, in the religious sedition of 489 AH in the city of Nīshābūr, the war between the Karrāmites and the Ḥanafīs and Shafiites has been mentioned (Ibn Funduq, 1361: 268–69).

During this period some conflicts and riots took place in Khurāsān under the guise of religion. These sectarian conflicts were more visible in Nīshābūr. In these conflicts, which arose from the 4th century AH and continued until the middle of the 6th century AH, the Karrāmites played a leading role. In this century, a large number of Karrāmites became rioters in Nīshābūr and clashed with the Sunnīs, especially with the Shāfi‘ī Ash‘arites and Shī‘ites. In the time of al-Maqdisī, the quarrels between the Karrāmites and the Shī‘ites were evident. According to him, these conflicts took place in the form of wars and existed in some other cities as well, such as Dīlam and Herāt. According to him, in Nīshābūr, some prejudice was expressed between the Manīshk/Manashk neighborhood and the Hira neighborhood, and this had turned into religious differences between *Shī‘ites* and Karrāmīyya at that time (Al-Maqdisī, 1411: 316, 323, 336).

The disputes mentioned by al-Maqdisī between the Shī‘ites and Karrāmites at the end of that century and the beginning of the next century became more intense in terms of the conflict with the Shāfi‘ī Ash‘arites. Ash‘arī theologians such as Ibn Fūrak (d. 406 AH) strongly denied Ibn Karrām and his followers and called him an innovator (Al-Subkī, n.d.: 2/54, 3/53). In reaction, Karrāmites persecuted and killed Ash‘arī scholars. Those who succeeded in combining Maḥmūd’s agreement with their theological profession and encroaching on the property of the wealthy aristocrats in Khurāsān had become a tool in his hands, clashed hard with the Ash‘arites, and took over the presidency of the city of Nīshābūr. They confiscated the property of the wealthy people in Khurāsān in favor of the Sultan (Sanaei and Bādkūbih Hazāvih, 2011: 18–19). In this regard, they first persuaded Maḥmūd to summon Ibn Fūrak, the great Ash‘arite theologian, to Ghazna to respond to the accusation leveled against

him by Karrāmīyya (Al-Subkī, N.d.: 3/53–54). He was poisoned and killed (406 AH) on his way to return from the Sultan's court in Ghazna to Nīshābūr (Bosworth, 1385: 189). They broke the pulpit of the great narrator, al-Hākīm Nīshābūrī (d. 405 AH), and forbade him from going to the mosque (Al-Subkī, n.d.: 3/68).

The conflict of the Karrāmites with other sects in Nīshābūr and other areas originated from various factors. Undoubtedly, some theological beliefs of the Karrāmīyya, such as *Taj̄sīm* of God and extravagance in Mu'āwīya's love (see: previous pages) arouse the sensitivity of other Sunnī theological sects such as the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites, as well as the Shī'ites. On the other hand, the view of rival scholars about the doctrine of the Karrāmites and their leader led to their prejudice, but as has been said, a closer look at the roots of these conflicts will reveal that the differences actually arose in the guise of religion. An earlier article entitled "The effect of class and livelihood level of followers of religions in Nīshābūr on the establishment of schools in the 4th–6th centuries AH" (Sanaei, 2016: 117–44) has implicitly addressed the main cause of the differences. Finally, theological and jurisprudential issues cannot be placed in the first place among the factors involved in these conflicts. As mentioned above, according to al-Maqdisī, the conflicts of Nīshābūr in the 4th century AH was rooted in prejudices expressed between the neighborhoods of the city and, of course, had shown itself in the form of religious conflicts (Al-Maqdisī, 1411: 336). Bulliet, Bosworth and Petrushevsky did not attach great importance to the role of religion in these disputes, either (Sanaei, 2016: 129–30).

In fact, the root cause of such differences were the class differences that manifested themselves in the cover of religious strife. This issue has already been discussed in more detail in the same article. It seems that in Khurāsān, the Karrāmites often belonged to the lower classes. According to al-Hākīm Nīshābūrī, the followers of Ibn Karrām were poor. He sat among them and preached with a simple appearance (Al-Subkī, n.d.: 3/54). In the period in question, perhaps only one relatively wealthy Karrāmīyya could be found in Nīshābūr, who was also related to the construction of the school (Al-Fārsī, 1384: 86). Meanwhile, many rich Ash'arites (believers in Shāfi'ī religion) and Mu'tazilites (believers in Ḥanafī religion) could be found in Nīshābūr at this time (Sanaei, 2016: 124–127).

The effect of this class difference can also be traced in the minds of the Karrāmites and their opponents. Apparently, the dependence of the Karrāmites on the lower classes had caused Ibn Karrām and his Karrāmīyya followers, including Ibn Mahmashād (d. 383 AH), to seek worldly possessions

as a kind of misguidance (Madelung, 1381: 84). In other words, the main teaching of this sect was to escape from the world and refrain from striving for the world. Therefore, in addition to worshiping, the Karrāmites also placed great emphasis on asceticism (Al-Subkī, n.d.: 2/53–54); However, it seems that they did not have to practically adhere to asceticism. They naturally belonged to the lower classes and were deprived of worldly possessions, and perhaps for this reason, some of their opponents called their asceticism false (Al-Samʿānī, 1382: 5/ 44–45). Such views, of course, were in stark contrast to the views of other religions and sects in Nishābūr (Malamud, 1994: 44). The large number of wealthy people in this city (Sanaei, 2016: 125–28) who adhered to the Ashʿarīs and almost all followed the Shāfiʿī jurisprudential religion provided a suitable ground for the leaders of the rival sect, the Karrāmīyya. In order to incite sedition by inciting the poor Karrāmīyya public, and in general, to explain the Ashʿarite sect as the fundamental enemy of the masses, they had rumored that Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (260–324 AH) considered common people as infidels. In the middle of the fifth century AH, ʿAbū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī al-Nayshābūrī (d. 465 AH) denied this claim in his letter to the people of the cities entitled “Complaint of the Sunnīs,” and he said that the only motive was to incite ignorant people (Al-Subkī, n.d.: 2/ 285–286).

5 Sufis and Karrāmites

Regardless of the relationship between Karrāmīyya and Sunnī theological and jurisprudential sects and religions, the status and importance of “asceticism” in this field raises a fundamental question for scholars: What was the connection of the Karrāmīyya to Sufism and the Karrāmites to the Sufis throughout the centuries?

Perhaps, as it turned out, Karrāmīyya can neither be considered as a mere theological sect, nor depicted as a theological-jurisprudential school. This is due to their jurisprudential distinctions and separation from the Ḥanafī and Shāfiʿī sects of jurisprudence in Nishābūr. However, this is not to deny that in the scales of this sect, theology weighs more than jurisprudence. Therefore, it is not unreasonable that this religion is considered more theological than theological-jurisprudential in the view of scholars. Thus, the general approach to Karrāmīyya falls under “Islamic sects” and not religions (the difference between the two terms *madhhab* and *Firqa* has already been discussed under “Karrāmīyya sect in ...”). The use of the term *Firqa* for Sufism by some sources such as *Al-Badʿ wa-l-Tārīkh* and *Bayān al-Adyān* (Al-Maqdisī, n.d.: 5/148; Abū

ʿl-Maʿālī, 1376: 44) also indicates the classification of Sufism in the category of sects. Thus, from this perspective, Karrāmīyya and Sufism both fall into the category of “sects.”

Ibn Karrām and his followers were known as ascetics. They wore torn leather garments and white turbans and roamed the streets and *bāzārs*, preaching to the people and quoting *ahadīth* (Al-Samʿānī, 1382: 11/61). Earlie, it was mentioned that some scholars observe that Ibn Karrām and his followers held ascetic tendencies due to their Sufi inclinations and equated their asceticism with Sufism. One of the reasons for this is that many similarities exist between the approach and teachings of the Karrāmites and that of the Sufis. The sectarian similarities between the two can in no way indicate the unity of the Karrāmites and the Sufis; just as the *zuhd* of *zāhid* and Sufi secularism cannot be considered equal.

The word asceticism (*zuhd*) in Arabic means reluctance, turning away, and lack of something. *Zāhid* refers to someone who has no desire for what is in the world and turns away from the wealth of the world (Al-Aẓharī, n.d.: 6/87; Ibn Durayd, 1988: 2/643; Al-Jawharī, 1997: 2/481). Although asceticism is usually considered to be from the roots of Sufism and ascetics such as Ḥasan al-Baṣrī are widely mentioned in the history of Sufism, it is an idea derived from religious texts⁵ and is fundamentally different from the asceticism and escape from the world explained in Sufism. In support of this view, it should be noted that a number of Muslim scholars simultaneously emphasized asceticism and avoided the blame of clinging to this world in Sufism. Because of this difference, asceticism has become commonplace among religious and non-Sufi scholars. Ḥusayn b. Saʿīd al-Ahwāzī, an Imamī jurist and narrator (alive until 254 AH) from the companions of the eighth to tenth Imams, has been the author of books on this subject. In various forms of asceticism, he has fully demonstrated his religious approach to the concept of asceticism. The Necessity of asceticism (*Farz zuhd's*) is to abandon what God has forbidden and stay away from sins. The asceticism of knowledge (*Maʿrifah*) is the cessation of love for anything that prevents men from remembering God and

5 In asceticism in the original religious texts, ignoring the world doesn't mean avoiding worldly blessings; It is known not to feel sorry for them and not to regret losing them. This is best expressed in one of the wisdoms of *Nahj al-Balāghah* by quoting verse 23 of Sūrah Ḥadīd (Nahj al-Balāghah, Wisdom No. 439, p. 526). It is also narrated from Imam Ṣādiq, the fifth Imam of the Twelvers, about the concept of asceticism that “Asceticism is not permissible in the world for the loss of property and sanctions. Rather, asceticism in the world is that your confidence in what you have is not more than what is in the possession of God, the Exalted” (Muḥaddith Qummī, *Safīnat al-bihār wa madīnat al-ḥikām wa l-āthār maʿa taṭbīq al-nuṣūṣ al-wārida fihā ʿalā biḥār al-anwār*, under “Zuhd”, 2/499).

resurrection. Asceticism of disasters is tolerance against divine disasters and trials, etc., (Ahwāzī, 1399: 3–4). The continuation of the article also proves the difference between *Sharī'a*-oriented asceticism and release of the world in Sufism in the relations between Karrāmites and the Sufis. Therefore, since the term *zuhd* was also common among Sufis, two types of ascetic approaches must be acknowledged. The main question is: What kind of asceticism was Karrāmīyya inclined to?

In order to increase the prestige of the Ahl Ṭarīqah, in the 4th–6th centuries AH, Sufi biographers such as Sulamī, Qushayrī and Maybudī considered many of the writers of previous generations with the slightest resemblance in beliefs and behavior among Sufis, even though Sufism had not yet emerged in the Islamic world and had not established itself as a pervasive school among them. Some of the ascetics of the first centuries AH can be mentioned, such as Al-Fuẓayl b. 'Iyāz at-Tamīmī (d. 187 AH) (Al-Sulamī, 1960: 7–22) and Bishr al-Ḥāfī (d. 227 AH) (See: Al-Sulamī, *ibid.*: 33–40).⁶ However, if we accept the hypothesis of scholars that the Karrāmites are Sufis, would it not be surprising that those biographers didn't count the Karrāmites as Sufis? Abū 'l-Faẓl Maybudī, one of the prominent Sufis of the sixth century, brought the Karrāmīyya along with the Khawārij and Mu'tazilah and considered them as a group that believes angels are superior to the children of Ādam (Maybudī, 1371: 2/783). Why did Muḥammad b. Karrām have so many disagreements with Aḥmad b. Harb, who was his teacher and the leader of the Malāmatīyya Sufi sect? Al-Sam'ānī provided an interesting account of the meetings of Ibn Karrām and one of the prominent leaders of the Malāmatī named Salīm Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Barusī, in which Ibn Karrām asked Barusī about his followers. Barusī's answer to the difference between the asceticism of Ibn Karrām and the asceticism of the Sufis is worth pondering: "If their inner desire was outside of them and their outer asceticism was inside them, they were great men." Then he said: "I see in him a lot of prayer and fasting and a lot of humility and not the light of Islam" (Al-Sam'ānī, 1382: 2/32).

This report indicates that the asceticism of the Karrāmites was in their appearance. Perhaps their asceticism can be considered as Sufis and contrary to the asceticism of religious and non-Sufi scholars. Nevertheless, this narration can probably reveal the difference between Karrāmites' asceticism and

6 The report of Al-Sulamī in the *sufi* classes implicitly states that Bishr al-Ḥāfī did not consider himself a *sufi*. This report – which includes a *sufi* personal objection to Bishr al-Ḥāfī about taking good property from the people and his response to it – is the objection and grief of his companions from the words of that *sufi*. In a way, he has confirmed that he does not belong to the *sufi* community.

Sufis' asceticism. The report also mentions a lot of prayer and continuous fasting; a trait that famous Sufis did not share. In the *Patricians of Nishābūr*, Richard Bulliet spoke of the three ways of asceticism, worship, and Sufi thought in Nishābūr, and thus implicitly separated the three. Nevertheless, he intends that in the middle of the 4th century AH, Sufism in that city absorbed the two currents of asceticism and worship. According to him, asceticism first appeared there in the early third century AH and then in the same century worship emerged, and a bit later, with a further delay, Sufism emerged in the next half of the century (Bulliet, 1397: 74–75). Therefore, according to this view, although asceticism can be considered as one of the roots of Sufism, for many reasons it cannot be considered as the same as Sufism. The simplest answer to this question can be obtained by looking at the different times of the emergence of the two currents of asceticism and Sufism in Nishābūr, which was one of the main centers of the presence of the Karrāmītes in Khurāsān. In confirmation of this view, the formation of Karrāmīyya dates back to the same time as the asceticism in that city; that is, the first half of the 3rd century AH.

Jalāluddīn Humāī has also distinguished *zāhid* from Sufi and has made major distinctions between them. Humāī's idea is that the Sufi goal is to attain knowledge and *fanā'* of God, while *zāhid* avoids worldly pleasures so as to gain the blessings of the Hereafter. He also believes that the *zāhid* abandons pleasures for fear of the eagle and the fear of God; but Sufi is constantly drowning in hope (Humāī, 1374: 64). In addition, although asceticism is considered to be one of the roots of Sufism, some Sufis didn't believe in asceticism at times. In the city of Nishābūr, the hotbed of both the Karrāmī and Sūfi groups, the famous Sufi, Abū Sa'īd Abū 'l-Khayr was not known for his asceticism, and Bulliet rightly referred to this issue (Bulliet, 1397: 75). In one of the anecdotes of Shaykh Abū Sa'īd in *Asrār al-Tawḥīd*, "zuhd" and "Sufism" are clearly separated from each other: "and he says I am a *zāhid* and this is neither the slogan of *zāhids* nor the Sufis" (Ibn al-Munawwar, 1348: 77).

The failure of the followers of these two sects to turn to each other indicates the difference between the Karrāmīyya and Sufism. Certainly, the Karrāmītes did not hold a positive opinion about Sufism (see: Continued article). On the other hand, it seems that the Sufis did not have a very positive opinion about Ibn Karrām's followers. Although the name Sufi has been used since the second century AH, this title does not appear next to the name of any Karrāmī. According to the statistics provided by Bulliet on the number of Sufis and ascetics of Nishābūr in the third and fourth centuries AH, no Sufi has been seen among the Karrāmītes in this city. However, the sources have only used the words *zāhid* and 'Abid in describing Karrāmīyya (Bulliet, 1397: 75). From the narrations given by Muḥammad b. al-Munawwar in *Asrār al-Tawḥīd* about

the famous Sufi, Abū Saʿīd ʿAbū ʿl-Khayr, and his opponents, the Karrāmites and the Ḥanafīs, it can be seen that the Karrāmites placed great emphasis on two things: *Zuhd* and *Sharīʿa*. On the subject of asceticism and the confrontation of the Karrāmites with the Sufis opposed to asceticism, we can mention the confrontation of the Karrāmites of Nishābūr with the Sufi school of Abū Saʿīd Abū ʿl-Khayr and his *khānqāh*. The Sufi approach of the Shaykh and the Sufis of his monastery was worldly, despite the world-escaping approaches of Sufis. The Shaykh and his followers paid a lot of attention to the world and its pleasures (Ibn al-Munawwar, 1348: 77), and perhaps part of the prosperity of his *khānqāh* in that city came from the same approach.

Ibn Munawwar wrote about the fierce enmity of the Karrāmites and their crucial figure, Abū Bakr Ishāq b. Mahmashāz Karrāmī, (d. 421 AH) with the Sufis and his association with followers, citing Qāzī Ṣāʿīd (d. 432 AH) the great Ḥanafī words in this regard: “Because Shaykh Abū Saʿīd ... at the beginning of the situation came to Nishābūr and the Majlis was saying and ... many disciples appeared.” At that time, Abū Bakr Ishāq Karrāmī was the first teacher in Nishābūr Karrāmites, and the head of the companions was Rāfiḍīs Qāzī Ṣāʿīd, and each of them were very obedient to him and they denied the Shaykh greatly and considered all Sufis as enemies. According to Ibn Munawwar, the Imams of Karrāmī and Ḥanafī gathered in a Majlis and wrote a proceeding against the Shaykh and the Sufis of his *khānqāh*. They sent it to the court of Ghazna and Sulṭān Maḥmud of Ghazna. The Sulṭān’s response was that the Shāfiʿī and Ḥanafī Imams should gather and examine the Shaykh’s actions and implement the *Sharīʿa* ruling on him. With the Sulṭān’s order, the enemies hoped the Shaykh and the Sufis of his *khānqāh* to be executed. At the same time, when the news of the wealth of the Shaykh and the Sufis of his *khānqāh* reached Abū Bakr Ishāq Karrāmī,⁷ he said, “let them fatten their bellies today, which they will lubricate with a stick tomorrow.” In continuation, Ibn Munawwar has turned the great enmity of the Karrāmites and the Ḥanafī Imam into their friendship and devotion based on his method of narrating anecdotes and by expressing the dignity of the Shaykh, (Ibn Munawwar: 77–82).

As mentioned, the Karrāmites denounced disobedience to the *Sharīʿa* of Sufis such as Shaykh Abū Saʿīd and his *khānqāh* and it seems that this was one of the biggest differences between the Karrāmites and some Sufis. However,

7 Ibn Munawwar has mentioned one of the great Karrāmites in this anecdote as “Abū Bakr Ishāq” and there is no doubt that he meant Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Muḥammadshād (d. 421 AH) and not Abū Yaʿqūb Ishāq b. Muḥammadshād (d. 383 AH). Therefore, in this anecdote, the two words “Abū Bakr” and “Ishāq” should be expressed as “Abū Bakr-i Ishāq,” with Ishāq being the father.

the other Sufis of Nīshābūr in the 4th and 5th centuries AH such as Abū Sahl al-Saʿlūkī (296–396 AH) (Al-Subkī, n.d.: 2/161–164), al-Hākīm al-Nīshābūrī (401–351 AH) (Al-Subkī, *ibid.*: 3/64–65), ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (330–412 AH) (Al-Subkī, *Ibid.*: 3/60–62) and Qushayrī al-Nīshābūrī (376–465 AH) (Al-Subkī, *ibid.*: 3/245) were often great *Muḥaddithin* or high-ranking jurists of their time who didn't violate the rules of *Sharīʿa*. As mentioned, the Karrāmī and Ḥanafī leaders of Nīshābūr during the reign of Maḥmud of Ghazna provided proceeding against Shaykh Abū Saʿīd and his followers. In that testimony, in addition to the worldliness of the Shaykh and his Sufis, it was emphasized that they did not obey the *Sharīʿa*: “He sings verses and poems on the pulpit, he does not say *Tafsīr* and *Akhbār*, and he does *samāʿ*, and he dances and orders the youth to dance” (Ibn al-Munawwar, 1348: 77).

That being said, the Karrāmīyya's negative view of Sufism stemmed from the worldliness of some Sufis and their disobedience of the *Sharīʿa*. However, Bulliet, who spoke negatively about Sufism (not just about a particular sect such as the Sufi school of Shaykh Abū Saʿīd), linked it to the tolerance of Sufism. According to him, the Karrāmītes insist on asceticism and worship, as the leader of the oppressed poor. At the same time, they forbade Sufism, which might completely reduce the pragmatism and irreconcilability of their mission (Bulliet, 1397: 76).

In addition, the beliefs of the two sects sometimes differed from each other. The most obvious difference in the beliefs of the two was seen in the *Tanzīh* and *Tashbīh* of the essence of God. The Sufis, unlike the Karrāmītes, did not attach the attributes of the creature to God, and considered such a practice distasteful. Under the title “Principles of *Tawḥīd* among Sufis” in *Al-Risāla al-Qushayrīyya*, Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī mentioned Sufis such as Abū Bakr Shiblī, Junayd, Abū Bakr Zahrābādī, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Pushanjī, and even Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr, saying that the analogy of God to the creature was completely rejected (Al-Qushayrī, 1426: 41–43). When explaining the concept of monotheism, Abū al-Ḥasan Pushanjī, one of the aforementioned Sufis, said that “neither the essence of God is similar to the essence of creatures, nor His attributes are similar to their attributes” (Al-Qushayrī, *ibid.*: 42).

6 Ṭalībān: A Political-Religious Movement Similar to Karrāmīyya

Sects in Islamic civilization have similarities and differences with each other in various aspects such as theological and jurisprudential opinions, political-social behaviors, the contexts of their emergence, and the social classes that their followers originated from. Some of them are sub-sects of the more general

sects and can be placed in width (without being influenced by each other) or length (influenced by each other). Many Islamic sects and movements have a beginning and an end, but among them, there have been sects and movements that have passed some ideas over time directly or indirectly to the later sects without any particular change or in an evolved form. Considering this, the approach of Islam that is referred to as “Radical Islam” in the political culture today is not an approach limited to the present. The roots and other versions of it can be traced in the Medieval time with common features, in Islamic societies, and in particular, in a range of Sunnī societies. Looking at extremist sects and movements in the Islamic civilization will open a way for a better and more complete understanding of political-religious sects and movements in the Islamic world at present, and especially for knowing their roots. Although this topic is not directly related to the main topic of this article, it is not without contribution to have a glimpse of Karrāmīyya and their characteristics in the middle centuries, and of contemporary movements simultaneously. This draws attention to the similarities of this sect and its followers with one of the famous contemporary political-religious movements in the Islamic world and its followers.

The political-religious movement of *Ṭullāb* (students of religious sciences), which entered the arena of politics and religion in Afghanistan in the winter of 1994 by conquering Qandahār and after a while, Kābul (Rashīd, 1397: 21), has many similarities with the Karrāmīyya of Khurāsān in the middle centuries. They are mainly from the Durrānī tribe of Pashtun people (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 20).⁸ It is of crucial importance to pay attention to the goals, motivations, social and religious contexts of their emergence, and their interaction with other ethnic groups and sects so as to understand their similarities with Karrāmīyya. At the beginning of its formation, the Ṭālibān movement, by referring to the chaotic situation of Qandahār and Afghanistan in general, announced their goal and motivation to free this country from the hands of corrupt leaders and to create a society that conforms to the rules of Islam (Marsden, 1394: 76, 95). However, although this movement was formed spontaneously at the beginning in response to the chaotic situation in Afghanistan, it also had other goals and motives. The motivations of the Karrāmīyya to fight the followers of different precepts in the middle centuries were not religious but social, while religion itself was a cover for disclosing class differences. Regarding the Ṭālibān and according to their own words, although religion was the motivation for the uprising, ethnic motivations were and still are prominent in their movement. In this context, we can look at the points of view from other ethnic minorities

⁸ A tribe that used to be called “Abdālī” (Elphinstone, 1379:359).

in Afghanistan, who consider Ṭālibān as a force that uses Islam as a cover to destroy non-Pashtuns (Rashīd, 1397: 143).

According to Aḥmad Rashīd, the Pashtun tribe also showed a positive view towards this force, because they were humiliated by the Uzbeks and the Tājiks (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 65). They have ruled Afghanistan for 300 years, and only recently have smaller ethnic groups wrested power from them, while the victories of Ṭālibān provided the Pashtuns with the hope to dominate this country again (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 20; Marsden, 1394: 73). The movement of Ṭālibān has taken on such an ethnic color that even the Ghilzai (Ghaljai), another Pashtun tribe, is somewhat excluded from the decision-making processes of Ṭālibān (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 104–15). Another proof of the non-religious nature of this movement is Elphinstone's report in the early 18th century about the Durrānīans, who called them “a tolerant people, even without prejudice against Shī'a.” He considered their mullahs as “calm and harmless” (Elphinstone, 1379: 375). Since realities of the Afghan society are very complicated, the challenge from the two issues of ethnicity and religion in this country has not been resolved so far; neither by the communists, nor by the Islamists (Rashīd, *Ibid.*: 142).

Another similarity between Karrāmīyya and Ṭālibān is that they both lay their foundations on the people with inferior social and cultural status. Karrāmīyya came from the deprived and inferior classes of Khurāsān society and they did not benefit from prominent scholars either. Among the Ṭālibān, it is not possible to seek help from the aristocracy, the wealthy classes and well-known scholars. In general, the southern regions of Afghanistan, where the Ṭālibān came from, have poor economic conditions compared to the northern regions (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 97). Rashid writes, “These young students are rootless, without support, jobless, and strictly speaking, they are the orphans of war. They are economically deprived and lacking in knowledge” (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 61). He also repeatedly points out their influence over the uneducated and simple village *mullāhs* (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 61–137). Mullāh Umar, the first leader of the Ṭālibān, was born in a poor and landless serf family in Qandahār. He did not have a specific social and tribal base in Qandahār, and little is known about his family background.

Finally, it should be noted that this group did not coexist with followers of other religions, especially Shī'ites. As mentioned, the Karrāmīyya were among the Ahl al-Hadīth sects and had an over-interpretation of religion like the Ḥanbalīs. They were incompatible with Shī'ites, Sufis and even Sunnī Ash'arīs. The Ṭālibān also “do not accept any interpretation other than their own interpretation of Islam” (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 143). At the beginning of their cause, they “applied the most stringent Islamic practice that is unprecedented in anywhere around the world” (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 89). They closed girls' schools and

prevented women from leaving the house to buy necessities. What is worse, they banned all of the entertainments such as music, television and even flying kites and most sports and games (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 20). Ṭālibān soldiers arrested men without beards in the main streets of Kābul (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 90). Their way of treating the Shī'ites was very violent and astonishing. In this regard, the Ṭālibān implemented a new behavior in Afghanistan, because, as it was said, according to the testimony of Elphinstone, Durrānī Pashtuns were not intolerant towards Shī'ism in the past. As Ahmad Rashid rightly stated, Sunnī Islam in Afghanistan has been very tolerant towards other Islamic schools and sects, as well as other religions or new lifestyles (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 136). However, ethnic motives were more accountable than religious tendencies in Ṭālibān's violent behavior against Shī'a Hazaras, Tājiks, and Uzbeks, who have different Sunnī tendencies from the Ṭālibān. The massacre of Shī'ites in 1998 in Mazār-i Sharīf can be considered as a form of genocide. Whatever the motive may have been, it is said that it occurred in a way with the intention of eliminating Shī'ites from the north of Afghanistan. They announced to the Shī'ites of Mazār-i Sharīf that they had no more than three options: become Sunnīs, go to Iran, or be killed (Rashīd, *ibid.*: 123–125). In spite of this, it seems that at present, as Ṭālibān have come back to power in Afghanistan, they have adjusted some of their religious policies and behaviors using past experiences, or at least they are pretending to do so.

7 Conclusion

The information and views of the sources about the nature of the Karrāmīyya sect and their relationship with theological and jurisprudential sects will sound confusing to some extent. This confusion will increase when the theological-jurisprudential nature of this sect-religion and the counterparts of theological and jurisprudential sects are considered simultaneously. It seems that the reason for the voluminous but sometimes contradictory statements about this sect stems more from the fact that it was the enemies of the Karrāmīyya – and not themselves – who spoke about this sect. The numerous and diverse opponents of this sect, including a wide range of Shī'ites and Sunnīs, the accurate information and the diverse views of followers of other sects, which may have sometimes been associated with a degree of prejudice, and the challenge of explaining the exact dimensions of this sect have made religion challenging. Some sources consider them to be Mushabbaha and Muṛj'ia based on Ibn Karrām's statements about *Tajsīm* and linguistic faith. Also, some sources considered it as a separate sect and sometimes connected it to the Ḥanafī jurisprudential

religion. However, there are indications at hand that the Karrāmīyya, who were generally more theological in nature, were yet distinguished from the Ḥanafīs in Nishābūr. Such was the case in the fourth century AH, when the geographer Al-Maqdisī, without considering the Karrāmīyya of that city specifically, said that the sect was of jurisprudential-theological nature in general.

Although this study discusses the nature of the Karrāmīyya sects at the beginning, it specifically seeks to examine its relationship with Sufism. One of the contemporary views in this field has linked the Karrāmītes to the Sufīs and the Karrāmīyya with Sufism. According to logicians, the “middle ground” of this incomplete induction was the existence of *Zuhd* between the two categories. Nevertheless, there are some evidences of the differences between the two sects and sometimes even the enmity between their followers during the third to sixth centuries AH. Although asceticism is considered to be one of the sources of Sufism, this concept is widely used in authentic Islamic texts. From the past to the present, it has neither been a strange thing among many Muslims and even their *Sharīʿa* advocate, nor exclusive for the Sufīs. However, there were also Sufīs such as Abū Saʿīd Abū ʿl-Khayr (d. 440 AH) who basically had nothing to do with asceticism. In addition to asceticism, the Karrāmīyya also insisted on the *Sharīʿa* and its observance. This was not the case with some Sufīs, such as Shaykh Abū Saʿīd Abū ʿl-Khayr and his *khānqāh*. The other aspect of the difference between the two lay in the issue of *Taj̄sīm* (or *Tashbīh*). While the Karrāmīyya believed in incarnation, the great mystics opposed incarnation and similitude and considered it distasteful.

In addition to all the differences between the two sects, it is interesting to note that neither the Karrāmītes nor the Sufīs have ever found themselves in favor of the opposite class. Various sources, such as Sufi works and biographies of scholars, do not even name a person who was both a Karrāmī and a Sufi. It is worth mentioning that in the most important place for the Karrāmītes in Khurāsān, i.e., Nishābūr (as Bulliet believes), Sufism appeared in the fourth century AH, about a century after the Karrāmīyya and the concept of asceticism came into existence. In addition, Shaykh Karrām’s enmity with Sufīs such as Shaykh Abū Saʿīd in the late fourth century AH shows that Karrāmīyya and Sufism were at least two separate sects or even two distinctive doctrines and at most two religions facing each other in the same city.

Karrāmīyya can be compared with the contemporary political-religious movement, the Ṭālibān. Although the Karrāmīyya belong to the middle centuries and the Ṭālibān are contemporary, many similarities can be seen between these two movements: (1) The motivations of the Ṭālibān and the Karrāmītes are not related to religious issues, but to social issues, and religion is a cover for ethnicity and class for both of them; (2) they lay their foundations on lower

social classes, and do not have the opportunity to receive high-level education and cultural activities; (3) just as the Karrāmīts have been incompatible with other Islamic sects such as the Ash'arites and Shī'ites, the Ṭālibān also accept only their own understanding of Islam – hence they have a history of massacring Shī'ites.

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