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“The Concept of Authority in Muslim Societies:
Political, Religious, Social and Literary”

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ABSTRACT

“Classical *Shari'ah* and its Applicability in Modern Times”

By: Liyakat Takim, Ph.D.
(McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada)

I propose to examine the *Shi'i* concept of authority during the absence of the twelfth Imam in shaping and molding leadership and other related institutional structures in contemporary times. The authority of scholars has been grounded on their acclaimed role as the inheritors of the religious traditions that connected the prophetic times to their own. These traditions referred primarily to the scholars' understanding and interpretation of the religious sciences, especially the Qur'an, *Hadith*, law, and theology. This paper will examine the various genres of authoritative models that have been posited by *Shi'i* jurists in contemporary times. These models range from *wilayat al-faqih* (the comprehensive authority of the jurist) to those who proffer alternative models of religious authority. The paper will then go on to examine how these genres of authority have impacted *Shi'i* Muslims in the West. In particular, it will examine how the principle of *taqlid*, (the requirement to follow the well-defined and structured religious leadership of the *maraji'*, the religious authority which is located in the Middle East), is used to generate loyalty and obedience of their followers in the West and show how the scholars have wielded their authority in impacting the lives of *Shi'is* living in the West.