The Nature of Imam Hussein's Movement

by
Murtada Mutahhari

Translated by
Dr. Alaed in Pazargadi

Edited by
Muhammad Khurshid Ali



The Nature of Imam Hussein's Movement.
First published by Beth'et Foundation (Foreign Dept.)
Printed in the Islamic Republic of Iran.
Bonyad Be'thet
Ave. Somaye (Between Ave. Mofatteh & Ave. Forsat)
Tehran. Telephone: 821159



Translator's Preface

The martyred scholar, Murtada Mutahhari was born in 1918 in the village of Fariman of Mashad in Khorassan.He studied for 16 years in the Divinity College of Ghom in the branches of literature, philosophy, jurisprudence and other Islamic subjects. Then he acted for several years as professor of theology and philosophy in the same college and at Tehran University. He was then engaged in research which resulted in the publication of many books. on religious, philosophical and social topics. He was an erudite and versatile scholar as is proved by his numerous lectures, pamphlets and books, a total of 40 published works. the most well dnown of which are: «Islamic World Vision», «Man in the Qur'an», «Islamic Revolution», «Man and Faith», «Divine Justice», «Society and History», «Revelation and Prophethood.»

He was mastyred by assassins in the year 1980 in Tehran.

In this book the writer discusses the revolt of Imam

Hossein as a rightful successor to the Caliphate, against the then ruling Caliph Mu'avieh and his son, Yazid. The writer shows that this revolt was caused by several factors, firstly as an act of defence in refusing to swear allegiance to Yazid which was considered an innovation contrary to religious traditions. Secondly, it took the form of assistance to the Imam's followers in Kufa on their explicit invitation. Thirdly, it assumed the shape of attack against an immoral system by the principle of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil, a factor which was the most important of all as an everlasting message for the whole world at all times.

In this book the letter (ع) stands after the names of all the Shi'a Imams as an abbreviation for the customary phrase 'peace be on him', used in such cases.

In conclusion my thanks are due to Mr. Khurshid Ali, editor of the Bethet Foundation for his co-operatiin in reading the script and making helpful suggestions.

A.P.

As events are various in nature, so are revolts and movements.

In order to gain knowledge of something, attention should be paid to its creative cause or to its final cause or to its material cause, namely the parts which make up the whole, or to its nominal cause which gives it its general properties,

The follwing points explain the nature of a movement:

1) To understand a movement and its nature, it is necessary to know the causes and reason which have led to it. This is called the creative cause.
2) What is a movement and its goal? Has it a goal or not? This is called its final cause.
3) What are the elements and contents of this movement, and what activities are carried on in it? This is calléd its material cause.
4) What form has it assumed as a whole? This is called its apparent of nominal cause.

In connection with the movement of Imam Hussein(ع), too, we should ask whether it has been an eruption. Has it been like a pot of boiling water which

has ended in an explosion?

Some revolts are eruptions. One difference of Islam with other schools of thought is this that, for instance a dialectic school believes in intensifying the contrariness of things, and augmenting troubles, and deepening the gaps, and opposing real reforms, so as to lead society to a revolution in the sense of eruption, not a revolution of which the people are conscious.

Islam by no means believes in an eruptive revolution. It insists on its being based on awareness and resolution.

Was Imam Hussein's movement an explosive movement caused unconsciously by great pressures in the time of Mo'avieh and his son Yazid,so that Imam Hussein (ع) was in his impatience willing to risk everything?

Our answer is in the negative, for all the evidence including his words and letters, exchanged between him and Mo'avieh and later with Yazid, and his well- known discourse at Mena delivered to the Prophet's companions and quoted in Tohaf- ol - Oghul, show that this movement started in all awareness like a perfectly Islamic revolution.

In his contact with his followers, Imam Hussein did not allow his revolution to assume an eruptive form. One reason for this claim is that he intended on every occasion to dismiss his followers, and remind them repeatedly that no material benefit was waiting for them, but only death. Even in the night before Ashura (the tenth of the month of Moharram when he attained martyrdom) he said: «I know no followers better and more learned than mine. I thank you all. You may leave me if uou wish. If they know your intention to withdraw from this arena, they will not hinder any of you. So,

leave with my household this desert where everything is strange to you, and leave me alone here.»

A leader who wishes to make use of the people's uneasiness and dissatisfaction to promote a revolution, would not speak in that way. He would emphasise religious obligation to them. But the Imam wished them to heed this religious obligation in all freedom. He wanted to make them realise that there was no compulsion for them to stand against the enemy. They could easily disappear in the darkness of the night without any inconvenience. Nor did he as a friend insist on their remaining there. Again he says: «I relieve you from your allegiance to me, if you think that it creates a duty or obligation for you.» This means leaving them a choice. If they wished to support what was right, they could freely and in full awareness and without any uneasiness caused by him or the enemy, make a stand in his favor.

This is what gives a great value to the martyrs of Karbala. Otherwise he could have adopted the same measures employed in the Spanish war. When Taregh-ben- Ziad conquered Spain and moved his ships through that famous strait named after him, he ordered his men to store provisions for twenty- four hours and burn the rest with the ships. Then he assembled his officers and men and pointing to the sea, said: «The enemy is before you and the sea behind. If you intend to flee, you have no way but the sea which will destroy you. You have food only for twenty- four hours, and after that you will die of hunger. The only way for your safety is fighting and victory. For, the enemy has your food.»

This was the method of a political leader. But the Imam (ع) never said that the sea was behind and the enemy in front of his followers; or that there was a

compulsion by the enemy or friend.

His revolution was in all consciousness accepted by him, his household and his companions. It was not expiosive in nature.

One of the differences between social and natural happenings is this that the latter are of a single nature, and cannot, unlike social events, be multi- natured. A metal cannot at the same time possess the property of gold and copper. But man, like social events, is surprisingly multi-natured. That is why Jean Paul Sartre said that the existence of man is prior to his nature. Moreover a human being may at the same time have the nature of an angel, a pig and a tiger. This in itself is a topic with a long story in terms of Islamic teachings and culture.

The revolt of Imam Hussein (ع) , too, is multi-natured, since it was influenced by various factors.

A movement may have both reactionary and commencing natures. The reaction may be either positive or negative against one or tother proceeding. All these can be seen in the movement of Imam Hussein .

One of the important factors from a chronological point of view is the factor of allegiance. Imam Hussein was in Medina, and Mo'avieh who wished to secure allegiance for his son Yazid's succession before his own death, sent agents to Medina to obtain that allegiance. This meant adhering to the Caliphate of Yazid on a personal basis and an innovation of a successor being nominated by his predecessor. This meant the rejection of the principle that the next caliph should be chosen by people, or, as the Shi'as believe, he should be nominated according to the Prophet's tradition. So, this policy of

Mo'avieh is not merely making people to put their signature to the succession of a son by his father's command, but the establishment of a tradition introduced for the first time by Mo'avieh.

This demand was met with a negative reaction by Imam Hussein (ع) on the basis of piety. Every human being is sometimes faced with demands in his society in the shape of lust, desire for position, threat or fear. He should resist them and say 'no', so as to be virtuous or pious.

They demand allegiance. The Imam refuses. They threaten, and he says he is ready to be killed, but not to swear allegiance. So far the movement was based on a negative reaction, and its nature is one of virtue, emphasising that there is no God but Allah, and refusing illegitimate demands.

But this was not the only factor of the movement. There was also the factor of positive reaction. It is based on this idea that Mo'avieh was bound to depart this world one day, and the people of Kufa would realise that twenty years before the actual event, Ali (ع) had ruled in that town where the effects of his teachings still remain. Of course by now many of its chiefs and leaders like Hajar-ben - Khazai, Rashid Hejri, Meysam Tammar and others will have been purged to deprive the city from the ideas and sentiments of Ali (ع) . But there are still traces of his teachings remaining. As soon as Mo'avieh dies, they get together and say that they should not lose the chance and must not let yazid be made Caliph. They have got Hossein- ben- Ali who should be invited to rule, and they will assist him to make the Caliphate truly Islamic. Kufa which has always been a military camp of the Muslims, has sent invitation to Imam Hussein (ع) . It

is not only a few letters, but eighteen thousand each of which is sometimes signed by twenty people, thus bringing the number to a hundred thousand. What should the Imam do now? The plea has been made, and the reaction is a positive one. The Muslims have risen and the Imam must give a positive answer and hasten to their aid.

At first his duty was to say no and keep himself chaste. So if he had accepted the suggestion of Ibn-Abbas and gone to live in the mountains of Yemen to be safe from Yazid s army, he would have fulfilled his first duty from the viewpoint of allegiance and piety.

But now a new duty had fallen upon him as a result of the Muslim invitation, which meant a sort of ultimatum. Although the Imam knew from the very beginning of his departure that the people of Kufa were not adequately prepared, and that they were timid and unprincipled, yet what answer could he give to history? If he had abandoned them, what would we have said today asking why the Imam did not give them an answer?

An example may be cited here. Abu- Salma Khalal was a minister in the Abassid Court. When he fell out with the Abassid Caliph, he at once wrote to Imam Jafar Sadegh (ع) and another letter to Muhammad- ben-Abdollah Mahz, and invited both of them at the same time to accept the assistance of him and Abu- Muslem who had hitherto served the Abbassids, saying that if he was willing, they would destroy them.

Firstly, such a letter was written to two people. At the same time, it showed lack of sincerity; secondly the letter was written after he had severed his relations with the Abbassid Caliph.

Imam jafar Sadegh (ع) read the letter, and burnt it in the presence of the messenger who asked what reply he would give. The Imam said: «This was my answer.»

Before the messenger returned, Abu- Salma had been killed. But we see that the people wondered why the Imam did not send a positive answer to Abu- Salma, even though they were aware of Abu- Salma's insincerity and of the fact that the Caliph killed him on suspicion of dishonesty.

Similar is the case of Imam Hossein (ع), too. If he had refused to give a positive answer, they would have said that by his accepting the invitation, Yazid and his followers would have been uprooted by the brave people of Kufa. Kufa had been a military camp ruled by Ali for five years. There the voice of Ali (ع) and the widows and orphans who had been nourished by him could still be heard. They would have said Imam Hussein (ع) was afraid, and if he had gone to Kufa, it would start a revolution. So, he considered it a duty to say: «I am ready if you are.»

There is also a third view which will be referred to later on. Now let us see which of these two factors has priority. Did the Imam first refuse allegiance and then was he invited by the people of Kufa or was it the other way round?

It was definitely the former, since the demand for allegiance was made immediately after Mo'avieh's death.

The question of allegiance chronologically comes first, for, the same man who brought the news of Mo'avieh's death to the governor of Medina, brought him another letter in which the matter of taking allegiance from Imam Hussein (ع) and a few others was

mentioned, At this time Kufa may not as yet have been informed of Mo«avieh's death, and according to history, Imam Hussein (ع) was asked for allegiance and he refused.

A few days went by in this way, until the Imam left Medina of the 27th Rajab under pressure, arriving at Mecca six days later, i.e. 3rd of Sha'ban. The call of the people of Kufa reached him on the 15th of Ramazan, i.e. about a month and a half after receiving the demand for allegiance. So, it is clear that the invitation came after his refusal to give allegiance. He had said: «I refuse to give allegiance even if no spot is left on the earth for me to live in.»

The third factor was his duty to enjoin the good and forbid the evil. He left Medina with this motto. It was not a question of rising for the sake of being demanded allegiance, but of rising in any case for the sake of enjoining good and forbidding evil. For, sins had spread over the Islamic world, and his religious duty made it incumbent upon him to rise.

The first question is one of defence or self-defence. The second question is one of assistance. But the third one involves attacking the government of the time, and as an attacker, Imam Hussein(ع) is a revolutionary. Each of the above factors creates a different obligation for him, and that is why we say that the movement is multi-natured.

On the basis of the first factor, i.e. the matter of allegiance, he was not bound to ask for co- operation. On the basis of the second factor, i.e. the matter of invitation, he had the duty of giving a positive answer to the people of Kufa, as long as they kept their promise. Yet he could leave them to themselves if they violated

that promise. For, by doing so, the matter of their holding the rein of government would become null and void. In that case the Imam had no obligation, but why did he continue his task? This shows that his task was not limited to the factor of invitation, which was a temporary matter beginning on the 15th of Ramadan until he reached the border of Iraq and Arabia. When he met Hor-ben- Yazid- ben- Riahi and also heard of the death of Muslim, the question of the invitation had lost its validity. Again, the fact that he is addressing Kufa people and not Yazid and his government, his statement that if the people do not want him he would turn back showed that he was not taking this step to accept allegiance.

On the question of enjoining good and forbidding evil, he was no longer a defender or helper, but an attacker, and a revolutionary. One of the mistakes made by the writer of the book «Shahid Javid» was that he had attached too much importance to the factor of invitation by Kufa people, as if it was something basic. As it happened it was the least effective of the factors; for if it had indeed been a fundamental factor, the Imam would have left off his claim and sworn allegiance the moment he heard that the Kufa situation had changed, and would say no more of his motto of enjoining good and forbidding evil.

As it happened the matter is quite the reverse, and his warmest and most exciting words are after the Kufa reversal. This shows that for him the third factor, i.e., enjoining good and forbidding evil is most significant as a means of attacking the government as a revolutionary.

On his way the Imam saw two men of Kufa and stopped to speak to them. But when they recognised the

Imam, they turned away. The Imam understood that they did not wish to speak with him. But they spoke to one of the Imam's companions about the death of Muslim and Hani and said they felt too shy to report it to the Imam. The Imam's companion reported what the men had said about the fall of Kufa and how the body of Muslim had been dragged through the streets. The Imam on hearing this account shed tears and recited the following verse of the Qur'an: «Some believers fulfilled their promise to God and went of till they were killed, and others waited for their turns to come.»

By this the Imam meant that he had not set out for Kufa alone, even though it had fallen, nor only for the invitation of its people.

He meant that he had a greater and heavier duty to perform. Muslim had fulfilled his promise and had gone on to martyrdom. His fate was also that of the Imam. As an attacker and a revolutionary, his logic was naturally different from a defender's and a helper's. The logic of a defender is based on tightly holding some valuable object of his to prevent a thief from seizing it, and either he knocks the thief down or runs away to keep his property safe. But an attacker intends to destroy another, even if he himself is killed in the process. This is the logic of enjoining good and forbidding evil, the logic of Hussein (ع), the logic of a martyr.

The logic of a martyr means the logic of a person who has a message for his society, a message which must be written only with blood.

There have been many people around the world with messages. In excavations are found tablets of kings or chiefs boasting of their lineage, their victories, their lives, pleasures, and oppressions, which remain under

the earth, and after they are unearthed, they are placeed in museums. It was as if Imam Hussein (ع) wrote his sanguine message on the quivering air, a message which is engraved on peoples' hearts because it is written with red blood. Today millions of Arabs and non Arabs who could understand the language of imam Hussein(ع) , would understand his message:

«I see in death only happiness, and in living with tyrants only misfortune.»

For him, a life of eating, drinking and sleeping only, and living with oppressors and submitting to many abjections, is a thousand times worse than death. This is a martyr's message.

Imam Hossein's message was for the whole world on a day when there was no pen and paper in that desert of Karbala. But this message lasted and was at once transplanted on to people's hearts in such a way that it will never be obliterated. Every year when the month of Moharram comes round, Imam Hussein(ع) is revived like a rising sun, repeating and crying out his message about that ignoble son of an ignoble, that bastard son of a bastard, namely Obeydollah-bin-Ziad, their Emir and Commander who was standing before thirty thousand men with swords and spears, while all the companions of Imam Hussein (ع)were killed. The Imam shouts: «He has sent a message that Hussein may choose one of the two things, the sword or abjectness. Can Hussein tolerate abjectness? Never! Our God does not approve of that for us.»

He was saying in effect that good people would continue to come until the Day of Resurrection and speak of this matter, and none of them will approve of his tolerating abjection. He was brought up and

nourished by a mother like Fatima Zahra , and can never bear abasement.

On the day he left Medina, he wrote in his will to his brother Muhammad Hanifa: «I wish the people of the world to know that I am not a rebel, a seditious man, an oppressor seeking war or rank. I have no such aims. My stand is for reform. I have come out to reform my grandfather's nation. I want to enjoin good and forbid evil.»

In this letter there is neither a mention of allegiance, nor naturally of the invitation by the Kufa people, which took place later on.

The actions of Imam Hussein(ع) can be explained by his logic of attack, martyrdom and propagation of revolution. If his logic was one of defence, he would not permit his followers to leave on the night before Ashura, and give them the choice to stay or go. In the logic of martyrdom, the more a movement spreads, the better is the goal attained. When his household and friends declare their readiness to stay, he prays for them. In the night of Ashura he sends Habib-bin-Mazaher Assadi to collect a few men from among the tribe of Bani Assad. How many of them were there? Even if he could bring fifty or sixty men, what could they do against those thirty thousand men? Imam Hussein(ع) wished to spread this movement by his logic of revolution. It was for this reason that he brought his household with him, for, they could carry his message.

Of the factors of invitation, allegiance and enjoining good and forbidding evil, which one had a greater worth? Obviously they are not of equal worth, and each has a worth which gives the movement the same amount of worth.

The third factor has given a higher value to the Hosseini movement, a value given to it by its hero. Many things are of value for a human being and are adornments. Knowledge isan adornment, so are rank and position, especially divine rank. Even outward things which represent these values give worth to a man. For example a clerical garment finds some significance, though this garment without the wearer's religiousness and without spiritual virtue has no worth at all. But as it has been worn by people worthy of the name of Priesthood, value is attributed to it. The same is true of a university professor's robe.

In various movements, any factors give worth to them. Movements are different in their nature; some are fanatical, some worldly and some human or divine in spirit, and so they are of different values.

All the three factors enhanced the worth of the Hosseini movement, particularly the third one. Sometimes this worth is given by the propagator of a movement to it, in the same way that the movement enhances his personal worth. Someone asks you: «What is this garment that you are wearing?» You answer: «It is of the kind worn by Ibn Sina (Avicenna), of whom the world is proud.» For some people a professor's robe may be an honour, but another one may be so distinguished that he raises the worth of that robe. For a woman ornaments are an adornment, but there may be a woman who is an adornment for ornaments.

Sa'esa'a- bin- Sowhan was a fine orator educated by Ali (ع), and the best compliment given to him was when Ali(ع) asked him to rise and make a speech. Incidentally it was this man who delivered the deeply felt funeral speech on Ali's burial. On Ali's election as Caliph, this

man spoke the following words of congratulations:

«Ali, you have adorned the Caliphate, and given it hononur. The Caliphate did not adorn you as you adorned it. The caliphate did not exalt you as you exalted it. The caliphate needed you more than you needed it. I congratulate the caliphate which bears your name, but I do not congratulate you for becoming caliph.»

Thus the factor of enjoining good and forbidding evil was used in such a way that it was exalted with a crown of honour. The Imam himself said: «I resolved to enjoin good and forbid evil and in this way to follow the path of my grandfather and father.»

This was Islam, which is a source of pride for many people. There are also Muslims who are in the true sense of the word the source of pride for Islam. But not all people are like that.

Seven or eight years ago I was invited by the Theological society of Shiraz University. One of the professors who may have been a former pupil of mine. was commissioned to introduce me. He said at the end of his remarks: «If this robe is a source of honour for others, this gentleman is a source of honour for the clerical robe.» I was deeply annoyed and when I rose to speak, I asked: «What Kind of a remark was this gentleman s? Does he understand what he says? I have only my turban and robe to be proud of. Who am I to be a source of honour to the turban and robe? What is this futile compliment that you pay one another?»

Abuzar- Ghaffari may be said to be an honour to Islam. So are Ammar Yasser and Avicenna who are educated by Islam.

Islam is proud of having well- educated men on

whom the world relies for, it has had a deep influence on the education and culture of the world. Khajxeh Nassir-e-din Toossi is one example for some of his contributions about the moon. But what are we? If Islam can accept us we will be proud. But most of us are a disgrace to Islam. So, let us put aside compliments.

Husseir (ع) gained his true worth by his enjoining good and forbidding evil, and that is what the Qur'an explicitly commands all human beings to do. We Muslims may not only neglect this principle, but also lower its worth completely by attaching too much importance to trifling things like clothes, ornaments, etc; such as you see in Saudi Arabia.

But Hussein paid attention to basic matters of good and evil. He said that the first and foremost evil in the Islamic world was Yazid, for, an Imam and leader should be a person who carries out the Qur'an's injunctions, establishes justice and has complete faith in religion. He offered all he had in full conviction for this goal, and gave it peerless magnificence. From the first day of leaving Madina, he spoke of the beauty of death. Not every death can be called beautiful. But death in the way of God and truth is an adornment for a man and woman alike.

The following motto is probably from Farzadagh:

«Though this world is very beautiful, yet the next world is far more beautiful. When all worldly things are left behind, why should we not bestow them liberally? Why should one not help others, and show benevolence? If these bodies must die, even if it is in fighting sickness and in bed, why should one not die a beautiful death?'

Thus, welcoming death with a sword in the way of God is far more glorious and beautiful.

SOME OTHER BOOKS PULISHED BY BUNYAD BE'THET

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