Al-Islam.org
Ahlul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project
Published on *Al-Islam.org* (https://www.al-islam.org)

Azadari

Now we come to a particular manifestation of the inter-action between Muslim and Hindu cultures, that is "Azadari". It is an Urdu word, which denotes mourning rites commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) and is companions about 1350 years ago at Karbala in Iraq. The Shi'ahs and a great number of the Sunnis observe these rites during Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar. In India, this system was popularized by Abdullah Qubt Shah, the King of Golcanda, who founded the city of Hyderabad. Gradually it spread to the whole kingdom among the Hindus as well as the Muslims. In the month of Muharram, replicas are made of the mausoleum of Imam Husayn; these are called "ta'ziya" in Urdu. Processions are taken out with ta'ziyas in which poems are recited lamenting the tragedy of Karbala.

Legend says that ta'ziya was invented in India — not the Azadari on the whole, but only this particular system of making replicas of Imam Husayn's mausoleum. When Timur Lang (known in the West as Tamerlane) came to India, and could not go in the month of Muharram to Karbala to participate in the mourning ceremonies there, he built a replica of the to him in commemorating the events of Karbala (Those who are against ta'ziya say that it was the influence of the Hindu culture, even if their claim was correct, it doesn't make it automatically unlawful or condemnable!)

When you see some merry-making, you may ignore them. But if you find someone crying, you will certainly go near him to ask what was the matter. So grief always attracts, while it is not necessary that joy should do so. As the rites of Muharram were related to grief and mourning, they attracted all the people from every walk of life, belonging to every belief and creed. In pre-partition days Maharajas of Gwaliar, Bharaipur, Patiala and many other Hindu states actively participated in Azadari. They had built very grand ta'ziyas which were taken out in processions and then kept safely in the building especially dedicated to the memory of Imam Husayn.

Even now thousands and thousands of Hindus participate in Azadari. One interesting example is of Bhavnagar (Gujarat) where ta'ziya processions are taken out on the eve of the 10th Muharram; every

ta'ziya is given a permanent number by the government, and that number fixes its position in the procession. The first ta'ziya belongs to a Hindu; and out of some eighty ta'ziyas, only two or three belong to the Shi'ahs.

This is how the things go. If one wants to remain in peace and harmony, one can easily do so. But how long can this unity survive? Unfortunately there are some bad elements in every country and every society; and India is a very big country. You must be reading in the newspapers, time and again, that there was a Hindu–Muslim riot in Moradabad, Meerut, Delhi, Aligarh, Ahmadabad and other places. Divisive forces have gradually got upper hand. Communal riots are becoming a regular feature of Indian life. And every riot leaves a legacy of bitterness and distrust in its wake. Even more unfortunate is the fact that now there is no leader like Mahatma Gandhi who was ready to sacrifice his own life on the altar of communal harmony and peace.

Or like the Home Minister, Gulzari Lal Nanda, who, in 1964, had made all District Commissioners Superintendents of Police “personally” answerable for the peace in their districts. What is more disturbing nowadays is that in places like Meerut and Muzaffarnagar police and para–military forces had joined the attacking forces against the Muslims, and no action was taken against those responsible for it. This has created a pervasive feeling of insecurity in the Muslim community. That feeling is not good either for the community or for the country. But the politicians and the powers seem to be oblivious to this danger. They are either unable or unwilling to control this situation.

Source URL:
https://www.al–islam.org/four–californian–lectures–sayyid–saeed–akhtar–rizvi/azadari#comment–0