

1. The First Shia of Guyana: Latif Ali

The relationship between me and Latif Ali of Guyana is like that between a father and his son. He has written in these articles how he became Shia. I would like to add here a few more details to complete the picture.

When his conversion to Shi'ism became known, the family of the girl who was betrothed to him, refused to give their daughter to a "kafir". He asked me to find him a practising Shia girl who would be ready to go to and live in Guyana. I requested some friends in Bombay and Gujarat to look for a suitable girl. After a few months he wrote to me that a Hindu girl (who was a teacher in the same school where Latif Ali was teaching) had accepted the true faith. He gave her the name "Zahra" and as usual sent her Declaration Form to me. I saw in the Form that Zahra was un-married. Immediately I wrote to them, suggesting that they should unite in marriage bond. They accepted. I sent authority letters to them to sign and give me authority to recite their nikkah. They sent the papers duly filled and I recited their nikkah formula in India. After receiving my telegram, they were officially married according to the law of the land.

When enough people joined him in the faith, he established The Pioneer Shia Muslim Association of Guyana.

There was a function in the school and Zahra was told to serve liquor to the guests. She refused and was sacked for insubordination. After a few months, Latif Ali was dismissed from service because of his Tablighi activities and travels. I wrote to them that it was a blessing in disguise, because now they were free to devote all their time in propagation of religion.

When my son visited Guyana, Latif Ali introduced him to the audience in these words:

"It is sufficient to say that our spiritual father is Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi father."

Once three active members of the Wahhabi movement in Trinidad were sent to Guyana to argue with Latif Ali. They too became Shia and it was the beginning of the new awakening in the Trinidad and

Tobago.

Latif Ali two articles are copied here from a booklet, 'Why I became A Shia', published by late Shaykh Hasan Sa'id (Tehran) and The Right Path of Toronto (Canada) respectively.

Why I Became a Shia' by Latif Ali

Introduction

I was born in the year 1954 at Rose Hall Estate Range, Canje, Berbice in Guyana. I attended Cumberland Methodist School and qualified for free secondary education at Berbice High School.

In secondary school I studied religious knowledge (Christianity) among other subjects. My father went to the Masjid often but being only nine years of age when he died, I have not yet become sure as to his faith in Islam. My teachers were staunch Christians but my profound distaste for Christianity grew with their dogmatic attitude.

I never entertained any doubts about Islam. As a matter of fact, my faith was strengthened when I read John 16: 12–15, where Jesus predicted the advent of Muhammad.

I examined other faiths but the retrogressive doctrine of reincarnation repelled me from many. Bahatism and Qadianism are such barefaced forgeries that even a youth like me shouldn't even consider them.

My biggest problem was, however, not the path but the method which I must employ to tread that path.

I wish to dedicate this reflection to the following brothers who have in various ways been instrumental in my selecting the method of Shiaism:

Br. Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi (Dar es Salaam)

Br. Mortaza Nouri (Iran)

Br. Ahmed Sheriff (Mombasa)

Sr. Yasin T. Al-Jibouri (Georgia)

Br. R.A. Juma (Houston)

Br. Hasan Said (Chehelsotun, Tehran)

Also my mother (Zorina Ali), My Brother (Nazir Ali), sister (Shanaz Santoo) and Neromanie Devi.

Chapter 1: Investigation

"Knowledge and wisdom are the lost properties of a believer. Take them back wherever you find them."
(Imam Ali a.s.).

For four years I have served a Sunni association as General Secretary. I was zealous, for to me

Sunnism was original Islam. But whenever the topic of Karbala arises our president limits us to the descriptive aspects and excludes the causes.

I checked the Encyclopaedia Britannica and found out that Sunnis fought Shias in the battle of Karbala. Still I was muddled for I had never before heard of "Shia". All we heard of was Umar the Great, Abu Bakr and Ayesha. Now I became suspicious about the belittling of the progeny of Muhammad (s.a.w.) by my fellow Sunnis. A Sunni clergyman once told me that Shias are people who claim that Ali should have been the prophet. A Jesuit priest from India told me that that Sunni is a lie and that I would one day find the Shia faith the best in Islam.

I prayed to Allah for His guidance, for as a believer I am very keen on matters which might entail "*kufr*". It seemed providential, for another Sunni lent me a book called the "*Eternal Miracle*" published by A Group of the Muslim Brothers in Iran. He asked me to avoid correspondence with the said brothers, but he didn't say why. So I did correspond and received "*Islam*" by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi and "*Anecdotes of Pious Men*" together with a very brotherly letter.

I studied these booklets very carefully and the first thing I asked myself was: Why did the Sunnis lie about Shiaism? Do they want to deter our investigation because we may discover facts detrimental to their concoctions? These booklets, this letter, they were the dawn of what was to be a new phase of my life.

Chapter 2: Discovery

وَمَا عَلَيْنَا إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ

"And it is only for us to deliver the Manifest Message:" (Qur'an, 36: 17)

Brother Mortaza Nouri is a person whose dignity and depth of intellect has created an incredible impact. He wrote to me: "Acceptance of Shi'ite sect – I think, one should not be pressed to accept and follow the Ahlul-Bait of the Prophet. Our duty is only to convey the facts concerning true Islam to those ignorant (uninformed) Muslims. Then whoever likes truth will naturally adhere." Indeed the work carried out by A Group of Muslim Brothers in Tehran (now, World Organization For Islamic Services, WOFIS) in spreading true Islam is highly commendable. I am grateful for their valuable gifts of books.

Sectional Analysis: Islam, by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi

I have yet to come upon a mind so keen on logic as Brother Rizvi. But what aspects of this unique booklet made me turn towards Shi'ism?

Justice of Allah

In this section I have been fully convinced of the Shia view as compared to the Sunni view. I was taught by my elders at Cumberland Jamaat that everything we do is done by God's will. Now, any wise thinker will question this concept. I did. It brought me into controversy with my fellow Sunnis. I was never at ease for I knew that ISLAM cannot (God forbid) harbour a wrong notion. The only answer was that the fault lies with the Sunni school of thought and their interpretation. Thus arose my second doubt about Sunnism. I will now quote my esteemed brother Rizvi and the quotation is more than proof and reason why the Shia standpoint is superior. No, not just superior but the "truth". Rizvi writes:

"Imam Musa al-Kazim said: "A man acquires ability when four conditions are fulfilled: (a) When there is nothing to hinder his plans; and his (b) health and (c) faculties (needed for that work) are up to the required standard; (d) God provides him the conditions of that work. When all these conditions are fulfilled a man becomes able to act according to his own free will.' When asked about an example, he said: "Let us suppose that there is a man, without any hindrance, of good health and strength, yet he cannot commit adultery unless he finds a woman. When (the 4th condition is fulfilled, and) he gets a woman, then it is upto him to choose one of the two alternatives – either he controls his evil emotions and saves himself as Joseph did; or, on the other hand, commits adultery. If he protects himself from that sin, it will not be by compulsion of Allah (as some people think), and if he commits the sin, it does not mean that he was above the power of Allah (as others think)."

My beloved teacher Rizvi continues: "According to our point of view, if anyone believes in predestination, he cannot, at the same time, believe in the Day of Judgement, because if Allah decrees every act which is done by our hands, then it would be gross injustice to inflict punishment upon us for those sins and evils which were pre-destined by Allah Himself."

Now I ask my dear non-Shi'ite Muslim readers a humble question: Which view is "truth"?

Chapter 3: The Question of the Caliphate

I am very grateful to the Bilal Muslim Mission of Tanzania whose Chief Missionary, Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi, once more enlightened me on the subject of the "Imamat" (proper). I also acknowledge with thanks the writers who I will time and again quote.

"The question of the Imamat and Caliphate has ripped the Muslim community asunder and has affected the thinking and philosophy of the different groups so tremendously that even the belief in God and the prophets could not escape from this divergence of views." (Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi).

The popular belief of Sunnis and their splinter factions is that Abu Bakr was *appointed* Caliph or successor to Muhammad. Some grant that he was elected. Now, if we should free ourselves from all sectarian bias and make an analytical journey through history, we shall see how those who usually called themselves the champions of Islam were actually the authors of our present decadence and

misfortunes as Muslims.

Rizvi writes:

"Imamat" literally means to 'lead', 'Imam' means 'Leader'.

"In Islamic terminology, 'Imamat' means 'absolute command of Muslims in all religious and secular affairs, in succession to the Prophet:

'Imam' means 'the man who, in succession to the Prophet, has the right to the absolute command of the Muslims in all religious and secular affairs.'

The word 'man' signifies that a woman cannot be Caliph (Imam).

(Quoted from "*Imamat*" by Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi).

Shias accept Ali as the first Imam or successor of the Prophet, and their acceptance is not based on personal desire but on compliance with the divine will.

He goes on:

"When one bears in mind the type of position several questions arise in this respect, the most weighty ones are:

(1) Is it upon God to appoint a prophet's successor or is it the duty of the 'Ummah' to appoint whomever they please?

(2) In the latter case, did God or the Prophet place in the hands of the 'Ummah' any systematic code containing rules and procedure for the appointment of a successor, or did the 'Ummah' by their unanimous consent before appointing a caliph, prepare a set of rules to which they adhered (subsequently), or did the 'Ummah' act according to their will (what they thought expedient) at the time and according to the opportunity at their disposal? Had they the right to act as they did?

(3) Does reason and Divine Law demand the existence of any qualifications and conditions for an Imam and Caliph? If so, what are they?

(4) Whether the Prophet of Islam appointed anyone as his Caliph and successor or not? If he did so, who was it? If not, why?

(5) After the Prophet's death, who was recognised to be his Caliph and whether the qualifications necessary for a caliph existed in him or not?" (Quoted from "*Imamat*").

For knowledgeable readers the questions have already been answered. For some the arguments to come will suffice.

Ponder the following Ayats of the Qur'an:

وَرَبُّكَ يَخْلُقُ مَا يَشَاءُ وَيَخْتَارُ ﴿٤﴾ مَا كَانَ لَهُمُ الْخِيَرَةُ

"And Thy Lord creates what He wills and chooses: they have no right to choose:" (28:68)

إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً

"Verily, I am about to make a Caliph on earth." (2:30)

يَا دَاوُودُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ

"O Dawood! Verily, We have made thee Caliph on earth." (38:26)

قَالَ إِنِّي جَاعِلُكَ لِلنَّاسِ إِمَامًا

"I am about to make thee an Imam to mankind." (2:124) (About Hazrat Ibrahim)

وَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أُمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا

"And We made them Imams who were to guide by Our command:" (21:73)

Question: who appoints? Answer: Certainly Allah!

Now let us look at the Declaration at Ghadeer Khum.

It is reported that on returning from the Hajjat-ul-Wida' (Farewell Pilgrimage) the Prophet stopped at a place called Ghadeer Khum and made a public declaration and reminder. He declared Ali to be his successor. The traditions are so numerous that no doubt can be entertained about its authenticity. Even compilers held in esteem by the Sunnis have mentioned it. Surprisingly Umar and Abu Bakr were very early to congratulate Ali, and yet their ostentatious behavior at a later stage were of fantastic magnitude.

Can we for one moment imagine that a Prophet whom the Qur'an exalts as the "Best Model" would leave his 'Ummah' in doubt as to who should be his successor?

Now let us suppose the 'Ummah' was in doubt; was there anyone fitter than Ali?

Traditions about Ali: (Y.N. Laljee – "Ali the Magnificent"),

1. He was of the noblest birth – both mother and father were Hashimites.
2. He was the only person born in Kaaba.

3. He was the only divinely authorised witness and attestor that Muhammad is the Messenger of God (***Surah Raad, Verse 43; Surah Hud, Verse 17; and Surah Saba, Verse 6***).
4. He was the first man to offer prayer ('Namaz') after the Holy Prophet.
5. He was the only one to offer assistance to the Prophet on the occasion of Dawat-e-Asheera.
6. Ali was the only one in the 'Ummah' (after Muhammad) inspired with Divine secrets.
7. He was first to compile and codify the Qur'an.
8. He was called the "brother" of Muhammad.
9. Ali was the only one named to bathe the Prophet's body after his death.
10. He did not flee any battlefield. (All three caliphs did!).
11. When the Prophet was engaged in battle he was the standard bearer; when not, he was always the commander.
12. He was the great warrior who succeeded in killing all his adversaries.
13. It was Ali who caught and conquered pagan Jinns. Many of whom accepted Islam.
14. Ali was designated "Aaron of the second Moses."
15. Ali is the one who (long before the creation of the universe) came into being along with the Holy Prophet, each of them being a fragment of the same 'Noor'; Muhammad having Prophethood and Ali the 'vilayat'.
16. Ali while in the stage of 'Noor' was the Divine teacher of Gabriel.
17. Ali is the head of Ahle-Tariqah and Sufis.
18. Only Ali and the Prophet could enter Masjid under the obligation of a bath.
19. Like the Holy Prophet, Ali was bestowed upon miracles; for example, On two occasions he made the sun come back when it had already set.
20. From Sahnan Gafari's "Shialism"
 - a) If the 'Ummah' wanted one with the highest knowledge the Prophet said: "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate."
 - b) Did they want the most judicious? -- The Prophet said: "The most judicious among you is Ali."
 - c) Did they want the bravest? -- Who was and is known as Lion of God? (Ali! Ali!).

d)Did they want the nearest one to Muhammad? -- The prophet said "I and Ali are of the same Divine light."

Now, in view of all the facts my Shia brethren have enabled me to enlist, the only argument the Guyanese Sunni erudites can offer me is that Abu Bakr (r.a) was asked to lead prayers in preference to Ali (r.a). But we all know that the Prophet (s.a.w) though ailing, was aided by the sons of Abbas Ibn Abdul Muttalib to perform that prayer. Now, even if Abu Bakr did lead that prayer, did Muhammad (s.a.w.) read behind him?

Now, if in the beginning the caliphate created a rift between the Muslims, we ought to follow only the justifiable side. The Shias support Ali and his rightful heirs, and so with all these glaring eye openers I whole heartedly accepted the Shia faith. I pray to Allah and hope that people will likewise accept truth when they see it. Remember, I said I was a secretary of a Sunni Association. I may have lost my prestige in worldly affairs, but with Allah, Muhammad (s.a.w.), Ali (r.a.) and the Ahlul Bait I feel an eminence in my entire soul which is enough. Lift our banner high, O Youths of Shiaism! May Imame-Asr make his return soon! Allahomma Ameen!

Chapter 4: Our Past

Our past cannot be neglected because just as our future is and will be the outcome of our present, our present is the outcome of the past. Therefore the men who handled affairs in our past need close scrutiny. According to Islamic history, corruption crept into the Islamic State; our Master and Imam Ali epitomised the situation in the following words: "Thus, the situation was brought to such a pitch that whosoever took up the reins of state was in the unhappy predicament of riding an untrained and refractory she-camel; if desiring to keep the animal under control he pulled the bridle hard, he would inflict a wound on its nostrils, and if he allowed it free run, the beast would dash itself and its rider to destruction and death."

The Holy Prophet (s.a.w.) had predicted that if the Muslims failed to accept Ali they would disintegrate. Look at what happened to the Muslim Empire. Look how many Muslim states we have and yet while Israel continues to spill Muslim blood they are more involved in internal conflicts. Yet these blind men with good eyes will not see! It is a disgrace to us, to hear what the so-called Muslim leaders do at Mayfair in England.

One might well ask where the champions of Islam were when our beloved Husain (r.a.) lay butchered at Karbala. Yes, they were on the other side. They were bought by the despotic rulers. Once you deviate no one knows how far it may go. How did a debauchee like Yazid become caliph? Where was the Muslim conscience?

Chapter 5: The Man-Made Imams

As a youth I dared not challenge the juristic ability of Abu Hanifa, Imam Shafi, Ibn Hanbal and Malik, but what I ask is how can we be asked to follow these people who lack unanimity and conformity? Each of his had their own interpretations. Which was right? At least all cannot be right. Besides, Abu Hanifa was born in 80 A.H, Imam Shafi'i 150 A.H. Malik 93 A.H. and Ibn Hanbal 164 A.H. Now who were the Muslims following in *fiqh* before 80 A.H? (Note: Abu Hanifa didn't start his *fiqh* on day one of his life.)

Sunnis often tell us that their books were earlier than Shia traditions. Now, apart from this being a lie, their despots used to suppress the Shias, how could they (the Shias) publish? Thus they (the Shias) had their secret manuscripts. They hadn't the privileges like Bukhari, a biased Sheikh with vested interest!

Chapter 6: Application and Conclusion

As a Shia I find that my complete lifestyle has changed. I feel illuminated. I sleep feeling that Imam-e-Asr may return any moment and hence I must be prepared. It is this attitude of preparedness which enables a Shia to be ever spiritually alert.

Now when I read my Namaz-e-Shab and I mention the names of the 'Masoomen' I feel a tremor in me. I know from these experiences that Shiaism is the only method of approach to Islam. I feel happy to be a Shia and that my former aimless wandering has now become a blissful journey to a promised place – Jannat (Inshallah).

I wish to conclude with the echoing of a Khutba from Nahjul Balagha and a few verses addressed to Muhammad (s.a.w.) and Imam Ali (a.s.).

"O people! Do not feel nervous and do not get disappointed if you find very few people following the path of truth and salvation; because the majority of men are wild after worldly pleasures, a world where after a lengthy and tantalising expectation, little time is allowed for enjoyments, which will then be followed by very long periods of punishments and sufferings.

"However different may be your modes of activities and way of doing things, the basic principles of good and evil gather men under certain categories. You know there was only one man who killed the camel of the Prophet Salih, but the whole nation had to suffer because they all approved of the action."

We are indeed in such a time and I exhort my fellow young Shias who live in Muslim states and can benefit from books in Arabic, to keep our standard up. You are our future hope. You are lucky to have institutions where you may study Islam in your country. We in the West are unfortunate. Never lose faith, my brothers and sisters. The time is coming. Shias will not be pushed around anymore. So long as we board the Ark of Ahlul Bait we will be saved from the deluge of social and moral decadence which is day by day encompassing the earth. Let us all lift our hands and pray for the return of Imam Sahebuz-Zaman:

For My Imam (Ali) And The Last Prophet (Muhammad (S.A.W)):

O man of morals sublime to the distant land we heard your call

The rancorous crusaders tried but failed--

In bid to mar your sacred fame.

For even now in Christendom

In the very heart of Christendom--

A muazin echoes your name.

Thy valiant cousin did the Fort of Khaibar take.

His noble deeds did but history make.

Sher--e-Khuda!

Asad-Ullah!

A thousand years may have gone by

Yet thy faithful Shias with Ya Muhammad, Ya Ali will ever cry.

(From the booklet, "*Why I became A Shia*", Published by Shaykh Hasan Sa'id, Tehran.)

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