

History of Shi'ism in Guyana

A Special Report by The Pioneer Shia Muslim Association of Guyana.

Before 1972, there was no Shi'a in Guyana or at least no one knew of any. Speculations that there might have been Shi'as among the indentured labourers from northern provinces of India are not dismissed; but it is hard to accept that they might have been assimilated or due to dissimulation not detected. To assume that a detectable Shi'a influence on traditional Sunnis originated here does not negate that it could have occurred even before the Sunnis left India and migrated to this land. Rather this is more likely as this influence is traced to *'azadari* which any Shi'a could tell you what an influence that is.

That a corrupt form of Ta'zia existed in Guyana is undeniable but the persistent trend in Trinidad betrays any semblance to sanctity of origin; it rather smacks of outright mockery by detractors rather than degeneration from the well-meaning.

It is Allah's grace and infinite mercy that what would be developed and established as institutional Shi'ism came to Guyana. No one here claims status but what else can it be but providential that one stumbles upon a booklet and curiosity leads him to further research and hence the gradual unfolding of the School of Truth.

A name every Guyanese Shi'a would remember and bequeath to posterity is the noble son of Truth: 'Allamah Sayyid Saeed Akhtar Rizvi.

If there is someone who knows the art of conveying the message of Ahlul Bayt (a.s.) to those thirsty for truth it is this person. His logical-proof mind set and yet simple expression helped us Shi'as in Guyana realise that we were groping in the dark. He focussed the rays of truth in our direction and the deception which clouded our hearts as the Umayyad legacy in a Sunni milieu vanished.

Latif Ali became Shi'a in 1972 and was immediately fired by the zeal of recognition of truth set out to enlighten all the lanes of darkness which were traditionally fed by the notions of what is Shi'ism. 'Allamah Rizvi the tireless teacher by correspondence, and Latif Ali the disseminator. It is not enough to thank the Sayyid but in du'as here he must always be remembered.

The Pioneer Shi'a Muslim Association of Guyana (PSMG) established in 1972 is hence the first Shi'a institution in Guyana. It would be very rare to find any Shi'a in Guyana who has not been converted by this institution or by one of its converts.

From its inception, the Pioneer Shi'a Muslim Association established a Madrassa for kids. It also published two newsletters: *an-Naba* for adults, and *al-Qalam* for madrassa children. All the historical and religious occasions (wiladats, wafat/shahadats of the Prophet and the Imams) are commemorated and celebrated accordingly.

The noble guidance of the martyr, Sayyid Mahdi al-Hakim (the first Secretary General of WABIL) is acknowledged for the support extended by Dr. Khalil Tabatabai and Huijatul Islam Syed Muhammad al-Moosawi. Br. Ghulam Sajan continues to be a source of inspiration.

Among the Sayyids who have visited us, we remember with love, Maulana Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi and Maulana Syed Baqri.

May Allah grant us the cognition that Imam-e-Zaman is watching over us.

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