3. **SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN IRAN**

Attempts will be made in this chapter to make an introductory description as well as classification of Iranian social movements. These movements are divided firstly into two main groups:

I. Non-religious such as the Sho’ubi revivalistic and nationalistic movement.

II. Religious movements which constitute the majority of Iranian movements, and are further divided into passive and active.

The passive religious movements were generally gnostic and the active movements though influenced by gnosticism were mainly Messianic.

3.1. **Non-Religious Movements**

a) **Maváli and Sho’ubi Nationalistic Movements**

In eighteenth century Europe, nationalism manifested itself in two different ways. In England and France, it found its expression in political and economic changes, but in Germany and Italy and among the Slavonic peoples, where the third state (i.e. bourgeoisie) was weak, pre-dominantly in the cultural field.¹

But even many centuries before i.e. since 8th century the nativistic impuls in Iran expressed itself in a way similar to the second group of countries mentioned above. The "Volkgeist" manifested itself in the cultural field - mainly in literature, as well as through the revival of the native language so vehemently as to make it a powerful literary medium.

It is generally held that the nationalism which appeared on the European scene after the French revolution, had its

¹Kohn: The Idea of Nationalism..., p. 4.
origin in the Jewish idea of the "Selected People", which found a grounding in Europe through Christianity, and played such an important role in the last two centuries. This idea is also one of the connecting channels relating nationalism to Millenarianism. When we attribute the early emergence of such an idea among the Jews it is generally attributed to their particular historical experiences. This can also be said about the Iranians. The Iranians, as Minorsky reminds us, have "a long history which is very different from the history of other people nearby."

It is this "particular historical experience" that helped the early emergence of nationalism in Iran which was firstly expressed in the cultural term. The Iranian national sentiment manifested itself in two ways. Firstly, and mainly in the form of cultural revivalism through the Sho'ubi and Māvāli intellectual movements and secondly to some extent in the form of some kind of nativism nurtured through the Chiliastic movements.

The history of secular nationalist movement in Iran began by the Māvālis who were the native Iranians enslaved by the Arab invaders but freed later on. These freedmen used to become the clients of some Arab tribes and subsequently due to their qualities achieved high positions in the administrative machinery of the Arab empire.

The intellectual movement of the Māvālis which came to be known as Sho'ubi movement, (derived from the word Sha'b meaning nation) was essentially revivalistic.

The atmosphere which gave birth to this movement was that of cultural contact and cultural exploitation (in addition to

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1Minorsky: Iran: Opposition..., p. 201.
economic exploitation).  

A few examples from the numerous cases recorded can give us a fairly clear picture of this relationship.

The Arabs being the conquerors and the rulers treated the Iranian natives as their social inferior. The order of super-ordination and subordination was very much maintained and social inter-course between the two groups was very much restricted. The Mavalis were not allowed to marry Arabs, and if such a marriage ever took place, it was considered void and the concerned Mavali punished.

Those born out of marriage between an Arab and his non-Arab slave girl were considered bastards and did not have the same rights as their half brothers born of an Arab woman.

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1 Mavalis were freed slaves but still attached to their masters. The majority of them were captive civilians or soldiers. These were different types of Mavalis and laws concerning them. There were also those who from the beginning of the Arab conquest accepted Islam, significantly enough this could be done by affiliation to one of the Arab tribes, the convert becoming a client or a second-class Arab. In Spain the social discrimination against Mawalladun - the new converts of Islam, corresponding to the Mavalis - continued much longer than elsewhere. (Hosayn 'Ali Montahen: Nehzat-e sho'ubiyyeh: jombeh-e meli-ye iraniyan dar barabār-e khālafat-e Amayi va'Abbasi. Tehran, 1354 A.H., pp. 133 - 137; S.M. Stern: Ya'qub the Coppersmith and Persian National Sentiment. In: C.E. Bosworth (ed.): Iran and Islam, Edinburgh, 1971, pp. 535 - 536.


4 Kremer: op. cit., p. 140.
The Arabs used to call one another by their family names, and they called the Mavalis by their first name or nickname, which was considered as a derogatory and insulting way of calling. A great amount of evidence can be marshalled in highlighting highly discriminative and humiliating treatment given to Mavalis and other Iranian subjects by their Arab rulers. This treatment enkindled the nationalistic impulse in their minds.

The Mavalis, living in close contact with the Arabs, entered into their service and did their best to give evidence of their abilities in different fields of life particularly intellectual.

The Iranian Mavalis had a great deal of achievement in literary, scientific pursuit. They mainly manned the empire's bureaucratic machinery. It was they who were largely responsible for the literary and other intellectual movements in Iran. An important work accomplished by the Mavalis was that they translated whatever was written about the achievement of Iranian people in different fields from their Pahlavi language into the Arabic language to convince their Arab masters that their ancestors had developed a high civilization. Quite a few Mavali intellectuals wrote also about the achievements of the Iranians in the fields of science and philosophy. The pioneer of the movement was Ruzbeh, known as Ibn al-Muqqafa (d. 757). His skillful translations from Pahlavi into Arabic made him the founder of Arabic prose literature. Earlier to this the Arab did not have the tradition of prose writing.

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1 Goldziner: Muhammedanische Studien, p. 267; Laydan: Tārikh-e Šamāl, Vol. IV, p. 71. The Arabs called one another by their Kunya (Konyeh) i.e. by the name of their fathers or mothers.

There were some poets of Iranian origin who mainly wrote in Arabic language such as Bāshshār b. Bārīd(1) (d. 783) and Abu Novās(2) (d. 806 – 816) who extolled the Iranians and their own Iranian origin through their poetry. This probably marked the beginning of the Sho‘ubi movement, which continued from the eighth century till the twelfth century. In Iran, the old Persian land nobility (Dehqān) became the main supporter of the Sho‘ubi movement. Thus at least initially this movement was started by intellectual and subsequently got support from the Iranian elite classes.

The Iranian principalities which came into existence during 9th Century provided propitious situation for the Sho‘ubi movement which was essentially anti-Arab in its orientation. In this movement, the Iranian past was glorified and myths and legends were created about the persons, places and events. The Iranians who ruled over the principalities could derive legitimation to their rule, by claiming descendancy from the Iranian legendary Kings and heroes. For example, a Sho‘ubi poem which has survived, shows how Yaqub (Qemabatur 868 – 876), the Luti adventure, "made use of Shu‘ubite notions in order to provide an ideology for his rule. Its importance lies in the establishment of a link between the Shu‘ubiyya and the rise of the independent dynasties in Iran."(5)

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1Sharif: Beiträge..., pp. 50 – 55; Goldziher: Muh. Studien, p. 162


3Montahen: Nehzat-e Sho‘ubiyyeh..., p. 188.

4It is not certain whether the name Sho‘ubi was used by the Iranians themselves or was given to them by their opponents. The term was already used for the Kharājītes who on religious grounds maintained the doctrine that no race or tribe enjoyed any inherent superiority. But this term was perverted to a new use and applied to those who proclaimed the superiority of the Persians to the Arabs, and defended their claim by social and cultural, not religious argument. (H.A.R. Gibb: The Social Significance of the Shu‘ubiyya. In: Studia Orientalia Ioanni Pedersen Dicata, 1953, p. 109).

Thus one of the immediate effects of the Sho'ubi movement was to provide ideological support to the Iranian principalities, which in their turn revived the ancient Iranian symbols and aimed at the restoration of the Persian realm.\(^1\) This development was checked by the Turkish invasion in the eleventh century, but by this time Persian literature, both poetry and prose, had reached high degree of maturity.\(^2\) Consequently, among the people incorporated into the Arab empire, the Iranians were most successful in reviving their national identity and the credit for this goes to the Sho'ubis. The movement of course was used as the instrument by the Iranian land nobility, traditional small landowning peasantry as well as Iranian bureaucrats, who already had occupied high positions in the empire, to establish their hegemony. They were able to go as far as to point "with pride to the magnificence of Iran at the time when the Arabs were no better than savages."\(^3\)

The language and argument in which the extremist Sho'ubis expressed themselves are comparable to the chauvinism of our time.\(^4\)

The influence of the Sho'ubiyyeh on various spheres continued in the centuries which followed. Among the Sho'ubis two individuals played outstanding roles: Ruzbeh and Ferdausi. Ruzbeh (Ibn al-Muqaffa') and his influence on the Mavāli movement as well as his contribution to the Arabic literature has already been referred to. In the tenth century, i.e. two centuries after Ruzbeh, a similar but more important role was played by Ferdausi.

\(^1\) Cf. Nafisi, who gives a detailed description of revivalistic and nativistic tendencies of Mardavij. (Sa'id Nafisi: Māh-e-nakhshab, zabān va fārmāng-e Iran: 7, Tehran, 1334 A.H.

\(^2\) Stern: Ya'qūb the Coppersmith..., pp. 538 - 539.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 537.

\(^4\) Gibb argues that Sho'ubiyyeh "was not merely a conflict between two schools of literature, nor yet a conflict of political nationalism, but a struggle to determine the destinies of the Islamic culture as a whole." Accordingly, it is erroneous to interpret their attack on the Arabs as nationalist. The Persian nativistic tendencies repeatedly displayed itself in risings which were not only anti-Arab but also anti-Islamic. (Gibb: The Social Significance..., p. 105ff.).
A Sho'ubi Shi'i (vivebat circa 930 - 1020). He collected all the epic and historical books in the Pahlavi language, and put them into verses over a period of thirty years. This work came to be known as the "Shāhnāmeh".

The Iranians "had historical traditions such as the national heroic epos, which kept alive the sentiment of a national past of Iran, from the mythical times till the times of the Sassanid dynasty." What Ferdausi did was the revival of this historical tradition of heroic epos. In fact the task of writing the "Shāhnāmeh" was earlier initiated by another "Sho'ubi" poet who could not finish it because he was assassinated just after he finished the writing of its first part.  

Ferdausi's aim, as he himself puts it, was to revive Iran. He, thus, tried to revive the Persian language and glorify the Iranian past. He made a deliberate attempt to use as few Arabic words as possible. A study made by Humbert, based on the exhaustive glossary of Wolf shows that in some fifty thousand lines of poetry Ferdausi used only 984 Arabic expressions, a

1 Stern: Ya'qub the Coppersmith..., p. 537.
4 Rypka points out that most of the copies of the Shāhnāmeh contain 48,000 to 52,000 lines and sporadically they may contain 55,000 or more lines. (Rypka: op. cit., p. 159).
considerable feat at a time when Persian was steadily declining. Since then the "Shahnameh" has been one of the major means of keeping alive Iranian national sentiment. It spread among the people very rapidly, through the increasing popularity of "Naqali" i.e. the performance of the Shahnameh's stories by darvishes and "heretics" who wandered through cities and villages. They developed a typical style of narration which incorporated both music and acting in itself.

The "Shahnameh" was also translated into different Iranian dialects and other languages and its effect has been so widespread and significant that, as it has been noted, the influence of the Iranian epic has always gone hand in hand with the belief in Imams.

Thus the Sho'ubi movement that was started by Navālis was largely instrumental in regenerating a sense of cultural identity among the Iranians. The efforts were made to use the literary idiom for the glorification of the past and to enable the Iranians to drive moral strength from that past.

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2Lambton is of the opinion that with the acceptance of Shi'ism as the official creed by the Safavids, Iranian national feeling, "which had continued to exist throughout the period after the Islamic conquest", took on a new form with its own separate identity. (Ann Lambton: The Persian Constitutional Revolution of 1905 - 6. In: P. J. Vitikiotis: Revolution in the Middle East, London, 1972, p. 173.) This is probably what Ferdousi wished, as Rypka says: "Ferdousi Anschauung der Vergangenheit entbehrte der Einheitlichkeit, die Verehrer der iranischen Vergangenheit und Muslim zugleich ist" (Rypka: Geschichte der neupersischen Literatur..., p. 163).
b) Social Bandits and Iranian Social Movements

The term "social bandits" was used by Hobsbawm to describe peasant rebels in general. He suggests that social banditry is a universal phenomenon which is a primitive form of social protest made by the peasants. Although the state pursues them and treats them as criminals, the native population admires them as their avengers and champions. The bandits, accordingly, are poor men having strong personality traits who refuse to submit themselves to the feudalist system. Hobsbawm adds that their revolts are often a personal protest against an unjust establishment. Because they lack in sophistication, the bandits can be manipulated by the revolutionary and anti-revolutionary forces alike.¹

This view of Hobsbawm about social bandits has been criticized by Block. According to him these bandits are actually the source of oppression for the peasantry in that they terrorize them.² Fathi put emphasis on the cultural aspects of banditry "because contacts between men with similar dispositions through generations often would give rise to a distinct set of norms, symbols."³ Accordingly "under certain social-structural conditions marginal groups can and do play a role of a decisive importance in bringing about social change."⁴

In the western part of Iran, where the mountainous regions of Kurdistan and Luristan lie, the type of peasant banditry described by Hobsbawm is very much endemic. A good number of

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³Ashgar Fathi: The Role of the 'Rebels' in the Constitutional Movements in Iran. In: International Journal of Middle East Studies, no. 10, 1979, p. 65. In Blok's view "what seems wrong with Hobsbawm's perception of brigandage is that it pays too much attention to the peasants and the bandits themselves. Before looking at them, it is necessary to look at the larger society in which peasant communities are contained" (Blok: op. cit., p. 211).
⁴Fathi: op. cit., p. 66.
bandits have become legendary, through the songs which have been made about them and the stories which have been told.\(^1\) However unlike Hobsbawm, Blok points out that the bandits are admired not because they are defenders of the poor but they are admired because they "stand out as men who evolved from poverty to relative wealth."\(^2\)

In urban areas of Iran social bandits known as "Ayyārs" and "Lutis" emerged. Their presence characterised the Iranian urban social structure through successive centuries. They have been a part of a numerous mob revolts, and in some cases they even spearheaded the revolts.\(^3\)

For Hobsbawm such social revolts were attempts of "the urban poor for the achievement of economic or political changes by direct action - that is by riot or rebellion - but as a movement which was yet inspired by no specific ideology, or, if it found expression for its aspiration at all, in terms of traditionalism and conservatism."\(^4\)

The "Lutis" and their forerunners the "Ayyārs" were well knit organized groups of people who were found in all major Iranian cities. They were so organized that "candidates for admission had to undergo a period of trial, after which, if they proved themselves worthy, they were admitted to membership of the association at a special banquet or 'Valīma' and girded by a belt." The "Luti" and "Ayyār" organizations were closely

\(^1\) In two typical Kurdish stories two bandits are admired and called with expressions such as "outlaw worthy persons" (Cf. Basile Nikitine: Kurdish stories from my collection. In: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Vol. IV, 1926, pp. 121 - 125).

\(^2\) Blok: On brigandage..., p. 214

\(^3\) The spontaneous revolts of the peasants and the poor city dwellers in Iran are too numerous to be mentioned here. In his "Iran in fruhislamischer Zeit", Spuler provides information about some of the important revolts.

\(^4\) Hobsbawm: Primitive Rebels, p. 110.
associated to the "Zurkhāneh" institutions, where a certain type of wrestling and gymnastic exercises are practiced. "The members of the 'Zurkhānas' also had a gild organization and initiation rites. Purity of character was demanded of those who wished to be initiated. These associations, like the craft gilds and the 'futuwwa' orders, had an 'Alid ting'.

Mainly the urban poor were recruited to these organizations. They always revealed critical and rebellious orientations towards the establishment. They have had their crude sense of social justice, egalitarianism and morality. They have had strong revolutionary potential in them and with that they could have become spearheads of social movements. But it did not happen so always because they lacked in ideological sophistication. However they always made themselves available for use to others who were engaged in social movements.

Floor has described the movements of the "Lutis" and their forerunners, the "Ayyārs", aptly by saying that they "were essentially popular movements among which the ideal of social justice, egalitarianism and high standing morals, embodied in the Javanmard, lived strongly."

Both bandits and "Lutis" are different from what Marx calls "Lumpenproletariat" living in all big towns who may here and there, be swept into a proletariat revolution, but due to their conditions of life, are used as the tools of reactionary intrigue.

1Lambton: Islamic Society..., p. 19.
But it is necessary to pinpoint the other side of the "Lutis". Quite often the "Lutis" were drawn into politics because of their social concern and were used by politicians and political influencers for their own ends. In return they received a sort of protection to their institutions. Although some of the "Lutis" on and often lived the life of criminals this can not be said about the "Lutis" as a general category. As it happened many times "Lutis" were a divided house and the conflicting factions were used by both revolutionaries and anti-revolutionaries.

De Bode who visited Iran in the first half of nineteenth century describes the case of the "Lutis" of the city of Esfahan as follows:

"The "Lutis" are a band of the most unprincipled and worst description of individuals, who club together, and are mixed up with all the broils which happen in Persian towns where the police has not much power. At Isfahan they once formed a regular gang, committing outrages in open day with impunity, because they were protected by the clergy. Their excesses and audacity had arrived at such a pitch, that after the death of Fet'hn-Ali-Shah, one of these "Lutis", named Ramazan, was proclaimed King by his associates, and styled Ramasen-Shah. Gold and silver coins were even struck in his name, and it was only by a rival "Lutis" that he was put down. This was all a farce; but the people suffered by it, and the civil authorities of the town brought into contempt. Khozrow-Khan, one of the old king's principal eunuchs, succeeded in establishing some order; but at his recall the "Lutis" again obtained sway, during the weak administration of Isfahan by Fazl-Ullah-Khan. It is reported that at his approach the Isfahan "Lutis", who are known for their ready withand daring spirit, went out in a body to meet him, and being aware with whom they had to deal, welcomed Fazl-Ullah-Khan, assuring him that the

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golden days of Isfahan had returned, for at the bare notice of his approach, the "Lutis" had left the town in a body. 1

The Iranian history reveals that the "Lutis" on numerous occasions played crucial role in the Iranian politics.

The earliest instance is that of Ya'qub the Coppersmith who in the ninth century, arrived in the capital of the south eastern Iranian province of Sistan from the countryside. 2 He joined the city "Ayyars" 3 and gradually assumed a leading position till in 861, he was proclaimed the amir of the province. 4 After several military expeditions he achieved enough power to attempt destroying the Arab Abbasid Caliphate, but he was defeated. Yaqub was one the earlier architects of Iranian nationalism and he was one of the most important supporters of the revival of the literary Persian Language, and Sho'ubite nationalism. As we will see later on the artisans and the Sufi mystics in Iran who played important roles in various Iranian movements had very intimate relations with the organisations or the brotherhoods of the "Ayyars". 5

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2 Franz Taeschner: Zunft- und Bruderschaften im Islam. Texte zur Geschichte der Futuwwa, Zurich/Munchen, 1979, p. 45; Stern: Ya'qub the Coppersmith..., p. 539.

3 Taeschner explains the activity of 'Ayyari' brotherhood (or futuwwa) as follows: "In den grossen Stadten des Irak und im iranischen Osten futuwwa Sunde, vor allem in Zeiten des Niederganges der legalen Staatsgewalt, die Macht an sich gerissen und in terroristischer Weise das Volk oligarchisch regiert haben, zumeist in einem Sinne, der auf Ausplunderung der Reichen und Unterstutzung der Armen hinauslief, wodurch sie sich in Gegensatz zur burgerlichen Ordnung der islamischen Welt setzten." (Taeschner: op. cit., p. 45)

4 Stern: op. cit., pp. 539 - 540.

5 Lambton: Islamic Society..., p. 19.
The "Lutis" continued to play this complementary role in the Iranian politics till the recent decades despite the fact that Iran has become highly centralized in the twentieth century.¹

The most famous lutis of modern Iranian history are Sattār Khan and Bāqer Khan of Tabriz who were active in the Constitutional Revolution. Their able leadership of the mobs as well as their courage and good manners made them national heroes.²

However it must be said that their continued existence over centuries and in large numbers can be attributed to the characteristic political decentralization and the poverty that characterized the Iranian urban areas. It became possible for these bandits to emerge and to sustain themselves because the political fabric of Iran was too thin to hold them down. They could emerge also because the urban poor needed saviours to protect their interests. It can be concluded in general that the "Lutis" had moorings in down-trodden classes and so they emerged as their saviours. However on certain occasions some of them acted against the interests of the poor classes. But mostly they encountered confrontations with the privileged classes pleading

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¹ During the rule of Pahlavi Shah, the "Lutis" organised mobs both for and against him, especially during the period of the Mosaddeq government and the coup d'etat of 1953 which toppled Dr. Mosaddeq.

² Floor: The Political Role..., p. 91; Fathi: The Role of the Rebels..., p. 58. Nafisi has devoted his book "Do mobārēz-e mashruteh" to the description of outstanding character of these two men and their role in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 - 1909. Although Nafisi writes only positively about them, in a letter written by a witness of the events in Tabriz, it has been pointed out that success spoiled Sattār Khan and "he began to rob inoffensive citizens, his house was full of spoils" (Cf. Edward G. Browne: The Persian Revolution of 1905 - 09, Cambridge, 1910, pp. 441 - 442).
the interest of down-trodden classes. And so they were dis-
liked and disproved by the privileged classes and admired
by the poor.¹

¹Migeod writes: "Über ihr Ansehen bleibt nur soviel zu sagen,
dass sie möglicherweise in niederen Schichten des Volkes eini-
gen Ruf als Faktoren ausgleichender Gerechtigkeit genossen
haben. Da aber ein Eigentumsausgleich gewaltsamer Art der
islamischen Auffassung ganzlich zuwider läuft, stand ihnen
der grosse Teil der persischen Gesellschaft mit Schrecken
und Ablehnung gegenüber" (Migeod: Die Lutis..., pp. 90 - 91).
3.2. Religious Movements

Now in this section we will take into consideration some of the religious movements that emerged in Iran during the last several centuries. As said earlier these religious movements can be classified into two categories: one passive movements and another active movements. The term active and passive has been used to emphasize the nature of involvement of people in and the general orientations of these movements.

a) Passive Movements of the Sufi Mystics

After the Arab invasion the majority of the Iranian people who were previously Zoroastrian were converted to Islam. As will be explained later on, the Shiite branch of Islam which was advocating equality and justice became an unseparable part of the ideology and strategy of active social movements in Iran. The Zoroastrian thought was a historical one, and this historicity remained preserved in Shiism and subsequently it was adopted by the active social movements.

But beside this, the non-historical idea of periodical renewal has had an important place¹ in Iranian thought especially as connected to the Sufism.

Sufism emphasizes the internal change in the individual rather than trying to change the outside factors. For that they developed special techniques to annul or overcome the human limitation, and to create a new human being above the human level i.e. a human God.²

¹Mircea Eliade: Kosmos und Geschichte: Der Mythos der ewigen Wiederkehr, Frankfurt/Main, 1984, p. 142.
²Ibid., pp. 171 - 172.
Sufism similar to the active movements (which will be our concern in the b. part of this chapter) emerged and thrived as a reaction to the moments of exploitation and oppression which people experienced. Therefore although Sufism differed in ideology and strategy from the active social movements, both were the results of the same factors. Thus it is not surprising that Sufism emerged by the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth centuries which was a critical period in Iranian history.¹ It was not a single and homogenous phenomenon in that it embodied some elements which were continuous and others that were subject to change. A large number of Sufi orders arose and declined over the centuries and in different regions. So Sufism has been a continuous phenomenon in the Iranian history. Browne states: "Sufism, then by reason of that quietism, eclecticism and latitudinarianism which are amongst its characteristic features, is the very antithesis, in many ways, to such definite doctrines as the Manichaean, the Isma'ili, and others, and would be more justly described as an indefinite immobility than as a definite movement."²

But it is worth-mentioning that Sufism was, as said earlier, flourished during the period of intense exploitation. During such periods the surplus which was produced by the community of producers was taken away from them by the influentials in the regimes created by the invader. Sufis became the spokesman of the members of such an exploited communities. They desired change but they also realized that the common man was so disabled, disheartened and unorganized that it would be impossible to mobilize him to offer resistance to the oppressors. Thus, they conceived the change in the external situation as impossible and so they tried to regenerate the common man into a new humanbeing having superior internal quality. But as the Sufis were generally

²Idib., p. 422
reacting against absolutism sometimes they moved away from
quietism through pantheism. They rejected absolute monotheism
and considered enlightened man the centre of all cosmic activiti-
es. By recognizing this, they believed that they could achieve
the inner change. The rebellious Sufi Mansur Hallaj was among
this group.

The Sufis always maintained distance between themselves
and the temporal power-holders and the spiritual power-holders.
They treated the people of these two categories as nonsignifi-
cant and negligible. They treated them as evils and wanted to
eliminate them from their potential community. But historical
evidences indicate that the Sufis both ideologically and prac-
tically were not homogeneous. There were Sufi orders which
chose to identify themselves with the ruling exploiting classes.
Ne'mato'llah (d. 1431), a well-known Sufi "was friend of kings.
He enjoyed the special favour of Shahrrokh (dominabatur 1404-
1447), while Ahmad Shah Bahmani, king of the Deccan (India),
deemed himself fortunate in persuading to come to his court one
of his grandsons." The Mullahi order of Dervishes which still
has a large following in Asia Minor is another example of qui-
etist and adaptive Sufism. In the later part of the eleventh
century "Sufism was gradually moulded into a more or less phi-
osophical system. This form of Sufism could to a considerable
extent ally itself with orthodoxy." And it was through this
type of Sufism that the masses were attracted to the Sunni
orthodoxy.

2 The German mystic Meister Eckehart expresses the mystical con-
cept of man and God in a simple sentence: "Nare ich nicht, so
ware Gott nicht." (Meister Eckehart: Vom Wunder der Seele,
Stuttgart, 1951, p. 38). Another mystic Angelus Silesius ex-
plains this cosmic oneness in the following similar manner:
"Ich weiss, dass ohne mich Gott nicht ein Nu kann leben, werd
ich zu nicht Er muss vor Noth den Geist aufgeben." (Angelus
Silesius: Cherubinischer Wandersmann. Geistreiche Sinn und
Schlussreime, ed. by Georg Ellinger, Halle, 1895, p. 15).
3 Shah Ne'mato'llah-i Vali of Kerman.
4 The son and successor of Timur.
5 Browne: A Literary History of Persia: The Tartar Dominion
In a society dominated by religion a mystic is also a social rebellion and vice-versa. The Sufis challenged both the vulgar orthodoxical elements in religion as well as the validity of social organization and social practices associated with them. The sphere of activity of a mystic does not remain limited to the religion, but he also assumes the role of a social reformer directly or indirectly. Although some of the Sufis did become mystics they were associated or involved with social movements. A case of the well-known Sufi Mansur-e Hallaj is a case in point. He was a pure mystic and martyr to his mystical beliefs, however reportedly he had very close connection with the Qarmatian movement and thus he was believed to be a follower of Chiliastic revolutionary doctrines. As Browne points out: "The garb of a Sufi dervish or religious mendicant was one of the most obvious disguises for a heretical propagandist to assume." Before Hallaj's cruel execution in A.D. 921 (scourging, amputation, decapitation and cremation), due to his public proclamation that he was God, and "just before his head was struck off, he bade his disciples to be of good cheer, for he would return to earth again in thirty years."

There are also some examples of Sufi orders which took active part in the fight against foreign invaders. When the city of Khwârazm was attacked by the Mongols, the Sufi master Najm-"el Din, removed his Sufi dress, took stones and a spear and

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4"After he had been scourged with a thousand stripes, and his hands and feet's cut off, he was put to death, and his body burnt with fire." (Browne: op. cit., p. 430).
5Ibid., p. 436.
fought with them till he was killed.¹

It has been argued by lanternari that the religious movements in which intercultural clash is involved, usually tend to be militant. Those whose life is beset by the foreign forces after direct and determined opposition to them. On the other hand, he argues, indigenous movements look for salvation through spiritual, cultural or ethical channels.²

The case of Sufism which initiated the silent social revolution contradicts the lanternari's argument. The Sufi passive movement developed rapidly during the periods of the Turkish and Mongal invasions and their exploitative domination. It seems that this-worldly utopian dreams are dropped in the situations when mobility and change look impossible. It has been noticed by some scholars that the negative Manichaean attitude towards this world was the reflection of extreme economic decline and inequality and the growth of a rigid class system.³

Sufism was a social movement in the sense that it reacted against the existing set of social situations characterized by discrimination, injustice, exploitation, falsehood and the like. The Sufis always cherished an image of potential community based on the principles of truth, justice and beauty. How far and whether they were successful in realizing the cherished goals is a disputable matter, but one can positively emphasize the major social implications of these movements:

1) It created and sustained moral forbearance and strength in the common man and enabled him to face the situation.

2) It suggested to the people an alternative mode of life in which the pursuits for economy and political objectives were subordinated to the pursuits for inner richness.

The Sufi movement is described as passive because the Sufis offered resistance which was essentially passive. The Sufis tried to dislodge the existing order by challenging its underlining legitimation and by denying approval to it.
b) **Active Millenarian Movements**

The Iranian Millenarian movements can be divided into five main groups according to their structures, orientations and organizational characteristics.

It need not be over emphasized that the movements in each category were moulded by the history-specific factors. In other words the movements which took place in a specific historical period shared with each other certain structural, orientational and organizational features. These movements took place during the period of different ruling dynasties established by the nomadic invaders. They can be enumerated as follows:

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1) **The Period of Arab Domination**

The period between the Arab and Turkish invasions (eighth to eleventh centuries) was a hectic and chaotic period, which brought about a large change in social and cultural aspects of the Iranian society. The Arab invasion made an everlasting impact on the Iranian society by introducing new cultural elements such as new religion, new language and new social practices into Iranian life and culture. Therefore under the pressure made through political and cultural invasion the old cultural and social edifice was crumbling down but the new had yet to find its roots. The movements which emerged during this period, thus, were influenced by this unique and particular state of affair. These movements were not simply power fights between different power holding groups. As will be explained later on, all these movements were initiated and participated by the under privileged classes of Iranian society. These people were going through a unique psychological crises. Most of them nurtured the hope of achieving more equality. However, they were disappointed and demoralized when they experienced more exploitation and oppression.

Similarly these new converts and especially those who took part in the oppositional movements, had to face the problem of legitimation of political hegemony.

Unfortunately very little information is available about those movements such as that of Mahan, Khadash etc. which emerged in the early part of Ummayad rule. Thus it is yet not possible to explain or understand how these movements faced the problems of legitimation and demoralization.

Some vague information is available about a man known as Abu Moslem who gathered around himself large number of Khurasanian people to fight the Ummayad caliphs. He apparently
played a main role in over-throwing the Ummayad dynasty and in replacing them by the Abbasids. Abu Moslem is a controversial character. He was politically very ambitious and he mustered support from divergent groups by making different promises to them. He was revered as a national hero by the people of different classes in Iran. Therefore when he was killed by the Abbasids who feared his popularity, he was made a martyr hero and the people attributed to him divine power. We also know that Abu Moslem had a considerable influence on the movements which appeared during Abbasid period although in his lifetime and in a power struggle between different anti-Ummayad groups, he put to death Behafarid (circa 750) who was the leader of a reformist movement opposed by both Zoroastrians and Muslims.

Therefore due to scarcity of informations about Abu Moslem we can not judge the nature of the action taken by him to replace Ummayads by Abbasids. We are only told that before his war with the Ummayads, Abu Moslem was advocating the legitimacy of one of Arab tribes to which the Abbasids also belonged.

One of the reasons for this may be that at that point of time the demoralized Iranians had not yet obtained a sense of self confidence. They were experiencing a moral crisis in regard to granting legitimation to the political hemolony of the Arabs. The Arab rulers were oppressive and exploitative and so

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2 Browne: A Literary History of Persia..., Vol. I, p. 309. In the Zoroastrian Messiah believes "among the Iranian heroes who will fight for the Saooshnânt are certain 'deathless chieftains' who, immortal in the flesh, are waiting in hidden or remote places for the call which will in the end rouse them to action" (Mary Boyce: On the Antiquity of Zoroastrian Apocalyptic. In: Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, Vol. XLVII, Part 1, 1984, p. 59).
the Iranians were less ready to accord their approval to their rule. But at the same time they could not find anybody among themselves, to him they could grant political legitimacy. Therefore because the Abbasid were propagating justice and especially equality between Arabs and non-Arabs they were supported by the Iranians. In fact when they came to power they let many Iranians from among bureaucrats and nobilities to achieve high positions in their empire. But they did not keep their main promise to bring about equality and justice to the poor masses and they even killed Abu Moslem. Therefore similar to the Umayyad period a large number of anti-Abbasid movements emerged.

In the following pages we take into consideration the main features of the movements which emerged during the domination of these two Arab dynasties. These can be enumerated as follows:

a) Messianism  
b) Militancy  
c) Nativism  
d) Belief in Magical power of the leader  
e) egalitarianism  
f) Artisan and peasant class background of the followers.

As we will subsequently see, Messianism became an inseparable part of Iranian active mellianarian movement for the period of the Arab invasion along the centuries to the present day. In the period of Arab invasion the charisma of the above mentioned Abu Moslem came to be printed on the Messianism of this period. As we have already mentioned Abu Moslem was made a national hero by different groups of Iranian people already in his lifetime. After his death, he was elevated to level of a messiah by the same people. Subsequently Abu Moslem's charisma was routinized and he became a symbol of Iranian aspiration, and this was used by the later Iranian revolutionaries. For example - a movement led by the Magian Sanbad (circa 756), which was also reformist and revivalistic in its character and was trying to introduce some reform into Zoroastrianism, made Abu Moslem an immortal hero, like the epic Iranian heroes, who were to accompany the Messiah.  

Sanbad claimed that when the Caliph (Abu Ja'far) decided to kill Abu Moslem, he has become a white bird and had flown away. Now he was in a castle with the Mahdi, and sent Sanbad himself to purify the world from non-believers before the coming of the Imam of the time. ¹

Al-Moqama' (Circa 780), who was called the Veiled Prophet of Khurasan, was also in close contact with Abu Moslem. He glorified and mythified Abu Moslem. ²

These movements were directed against the rule of the foreign oppressions. They took a violent form and the followers did not hesitate in taking arms. This is mostly because the Arab Caliphs did not hesitate to suppress these movement through their military power. These movements could survive only if they could defend themselves militarily. Therefore the first decision of the leaders was to develop and increase their defence abilities. From the following examples we can draw the conclusion that to some extent they were successful. These were not power battles among or between various groups each possessing some military ability. The followers of these movement were zealous believers and deeply hated the Caliphs. However they were, to a large extent, only artisans and peasants, and thus lacked military efficiency. Therefore all these movements were finally defeated at the hands the trained and disciplined armies. In spite of that the following examples indicate that these movements could perform long term war and active resistance and showed surprising bravery and self sacrifice. For example


Ostādīs (circa 765) is said to have had 300,000 armed followers and fought for about two years against the Abbasids, and was finally defeated by one of the Commandors of the Caliph al-Mansur (d. 775) who ordered the massacre of a large number of Ostādīs' followers.\(^1\)

Al-Moqana' fought against another Abbasid Caliph al-Mahdi (d. 785) for 14 years. According to Ibn Asir (Ibn Athīr) to prevent al-Moqana's fortress falling into the hands of the troops, he and a large number of his followers poisoned themselves and before dying burned the fortress.\(^2\)

Among all the movements during Abbasid period the one led by Babak was the most militant movement. Babak was leading a Khoram-dini movement against Abbasid Caliphs and posed a greater danger to their domination. There were two branches of the Khoram-dini movement, one in Gorgan led by Māziyār\(^3\)(d. 840), and the other by Babak who succeeded Jāvidān as leader of the Khoramis in Āzarbāijān.\(^4\) Babak fought different armies sent by the Caliph for about 23 years,\(^5\) and the wars finally ended

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\(^1\) Muller: Der Islam..., Vol. I, p. 495; \(\text{'tezādū Saltaneh: op. cit., p. 181; Browne: op. cit., p. 317. Al-Mansur sent Khasen b. Khozaymeh who after defeating Ostādīs slew 70,000 of his followers and 14,000 more who were taken captive, were beheaded immediately after the battle.}

\(^2\) Cf. Raqi: op. cit., p. 190; Nafisi: op. cit., pp. 26 - 28; Moḥammad Taqī Danesh Pāzuh (ed.): Bāb-e panjam-e Bayān ol-Adyān, Abol Maṭbābi Moḥammad ben 1′Hosayn 1′Alavi. In: Farhang-e Iran Zamin, Vol. X, p. 175. According to the documents studied by Nafisi, al-Moqana ordered his wife to pour poison in the wine of other women (he seems to have had a large number of women followers). As they fell dead he threw their bodies into an oven, and, after doing so he himself sprang into the fire.


\(^5\) Danesh Pāzuh: Bāb-e panjam..., p. 177;
in his cruel death in Samara. Another noteworthy military confrontation of the Arab rulers and the down-trodden people took about 14 years from 869 to 883. This was in lower Iraq and Khuzestān, where the rich land-owners used the slave labour for the cultivation of sugar-cane fields. The landlords were a part of the Abbasid ruling class, and some of them even belonged to the Abbasid clan. Therefore when the slaves, led by an Iranian, called Ali Mohammad, revolted against these land-owners, the Abbasid mercenary army was sent to suppress them. It is said that more than 500,000 slaves, men and women, participated in this movement which came to be known as Zanj movement.

The movements during this period were characterized by strong overtone of nativism. This was because the invaders not only captured political power, but also began to demolish cultural and national identity of the native people by imposing on them their own culture. Before we discuss this nativistic elements in the Iranian movements, we should take into consideration another feature of these movements namely the belief in the magical power of the leader. As Weber has pointed out the situation of crisis favours the emergence of the charismatic leadership. During crisis situation people lose their confidence in their own efficiency and they also realise their limitations. So they eagerly wait for somebody with superior qualities who can take them out of this crisis

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2 According to Jorji Zaydān the number of revolted slaves was about 2,000,000. The period of 14 years is also given by Theodor Noldeke: A Servile War in the East. In: Sketches from Eastern History, London and Edinburgh, 1892, p. 146ff. Also cf. E. Ashtor: A Social and Economic History of the Near East in the Middle Ages, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976, p. 120.
situation. There are two processes which simultaneously take place in such situation. The people attribute some magical powers to their leaders and this gives them a sense of relief. Likewise the leaders also claim that they are gifted by some magical or divine powers in terms of which they legitimize their dominance over others. During this period quite a few leaders, who led the movements against the Caliphs, asserted that they possessed magical power. For example - Biruni narrates that Behafarid, who led a movement against the Ummayads, first disappeared and went to China for seven years. He returned, bringing with him a green skirt which when folded could be covered in a man's fist.¹ That skirt must have been of a superfine muslin cloth and so it could be folded fitting in a man's fist. There were nothing magical about it but the people then thought that Behafarid was doing some thing of miracle and began to belief that he was having magical or divine power.

Similarly Al-Moqanna¹ claimed divinity and said he was manifested in a material body so that the followers could see him. He is said to have created a moon called the moon of "Nakhshab" which he took out of a well every night.² Similarly the Zanj slave movement was led by an Iranian('Ali b. Mohammad),³ who claimed to possess the power to perform miracles, as the result of which he was persecuted. He also used to wear a golden mask, something unusual which could have a dramatic effect on his followers. In fact according to some authorities this he did because he was blind by one eye

²Nafisi: Man-e nakhshab, p. 26; Rażi: Moda'iyan-e nobovat, p.190.
and did not have a pleasant face.¹

To go back to the nativism among the movements, we may state here the fact that the oppressive and exploitative rulers were at the same time strangers affected the Iranian active movements in two ways:

a) It gave birth to a nationalistic feeling which, as we have already mentioned, was the core of the Sho'ubi movement. Therefore nationalism became the main constituent of a movement which was started and supported by the members of the better of sections of Iranian society (i.e. bureaucrats and land nobility)

b) In the movements of the lower classes of Iranian people the nativism become subordinant to the egalitarian aim of the movements.

Therefore the nationalistic impulses of the Iranian people did also find expression on and often in different Messianic movements of this period. For example: Sanbad who led a movement against the political and cultural hegemony of the Arabs, is said to have told the Zoroastrians that in a book which he saw it was revealed that the Arab domination could not last long and that one of the Sassanians, the ancient Iranian kings, would reappear again and defeat the Arabs.² Obviously this he used as a strategy to regain a sense of confidence, to remove feelings of despair and to introduce a ray of hope in the minds of the native Iranians. It is also quite apparent that there is a Messianic element involved in this strategy. As it was mentioned earlier Messianism was a component of the Zoroastrian religious ideology. A reference has already been made to the role played by the Mavali and Sho'ubi nationalists in the

¹Razi: Moda'iyān-e nobovat, p. 189. According to some others he used to wear a green veil (Muller: Der Islam..., Vol. I, p. 495).
awakening of national consciousness among Iranian people. It has also been reported that the same Mavali nationalists made a great contribution to the Zanj slave movement. The Mavalis not only led the slave revolt, but many of them either took an active part in it or indirectly supported it.\(^1\)

There was an egalitarian ideological strain in the pre-Islamic Iranian thought, which was largely introduced by Mazdak, who is described as one of the earliest thinkers to formulate egalitarian ideology. (We will discuss Mazdakism in greater detail later). Egalitarianism, which is referred to as Mazdakism by the historians, was a goal value for the Iranian oppositional movements of this period. For example Biruni says about al-Moqana' that "he made obligatory for his followers all the laws and institutions which Mazdak had established."\(^2\)

Similarly, Khoramndini movement, referred to earlier, also seems to have been the continuation of Mazdakism movement in the Islamic period. According to "Siyāsat nāmeh", which is considered as an authentic account of early Iranian history, the Khoramndini movement was started by Khoramneh the widow of Mazdak himself,\(^3\) and survived till the twelfth century.\(^4\) Siyāsat nāmeh also describes the leader of the Zanj a Mazdakite.\(^5\) Ibn Asir (Ibn Athir) says: Many slaves

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\(^2\) Quoted by Browne: A Literary History of Persia..., Vol. I, pp. 313 and 318; and Raqi: Moda'iyya-e nobovat, p. 189.

\(^3\) Negān al-Molk: Siyāsat nāmeh, pp. 231 - 232.

\(^4\) Ibid., pp. 213 - 214; Browne: op.cit., p.313.

\(^5\) Klima: Beiträge..., p. 78.
joined him in order to get free from the painful life of slavery. He promised them the ownership of land and property and swore never to betray them and to do everything he could for them. Then the slave masters came to him and offered to pay him five dinar for each slave if he sent them back. Instead 'Ali b. Moḥammad asked the slaves to scourge the owners or their messengers.¹

The strong egalitarianism which characterizes these various movements can be explained, as some historians have already done, by saying that these movements were mostly mass movements, activated and supported by the sections of poor, underprivileged and exploited people in Iran. What these people wanted was freedom from exploitation and freedom from fear. And for that they wanted a society based on an egalitarian principle. Although we still do not have adequate information about the class background of all the leaders of the movements of this period, we can still say on the basis of available evidence that some of them came from the same background as their followers.

Al-Moqana', in his early stage of life, is said to have been a washerman.² On the basis of different records we can conclude that Bābak's father was an oil-seller of Ctesiphon (Mada'en) who migrated to the frontiers of ʿAzarbājān where he died soon after his marriage. Bābak was brought up by his mother who was working as a maid servant for others. Bābak's following consisted of poor peasants who when took to arms,

² Razi: Modā'iyan nobovat, p. 189.
needed some time to learn how to fight. Babak himself made his living through a variety of proletarian jobs.

Among the officers of the Zanj movement were the freed black slaves, weighers of grain, butchers, phlebotomists (a despised profession), artisans, and the movement was supported by the peasantry.

Another significant feature of the social movements during this period is that along with the Messianic beliefs, there were the beliefs regarding re-incarnation and metempsychosis.

This idea of re-incarnation and metempsychosis was probably borrowed from Buddhism, which in pre-Islamic times existed beside Zoroastrianism in Eastern Iran. After the spread of Islam, particularly during this phase, this idea became the main ideological element of the revolutionary movements. Shahrestani tells us that the followers of Sanabad believed in anthropomorphism and metempsychosis as well as in re-incarnation. The idea of re-incarnation and

1 Naqid b. Amr at-tamimi, quoted by Browne: A Literary History of Persia..., Vol. I, p. 324; Nafisi: Babak-e khoramdin..., p. 8. According to Razi, as Babak's brother, 'Abdollah, was arrested, he is said to have been happy that only a Dehghan (i.e. Iranian land nobility) could do it as he himself was a Dehghan. (Razi: Moda'iyan nobovat, p. 201). According to Mohammad Ufi, Babak's followers were agriculturists due to which, in the beginning, they were unable to fight. (Mohammad Ufi: Jawama' al-hikayat wa lawama' al-rawayat. In: Nafisi: op. cit., p.13); Moqadasi mentions the poverty of Babak's followers (Moqadasi: Al-bad' wal-tarih, Vol. III, p. 9, Paris. In: Nafisi: op. cit., p. 72).


3 Ibid., p. 118.

4 Halm: Die Traditionen..., p. 44ff.

5 Ibid., p. 58ff.

metempsychosis is also attributed to 'al-Moqana', who said that when the Creator created the world He entered into the body of Adam, and after that, into the bodies of Noah, Moses, Jesus, Mohammad and Abu Moslem and finally 'al-Moqana' himself. ¹

Bābak declared himself to be God or at least a Divine theophany. He also said that the soul of his master Jāvidān had passed onto him.² It is recorded by Shahrestānī also that the doctrine of the Khoramdini as a whole was based on Tanāsokh (i.e. the passing of the soul from one body to another) and Holul (i.e. the passing of God into human form).³ On the coins struck by the leader of the black slaves the leader calls himself "al-Mahdi 'Ali b. Muhammad - the Redeemer."⁴

This idea of re-incarnation and metempsychosis came in handy to explain the divine and the magic power which the leaders believed to have had. As said earlier it is this belief of the followers in the divine and magical powers of the leaders that was used by the leaders to mobilize public support for the movement as well as to generate a sense of confidence in their minds. This belief also can be viewed as an ideological antagonism to the strict absolutism of the Arabs. The role this belief played in creating hopes in the hearts and minds of the people about the arrival of Messiah can not be over emphasized. At the same time, the idea of metempsychosis could theoretically explained the existence of a hidden Messiah.

³ Quoted by Rażı: op. cit., p. 203; also in Nafisi: Bābak-e khoramdin..., p. 22.
2. The Period of Saljuq Turkish Domination

During the second phase the Iranian Millenarian movements were characterized by the involvement of active Shi'ism. Some of the movements as we will see later on were able to achieve a limited political victory which led them to create independent states or to establish autonomy in small regions.

The emergence of Shi'ism was originally politically motivated. The disputes about the successors of the prophet brought the followers of 'Ali b. Abi Ṭalib (d. 661) together and they called themselves the Shi'at-ʿAli (Party or followers of ʿAli). They differed in no way from the rest of the community as regards religious beliefs. The faction of Shiites was purely Arab and made no attempt to gain the sympathy of the subject races. However the number of Shi'ites increased rapidly among non-Arabs in Iraq who in the first Islamic century "constituted the majority of the population there."  

Since then Shi'ism had become the most important and widespread sectarian ideology throughout the Islamic empire. Particularly in Iran Shi'ism became very popular among the poorer and down-trodden sections of population because of the Messianism it advocated. Gradually Shi'ism came to be identified as an ideology of the oppressed and Ali b. Abi Ṭalib was glorified as "the Saviour" of the helpless people. So the conflict between the Sunnis and the Shiites did not remain merely a theological conflict but it became the conflict between the oppressed and the oppressors. Shi'ism came to be dominated by the Mawali and other oppressed

2Al-Haidari: Zur Soziologie..., p. 119.
classes, and became the instrument of their social and religious revolt against the oppression of the orthodox state.\(^1\)

Later, Shi'ism became the mouth-piece of all the unprivileged people, by passing over the ethnic boundaries.\(^2\) So Shi'ism no longer remained Arabic, but it became so to say Mavālī Shi'ism. But the change from Arab to Mavālī Shi'ism brought about a new era in its history by introducing into its ideology eschatological and messianic ideas which existed in Zoroastrianism and Christianity and which had survived among the new converts to Islam. After the murder of 'Ali b. Abī Taleb and the dramatic martyrdom of his son Hosayn and his family and followers at Karbala (Oct. 10, 680), Shi'ism was transformed into a revolutionary messianic movement, which first manifested itself in the revolt of Mokhtar in 685. His revolt was supported by the poor Arabs and especially the Mavālīs. Mokhtar preached that Muhammad b. al-Hanafiya, a son of 'Ali was the Messiah. Despite the suppression of Mokhtar, the movement survived, and the idea of a hidden Mahdi as the one who would return and "fill the world with justice and equity"\(^3\) held good.

Shi'ism was later split into two main groups namely moderates such as the Twelvers and Zaidis and the extremists (Gholāt) such as the Isma'ilis or Seveners. In the formative period of the Shi'i movements numerous sects rose and revolted again and again and on their failure, passed into mythology.\(^4\)

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2Ibid. In Iraq and Syria the Greek Christians became Sunnis whereas Shi'ism attracted the peasants and artisans who were gnostics. It was probably through such followers that Shi'ism became connected to the trade guilds. (Cf. note by professor H.A.R. Gibb, in: Arnold J. Toynbee: A Study of History, Vol. I, London/New York/Toronto, 1951 (1934), pp. 400-401).
4Ibid., p. 27.
Thus from the tenth century onwards most of the move-
ments were inspired by Shi'ism and Mazdakism.\footnote{1} We will now
briefly discuss two major events of this period, namely
the Qarmatian and the Assassin movements.

a) Qarmatian Movement

The Qarmatians, whose movement became one of the main
concerns of the heterographers, first came to surface in 892
and soon spread throughout Syria, Mesopotamia and Iran. One
part of the Qarmatians led by Abu Sa'id of Janaba and his
son Abu Taher (d. 944) succeeded in establishing a republic
in Bahrain, (which was then a part of Iran and it lasted for
about 150 years.)

One of the important features of the Qarmatian movement
was its popularity among the artisans and the workers. It
has been pointed out that the Qarmatians were the ones who
created the Islamic guilds and gave them their distinctive
character.\footnote{2} Tabari also points out that the Qarmatians were
mainly peasants and tillers.\footnote{3} He also states that the first
protest against the Qarmatians came from a local landlord
who complained that the 50 prayers a day, ordered by the
Qarmatian preacher, interfered with work of his labourers.
This is indicative of the class character of this movement.

The Qarmatian movement was probably the first revolu-
tionary movement inspired by Shi'i Chiliasm and Mazdakite
egalitarianism which was able to establish a sovereign state.

\footnote{1} Also see: Appendix note no. 5, in this work.
\footnote{2} Massygon: Articles "sinf" and "shadd", in: Encyclopædia of
\footnote{3} Abu Djafar Mohammad ibn Djarir at-Tabari: Ta'rikh ar-Rusul
we'l-Mulûk (Annales) ed. M.J. de Goeje and others, Leyden,
of Isma'ilism, p. 92.
It is interesting to note that, after their victory, the leaders of the movement did their best to materialize their utopian ideology. According to Ibn Hawqal, the Waramatian state was a sort of oligarchic republic. "The ruler was in no sense absolute, but rather a first among equals, ruling with the aid of a kind of a committee consisting of his close associates and relatives by both physical and initiatory bonds." ¹

Nāṣer Khosrow, who visited this republic in 1051, observed that in the Waramatian state the people neither had to pay taxes nor tithes. Advances were made available to any one who demanded until his affairs were re-established. At Lahsa, the capital city of Waramatians, some of the mills were owned by the state and in which corn was ground for private individuals, without any payment. The repair for poor house-owners was carried out at public expenses.² As quite a few Muslim historian vouchsafe, the regime described by Nāṣer Khosrow resembled the type of government Mazdak demanded the Sassanid king subad to establish. But Nāṣer Khosrow also speaks of 30,000 black slaves who were doing agricultural work in Bahrain³. This indicates that the egalitarian system of the Waramatians probably did not have any concern for the slaves. This part of the Waramatian state has not been taken into consideration by those who have eulogized that state as an excellent example of egalitarian state in Iranian history. But this is still not to deny the fact that the Waramatian state was a serious attempt made towards the realization of an egalitarian society.

²Abu Mo'in Nāṣer Khosrow: Safar-nāme, Berlin, 1340 A.H., p. 82.
³Nāṣer Khosrow: Safar-nāme, p. 82.
As was in the tradition of Shi'ite extremism the Warnatiants believed in re-incarnation or the return of the leader. Nāser Khosrow says: Before his death Abu Sa'id ordered his followers to remain united until his return. He said: "If, when I return, you do not recognize me, strike me on the nape with a with a sabre. If indeed it be me, I shall come back to life immediately."1

Like other Shi'i movement Warnatiants were concerned with Alid legitimism. But they subordinated it to the demands of their egalitarian aims. Contrary to other Shi'ites, the Warnatiants did not imagined their leaders to be all powerful. As we have already mentioned for the Warnatiants the leaders were considered as of the group and not above the group.2

Warnatiants exhibited nativistic tendencies and are said to have revived some of the Zoroastrian beliefs.3

The Warnatiant movement was an organized, active revolutionary, egalitarian and Messianic movement.

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1 Naser Khosrow: Safar-nāmeh, p. 82.

2 Mohibul Hasan Khan: Mediaeval Muslim Political Theories of Rebellion against the state. In: Islamic Culture, no. 18, 1944, p. 43.

3 For example - Abu Taher of Jamāba is said to have ordered those to be punished who extinguished fire, by cutting off their tongues or hands. (Razi: Moda'iyān-e nobovat, p. 219). Fire was the most important element among the Zoroastrians. Also see Appendix note no. 6 in this work.
b) **Nezārī Movement**

Another similar millenarian movement that took place during this period and that commands our attention is Nezārī movement.

Throughout Saljuq domination the greatest danger to the ruling class was posed by Nezārī assassins. Nezāris were the native Iranians of a Shi’ite persuasion. They had close connection with Ismailis of Egypt. They created their independent colonies in the mountains of Iran and Syria. Their headquarters was located in the fortress of Alamut. From there their leader Hasan-e Sabah and his successors created an atmosphere of terror for the Saljuqs and their native Persian collaborators.

The Assassins' activities lasted for 166 years, i.e. from 1090 to 1256. During this period there were eight lords of Alamut. Hodgson divides their history according to three groups of reigns:

"The first three reigns, from 1090 to 1162, served to establish the community as an independent power; the effort to overthrow the Sunni pattern is made, and fails; and the more restricted sphere of subsequent Nizari activity is marked out.

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1 The word "assassine" which is used in many European languages is derived from the guerilla activities of the Nezārī movement and indicates the width and importance of this movement. A legend existed about the Nezārī assassins according to which these young men were given Hashish and made unconscious. After that they were taken to a garden and told that it was paradise. Thus it is said that their self-sacrificing and fearless missions were due to their belief, that if they died, they would go to paradise. (Gerhard Wahrig: Deutsches Worterbuch, Gutersloh/Berlin, 1977 (1968); Edward G. Browne: A Literary History of Persia: From Firdawsi to Sa‘di, Vol. II, Cambridge, 1977 (1905), pp. 204 - 206; Sir Henry Yule: The Book of Sir Marco Polo, 3rd ed., London, 1903, Vol. I, pp. 139 - 148).

2 According to Nafisi their activities lasted for 171 years.
In the second period, 1162 to 1210, Nizarism is reconstructed by newly-found imams, rejecting as hopeless the Islamic society at large, and turning to its own genius for a world within itself: the realm of the 'Abiyyama, the great Resurrection. In the final period, 1210 to 1256, even this effort broke down, and the Nizaris attempted to fit into the kaleidoscopic Sunni society as one state among many—an attempt which came to violent end almost befitting its narrow ambition.\(^1\)

During the 35 years of Hasan's reign, his Fadā'is (i.e. Nezārī guerillas) assassinated about 48 very prominent men belonging to the Saljuq ruling class.\(^2\) The Fadā'is whose names were feared\(^3\) and admired all over the Saljuq empire, even succeeded in assassinating two Caliphs of Baghdad.\(^4\)

The class background of the Assassins was not different from that of those who participated in other Iranian movements. The Assassin movement was strongly supported by farmers and artisans. Its popularity among the farmers was a reaction to forcible occupation and confiscation of the lands of these small landholders and landholding farmers according to the tribal law of the Saljuqs. In the domain of the Assassins large land-ownership did not exist.\(^5\) "When one looks at the rock of Alamut, one is astonished by the slightness of its area. Without the support coming from the country

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3 Fadā'i was the name given to the Nezārī assassins. It means "devotee or volunteer for a dangerous cause". This term has survived up to the present time and since then has been used by several groups for whom assassination constituted an important part of their political activities. (S. Haim & Persian-English Dictionary, Tehran, 1354 A.H.).
4 Hodgson: The Order of Assassins, p. 112.
5 Nafisi: Haṣan-e Sabāh,
such a fortress could not have withstood all the numerous and prolonged attacks which were directed against it."¹

They belonged to the Isma'ili branch of Shi'ism. Ghazali realises that the Isma'ili doctrines were especially attractive to the "awāmm" that is the common and the unprivileged people.² In general the Isma'ili branch of Shi'ite doctrine was becoming popular among the poor not only in Iran but also in other Islamic countries. Due to this reason the Sunni sources began to argue that the poor were attracted to Isma'ili doctrine not because their theological quality is superior, but because they made false promises to the poor people. Thus to refute the Isma'ili doctrines, the Sunni sources had to shift their emphasis from theological to economic aspects.³

Ghazali also admitted that "the chief danger of heresy lay in its attraction for the labouring and artisan classes."⁴

It is worth mentioning that artisans achieved the highest positions among the Assassins. The da'i Abu Hamzeh was a shoe-maker, who siezed at least two fortresses,⁵ and Abu Taher, a goldsmith, succeeded the Isma'ili chief, al-Hakem al-Monajjem.⁶


³Lewis: op. cit., p. 93.


⁵Hodgson: op. cit., p. 76.

⁶Ibid., p. 91.
The Ismailis even claimed that the assassination of the great Saljuq minister Negām al-Molk was revenge for a carpenter whom the minister had executed.

The leaders of Alamut castle were charismatic and were considered to be the incarnation of wisdom.\(^1\)

The doctrine of the Nezāris was based on Shi‘ism and the seventh Imam was believed to be the hidden Imam.\(^2\) Chiliasm was the most prominent feature of the Assassin movement. Therefore as a part of Shi‘ite Chiliasm they believed that a new social order based on social justice and equality can and should be brought about. But they themselves could not do so due to the military power of the Saljuqs. Instead they tried to realize their dream in their own small world. Thus, in 1164, during the month of Ramaḡān\(^3\) an important event took place in the fortress of Alamut. Hasan II gathered the people together for what was to be called the Festival of Resurrection.\(^4\) He declared that he had received a message from the hidden Imam\(^5\) “according to which the burden of the obligation of ritual law (shari‘a) was lifted,”\(^6\) and thus people were asked to break their fast. It meant that those who in spirit responded to the call were now raised to immortal life and those who did not respond were now judged and banished into non-existence.\(^7\) Now as Wā‘em(messenger) of the Resurrection\(^8\) Hasan II considered himself greater than the prophets.\(^9\)

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1 Hodgson: The Order of Assassins, p. 41.
2 The difference between the Seveners and Twelvers emerged in discussion about the succession of Emām Ja‘far al-Ṣādeq. The Seveners considered his eldest son Iṣmā‘īl as his natural successor. But the Twelvers found him incapable and thus chose the other son Musā al-Kāzem.
3 The month of Ramaḡān, in the Islamic calendar, is a month of fasting.
4 Hodgson: op. cit., p. 149.
5 The name of the hidden Ismaili Imam is Tayyeb.
6 Hodgson: op. cit., p. 149.
7 Ibid., p. 151.
8 Wiyāma or Wiyāmat means rising or resurrection.
"The function of a wa'im is to introduce paradise on earth. Ritual law will be abolished, there will be neither work nor illness."\(^1\)

As already mentioned, the resurrection was spiritual. The beliefs of the Isma'îlis had already embodied the ideal of the rising of the soul, of the mind, from one realm of apprehension to a higher one. They believed in minor resurrections, but the final resurrection, according to them, was the time when an individual was released into a purely spiritual existence at death.\(^2\)

The Assassins had nativistic tendencies and a particular dislike of the Turkish soldiery.\(^3\) It has been even claimed that the Assassin movement was the last struggle of the Iranian knighthood against the victorious new era of the Saljuqs to return back to the stage of former feudalism.\(^4\)

After the fall of Alamut the Nezârî Isma'ilis continued to live underground but as a passive and unimportant group. It is estimated that altogether they lived in Iran for about

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1. Rudolf Strothmann: Gnostistexte der Ismailiten, Gottingen, 1943. In: Hodgson: The Order of Assassins, p. 15. A world, in which no work and sickness exists is also a favourite subject of the modern Messianic movements in the so called Third World.


4. W. Barthold: Die persische Su'ûbîja und die moderne Wissenschaft. In: Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete, Vol. XXVI, 1912, p. 256. Minorsky rejects this idea and argues: "In reality, the resemblance of the fortresses of the Assassins to the strongholds of the former masters of the provinces was purely external. The Iranian barons reflected the isolation of the areas, which were self-sufficient economically, and the opposition of the local interests to the unifying tendencies of the monarchy. On the contrary, the Isma'îlis did not work for any particularism. Their idea was to unify the country, and even countries, on the basis of a system which would permit the organization of all classes and sorts of people in a single social pyramid built according to the degrees of initiation." (Minorsky: Iran: Opposition..., p. 188).
four centuries before they went to India. They had believed in the secret magical power behind certain numbers. For them the numbers 5, 7, 12, 24 and 30 represented cosmic secrets. The Nezāris showed interest to science and philosophy, especially the Greek philosophers Aristotle and Plato. They also provided patronage to scholars such as Nāṣer Tusi.¹

The Assassin movement was an organized one with a sophisticated ideology, administration, propaganda machine and social organization. The Assassins could have achieved more in the course of 150 years, if the Saljuqs would not have been militarily that strong. The strong military power of Saljuqs could be attributed to their nomadic military abilities, their sheer number and also to their tribal intergroup solidarity. In addition to these they could elicit collaboration from Iranian bureaucrats. But the Assassins received their support from the farmers and artisans, and thus like other sedentary people they were militarily inefficient. We have already discussed the military weakness of the sedentary population of Iran in their confrontation with the nomadic tribes.

3. The Period of Mongol Domination

After the Mongols invaded Iran they succeeded in total destruction of the Nezāri Assassin Movement. The period of Mongol domination is particularly marked by the growth of the passive Sufi movement which has already been discussed.

The Sufis strongly influenced the active movements of this and later periods. An important movement of this period influenced by Sufism was the Ḥorūfī, which was started by

¹When the Alamut was seized by the Mongols, Tusi, who was a Twelver Shi'i, claimed to have been kept there against his own will. But it was only to please the Mongols who gave him a very important position.
Astarābādī\(^1\) (circa 1386). This movement began in the fifteenth century and spread over quickly from Harāt to Shirvān and from there to Aleppo. Due to the strength and extremely aggressive designs of the Mongols the followers of this movement had to go underground. They did not get the opportunity for open struggle of the kind undertaken by the Nezāri, Qarmatian and Khoramdīni. Horufis sent missionaries to distant places, especially to craft centres, and did in the beginning avoid assassinations of prominent persons.

But they started the assassinations after their attempt to achieve power through other means failed. There is an interesting analogy between the Mazdakis and Horufis. Like the Mazdakis who tried to bring about changes from above, the Horufis, in the beginning, established a good relation with the Mongol ruler Mirānshāh\(^2\) (d. 1400).

The underground activity of the Horufis does not seem to have reduced the speed of its spread. Astarābādī's doctrine, explained through his poetry, spread from Astarābād, south of the Caspian Sea, to Adrianople (now in west Turkey) in his life time and caused anger and fear among the ruling classes.\(^3\) The Mongol Timur ordered his son Mirānshāh to cut off his relationship with the movement and destroy it. Mirānshāh was using this movement for his purpose against orthodoxy. He arrested Astarābādī and some of his followers, imprisoned them and finally put them to death.\(^4\)

\(^4\) Tarbiyat: Op. cit., p. 386. According to Ibn Hajār, Mirānshāh "struck off his head with his own hand. And when this was known to Timur, he demanded his head and body and burned them". (Browne: Some Notes..., pp. 61 – 62).
The persecution of the Horufis seems to have been widespread. A number of them escaped to Asia Minor, among whom was Nasimi, one of the leading figures of the movement. Through his poetry he preached atheism and heresy because of which he was first convicted and consequently he was flayed alive in Aleppo.

Horufi was mainly the movement of the artisans and urban population. Astaraḏāḏi, the founder of the movement, was a hat-maker from the city of Astaraḏāḏ. When the Mongol Shāhrokh was stabbed by a Horufi, the assassin was killed immediately, but in his pocket they found a key through which they discovered a house which was a centre for the artisans, especially hatmakers. The house was regularly visited by many artists, scholars and freethinkers of Harāt. It seems that the Horufi propaganda was mostly directed to woo the urban working population.

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1 Emād-ādīn Nasimi, born about 1369 in one account near Baghdad, in another account in Shirāz and executed in 1417.

2 Gibb: History of Ottoman Poetry, p. 346. While this being done, it is said that his face became pale due to bleeding. Some accused him of being coward. He answered in verse: "Even the face of the sun, who is the bravest of all, becomes pale as he goes to rest at the end of the day" (Muḥammad Zādeh: Introduction to Divān of Emād-ādīn Nasimi, Baku, 1972, p. 15).

3 This execution scene with the accused man being criticized of being afraid despite his claims of being all powerful and immortal, is often repeated in the history of Iranian active movements. Whether these have happened or have been created by the followers, it leads us to have a better understanding of the psychology of these people and their ideal of martyrdom and elevation to super human level. See appendix Note No. 7.


5 Khwandamīr: op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 323 - 324 and Vol. III, pp. 615 - 617. Many leaders of millenarian movements in medieval Europe were the members of the secondary elites with high education. For example, Thomas Muntzer, according to Cohn, was an "eternal student", an extraordinarily learned and intensely intellectual. But they have also been negatively evaluated as frustrated and déclassés intellectuals which may not completely touch the truth (Cf. Cohn: The Pursuit, p. 251).
Their doctrine was inspired by Mazdakism, Sufism and especially humanism which from the ninth to the fifteenth century became the core cultural and philosophical value in Iran.\(^1\) For the Horufis, "man, created in the image of God, in the ideal form, is the Microcosm, the book of God, the Goal and Measure of all things."\(^2\) Each human being was a manifestation of God and no distinction existed between his body and soul.\(^3\)

Their doctrine was also influenced by Shi‘ism and its Messianism. The external characteristic of their doctrines was the use of the numerical values of words. They taught the genuineness of letters\(^4\) and their name Horufi, i.e. Literalist or Cabbalist\(^5\) is derived from this part of their teachings. According to them, on the day of Creation the letters, "K" and "R" were first created. This is an esoteric interpretation which was also practised by the Isma‘ilis.\(^6\) They rejected material Resurrection, Paradise and Hell, and inclined towards a belief in Transmigration and Re-manifestation of the same significant essences in new forms.\(^7\) For them Paradise meant this world, with knowledge of the science of letters and hell was ignorance.\(^8\)

The doctrine of Ta‘wil, or allegorical interpretation encouraged the Horufis to disregard external forms of devotion and religious observances.\(^9\)

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\(^2\) Browne: Some Notes..., p. 70.


\(^6\) Mohammad Žādeh, in: Naṣimi: op. cit., p. 12. The Horufi, on the base of the 32 letters of the Persian alphabet, created a system of esoteric meanings connected to them.

\(^7\) Browne: op. cit., p. 71.

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 74.

\(^9\) Ibid., p. 78.
A more radical fraction of the Horufi called Noghtavi or Pasikhāni, spread among the peasantry. It had a secret organization, and a large but dispersed following. They were accused of being atheists, not believing in resurrection, heaven or hell, and for worshipping only mankind, \(^1\) for believing that the world is self existent and original. \(^2\)

The Horufi did not lack nativistic tendencies. For example— their main book was written in Persian and special attention was paid to the Persian alphabet. However nativism did not seem to have had any significant place in their orientation. On the contrary nativism played an important part in another contemporary movement known as Sarbedārān \(^3\) in Sabzavār (1338 – 1381). Their ideology was also a syncretism of Shi‘ism and Sufism, mixed with pre-Islamic Iranian beliefs and customs. It was inspired by the epic stories of Shāhnāme of Ferdowsi and its legendary heroes. They proclaimed that they would never allow a single Mongol or Tartar to set foot on Iranian soil again. But this did not reduced the strong Messianic expectation of the people of Sabzavār, who were taking a caparisoned horse to the gate of the city twice a day for the service of the Hidden Imām, hoping that he would appear again. \(^4\)

4. **The Period of Turkoman Domination I**

Now in the following paragraphs we are going to discuss two movements which are quite different from the movements which we took into consideration earlier. The movements

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3. *Meaning "Gallows-birds".*
discussed earlier were initiated and supported by the native Iranians against political domination and cultural hegemony of the dynasties which were founded by Arab, Turkish, Mongol invaders. In these movements the leaders mobilized support sources by making nativist appeals, by assuring Messianism and the like. But two particular movements namely Mosha'sha'i in Khuzestān and Safavid in Āzarbaijān were quite different from other movements in terms of their orientation and support mobilization.

1) The discussion that follows is focused on to show as to how the social situation is created in which Messianism becomes well comted for the people.

2) How the strategy of a movement changes after major recruitment of followers from another class. And particularly in the case of the two above mentioned movements, how the former passive ideology and strategy is radicalized by obtaining large nomadic followings.

3) How the extremist leaders of a movement may become passifist when they achieved power through these movements and betray the expectations of their followers.

An important and interesting phenomenon in the development of Iranian active movements is the penetration of Shi'ism and its Messianism into nomadic tribes. The main factor for this development was, the crisis which the Turkoman tribes faced, due to their hurried escape from the Mongols, who pushed them back from the Saljuq empire towards Armenia, Syria and Asia Minor, and the later damages caused to them through intertribal wars.¹ This created a very complicated situation and a general crisis which gave birth to what we may call nomadic Chiliasm. Shi'ism now provided ideology for the nomadic warrior religiosity.

¹Cf. Minorsky: Iran: Opposition..., p. 193. Also see: Appendix note no. 9. in this work.
The movements in point are the Mosha'sha'i\(^1\) in Khuzest\än and the Safavid in "Azbaij\än" which are examples of this nomadic Chiliasm.

The emergence and development of the Safavid and Moshasha'is were similar. They both had their origins in passive Sufi orders, but they were transferred into militant active movements after attracting nomadic followings. The Moshasha'i movement was started by Sayyed Mohammad Falâh (d. 1461 or 1465) against the "Wara-goyunlu Turkomans. It is interesting to note here that Falâh could muster the support of the Arab tribes of Khuzestan and Basra. When he claimed to be the Mahdi, his claim was accepted by his Arab tribal followers. They gave him total loyalty and organized themselves into an army under his leadership and had its first success in a bloody battle against the Emir of Jazâ'er.\(^2\) Jonayd (militatbat 1447 - 1456) was a successor of the Safavi Sufi masters and his ancestors had led a passive Sufi order in "Azbaijân" for several centuries. Jonayd obtained an aggressive and militant outlook and posture after he travelled for some times among the nomadic tribes in Asia Minor.\(^3\) He succeeded in mustering the support of a large number of nomadic tribes, which turned into an invading army.

These nomadic tribes who supported the Safavid Jonayd, considered him to be God and his son Haydar (militatbat 1456 - 1488), the son of God.\(^4\) As Jonayd and his son Haydar were

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\(^1\)The word Mosha'sha' assumed by Falâh means "the radiant".


killed in the battles, Haydar's son Esma'il was able to use these nomads and subsequently destroy the Turkoman dynasty of Jara-goyunlu. According to an anonymous Italian merchant the Safavid Esma'il (dominabatur: 1499/1500 - 1523/1524) also was "loved and revered by his people as a God, and especially by his soldiers, many of whom enter into battle without armour, expecting their master Esma'il to watch over them in the fight."  

Here we can examine a close relationship between leadership needs of a group and the characteristics of the emerging leadership, as well as the inter-play between the leadership and its followers. The nomads are highly pragmatic people. They live their life mostly an practical plane and have down to earth orientations. In their normative system their emphasis is on "here and now" and utilitarian "problem solving" considerations. So the nomads do not wait for a Messiah to come, but would always prefer to have a living Messiah among them, who not only work for them but also with them. Also who guide them in solving their practical problems and who will provide a sort of justification or legitimation for their warlike activities. Falān and Jonayd and his successors fitted well within the leadership expectations of those Arab and Turkoman tribal communities. They claimed themselves to be the Messiahs, and as said earlier, they were accepted as such by their nomadic followers. We have additional evidence in support of this point. For example - Esma'il, the grandson of Jonayd, 

1 Browne: A Literary History of Persia..., Vol. IV, p. 50.  
2 Al-Haidari wrongly supposes that Messianism is a specific feature of sedentary population. The above examples show that by changing its form Messianism can easily penetrate the nomadic societies. (Al-Haidari: Zur Soziologie..., p.100ff.).  
3 The picture of Esma'il provided by contemporary Venetian travellers and Iranian historians, is of a strange character: An intelligent, warlike and attractive man on the one hand and ruthless, blood thirsty and intolerant on the other. (Browne: A Literary History of Persia..., Vol. IV, p. 22.). These are all qualities of a good tribal leader.
who continued the familial leadership of the Safavid movement proclaimed himself as "of the same essence as Ali", who, he announced, as a manifestation of God. In short he arrogated to himself the exalted position of the Absolute Truth. Similarly Falāh, the leader of the Noshah'shā'ī movement like the Safavids claimed to be a member of an Alid descent and even a Mahdi. He also proclaimed himself to be the future world invader. Falāh's extremist son also declared himself an incarnation of 'Ali b. Abi Ṭāleb and God and could even push his father into background.

The attribution of magical power to the leader rooted in the tribal psyche. Certain myth about magical power of Sayyed Falāh were created and believed in. It was said that he had learned some magical secrets in a book belonging to his Sufi master, Shaykh Ahmad b. Fadl, and that he taught a

2. Ibid., p. 1026a, 1047a.
3. Ibid., pp. 1026a - 1047a. Esmā'īl using the already existing theories of "Holul" i.e. the passing of God into human form, claims that a man can be a manifestation of Godhead, so that Esmā'īl is Adam having put on new clothes. He has come as God's light, as the seal of the prophets, as a perfect Guide, as the guiding Ĕmām. (Minorsky: op.cit., 1026a, 1048a, 1049a). According to Glassen it is not still clear whether Esmā'īl was considered by his followers as a God, prophet or the representative of the Hidden Ĕmām. (Glassen: Sāḥ Esmā'īl..., p. 64). She refers to a document in which it is observed that Esmā'īl was initiated by the Ĕmām himself who sent him and legitimized his fight. (India Office Library (Fers, 1877), fol. 26b - 28a; E.D. Ross: The Early Years of Shah Esmā'īl, founder of the Safavi Dynasty. In: Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1896, pp. 309 - 313).
4. This brought him into conflict with his own teacher who was a Sufi. Also see: Appendix note no. 2.
recitation (zikr) to his followers, containing the name of 'Ali, which enabled them to go into fire or bend a sword with their stomach, without being harmed.\footnote{Majālis ul-mo'minīn of Ḥāji Nūrollāh and Jahannuma of Hāji Khalifeh, quoted by Caskel: Sīn Mahdi des 15 Jahrhunderts p. 61; and E'tasgādā Saltāneh: Moda'iyan-e nobovat, pp. 266-267; Kāsravī: Tarikh-e pājang saleh... p. 14.}

It is this nomadic Messianism which brought together the tribes under the leadership of Mosha'sha'ī and Safavi, and sparked off political aspirations and ambitions in their minds. They fought for their political sovereignty through their military power. Through several military expeditions the Mosha'sha'īs brought a large area in Khuzestān, Shushtar, and Dezful under their domination and they made Hovayzeh their capital.\footnote{Caskel: op. cit., p. 62.} Similarly the Safavid Esmā'īl brought seven important Turkoan tribes together and was able to bring the entire Iranian territory under his command and establish the Safavid dynasty (1501 - 1722). As said earlier, the initiators of these two movements belonged to the Sufi orders which were characterized by high degree of passivity. So, in fact, these movements should have been of passive nature like certain other movements which we have discussed in earlier pages. But these movements turned out to be the protest movements of violent nature. This unexpected development can be understood in terms of agressive, matter of fact and 'this worldly' orientations of their tribal followers. The leaders needed the support of their followers who expected them to be active and aggressive. In other words both leader and movement were forced to adapt themselves to the orientation of the majority of the followers. The tribal way of life was characterized by raids, plunderings inter-tribal wars and permanent struggle with the rough nature, limitless hatreded and antagonism towards the sedentary people. These and others characteristic features of nomadic life would also mark the social movements supported by such people. The focus of discussion now...
can be shifted on the third point. In both these movements when their leaders and/or their successors gained power for themselves the process of routinization of the movement started. The leaders became interested in status quo and so became passive. When they started these movements they were radical Shi'ites but after they became powerholders they found it in their interest to become conservative. They began to suppress radical and extremist movements with a heavy hand. But the Utopian desires of their followers continued to cherish the militancy. Thus there aroused a conflict of interest between the leaders and their followers.

In the beginning Falāh showed some excesses, and his extremist son, attacked many cities and caravans and even destroyed the Shi'i shrines. But after his son had been killed on one of his military expeditions, Falāh reappeared on the scene, the process of routinization began. The successors of Falāh, whose domain had become a vasall state, after it had been conquered by Shāh Esma'īl, became orthodox Shi'is who continued to rule in Khuzestān upto 1921.

The process of instituzination of Esma'īl's charisma, began even before Esma'īl's death, after he was defeated in war by the Ottoman Sultan Selim. Thus very soon a great difference appeared between the Shi'ism of the Safavids before and after Esma'īl. Esma'īl himself, his father and grandfather followed a radical Shi'ism, but their successors introduced an institutionalised orthodoxy.

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1 Keddie: Religion, Society, and Revolution..., p. 22.
2 According to Cohn Millenarianism of Christianity declined as it became the official religion of the Roman Empire. As the Millenarian beliefs reappeared, they stand in more or less explicit opposition to the teaching of the church (Cohn: Medieval Millenarianism..., p. 33).
3 Called Maulā 'Ali.
4 Caskel: Ein Mahdi..., p. 69; E'tezādo Saltaneh: Moda'iyan-e nobovat, p. 271; Kāsravī: Tārikh-e pansad'sālehe..., p. 22.
6 Caskel: op. cit., p. 88.
7 Browne: A Literary History of Persia..., Vol. IV, p. 58.
solved this problem by disassociating themselves from their militant followers who had helped them to come to power. In such a situation, the followers generally "withdraw into a passionate inner life of 'the movement' or 'the sect', leaving the rest of the world to its own devices except for some token assertions of Millenarian hopes and perhaps of the Millennial programme... (or) may merely retire to wait for the next revolutionary crisis.¹

5. The Period of Turkoman Domination II

Now we try to introduce the Bābi movement. There are some particular considerations which involve in choice of this movement for study. This movement is relatively a recent one, and some of the people who participated in the movement lived till very recent time. Some Western scholar succeeded personally to interview the main leaders and participants. Consequently there is a great deal of documentary material available about this movement. Moreover this movement passed through different phases of development such as from liberal orientation to radical orientation and then to passive orientation.

The Bābi movement which emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century is a typical example of active and Messianic movements in Iran. It had inherited quite few of its characteristic features as well as ideological legacy from earlier movements. Its ideological foundation was a philosophy advocated by a theological school known as Shaykhi. This school believed in the principal of the perfection of human being that is "the Perfect Shi'i".

The Shaykhis like the Ismā'īlis believed in the esoteric world and all their eschatology was based on the non-material world of the spirits. So, for them, the Mahdi existed not in physical form but in spirit. And the Perfect Shi'i

¹Hobsbawm: Primitive Rebels..., p. 63.
was considered to be the gate of connection between the physical world and the spiritual world.

The school itself advocated a philosophy of a passive nature, and as was the case with previous Sufi ideology, it gave birth to the active movement of the Bābi. In 1844, under the influence of the Shaykhī ideas, a young merchant of Shirāz proclaimed himself to be the gate (Bāb) to the Divine Truth. In the course of time he began to claim for himself more and more exalted positions. He firstly announced that he was the Bāb, when he was only 24 years old and then, he claimed to be the Mahdi and the new prophet of the Age in 1847, while he was still 27 years old.

The Bābi movement was affected by the social and economic crisis in the whole of Asia, due to the Western and Russian colonial powers. Bāb's initial preaching was addressed at the middle class, the petty bourgeoisie, the lesser clergy and the traders. The Bāb himself belonged to a merchant family. Among his demands were such trivial demands as the legalization of interest on loans, the fixing of the monetary standard, and the inviolability of commercial correspondence. He regarded begging and idleness as reprehensible.

As said earlier the Bābi movement underwent several changes in the course of time. Firstly (from 1844) its leaders thought that they would be able to achieve their goals

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2 Bayat-Philip: op. cit., p. 46.
3 Minorsky: Iran: Opposition..., p. 198.
4 Keddie: op. cit., p. 95.
by "converting to their creed the higher representatives of the clergy and the ruling class."\(^1\)

This was similar to Mazdakites and Horufis. However, similar to Mazdakites and Horufis their attempts to attract the ruling class failed. Again, similar to Horufi-Noghtavi movement the Bābi movement subsequently came to be supported by peasants and this brought radicalism in the movement's outlook. One of the leaders of the movement who came from Māzandarān and belonged to a peasant family went so far as to suggest the abolition of private property.\(^2\) Then (1848-1852) there were several popular revolts by the Bābis in support of their demands. But when the revolt failed to bear any fruits they turned to terrorism. Once they made an attempt on the Shah's life, which was followed by a brutal repression of the movement.\(^3\) This is how the movement which once was having liberal orientation, subsequently assumed radical posture.

Another peculiar tendency of this movement was manifested in the fact, that the Bābis, like their forerunners the Shaykhis, advocated the equality of men and women and discouraged polygamy.\(^4\)

The Bābis like the Ismā'īlis took shelter in fortresses in different parts of Iran with the hope of defending themselves against government attacks. With the defeat of the revolts, followed by the execution of a number of

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\(^2\) Ivanov: op. cit., p. 880.

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 879.

\(^4\) Bayat-Philip: Tradition and Change..., p. 46; Keddie: Iran: Religion, Politics..., p. 95. Among the Bābis a woman poet and preacher was widely recognized for her outstanding ability, and is said to have preached unveiled.
Bábis, the movement entered into a new phase. A man called Bahá’ulláh (d. 1892) announced that he was the prophet whose coming was predicted by the Báb.¹ A large majority of the Bábís followed him, and they called themselves Bahá’ís.

Bahá’ulláh gave a very sophisticated ideology to his followers with the result that the Bahá’í developed into "a syncretic, liberal, westernized religion".²

The Bahá’ís began to follow a quietist path in this last stage and even though they shared hatred for the Wažir Kings, with earnest while Bábís they became monarchists. Bahá’ulláh asked his followers to be obedient subjects of the Wažir Nasir-od Din Sháh to whom in a letter, they expressed their sincere loyalty.³ The Bahá’ís were absolutely forbidden to discuss political matters in their assemblies, and after that, loyalty to authorities and non-politicity became an inseparable part of Bahá’í religion.⁴

Another group called Azali, which remained faithful to the original teachings of the Báb, took active part in other

¹The Báb preached successive and progressive revelations each more advanced and abrogating its forerunner. Thus the Báb said that his revelation would be followed and superseded by a future prophet who comes two thousand years after him. But Bahá’ulláh intentionally overlooked this date given by the Báb. It is said that Bahá’ulláh’s schism was directly planed by the British colonialists. As a matter of fact he and his followers were given shelter in Palestine and were provided other kinds of supports by the British. They even now enjoying supports by the American and other western powers for one or the other reasons.

²Keddie: Iran: Religion, Politics..., p. 95.


risings of the 19th and 20th centuries. Browne shows that, in contrast to the Bahá'ís, who tried to take a pacifist stance, some of the Azalis played an important role in the Persian Revolution of 1905–1909.

The Bābī movement provides us with the example of a Millenarian movement which after failure gradually transformed itself into an institutionalized ethical religion. It naturally only means that the existing religiosity finds a reformed form of expression which provides more satisfaction to the followers. They accept the failure through theological rationalization and transferring the Messianic myth as an "Endzeit" myth into the past which can function as a new "Urzeit".

A brief review of various Iranian Social Movements highlights the following points -

a) Iran since the period of known history had experienced a succession of social movements, and there was hardly any time in the history when there was no any movement going on. An important point which commands our attention is as to why these successive movements have occurred in Iran. This question has constituted one of the central themes of this study.

1 Keddie says: "Although their numbers were too small to be decisive, it seems likely that Azali Babis did join the Tobacco protest" (Keddie: Religion and Rebellion in Iran..., p. 109).


4 Browne shows that contrary to Bāb’s subordinate place of ethical teaching, it began to constitute the chief part of the Bahá’i teachings (Browne: Materials..., p. XXff.; also cf. Dwight M. Donaldson: The Shi'ite Religion: A History of Islam in Persia and Irak, London, 1933, pp. 367–368).

5 See Appendix note no. 10 in this work.
b) These movements had been largely activated and supported by the followers of different versions of Shi'ite doctrine, who have been in majority in Iran right from the early Islamic period and particularly since fifteenth century. One would be tempted to raise a question as to what sustains the revolutionary spirit among the Shi'ites.
3.3 ʿAshurā: The Ceremony of Patience and Impatience

There is ample anthropological and sociological evidence which highlights the role played by the ceremonies, rituals and other symbolic actions, and by the ideas embodied in them in creating a particular type of spirit, that is values, beliefs and attitudes, in the minds of people. Here we intend to discuss a particular ceremony performed by the Shi'ites, namely the ʿAshurā ceremony, emphasizing its implications for generating the spirit of defiance that characterizes the Iranian mind.

The ceremonies performed in the month of Moharram, are the ceremonies of patience and impatience. It make the existing oppressive situation tolerable, but at the same time they are expressions of the desire of the people to change it.

They include mourning processions, passion plays and narrations, all in the memory of the martyrdom of the third Imam, Hosayn, which took place on (Oct. 10, A.D. 680). This day is named as ʿAshurā.¹ On that day all over the country the mourning processions are taken out, people carrying standards and flags in the hands, indulging self flagellation and singing mourning choruses.

The ceremony was introduced for the first time by a Shi'i Buyid ruler in the tenth century.²

"The mourning ceremonies of the Buyid period had an immediate external objective: Opposition to the power and

¹ It is in the tenth day of Arabic month of Moharram. "The name is obviously the Hebrew 'āsōr' with the Aramaic determinative ending." (A.J. Wensinck: art. ʿAshurā, in: Encyclopedia of Islam).

² Browne: A Literary History of Persia..., Vol. IV, p. 30. The Buyid ruler was Mo'ezzod Dauleh Ahmad.
establishment of the Sunnis." It is recorded by a seventeenth century Italian traveller that during the ceremony period no Sunni could dare to appear in public because of fear of possible danger.

There had been an analogous myth already existing in pre-Islamic Iran i.e. the martyrdom of Siyāvush, who in the Iranian epic, the Shāhnāme, was depicted as a symbol of purity and goodness. Narshakhi writing in the tenth century says: "The people of Buhkārā have many a lament on the slaying of Siyāvush which is known in all regions and the minstrels have made them into songs which they chant, and the singers call them 'the weeping of the Magi.' It seems that the Shi'i passion play known as Ta'ziyeh had been developed from the martyrdom scene in the mourning processions. This peculiar passion play became very popular during the Wājār period which was marked by maximum deterioration and fall of the Iranian society.


3 "The dramatic portrayal of the tragedy of Ashura developed from the institution of the recital of dirges by mourners with a vivid description of the tragedy, in the first person or ecstatic language, from the first representation in Maqtals" (Baktash: Ta'ziyeh and its Philosophy, p. 106).

In Ta'ziyeh different stories about the tragic life of Imam Hosayn and his family and friends are inacted during the first ten days of Moharam. The plays which make up this popular theatre are based on folklore, composed by unknown writers, as is also the case with the procession's mourning songs.

"The spirit of war and death casts its shadow over the entire play in nerve-wracking and fear-inspiring manner - a spirit which is constantly present throughout the various scenes of rebellion, joyfulness, decision-making and leave taking. As the tale moves towards its conclusion, the hero's inexorable fate and the force of oppression and tyranny rush onward like a flood, smashing, collapsing, destroying and carrying everything with them."  

A great deal of symbolic signs are used as to convey the inner meanings in concrete terms. For example the colour green is used to symbolize the Good (Hosayn's party) and red the Evil (Yazid's party).  

"The principal 'sympathetic' (good) characters chant their parts in lines of elegant verse to traditional classical Persian musical modes, while the 'villainous' (evil) characters declaim their lines in exaggerated speech contours." 

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4 William O. Beeman: A Full Arena: The Development and Meaning of Popular Performance Traditions in Iran. In: Bonine and Keddie: Modern Iran, pp. 362-363. The passion play was not unaffected by the Iranian nativistic tendencies. It is asserted by Arabic writers and universally believed by Iranians that Hosayn married the daughter of the Sassanian king Yazdgird. She figures among the heroines of passion plays. Sykes is of the opinion that "belief in the Sassanian origin of the descendants of Hosayn has been the main cause for the faithful adherence of Persia to the house of Ali" (Sykes: A History of Persia, Vol. I, pp. 542-543; also cf. Donaldson: The Shi'ite Religion..., pp. 108 - 109); Arnold: The Preaching..., p. 209.
"Rauzeh-Khānī", another narrative form, probably a "Vorform" of Tazieh, is used to convey these very stories to the people on different occasions all through the year.

"Many families have had regular ceremonies of 'rauzeh khānī' in their homes on a set day every month for decades... the best of the 'rauzeh khāns' deliver sermons based on contemporary events, to which they append an emotional rendering of the events leading to the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, exhorting the people to weep."  

Thanks to the flexibility of the texts, the scenes are not only a representation of an historical event but are also relevant to the people's own period. The people in the audience imagine themselves as being represented by the oppressed character in the plays and stories and identify their own oppressors with the killer of the Imam. Thus it is hardly surprising that many of the contemporary rulers have often been described as the villain Yazid. A contemporary religious leader says: "Hosayn died in protest against the hunger of the hungry, the poverty of the poor and the oppression of the oppressed." Thus Hosayn is viewed as the friend of poor and oppressed.

One can very easily discern that there exists an optimistic dualism in Shi'ism. This dualism demands actions

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2 Beeman: A Full Arena: The Development and Meaning of Popular Performance Traditions in Iran..., p. 368. Among some 'Alavis Monarram is actually an occasion for rejoicing and not mourning, since they consider this month the time the Mahdi re-appears. Therefore in the twelfth day people dress in their best clothes to welcome him (Metin And: The Muharram Observations in Anatolian Turkey. In: Chelkowski: Ta'ziyeh..., p. 244).
4 In the Shi'i Motazilite theology, as contrary to the Sunni and Ash'arite, the dualism is based on freedom of choice (Cf. Baktash: Ta'ziyeh..., p. 99ff.).
from the followers and not only weeping, when the suitable condition for them arise.¹ Thus the yearly performance of Ḍūlūrā ceremonies keep the desire alive in the minds of Iranians to fight with the oppressors. Similarly when they are able to express their hatred and remove their aggression they can avoid voilence in order to wait. Therefore these ceremonies are the ceremonies of patience and impatience. They make the existing oppressive situation only tolerable, but at the same time they are the expressions of the desire of people to change it as soon as they get the opportunity.

¹ In 1970 in ammowing drama on the death of Imām Hosayn his voice calls the audience to rise up against the tyrants and no more remain silent and accept humiliation: "I would be killed every time a zealous man is silent or a man of endurance slackens. I would be killed as long as some Yazid rules over you and does what he pleases... Then would the wound of the martyr forever curse you because you did not avenge the blood of the martyr. Avenge the blood of the martyr." (‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Shargāwī: Thā‘r Allāh A Play in two Volumes, II, Al-Husayn Shahidan (Cairo, 1388/1969), pp. 286 - 293. In: Ayoub: Redemptive Suffering in Islam..., pp. 233 - 234).
3.4 Main Common Characteristics of Iranian Millenarian Movements -

Earlier in this chapter we have taken a review, although a brief one of the various types of social movements that took place over centuries. Our main concern there was not to discuss these movements in details but to pinpoint their relationship with the existing social-political-economic situation. And also to see whether it was possible to identify any common features of these various movements. Now we are poised to discuss certain common elements that characterized those movements. They can be enumerated as a) Messianism b) Dualism and Nativism c) Egalitarianism.

a) Messianism

Millenarism is endemic in Iranian culture. Zarathustra is said to be the first known Millenarian in the wider sense of the term.¹ "Zoroastrianism is in fact the archetypal millenarian faith to which most subsequent millenarian movements may well owe a historical debt."²

Zoroastrianism takes the view of the development of the world as a continuous process and not a cyclical one, as taken for example by Hinduism. For them the world history is divided into three epochs; the epoch of creation, of mixture and of separation. The Zoroastrians believed that the period of world history is limited and it would end with epoch of separation. Each epoch is believed to be one thousand years. During each epoch a "Saviour" (Saoshyānt) would appear to save the people from destruction. The last and the greatest Saoshyānt would be Astvat-ereta,³ who would bring about a world based on the principle of justice.

¹Boyce: On the Antiquity.... p. 74.
²Ibid.
Saoshyan, the Zoroastrian Messiah, is conceived as a man of human parents,¹ a friend of each of his followers,² and is the one who would lead the forces of Good in the last great struggle against the forces of Evil³. The Zoroastrian Millenarian, which is of revolutionary nature, is associated with the great Iranian migration (1000 to 2000 B.C.).⁴ This Millenarianism survived and became a part of ideological basis of various subsequent active social movements. This was mainly because the social situation similar to that during the time of Zarathustra reappeared again and again in the Iranian history. The historicity of Zoroastrian Millenarism could easily be adopted by the active social movements whose main aim was historical. That is to say that they intended to bring about one epoch and initiate another one. It was just natural that after the Arab invasion Messiah, took the form of Vahram-e Varjavand as a national freedom fighter, and the Saviour of Iranian people from the yoke of foreigners.⁵

For those who were converted to Islam, the situation remained the same as before. The social and economic system remained unchanged despite their longing for the same. What was added was humiliation as the conquered people. In the new situation the sense of social economic and political insecurity increased and it had psychological implications for them. They felt humiliated and frustrated and at the same time believed that their situation would be or could be changed. This caused the old doctrine of Zoroastrian Millenarianism to be recurrent in the minds of Iranian people.

¹Idem: Zoroastrians..., p. 42.
²Emil Abbeg: Der Messiasgläube in Indien und Iran(Auf Grund der Quellen dargestellt), Berlin/Leipzig, 1928, p. 204.
⁴Boyce: On the Antiquity..., p. 74.
⁵Cf. Klima: Beiträge..., pp. 73 - 74; Abbeg: Der Messiasgläube..., pp. 239 - 240.
under the newer names. It was not only the complex eschatology that the Near Eastern religions borrowed from Zoroastrianism, but even its historical Millenarism also found ready acceptance in Judo-Christian belief system as well as post Islamic religious movements in Iran.

The significance of the historicity of this Messianism is evident in the great effort that was made to make it the centre of a syncratic oppositional ideology. It is recorded in Siyāsat Nāmeh, that the Zoroastrian Sanbād who rose against the Abbasids, put a Messianic story at the centre of his propaganda, with the view to unite all groups which were opposed to the Arabs. Thus he said: Abu Moslem is not dead and the Caliph al-Mansur is planning to kill him, but Abu Moslem called the name of the great God and transformed himself into a white pigeon and flew away and now he sits in a copper fort with Mahdi and Mazdak. All three will come out, Abu Moslem as the leader and Mazdak as his Vazir (minister). He also claimed that Mazdak was a Shi'ī and that there were understanding and union between the Shi'ītes and the Mazdakites. Al-Moqana, claimed that the divine

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1 Especially the concepts of angles, devil and/or evil spirits, heaven and hell as well as the day of Judgement.
2 Keddie: Iran: Religion, Politics..., p. 81.
3 Isidoe Scheftelowitz: Die altpersische Religion und das Judentum. Unterschiede, Übereinstimmungen und gegenseitige Beeinflussungen, Giessen, 1920, pp. 201 - 203; Sykes: A Persian History, Vol. I, pp. 112 - 113. There are some other works that discuss the relationship between Zoroastrian and Judo-Christian eschatology. According to Boyce in addition to Semitic religions, Zoroastrian Messianism influenced Hinduism and Buddhism (Mary Boyce: Lecture held by Dr. Mary Boyce in symposium of Zoroastrians in Chicago, Pers, trans. by Dr. Rostam Šarfeh, in: Huvakht, no. 6, 1356 A.H., p. 15).
5 Nezām ol-Molk quoting Sanbād writes: "Mazdak shi'ī bud va man šoma rā fərmāyam ke bā shi'a dast yaki dārid" i.e. Mazdak was a Shi'īte and I tell you to unite yourselves with them (Ibid., p. 214).
spirit was at first manifested in Adam, then Noah, Ibrahim, Moses, Jesus, Mohamad, 'Ali, Mohammad al-Ḥanāfī, Abu Moslem and at last in al-Moqana' himself,¹ thus declaring himself the only living Messiah.

The movements which emerged in the period between Arab and Turkish invasions had strong revivalistic overtones. A man called ʾEsḥaq claimed in Transoxania that Zoroastria was not dead, he would come and revive his religion.² Along its spread among the Iranians, Shiʿism became the main advocate of Messianism and they also tried to provide doctrinal and theological basis for it. This was a necessity for them in order to be able to compete with systematic refutation of Shiʿism by the orthodox jurists.

It has been pointed out that there was no trace of Mahdism in pre-Islamic history of the Arabs. Neither the word itself is mentioned in Arabic pre-Islamic legends and epics nor is any connected concept and expectation.³

It can be said that Messianism was required to be introduced into Islam and particularly into Shiʿism mainly with the view to provide psychological respite to the underprivileged sedentary population constituted the main body of the followers.⁴

² Browne: op. cit., p. 314f.
³ Al-Haidari: Zur Soziologie..., p. 117. The term that occurs in the ḫorān is “al-ḥaḍī” i.e. the guide in surahs XXII, 53 and XXV, 33. (Donaldson: The Shiite Religion..., p.226). There is a clear statement by Majlesi that prophet Mohammad is reported to have said: “O ye people! I am Prophet and Ali is my heir and from us will descend al-Mahdi, the seal (i.e. the last) of the Imams, who will conquer all religions and take vengeance on the wicked...etc” (Muhammad Bakir Majlesi: Hayaṭu-l-jubūb, 3 Vols., 11th, in Iran, 1909. Trans. of Vol. II by James L. Merrick: The Life and Religion of Muhammad, Boston, 1850. p. 342. In: Donaldson: op.cit., p. 229).
⁴ In Darmesteter’s view the Messianic idea was transferred into Islam by the Iranian converts. This is based on the Indo-Iranian concept of "Farr-e Yazdân" or transmission of the Glory.
It is evident that the feelings of insecurity, these people have had were responsible for the development and deepening of the Messianic beliefs. The brutal persecution of the Shi'ites during the Abbaside period, could not force them to go underground. But the Shi'ites scattered in different parts of Iran or in remote places such as Yaman and even Maghreb. The Shi'ites were not able to speak openly about their beliefs. So they legitimized their secrecy by developing the doctrine of "taqieh" (i.e., Dissimulation). Goldziher writes: "Der Schiit durfte nicht bloß, sondern musste sein wirkliches Bekenntnis verheimlichen. Er musste in seinem Gebiet, in dem die Gegner herrschen, so sprechen und handeln, als gehore er zu ihnen, um nicht Gefahr und Verfolgung der Genossen hervorzurufen."  

It was under such an atmosphere of fear and persecution that the people could not conceive of a living Messiah. It was just not possible for him to be there and so gradually a new concept of hidden Messiah entered into the Shi'i theology.

Thus the doctrines of Ghaybeh (i.e., absense or concealment of the Mahdi) and Raj'a (i.e., his return) became the most important ideological characteristics of almost all different Shi'i and other movements. So we come across numerous references about a longing for the return of the absent Messiah. Some of the small extremist groups among the Shi'ites, put 'Ali at the centre of their religious loyalty, in such a way that he was elevated to the level of a super-human and super-natural being and the incarnation of the Divinity.

1 Vladimir Ivanov: The Alleged Founder of Ismailism, Bombay, 1946, p. 142.
We have already discussed in the earlier pages as to how Messianic ideas got penetrated into the nomadic tribes and how the idea of living Messiah reappeared. This fitted the psyche of nomadic people better, whose social and economic system encourages the concept of a living super-natural leader to develop among them. These people were concerned with their immediate interests and pragmatism dominated their orientation. So they needed some one now and here, who lead them in their activities to achieve their material goals and to solve their problems. They had no patience to wait for a Messiah to come. In his poetry, the Safavid Shah Esma'il claims descent from 'Ali through Hosayn and believes in the reincarnation of the divine substance of 'Ali and he is of the same essence as 'Ali and composed of the latter's mystery. Finally Esma'il makes the highest claims as being God's light, as the seal of the prophets, as a Perfect Guide, as Absolute and Truth or God.\footnote{Minorsky: The Poetry of Shah Esma'il, p. 1026a.} And that is exactly what brought the several nomadic tribes, at a critical stage together and around the charisma of Esma'il, which could become the symbol of unity for several desperate and dispersed tribes for the search a better life.

b) Dualism and Nativism

From the very early periods nativistic tendencies appeared in the Iranian Messianic movements. Nativism is understood here in terms of strong ingroup feeling and the dislike of strangers, whose presence was felt to be dangerous to the natives. This type of nativism is also got manifested in some forms of cultural revivalism. This nativism differs from the "nationalism" of the Sho'ubis. we have already discussed the Sho'ubi movement and its concept of nationalism. Nativism was always a part of Messianism. However like Sho'ubi nationalism it was connected to the Iranian dualism. All these three concepts, i.e., Messianism, Nativism and Dualism, in a way, are
remnants of the pre-Islamic Iranian system of thought. The Zoroastrian history of the world is divided into three stages, the creation of the two antagonistic principles, the mixture of these two principles and their constant struggle and finally the period of separation which results in the victory of the Ahuramazda or the good principle over Ahriman or evil principle. 1 "In his Gathas Zoroaster looks back to 'eternity past' and the beginning of time, and forward to the Last Judgement and 'eternity to come', and sees all that takes place in between as part of the cosmic struggle between good and evil, leading to the final overthrow of the latter" 2 which will be performed under the leadership of Astvat-ereta, the greatest among the three saviours. 3 Among comrades of Astvat-ereta are "the heroes of the old who will return to aid the Iranian people at the end of time, as they had done in the past." 4 In this way the Iranians were put on the side of the forces of both the good and the Messiah and consequently the originally cosmic apocalyptic develops a patriotic character as well as a "political prophecy." 5

In the cosmic antagonism between these two principles, Zoroaster considers a historical role to be played by man. He has the choice to take either side. 6 Even the pessimistic dualism of Mani could not completely oversee this

1 Cf. Boyce: Zoroastrians..., pp. 74 -75.
3 Idem: Zoroastrians..., p. 75.
historical role. For him the cosmic antagonism was between the soul and the matter, which was, similar to Zoroastrianism at the state of Mixture. It is through man's endeavour that these two could be separated by way of gnosia and complete rejection of material world.

Mazdak believed that the course of the main cosmic struggle is accidental, as the period of Mixture did occur by the blind attack of the darkness, it will be only through accident and not through free and conscious action that salvation can be achieved. A branch of Mazdakism called Mohaniyeh directly connected dualism to Messianism, which was a revival of the idea of "God's Kingdom" a term first used by Zoroaster. He divides the kingdoms into two types: one the kingdom of light and the other the kingdom of darkness. The Millenarian world, which is "God's Kingdom" appears when the kingdom of darkness comes to an end.

However this can be achieved if the Messiah helps his people not only in the cosmic struggle against the evil, but also against the "false" invaders of their land.

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1. Mani was born 216 A.C. in western Iran. He declared himself a prophet and from 234 he began to propagate his religion till 277 when he was executed by the Sassanian king Bahram. Mani believed in a pessimistic dualism. There exist two principles of Good and Evil like Soul and Matter. Human body is a material prison for the body and thus he believed in destruction of body to free the soul. Mani's religion was widespread and was one of the influential religious thoughts in both Asia and Europa.


"One day shall come to Asia's wealthy land an unbelieving man, wearing on his shoulders a purple cloak, wild, despotic, fiery. He shall raise before himself flashing like lightning, and all Asia shall have an evil yoke, and the drenched earth shall drink in great slaughter. But even so shall Hades care for him completely overthrown. He shall be utterly to destroy." 1

"From us shall come that Shah Vahram The Glorious, from the family of the Kay's We will bring vengeance on the Arabs, As Astitaha brought vengeance... on the (whole) world. Their mosques we will cast down, we will set up fires, Their idol-temples we will dig down and blot them out from the world, So that 'nihil' shall be the miscreations of the Druž From this world." 2

It seems that some like Ustādis, who resorted to war against the Arabs, 3 attempted to materialize this Messianic mission.

In the second stage of the Iranian Messianic movement, dualism was wrapped into theological discussions. The origins of two principles of 'Aql and Nafs of the Esma'īlis was connected to Zoroastrian dualism. 4 According to this (which preserved the connection between dualism and Messianism), with the coming of Messiah (Jā'īni) "the Nafs al-Kull would finally return to unity with the 'Aql al-Kull." 5

1 Eddy: The King..., p. 12.
4 Hodgson: The Order of Assassins, p. 123.
5 Ibid., p. 154.
Although nativism declined to be an important feature of the Messianic movements of the later periods it remained a part of these movements. With the victory of the Safavids and the acceptance of Shi'ism as the official creed of the country the Iranian national feelings, which had continued to exist throughout the period after the Arab conquest, began to take a new form. As De Godeau noticed the influence of the Iranian epic went along side by side with the "belief in the Imam." 1

Thus the Safavid victory, on the one hand accounts for the break-up of the former Iranian world, on the other hand, however, it "has already produced in Persian minds a political consciousness which is closely analogous to the Nationalism which has been the product of the Protestantism" 2 in the Western World.

This survival of nativistic tendencies should be attributed to the presence of alien people who at the same time posed as direct enemies of these movements. Still it should be mentioned that nativism, even at the first phase of Iranian movements did not become a driving force. The survival of dualism, in their system of thought, should also be attributed to the antagonistic surroundings of the people which the dualistic myth could very well express.

The reflection of the optimism of Mazdak can be found among the Yazidis and the Ahl-e Haqq who believe in the victory of good and mortality of evil. 3

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2 Minorsky: Iran: Opposition..., p. 199.
It is worth noting that even in the passive and ahistorical movement of the Sufis, we find a trace of dualism. The Sufism "in the dualism of the Magians and Manichaean sees typified the interaction of Being and Not-Being where from the Phenomenal World results."¹

"The millennial reign of Ḥusayn will culminate with the final defeat of Satan and all his hosts. The man at whose hands this final victory will be achieved is 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, the heroic wielder of the great sword (dhu al-fiqār). Then, 'God the Invincible (al-Jabbār) himself will descend in clouds of fire with the angels' and his eternal decree will be executed. This final battle against the very principle of evil will naturally be fought near Karbala..."²

c) Egalitarianism

Egalitarianism appears to be one of the goal values of these Messianic movements. This egalitarian orientation of these movements can be understood if one takes into consideration the socio-economic background of the followers of these movements. Egalitarianism was the central theme in the ideological preachings in the Mazdakite movement which was the archetype of Iranian revolutionary movements, and its ideological influence perpetuated and always remained dominant. The essence of Mazdak's teachings is summarized in the saying attributed to him by the "Siyāsat nāmeh": "Riches must be shared and distributed according to the needs."³

Mazdak's main demand was equality in property and in number of women one should have. The rich enjoyed the privilege of having numerous women at the cost of the poor men. To have an idea about the extent of this inequality it would be enough for one to refer to the account of women in the

³ Nezām ol-Molk: Siyāsat nāmeh, p. 197.
possession of the Sassanid king Khosrou Parviz, who even after the reform kept 15,000 slave girls for entertainment, 6,000 serving in his camp, in addition to his numerous wives and court servants. Mazdak defended the right of each man to have a wife, and demanded desolation of the harems of the rich and more freedom for the women. In a rigidly stratified class society of the Sassanian empire, where the poor were subject to all sorts of discriminations and humiliations, Mazdak demanded a full social equality between the poor and the rich.

1 These statistics belong to the period after the reform carried on after the suppression of the Mazdakite movement by Khosro who instituted a series of sweeping reforms especially in the bureaucracy and the economy of the country.

2 Wazi Ahmad b. Mo'ammad Ghefari Kashani: Tarikh-e negarestan, Tehran, 1340 A.H., p. 88. Tabari also reports that Khosro had 12,000 women and girls, 3,000 concubines and several thousand others for service, music and entertainment (Th. Noldeke: Geschichte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sasaniden, Leyden, 1879, Repr. Graz, 1973, p. 353.


4 During the Sassanian period social and economic stratification was based on the following division: (i) the religious classes; (ii) the warriors; (iii) the bureaucracy, among whom were included also biographers, doctors, poets, and astronomers; (iv) peasants, shepherds, merchants, and artisans. (Lambton: Islamic Society..., p.3, referring to A. Christensen: L'Iran sous les Sassanides, Copenhagen, 1936, p. 93ff.; and Tansar nameh, ed. M. Minovi, Tehran, 1932-5, p. 12.)

He found it legitimate to allow his followers to plunder the wheat storages of the rich during the period of the seven years drought.¹ The Mazdakite movement which was an indigenous movement was born, in Lanternari's term, due to an internal crisis. It is true that it did not show any nativistic tendency, however contrary to what Lanternari has argued with regard to such movements, the Mazdakites exhibited strong egalitarian and revolutionary tendencies.² Some authors have categorized this movement as purely political and have raised doubt about its Messianic character. However it is very much true that the other movements which were influenced by Mazdakism were both Messianic and nativistic. For example, in Khorramdini movements, all of these three aspects (Messianism, nativism and egalitarianism) were present together. The Khorramdini movement was actually the first manifestation of the Mazdakism after the Arab invasion, which according to Siyāsat-nāmeh was initiated by Khorrameh the widow of Mazdak.³ The record of Khorramdini Messianism is preserved in Mo'jem al-Boldān according to which Khorramdinis were expecting the return of the Messiah.⁴ The leader of Khorramdinis, Jāvidān, after declaring Bābāk as his successor, is said to have made the following millenarian prediction about him: "He would dominate the earth and kill the tyrants and revive Mazdakism. Through his help the humiliated would gain power and the degraded be elevated."⁵

¹ Ferdausi: Shāhnāme, p. 2299ff.
² Lanternari: The Religions of the Oppressed, pp. 311 - 312. See page
³ Nezām ol-Molk: Siyāsat nāmeh, pp. 213 - 214; also quoted by Klima: Mazdak..., p. 274.
Khadāsh, ¹ led another Mazdaite inspired movement. His propaganda was characterized by: a) He was very critical of religious prayers, fasting and pilgrimage. b) He is said to have preached "weibergemeinschaft" ² under a socio-economic condition comparable to the Sassanian period.

The egalitarian preaching sometimes meant promises of release from an intolerable situation and was sometimes mixed with Utopian dreams and Utopian folk legends. The leaders of the Zanj revolt, for example, could attract a large number of slaves by promising them not only freedom but even the right to possess land and property. ³

The majority of the Iranian movements were of a Utopian nature. In the main Shi'i version the imaginary city of Utopia is described as a place where even the buildings are equal in height, so that none of them may overlook another, and that none may shut out the air from another. ⁴

The followers of all these movements believed that the perfect egalitarianism can be found where the Messiah rules. As the world history of thought tells us the philosophers also conceived Utopia, but their Utopia, say for example Marxian concept of classless society, was always secular in nature and the one which could be built-up through the human effort. But the Utopia of the under-privileged masses in Pre-industrial society was based on their religious beliefs, and they thought such a Utopia could be possible only through a Messiah. They believed that this Utopian egalitarianism was an order of God who has ordered that all the differences

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¹ Anār ibn Yazid, known as Khadāsh appeared during the rule of the Caliph Heshām (724 - 743).
between human beings should be abolished. An Urge for a legitimate and just world in an unjust state of affairs motivates the under-privileged masses to take action. Kissling writes:

"Die soziologische Rolle der Derwischorden besteht also... gesellschaftlich in einer Art Vertretung sozialistischer Gedankengänge. Ob die Derwischorden diese Rollen bewusst oder unbewusst spielten, bleibt für das Faktum gleich. (...) Denn vom Grundsatz des Nichtbesitzendurfens, zum Nichtbesitzenlassen ist ja nur ein Schritt, so dass wir hierin wohl einen der Antriebe der sozialrevolutionaren Tendenzen erblicken dürfen."  

There is a tradition frequently repeated in Shi'i writings according to which when the Hidden Imam comes back again, he would "fill the world with justice and equity as it was full of injustice and oppression." For the people who are indoctrinated with an idea that it is their moral duty to revolt against injustice and abolish it, it becomes difficult to reconcile with unjust social order. It is a dualistic struggle:

"Wir gedulden uns nicht mehr,
Wir tragen die Schande nicht,
Die Lage des Volkes muss unbedingt geandert werden.
Erwarten wir noch Tapferes, zerschlagen wir
Die Tyrannei und beseitigen die Dunkelheit,
so dass Licht wird."

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4 Al-Haidari: Zur Soziologie..., Wasida no.1, p. 173. The above is one of the poems performed in a Moharam ceremony.
We have ample historical material about the movements which had attempted to bring about a Utopian egalitarian order. We may refer here to Warmatians and Nizāri Ismā‘ili movements as illustrations.

Ismā‘ilism especially in its Nizāri version, was strongly influenced by Mazdakite egalitarianism and Iranian Messianism, and it can be considered as an endeavour to materialize egalitarianism. It is reported that Hassan-e Sabbah, the first leader of the Assassins had a very strong commitment to the principle of justice and equality. He made his wife and daughters work like other women, and even had his son executed on the charge of murder. 

The most interesting case is that of Warmatians who for the first time established a highly egalitarian state which survived about 150 years. According to Ibn Rezām, the preacher Ḥamdān Warmat:

"Having converted the inhabitants of some 'Iraqī villages to his doctrine, imposed on them an ever increasing series of taxes and levies, and finally 'imposed on them the ulfa (union, which consisted of collecting all their property in one place, in order to enjoy it in common. The da‘īs chose in each village a trustworthy man, who was to receive all that the inhabitants of the village had by way of cattle, jewellery, furniture, etc. In return, this manager supplied clothes to the naked, and satisfied all the other needs of the people, so that there were no longer any poor people among the sectaries. Everyone worked with diligence and emulation, in order to deserve high rank by the benefit he brought to the community; the women brought whatever they earned by weaving, and even the children gave the money they earned by frightening birds away from the crops. Nobody retained any personal property beyond his sword and his arms."  

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1 Cf. Klima: Mazdak..., p. 278.
2 Minorsky: Iran: Opposition..., p. 188.
The Babi movement, which had quite a few features of the earlier movements and was started by the middle class people, obtained an egalitarian orientation as soon as it penetrated the peasantry. One of the Babi leaders,\(^1\) taught that the old order had died away and that all things of this world belong to God and "he who renounces his property, which is usurpation, will be free from Khoms and Zakāt."\(^2\)

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\(^1\)Mūhammad Ṭāhirih of Ṣarfarūsh.

\(^2\)M. S. Ivanow: The Babi Rising..., p. 880. Khoms and Zakāt are two types of Islamic religious taxes.