CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Martyrdom as a View of the World

(i)

The foundations of the positivist method of science or the empiricist conception of science, (both a legacy of European Enlightenment) rested on the separation of 'fact' and 'value' and their relegation to two different realms of study.

The positivist regime rested on two fundamental presuppositions: (i) the autonomy and dissociation of fact and and value in the field of knowledge; and (ii) the autonomy and dissociation of truth (theory) and praxis (technique) or alternatively, consciousness and conscience, or belief and conduct in the field of life. The inter-relation between knowledge and human life within a larger whole comprising of, say, God, man and nature, it left as an entirely open question on which it was perfectly agnostic. Positivistic logic built a powerful new system of science and culture, ethics and politics on these foundations which has lasted to this day (Uberoi, 1975:10).

In the new philosophy, God, man and the world could possible be unified inwardly in the form of theoretical belief, but had deliberately parted outwardly, for all practical purposes. This separation was followed by a dissociation of thought, word and deed in the form of separation between faith and knowledge.
The positivist science took the systematic unfolding of the 'autonomy', 'separateness' and 'difference' as its fundamental premise and task. Truth could be understood and lived in its several parts.

In the age preceding the Enlightenment, God was perceived as the King of the world; God was the source of the world, its control and meaning. God as King was the primary discourse which lent meaning to existence. Implicit in this perception was that “..... there existed an integrity of vision which inwardly linked the truth of each part of man’s estate with the truth of the whole for the subject.....” (Ibid,19).

In other words, there existed an integrity of vision which revealed the link of the truth of each part of the man’s being with the truth of the whole. God and world, internal and external, self and other, theoretical truth and technical praxis and fact and value were intimately related.

The positivist regime brought about the disintegration of this vision of unity of man, God and world, the part and the whole, the internal and the external, and thought and praxis. In the new secular and scientific vision each varied aspect or part was to be comprehended separately and brought under control independently of other aspects, piece by piece. Emphasis was on autonomy and difference of the segments, sections or strata of the universe; the inner and the outer, particularly the outer, and each varied aspect or part was to be comprehended separately and brought under control independently of others, piece by piece.

Thus religion was separated from the world of material pursuits. It was relegated to the realm of the 'internal', a part of beliefs dissociated from the realm of the
'everyday' practical living. The political aspect of religion manifest in conflicts and struggle for self-definition was seen as a transgression of what religion is supposed to be — 'internal-' governing the inner life, other-worldly- dissociated from the activities of 'this world'. It belonged to the domain of 'faith' and thus separate from that of empiricist scientific knowledge.

The commemoration of martyrdom of Hussein, questions this segmental or sectoral or dualistic perception of man and the universe which separates faith and knowledge; God and man, thought and action. It provides a discourse on the continuity and unity of ideology and praxis. It provides a vision of the unity of the different aspects of man's being in the world, to the whole — of thought, word and action, of internal belief and external practice. It is an integral aspect of 'everyday' living, which is the realm of both care and conflict, faith and politics. Martyrdom of Hussein provides a discourse on a way of life and a view of the world. It embodies the unity of thought, word and action.

On the basis of an examination of Sikhism, Uberoi argues for a recognition of the figure of the martyr, rather than a hero or a victim, as the universal foundation of the civil society. He presents martyrdom as embodying the truth as non-dualism of the 'self,' the world and the other in history, religion and society. It becomes a means to remove dualism of status and power — collective and individual — by virtue of the fact that through the annihilation of the 'self' it denies the dichotomy of state and priesthood versus society. (Uberoi, 1996)

The nohas and sermons provide an integrated vision of unity of man and God and the world. Here Islam is constructed, firstly, as a system of ideas and thought, secondly,
historically as a process of translation of this system into codes of conduct and actions; and finally, at the level of the individual, where the individuals (The Prophet, the Ahl-i-Bayt, Imams) are the embodiment of the ideas, thoughts and the process (method) of translating these into codes of conduct and way of life.

(ii)

**Shia Islam: ideology and praxis**

As is clear from Chapter one, the ideological structure of Islam is centred round the five beliefs and the related *faraez* or obligatory duties. The Quran is the source of this system of faith. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the belief in the doctrine of 'Tawhid' is the fundamental element of this ideological structure from which others follow or of which the others are corollaries.

The Quran is an exegesis on the doctrine of 'Tawhid' – the oneness of God. The point will be clear if one looks at the remaining beliefs in this light. In the Tradition of the Prophets, ending with Prophet Muhammad, the Prophets are messengers of this 'one' God who spread the message of Tawhid as against 'shirk' (multiplicity of Gods). The successors of the Prophet, the inheritors of his 'Nur' – Divine Light transmitted by God- continue to preach the message of 'one God', who is the Divine Judge and will see the man on the Day of Judgement. The *faraez* are the ritual expressions of acceptance of 'Tawhid'. An understanding of 'Tawhid' is crucial to comprehending the nature of the world-view and action revealed in this study.
Tawhid

The testimony that 'There is only one God' which professes God's Unity is the first and fundamental tenet of Islam; all else depends on it or derives from it.

"Islamic intellectual history can be understood as a gradual unfolding of the manner in which successive generation of men have understood the meaning and implications of professing God's Unity. Theology, jurisprudence philosophy, Sufism, even to some degree the natural sciences, all seek to explain at some level the principle of Tawhid...." (Tabatabai, 1989: 23).

The correct knowledge of Islam is attainable on the basis of a philosophy of history grounded in Tawhid. It is the doctrine of the unity and uniqueness of God. It is a central concept of the Islamic theology. It has to be viewed, as Dr. Ali Shriati does, as more than a mere religious-philosophical theory. It actually represents a non-dualist view of the world which regards

"... the whole universe as a unity, instead of dividing it into this world and the here-after, the natural and the supernatural, substance and meaning, and spirit and body. It means regarding the whole existence as a single form, a single living and conscious organism possessing will, intelligence, feeling and purpose.... it represents a world-view that demonstrates a universal unity in existence, a unity between.... God, nature and man, because the origin of all the three is the same. All have the same direction, the same will, the same spirit, the same motion and the same life...." (Shariati, 1978: 82-83).

The very structure of Tawhid does not accept contradiction or disharmony in the world and existence, between man and nature, spirit and body, matter and meaning. Thus, it does not also accept legal, class, and social, political, racial, territorial, genetic or economic contradictions. It implies a mode of looking upon all being as unity (Ibid, 87).
In the view of Shariati, correct thought is the pre-requisite to correct knowledge, and correct knowledge is the pre-requisite of belief. These three, taken together, are the necessary attribute of an aware conscience and of any movement which strives in practice and theory for the attainment of perfection. Divisions, distinctions and contradictions of all forms are reconcilable in a worldview of *Shirk* – dualism, trinitiaism, or polytheism, but not with *Tawhid*. Belief in contradictions forms the basis of discrimination, plurality and conflict in society; belief in *Tawhid* forms a basis for removal of contradictions and disharmony. Further, *Tawhid* implies a negation of the dependence of men on any social force. The source of support, orientation, belief of any individual is one – the only will, the power and consciousness that rules over the universe. The position of man in this world is an objective embodiment of this truth.

**Jihad and Shahadat : Method of translating Tawhid in life**

The structural principles of any system can be discerned readily through a consideration of some of its representative leaders and events. Hence *Jihad, Shahadat* and the biographies of *Ahl-i-Bayt* become expositions of the structural principles of Shia Islam.

*Tawhid* forms the basis of understanding the unfolding of the history of Islam, particularly Shia Islam. The entire history of Islam, beginning from the Prophet is the history of the process of realising *Tawhid* in life. The process is *Jihad*. The entire history is that of struggle between truth and falsehood, monotheism and polytheism, oppressor and the oppressed, and the deprived and the usurpers. It is the history of struggle to remove contradictions, and to bring harmony. This struggle has been going on since the first Prophet – Adam – and all the successive Prophets have been engaged in *Jihad* to
translate Tawhid from a philosophical doctrine into a basis for social life. They have, as history reveals, always-faced oppression at the hands of rulers. Belief in Tawhid necessitates a sense of historical responsibility and commitment of those who profess it. Shahadat (martyrdom) becomes the ultimate form of Jihad where the martyr bears witness to, or testifies to, how to live in accordance with the worldview of Tawhid. His death becomes a discourse on non-dual way of life.

After the death of the Prophet, Ali, Hasan, Hussein and Zainab became the standard bearers of Tawhid. The Jihad and Shahadat of Ali, Hasan and Hussein were in the process of translation of Tawhid into a basis of social life. Zainab, as the survivor, continued this struggle.

Biographies of the Ahl-i-Bayt: Embodiment of Tawhid in Persons

The life of the Prophet was a manifestation of struggle against outsiders, whose vested interests, were challenged by his movement of 'Islam', submission to the will of One God. His life and code of conduct were exemplary. They were living demonstrations of how to live with the spirit of Tawhid. His negation of all kinds of differentiation of power, status and class, through his way of life, eg., his code of dress—he did not wear the robe symbolic of aristocracy—, his walking and not using camels and living a life of voluntary poverty and, his devotion to spread the message of Islam. He demonstrated the principle of Tawhid as manifested in the 'being' of a person in the form of attitudes of humility, patience, love and truth and total commitment to one God, who is the only Lord and all others are related to him by virtue of his benevolence and grace. The latter – commitment to 'One God' – translates into world-view and forms the basis of relations between man and the attitude of 'man' in this relationship.
After the Prophet’s death Ali, Hasan and Hussein are embodiments of the doctrine and the method, i.e., Tawhid and Shahadat and Jihad. Their lives are a representation of struggle with insiders. Islam became a tool in the hands of possessors of money and power, and when its true visage was hidden behind opportunism, vasillation, misinterpretation, truth was lost.

Their Jihad and Shahadat emerges as a non-violent struggle. Ali refrained from wielding his Zulfiqar, his sword, for twenty-five years (in the face of the injustice done to him before he was made the Imam by the people). His silence and non-aggressive resistance was an act of sabr-patience-for the good of Islam. His way of life prior to and during this period is a life of absolute humility voluntary poverty, charity and contemplation. He spent his time compiling the Holy Quran and contemplating on it. His decision on non-aggression was a conscious decision; he made a choice. He could have won leadership by fighting. That he did not do so was his demonstration of how to place value above “self gratification”, a true embodiment of Tawhid.

After Ali, Hasan too opted for a reconciliation and stepped down from leadership in order that no elements of disharmony creep into Islam and to ensure the prevalence of the spirit of Tawhid, and for this he was martyred. Hussein came in at a time when disharmony, contradiction and division of class, status and power had corroded the spirit of non-dualism of Islam founded by the Prophet, nurtured and protected through Jihad and Shahadat by Ali and Hasan. Hussein’s decision to go ahead and accept the challenge to fight rather than submit to forces which negated Islam was politically incorrect – as all forces were against him, being surrounded by hypocrites and traitors. His deciding to fight Yazid’s forces, certified his death. Hence his act was not political. His act was one
of deliberate choice, to bear witness, to expose, to make a statement of how not to succumb to dualist forces and on how to live in the spirit of Tawhid. Consider the event of Karbala. He constantly resisted battle. He gave freedom to those who were with him, withdraw with grace, if they did not agree with him. His family and friends stood by him with love and commitment.

His survivors were his sister Zainab and his sick-son Zain-ul-abidin. Zainab became the standard bearer of Tawhid after his death.

The manner of this form of Jihad in Karbala is significant. There is a narration of events which highlights the intensity of atrocity and injustice through its effect of suffering on kinsmen. The suffering on the one hand, involves a stoic forbearance with commitment to 'Truth' and its embodiment in the martyrs, and an unrestraint demonstration of pain experienced at the suffering and death of a 'loved' one, the martyr. This Jihad merges within itself, commitment, love faith and acceptance of the inevitability of pain and suffering in the path of 'right' living.

It is interesting that the carrier of the torch of this form Jihad, spreading its message as a living martyr is a 'woman'. The role of Zainab, as has been seen, is pivotal in spreading, the message of Tawhid, Jihad and Shahadat. Men 'die' and their 'death' becomes a discourse on a non-dual way of life and women live to articulate this discourse in words. There is a complementarity. The same principle determines this complementarity of men and women – both are representatives and embodiments of the same stream of non-dualist existence. The majority of narratives, in nohas in particular, is either in the female voice, or is about the female suffering as the manifestation of Jihad.

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and *Shahadat* as a basis for living in accordance with a principle. It establishes pain and suffering as the important elements of life.

Hence Shia Islam emerges as a cultural system firmly anchored in a non-dualist worldview which binds history, society and the individual.

(iii)

**Truth as an embodiment of unity of saying, being and doing**

The civil society mirrors the process of how religious beliefs and practices are assimilated and internalised to bring religion from being a system of thought into the realm of a lived reality.

It is assimilated in the context of the ‘everyday’ life by virtue of its location in time and space; in a language, from which it draws its idioms, metaphors, symbols as well as from this social and historical context. The *nohas* in particular are replete with symbols, particularly meaningful in the context of the Indian sub-continent. The use of terms such as *randsala* (widows garb), *afshan* (shiny material applied to the parting of hair of married women), *kangana*, *banna*, *banni nath*, *mehndi* are firmly rooted in the culture of the Indian subcontinent, these have connotations understood by all and hence are important means of understanding the extent of tragedy or happiness.

This is important as there have been criticism of such usage. A number of critics of the observances of martyrdom of Hussein, including religious specialists in Islam, have pointed out to this author, of the lack of ‘historical and factual truth’ in the descriptions given in the *nohas* and *sermons*. In order to point out certain discrepancies, they mentioned (i) women in Arabia do not have the concept of *Afshan*, this is typical only of the Indian subcontinent due to the coexistence of the Muslims and Hindus – thus
a factual error; (ii) the idea of 'Mehndi' is regarded as absurd, as it was argued that in the first place mehndi does not grow in the desert region, and secondly when Hussein and his family did not have water to drink or even to wash, from where did they get water to mix the henna? There have been similar other arguments given to justify factual errors regarding use of 'nath' and odni, etc., and hence the conditions are rejected as baseless and foolish.

Allama Tabatabai's statement is of significance in this regard.

".... but what does it mean to say that there is no god but God? For Islam, the manner in which the believer answers this question displays the depth to which he understands his religion, and, paraphrasing a Hadith of the Prophet often quoted in Sufi texts, one might say that there are as many ways of understanding the meaning of this profession (of Tawhid) as there are believers...." (Tabatabai, 1989:23).

The use of seemingly factually incorrect data to describe the tragedy viewed in the light of Tabatabai's formulation, is one of the several ways of understanding, accepting and internalizing the principle of non-dualism. The use of such terms reveals the manner in which an 'ordinary' person receives the concept, translates it in terms of his/her own experiences and embodies it within as a value aimed at structuring his worldview and determining his actions. In the Indian context this reveals among other things an important basis of non-dualistic living in the two communities of 'Hindu and Muslims' being bound together by a common cultural expression. It reveals the existence of unity in difference – where both are subsumed in the larger identity of being elements of Indian culture. The participation of Hindus in Muharram observations all over India – Amroha, Rudauli etc. is well known, some of the renowned zakirs and sozkhans are also Hindus.
Further, this raises the question of 'truth' in understanding these renditions. What is the nature of truth that the anthropologist seek to discover? It is not truth in the sense of being a true representation of reality as per the empiricist tradition – where there is a separation between the subject and the object and the reality is perceived as lying out there to be discovered and accurately described. The function of language from this perspective is to accurately represent the reality. If it does so, the words spoken are true.

However, when viewed in terms of 'spokenness' the nature of truth becomes non-dualistic, in that truth emerges as expressing, in speech, of a unity among ones saying, being and doing. The key to understanding this is as Buber says, in terms of 'faithfulness'.

"..... It is faithful truth in relation to reality which was once perceived and is now expressed, faithful truth in relation to the person addressed, whom the speaker means, as such, faithful truth in relation to its speaker, this is, to his (or her) factual existence in all its hidden structure.... This concrete person, in the life-space allotted to hims (or her) answers with faithfulness for word that is spoken...." (Buber, 1965).

The nature of reality revealed through words is 'true' in the sense that words are not only a means of revealing the reality of religion as a vibrant way of thought and action in the civil society, but also constitutes an expression of the societies mode of 'being' in this world.

The combination of historical fact with imagination is the functions of word to render reality and truth alive and prevent it from receding into 'memory'.

Richard Gilman states, that imaginative writing does not wrest secrets and intimate meaning from history, but

"innoculates history with a serum of invented insights which actually immunize the reader against mere factual truths and force him
into a more painful confrontation with the implications about himself and his world that this serum sends coursing through his emotional and intellectual bloodstream. History provides the details and then abruptly stops. Literature seeks ways of exploring the implications and making them imaginatively available. If anything, literature, like all are, is the account of what history has failed to produce on its own, so that men have to step in to make good the deficiency.....(Langer, 1975:8).

Thus the commemoration of martyrdom of Hussein reveals a reality much larger than the one when it is viewed either as a means of getting the intercession of the Imams and going to paradise, or as a way a defining their distinct identity, or marking out their space as distinct from other spaces. Further, this annual commemoration as 'going back' to the event in its original form and reconstructing it and re-living it, is also not understood in terms of it being an attempt to recreate and bring back the glory of Islam as it was during the Prophet’s time or during Ali’s time.

Dr. Ali Shariati said about the Prophets, that every Prophet chose the method of spreading the world of God according to the needs and circumstances of his time. Similarly, every community chooses and adopts methods of finding meaning in existence. The method of realizing the system of 'meaning' (culturally transmitted) in its ‘everyday’ life by going back into history, in space and time, is one such way.

(iv)

Production of `self' and the nature of boundaries

Consciousness of being a part of a cultural tradition and deriving out of this a search for meaning creates and defines boundaries around communities. What is the nature of these boundaries? Is antagonism and rivalry against those outside them, implicit in these boundaries?
Among the Shia, the process of going back in time, reconstructing the historical past and delving into its cultural heritage occurs through the contemplation of the martyrdom of Hussein. The historical reconstruction focuses on 'persons'. Events and epochs gain significance by virtue of the thoughts and actions of these persons who are the Ahl-i-Bayt, who are believed to represent universal human values. Their actions represent struggle for the survival of these values as against those of hypocrisy, selfishness and capriciousness. Further, the historical reconstructions are those of epochs of struggle within the community of Muslims. The recollections are of how to retain the universal values of truth, love, and loyalty adequately when confronted by challenges from within the community.

The contemplation on the martyrdom of Hussein takes the community not only into an 'outward' journey into the past, but also into an 'inward' journey of thought. The 'inward' journey entails a collective process of seeing and experiencing the pains of Imam Hussein and the other Ahl-i-Bayt. Through this occurs the 'becoming' of the Shia community. It generates a process through which the individual and the community become conscious of themselves as constituting and embodying a 'tradition' of Tawhid ('non-dualism'), historically and culturally. Thus the nature of this consciousness, defines the identity but it does not create boundaries, with implicit antagonism. The consciousness is of the 'uniqueness' of the self, which though generated with reference to the other, is not antagonistic. At one level, the Shia radiates the renewed awareness of his/her historically and culturally unique status in the world, and at another level, a sense of exclusivity forms the basis of his/her acquiring a sense of belonging to the wider horizons of 'humanity'. Thus the nature of boundary is well-defined, on the one hand,
in that it is a marker of distinctiveness of the 'Shia' vis-a-vis the others; but on the other hand, by virtue of expanding the meaning of being a 'Shia' to being a humanist, it removes 'antagonism' and 'rivalry' as a basis of relation to 'the other' from its definition of its self-- its boundary.

The regressive inquiry emerges as an epistemological journey of the Shia in search of meaning and an attempt to understand these questions from their perception, is an attempt to reveal how a living tradition of meaning formation has been carried forward. Culture, at any point of time, in its manifestation in the individual, collectivity or in events, comprises of a tradition, which entails not only a mobile forward process from one set of acquisition to another, but with every forward movement a reference to an earlier one is repeated. There occurs a continuous synthesis in which all acquisition, are valid, and all of them make up a totality such that at every present stage, the total acquisition is so to speak the total basis for the acquisition of the new level.

Hence regressive inquiry is not to be dismissed as a futile exercise to reconstruct the past, as means of turning away from the realities confronted in the present. It is an enquiry into the system of knowledge, which underlies the perceptions of the world, the self and the other. Further, it is also an inquiry into the process of how these perceptions transform individual notions to objective perceptions of reality general to the collectivity through the use of language.

Systems of knowledge, comprised of ideas, symbols and metaphors, provide the individual and the collective with categories to think. Speaking of 'symbolic' system of totemic classifications, Levi-Strauss asserts, that the symbolic animals are chosen, not because they are 'good to eat', but, because they are 'good to think', i.e., because they are
food for thought (Levi-Strauss, 1969). The knowledge system provide categories in terms of which the world and the universe is perceived, ordered and understood. These exist in order to "... advance understanding, to make intelligible the relations which exist between things...." (Dukheim & Mauss, 1963:81).

Enquiry into knowledge systems in terms of the location in time and space by a collectivity, among other things, is an attempt to define itself and it involves a process of maintaining its boundary, as spoken of by Fredrick Barth (1969). Implicit in this process of boundary maintenance is the desire to retain and highlight the uniqueness of the collectivity, which is not through the negation or demonization of the other or through generating antagonism against the 'other'.

Antagonistic boundaries and rivalries are created when historical consciousness becomes selective, when the journey into the past is made to acquire source material for comparative assessments of the past with the present. In other words, when "past and present" are not regarded in continuity, but are separated from each other. They are viewed as distinct entities. This separation implies value judgements, i.e., to give value, in a scale of preference to certain periods, hence 'golden age' and 'dark age'. History is used to evaluate certain epochs. Such historical consciousness breaks time into discontinuous units and provides the basis for going into the past for winning the present. It implies constructing a tradition in line with preferred periods of history, consciously choosing to ignore those phases that are out of step, in order to forward their claim to superiority, vis-a-vis others in a competitive framework (Gupta, 1997:166-67).