

Compilation of Imam Ali's Words and the Classification of Nahj al-Balaghah

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Compilation of Imam Ali's Words and the Classification of Nahj al-Balaghah

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The article discusses the different types of classifications & the methodology employed in doing it.

Compilation of Imam 'Ali's Words

Ever since the early years of Islam, the eloquent wordings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.), especially his unparalleled sermons, have attracted the attention of the literati as well as the common man. Those familiar with the intricate beauties of the Arabic language, had collected or compiled these precious bezels of wisdom, starting from the lifetime of the Commander of the Faithful. As the historian Abu al-Hasan Mas'udi (d. 346 AH) says:

"What the people had memorised or preserved of (the sayings of) Imam 'Ali (A.S.) and according to which they acted in word and deed, were 400 sermons as well as 80 – odd sermons which had delivered extempore."[1](#)

According to the bibliographical works, centuries before Sayyid Razi compiled his magnum opus Nahj al-Balaghah, several scholars had collected in book-form the sayings and judgements of Imam Ali (A.S.). The list is long and is out of scope of this article. However, it would suffice to mention the names of some of the prominent persons whose collections were well known before Razi took up the task:

1. 'Ubaydullah bin Abi Rafi': Shaykh Tusi has stated in al-Fihrist. "'Ubaydullah bin Abi Rafi' is the author of the book Qazaya Amir al-Mu'minin."[2](#)
2. Zayd bin Wahab Juhani: Shaykh Tusi in al-Fihrist states: "Zayd bin Wahab is the author a book on the sermons of Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.), titled Khutab Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.) 'ala al-Manabir fi al-Jumu'ah wa al-A'yad wa Ghayriha."[3](#)
3. Muhammad bin Qays Bajalli: According to Shaykh Tusi, he is the author of the book Qazaya Amir al-Mu'minin ('a).[4](#)

4. Asbagh bin Nubatah: Shaykh has written in al-Fihrist: "Asbagh ibn Nubatah was one of the close companions of Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.) who survived the Imam and has narrated the epistle which was written to Malik al-Ashtar on being appointed the governor of Egypt. He is also the narrator of the Imam's long wasiyyah (will) to his son Muhammad ibn al-Hanafiyyah."[5](#)

5. Isma'il bin Mihran: Shaykh Tusi says about him: "He was a companion of Imam Reza (A.S.) and has narrated from him. He is the author of several books including the one titled Kitab Khutab Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.)."[6](#)

6. Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bin Hashim al-Qummi: Shaykh Tusi says about him: "He was a companion of Imam Reza (A.S.), and of the books which he wrote mention could be made of al-Nawadir and Kitab Qazaya Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.)."[7](#)

7. Salih bin Abi Hammad Razi: al-Najashi in his Rijal states: "He was a companion of Imam Hadi ('a) and is the author of several books including Kitab Khutab Amir al-Mu 'minin ('a)."[8](#)

8. Hisham Kalbi (d. 206): al-Najashi says about him: "He is the author of several books including Kitab Khutab Amir al- Muminin ('a)."[9](#)

Ibn Nadim also confirms this in his al-Fihrist that Hisham al- Kalbi was the compiler of the sermons of Amir al-Mu'minin ('a).[10](#)

9. Ibrahim bin Nahmi: Shaykh Tusi and al-Najashi say that he was the author of several books including Kitab al-Khutab.[11](#)

10. Abu al-Hasan 'Ali bin Muhammad al-Mada'ini al- Akhbari: Khawansari says that he was the author of as many as 200 books of had'ith and history including Kitab Khutab Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.). [12](#)

11. 'Abd al-' Aziz Jalludi: al-Najashi says in al-Rijal-. He is the author of several books. As related by scholars among his books (on the wordings of Imam 'Ali) are Musnad Amir al- Mu'minin, Kitab al-Khutab (sermons), Kitab al-Shi'r (poems), Kitab al-Qaza' (judgements), al-Rasa'il (letters), Maw'azah(maxims) and Du 'a ' (supplications).[13](#)

12. 'Abd al-'Azim al-Hasani: His tomb in Rayy is a site of pilgrimage revered as Shah 'Abd al-'Azim, and according to al- Najashi he compiled the book titled Kitab Khutab Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.). [14](#)

13. Ibrahim Thaqafi (d. 283): According to al-Najashi he wrote several books including books on the Rasa 'il, Akhbar and Khutab of Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.).[15](#)

14. Muhammad bin Khalid al-Barqi: According to al-Najashi he wrote several books including Kitab al-Khutab.[16](#)

15. Muhammad bin Ahmad Kufi Sabuni: According to al- Najashi he is the author of several books

including Kitab al-Khutab.^{'17}

16. Muhammad bin Isa Ash'ari: He was a companion of Imam Reza and Imam Jawad (A.S.) and has related hadith from them. He is the author of Kitab al-Khutab.^{'18}

17. Jahiz (d. 255): He has collected 100 of the short sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.) under the title "Matlub Kull Talib min Kalam Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali bin Abi Talib". He says in the introduction to his work: "Every single word (of Imam 'Ali) is equal to 1000 words of wisdom expressed by the Arabs." Ibn Maytham Bahrani Rashid al-Din Watwat and "Abd al-Wahhab have written three famous commentaries on this collection."¹⁹

Furthermore, 'Allamah Tehrani in al-Dhan'ah has listed a great number of the books titled 'Usul' which contained the sermons of Imam 'Ali (A.S.).²⁰

Nahj al-Balaghah was a high water mark in this regard and created a lively trend in the writing of commentaries on the sayings of the Commander of Faithful. But Razi, as he says in his introduction to Nahj al-Balaghah, had not collected all that was said by Imam 'Ali (A.S.), since it was difficult for him to have access to all that was related from Amir al-Mu'minin (A.S.). Thus, scholars who came after Razi, continued this trend of collecting and selecting the sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.). Among them mention could be made of the following authors and their works:

1. 'Abd al-Wahed bin Muhammad Tamimi Amudi (d. 510). He compiled the book Ghurar al-Hikam wa Durar al-Kalim in which he has collected 11,050 of short sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.), compared to 480 selected by Razi.

2. Abu 'Abdullah Qaza'i (d. 454): He has collected the sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.) spread over nine chapters in his book titled: Ma 'alim al-Hukama ' wa Mathurah Makarim al-Shiyam.²¹

3. Shaykh al-Tabrisi (d. 548): He has arranged the sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.) in alphabetical order in his book Kitab Nathr al- Lial'i.²²

4. Ibn Abi al-Hadid Mu'tazili (d: 655): In his voluminous commentary on Nahj al-Balaghah, he has selected 1,000 sayings of Imam 'Ali (A.S.) that were not mentioned by Sayyid Razi.²³

Classification of Nahj al-Balaghah

Nahj al-Balaghah is a vast and deep ocean of knowledge that cannot be fathomed easily. Although scholars and researchers have tried to delve into this ocean of wonder, they have not yet succeeded in fully locating or comprehending the pearls of knowledge that the words of Imam 'Ali contain. The topics or subjects of this immensely rich book are so broad and varied that they cannot be easily enumerated. Thus, those who have focused their research on Nahj al-Balaghah, have endeavoured to identify the subjects of this book to their best ability²⁴, yet it could be said that they have succeeded fully in their

efforts. Some of the prominent efforts made in this field are as follows:

A. Martyr Murtaza Mutahhari says in his valuable book "Sayri dar Nahj al-Balaghah", that there are quite many subjects and topics in this book which could be broadly defined as follows:[25](#)

1. Theology and the Supernatural / Ilahiyyat wa Mawara ' al-Tabi'ah
2. Manners and Worship / Suluk wa Ibadat
3. Government and Justice / Hakumat wa Idalat
4. World and worldliness / Dunya wa Dunya-Parasti
5. Epic and Bravery / Hamasah wa Shaja'at
6. Poetical Saga and Mysteries / Malahim wa Maghibat
7. Supplications /Du'a wa Munajat
8. Criticism of People's Behaviour
9. Social Principles
10. Islam and Qur'an
11. Ethics and Self-Reform
12. Personalities

B. The Syrian Researcher, Labib Bayzun in his book, Tasnif Nahj al-Balaghah has presented a more precise categorization in this regard. Actually he has categorized the contents of Nahj al- Balaghah under nine general definitions, each of which consists of several subjects –49 in all– and each subject is made up of numerous specific topics numbering 376. His definitions are as follows:

1. Fundamentals of Religion / Usul al-Din
2. Practical Laws of Religion / Furu ' al-Din
3. Leadership and Leaders / al-Imamah wa al-Aimmah
4. Lifestyle of Imam 'Ali ('a) / Sirah al-Imam
5. Wars of the Imam during his caliphate / Hurub al-Imam
6. State Policy / Siyasah al-Dawlah

7. Social Affairs / al-Shu'un al-Ijtima'iyah

8. Man and Personal Affairs / al-Insan wa Shu'unuh

9. Maxims and Advices / al-Mawa'iz wa al-Irshadat²⁶

C. In the book al-Dalil 'ala al-Mawzu 'at Nahj al-Balagha²⁷ Nahj al-Balaghah has been categorized into 7 broad definitions and 132 specific subjects. The definitions are as follows:

1. Divinity and Universe / al-Ilahiyyat wa al-Ka'inat

2. Prophethood / al-Nabuwwah

3. Fundamentals of Religion and Practical Laws / al-'Aqa'id wa al-Ahkam

4. Leadership and Government / al-Imamah wa al-Khilafah

5. History / al-Tarikh

6. Society, Politics and Economy / al-Ijtima' wa al-Siyasah wa al-Iqtisad

7. Ethics / al-Akhlaq

D. Uways 'Abd al-Karim Muhammad in his book al-Mu'jam al-Mawzu'i li Nahj al-Balaghah is critical of the methods used by earlier scholars to classify Nahj al-Balaghah. He has pointed out the deficiency in their approach and has categorized Nahj al-Balaghah into 22 sections, each of which contains a number of subjects, which in turn cover many topics. He has listed 604 topics in all.²⁸ The 22 sections in which he has divided the book are as follows:

1. Wisdom and Knowledge / al-Aql wa al-Ilm

2. Islam, Faith, Certainty, Disbelief, Polytheism and Doubt / al-islam wa al-Iman -wa al-Yaqin wa al-Kufr wa al-Shirk wa al-Shakk.

3. The Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah / al-Qur'an wa Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah

4. Fundamentals of Religion / Usul al-Din

5. Worship, /al- Ibadat

6. Piety and the Pious / al-Taqwa wa al-Muttaqin

7. Fear and Hope /al-Khawf wa al-Raja '

8. Repentance, Forgiveness of Sins / al-Tawbah wa Ghufraan al-Dhunub

9. Supplications / al-Du'a wa al-Ad'iyah al-Ma'thurah 'anh
10. Asceticism / al-Zuhd
11. Advices and Moral Lessons /al-Maw'izah wa al-I'tibar
12. Enjoining of Good and Forbidding of Evil / al-Amr Bi al- Ma'rufa al-Nahy 'an al-Munkar
13. Jihad, Battle Technique and Martyrdom / al-Jihad wa Fann al-Harb wa al-Shahadah
14. Islamic Ruler and his Qualities / al-Hakim al-Islami wa Khasa'isuh
15. Economic issues in Nahj al-Balaghah / al-Janib al- Iqtisadi fi al-Nahj al-Balaghah
16. The Greater Jihad or Self-Reform / Jihad al-Akbar aw Tahdhib al-Nafs
17. Ethics / al-Akhlaq
18. Family, Kinsfolk, Spouse, Educating Children and Neighbours / al-Usrah wa al-Aqraba' wa al-Mar'ah wa Tarbiyah al-Abna ' wa al-Jar
19. Friendship and Friends / Al-Sidaqah wa al-Asdiqa '
- 20 Historical Issues / al-Qazaya al-Tarikhiyyah
21. Judgement and Verdict/ al-Qaza ' wa al-Ifta '
22. Miscellaneous Issues / Mawazi ' Mutafarraqa

In addition to the above mentioned scholars and their definitions of the subjects found in Nahj al-Balaghah, several other researchers have listed their own categorization of the jewels of knowledge that this great book contains. Following are names of some of these works and their authors:

1. Faharis (Indices) Nahj al-Balaghah, Subhi Salih^{[29](#)}
2. Al-Had'i ila Mawzu 'at Nahj al-Balaghah, 'Ali Meshkini^{[30](#)}
3. Farhang-e Aftab, 'Abd al-Majid Mu'adikhawah"^{[31](#)}
4. Qamus Nahj al-Balaghah, Muhammad 'Ali Sharqi"^{[32](#)}

It is worth noting that in addition to the above-mentioned books and their authors, several researchers have written works on specific topics of Nahj al-Balaghah.^{[33](#)} The names of some of these books are mentioned below:

1. Hikmat Nazari wa 'Amali dar Nahj al-Balaghah by 'Abdullah Jawadi Amuli;^{[34](#)}

2. *Insan Kamil dar Nahj al-Balaghah* by Hasan Hasanzadeh Amuli;[35](#)
3. *Ilahiyyat dar Nahj al-Balaghah* by Lutfullah Safi;[36](#)
4. *Dunya dar Nahj al-Balaghah* by Sayyid Mahdi Shams al-Din;"[37](#)
5. *Jahiliyyat az Didgah Qur'an wa Nahj al-Balaghah* by Ahmad Sadiqi Ardestani;[38](#)
6. *Jihad az Didgah Imam 'Ali dar Nahj al-Balaghah* by 'Abbas 'Ali 'Amid Zanjani;[39](#)
7. *Khawarij az Didgah Nahj al-Balaghah* by Husayn Nuri;[40](#)
8. *Jami'ah az Didgah Nahj al-Balaghah* by Waliyyullah Barzegar;[41](#)
9. *Hukumat-i Islami dar Nahj al-Balaghah*, produced by a team work.[42](#)

[1.](#) Mas'udi, *Muruj al-Dhahab*, vol. 2, p. 19.

[2.](#) Tusi, Muhammad bin al-Hasan, *al-Fihrist*, p. 107, No. 456.

[3.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 72, No. 291; *al-Najashi, al-Rijal*, p. 236.

[4.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 131, No. 579.

[5.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 37.

[6.](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 11 & 32.

[7.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 4, No. 3.

[8.](#) *Al-Najashi, al-Rijal*, p. 140.

[9.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 306.

[10.](#) Ibn Nadim, *al-Fihrist*, p. 108.

[11.](#) Tusi, p. 6, No. 8; *al-Najashi, al-Rijal*, p. 14.

[12.](#) Khawansari, Muhammad Baqir Musawi, *Jannat*, vol. 5, p. 199.

[13.](#) *Al-Najashi, al-Rijal*, pp. 167–168.

[14.](#) 'Allamah Hilli, *al-Rijal*, p. 130.

[15.](#) *Al-Najashi, al-Rijal*, pp. 13–14.

[16.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 236.

[17.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 265.

[18.](#) *Ibid.*, p. 239.

[19.](#) This collection was researched and edited by Muhadith Urmawi and published by Tehran University, 1390 AH.

[20.](#) Tehrani, Aqa Buzurg, *al-Dhari'ah*, vol. 7, p. 187, vol. 14, pp. 111–112.

[21.](#) This is an offset version by Maktabah al-Mufid of the original edition published in Egypt.

[22.](#) *Al-Dhari'ah*, vol. 24. P. 53.

[23.](#) Ibn Abi al-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah*, vol. 4, pp.530–573.

[24.](#) The Introduction written by Sayyid Razi to *Nahj al-Balaghah*.

[25.](#) Mutahhari, Murtaza, *Sayri dar Nahj al-Balaghah*, pp. 30–31.

[26.](#) Labib Bayzun, *Tasnif Nahj al-Balaghah*, pp. 9–26.

[27.](#) Ansariyan, 'Ali, *al-Dalil 'ala al-Mauzu'at Nahj al-Balaghah*, pp. 9–15.

[28.](#) *Al-Mu'jam al-Mawzu'i li Nahj al-Balaghah*, pp. 464–500.

[29.](#) Lebanese researcher Subhi Salih has provided a list of indices at the end of *Nahj al-Balaghah* and arranged in alphabetical order the subjects he has derived from the book. Under each subject he has referred to the relevant text in *Nahj al-Balaghah*. There is also a subject-wise list of sermons and letters, while a third list classifies such subjects as matters related to faith, Shari'ah laws, philosophy, theology and social Issues.

- [30.](#) The author has arranged the topics in Nahj al-Balaghah in alphabetical order, and under each topic, he has presented the relevant text from the book.
- [31.](#) This is a 10-volume work is a lexicon in alphabetical order on the concepts mentioned in Nahj al-Balaghah. Under each entry, the relevant text from Nahj al-Balaghah together along its Persian translation has been given.
- [32.](#) Although, this 4-volume book deals with definitions and interpretations of the words of Nahj al-Balaghah, it could also be called a subject-wise classification, since under each phrase, the relevant text is given.
- [33.](#) There are other classifications, which are under process and have not yet been completed. Refer to "What do we know about Islam?" Nahj al-Balaghah, pp. 105-108 & pp. 111-114.
- [34.](#) Jawadi Amuli, 'Abdullah, Hikmat Nazari wa 'Amali dar Nahj al-Balaghah, Qum, Daftar-i Intisharat Islami, 1362 S, 168 pages.
- [35.](#) Hasanzadah Amuli, Hasan, Insan Kamil dar Nahj al-Balaghah, 3rd edition, Nashr-i Roshangar, 1365 S, p. 176 pages. This book has been translated into Arabic by 'Abd al-Razzaq Iftikhari under the title "al-Insan al-Kamil fi Nahj ul-Bulaghah", and published by Mu'assasah al-Ma-arifal-Islamiyyah. 1416 AH, 229 pages.
- [36.](#) Safi Gulpayegani, Lutfullah, Ilahiyyat dar Nah al-Balaghah, first edition, Bonyad-i Nahj al-Balaghah. 1361 S, 343 pages.
- [37.](#) Shams al-Din, Mahdi, Dunya dar Nahj al-Balaghah, first edition. Ministry of Islamic Culture & Guidance, Tehran, 1365 S, 147 pages.
- [38.](#) Sadiqi Ardestani, Ahmad, Jahiliyyat az Didgah-i Qur'an wa Nahj al-Balaghah, Nashr-i Muhammad. Qum, 1362 S, 112 pages.
- [39.](#) 'Amid Zanjani, 'Abbas 'Ali, Jihad az Didgah-i Imam Ali dar Nahj al-Balaghah, 5th edition, Ministry of Islamic Culture & Guidance, Tehran, 1366 S, 174 pages.
- [40.](#) Nuri, Husayn, Khawarij az Didgah-i Nahj al-Balaghah, Daftar-i Intisharat-i Islami, Qum, 1361 S, 175 pages.
- [41.](#) Barzegar, Waliyyullah, Jami'ah az Didgah Nahj al-Balaghah, Sazman-i Tablighat-i Islami, Tehran, 1372 S, 447 pages.
- [42.](#) Hukumat-i Islami dar Nahj al-Balaghah, by a group of researchers, Bonyad Nahj al-Balaghah, Tehran, 1368 S, 216 pages.

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