

The Scope of the Evil Eye's Effect from the Perspective of Shia and Sunni Traditions

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Abstract

Belief in the evil eye is one of the oldest and most common beliefs in the world. This belief also has many adherents among Muslims. Traditions related to this belief are among the most important factors in its spread, but one of the challenges of this issue is the scope of the evil eye's effect. Some have considered the evil eye to be highly effective, making it necessary to be constantly wary of it, while others, despite believing in it, consider the probability of affliction to be low and practically pay no attention to it in their daily lives. The present study, employing a descriptive-analytical method and utilizing library resources, seeks to examine this issue from the perspective of Shia and Sunni traditions. All Shia traditions concerning the broad scope of the evil eye's effect have entered from Sunni sources. Nine traditions have been reported in Sunni sources that indicate an extensive scope of the evil eye's influence. Among these, only the tradition of Ibn 'Abbās, which considers the evil eye to be beyond divine decree (qadar), has been transmitted with a chain that is considered authentic by Sunni standards; although it is unclear whether Ibn 'Abbās heard this tradition directly from the Prophet (pbuh) or through an intermediary. All traditions that introduce the evil eye as the most important cause of death and the main cause of failures and disappointments are weak and unreliable, and there is a possibility that they were influenced by the culture of the time.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Belief in the evil eye is one of the oldest and most widespread human beliefs, which has found a special place in Islamic culture and civilization and has permeated literature, art, and popular customs. Despite the widespread acceptance of this phenomenon among Muslims, one of the fundamental challenges is its scope and extent of influence. Is the evil eye a rare phenomenon with minor harms, or is it a pervasive and determining factor in human destiny? This question is important because the answer determines the practical approach of Muslims toward this belief. Some traditions have introduced the evil eye as the most important cause of death, failures, and even as a force that can override divine destiny and decree, causing

constant anxiety and distress in society. The present study, with a critical approach and relying on the precise authentication of Shia and Sunni traditions, seeks to answer this fundamental question: What is the actual scope of the evil eye's effect based on authentic hadith texts, and whether the traditions that expand its scope possess sufficient credibility or are influenced by the culture of the time and previous beliefs.

Materials and Methods

This research was conducted using a descriptive-analytical method and library resources. The statistical population of the study included all traditions related to the scope of the evil eye's effect in Shia and Sunni hadith sources. Data collection was carried out through systematic searches in software and hadith books of both schools. After identifying the relevant traditions, all chains of transmission and Isnad of each tradition were extracted and authenticated based on authoritative biographical evaluation (rijal) sources of both schools. Additionally, the content of the traditions was compared and analyzed with each other, with other relevant traditions, and with rational principles and the Holy Qur'an. In the analysis phase, the traditions were categorized into three general groups: 1) Traditions indicating the evil eye's precedence over divine decree, 2) Traditions indicating the evil eye as the main cause of death, 3) Traditions indicating the evil eye as the rights of failures and disappointments. Finally, the extent of the traditions' influence from the culture of the time (pre-Islamic Arabs and Jewish beliefs) was also examined.

Results and Findings

The research findings show that all Shia traditions concerning the extensive scope of the evil eye's effect have entered from Sunni sources and have no precedent in the original and fundamental Shia sources. These traditions have mainly found their way into Shia hadith culture through later texts such as Makārim al-Akhlaq and Biḥār al-Anwār.

The traditions can be categorized into three general groups:

The First Group (the evil eye's precedence over divine decree): Three traditions from Ibn 'Abbās, Asmā' bint 'Umays, and Abū Hurayrah have been reported. Among all the chains, only the tradition of Ibn 'Abbās (through Wahīb ibn Khālīd → Ibn Tāwūs → his father → Ibn 'Abbās) is considered authentic based on Sunni rijāl principles; although Ibn 'Abbās was a child at the time of the Prophet's (pbuh) death, and it is probable that he heard the tradition through an intermediary. All seven chains of Asmā' bint 'Umays's tradition (from narrators such as 'Ubayd ibn Rifā'ah, Muhammad ibn Ishāq, Abū Ishāq al-Sabī'ī, 'Ubaydullāh ibn Abī Ziyād, Ibn Jurayj, 'Abdullāh ibn al-Mu'ammal, and 'Atā' ibn Abī Rabāh) are weak and unreliable in terms of chain of transmission. Issues such as the narrator's anonymity ('Ubayd ibn Rifā'ah), tadlīs (concealment of sources) (Abū al-Zubayr, Ibn Jurayj), confusion and poor memory (Abū Ishāq al-Sabī'ī), rijāl weakening ('Ubaydullāh ibn Abī Ziyād, Muhammad ibn Ishāq, 'Abdullāh ibn al-Mu'ammal), and disconnection of the chain

('Atā' who was only a child and had not seen Asmā') are observed in these chains. The tradition of Abū Hurayrah is also not reliable due to the weakness of 'Ubaydullāh ibn Abī Ziyād.

The Second Group (the evil eye as the main cause of death): Five traditions were examined. All of these traditions are weak in terms of chain. Narrators such as 'Alī ibn Abī 'Alī al-Ḥāshimī (fabricator and abandoned), Shu'ayb ibn Ayyūb (disputed and with a solitary tradition), 'Alī ibn 'Urwah al-Dimashqī (fabricator), Muhammad ibn Maymūn al-Makkī (weak and negligent), 'Uthmān ibn 'Īsā and Husayn ibn al-Mukhtār (from the Wāqifah sect) are present in the chains of these traditions. Also, Tālib ibn Hubayb, who is the sole narrator of the tradition "most deaths," has been weakened by Bukhārī and 'Uqaylī. From a content perspective, these traditions contradict other traditions that consider sins or diseases such as plague and digestive problems as the main cause of death, and they are incompatible with reason and sensory observations.

The Third Group (the evil eye as the rights of failures and disappointments): Two traditions from Ibn 'Abbās (with the expression "tastanzil al-ḥāliq" – it brings down the mountain peak) and Abū Dharr have been reported, both of which have been transmitted through weak chains. In the chain of Ibn 'Abbās's tradition, the narrator "Duwayd" is unknown and weak, and in the chain of Abū Dharr's tradition, "Mihjan" is unidentified.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this research, out of the total of ten traditions reported about the extensive scope of the evil eye's effect, only one tradition (the tradition of Ibn 'Abbās about the evil eye's precedence over divine decree) is considered authentic based on Sunni principles, which itself indicates hyperbole in emphasizing the importance of the issue and does not imply actual precedence over divine decree. All other traditions that have introduced the evil eye as the main cause of death, half of deaths, one-third of deaths, or the rights of the collapse of mountains lack Isna credibility, and there is a possibility that they were influenced by Jewish beliefs and the culture of pre-Islamic ignorance (Jāhiliyyah). Therefore, the widespread attribution of failures, deaths, and disappointments to the evil eye has no valid narrative basis, and such a perspective not only causes mistrust of others and neglect of the real diagnosis of problems but also contradicts Qur'anic teachings that attribute the decline of blessings to sin, ingratitude, and oppression.

Keywords: Evil Eye; Scope of Effect; Sunni Hadiths; Shia Hadiths; Authentication