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Incident of Shi'b Abī Ṭālib (616-619AD) in Early Sīrah Writings: An Analysis of Two Different Historical Accounts

Abstract

The incident of Shi'b Abī Ṭālib_also referred to as the social and economic boycott of Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib_constitutes a significant episode in Sīrah history; yet the early Sīrah sources furnish only limited details regarding it. Furthermore, the fewer details provided are shrouded in mystery and needs clarification. The present study intends to analyze key aspects of the incident of Shi'b Abī Ṭālib including the question of the shifting of Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib in Shi'b and the issue of their possible siege by doing an internal criticism of the early sources of Sīrah. The study has divided the early sources of Sīrah into two groups based on their different presentation and narration of the event of Shi'b Abī Ṭālib. The first historical account is constructed by Ibn Hishām by editing the works of Ibn Isḥāq and has been followed by many later historians. The second account which is very different from the first has been collected from the maghāzi of 'Urwah bin Zubayr and the newly found manuscript of Ibn Isḥāq largely narrated by Yūnus bin Bukayr. The account is further supported by the traditions of Mūsā bin 'Uqba and Ibn Sa'd. The study argues that the first set of historical sources have left certain doubts and questions regarding the authenticity and details of the event. Conversely, the second set of sources has described the event in a more vivid and clear manner thus providing a historically more accurate view of the incident.

Introduction

The Makkan period of the life of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) has been extensively documented by early Sīrah writers; however, certain significant events remain shrouded in mystery and require further clarification. While worldwide research on the Sīrah has illuminated various lesser-known aspects of this formative period, some areas continue to warrant rigorous scholarly attention— foremost among them the social and economic boycott of Banī Hāshim. This episode, which involved a systematic effort by the Quraysh to isolate the Prophet (PBUH) and his supporters socially, politically, and economically, represents one of the most testing phases in the early history of Islam. Despite its importance, early Sīrah sources provide only fragmentary and sometimes inconsistent accounts of the event, leaving key questions unanswered. Addressing these gaps through

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critical examination of primary sources is essential, not only for reconstructing the historical reality but also for understanding the resilience, solidarity, and moral steadfastness of the early Muslim community.

The event has been usually described as a siege. To mention a few sources, early western historians like Washington Irving and William Muir both have mentioned the incident.[1] Irving believed it to be the result of the jealousy of Banī Umayyad while Muir highlighted it as an evidence of the support of Banī Hāshim for the Prophet PBUH.[2] Martin Lings and Montgomery Watt believed the boycott to be not very harsh[3] while Shibli Nomani and Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri have particularly reported the sufferings of the Banī Hāshim during the boycott.[4] Shibli Nomani has given it the title *Shi'b abi Ṭālib mein meḥsoor honā*, Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri, has called it as a "complete boycott" but also mentions "three years in Shi'b Abī Ṭālib" and he also believes that Banī Hāshim were besieged in Shi'b.[5] A latest study by Tariq Ramadan further mentioned that the Banī Hāshim's suffering and hunger was unbearable in Shi'b.[6] Montgomery Watt in *Muhammad at Mecca* argued that this was a grand alliance of the tribes against Banī Hāshim, particularly of those who were part of the *Hilf al-Fuḍūl*. He further mentioned that this act was a campaign against Muhammad (PBUH) while at the same time; it was also an act of "aggrandizement of Makhzūm".[7]

There were two very significant works which have raised logical and serious doubts on the accounts of Shi'b Abī Ṭālib and *maḥāsarah* for three years. The first study is an article written by Dr. Nisar Ahmed titled "Shi'b-i- Abī Ṭālib" in 1984, published in Rasōl Number of the journal *Naqōsh*. Dr. Nisar has opened up his discussion by providing clarification about the place called Shi'b Abī Ṭālib and concluded that it was a residential quarter including Shi'b Maulād, (house where Prophet PBUH was born) Shi'b Abī Muṭṭalib, and Shi'b 'Alī which was closer to *haram*. Moreover Dr. Nisar has further argued that since the boycott does not talk about Banī Hāshim being forced to leave their houses or to be besieged thus it was not a siege. Dr. Nisar has further dismissed the position taken by some of the other historians who agree on not calling it a siege; instead believed that Banī Hāshim themselves decided to leave their houses and moved to another place little far away from Makkah. Dr. Nisar has concluded that this was a harsh social and economic boycott and the whole tribe suffered from the consequences of this boycott.[8]

Another more recent view has been given by Khalid Masud in his book *Hayāt-i-Rasōl-i-Ummī* published in 2003. According to Khalid Masud, there was definitely no siege and furthermore there was no written document of boycott as well. He has supported his argument by a Hadith of Abū Huraira during the period of the last pilgrimage. According to Abu Huraira, the Holy Prophet PBUH while they were at Minā told them about a Shi'b of Banī Kinānah where Quraysh and Banī Kinānah made a pledge to boycott Banī Hāshim. Khalid Masud has further rejected the chances of a written document and believed that it was only a group of opponents who swore this allegiance which was not accepted by the whole community of Quraysh and thus had lost its significance because of its partial application.[9]

A still more recent study exclusively focusing on Shiʻb Abī Ṭālib, written by Mohammad Mushtak Tijarwi titled "*Rasulullah Sallalahu Alaihi wa Sallam Shebe Abi Talib Mein*" has thoroughly quenched the thirst of scholars by discussing about almost all aspects of the event with the help of earlier primary sources. Starting from the explanation and location of Shiʻb, Tijarwi explored the event from the Ḥadith sources and the traditions of Ibn Abbas. He believed that the main historical traditions of this event have been provided by ʻUrwah bin Zubayr, Imam al-Ẓuhri and Mūsā bin Uqba, thus Tijarwi was able to construct a historically well-grounded explanation. He has discussed in detail the reasons of the event, and conditions during the siege. He further provided details about tribes involved on both sides particularly about the members of Banī Hāshim and Banī ʻAbd al-Muṭṭalib and Muslims in Makkah.[10]

The present study intends to analyze key aspects of the incident of Shiʻb Abī Ṭālib including the question of the shifting of Banī Hāshim and Banī ʻAbd al-Muṭṭalib in Shiʻb and the issue of their possible siege by doing an internal criticism of the early sources of Sīrah. The study has divided the early Sīrah sources in to two groups on the basis of the nature of different accounts regarding this event. The first historical account has been developed by Ibn Hishām by editing the works of Ibn Isḥāq which has been followed by many later historians. The second account which is very different from the first has been collected from two sources, one is the *maghāzi* of ʻUrwah bin Zubayr and the other is the newly found manuscript of Ibn Isḥāq by Dr. Hamidullah in which the major traditions have been narrated by Yūnus bin Bukayr. The account is further supported by the traditions of Mūsā bin ʻUqba and Ibn Saʻd. The study argues that the first set of historical sources have left certain doubts and questions regarding the authenticity and details of the event. Conversely, the second set of sources has described the event in a more vivid and clear manner thus providing a historically more accurate view of the incident.

Account of the Event of Shiʻb According to First Set of Sources (Ibn Hishām, al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Khaldūn)

The first written preserved record on Sīrah was the account of Ibn Isḥāq edited by Ibn Hishām. Many of the later historians have copied the traditions of Ibn Hishām thus the version given by Ibn Hishām got general acceptance among the early Sīrah writers. For instance the account of the event of Shiʻb given in al-Ṭabarī's *Kitāb-ul-Rusul-wal-Mulūk* is almost the copy of Ibn Hishām. Similarly the account of al-*Rawḍ al-Unf* is almost similar to that of Ibn Hishām however he has given detailed explanation of some poetry on Abū Lahab.[11] Ibn Hishām has edited and omitted some details provided in Ibn Isḥāq due to several reasons. It is interesting to explore that the incident of the boycott of Banī Hashim has been narrated in a very brief manner by Ibn Hishām, thus creating much confusion and leaving several questions regarding the authenticity of this incident.

The account of Ibn Isḥāq in the edited version of Ibn Hishām starts with the improved situation of Muslims including the refusal of Najāshī to handover the Muslims and the effect of the conversion of ʻUmar. He has also mentioned that the Prophet PBUH had now the support of ʻUmar and Ḥamzah and Islam was spreading in different tribes of Quraysh. The Quraysh gathered and decided to

write a contract (عقد) against Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (و بنى المطلب و بنى هاشم يكتبوا كتابا يتعاقدون فيه على بنى هاشم). This contract was written on a written material (الصحيفة) and was hanged on the walls of Ka'bah.[12] On this Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib sided with Abū Ṭālib and entered with him in his Shi'b (معه شعبه) and gathered in it (فدخلوا واجتمعوا إليه).[13] The same account has been chosen by al-Ṭabarī who mentioned that when Quraysh did this, the Banī Hāshim and the 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib joined Abū Ṭālib, entered with him to his valley and gathered round him there.[14] The whole terminology focuses on the contract which was written on a written material and has not focused on Shi'b. Furthermore the word of siege has not been used by Ibn Hishām.

According to this account, there is just the mention of Banī Hāshim and the 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib entering and gathering at Shi'b which was a residential quarter of the Holy Prophet PBUH and the family of the Abū Ṭālib.[15] It can also be assumed as a general gathering at the house of someone notable at the outbreak of this crisis situation, similar to the gathering of public at some place for registering their protest or for showing their solidarity with some cause or with an individual or a group of people. There is no clear statement referring to the transfer or settling of Banī Hāshim or Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib to Shi'b. While this group was showing solidarity with Abū Ṭālib and the Prophet PBUH, the next point mentioned both by Ibn Hishām and al-Ṭabarī is the disassociation of Abū Lahab from Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. Thus it seems that the whole description about Shi'b is narrated in the context of the support of the whole tribe for the Prophet PBUH except for Abū Lahab. In this account, the place loses its significance as it seems to be mentioned just in order to explain something else.

According to Ibn Hishām, this situation continued for 2-3 years and nothing reached them.[16] After that the incident of Ḥakīm bin Ḥāzim bringing wheat for his aunt Khadījah has been mentioned and it was cited that she was with the Holy Prophet PBUH in the Shi'b.[17] The same incident has been narrated by al-Ṭabarī.[18] Then there is a long discussion on Abū Lahab and the verses related to him.[19] This incident also does not explains anywhere that the whole tribe was shifted to Shi'b as it only mentions Khadījah who was in Shi'b with the Holy Prophet PBUH.

Then there are certain other details including the ill-treatment of the Holy Prophet PBUH and of different other people. According to the sequence in which al-Ṭabarī has related the event of boycott, the incident of satanic verses occurred during the period of Boycott. Mentioning this event, al-Ṭabarī relates that when Prophet PBUH recited the verses, Muslims as well as infidels present in the mosque (probably in the precincts of Ka'bah) prostrated.[20] It means that the Prophet PBUH was not only free to move during this period but also was praying at a place where there were Muslims as well as infidels. In this period the Prophet PBUH was preaching openly and secretly further raising doubts on the possibility of siege and gives an impression that there was only an economic and social boycott.[21]

Afterwards the annulment (نقض) of ṣaḥīfah is mentioned by Ibn Hishām with the tradition in which Abū Ṭālib was sitting and some members from the Quraysh actively maneuvered and planned to invalidate this document.[22] Talking about the annulment of the boycott, al-Ṭabarī narrated the incident of Hāshim bin 'Amr of

'Amīr bin Lu'ayy talking to Zuhayr b. Abī Umayyah whose mother was 'Atikah bt. 'Abd al-Muṭṭlib, He asked him,

> Zuhayr, are you content to eat food, wear clothes, and marry women while your maternal uncles are in the condition in which you know them to be, unable to buy or sell, and unable to give or take in marriage? I swear by God that if they were the maternal cousins of Abū al-Ḥakam b. Hishām and you were to call on him to do what he has called on you to do; he would never agree to do it.[23]

This passage also only refers to their being unable to buy and sell and unable to give or take in marriage. Thus nothing of the account of al-Ṭabarī and of Ibn Isḥāq through Ibn Hishām clearly refers to any siege or moving of Banī Hāshim to Shi'b. Some other later accounts following this version also presented the event in the same way. For instance there is no mention of siege in Ibn Khaldūn. In fact Ibn Khaldūn does not even talk about any gathering at Shi'b Abī Ṭālib. He just stated about the boycott which was written.[24]

This historical information appears to be scanty, incomplete and leaves some very important questions regarding the event. For instance, the account has not clearly talked about the shifting of the tribe in the Shi'b, nor apparently there seems any reason to shift if it was only a social and economic boycott and not an active war. It is also important to understand whether the whole tribe shifted to Shi'b or there were some people who had their houses in Shi'b. The narrative is further silent on the role of other prominent Muslims who did not belong to Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. If there had been a shifting of these two clans to a specific place or a siege or even a boycott, the status of other Muslims should have been reported. The role of 'Umar and Hamza remains ambiguous who had recently accepted Islam and it was reported that their conversion strengthened Muslims. Hamza belonged to Banī Hāshim but nothing has been mentioned about 'Umar in this whole episode although he had accepted Islam before. Nothing has also been mentioned of any secret support by Abū Bakr which was very frequently mentioned during the incident of cave Thawr.

Details of different events even in the Makkan period were clearly recorded particularly the names of the persons, for instance while narrating the migration of al-Ḥabshah, all early Sīrah writers have referred the names of migrants including the names of women and children born during that time period. Thus it seems anomalous if something happening in Makkah was not recorded. The narration talks randomly about Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and does not specifically mention the details of those who entered Shi'b.[25] Apart from Abū Lahab, there were other staunch opponents of Prophet in Banī Hāshim. For instance Abū Sufyān bin al-Ḥārith bin 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib remained staunch opponent of Islam and the Holy Prophet PBUH for 20 years.[26] He was the son of the uncle of Prophet PBUH Ḥārith who had died before the emergence of *nubawaat*. Nothing has been stated about the response of such members of Banī Hāshim.

Account of the Event of Shi'b According to the Second Set of Sources ('Urwah bin Zubayr, Mūsā bin 'Uqba, Ibn Isḥāq though Yūnus bin Bukayr and Ibn Sa'd)

The event of the boycott of Quraysh has been narrated in a slightly different and comprehensive manner in the account of 'Urwah bin Zubayr and the recovered work of Ibn Isḥāq by Dr. Hamidullah in which the majority traditions have been recorded through Yūnus bin Bukayr. The narrative of 'Urwah bin Zubayr has been largely collected from the traditions of Abu al-Aswad.[27] Very interestingly Muhammad Mustafa al-A'zami has compared the account related to entering of Shi'b in 'Urwah bin Zubayr and the narratives of Mūsā bin 'Uqba and found both accounts to be almost similar. Mūsā bin 'Uqba is considered very authentic by some of the Ḥadith scholars while Abu al-Aswad is not considered as authentic. Mūsā bin 'Uqba has relied for his accounts on Imam al-Ẓuhrī whose main source of information was 'Urwah bin Zubayr which justifies the reason of this notable resemblance in both accounts.[28] Thus by using this technique of internal criticism, Muhammad Mustafa al-A'zami has tried to prove the authenticity of the accounts of 'Urwah bin Zubayr that he has collected. This set of sources has not seen this event in isolation and provides answers to the questions emerging from the earlier account in a better way. This will further help to clear the doubts raised regarding the authenticity of this incident.

Part 1: Narrative of the Threats to the Life of the Prophet PBUH and the Tribal Support of Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib

This set of sources has clearly recorded the threats to the life of the Prophet PBUH immediately before the event of boycott. According to this narration, the whole situation arose with the harsh treatment of the Quraysh which was becoming harsher day by day. The condition of enmity worsened with the plans of the Quraysh to assassinate the Holy Prophet PBUH. 'Urwah bin Zubayr has depicted this situation very clearly. According to his account, it was the plan of Quraysh to assassinate the Holy Prophet PBUH which triggered the animosity between the tribes. In response, Abū Ṭālib gathered his tribe in Shi'b Banī Hāshim. The Muslims also joined and the whole tribe gathered due to their tribal sentiment.[29] Similar tradition has been narrated by Ibn Isḥāq from Yūnus that Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib felt humiliation in handing over their tribesman to the enemy although many of them were also against the religion of the Holy Prophet PBUH.[30] Similarly, according to al-Qasṭallānī, the Quraysh had decided to kill the Holy Prophet PBUH, and when this news reached Abū Ṭālib, he gathered the men of Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and ordered them to bring the Prophet PBUH and enter him in their Shi'b with his people. This same view has been endorsed by al-Zarqānī.[31]

The description of Ibn Sa'd is much closer to the accounts of 'Urwah bin Zubayr. The details of the threats to the life of Prophet PBUH have been recorded in a slightly different manner. The Quraysh came with a suggestion to hand over 'Umārah ibn al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīrah in return for the Prophet PBUH so that they may kill him which Abū Ṭālib obviously and plainly refused.[32] In one of the heated discussions with Quraysh chiefs and Abū Ṭālib, they threatened to kill the

Holy Prophet PBUH. On the evening of the following night, Prophet PBUH disappeared and was not at his home. Abū Ṭālib worried and furious gathered the young men of the Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib with swords in their hands and ordered them to kill the chiefs of Quraysh if Prophet PBUH has been slain. However then Prophet PBUH was found and Abū Ṭālib was relieved. Yet the other day, Abū Ṭālib took Prophet PBUH and the other youth of the Banī Hāshim with him to Quraysh, showed them the swords and told them if they had killed the Prophet PBUH yesterday, none of them had been alive.[33]

On looking at this response of the Banī Hāshim and Muslims, Quraysh decided to put this boycott on Banī Hāshim until these people agree to hand over the Holy Prophet PBUH to them for assassination.[34] Al-Qasṭallānī added these words in the content of the document that the Quraysh would never accept a peace treaty from them (Banī Hāshim) until they would hand over the Prophet PBUH, to be killed.[35] Ibn Sa'd has also clearly mentioned that the document was written against Banī Hāshim because the Quraysh wanted to assassinate the Holy Prophet PBUH.[36] According to the account of Ibn Isḥāq , Abū Ṭālib along with his tribesmen gathered at Ka'bah and tried to avert the Quraysh from their decision to boycott on the name of the Lord of that house however when Quraysh put this reconciliation on the condition of the execution of the Holy Prophet PBUH, Abū Ṭālib firmly rejected it.[37] Al-Zarqānī has mentioned another very important point that it is clear that the document was written after they entered the Shi 'b.[38]

Similarly in the poetry added in the account of Ibn Isḥāq, there are repeated verses commenting on the evil plans of Quraysh to assassinate the Holy Prophet PBUH which Abū Ṭālib believed was not possible until all men of his tribe perish because they will never back off from defending their tribal member. The demand and fear of the murder of the Holy Prophet PBUH has also been mentioned in the poetry referred to Abū Ṭālib.[39] Fearing that the Quraysh might attempt to assassinate the Prophet (PBUH), Abū Ṭālib adopted the precaution of having him sleep between himself and his sons, thereby ensuring his protection throughout the night.[40] 'Urwah bin Zubayr has also mentioned that Abū Ṭālib used to change the bed of the Holy Prophet PBUH from any of his sons or nephews.[41] Al-Zarqānī similarly narrated that out of the fear that someone might kill the Prophet PBUH, Abū Talib used to change the bed of the Holy Prophet PBUH with any of his sons, brother and cousins to deceive anyone who might have plans to assassinate him.[42]

Interestingly all of this background has been omitted by Ibn Hishām in whose account Banī Hāshim appears to be a passive victim of an oppressive boycott but there is no mention of the plans of Quraysh to assassinate the Holy Prophet PBUH and the active sometimes armed support of the Banī Hāshim for the Prophet PBUH.[43] Ibn Hishām has mentioned the incident when 'Umārah was offered in return for the Prophet PBUH and the refusal of Abū Ṭālib to hand over his nephew to be killed.[44] Similarly there was another tradition narrated by Ibn Hishām referring to Abū Jahl who had made a plan to kill the Prophet PBUH while knowing that 'Abd al-Manāf will take revenge on him.[45] However these are separate events not mentioned in the context of the event of boycott which is only making sense in the light of the above narrative.

This set of sources has radically changed the understanding of the event as if there was a threat to the life of the Prophet PBUH, and Abū Ṭālib and his tribe were eagerly and actively protecting him, then the situation was entirely different. The incident of Abū Ṭālib showing swords and telling Quraysh that any aggressive act towards the Prophet PBUH would lead towards a violent war between Quraysh is also significant to understand the situation in which this boycott was planned as a tactic to pressurize Banī Hāshim. The earlier tribal rivalries and alliances were also important apart from the preaching of the Prophet PBUH and the enmity of Quraysh towards Islam. It was significant that Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib opted to support Abū Ṭālib in protecting the Prophet PBUH, however Abū Ṭālib was actually expecting the support of 'Abd Shams and Nawfal along with their allies particularly Taym and Zuhrah. In one of the poetry, there is a complaint from Abū Ṭālib to Banī 'Abd al-Manāf who deserted them and left them imprisoned in their quarters.[46] In one of the sections of poetry attributed to Abū Ṭālib, he questioned Banī Taym and particularly 'Abd Shams and Nawfal for their support for ignorant people against their brothers and sons of their uncles.[47] Banī Hāshim, Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, Asad, Zuhrah and Taym were the members of *Hilf al-Fuḍūl*. Before that there was another rivalry and a confederacy of 'Abd al-Manāf was established against 'Abd al-Dār supported by Makhzūm.[48] That is why Abū Ṭālib was expecting the support of Asad, Zuhrah and Taym along with Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and similarly he also pleaded to the members of 'Abd al-Manāf to support him in those times of crisis.[49]

Selection of Words for this Document and the Problem of Entering Shi'b

This version of Ibn Isḥāq has also used the word of Ṣaḥīfah (الصحيفة) and there was an emphasis on it been written document as was in the manuscript of Ibn Hishām however it was added that this was a great ordeal for the Muslims (the word Muslims has been used) and they were badly shaken.[50] Another word (القاطع) has been used by Abū Ṭālib who was calling it a cruel boycott.[51] Like the account of Ibn Hishām, it talks about the abolition of marital relations and economic ties with Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib however it further adds that they (Quraysh) bound them.[52] It was this account of Ibn Isḥāq who has used the word of wāḥṣarū (hasra). Later Ibn Sa'd has also used this word.[53]

Another important point is that this manuscript of Ibn Isḥāq clearly talks about Abū Ṭālib entering the Shi'b with his nephews and brothers, and also with other Muslims supporters and even the non-Muslim supporters.[54] 'Urwah bin Zubayr has also used the word of 'Muslims' instead of Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. According to the account of 'Urwah bin Zubayr, Muslims also entered the Shi'b in support of the Prophet PBUH.[55]

Now it's important to understand the place where they gathered and the word Shi'b. In Arabic, a valley or narrow way among mountains is called Shi'b. According to Ibn Isḥāq, Holy Prophet PBUH and the Muslims in the early period of Islam used to pray in *al-sho'āb* (الشعاب) which means one of the Shi'bs of Makkah.[56] Similarly in the event of the year of the elephant, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib when decided not to retaliate Abrahah ordered his tribesmen to leave Makkah and to enter in the mountains and *al-shoab* (الشعاب).[57] It is said about Zayd bin Amr bin Nufayl who had adopted the religion of Ibrāhīm that when he was harassed by his

brother al-Khaṭṭāb bin Nufayl, he was forced to withdraw to the upper part of Makkah and he stopped in the mountain of al-Ḥirā' facing the town.[58] Similarly there is an incident of Hishām bin ʻUmro who used to bring a camel full of food and kicked him so that it entered the Shiʻb to Banī Hāshim during the boycott.[59] From all of these details, it seems that Shiʻb was not a regular part of city residence but was a place which was rarely used for seeking protection or hiding in special circumstances.

It is said about Quṣayy bin Kulāb that he settled many of the tribes of Quraysh in Abṭaḥ (an open vast valley consisting of sand and stones) and rest remained settled in the upper part of Makkah.[60] Quṣayy became the ruler of Makkah after almost 300 years rule of Khuzāʻah. During this time, Quraysh were nomadic people and had no role in the administration of the Ka ʻbah.[61] Thus it seems that in the upper part, there were the older houses of different clans or some might have constructed them later which they used for several purposes including staying guests. The houses of the clan of Banī Hāshim were named as the Shiʻb of Abū Ṭālib (also called as Shiʻb abi Yūsuf). Ibn Yāqūt has narrated about the Shiʻb abī Yūsuf that the Holy Prophet PBUH and the Banī Hāshim have taken refuge in this Shiʻb when Quraysh had written a document against them. ʻAbd al-Muṭṭalib had divided it amongst his sons and Prophet PBUH had taken the share of his father. These were the houses and probably the guest houses of Banī Hāshim. The words *manzil* (منزل) and *masākin* (مساكن) both have been used. *Masākin* clearly means houses while *manzil* can also be used for a house for the guests or an inn.[62] Al-Zarqānī, on the other hand very clearly calls the Shiʻb as the guest house or a house (منزل) of the Banī Hāshim other than their houses in which they live(كنهم مسا). Further, according to his information, it was called as Shiʻb abī Yūsuf and belonged to Hāshim. ʻAbd al-Muṭṭalib divided it among his sons when his eyesight weakened, and the Prophet PBUH received his father's share in it. About the source of this information, he mentioned that it has been reported like this by informers and same has been reported by al-Nūr.[63] It might be possible that Hāshim constructed these houses for the use of his clan and later they became part of the inheritance.

Thus it seems that *al-shoab* were not the usual residence of Quraysh but these were probably the old houses or guesthouses which were used to take shelter in times of crisis or to keep guests. It was a place other than the main settlements in the city. It seems that the latest houses of Banī Hāshim and Banī ʻAbd al-Muṭṭalib in the main settlement were scattered within the whole lower valley thus in order to stay united for security purposes, they shifted to Shiʻb which must have been a make shift arrangement as this place was not suitable to accommodate a large number of family members of Banī Hāshim and Banī ʻAbd al-Muṭṭalib. This house might be sufficient for members of Banī Hāshim but as Banī ʻAbd al-Muṭṭalib also gathered with Abū Ṭālib in his Shiʻb along with Banī Hāshim,[64] thus it must have been a small space for such a large clan. Apparently there seems no security risks to the other members of Banī Hāshim and Banī ʻAbd al-Muṭṭalib except for the Prophet PBUH.[65] However there might be apprehensions of a possible attack on any other member of the tribe in the case of such a boycott. The main purpose to shift to Shiʻb was to stay united to protect the Holy Prophet

PBUH but the secondary purpose was also to stay away from the main settlements in order to avoid the risk of an attack on other members of the family.

Coming to the question of siege, according to a report of Ibn Sa'd when Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib settled at Shi'b, Quraysh blockaded Banī Hāshim in the Shi'b of Abū Ṭālib.[66] According to Ibn Isḥāq, Abū Ṭālib entered the Shi'b and this was Shi'b Abī Ṭālib on the side of Makkah. Most importantly it clearly talks about a siege (و حصروهم في شعبهم) and the fact that Quraysh cut the delivery of any items from market and they do not allow anyone to enter it with food or other items.[67] This was probably the most accurate description of the siege which was endorsed by the account of 'Urwah bin Zubayr who further reported that Banī Hāshim remained imprisoned in Shi'b Banī Hāshim for three years as the roads to the markets were closed for them and it was not possible for them to get food items in the areas surrounding Makkah.[68] Although there was no standing army outside the Shi'b, however still Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib were forced to stay in their Shi'b for security reasons and for staying isolated from the rest of the tribes. They come out from the Shi'b only during the pilgrimage season[69] which was a period of sacred months in which fighting was prohibited.

The tradition of the crying of the children and Ḥakīm bin Ḥazām bringing food for Khadījah in the Shi'b also gives some evidence for the stay of Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib in the Shi'b. Ḥamzah bin 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib is also mentioned in this tradition, which means that he was present in the Shi'b with all other tribesmen.[70] After the document was eaten by insects, some of the Quraysh who opposed this decision took up arms and went to Banī Hāshim and Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and ordered them to return to their houses.[71] It means there was a proper entering and exit of the people from the Shi'b recorded by the sources. Ibn Isḥāq has also used the words that "so the people exit from their Shi'b". (فخرج اقوام من شعبهم)[72]

Thus this set of sources has clearly talked about Abū Ṭālib gathering his men in his Shi'b which was the quarters of Banī Hāshim. This place was also giving shelter to Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib and probably to the rest of the Muslims, thus all the supporters of the Holy Prophet PBUH were isolated in the Shi'b. Once the document was written, they stayed in Shi'b for 2 or 3 years. The main purpose to stay in Shi'b was to keep the whole tribe physically united to protect the Prophet PBUH. They were free to move theoretically but were imprisoned in a way that the roads to the markets were closed and no one was allowed to bring food in. Similarly some of the staunch opponents ensured that Banī Hāshim could not buy anything from the outside merchants.

Annulment (نقض) of Ṣaḥīfah

The incident of the Annulment (نقض) of Ṣaḥīfah has been mentioned through two traditions. According to one tradition, Abū Ṭālib gathered his men and went to the Ka'bah when the report of the eating of document was shared by the Holy Prophet PBUH with him. He insisted on this incident being an evidence of the truth of Prophet PBUH and pressurized the Quraysh to abolish this boycott if whatever he was saying was true. The Quraysh agreed on it and were morally bound to abolish it when the Prophet's PBUH prediction came true. In the meanwhile, Mu'ṭim bin Adī, Hishām bin 'Umro and 'Amir bin Lu'yi also stood

and declared their withdrawal from this *ṣaḥīfah*, followed by others. This marked the return of Banī Hāshim from the Shiʻb.[73] While the other tradition is how those who turned against this boycott made a plan and joined each other in the morning to talk about it. Muʻṭim bin Adī teared the document. Abū Ṭālib was sitting and silently watching this situation in this tradition.[74] This second tradition has been mentioned by Ibn Hishām while completely omitting the first.

ʻUrwah bin Zubayr further added a significant detail that the document was kept by Abū al Bakhtarī, Muʻṭim bin Adī, Hishām bin ʻUmro who renounced it after it was eaten by insects. Zuhaīr bin ʻUmayyah and Rafah bin al-Aswad bin ʻAbd al-Muṭṭalib bin Asad were those people who had married the women of Banī Hāshim. They also supported the decision of renunciation.[75] Thus, this set of sources details the active role of Abū Ṭālib in the annulment of the boycott, highlighting how his wisdom and leadership enabled him to secure the support of many among the Quraysh. While the account of Ibn Hishām has highlighted the tradition in which Abū Ṭālib was sitting and silently watching and rest of the Quraysh actively participated in the annulment of the boycott.

Conclusion

The account of ʿUrwah bin Zubayr, along with the recovered work of Ibn Isḥāq preserved through Yūnus bin Bukayr, provides a detailed description of the boycott against Banī Hāshim. This narrative was further expanded upon by Ibn Saʿd, who added several significant details. While the omissions in the version of Ibn Hishām may not necessarily have been intentional, the absence of many important elements leaves the reader with gaps, ambiguities, and unanswered questions. Further research is required to determine whether these omissions were deliberate, possibly with the aim of minimizing the role and active support of Banī Hāshim for the Prophet (PBUH) within the Sīrah tradition. For now, it can be concluded that the uncertainties arising from Ibn Hishām's account can be addressed by incorporating the versions preserved by ʿUrwah bin Zubayr, Mūsā bin ʿUqba, Ibn Saʿd, and the recovered material from Ibn Isḥāq.

An examination of the second set of sources allows for a more coherent and contextualized understanding of the incident of the Shiʿb. According to this account, the episode did not take place in isolation but was the outcome of a broader sequence of hostilities. The Quraysh had conspired to take the life of the Prophet (PBUH), prompting Banī Hāshim to demonstrate their unwavering solidarity with member of their tribe. Despite persistent pressure from the Quraysh to withdraw this protection, they remained resolute.

For the security of the Prophet (PBUH), the clan withdrew to the Shiʿb, where the Quraysh—acting in accordance with their formal pact—implemented a blockade, obstructing access to markets and preventing Banī Hāshim from obtaining food and other necessities. At this time, many Muslims had already migrated to Ḥabashah, while those who remained—likely including individuals in the Shiʿb—continued to offer direct support and protection to the Prophet (PBUH). Covert assistance also came from sympathetic tribesmen, who secretly sent provisions into the Shiʿb. Banī Hāshim's steadfastness in the face of prolonged economic and social deprivation ultimately stirred feelings of guilt and moral unease among several leaders of the Quraysh. This change of sentiment led

to their support for the annulment of the boycott, without fulfilling the Quraysh's initial condition of surrendering the Prophet (PBUH).

Notes & References

[1] Washington Irving, *Life of Mahomat (*Massachusetts: Jazzybee Verlag, 1850), 56-61; William Muir, *The Life of Mohammad* (Great Britain: John Grant, 1861), 93-105.

[2] Irving, *Life of Mahomat,* 56; Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, 93-4.

[3] Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (London: Islamic Text Society, 1983), 88-92. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad in Makkah* (Great Britain: Oxford, 1953), 120-122;. Montgomery Watt, *Prophet and Statesman*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961). 77-78.

[4] Shibli Nomani and Syed Sulaiman Nadvi*, Sīrat al-Nabī* (Lahore: Idārah Islāmiyat, 1994; originally published 1917), 166-7; Safiur Rehman Mubarakpuri, *Tajaliyāt-e-Nabovat (*Lahore: Rahman, 2002), 129.

[5] Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri, al-*Rahīq al-Makhtōm*, (Lahore: Al-Maktabat al-Salfīah, 2002), 158.

[6] Tariq Ramadan, *In The Footsteps of the Prophet***, (UK: Kube Publishing, 2011),** 66-67.

[7] Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad in Makkah* (Great Britain: Oxford, 1953), 120-122.

[8] Nisar Ahmed, "Shi'b Abī Ṭālib", in *Naqoosh* (Rasool Number), vol. 9, no. 130 (1984): 260-268.

[9] Khalid Masud, *Hayāt-i-Rasōl-i-Ummī* (Lahore: Dār al-Tazkīr, 2003), 195-199.

[10] Mohammad Mushtak Tijarwi, *Rasulullah Sallalahu Alaihi wa Sallam Shebe Abi Talib Mein* (Karachi: Kutub Khānah Sīrat, 2023), 23-156.

[11] Abd al-Rehmān al-Suhaīlī, *Al-Rawḍ al-Unf fi Sharḥ al-Sīrat-al-Nabwaiyyah li Ibn Hishām*, Edited by Abd al Rehmān Wakīl, vol. 3 (Dār al-Kutub al-Hadīthah, 1967), 282-287; 296-319.

[12] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah li Ibn Hishām*, Edited by Muṣṭafa Al-Saqqā, Ibrāhīm al-Abyarī and 'Abd al Ḥafīz Shalabī, vol. 1 and 2(Cairo: Shurkah' maktabah wa maṭba'a Muṣṭafa al-Babī al-Ḥalbī wa Awlādahu, 1955), 350.

[13] Ibn Hishām*, Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah*, 351.

[14] al-Ṭabarī, Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarīr, *Ta'rīkh al Rusul wa-'l Mulūk*, ed., M. J. de Goeje. Prima series III, (Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901), 1190.

[15] Details are mentioned in the next section.

[16] Ibn Hishām*, Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah*, 353.

[17] Ibn Hishām*, Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah*, 353-4.

[18] al-Ṭabarī, 1190.

[19] Ibn Hishām*, Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah*, 354-7.

[20] al-Tabari, 1192.

[21] Tabari, 1191.

[22] Ibn Hishām*, Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah*, 374-76.

[23] Al-Ṭabarī, I, 1197: Quotation taken from *The History of al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Rusul wa'l Mulūk: Muhammad at Mecca*, vol.vi, ed., Ehsan Yar-Shater, trans., W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. Mc Donald (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 112.

[24] 'Abd al Reḥmān bin Muḥammad bin Khaldūn, *Tarīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Mawsastah Jamāl Lil Ṭabā'at wa 'l Nashr, 1979), 9-10.

[25] Tijarwi has tried to make an assessment of the number of people besieged in the Shi'b and he has concluded it to be around 150. Mohammad Mushtak Tijarwi, *Rasulullah Sallalahu Alaihi wa Sallam Shebe Abi Talib Mein,* 66-73.

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[26] Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. *Tārikh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*: *Biographies of the Prophet's Companions and Their Successors*, trans., Landau-Tasseron, E. *vol. 39:* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 21.

[27] He was Muḥammad bin 'Abd al Raḥmān bin Nawfal bin al-Aswad from the tribe of Quraysh. He became an orphan in very young age and was brought up by 'Urwah bin Zubayr. 'Urwah bin Zubayr, *Maghāzī Rasōl Allah*, Edited and Researched by Muhammad Mustafa al-A'zami, urdu translation by Muhammad Saeed ur Rehman Alvi (Third Edition) (Lahore: Idārah Thaqāfat-i-Islāmīah, 2000), P. 64-5

[28] 'Urwah bin Zubayr, *Maghāzī Rasōl Allah*, 83-88.

[29] 'Urwah bin Zubayr, *Maghāzī Rasōl Allah*, 116-117.

[30] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā wa 'l Mub'ath wa 'l Maghāzī*, researched by Dr. Hamidullah (Lahore: Dār al-Nafīs, 2005),137.

[31] Al-Qasṭallanī, *Al-Mawāhib al-Ludīnyah bil minaḥ al Muḥammadiyah*, in *Sharḥ Al-Zarqānī*, ed., Muhammad Abd al Aziz al-Khalidi, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb al-'Ilmīah, 1996), 12-13.

[32] The event of 'Umārah ibn al-Walīd ibn al Mughīrah has been mentioned by many other sources including Ibn Hishām, however Ibn Hishām has not created its link with the incident of Shi 'b and has also not mentioned the rest of the event.

[33] Muḥammad bin Sa'd ,*Al-Ṭabaqāt-al-Kubrā*. Edited by Hamza al-Nasrtī, 'Abd al-Ḥafīẓ Farghalī and 'Abd al-Ḥamīd Mūṣṭafā. vol. 3 (Cairo: Al-Maktabah al-Qayyimah, n.d.), 283-4.

[34] 'Urwah bin Zubayr, *Maghāzī Rasōl Allah*, 117: Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*,137.

[35] Al-Qasṭallanī, *Al-Mawāhib al-Ludīnyah*, 13.

[36] Ibn Sa'd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt-al-Kubrā*, vol. 3, 291.

[37] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā* 139-140.

[38] Al-Zarqānī, *Sharh Al-Mawāhib al-Ludīnyah bil minaḥ al Muḥammadiyah*, ed., Muhammad Abd al Aziz al-Khalidi, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutb al-'Ilmīah, 1996), 14. Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri has also talked about the threats to the life of the Prophet PBUH and the gathering of the tribe of Banī Hāshim, Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib by Abū Ṭālib to protect the Prophet PBUH. He further mentions that the document was written in response to this support. Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri, al-*Rahīq al-Makhtōm*, 155-7.

[39] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 141.

[40] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 141

[41] 'Urwah bin Zubayr, *Maghāzī Rasōl Allah*, 117.

[42] Al-Zarqānī, *Sharh Al-Mawāhib al-Ludīnyah*, 14.

[43] Some of the scholars of history have mentioned that Ibn Hishām omitted some such details which appeared to be pro-shite. Ibn Hishām has omitted some anecdotes which present Alī as playing an important role in the early days of Islam. Montgomery Watt, "Translators Forward" in *The History of al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-Rusul wa'l Mulūk: Muhammad at Mecca*, vol.vi, xiii.

[44] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah*, 266-7.

[45] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah*, 298.

[46] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah*, 268, 279.

[47] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 139.

[48] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah*, 130-132.

[49] There are long passages of poetry referred to Abī Ṭālib in ibn-i-Ishaq. Many of these verses complain about the betrayal of Taym, Zahrah, Nawfal or men of Abd al Manaf and plead them for support. Ibn Hishām*, Al-Sīrat al-Nabwiyyah*, 268, 272-280.

[50] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 137.

[51] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 140.

[52] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 137.

[53] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 140; Ibn Saʻd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt-al-Kubrā*, 291.

[54] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 140.

[55] ʻUrwah bin Zubayr, *Maghāzī Rasōl Allah*, 116-117; Al-Zarqāni in his Sharḥ has mentioned a very different description which cannot be accepted wholly but probably explains the position of the majority of the Muslim supporters. According to him, it apparently seems that all the Muslims other than Banī Hāshim went to Habshah and they stayed there for 2-3 years. Al-Zarqānī, *Sharḥ Al-Mawāhib-al-Ludīnyah*, 14.

[56] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sirat-al-Nabwiyyah*, 263. Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 128.

[57] Ibn Hishām*, Al-Sirat-al-Nabwiyyah*, 50.

[58] Ibn Hishām*, Al-Sirat-al-Nabwiyyah,* 231.

[59] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*,145-6.

[60] Ibn Saʻd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 1, 69-70. That is why some of the Quraysh who settled in this lower valley were called as *Quraysh-i-Ibṭaḥ* and those who remained in the upper part were called as *Quraysh Ẓawahir*.

[61] Safiur Rahman Mubarakpuri, al-*Rahīq al-Makhtōm*, 50.

[62] Ibn Yāqūt, *Muʻjam-al-Buldān*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār Sādir, 1977), p. 347

[63] Al-Zarqānī, *Sharḥ Al-Mawāhib-al-Ludīnyah*,13.

[64] Ibn Saʻd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubra*, vol. 3, 291.

[65] There are examples of people moving outside the Shiʻb. For instance it was the duty of Alī to go out from Shiʻb early in the morning to travel towards the borders of Makkah in search of food. Sometimes, he comes back with a few dates and wheat but in some days he comes back empty-handed. Talib Hussain Karpalvi, *Sīrat al-Nabī* (Lahore: Islāmīa wa-tabalīgh, 1993), 142-143.

[66] Ibn Saʻd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, vol. 3, 291.

[67] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 140.

[68] ʻUrwah bin Zubayr, *Maghāzī Rasōl Allah*, 117.

[69] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 140.

[70] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 142.

[71] Ibn Saʻd, *Al-Ṭabaqāt-al-Kubrā*, vol. 3, 293.

[72] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 143.

[73] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 142-3.

[74] Ibn Isḥāq, *Sīrat Ibn Isḥāq*: *Kitāb al-Mubtadā*, 146-7.

[75] ʻUrwah bin Zubayr, *Maghāzī Rasōl Allah*, 120-1.