

Red Shi'ism: The Religion of Martyrdom

Black Shi'ism: The Religion of Mourning

By: **Dr. Ali Shariati**

Islam is a religion which made its appearance in the history of mankind with the cry of "No!" from Mohammad (PBUH), the heir of Abraham, the manifestation of the religion of the Unity of God and the oneness of mankind; a "No" which begins with the cry of "Unity", a cry which Islam reiterated when confronted with aristocracy and compromise.

Shi'ism is the Islam which differentiates itself and selects its direction in the history of Islam with the "No" of the great Ali, the heir of Mohammad and the manifestation of the Islam of Justice and Truth, a "No" which he gives to the Council for the Election of the Caliph, in answer to Abdul Rahman, who was the manifestation of Islamic aristocracy and compromise. This "No", up until pre-Safavid times, is recognized as part of the Shi'ite movement in the history of Islam, an indication of the social and political role of a group who are the followers of Ali, known for their association with the kindness of the family of the Prophet. It is a movement based upon the Quran and the Traditions; not the Quran and the traditions as proclaimed by the dynasties of the Omayyids, Abbasids, Ghaznavids, Seljuks, Mongols and Timurids, but the ones proclaimed by the family of Mohammad.

The history of Islam follows a strange path; a path in which gangsters and ruffians from the Arab, Persian, Turk, Tartar and Mongol dynasties all enjoyed the right to the leadership of the Muslim community and to the caliphate of the Prophet of Islam, to the exclusion of the family of the Prophet and the rightful Imams of Islam. And Shi'ism begins with a "No"; a "No" which opposes the path chosen by history, and rebels against history. It rebels against a history which, in the name of the Quran, Kings and Caesars, follows the path of ignorance, and in the name of tradition, sacrifices those brought up in the house of the Quran and the Traditions!

Shi'ites do not accept the path chosen by history. They deny the leaders who ruled the muslims throughout history and deceived the majority of the people through their succession to the Prophet, and then by their supposed support of Islam and fight against paganism. Shi'ites turn their backs on the opulent mosques and magnificent palaces of the Caliphs of Islam and turn to the lonely, mud house of Fatima. Shi'ites, who represent the oppressed, justice-seeking class in the Caliphate system, find in this house whatever and whoever they have been seeking:-

Fatima:

the heir of the Prophet, the manifestation of the "rights of the oppressed" and, at the same time, the symbol of the first objection, a strong and clear embodiment of the "seeking of justice". In the ruling system, these are the cries and slogans of subject nations and oppressed classes.

Ali:

the manifestation of a justice which serves the oppressed, a sublime embodiment of the Truth who is sacrificed on the altar of inhuman regimes, and which lies hidden in the layers of the formal religion of the rulers.

Hassan:

the manifestation of the last resistance of the garrison of "Imamate Islam", who confronts the first garrison of "Islamic Rule".

Hossein:

bears witness to those who have been martyred by the oppressors throughout history, heir of all the leaders fighting for freedom and equality and the seekers of justice, from Adam to himself, forever the messenger of martyrdom, the manifestation of bloody revolution.

Zeinab:

bears witness to all of the defenceless prisoners in the system of executioners, and is the messenger left after martyrdom, and the manifestation of the message of revolution.

Shi'ites take their slogans from the embodiment of the tribulations and hopes of the masses of the oppressed. Aware of the rulers, and in rebellion against them, they cry out:-

"Seek the leadership of Ali and flee from the leadership of cruelty. Choose Imamate, and stamp 'cancelled,' 'disbelief' and 'dispossession' upon the forehead of the Caliphate.

Choose justice, and overthrow the system of paradox and discrimination in ownership.

Choose the principle of being ready to protest against the existing conditions, where the ruling government, religious leaders and aristocracy try to show that everything is in accordance with the Will of God, the Divine Law and the satisfaction of God and his creatures. Such things, to the ruling government, included their conquests, their plundering of mosques, associations, schools, gifts, trusts, and charities and the observance of religious ceremonies and practices.

Choose religious leadership for the central organization of the movement.

Choose the concept of imitation of your betters so as to properly organize your energies and bring order, discipline and direction.

Choose the vice regency of the Imam so as to have a responsible leader.

Give a share of the funds to provide for the socio-political struggle, for educational foundations and for teaching, in a system where all religious funds are forcibly collected by the government acting as a government of the Law.

Choose mourning, to continue the constant historical struggle of the Shi'ites against usurpers, treachery, cruelty, and the sources of fraud, lying and degeneration, and especially to keep alive the memories of the martyrs.

Remember Ashura, to humiliate the ruling group who call themselves the inheritors of the traditions of the Prophet, for the remembrance of it will prove that they are the inheritors of the killers and murderers of the Prophet's family. It will show you a path of action, and provide an answer to the recurring question "What should be done?". It will help you to decide on the best agenda for the struggle against the rule of tyranny. It will avoid allegiance to cruelty. It will provide a pattern for the unbroken continuity of history. It will declare an unending struggle between the inheritors of Adam and the inheritors of the devil. Ashura reminds us of the teaching of the eternal fact that the present version of Islam (in 1972), is a criminal Islam in the dress of tradition, and that the real Islam is the hidden Islam, hidden in the red cloak of martyrdom.

And finally, concealment; creating a clever camouflage for the organization, and its activities, affiliations, leadership, personalities and plans, to protect the leadership, people and groups from being harassed by the rulers of the day and from the hard-heartedness of the religious organisation associated with them, who might either slander the Shi'ite movement through excommunication and rouse the ignorant masses against them, or destroy it through persecutions, or weaken it through wholesale murders, imprisonment and deportations, and thus to create the best conditions for the struggle and its continuation; to practice, carefully, the principle of secrecy, and maintain the distinctive conditions of an underground movement."

We can see that for over eight centuries (until the Safavid era), Alavite Shi'ism was more than just a revolutionary movement in history which opposed all the autocratic and class-conscious regimes of the Omayyid and Abbasid caliphates and the kingships of the Ghaznavids, the Seljuks, the Mongols, the Timurids and the two Khanids, who had made the government version of the Sunni School their official religion, and it waged a secret struggle of ideas and action. Like a revolutionary party, Shi'ism had a well-organized, informed, deep-rooted and well-defined ideology, with clear-cut and definite slogans and a disciplined and well-groomed organization. It led the deprived and oppressed masses in their movements for freedom and for seeking justice. It is considered to have been the rallying-point for the demands, distress, and rebellions of the intellectuals seeking to gain their rights, and for the masses in search of justice.

Because of this, throughout history, as the power of the rulers grew, the difficulties, injustice, dispossessions, and the denial of the rights of the people, and the exploitation of the farmers, increased. Inequality became more pronounced because of the system of aristocracy, class-inequalities, brain-washing, ideological prejudices, the connection between the theologians and the temporal rulers, the poverty and privation of the masses, and the power and wealth of the rulers. When this occurred, the Shi'ite front became stronger, the basic slogans of the movement more powerful, and the struggle of the Shi'ites more intense and more important. It changed from a School of thought, a way of study and religious sectarianism reserved for the intellectuals and the chosen few, to a way of correctly understanding Islam and the culture of the people of the house of the Prophet, when confronted by Greek philosophy and oriental Sufism, to a deep-rooted and revolutionary, socio-political movement of the masses, especially the rural masses. It caused greater fear among the autocratic rulers and the hypocritical religious bodies who rule the people in the name of the Sunni sect.

It is for this reason that the pseudo-intellectual and free-thinking rulers, at whose courts the Jews, Christians, Magians and even the materialists enjoy freedom, honour and influence, talk of the Shi'ites with such anger and vexation that a massacre of all of them would not quench the thirst of these rulers. They flay them alive, pass iron rods through their eyes, pull out their tongues and burn them alive. These are all current practices of the day. It reaches the point that the historians, theologians and even philosophers and men of piety of the court considered it to be part of their prayers to invent any false accusations, forgeries and falsified records that they could against the Shi'ites! It is in such circumstances that Sultan Mahmoud of Ghazni declares "I search the world over for a Shi'ite". It is his government which sponsors the Sunni theological decree that marriage of a Muslim man with "people of the Book" i.e. Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians, is legal, but it is illegal to marry a Shi'ite woman.

With the coming to power of the Seljuks, prejudices and bias become stronger against the world of thought and religion. From the social point of view, the feudal and guardianship system accentuates the degree of the exploitation of the masses, especially the farmers, to an unbearable degree. In order to maintain the policies of the state, floggings and torture are necessary, resulting in the construction of many piles of skulls and eyes.

The religious body of the Sunni sect, which had from the beginning become 'the government's Islam', becomes a conglomeration of the most debased and prejudiced beliefs and harsh rules. It turns into a tool for the justification of the inhuman ways of the rulers. It compromises with the autocratic regimes of the Ghaznavid and Seljuk Turks and the Mongols. It becomes an opiate for the masses, and an instrument for murder to be used to prevent any thought or action that jeopardizes the interests of the strong and harms the landlords and feudal chiefs.

This is what causes Shi'ism, during this period, to appear as the fountainhead of the rebellion and the struggle of the downtrodden and oppressed masses, especially the rural people. It flourished wonderfully, in multiple facets, and in different directions, moderate or extreme, in the form of various movements of the masses against the powers of the day; movements like the terrorism of Hasan Sabbah, the communal living of the Qaramateh, the extremist cultural and religious beliefs of the Ghalat, and the rebellion for free-thinking of some of the Sufi sects of the revolutionary and Shi'ite School of thought, against the harsh prejudices and the soulless, petrifying censorship of the theological and legal system attached to the ruling group. Finally, the intellectual, moderate and rich School of the Imamate, as the greatest flow of thought and culture, rebels when confronted by the religion and culture of the government.

The rousing call and the possibilities for learning in this School of thought are based upon the twin principles of imamate and justice. It produces the revolutionary cries of Ashura and the aggressive mobilization of the masses against existing conditions. It invites people to await the hidden Imam who is in occultation. It raises the critical problems of the 'signs of appearance' and the 'end of time'. It keeps alive the hope of 'redemption after martyrdom'. It promotes the idea of revenge and revolt, faith in the ultimate downfall of tyrants and the decrees of destiny against the ruling powers who dispense justice by the sword. It prepares all the oppressed and justice-seeking masses who are waiting to participate in the rebellion. In some towns like Kashan and Sabzevar, where the Shi'ites are strong, they saddle a white horse on Fridays, and all the people of the town, the protesting, dissatisfied and expectant Shi'ites, follow the horse out of town, despite the opposition of the government and the ruling religion. They await redemption and freedom from tyranny, and the beginning of a rebellion. They discuss questions which cause fear among the ruling group.

During the first half of the eighth century, following the wholesale massacres of Genghis Khan and Hulaku, when the rule of the Mongols had reduced the Iranian masses to submission, depression, humiliation and weakness; when the revenge of Genghis Khan was law; when the sword and the hangman were enforcers of the law; when the Mongol Khans and nomads and the officers and chiefs of Mongol tribes each ruled as a feudal lord over various regions and estates, and had enslaved the peasants in the most cruel manner; when, in the towns as well, the men of religion were mostly in the service of the Mongol rulers, they called upon the masses to submit in the name of 'the true Sunni religion' to the pseudo-Muslim rulers who continued to be replicas of Genghis Khan. They circumcised themselves only to please the religious sentiments of the Muslims, at the cost of the spread of the culture, faith, morality, society and of the very existence of the Muslims!

Some of the religious men, whose piety made them abstain from co-operating with the rulers and tyrants, had crept into the oblivion of piety in the monasteries of the Sufis, thereby indirectly becoming the means by which the path is paved for oppression and the ground is prepared for murder. They had left the people defenceless against the floggings of the Mongol executioners and robbers, and the fraudulent men of religion.

It is under these circumstances that a religious preacher sets out in search of the truth in the way that Salman did. Salman approaches all those with claims to religious faith. First he approaches the pious Balu to seek the path of salvation in his School of piety and freedom. There, he sees piety remaining silent against tyranny. What a shame! What heartlessness and selfishness, that a man should be surrounded by the screams of prisoners, the shouts of executioners, the poverty of the hungry, the whips of the cruel over the bodies of the helpless, and, instead of volunteering to defend them, that he should simply seek his own redemption and try to gain paradise for himself! Salman flees from this man in disgust and goes to Semnan to see Rukneddin Emad-od-Dowleh, whose piety and leadership in Sufi practices is well-known. He finds Sufi practices also, like piety, a means of escape from reality and responsibilities, turning away from the fate of the masses, and ignoring cruelty and tyranny. Salman finds the Sufi to have a tender heart, tender feelings and a sublime soul. But, how is it that the rivers of blood shed by the Mongols in this country, and that the decline threatening Islam and the masses of the people, do not in any way disturb the peace of his soul and the tenderness of his heart? Salman flees from him in hatred, and goes to the Sheikh ol-Islam, Imam Ghiasuddin Habibollah Hamavi in Bahrabad, to gain knowledge of the religious laws and the theology of the true Sunni sects from him, and to find his way back to the original spring of truth. Here, he sees a theology that discovers and discusses a thousand problems in bathroom etiquette, but has a total lack of any awareness of the evil destiny facing the nation.

Disgusted with all these robes of piety, and satisfied that these religious teachings are all the weavers of the clothes of piety to be worn on a body of oppression, then with a heart filled with hatred towards the cruel Mongol rulers, and reeling with pain because of the evil destiny of the Muslim masses, as a Muslim responsible for the people and knowledgeable about the times, and as a protestor against the existing system, having lost all faith in the sellers of religion, Sheikh Khalifeh chose the Islam of Ali, the School of protest and martyrdom.

In the dress of a simple darvish, he goes to Sabzevar as a lonely stranger, takes up residence in the great mosque of the town, and begins preaching there. This marks the beginning of the Sarbedaran liberation movement. He is a preacher who is in revolt against everything that teaches people to bow to ignorance and oppression, a revolt backed by a faith, a School of thought and a "Red" history: Shi'ism. Slowly, the deprived masses begin to understand, to find their way, and as a result, to become a threatening force. The official pseudo-clergy start their usual game of spreading rumours and then issuing religious decrees, and at last, calling for authorised murder, saying:-

"This Sheikh discusses worldly affairs in the mosque",

"This Sheikh conjectures in the mosque and defiles the house

of God", and "This Sheikh confuses the religion of the people".

The pseudo-clergy try to turn the people against him, and prepare the ground for his downfall. They help the Mongol ruler to take his life. They write to the Mongol ruler saying that the Sheikh has strayed from the true Sunni Religion, and is not prepared to repent and retract in spite of their best efforts. They say he is propagating worldly ideas in the mosque, and spreading the work of the protesters (Shi'ites)! They continue "His behaviour

calls for the death penalty, and it is up to Sultan Saied to rid the religion of this pestilence". The spreading of rumours and the rousing of people against him increases but the Sheikh's call to understanding, faith and salvation, continues to attract the hearts of the deprived and suffering rural masses more and more to him. Until early one morning, when his admirers go as usual to see him, they see his dead body in the mosque.

After the Sheikh's assassination, his disciple Sheikh Hasan Juri continues his work. He gives an immediate call to arms, organizes his disciples and goes underground. He starts roaming the towns and sowing the seeds of understanding and revolt wherever he goes, on the basis of Shi'ism. The minds of the people are prepared. The hearts of the enslaved masses are throbbing for revolt under the curtain of secrecy. One spark will be sufficient.....

A nephew of the ruler enters the village of Baashteen, a village about thirty-six kilometres south of Sabzevar, as he normally does. With his followers, he enters the house of Abdul Razzaq, one of the pious and honourable villagers who is still reeling under the devastating influence of the religious propaganda of the ruler. The retinue asks the villagers for food, and are duly served. Then they ask for wine! For the villagers, who are Muslims and Shi'ites, who have been deeply influenced by the words of Sheikh Khalifeh, the bringing of wine for such rascals, and that, too, under compulsion, is too much. However, they serve it! The guests become intoxicated! They ask for women! This was the beginning of the explosion, very simple and rapid! The host goes to the people and calling the Shi'ite masses, exclaims that the Mongol ruler is asking for their women. What is their reply? They say "We are prepared to die rather than be so defiled! Our women for the enemy shall be our swords". The result is inevitable. The masses have made up their minds. They kill the whole group at one attempt. As they know that there is no turning back, as they know that they have already chosen death, they stop wavering. The choice of death gives them such energy that their single village revolts against that bloodthirsty regime and is successful. The villagers overrun the town, fighting against the Mongol army and the decrees of the pseudo-clergy of the religion of the state. They are victorious. Their cry: "Salvation and Justice!" and "The destruction of the power of the ruling Mongols and the influence of the priests of the religion of the rulers and the big landowners of the ruling class". The victims of the ignorance of the pseudo-clergy and the prisoners of the oppression of the Mongols continue joining the ranks of the rebels. Sabzevar becomes a centre of power; like a fire that spreads through dry brush, the Shi'ite revolutionary guards, who enjoy the backing of the rural warriors and champions of the masses, and have the ideology of Sheikh Khalifeh and Sheikh Hasan and similar kinds of well-informed, righteous and missionary men of learning, engulf the whole of Khorasan and northern Iran and even inflame the south of the country. And for the first time, a revolutionary movement based on Alavite Shi'ism, against foreign domination, internal deceit, the power of the feudal lords and wealthy capitalists, had an armed uprising, led by peasants seven hundred years ago, under the banner of justice and the culture of martyrdom, for the salvation of the enslaved nation and the deprived masses.

And this is the last revolutionary wave of Alavite Shi'ism, Red Shi'ism, which continued for seven hundred years to be the flame of the spirit of revolution, the search for freedom, and justice, always inclining towards the common people and fighting relentlessly against oppression, ignorance and poverty.

A century later came the Safavids, and Shi'ism left the great mosque of the common people to become a next-door neighbour to the Palace of 'Ali Qapu in the Royal Mosque.

Red Shi'ism changes to **Black Shi'ism!**

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Revision by: Dr. Bartlett M.D.