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KĀẒEM RAŠTI

KĀẒEM RAŠTI, Sayyed Kāẓem B. Qāsem b. Aḥmad b. Ḥabib Ḥosayni (b. Rasht, ca. 1784-99; d. Karbalāʾ, 1844; Figure 1), student and successor of Shaikh Aḥmad b. Zayn-al-Din Aḥsāʾi (q.v.) and head of the Šayḵi movement. The main sources for Rašti's biography are some of his own works which contain autobiographical information (e.g., *Dalil al-motaḥayyerin*), as well as two biographies written by his students. The latter two are said to be lost, but their contents have been summarized by Abu'l-Qāsem b. Zayn al-ʿĀbedin Kermāni (I, pp. 143-61). Multiple dates are given for Rašti's birth (1198/1784, 1205/1791, 1212/1797-98, and 1214/1799-1800), thus leaving a gap of some fifteen years (MacEoin, p. 96). His grandfather was originally from Medina but, due to an outbreak of cholera, had left that town and settled down in Rašt in northern Persia, where Sayyed Kāẓem was born (Kermāni, I, p. 146). Rašti's ancestors were chiefly merchants, and there is no mention of any eminent theologians among them.

Accounts concerning his childhood are sparse and contradictory and often mixed with myths and marvels commonly found in saints' biographies. Already as a child, he showed little interest in playing, but was rather inclined to seclusion and mysticism and studying the Qurʾan. Like his master, Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsāʾi, Rašti is said to have had several significant visions, including a dream in which Fāṭema, the Prophet's daughter, instructed him to travel to Yazd, where he was to meet Aḥsāʾi (Kermāni, I, p. 147; Rafati, p. 127). Edward G. Browne mentions a different account, according to which, at the age of twelve, Rašti was living in Ardabil, where an ancestor of the Safavids appeared

to him in a vision and told him to go to Yazd (Brown, II, p. 238). It seems improbable, though, that he met Aḥsāʾi at such a young age (MacEoin, pp. 96-97). At any rate, visions would play an important role in Rašti's later life, just as they did for Aḥsāʾi, since they provided the basis for claims to otherwise hidden knowledge. The Šayḵiya is thus sometimes also referred to as Kašfiya.

It was in Yazd that Rašti for the first time met Aḥsāʾi sometime between 1809 and 1814 (Kermāni, I, p. 147; MacEoin, p. 97), when the latter was living there. Rašti soon established himself as a prime student of Aḥsāʾi and gained wide reputation amongst the shaikh's followers. From that point on, he spent most of his time in the presence of his master, only leaving him for pilgrimage to Mecca and when being sent on journey by him (cf. MacEoin, pp. 98 ff.).

Rašti must have received his basic education in Rašt, his hometown. Later on, he also obtained authorizations (*ejāza*) from Sayyed ʿAbdallāh Šobbar, Mollā ʿAli Rašti, and Shaikh Jaʿfar Kāšef al-Ḡeṭāʾ, as well as the latter's son, Musā (Āl Ṭāleqāni, p. 124; MacEoin, pp. 100-101). Nevertheless, Aḥsāʾi must be considered as Rašti's prime mentor. Rašti seems to have regarded him as a father figure, just as Aḥsāʾi is reported to have referred to Rašti as "my son" (*waladi*; Kermāni, I, p. 147). Rašti himself explained how he became impressed with Aḥsāʾi's knowledge and his personality (Rašti, *Dalil al-motaḥayyerin*, pp. 18, 21; see also letters and poems quoted by the editor in the introduction to *Resālat al-soluk*, pp. 13 ff.). Their relationship has also been characterized by some as that of *morād* and *morid* (the spiritual master and his disciple; MacEoin, p. 100; cf. Rafati, p. 127).

Aḥsāʾi died in 1241/1826 without leaving a written testament designating a successor. Nonetheless, Rašti's role as leader remained undisputed, despite the fact that there were several older and seemingly more qualified candidates (Rašti, *Resālat al-soluk*, editor's note, p. 17; Rafati, p. 46; MacEoin, pp. 104-5). This was due to the fact that Rašti's special status was already evident during the lifetime of Aḥsāʾi, who had occasionally sent him as his representative or put him in charge, when he traveled himself, just as he had done when he went on his last pilgrimage, in the course of which he passed away (Kermāni, I, p. 147). Aḥsāʾi also had directed him to answer letters on his behalf and even to complete some of his unfinished works (e.g., *Ṯawāb al-aʿmāl*). A number of sayings are also attributed to Aḥsāʾi that distinguish Rašti from other students, the most significant of which might be the following, since it comes close to establishing a sort of *selsela* (chain of spiritual descent): "Receive ye knowledge from Sayyed Kāẓem. For he has received it directly (*mošāfahatan*)

from me, and I have received it directly from the Imams, who in turn have received it directly from God" (Moḥammad-Karim Kermāni, p. 71; MacEoin, p. 102)

Although not endowed with as much charisma and theological authority as Aḥsāiʾi, Rašti eventually managed to establish himself as a respected theologian vis-à-vis other ulama as well as the Ottoman authorities in Karbalāʾ. However, initially he faced severe opposition. Aḥsāʾi had been a respected religious authority during most of his lifetime, and it was only towards the end of his life that he became subject to charges of heresy. His reputation was sound, and his connections to influential authorities included even the Persian royal court. Fatḥ-ʿAli Shah himself had spared him more severe consequences. Rašti, however, was perceived as a somewhat weaker target. Most of the early years after his mentor's death he spent writing apologetic tracts, proving his own and Aḥsāʾi's orthodoxy (Eschraghi, pp. 24 ff.; Behmardi, in Rašti, *Resālat al-soluk*, pp. 18 ff.). In 1243/1828, he appeared before a group of influential ulama of Karbalāʾ, among them Moḥammad-Mahdi Ṭabāṭabāʾi, Moḥammad-Jaʿfar Astarābādi, and Šarif-al-ʿOlamāʾ Moḥammad-Šarif Māzandarāni, who questioned him about Aḥsāʾi's view on resurrection. Although Rašti ably defended his master, eventually he was forced to admit that some of Aḥsāʾi's statements, if taken literally, would amount to disbelief. Thus, the ulama present at the meeting issued a decree against him, denouncing him as an unbeliever (for details of the event, see Rašti, *Dalil al-motaḥayyerin*, pp. 55 ff.; idem, *Kašf al-ḥaqq*, for the main arguments; Āl Ṭāleqāni, pp. 136 ff.). Later on, he was deprived of his right to *ejtehād* and banned from Karbalāʾ, but neither decree was ever enforced, due to his adversaries' lack of influence and the fact that their efforts were not supported by most major ulama (Behmardi, in Rašti, *Resālat al-soluk*, pp. 20 ff.; MacEoin, p. 106). Rašti, however, managed to gain influential supporters, such as Mollā Moḥammad-Bāqer Šafti of Isfahan (Amanat, pp. 159 ff.). He also established friendly contacts with other ulama, including Sunnis. Political authorities as well as members of the royal family, such as Solaymān Khan Afšār, at least sympathized with his views (MacEoin, pp. 110 ff.; Behmardi, in Rašti, *Resālat al-soluk*, p. 20; Āl Ṭāleqāni, pp. 164-65). Towards the end of his life, Rašti and his adversary, Sayyed Ebrāhim Qazvini, were considered as the two most powerful ulama of Karbalāʾ.

Rašti always claimed that Aḥsāʾi's views were in perfect harmony with Twelver Shiite orthodoxy and that any claim to the contrary was merely

grounded in insufficient knowledge of the latter's specific terminology—a view also held by Henry Corbin and Idris Samawi Hamid (Rašti, *Dalil al-motaḥayyerin*, pp. 35 ff., 54; idem, *al-Mizān al-ḥaqq*, fol. 184a.; Corbin, p. 215; Hamid, pp. 51-52). According to him, Aḥsāʾi had not founded a new *maḏhab*, but had only clung to the true teachings of the Holy Imams. Nevertheless, as a fruit of permanent conflict with the Oṣulis, the Šayḵis gradually developed a distinct identity and increasingly were perceived as a new school of thought within Twelver Shiʿism (Rafati, pp. 129-30; MacEoin, pp. 105, 109; Smith, p. 9; Hamid p. 52-53). Another factor that no doubt led to consolidation of Shaykhism was that Rašti, unlike Aḥsāʾi, only rarely traveled; therefore Karbalāʾ gradually evolved into a focal point and center for the Šayḵiya under his leadership (MacEoin, p. 105)

Rašti died on 11 Ḏu'l-ḥejja 1259/1 January 1844 in Karbalāʾ. It is alleged by some that he was poisoned on orders of the Sunni governor of Baghdad (Kermāni, I, p. 154), but there is no proof for this allegation, especially in the light of their otherwise good relationship. The legend might have served to clear Rašti of charges of collaboration with a governor otherwise reputed to be a fierce enemy of the Shiʿites (see below).

Works. Rašti left a voluminous literary output. In a bibliography penned by Rašti himself, well over 130 titles are mentioned (*Dalil al-motaḥayyerin*, pp. 109 ff.), while another one lists 170 items (Kermāni, I, p. 157; II, pp. 86-167; see also Nicolas, II, pp. 32-36; Āl Ṭāleqāni, pp. 390-405; Rafati, pp. 131-32). Parts of these, according to Rašti's own explicit statement, were lost or destroyed. He does not seem to have taken special precautions for preserving his writings. He did not keep copies of his correspondence, since apparently he was convinced that God would preserve them, should it be His will. A number of manuscripts were also destroyed or stolen during riots in Karbalāʾ (Kermāni, I, pp. 157-58). Rašti also commented on some of his mentor's works (e.g., *Ḥayāt al-nafs*, *Resāla moḵtaṣar al-ḥaydariya)* and translated parts of his magnum opus, *Šarḥ az-ziāra al-jāmeʿa al-kabira,* into Persian (Kermāni, II, pp. 87, 91-92; Rafati pp. 58, 131; MacEoin, p. 99).

Rašti, even more than Aḥsāʾi, used coded language and esoteric expressions, thus rendering his writings notoriously difficult for the uninitiated. This might have been a reaction to the circumstances he taught under. Rašti practiced dissimulation (*taqiya*) and, in his writings, followed the long tradition of Islamic writers who arbitrarily chose to express themselves in a somewhat veiled and mysterious language in order to avoid possible attacks

by their enemies. He also might have had the Sufi approach in mind, which aims not to divulge certain truths to the unworthy or uninitiated (see, e.g., *Šarḥ al-ḵoṭba* I, p. 90; II, pp. 305, 317; III, pp. 170 ff., 392-93). Sometimes, his obscure writings became a target of criticism and mockery by his contemporaries. For instance, Sayyed Moḥammad-Mahdi Musawi Eṣfahāni Kāẓemi wrote in his *Aḥsan al-wadiʿa*: "Sayyid Rašti has produced numerous writings; however, no one seems to understand them. It is as if he writes in Hindi" (apud Modarres, II, p. 308).

Rašti's writings mainly focus on philosophical, theological, and epistemological themes, as well as, to some lesser extent, the occult sciences. He also wrote on jurisprudence, grammar, and other fields of traditional scholarship. Although he issued a number of authoritative religious rulings (*fatwā*), it seems that he particularly disliked jurisprudence (*feqh*), as evidenced in his note to Karim Khan Kermāni that he should "flee from [it] as ye would from a lion" (apud MacEoin, p. 111).

Rašti's claim to knowledge of hidden matters is reflected, for example, in his incomplete commentary on the *Basmala*, a work he claimed to have been inspired directly by the Imam Ḥosayn b. ʿAli (*Šarḥ al-qaṣida*, pp. 80, 140). Among his earliest works are a commentary on the *Āyat al-korsi (*Qurʾan 2:255) and another one on some passages of Moḥsen Fayż Kāšāni's *al-Kalemāt al-maknuna fi ʿolum al-maʿrefa,* bearing the title *Maṭāleʿ al-anwār* (MacEoin, p. 98). His most voluminous work is no doubt *Šarḥ al-ḵoṭba al-ṭotonjiya,* a partial commentary on a text attributed to Imam ʿAli b. Abi Ṭāleb. The authenticity of this highly allusive sermon has been a matter of controversy but was attested by both Aḥsāʾi and Rašti (Aḥsāʾi, *Rasāʾel al-ḥekma*, p. 216; Rašti, *Šarḥ al-ḵoṭba* II, pp. 20 ff.), who generally were reluctant to reject traditions solely due to outward criteria, or because they were difficult to understand (Aḥsāʾi, *Šarḥ al-ziāra* IV, p. 51). It is unclear whether the commentary was left incomplete by Rašti himself or whether parts of the manuscript have been lost.

Another important work is the slightly less voluminous *Šarḥ al-qaṣida al-lāmiya*, a commentary written in 1258-59/1841-42 on a poem by ʿAbd-al-Bāqi Mawṣeli. The text itself has not much to do with the actual content of the poem, but in it Rašti, among a variety of subjects, develops his idea about two cycles of revelation—one of *nobowwa*, which ended with the Prophet Moḥammad, and one of *walāya*, which would be inaugurated by a mysterious figure, only alluded to very vaguely (Eschraghi, pp. 247 ff.; Amanat, pp. 58-59; MacEoin, p. 104). Both Rašti and Aḥsāʾi generally saw certain Sufi doctrines,

such as the *waḥdat al-wojud (see EBN AL-ʿARABI)*, antinomian tendencies, claims to performing miracles, and the idea of a *moršed* (other than the Imam) as a deviation from the true faith. Rašti thus labeled them as "evildoers," "hypocrites," "sinners," and worse (*Šarḥ al-ḵoṭba* I, p. 36; II, pp. 123, 194-95, 288; III, pp. 193-94; *al-Mizān al-ḥaqq*, fol. 85a). He also condemned the philosophers (*ḥokamāʾ*, *maššāʾin*, *motakallemin*) for their "absurd beliefs" and "vain superstitions" (*Šarḥ al-ḵoṭba* II, p. 123). These attacks might also have served the purpose of demonstrating his own orthodoxy. A striking feature of *Šarḥ al-qaṣida* is, therefore, its closeness to Ebn ʿArabi's terminology, who is here even named *al-Šayḵ al-akbar* "the Greatest Master" (pp. 16, 18, 25), whereas in other works both Rašti and Aḥsāʾi had denounced him in strong terms and labeled him *Momiet-al-din* "the Murderer of religion" (e.g., *Šarḥ al-ḵoṭba* I, p. 36). Even more surprising is the fact that Rašti, a rather staunch Shiʿite, here refers to the Sunni caliphs ʿOmar b. al-Ḵaṭṭāb and Abu Bakr respectfully as "our lord" (*sayyedonā*; *Šarḥ al-ḵoṭba* I, p. 349; in contrast, compare his statements about the *ḵolafāʾ* in *Šarḥ al-ḵoṭba* II, p. 123). A possible explanation for this is that the addressee of *Šarḥ al-qaṣida* was a Sunni, ʿAli-Reżā Pasha, the governor of Baghdad, who is reviled amongst Shiʿites for his killing of hundreds of their fellow believers during a siege of Karbalāʾ. Rašti had negotiated with him by that time and convinced him to spare anyone who took refuge with him (Behmardi, in Rašti, *Resālat al-soluk*, pp. 23 ff.; Kermāni, I, pp. 151-52; see detailed account in Āl Ṭāleqāni, pp. 154 ff.). In any case, these examples demonstrate the complexity of Rašti's writings and the difficulty to penetrate his true ideas.

The *Dalil al-motaḥayyerin* is in part an autobiography, as well as an explanation of Aḥsāʾi's teachings. In it, Rašti describes his several meetings with the ulama, who were critical of Aḥsāʾi. *Kašf al-ḥaqq* is a related, earlier apologetic work that Rašti, according to his own statement, widely disseminated. Its main theme is a discussion of the ascension of the Prophet Moḥammad to Heaven (*meʿrāj*) is. One of the charges leveled against Aḥsāʾi had been his alleged denial of the corporeal ascension of the Prophet. The purpose of this treatise was to clear Aḥsāʾi of all charges and to demonstrate his views to be in accordance with traditional Islamic teachings.

Rašti also produced a few Persian works, the most voluminous among which is the *Oṣul-e ʿaqāʾed*. However, like Aḥsā'i in his *Ḥayāt al-nafs,* Rašti avoided matters of doctrinal controversy, even when treating such topics as resurrection and *walāya*; and so, for the most part, the work reads like a

regular Twelver Shiʿite creed account (see SHIʿITE DOCTRINE). As an introduction to specific Šayḵi ideas, its usefulness may be somewhat limited.

Rašti also left behind a large number of letters written to individuals, which still lack careful investigation. Letters to trusted friends and students might in some cases help to identify his true or secretly held ideas, which he chose not to reveal in his more publicly accessible writings. Also, a more detailed study is needed of the writings of both Aḥsāʾi and Rašti in order to be able to determine whether the latter only confirmed his mentor's teachings or actually introduced innovative elements into it. For now, it seems to have become common sense to refer to Aḥsāʾi's and Rašti's works as a monolithic set of ideas and regard them both as founders of the Šayḵiya (Kermāni, I, p. 94; Rafati p. 46; Amir-Moezzi, p. 38). Undoubtedly, their writings resemble each other much more than those of the Šayḵi generations after them.

Students. Rašti must have had hundreds of students, most of whom have not been recorded (for a list of some better-known students, see Āl Ṭāleqāni, pp. 125 ff.). Since he did not appoint a successor, numerous claims to leadership were raised after his death. Ḥājj Moḥammad-Karim Khan Kermāni became the head of the group subsequently known as the Kermāni branch. He seems to have enjoyed a special rank among Rašti's students and was therefore accepted as leader by a large number of Šayḵis, especially in Kermān. Other claimants included Mirzā Ḥasan Gowhar in Karbalāʾ and Mirzā Moḥit Kermāni, the teacher of Rašti's sons, as well as Moḥammad-Šafiʿ Tabrizi in Azarbaijan. Mirzā Moḥammad Ḵorāsāni became the leader of another branch in Tehran (Behmardi, in Rašti, *Resālat al-soluk*, pp. 25-26; MacEoin, pp. 126 ff.). All these leaders apparently lacked the charisma and authority of Shaikh Aḥmad and Sayyed Kāẓem, and therefore, from this point in history on, the Šayḵi movement became irreversibly divided into several offshoots. These fractions of the Šayḵiya remain in existence until today and differ, not only in questions of leadership, but also in certain points of doctrine, for instance, the doctrine of the Fourth Pillar (*Rokn-e rābeʿ*; detailed discussion in Āl Ṭāleqāni, pp. 298 ff.; Rafati pp. 135 ff.; Amir-Moezzi), which is held by the Kermāni branch but not shared by other groups. Among the followers of Rašti was the well-known Ṭāhera Qorrat-al-ʿAyn. She later joined the Bāb's religion and was martyred as one of his leading followers. Another one of Rašti's pupils was Mollā Moḥammad-Ḥosayn Bošruʾi, whom he had sent to negotiate with Moḥammad-Bāqer Šafti (see above). Bošruʾi was successful in securing the latter's support for the Šayḵis. Bošruʾi later became the first follower of Sayyed

ʿAli-Moḥammad Širāzi, the Bāb, and played a central role in his movement. Rašti also left two sons, Aḥmad and Ḥasan. The latter was a student of his father and of Mirzā Moḥit Kermāni. He later moved to Ḥamadān. Aḥmad was put to death in 1295/1878-79 on his way home from the shrine of the Imam Ḥosayn. Neither of his sons seem to have enjoyed special significance among the Šayḵis. Rašti's offspring became known as the "Āl Rošdi from Karbalāʾ" (Behmardi, in Rašti, *Resālat al-soluk*, pp. 26-27; for more details on Rašti's offsprings, see Āl Ṭāleqāni, pp. 165 ff.).

Connection to the Bāb. A number of prominent Šayḵis joined the movement of the Bāb (Rafati, pp. 150 ff.; MacEoin, pp. 139, 142 ff.; Smith, pp. 12, 42; Āl Ṭāleqāni, pp. 125 ff.). A few months after Rašti's death, he had put forth his somewhat ambiguous claim to be the Fourth Pillar (*Rokn-e rābeʿ*, *Ḥarf-e rābeʿ*) or to be a new manifestation of the Divine Logos. In fact, the earliest and most prominent Bābi's were almost all former students of Rašti (e.g., Bošruʾi, Moḥammad-ʿAli Qoddus Bārforuši, Shaikh ʿAli Toršizi ʿAẓim, Ṭāhera Qorrat-al-ʿAyn, Mollā ʿAli Basṭāmi, and Mollā Ṣādeq Moqaddas Ḵorāsāni. The Bāb, prior to commencement of his prophetic career, had spent some time in Karbalāʾ in the early 1840s, where he came into contact with Šayḵis. It is sometimes reported that he also attended classes and seminaries. In some of his earliest writings he referred to Rašti as his teacher (*moʿallem*) and master (*sayyedi, mawlāyi*; Bāb, *Resāla fi'l-soluk*, p. 489; idem, *al-Lawāmeʿ al-badiʿ*, p. 169). However, given the Bāb's only rudimentary education, attested to by both his family and contemporary adversaries and sympathizers, it seems highly unlikely that he could have attended Rašti's classes (the problem of the Bāb's education is discussed in Amanat, pp. 138 ff.; Eschraghi, pp. 148 ff.), given the hierarchical structure of traditional seminaries. The Bāb, after all, had been, according to traditional accounts, denied formal education at an earlier point of his life, due to his lack of knowledge of the most basic sciences (Amanat, pp. 114, 116). The purpose of the Bāb's statement might, then, have been to show his nearness to the Šayḵi leader and support his own claim to authority. In any case, his writings display intimate knowledge of the Šayḵi terminology and doctrine, which is at least most remarkable, even if one were to accept the traditional account that he attended classes for about a year.

Bābi and Bahāʾi historiographers refer to a strong messianic element in early Šayḵi teachings. Occasionally the efforts of the two shaikhs (Aḥsāʾi and Rašti) are reduced to preparing people for the immediate advent of the Mahdi (on which, see ISLAM IN IRAN vi, vii). Such a claim is certainly not justified by

their writings, which contain few, and then very vague and obscure, references to some sort of messianic figure or event (see Aḥsāʾi and Rašti, *Asrār al-Emām al-Mahdi*, a compilation of Šayḵi texts on the subject; cf. Rafati, pp. 218-19, for a list of writings by Aḥsāʾi and Rašti on the Mahdi). One such example occurs towards the end of *Šarḥ al-qaṣida*, where Rašti says that the inaugurator of the future cycle of revelation is present now, that his name is Aḥmad, and that he himself knows everything about him but cannot divulge his true identity (quoted in Nicolas, II, pp. 44, 52 ff.; Bayat, pp. 52 ff.; Rafati, p. 172). However, the fact that many Šayḵis converted to the Bāb's new religion might be an indication that some sort of expectation prevailed, even though the true nature of that expectation (the actual Mahdi or only his representative) is still unclear. Further research into early Šayḵi writings and the correspondence between Bābi converts and their former Šayḵi colleagues may shed further light on this question. There is a strong possibility that at least Rašti had entertained certain expectations into which he had initiated some of his students orally, rather than in writing (Amanat pp. 60 ff.; Eschraghi, pp. 89 ff.)

Sometimes, the fact that Rašti did not leave a testament nominating his successor is interpreted as anticipation of a messianic event (cf. MacEoin, pp. 126 ff.). Vahid Rafati argues that Rašti's testament does at least allude to the imminent advent of the Mahdi (pp. 136-37, 174). On the other hand, the fact that most Šayḵis did not join the Bāb or any other messianic movement is a strong indication that the alleged messianic spirit had not reached the majority of its members, but was, rather, confined to an elect few.

That many Šayḵis did convert to Bābism might also be due to certain elements of their doctrine, which deviates from traditional Twelver Shiʿism—for example, the idea of an absolute representative of the Hidden Imam, who can be known even during the Occultation; the rather complex theory about life after death and the belief that the Mahdi might return in a different body (cf. Rafati, pp. 167 ff.; Eschraghi, pp. 92-93; Amanat, pp. 53-54); and the focus on the Imams as manifestations of the Divine. In short, a more esoteric approach towards certain questions of Imamology and theology in general allowed for the Bāb to develop his own ideas in the framework of the Šayḵiya, rather than in traditional Twelver Shiʿite discourse, which upholds a belief in the physical reappearance of the twelfth Imam, Moḥammad b. Ḥasan, and does not believe in any representatives during the "Great Occultation." But another important factor in the Bāb's gravitation toward the Šayḵiya must have been the general

longing for change that existed in 19th-century Iranian society and was no doubt stronger with members of an already unorthodox and somewhat innovative group.

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