

Part E: Persecution under the Mongols and Recent Times

[Persecution by the Mongols](#)

During Akbar's rule, Judge Noorullah ash-Shushtari, known as (the Third Martyr) and popularly called 'Qadhi (judge) Sahib', migrated from Iran to India. He was a great scholar in all the five schools of Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) ; the Hanafite, Shafiite, Malikite, Hanblite, and Shiism. His knowledge was appreciated by Akbar who appointed him as the chief judge of Lahore. Ash-Shushtari accepted the appointment with a precondition that he would administer justice according to any of the five schools of Jurisprudence. His knowledge of the Islamic sects had convinced him that there was always a parallel in one of the four Sunni schools of Jurisprudence. Accordingly, he gave judgment according to that school of Sunni Jurisprudence that was in agreement with the Shiite thought. Complaints started pouring that ash-Shushtari was administering judgment according to the Shiite Jurisprudence. Ash-Shushtari showed that in fact he gave Judgment according to one of the four Sunni schools, which incidentally was in agreement with the Shia Law. Akbar realized the wisdom of ash-Shushtari and refused to entertain any complaint against him. ¹

When Akbar died, his son Jahangir killed Ali Quli Khan and took his widow, famous Noor Jehan as his wife. We may recall the incident of Khalid bin al-Waleed with Malik bin Nuwayra where Khalid killed Malik and committed adultery with his wife. By his nature, like Khalid bin al-Waleed, Jahangir was also a tyrant.

One of the Sunni scholars Makhdumul Mulk Abdullah al-Ansari became all-powerful in Jahangir's court. He was an extremist. He issued a *Fatwa* that it was not only impermissible but had become sin to perform the *Hajj* in the circumstances then prevailing. When asked to explain he said, "*In these days, if pilgrims travel by land, they will have to pass through the land of the Rafidhite (Twelver Shia)] which is sin. On the other hand, if the pilgrim takes a ship, all ships belong to the Europeans where they will find the portraits of Jesus and Mary which amounts to idolatry that is sin.*"² Makhdumul Mulk equated the

Shia to idolaters and thereby indirectly declared them as disbelievers.

Makhdumul Mulk could not find fault with the judgments rendered by Noorullah ash-Shushtari. He therefore planted a spy who pretended to be a Shia. He gained the confidence of ash-Shushtari and got access to two books on Shiism, namely, '*Ihqaqul Haq*' and '*Majalisul Mo'minin*'. The spy pretended to be deeply interested in the books and, after taking ash-Shushtari's permission to read them, he took them to his house. He passed on copies of the books which became powerful weapons in the hands of those who were inimical to ash-Shushtari. They took the books to Jahangir as a proof that ash-Shushtari was Shia who deserved to be executed. Jahangir agreed to their demand and ash-Shushtari was flogged with barbed whips that virtually stripped his skin. This was in the year 1019 AH. Ash-Shushtari's dead body was left lying on the open ground for several days.³

An Iranian nobleman, who was holding a high post in Gwalior, dreamt that Lady Fatima (a.s.) was asking him to bury the body of the martyr ash-Shushtari. The Iranian took permission from Jahangir and buried the body near the Civil Court, a few yards away from *Changi Chowki*. In the year 1188, Muhammad Mansur Musavi Nishapuri constructed a shrine over the tomb. In the year 1290, a compound wall was constructed enclosing the huge area of endowed land by Sayyid Ali Naqi, Deputy Collector. In the year 1309, Tahsildars Kifayat Husayn and Khan Bahadur Sayyid Abul Hasan and Sayyid Nazim, an advocate, fixed iron doors, and with donations collected by the public. Nazim Husayn also started the *Majlis* which has continued until now. In 1332 AH, a committee was formed that supervised the construction of four buildings to accommodate men and one building to accommodate women. They were constructed under the direction of the Secretary Nawab Muhammad Sajjad Ali of *Sheesjh Mahal*.⁴

Adil Shahi and Qutub Shahi the kings of Deccan were Shia. Aurangzeb persecuted and killed several of them. My father told me that my ancestors, who were Shia living in Bijapore, were hunted down and killed. The younger members of the family were made to stand and walls raised around them, that if old structures were to be pulled down now, skeletons would be found in the walls. Because of the persecution, my grandparents left Bijapore and settled in Vellore of North Arcot District of the erstwhile Madras State. They were pious people and until now, their graves in Qasba near the Fort at Vellore are revered both by Hindus and Muslims alike. However, in the process, they were forced to conceal their faith, offer prayers only privately in closed rooms, and shut themselves up during the first ten days of Muharram. In course of time, Vellore and some surrounding villages acquired their own Shia population. Madras being a cosmopolitan city, soon attracted the Shia who settled in pockets in areas such as Thousand Lights on Mount Road, Triplicane, Royapettah, Perambur, Pudupet...etc., and spread to several outskirts of Chennai. Madras gave birth to several Shia scholars such as Moulvi Hasan Raza from Pudupet, Moulvi Nabiul Ahmed Khan, Moulvi Ghulam Muhammad Mehdi Khan, his son Ghulam Muhammad Taqi Khan, and S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali from Thousand Lights; and lastly, my mentor and teacher Mirza Ghulam Abbas Ali Sahib from Royapettah. There were such great businessmen like the Khaleelis. It is said that the Khaleelis acquired so many properties on Mount Road that the British Government issued a notification, prohibiting sale of any property to the Khaleelis.

Bangalore, Mysore and its suburbs also have a sizeable population of Shia. Andhra Pradesh Hyderabad has the largest Shia population. Vizag, Masuliptam, Nagaram and Nellore also have sizeable Shia populations.

Hyderabad has its own legends. The Nizam was prevailed upon to issue an order prohibiting breast-beating and to the Chant of 'Husayn', 'Husayn' in the famous Ashura procession of Bi Bi ka Alam. The Sunnis had argued that breast-beating is barbaric and should be banned in these enlightened days. When the Shia came to know about the ordinance, they approached the Nizam who had a soft corner for the Shia. He gave them counsel and said, 'you go ahead with the procession on the lines I have given you.' When the procession started, the Shia started chanting 'Ibne Zehra wa wayla' while striking their heads. The Sunnis rushed to complain to the Nizam. The Nizam replied, *"At your instance, I have banned breast beating. What can I do if they strike their head? I have also banned the use of the words "Husayn" as desired by you. It will not be an offence if the Shia use the word "Ibne Zehra" though that word also refers to Husayn. They have not violated my order. "*

In the late seventies through the eighties, there was a rash of politically manipulated communal violence in the city of Hyderabad which was frequently subjected to imposition of curfew. Once, the curfew fell on the day of Ashura. Prominent Shia met and decided that, come what may, they would take out, as usual, the procession of Bi Bi ka Alam and perform all the usual rituals of *Matam*. They went to speak to the Police Commissioner Mr. Pavithran and to convey the resolution of the Shia to hold the procession as usual despite the curfew. Mr. Pavithran was a very sensible person and he had observed that the Shia localities had the lowest crime rate and that never did any untoward incident occur during the Ashura procession. He therefore allowed the Ashura procession of the Bi Bi ka Alam to be taken out as usual. The Sunnis and some extremist Hindus objected saying that in the procession, Shia youth would come out openly with their swords and knives and would likely use the occasion to use the weapons against their opponents. They asked, 'Would Mr. Pavithran permit them to come out openly with their swords and knives?' They argued that the Shia should at least be banned from doing '*Matam*' with swords and knives. Mr. Pavithran replied, *"If you want to put your swords and knives to the same purpose of beating yourselves, as the Shia do, then, to that extent I have no objection if you too carry weapons to beat yourselves."*

One of the great miracles of Imam Husayn (a.s.) to the present day is that the wounds of those who beat themselves with chains, knives, and swords never become septic and none is known to have died in the long history of the Ashura processions anywhere in the world. I had personally witnessed a team of Germans taking video of the Shia, young and old, beating themselves with chains, Knives, and swords in the Ashura procession at Diwan Devdi, Hyderabad. One of the team members told me that they were puzzled by the fact that the chain, knife, or sword used by one individual was used by another without cleaning it. Looked at scientifically, this should lead to gangrene because the blood group of one individual using the knife or sword may be 'A' and the next person using the same sword may belong to a different blood group. The gentleman told me that when they collected samples of blood from various

individuals and found that all the blood samples had turned to 'O' group, and later when the blood of the same individuals was tested later, they belonged to various blood groups. None of the participants ever needed or took ATS injection.

In order to obliterate this living miracle, a very attractive proposal was mooted that instead of letting the blood flow on the roads on the Day of Ashura, the Shia should donate their blood that could be used to save lives. Many Shia were impressed by the novelty and apparent nobility of the cause. Soon, it was realized that the motive behind the suggestion was to dilute the effect that the procession made on the onlookers and to erase the miraculous nature of Matam during Ashura. Our ancestors sacrificed their properties and lives to keep the memory of Karbala fresh in the minds of generations to come. Unfortunately, even among the Shia, there has arisen a minority that holds prayer to be superior to Majlis. There is no comparison between the two; if prayer is like the Book of God, Majlis is the remembrance of the Prophet's progeny (a.s.).

Remember that the Prophet (S) had said, "I am leaving among you two precious things entwined and knit together like a strong rope; the Book of God and my Progeny. They will never separate from each other until they will come to me at the Pond in the Paradise. If you cling fast to them, you will never go astray at all." An unnecessary controversy is raised to separate the Book of God from the Progeny of the Prophet (S) in an attempt to glorify one over the other. Glorifying one means demeaning the other and that could only be the work of Satan. The atrocities against the Shia were so severe that they preferred to remain in anonymity. It is only recently that the world has started to take notice of the Shia. It is for the Shia to put forth their religious beliefs through their writings and to establish their exclusiveness through their conduct. We should try to weed out some undesirable elements that are a blot on the name and character of the Shia, by educating our masses.

1. Ibid., p. 23-24

2. Shahide Salis, P. 22.

3. Ibid., P. 24.

4. Shahide Salis, P. 25-26.

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