(.The Martyrdom of Imam Husayn (A.S

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On Mu'awiya death, his son Yazid assumed the caliphate in accordance with the former's unprecedented testament in Rajab 60/March 680. A true representative of the way of life common among the pre-Islamic youth of the Umayyad aristocracy, Yazid commanded no respect in the community.

His anti-Islamic behaviour and openly irreligious practices were well known throughout the Muslim world and earned for him contempt and disfavour, especially among those who cared for religion. Even those few writers who attempt to hush up some of the information unfavourable to the Umayyad house could not refrain from reporting that Yazid was the first among the caliphs to drink wine in public and that he sought out the Worst company, spending much of his time in the pleasures of music and singing and amusing himself with apes and hunting-hounds.

He himself had no use for religion, nor had he any regard for the religious sentiments of others. Addicted to wine-bibbing, attracted to singing-girls, and exposed to all sorts of vices, Yazid has never been presented in good terms by any Muslim writer of any period or by any school of thought. His open and persistent violations of Islamic norms were still more shocking to the community because of his close proximity to the Prophet and the Rashidun caliphs, of whom he claimed to be the successor and from whose authority he derived his title.

Nevertheless, Mu'awiya's meticulous arrangements, coupled with his formidable military grip on the Muslim world, ensured the smooth succession of his son. Yazid was thus hailed as the “Commander of the Faithful” by all the tribes and the provinces; yet his title was not secure until he could receive homage from the four most notable personalities of Islam, whom Mu'awiya, in spite of his utmost efforts, could neither buy nor coerce as he had done with all other men of prominence and the chiefs of the tribes.

With the death of Mu'awiya the last of the first generation who could claim for himself at least some political importance, the caliphate had to pass on to the second generation (tabi'un) after the Prophet. The grandees of this generation, as has been described in the preceding chapter, were Husayn b. 'Ali, 'Abd Allah b. az-Zubayr, 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar, and 'Abd ar- Rahman b. Abi Bakr, the sons of the most prominent Companions of the Prophet who were held in great respect by the community; Husayn, also being the only surviving grandson of the Prophet, enjoyed greater regard than the other three.

It was therefore obvious that without their recognition Yazid's authority could not be firmly consolidated, was fully aware of the importance of these four, and having failed to secure their agreement to Yazid's succession, he warned his son of the danger before he breathed his last. On his deathbed Mu'awiya advised Yazid: “O my son, I have arranged everything for you, and I have made all the Arabs agree to obey you. No one will now oppose you in your title to the caliphate, but I am very much afraid of Husayn b. 'Ali, 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar, 'Abd ar-Rahman b. Abi Bakr, and 'Abd Allah b. az-Zubayr. Among them Husayn b. 'Ali commands great love and respect because of his superior rights and close relationship to the Prophet. I do not think that the people of Iraq will abandon him until they have risen in rebellion for him against you. As far as is possible, try to deal with him gently. But the man who will attack you with full force, like a lion attacks his prey, and who will pounce upon you, like a fox when it finds an opportunity to pounce, is 'Abd Allah b. az-Zubayr.

Whenever you get a chance, cut him into pieces.”

Mu'awiya's advice, commonly reported by many sources, confirms the reports that Mu'awiya's efforts to secure the approval of these grandees of Islam for Yazid's succession had not been successful.

In order to secure undisputed possession of the caliphate, the first task Yazid undertook was to order the governor of Medina, Al-Walid b. 'Utba, to exact homage from the refractory, especially from Husayn and Ibn az-Zubayr. In his letter to the governor, he gave strict orders that they should not be allowed to delay, and if they refused, that Walid should behead them at once. Some sources include the name of Ibn 'Umar as also having been specifically mentioned in this letter.

Walid b. 'Utba accordingly sent for Husayn and Ibn az-Zubayr at an unusual hour of the night to oblige them to pay homage to the new caliph. Both of them realized that Mu'awiya was dead, and both had decided to stand by their refusal to pay homage to Yazid. Ibn az-Zubayr did not go to the palace and fled to Mecca the following night. Husayn went to see the governor, but was accompanied by a strong band of his supporters in case of a serious confrontation.

Leaving his supporters at the gate, Husayn went into the palace alone.

Walid read to him Yazid's letter and asked for immediate recognition of the new caliph. Husayn replied uncommittedly that the bay'a, in order to be valid, must be made in public and that the governor should arrange a public gathering in the mosque where he would also be present.

With this reply, when Husayn rose to leave the palace, Marwan b. al-Hakam, who was present there as well, rebuked the governor, saying: “By God, if you allow Husayn to leave without paying the homage now, you will never be able to get it from him; so arrest him and do not free

him until he pays the homage, or behead him." In fact, Marwan had already advised Walid to call these two for the bay'a, and if they refused, Mu'awiya kill them at once before the news of Mu'awiya's death became known to the people. Walid, however, did not accept this advice: as Husayn left the palace, the former retorted to Marwan's harsh attitude, saying: "Do not reproach me for this, O Marwan. You have advised me to do something in which there lies complete destruction and the ruin of my religion. By God, if the entire wealth and treasures of the whole world were given to me I would not kill Husayn.

Should I kill him only because he refuses to pay homage,I would suffer total destruction on the Day of Judgement, for in the sight of God there cannot be anything more accountable than the blood of Husayn."

The reply of Walid to Marwan, so commonly recorded by the sources, reflects that particular regard and respect with which the grandson of the Prophet was held not only by his followers, but by a great number of Muslims in general.

Husayn, however, succeeded in avoiding the demand for the Bay'a for two days and finally escaped at night with his family and most of the Hashimites to Mecca. Walid b. 'Utba paid for his lenient attitude towards the grandson of the Prophet: he was shortly thereafter dismissed from his post as governor of Medina.

Ibn az-Zubayr, who reached Mecca before Husayn, had gathered people around him against Yazid, and he is reported to have been harbouring secret ambitions for the caliphate himself. But as soon as Husayn arrived in the city, the people abandoned Ibn az-Zubayr and gathered around Husayn.

This was only natural, for our sources clearly state that "Husayn was much dearer and far more respected by the people of the Hijaz than Ibn az-Zubayr, who knew that the people there would never follow him as long as Husayn was in Mecca." So great were the inclinations of the people to Husayn that after his arrival there people prayed with him, performed the tawaf of the Ka'ba with him, and preferred to stay around him most of the time.

Husayn, like his brother Hasan, combined in his person the right of descent both from the Prophet and from 'Ali; and now after the death of Hasan he was the only candidate from the Prophet's family. But in the preceding years he had done very little to support his rights, restricting himself to a negative attitude towards Yazid's nomination. Nor, due to Hasan's treaty with Mu'awiya, was it possible for him to act as long as Mu'awiya was alive.

This he explained to the Shi'is of Kufa whenever they approached him concerning an uprising. The death of Mu'awiya changed the situation. On the one hand, Husayn was now free from the treaty obligations of his brother and, on the other, the demand for active guidance and

leadership from the Shi'is of Kufa became increasingly pressing.

As soon as this group received word of Mu'awiya death, they held a series of meetings expressing their renewed and enthusiastic support for Husayn. They sent out numerous letters and a succession of messengers urging Husayn to come to Kufa to take their leadership, as they had no Imam other than him. The first letter Husayn received on 10 Ramadan 60/15 June 680; it was signed by Sulayman b. Surad al-Khuza'i, Al-Musayyab b. Najaba, Rifa'a b. Shaddad, Habib b. al-Muzahir, and Muslim b. Awsaja in the name of the Shi'is and Muslims of Kufa, and read: “We thank God for casting down the tyrannical rule of your enemy, who had usurped the power to rule this community with out any right, allowed the possession of God to pass into the hands of the powerful and the rich, and killed the best men [an allusion to Hujr b. 'Adi and his supporters] while allowing the worst of the people to remain alive.

We invite you to come to Kufa, as we have no Imam to guide us; and we hope that through you God will unite us on the path truth. We do not go to Friday congregational prayers to pray with Nu'man b. Bashir, the governor of Kufa, nor do we assemble with him at the occasion of the 'Id. If we hear that you are coming to us, we will oust the governor from our city. Peace and mercy of God be upon you.”

This letter, signed by the men named above, must have served as a major incentive to Husayn, for the signatories had been trusted followers of his house from the very beginning and had proven their loyalty at the battles of Al-Jamal and Siffin with 'Ali. Though they had been extremely perturbed and disappointed by Hasan's abdication in favour of Mu'awiya, they nevertheless remained loyal to the former and hostile to the latter. Apart from these early Shi'is, a great number of other Kufans also wrote letters to Husayn, each signed by numerous individuals for the same purpose.

Similar letters urging Husayn to assume active leadership were also sent by the Shi'is of Basra. Not all of them, however, had the same degree of religious motivation: some had political aspirations, hoping to throw off the yoke of Syrian domination.

The actions of Husayn, however, show that from beginning to end his strategy was aimed at a much higher goal than simply accession to the caliphate. There is no evidence that he tried, while at Mecca, to enlist active supporters from among the people who gathered around him or to propagate his cause among the great numbers of people who were coming to Mecca for the Hajj; there is also no evidence that he attempted to send his emissaries to stir up any rebellion in provinces such as Yemen and Persia, which were sympathetic to his house, even though advised by some of his family members to do so.

And above all, had he acted promptly on the invitation of the Kufans, while the governorship of

the city was in the hands of the weak Nu'man b. Bashir, he might have had a fair chance of success. His speedy arrival would not only have forestalled any effective action on the part of the Umayyad government, but would also have stirred real enthusiasm among the Ku fans. This was emphasized by the leaders of the movement when they wrote: “In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate; to al-Husayn b. 'Ali, from his Shi'a, the faithful Muslims: Further make haste, for the people are awaiting you, as they have no Imam other than you! So haste, and again haste! Peace.”

This last letter was signed by a number of people and was sent with a delegation consisting of Hani b. Hani as-Sabi'I and Sa'id b. 'Abd Allah al-Hanafı, the two most trusted Shi'is of Kufa. In response to all these approaches, however, Husayn sent only one letter in reply through this last delegation. The content of this letter is worthy of note; it reads: “From Husayn b. 'Ali to the believers and the Muslims [note that the word Shi'a is not used]. Hani and Sa'id came to me with your letters, they being the last among your messengers and delegations to come to me. I have understood what you said and that you have invited me to come to you because you have no Imam to guide you, and that you hope my arrival there will unite you in the right path and in the truth.

I am sending my cousin and the trusted one from my family [Muslim b. 'Aqil] to report to me about your affairs. If his report conforms with what you have written, I will soon come. But you must be clear about the fact that the Imam is only one who follows the Book of God, makes justice and honesty his conduct and behaviour, judges with truth, and devotes himself to the service of God. Peace.”

The last sentence of the letter, explaining the duties of an Imam and the nature of the Imamate, helps us to understand Husayn's approach and attitude towards the whole problem. Abu Mikhnaf has also preserved for us Husayn's letter to the Shi'is of Basra, which is equally worthy of quotation here.

It reads: “God has chosen Muhammad from among his people, graced him with His Prophethood and selected him for His message. After he admonished the people and conveyed His message to them God took him back unto Himself. We, being his family (ahl), his close associates endowed with the quality of guardianship (awliya'), his trustees and vice regent (awliya'), and his heir and legatee (warith), are the most deserving among all the people to take his place. But the people preferred themselves over us for this [privilege]. We became contented, disliking dissension and anxious to preserve the peace and well-being [of the community], though we were fully aware that we were more entitled to this [leadership] than those who had taken it for themselves… I have sent my messenger to you and I call you to

the Book of God, and the Sunna of his Prophet, the Sunna which has become obliterated and innovations have become active and energetic. If you listen to me and obey my orders I will guide you to the right path. May the Peace and the Mercy of God be upon you."

The content of this letter is a complete statement of the Shi'i doctrine of the Imamate even at this early stage. That the historical sources have recorded little of what we may call Shi'i religio-political theory is due to the fact that their main interest has been in events, not in the underlying principles behind those events. Yet in narrating the events the sources have preserved certain documents such as letters or speeches which give us a glimpse of those ideals which underly the events.

We have quoted one of Hasan's letters in the previous chapter and pointed out the thinking of the Ahl al-Bayt. Now in the time of Husayn, twenty years after, Husayn's letters give exactly the same vein of thinking. In these letters Husayn adequately explains the concept of walaya, which means that God has bestowed upon the family of the Prophet special honour and qualities, thereby making them the ideal rulers, and that through their presence on earth His grace is disseminated. The other two terms of doctrinal importance are walaya, trusteeship or custodianship, and warith, heir and legatee, which are used by Husayn.

We have seen in Chapter 4 that at the time of 'Ali election for the caliphate, he was hailed in these terms by his closest associates. Now after thirty-five years the same terms are being used by Husayn.

Both these terms carry the idea of God's recommendation of the family of the Prophet to the people, that Muhammad recommended 'Ali, and that at his death 'Ali recommended Hasan, who left the legacy of the House for Husayn. It may, however, be too early for these concepts to have assumed the full flowering of their doctrinal content, yet one can see their presence in their embryonic form.

The other important part of Husayn's letter is his declaration that the right of ruling the community is the exclusive right of the family of the Prophet and they alone can guide the people in the right path; or in other words, they alone, by virtue of their special qualities, can combine temporal power and religious guidance together. Moreover, by this statement Husayn made a judgement on the caliphates of Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman.

Then, in the last part of his letter, by calling people to the Sunna of the Prophet Husayn implicitly rejected the interpretations of the first three caliphs who were not among the Ahl al-Bayt. The followers of the House of the Prophet would, therefore, go back directly to the Sunna of the Prophet and their Imams, who are divinely inspired (walaya).

However, Husayn decided to respond to the call. Two obvious factors inspired him to act.

Firstly, being the grandson of the founder of Islam, he must have felt it his duty to respond to the repeated appeals of these Muslims; and secondly, Yazid's pressing demand for homage was such that Husayn's filial piety and pride could not allow him to accept.

It was a difficult situation. Acceptance of the authority of Mu'awiya as the head of the Muslim state was an entirely different matter from the acceptance of Yazid. Mu'awiya, in spite of his worldliness and indifferent attitude towards religion, did not totally violate the norms of Islam, at least not outwardly.

Yazid not only violated Qur'anic norms and Prophetic Sunna, but also openly subjected them to contempt and ridicule, as has been the consensus of Muslim writers of all times. Even Mu'awiya's own agents, in implementing the plan for Yazid's nomination, were concerned about the latter's character. Thus when Mu'awiya asked Ziyad to prepare the people of Basra and Kufa to accept Yazid's nomination, the governor advised Mu'awiya to try to mend the ways of his son before asking people to swear allegiance to him.

It would indeed be a great mistake to assess the case of Yazid without taking into consideration the living impact of the Prophet and the first generation of Islam. The tense contradiction between this and the character of Yazid ultimately provoked the tragedy of Karbala, to which we must now turn. In order to maintain the continuity of our narrative, the sources of our information and their authenticity will be discussed at the end of the chapter.

In spite of repeated appeals' and hundreds of letters sent by the Ku fans, Husayn did not take a hasty decision, and as a precaution sent his cousin, Muslim b. 'Aqil, to Kufa as his emissary with instructions to ascertain the truth of these representations and report back on his findings. As soon as Muslim arrived at Kufa there was held in the house of Sulayman b. Surad al-Khuzai'i a meeting which, for the sake of secrecy at this stage, was attended only by the leaders of the movement.

In response to Husayn's letter, read before those present and quoted above, Shi'i leaders such as 'Abis b. Abi Habib ash-Shakiri, Habib b. Muzahir, and Sa'd b. 'Abd Allah al-Hanafi made passionate speeches and declared their wholehearted support for Husayn until the last breath. We shall see shortly that their pledges were not empty words: they remained loyal to the cause, fulfilled their promises, and ultimately gave their lives with Husayn at Karbala. Apart from these religiously devoted people supporting the cause of the Ahl al-Bayt, the political supporters of 'Ali from among the people of Kufa did not think it wise to lag behind in supporting a movement which they thought might be successful in throwing off Umayyad domination and raising new opportunities for them. Muslim b. 'Aqil thus quickly gathered thousands of pledges of support. The number of people who registered their names and swore allegiance to Muslim

in the name of Husayn is variously given as 12,000 and 18,000, the majority of the sources recording the second figure. Soon the movement became so widespread that Muslim b. 'Aqil was able to preside over the public meetings from the pulpit in the mosque of Kufa. Confident of Kufan support, Muslim consequently wrote to Husayn to come to Kufa and assume leadership of the people. The letter of Muslim was sent to Husayn not by an ordinary messenger, but by 'Abis b. Habib ash-Shakiri, a trusted leader of the Shi'is of Kufa. Having been assured of the extent of Kufan enthusiasm, Husayn decided to go to Iraq. Already Ibn al-Hanafiya at Medina, and then 'Abd Allah b. 'Umar and 'Abd Allah b. al-'Abbas, when they met Husayn on the road between Medina and Mecca, had warned Husayn against the dangers. Again at Mecca Ibn 'Abbas, along with many other friends, reiterated their advice with greater insistence and tried to persuade him not to rely onKufan promises, reminding him of their instability, their treacherous nature, and how they had betrayed, at the hour of trial, his father and brother. On the other hand, 'Abd Allah b. az-Zubayr first hypocritically voiced his concern for the safety of Husayn in the enterprise but nevertheless urged him to go on with the plan, for he wanted to make a bid for power himself. While Husayn was in the Hijaz this was impossible, as the people would never give Ibn az-Zubayr precedence over the grandson of the Prophet

The former was thus pleased to see that Husayn should leave the field free for him in Mecca. In spite of all the advice, however, Husayn did not abandon his project, for he had in mind a definite plan and strategy, as will be discussed later.

Receiving word of Muslim's arrival in Kufa and the support given to him by the people there, Yazid, no longer trusting the mild-tempered and weak governor of the town, Nu'man b. Bashir, appointed his strong man 'Ubayd Allah b. Ziyad, the governor of Basra, to take charge of Kufa as well and to go there at once. The immediate task to be carried out was to crush the Shi'i movement by taking whatever measures were required for this purpose. The text of Yazid's letter is preserved by various sources and gives a clear idea of his violent attitude towards the movement in support of Husayn.

Fully aware of the insurrection in Kufa in favour of Husayn, Ibn Ziyad rode into the city in disguise, wearing a black turban, covering his face, and surrounding himself with a small squadron of horsemen. The Kufans, who were expecting Husayn, mistook Ibn Ziyad for the former, gathered all around his horse, greeted him enthusiastically, and shouted: “Hail to you, O son of the Prophet; we have been waiting you.”

Ibn Ziyad, quietly observing the people's enthusiasm for Husayn, entered the mosque along with the crowds, mounted the pulpit, and then suddenly tore the veil from his face. He delivered

a terrifying speech, declaring death and unprecedented punishment for the sympathizers of Husayn, while making tempting promises for those who would prove their loyalty to the Caliph. The Kufans, known for their lack of resolution, were stricken by awe and fear, completely lost heart, and ultimately abandoned Muslim, who after attempting in vain to organize an immediate revolt, was captured and beheaded together with Hani b. 'Urwa in whose house he had stayed. This unreliable attitude of the political supporters of Husayn, the so-called Shi'is of Kufa in general, once again demonstrates the weakness of their character, as had been pointed out to Husayn by those of the travellers coming from Kufa who happened to meet him on his way. For example, at a place called Sifah he met the poet Farazdaq and inquired about conditions in Kufa. Farazdaq replied: “Their hearts are with you, but their swords are with your enemies.” Husayn left Mecca on 8 Dhu'l-Hijja/10 September 68o, the same day Muslim b. 'Aqil was beheaded in Kufa. He had only about 50 men from among both his relatives and friends able to bear arms, besides women and children, accompanying him from Mecca on the fateful journey. Husayn's sudden departure from Mecca, where he had been staying for the past five months and where a great number of people were arriving for the Hajj, only two days away, cannot have been without some serious cause.

Tabari and other sources, quoting Husayn himself, report that the Umayyad government sent some soldiers disguised as pilgrims to arrest him or even assassinate him. Though it is difficult to ascertain the authenticity of this sort of report, still we cannot rule. out a possibility of this kind in view of what happened to the holy cities later at the hands of the army sent by Yazid in connection with the rebellion of Ibn az-Zubayr.

While Husayn was heading towards Iraq, Ibn Ziyad, after killing Muslim and Hani, made Kufa a scene of terror and horror. First, he applied severe economic pressure on the population through the 'arifs, whose function and importance as being responsible for distribution of stipends and the maintenance of law and order in their respective 'irafas has already been discussed in Chapter 5. He exploited these state functionaries and ordered them to write down the names of any strangers or rebellious or suspicious people in their irafas.

He held the 'arifs responsible for any trouble that might occur in their 'irafa and threatened that the 'arif would be crucified and the entire 'irafa would be deprived of its stipend if anything was concealed from Ibn Ziyad. Secondly, he made a declaration that anyone suspected of supporting Husayn would be hanged without trial, his house would be set on fire, and his property would be confiscated.

Kufa was thus soon brought under full control. At the same time, Ibn Ziyad blockaded all the roads leading from the Hijaz to Kufa and gave strict orders forbidding anyone from entering or

leaving the territory of Kufa. At Al-Qadisiya, which by the normal route links Kufa with the Hijaz, he set up a strong military post with an army of 4,000 troops under the command of Husayn b. an-Numayr at-Tamimi. Similarly, other border areas like Qutqutana, La'la', and Kaffan, which link Kufa with Basra and other parts of Iraq, were being heavily patrolled by the Umayyad army; and consequently it was almost impossible for anyone to enter or leave Kufa. Husayn learned of all these strict measures from the Bedouins, but continued his journey undeterred.

When he reached AthTha'libiya he received word from some travellers of the execution of Muslim b. 'Aqil and Hani b. 'Urwa at Kufa; then at Zubala he learned that his messenger Qays b. Mushir as-Saydawi; whom he had dispatched from Hijir, the fourth stage from Mecca, with a letter for the Kufans informing them of his imminent arrival, had been captured at the checkpoint at Al-Qadisiya and that he had been brutally killed by Ibn Ziyad in Kufa: he was thrown from the top of the governor's palace when he refused to curse Husayn to save his own life. Husayn could not control his tears at the tragic fate of his trusted follower and, quoting a verse of the Qur'an, said: "'Among the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God. Some of them have completed their vow [i.e. have sacrificed their lives in fulfilling their vow], and some others are still waiting [to die]; but they have never changed [their determination] in the least.' (Qur'an, XXXIII,. 23). O God, make Paradise an abode for us [the surviving ones] and for them [the ones who have been killed], and unite both of us in a resting place under your mercy and make your reward our only object of desire and our treasure."

This statement by Husayn is clear enough to demonstrate that he was fully aware of what was going to happen to him and that he was fully prepared for it. Another expression of Husayn's thinking is reflected by his proclamation to his companions which he made after receiving this news at Zubala. He stood among those accompanying him and after informing them of the doleful news and of the obvious danger of death and complete destruction for which he was heading, he asked them to leave him and withdraw to safety.

Those who had joined him during the journey with certain hopes of material gains did depart, and there remained with him only those who had followed him from the Hijaz. These statements by Husayn must be taken into consideration, for they are important for an understanding of his thinking, which will be discussed below.

Leaving Zubala, Husayn reached Batn 'Aqiq, a place a few stages from Kufa; and upon learning in detail of the strong military force stationed at Al-Qadisiya, he changed his route to enter Kufa from another direction. Husayn b. Numayr, the commander at Al-Qadisiya, was informed of Husayn's change of route and sent a detachment of 1,000 troops under the command of

Hurr b. Yazid at-Tamimi al-Yarbu'i to intercept him. When they appeared on the horizon, Husayn ordered his people to pitch their tents at a nearby place called Dh(1Husm (or Husam). The army of Hurr soon reached Husayn.

The day was hot and Hurr's army had run out of water; the grandson of the Prophet could not tolerate that even his enemies should suffer from thirst, and he ordered his men to give water to the Umayyad troops and to their horses. Husayn himself took part in serving water to those badly affected by thirst and the heat. Hurr had a certain regard for Husayn, and at both prayers of the day he, along with his troops, prayed behind him. Even when four of the leading Shi'is of Kufa who had managed to escape from the city joined Husayn at this point, Hurr, though he protested, did not dare to use force. After each of the two prayers, Husayn explained to his adversaries the reasons which had caused him to set out: “O people of Kufa! You sent to me your delegations and wrote me letters saying that you had no Imam and that I should come to unite you and lead you in the way of God … You wrote that we, the Ahl al-Bayt, are more qualified to govern your affairs than those who claim things to which they have no right and who act unjustly and wrongfully…. But if you have changed your minds, have become ignorant of our rights, and have forgotten your delegations and repeated appeals to me to come for the sake of your religion… I shall turn back.”

Then Husayn showed Hurr two sacks full of the letters sent by the Kufans to him, but Hurr said he knew nothing of these and that he had come with the orders of Ibn Ziyad to arrest him and his party as prisoners to be handed over to Ibn Ziyad. Husayn refused to submit, but still Hurr did not use force against him. After some argument it was agreed that Husayn should keep on travelling along the Euphrates in the opposite direction from Kufa until fresh orders arrived from the governor, and that Hurr would follow Husayn closely.

When they reached the district of Ninawa (or Naynawa) a horseman arrived from Kufa. Without greeting Husayn, he gave Hurr a letter from Ibn Ziyad ordering him not to allow the “rebels” to make a halt except in a desert place without fortifications or water. Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, a companion of Husayn, then suggested that he should attack Hurr's small detachment and occupy a fortified village called Al-'Aqr, but i;1usayn refused to be the one to initiate hostilities. Husayn, however, managed to proceed only a little farther until they reached the plain of Karbala and there pitched their tents. It was 2 Muharram 61/2 October 680.

On the third of Muharram the situation deteriorated as 'Umar b. Sa'd arrived with the Umayyad army of 4,000 men and assumed overall command on the field. Upon reaching Karbala Ibn Sa'd learned that Husayn now intended to return to Medina; but Ibn Ziyad, on receiving word of this development, ordered that all the “rebels” should render homage to Yazid. Meanwhile, they

were to be prevented from reaching the river. 'Umar b. Sa'd accordingly stationed a force of 500 cavalry on the road to the river, and for three days before the massacre on the tenth of Muharram Husayn and party suffered terribly from thirst.

A daring sortie led by 'Abbas, Husayn's brother, managed to reach the river but succeeded in filling only a few waterskins. Ibn Sa'd was still trying to persuade the governor to find some peaceful means to avoid shedding the blood of the grandson of the Prophet, but all in vain. Ibn Ziyad sent his final orders through Shamir b. Dhu'l-Jawshan (commonly written as Shimr) either to attack Husayn immediately or to hand over the command of the army to Shamir, the bearer of the letter. The orders also specified that when Husayn fell in the fighting his body was to be trampled, because he was “a rebel, a Seditious person, a brigand, an oppressor”.

Ibn Sa'd had to act, as he was anxious to retain his appointment as the deputy of the governor of the province of Ray' and was well aware of the fact that Husayn would never submit, for the latter “had a proud soul in him”.

Soon after receiving these new orders on the evening of 9 Muharram, Ibn Sa'd advanced with his army towards the camp of Husayn. Noticing this, Husayn sent his brother 'Abbas, along with some followers, to ascertain the reason for their approach. 'Abbas was told of the orders of Ibn Ziyad, and when informed of this Husayn sent 'Abbas back to request a respite of one night. This was granted.

At this point Husayn assembled his relatives and supporters and delivered a speech. This speech is unanimously reported in the events of the night of 'Ashura by the sources through different authorities, and it is useful in understanding Husayn's thinking. He said: “I -give praise to God who has honoured us with the Prophethood, has taught us the Qur'an, and favoured us with His religion … I know of no worthier companions than mine; may God reward you with all the best of His reward. I think tomorrow our end will come … I ask you all to leave me alone and to go away to safety. I free you from your responsibilities for me, and I do not hold you back. Night will provide you a cover; use it as a steed … You may take my children with you to save their lives.”

With only a few exceptions, his supporters, from among both friends and relatives, refused to leave or survive after him; through their speeches, to be discussed later, they showed an unshakable devotion to his cause. After some measures were taken for the safety of women and children and for Defence by bringing the tents closer together, tying them to one another, digging ditches in the rear and on the flanks and filling them with wood, the rest of the night was spent in prayer, recitation of the Qur'an, and worship and remembrance of God.

The borrowed night ended, and the fateful morning of 10 Muharram brought with it the

summons of death and the tragic end of the family of the Prophet and its handful of supporters. Husayn drew up in front of the tents his small army of 72 men: 32 horsemen and 40 foot soldiers of varying ages ranging from the seventy-year-old Muslim b. 'Awsaja to the fourteen-year-old Qasim b. Hasan b. 'Ali The rear of the tents was protected by setting on fire the heaps of wood and reeds. Zuhayr b. al-Qayn was given command of the right wing, Habib b. Muzahir al-Asadi of the left, and 'Abbas b. 'Ali was entrusted with the standard of the Hashimite house.

Husayn, preparing himself for the fateful encounter, dressed himself in the cloak of the Prophet, perfumed himself with musk, and rode on horseback with the Qur'an raised in his hand. Addressing his enemies and invoking God in a long and beautiful sermon, he said: “O God, you are my only Trust in every calamity; you are my only hope in every hardship; you are the only promise in the anxiety and distress in which hearts become weak and [human] action becomes slight, in which one is deserted and forsaken by his own friends, and in which the enemies take malicious pleasure and rejoice at his misfortunes. O God, I submit myself to You; my complaint is to You alone against my enemies, and to You alone is my desire and request. Who else other than you can relieve me from grief. You alone are the custodian of every blessing and the Master of every excellence and the last resort for every desire.”

The enemy replied to Husayn's discourse with the most insulting and heinous remarks; among them, Shamir, seeing the fire burning by Husayn's tents, said: “Husayn, you are hastening for the fire in this world even before the Fire of the Day of judgement.” Husayn's companion, Muslim b. 'Awsaja, could not control himself at this heinous insult and asked his permission to reply with an arrow, but Husayn stopped him, saying: “We will never start the fighting from our side.” As the situation grew hotter and an attack from the Umayyad army imminent, Husayn once again came forward; after praising God and praying for His blessing on Muhammad, he addressed his enemies: “O people! you are accusing me, but think who I am! Then search your hearts for what you are doing to me. Consider well if it be lawful for you to kill me and violate my sacrosanctity. Am I not the son of the daughter of your Prophet, the son of the Prophet's wasi and cousin…? Did not the Prophet say of me and my brother that 'they are the lords of the youth of Paradise'? You cannot deny the truth of what I have said concerning the merits of the family of Muhammad. Are all these not sufficient to prevent you from shedding my blood?” And again: “If you search in the whole East and the West you will not find a grandson of the Prophet other than me.”

Husayn's numerous speeches and repeated appeals in the name of the Prophet to his enemies' religious sentiments, which he made throughout the day and after each loss of life among his

supporters, were all in vain. The only reply he received was that he must submit himself to Yazid or be killed. To this demand Husayn's reply was that he could never humiliate himself like a slave.

The day-long battle-sometimes in single combat, sometimes collectively-began in the morning and ended shortly before sunset. The phases of the battle can be followed fairly clearly. After Husayn's first speech, the Umayyad army began firing arrows and duels took place. For most of the day there were series of single combats, with dialogues between the adversaries which are vividly recorded in the sources and which will be discussed in some detail later.

It seems that two major assaults were made by the Umayyads before noon and were met with stiff resistance, but the Umayyad cavalry and 500 archers maintained steady pressure on Husayn's small force. As the latter could be approached only from the front, Ibn Sa'd sent some men from the right and left towards the Talibi's tents to destroy them, but the supporters of Husayn, slipping among the tents, defended them energetically. Shamir, with a strong force under his command, approached the tent of Husayn and his wives and would have set it on fire, but even his comrades reproached him for this and he went away ashamed.

At noon Husayn and his followers performed the prayer of the Zuhr according to the rite of the Salat al-khawf(the prayer prescribed for when one faces a disastrous situation and calamity). It was in the afternoon that the battle became fiercer, and Husayn's supporters one after the other fell fighting in front of him. Until the last of them had perished not a single member of Husayn's family came to harm, but finally it was the turn of his relatives.

The first to killed was 'Ali al-Akbar, the son of Husayn, followed in quick succession by the son of Muslim b. 'Aqil, the sons of 'Aqil, three brothers of 'Abbas b. 'Ali from 'Ali's wife Umm al-Banin, then Qasim, the son of Hasan, a young and beautiful boy whose body was trampled and mutilated and whose death is described in touching terms. Husayn watched the fall of each of them and ran to the field to bring back their bodies and lay them in a row before his tent.

One by one all the Talibi's gave their lives fighting the enemy, and eventually there remained only two: Husayn and his half-brother 'Abbas b. 'Ali; the standard bearer of the vanquished army. Famous for his physical strength and bravery and known as “the moon of the Banu Hashim” because of his extraordinary beauty, the latter was a great support to Husayn throughout the period of torture and calamity. Now it was time for him to throw himself on to the swords of the bloodthirsty Umayyad army. With broken hearts, distressed and spattered with the blood of their dearest ones, both brothers went together and fell upon the enemy.

The enraged 'Abbas penetrated deep into the ranks of his foes, became separated from Husayn, and was killed some distance away. Alone and weary, Husayn returned to the tents to

console the terrified and grief-stricken women and children for what would befall them after his demise and to bid them farewell for the last time. Trying to calm his thirsty and crying infant child, Husayn took him in his arms just as an arrow struck the baby. Husayn lifted his hands with the dead child toward heaven and prayed to God for justice and rewards for his sufferings.

Exhausted and weary, lonely and dejected, wounded and bleeding, Husayn seated himself at the door of his tent. The Umayyad forces wavered for a moment, hesitant to kill the grandson of the Prophet. Finally it was Shamir who advanced with a small group of soldiers, but even he did not dare to deliver the final blow on Husayn; there merely ensued an altercation between the two. At last the son of 'Ali rose and threw himself on the Umayyads. Attacked from every side, he finally fell face-down on the ground just in front of his tent, while the women and children watched the dreadful -scene.

A boy of tender age, 'Abd Allah, the youngest son of Hasan b. 'Ali, in a fit of horror and terror, could not be controlled by the women, rushed from the tent, and stretched his hands around his uncle to protect him. A sword fell upon him and cut off the hands of the young boy. Finally, as Sinan b. Anas b. 'Amr raised his sword again to make the final blow on Husayn, the latter's sister Zaynab came out of the tent and cried, addressing Ibn Sa'd: “O 'Umar b. Sa'd, will Abu 'Abd Allah [Husayn's kunya] be killed while you are standing by and watching ?”

Nothing could help. Sinan cut off the head of the grandson of the Prophet in front of the tent where the women and children were watching and crying. Khawali b. Yazid al Asbahi took the head into his custody to be taken to Kufa.

The combat having thus ended, the soldiers turned to pillage and looting. They seized Husayn's clothes, his sword, and whatever was on his body. They looted the tents and seized from the women their ornaments, their baggage, and even the mantles from their heads. The only surviving male of the line of Husayn, his son 'Ali, who because of serious illness did not take part in the fighting, was lying on a skin in one of the tents.

The skin was pulled from under him and Shamir would have killed him, but he was saved when Zaynab covered him under her arms and Ibn Sa'd restrained Shamir from striking the boy. The tragic day is known as Al-'Ashura, the tenth day of the month of Muharram.

The atrocities were not yet over. Husayn's body, already torn by numerous wounds, was trampled by the horses often mounted soldiers who volunteered to inflict this final indignity on the grandson of the Apostle of God. On the morning of 11 Muharram, bodies of the Umayyad troops who had fallen in the battle were collected together; and after the prescribed prayer for the dead led by Ibn Sa'd, they were buried. But the headless bodies of Husayn and of those

killed with him were even left uncovered.

On 12 Muharram, however, when the Umayyad forces left Karbala, the people of the tribe of Bani Asad from the nearby village of Ghadiriya came down and buried the bodies of Husayn and his companions on the spot where the massacre had taken place. It is of interest to note that those whose bodies were left in such a pitiful and contemptible manner not long before were so honoured and immortalized that their graves have become one of the most venerated sanctuaries, have been embellished with gold, and have been ornamented with splendid decoration; they soon became the centre of pilgrimage for a countless number of devotees. There is hardly any trace of the graves or of the memory of those who were the victors at Karbala, whereas the tombs of Husayn and his vanquished supporters with their lofty minarets have become landmarks and symbols of grace and hope for the destitute.

The morning of 12 Muharram saw a peculiar procession leaving Karbala for Kufa. Seventy4wo heads were raised on the points of the lances, each of them held by one soldier, followed by the women of the Prophet's family on camels and the huge army of the Umayyads. Abu Mikhnaf describes the scene of the departure of Zaynab and other women of the Prophet's family as captives from Karbala.

Their lamentations at the sight of the massacred bodies of their sons, brothers, and husbands which were lying uncovered in front of them, caused even their enemies to shed tears. Qurra' b. Qays at- Tamimi, a member of the Umayyad army, is reported by Abu Mikhnaf as saying that he could never forget the scene when Husayn's sister Zaynab passed by the mutilated body of her brother; she cried in hysterical fits, saying: “O Muhammad! O Muhammad! The angels of Heaven send blessings upon you, but this is your Husayn, so humiliated and disgraced, covered with blood and cut into pieces; and, O, Muhammad, your daughters are made captives, and your butchered family is left for the East Wind to cover with dust?”

After reaching Kufa the captives and the heads of the victims were presented to Ibn Ziyad, and the head of Husayn was placed in a tray in front of him in a court ceremony crowded with nobles and spectators. Ibn Ziyad, having a cane in his hand, struck the lips of Husayn again and again. Zayd b. Arqam, an old Companion of the Prophet present in the court, not aware of what had happened, recognized Husayn's face, was stricken by shock and grief, and shouted to Ibn Ziyad: “Remove your cane from these lips! By God, on these lips have I seen the lips of the Prophet of God, kissing and sucking them.”

He left the court weeping; outside, people heard him saying: “O people of the Arabs, after this day you have made yourselves home-born slaves and cattle. You have killed the son of Fatima and made your ruler Ibn Marjana [kunya of Ibn Ziyad], who will now keep on killing your best

men and force you to do the most hateful things. You must now be ready for the utmost disgrace."

The head of Husayn was erected for public display in Kufa before it was sent to Yazid in Damascus. How long the captives were detained in Kufa in a dungeon is not quite clear, but it seems that before long the captives and the heads were dispatched to Damascus to be presented to the Caliph.

When the head of Husayn and the captive women and children were presented before Yazid, in a court ceremony equally as lavish as that of Ibn Ziyad, Zahr b. Qays, who led the caravan as the representative of Ibn Ziyad, made a long speech of presentation describing how Husayn and his companions had been massacred and how their bodies had been trampled and left for the eagles to eat. The reaction of Yazid is reported to have been different from that of Ibn Ziyad, and he regretted the haste with which his governor had acted.

This seems to be contrary to all those reports which describe Yazid's orders to his governor in Medina, and then to Ibn Ziyad in which he clearly ordered them to either exact homage from Husayn and his followers or behead them without delay. The conversation which took place between Yazid and both Zaynab and 'Ali b. al-Husayn, in which the Caliph rebuked them and treated them harshly, also cast doubt on his alleged feelings of remorse.

Moreover, as is pointed out by Ibn Kathir, a Syrian pupil of Ibn Tamiya usually hostile to the Shi'i cause, if Yazid had really felt that his governor had committed a serious mistake in dealing with Husayn he would have taken some action against him. But, says Ibn Kathir, Yazid did not dismiss Ibn Ziyad from his post, did not punish him in any way, or even write a letter of censure for exceeding his orders. If Yazid at all expressed his remorse it must have been due to the fear of reaction or revolt by some section of the Muslim community.

After some time, however, Yazid released the captives and sent them back to Medina. Thus ended the most pathetic tragedy in the history of Islam. Edward Gibbon, with his limited sources of Islamic history and mainly depending on Ockley's narrative of Karbala, could not help but comment: "In a distant age and climate, the tragic scene of the death of Husayn will awaken the sympathy of the coldest reader."

We have seen in the previous chapter how ardently and passionately the Prophet loved his grandsons Hasan and Husayn, but only fifty years after the Prophet's death, as Dinawari points out, while many of the Prophet's Companions who were well aware of this affection were still alive, one of these beloved grandsons was brutally murdered at the hands of those who claimed to be members of the Umma of Muhammad.

With this brief summary of the lengthy accounts of the tragic end of Husayn, it is intended

firstly to analyse how it became so easy for the Umayyads to destroy him and crush the Shi'i movement behind him; and secondly, to determine the elements of purely religious sentiment among those who readily sacrificed their lives with Husayn and thus made another step forward towards the consolidation of Shi'! thought in Islam.

It has already been pointed out that of those who invited Husayn to Ku fa, and then those 18,000 who paid homage to his envoy, Muslim b. 'Aqil, not all were Shi 'is in the religious sense of the term, but were rather supporters of the house of 'Ali for political reasons-a distinction which must be kept clearly in mind in order to understand the early history of Shi'i Islam. They wrote to Husayn hundreds of letters, each signed by groups, and when Muslim b. 'Aqil reached Kufa they gathered around him; but this was for most of them an expression of their desire to throw off Syrian domination, a goal which at that time they thought was possible through Husayn.

But as soon as Ibn Ziyad, well known in Islamic history for his high-handed policy, took over the governorship of Kufa and after all those extreme and severe measures carried out by him to crush the movement, the Kufans saw their hopes gone, and their characteristic lack of resolution in times of trial overcame their political aspirations. They thus submitted to the reality of circumstances rather than endanger themselves for the cause.

There was, however, a small group of the Ku fans who had invited the grandson of the Prophet and led the movement motivated purely by their religious feelings. Where were they when Husayn was so helplessly killed at Karbala? We have seen that after the execution of Muslim b. 'Aqil and Hani b. 'Urwa, Kufa was kept under firm control. Anyone suspected of sympathy for Husayn was to be executed. Naturally all the sincere leaders of the movement adopted the stratagem of hiding to escape arrest and execution, not because they betrayed Husayn and wanted to save their lives, but, as we shall see presently, because they wanted to make themselves directly available to Husayn, then on his way to Kufa.

This may be seen by comparing the lists of names of those who gave their lives at Karbala with Husayn or later with the Tawwabun, with those who wrote the first letters of invitation to him and who had been leading the movement in Ku fa. We have seen that four of these Shi'i leaders of Kufa managed to join Husayn at Dhu Husm in spite of Hurr's objection.

As soon as they heard of Husayn's arrival at Karbala, those who could, in spite of all the obstacles, somehow manage to reach Karbala did so; they laid down their lives before Husayn or any one from among his family members were hurt.' And of those who were not with Husayn at Karbala, some had already been arrested and some others, due to the heavy blockade of the roads, could not make their way to Karbala until it was too late.

When Husayn had left Mecca there were only 50 persons with him, 18 Talibi's or close relatives, and 32 others. After the battle, however, 72 heads were taken to be presented before Ibn Ziyad, 18 of them Talibi's and 54 Shi'is, though the real number of those who fell at Karbala with Husayn seems to have been more than 72. Samawi and some other sources enumerate the non-Talibi's and give the total number of victims as 92.

If this was the case, then it seems that the heads of those who had no tribal identity were not taken to Ibn Ziyad, thus resulting in the lower figure of 72 deaths. Tabari and Dinawari list the names of the tribes and the numbers of heads carried by them to Kufa as follows: Kinda, thirteen; Hawazin, twenty; Tamim, seventeen; Asad, six; Madhhij, seven; Thaqif, twelve; Azd, five; and another seven of unknown tribal affiliation.

There is a slight variation between the lists of Tabari and Dinawari. While Tabari mentions the Madhhij as carrying seven heads and does not record Thaqif's twelve, Dinawari omits Madhhij's seven and mentions the Thaqif as having carried twelve heads, in addition to mentioning five heads held by the Azd. Scrutiny of other sources confirms both: seven heads carried by Madhhij and twelve by Thaqif. This gives a total of 87 victims of the massacre whose heads were presented at the court of Ibn Ziyad.

Tabari and other sources also tell us in detail how Husayn's true followers managed to escape secretly from Kufa and reach Karbala. In addition, we find a few names of those who came to Karbala with the Umayyad army and, when they saw the sacrilegious treatment by the Umayyads of the grandson of the Prophet, could no longer resist their feelings for the house of the Prophet, defected from the Umayyad ranks, and cast their lot with Husayn. Besides Hurr, whose defection is reported in great detail, it is also commonly recorded that on the morning of 'Ashura, just before the battle began, thirty nobles of Kufa who were with the army of Ibn Sa'd defected from him over to Husayn's side and fought for him.

Furthermore, it should be noted again that the blockade of all the roads coming into Kufa and its vicinity made it almost impossible for the majority of those Shi'is of Kufa who were in hiding, and also for those residing in other cities like Basra, to come to the aid of Husayn. Nevertheless, a few persons from Basra did reach Karbala and shared the fate of Husayn. We have, therefore, good grounds for supposing that had there not been so many obstacles and had there been sufficient time and opportunity to mobilize their strength, quite a few of the Tawwabun (penitents), to be discussed in the following chapter, who later on sacrificed their lives in the name of Husayn, would have been with him at Karbala.

Circumstantial evidence allows us to suggest that those who gave their lives for the sake of the slain Husayn would have gone at least as far for the living Husayn. On the other hand, the aim

of elaborating this fact is not to suggest that had there not been those unavoidable circumstances Husayn's fate would have been any different. It would certainly have been the same in any case because of the well-organized and formidable military strength of the Umayyads and the characteristic fickleness of the majority of the Kufans, coupled with the as yet weak and disorganized movement of the religiously motivated Shi'is.

Our purpose is to suggest that under slightly better circumstances the defeat at Karbala would not have occurred so helplessly and without there being any conspicuous resistance, and thus we would have a clearer picture of the physical strength of the Shi'i movement at this stage. To support this hypothesis we can cite the successes achieved not long after Karbala, but under better circumstances and with better opportunities, by Al-Mukhtar and Ibn az-Zubayr, both far less important than the grandson of the Prophet.

We will only point out here in passing that Al-Mukhtar b. Abi 'Ubayda ath-Thaqafi seized possession of Kufa in 66/686-687 and captured Mesopotamia and some parts of the eastern provinces from the Umayyads mainly in the name of the blood of Husayn. Re, however, lost control of the situation and was killed in 67/687 or 68/688. 'Abd Allah b. az-Zubayr proclaimed his caliphate in 61/680-81 and by 64/684 had established his power in Iraq, in southern Arabia, and in the greater part of Syria. Re was killed in battle against Hajjaj in 73/692 after ruling for almost nine years.

An analysis of the sources describing the movement of and the support given to both Al-Mukhtar and Ibn az-Zubayr leaves us in hardly any doubt that some of the component parts of Husayn's movement, later on frustrated and perverted, gave vent to their indignation against the Umayyads under the banners of these two adventurers. This comparison leads us to another important point. Al-Mukhtar and Ibn az-Zubayr achieved considerable political success in their enterprises, and both were able to rule certain parts of the Muslim world for quite a few years; but neither could leave any religious following behind him after he had fallen, though both were, in a sense, as much martyrs as Husayn himself.

There is no evidence at all that Ibn az-Zubayr left any sectarian following behind him; the name of Al-Mukhtar was kept alive for a very short time and was followed by a small group, but it soon afterwards lost its identity and was merged in a wider group. The reason is both obvious and vital. Neither Al-Mukhtar, nor Ibn az-Zubayr, nor their supporters had any specific ideal or any particular view which could keep their memory alive in the annals of religious thought in Islam. Husayn and his cause, on the other hand, though militarily a complete failure, were so conspicuously upheld by a sizable part of the Muslim community that his name became an emblem of the identity or entity of the second largest group in Islam.

This was due to the fact that his movement was based on a particular view of the leadership of the community, which has been elaborated in the first two chapters above and which has also been pointed out in the letters written by I;1asan to Mu'awiya and by Husayn to the Shi'is of Kufa. The memory of Al-Mukhtar and Ibn az-Zubayr died with the lapse of time and could only find place in the annals of history.

The memory of Husayn remained alive in the hearts and minds of the Muslims and has become a recurrent theme for certain values. The section of the Muslim community which upheld the cause and memory of Husayn at the expense of and in disregard for political realities, but still remaining an integral part of the religious entity of Islam, was thrust into a sectarian role by that majority which, though unwillingly, compromised with the political realities at the religious level.

Some Muslim historians writing directly under the influence of the ruling authorities of the time, and those theologians who by necessity tried to find a compromise position between the ruling authorities on the one hand and the Islamic community on the other, described Husayn's action as an ambitious attempt to wrest political power and as a mistake of judgement. Western scholars of Islam, in their rather superficial attempts to study Husayn's action, have subjected themselves to a certain mechanical methodology which they term a “scientific historical approach”.

The German school of orientalists, the first to enter the field of modern orientalism, though it indeed made valuable and solid contributions in certain branches of Arab-Islamic studies with admirable thoroughness and depth, was so committed to a particular historical methodology that it could never grasp the “feelings” and “necessary aptitude” so vitally important in understanding religious history and its development. The impact of the German school has been so strong that this trend has persisted, and the subsequent schools of the French and British scholars, with very few exceptions, have followed the same trend.

It is thus rather regrettable that the tragedy of Karbala has been regarded by these scholars with the same mechanical historicism: none of them has ever tried to study Husayn's action in its meaning and purpose. It was therefore natural for these scholars to describe Husayn as an ill-fated adventurer attempting to seize political power, his movement as a rebellion against the established order, and his action as a fatal miscalculation of Kufan promises.

We have already hinted in passing that Husayn had been fully aware of the situation and the consequences. On the road from Medina to Mecca, then at the time when he was leaving the “House of God” for Ku fa, and finally throughout the journey from Mecca to Ku fa, he was warned by dozens of people about the danger and that “the hearts of the Iraqis were for him

but that their swords were for the Umayyads."

But I;1usayn's replies to all of those who attempted to deflect him from his purpose were always more or less in the same vein: "God does as He wishes…, I leave it to God to choose what is best…, God is not hostile to him who proposes the just cause."

From these replies it is clear that Husayn was fully aware of the dangers he would encounter and that he had a certain strategy and plan in mind to bring about a revolution in the consciousness of the Muslim community. Furthermore, it is also very clear from the sources, as has been stated before, that Husayn did not try to organize or mobilize military support, which he easily could have done in the Hijaz, nor did he even try to exploit whatever physical strength was available to him. Among many instances in this respect we will restrict ourselves to citing only one.

At a place called 'Uzayb al- Hujaynat, after having already learned about the Kufan abandonment of his envoy Muslim b. 'Aqil and his subsequent death, it was clear to Husayn that he had no hope of support or even survival in Kufa. Nevertheless, he totally refused an offer of safety, if not success, extended to him. Abu Mikhnaf and other sources relate that at this place four of the leading Shi'is of Kufa managed to reach Husayn with the help of Tirimmah. b. 'Adi at-Ta'i, who acted as a guide (dalil). Tirimmah made a strong appeal to Husayn, saying: "By God I have left Kufa in such a condition that when you reach there you will not find a single person who could help you against your enemies. By God, if you go there, you and those who are travelling with you will be instantly butchered. For God's sake, abandon your plan and come with me to the safety of our mountains here. By God, these mountains have been beyond the reach of the kings of Ghassan and Himyar, from Nu'man b. al-Mundhir, and from any black and red [i.e., from any formidable power]. By God, if you decide to come with me no one can humiliate you or stop you from doing so [reference to Hurr]. Once you reach my villages on the mountains, we will send for men of [the tribes of] Ba'ja and Salma of the Tayy'. Then, even ten days will not pass before the horsemen and the foot soldiers of Tayy' arrive to help you. You can stay with us as long as you wish, and if then you want to make an uprising from there, or if you are disturbed, I would lead a force -of twenty thousand men of the Tayy' with you, who would strike [at your enemies] with their swords in front of you. By God, no one will ever be able to reach you, and the eyes of the people of Tayy' would remain guarding you.'

Husayn's only reply to this extremely valuable and timely offer, when all hopes of support in Kufa had already vanished, was: "God bless you and your people, but I am committed to some people, and I cannot go back from my word, though I did not know what would happen between us and them. However, things are destined."

One cannot help asking how it would be possible for a man making a bid for power to refuse to accept such a promising offer of support. Can anyone think that after knowing all of the latest developments in Kufa Husayn was still hoping to find any support or even the slightest chance of survival in Kufa? Moreover, we have detailed descriptions of the fact that when at Zubala I;1usayn learned of the brutal execution of his envoy Qays b. Mushir, he gathered those accompanying him and asked them to leave him alone and go to safety.

After Zubala, Husayn made this proclamation to his companions time and again, the last of these being on the night of 'Ashura. Is it conceivable that anyone striving for power would ask his supporters to abandon him, no matter how insignificant their number might have been? No one can answer these questions in the affirmative. What then did Husayn have in mind? Why was he still heading for Kufa?

It is rather disappointing to note that Western scholarship on Islam, given too much to historicism, has placed all its attention on the discrete external aspects of the event of Karbala and has never tried to analyse the inner history and agonizing conflict in Husayn's mind. Anatomy of the human body can give knowledge of the various parts and their composition, but cannot give us an understanding of man himself.

In the case of Husayn, a careful study and analysis of the events of Karbala as a whole reveals the fact that from the very beginning Husayn was planning for a complete revolution in the religious consciousness of the Muslims. All of his actions show that he was aware of the fact that a victory achieved through military strength and might is always temporal, because another stronger power can in course of time bring it down in ruins. But a victory achieved through suffering and sacrifice is everlasting and leaves permanent imprints on man S consciousness. Husayn was brought up in the lap of the Founder of Islam and had inherited the love and devotion to the Islamic way of life from his father.

As time went on, he noticed the great changes which were rapidly taking place in the community in regard to religious feelings and morality. The natural process of conflict and struggle between action and reaction was now at work. That is, Muhammad's progressive Islamic action had succeeded in suppressing Arab conservatism, embodied in heathen pre-Islamic practices and ways of thinking.

But in less than thirty years' time this Arab conservatism revitalized itself as a forceful reaction to challenge Muhammad's action once again. The forces of this reaction had already moved into motion with the rise of Mu'awiya, but the succession of Yazid was a clear sign that the reactionary forces had mobilized themselves and had now re-emerged with full vigour. The strength of this reaction, embodied in Yazid's character, was powerful enough to suppress or at

least deface Muhammad's action.

Islam was now, in the thinking of Husayn, in dire need of reactivation of Muhammad's action against the old Arabian reaction and thus required a complete shake-up. Such a shake up would not have been so effective at the time of Hasan, for his rival Mu'awiya, though he had little regard for religion, atleast outwardly tried to veil his reactionary attitude of the old Arabism. Yazid did not care even for this; he exposed these pretensions and his conduct amounted to open ridicule of Muhammad's Sunna and Qur'anic norms.

Now, through Yazid, reaction of the old Arabism was in direct confrontation against the Islamic action of Muhammad. This could be seen by such instances as when Yazid, during his father's reign, once came to Medina in the season of the Hajj and became badly intoxicated from wine-drinking. Ibn 'Abbas and Husayn happened to pass by him, whereupon Yazid called his servant and ordered him to serve wine to Husayn, insisting that the latter take it. When Husayn angrily refused and rose to leave, Yazid, in his drunken stupor, sang: “O my friend, how strange it is that I have invited you, but you do not accept, To women singers, pleasures, wine, and music, And to a brimming full jar of wine on the lip of which sits the master of the Arabs. And among them [the singing girls] there is one who has captured your heart, and she did not repent by doing this.”

Husayn stood up and said: “But your heart, O son of Mu'awiya.”

Now this same Yazid was the Caliph of Islam and was asking Husayn to accept his authority. Husayn's acceptance of Yazid, with the latter's openly reactionary attitude against Islamic norms, would not have meant merely a political arrangement, as had been the case with Hasan and Mu'awiya, but an endorsement of Yazid's character and way of life as well. This was unthinkable to the grandson of the Prophet, now the head of Muhammad's family and the embodiment of his Sunna.

In order to counteract this reaction against Islamic action, Husayn prepared his strategy. In his opinion he had the right, by virtue of his family and his own position therein, to guide the people and receive their respect. However, if this right were challenged, he was willing to sacrifice and die for his cause. He realized that mere force of arms would not have saved Islamic action and consciousness. To him it needed a shaking and jolting of hearts and feelings. This, he decided, could only be achieved through sacrifice and sufferings.

This should not be difficult to understand, especially for those who fully appreciate the heroic deeds and sacrifices of, for example, Socrates and Joan of Arc, both of whom embraced death for their ideals, and above all of the great sacrifice of Jesus Christ for the redemption of mankind.

It is in this light that we should read Husayn's replies to those well-wishers who advised him not to go to Iraq. It also explains why Husayn took with him his women and children, though advised by Ibn 'Abbas that should he insist on his project, at least he should not take his family with him. Aware of the extent of the brutal nature of the reactionary forces, Husayn knew that after killing him the Umayyads would make his women and children captives and take them all the way from Kufa to Damascus.

This caravan of captives of Muhammad's immediate family would publicize Husayn's message and would force the Muslims' hearts to ponder on the tragedy. It would make the Muslims think of the whole affair and would awaken their consciousness. This is exactly what happened. Husayn succeeded in his purpose. It is difficult today to evaluate exactly the impact of Husayn's action on Islamic morality and way of thinking, because it prevailed.

Had Husayn not shaken and awakened Muslim consciousness by this method, who knows whether Yazid's way of life would have become standard behaviour in the Muslim community, endorsed and accepted by the grandson of the Prophet No doubt, even after Yazid kingship did prevail in Islam, and the character and behaviour in the personal lives of these kings was not very different from that of Yazid, but the change in thinking which prevailed after the sacrifice of Husayn always served as a line of distinction between Islamic norms and the personal character of the rulers.

Except for a few mediaeval writers committed to certain interests, Muslim historians and authors have always paid their utmost tribute in praising Husayn's heroic action. It is indeed encouraging that in modern times more and more Muslim scholars of all schools of thought have been contributing independent works to explain Husayn's philosophy of sacrifice and martyrdom. Among the numerous books published in the past few decades, coinciding with the reawakening of the Muslim world, we would refer our readers to only two.

One is by the famous Egyptian author 'Abbas Mahmud al-'Aqqad and entitled Abu ash-shuhada', al-Husayn b. Ali (Father of Martyrs, Husayn b. 'Ali). The other is by a great Lebanese scholar and shaykh, 'Abd Allah al-'Ala'ili, and is entitled Al-Imam al-Husayn, sumu'l-ma'na fı sumu'dhdhat. (The Imam Husayn, Loftiness of Purpose in a Lofty -Personality), a comprehensive study of Husayn's life, times, and martyrdom. Both writers, the former a secular scholar of history and philosophy, the latter a religious scholar of very high standing and scholarship, have discussed thoroughly the meaning, purpose, philosophy and the highest ideal of Husayn's deed.

Now we must turn to examine the second inference to be drawn from the outline of the episode of Karbala given above: to determine the religious feelings of those who willingly gave

their lives with Husayn. In describing the tragedy our sources do not fail to provide ample material on those doctrinal feelings which compelled the supporters of Husayn to choose to die with him rather than to live in peace and comfort, a choice which remained open to them even up to the last moment.

This can be elucidated by examining those speeches and pledges of loyalty made by these persons on several occasions. It is also illustrated by that war poetry in rajaz (verbal duels) which was exchanged between the combatants of both sides. In Arabian warfare it was customary that when two combatants came to fight each other, each would declare his tribe, its deeds and status, and the stand for which he was going to fight. Only a few examples, however, from each of these three categories will be cited here to show that there was a particular doctrinal stand for which the followers of Husayn stood and died.

We have seen that Husayn's messenger Qays b. Mushir, whom he had sent from Hajir to inform the Kufans of his arrival, was arrested at al-Qadisiya and sent to Ibn Ziyad for trial. The governor ordered him to go to the top of the palace and curse Husayn if he wanted to save his life. Qays used this opportunity to propagate his cause; he addressed the people, saying: “O people of Kufi. I am Husayn's messenger, and I declare before you that Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet, is the best man of his time among the men of God on earth and has better claims upon you than anyone else. It is therefore your duty to respond to him.”

Qays then called for the curse of God upon Ibn Ziyad and God's blessing for 'Ali He was thereupon thrown to his death. If we compare Qays' attitude with that of Hujr b. 'Adi al-Kindi about twelve years earlier, mentioned in the preceding chapter, we find a consistent way of thinking which links them in an unbroken chain of Shi'i thought. Qays' introduction of Husayn with special reference to his relationship with the Prophet and stating that he was the best man of God of his time on earth goes back to the ideas promulgated from the very beginning by the supporters of 'Ali.

As mentioned above, on the eve of 'Ashura (9 Muharram) Ibn Sa'd ordered his forces to advance towards Husayn's camp after receiving Ibn Ziyad's orders for an immediate attack. Husayn sent his brother 'Abbas along with some leading followers to ask for a night's respite. After some argument this was granted, and 'Abbas returned to inform Husayn; but Habib b. Muzahir and Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, who had come along with 'Abbas, remained behind to try to convince the Umayyad army of their wrongdoings. There are some useful dialogues recorded between these two men and their opponents. Habib b. Muzahir spoke first to the enemy: “By God, how evil and wretched those people will be when they appear before God after killing the family and the Ahl al-Bayt of their own Prophet. The people of this sacred family are those who

are the best worshippers of God and who spend their mornings striving in the devotion to God, devoting themselves to the best of His remembrance."

Azra b. Qays from the Umayyad side tauntingly replied: "You go ahead with the purification of your soul as much as you like" (implying: "but do not try to convince us"). To this Zuhayr b. al-Qayn responded: "O Azra! God has indeed purified our souls and has guided us. So fear God, O Azra, because I am one of your sincerest advisors. May God make you think, O Azra. Would you like to be one of. those who have fixed for themselves the path of error by killing these sacred and purified souls [Husayn and other members of the Ahl al-Bayt]?"

Azra b. Qays again retorted: "O Zuhayr, you were not among the Shi'is of 'Ali, but were known to be an 'Uthmani."

Zuhayr replied: "But now being with Husayn you must recognize that I am a Shi'i of 'Ali."

After this respite of only one night, and with all hopes gone, it was certain that the following morning would bring the summons of death for Husayn and his supporters. He gathered his companions and asked them to leave him alone as the enemy wanted nothing but his head. All the prominent companions and relatives of Husayn, in reply to his address, refused to leave him until all of them were killed.

Perhaps we should avoid considering the pledges made on this occasion by the relatives of Husayn, like 'Abbas, his half-brother and others, which may be interpreted as the clannish loyalty to the head of the clan. We would, therefore, record here the pledges of those who had no blood, clan, or even tribal relationship with Husayn, but only ties of religious or doctrinal loyalty.

From among the followers of Husayn the aged Muslim b. 'Awsaja stood up and exclaimed: "How can we leave you? What excuse then will we have before God in discharging our duty towards you? No, by God, we will not depart from you. I will fight with you until my last breath and until I die with you."

Then Sa'd b. 'Abd Allah al-Hanafi addressed Husayn, saying: "By God, we will not depart from you until by sacrificing our lives we have proven to God that we have faithfully fulfilled the duty we owe to the Prophet concerning you. By God, if I knew that I would be killed and then again be given a new life, and that then my body would be burned alive, all this being repeated seventy times, I would still not leave you until I died in front of you. And why should I not do that when I know that I can only be killed once, leading to an everlasting honour and privilege. [The last sentence in Bidaya reads:] By God, if I knew that I would be killed before you a thousand times, and by this your life and the lives of the other Ahl al-Bayt would be saved, I would love to be killed a thousand times; but this is only to be killed once, leading to an

everlasting honour."

After quoting a similar speech by Zuhayr b. al-Qayn, our sources say that all the companions of Husayn pronounced more or less in the same vein and declared their complete loyalties to Husayn, saying: "By God, we will never leave you alone until all of us are killed and our bodies are torn to pieces. By this we will have fulfilled our duties to you."

The contents of all these statements and pledges provide very useful points with which to emphasize that religious urge which made the companions of Husayn so firm and enthusiastic, even at that moment of calamity. The points prevailing in these pledges are: 1: emphasis on Husayn's close and direct relationship with the Prophet, and not specifically with 'Ali; 2: that to betray Husayn is to betray the Prophet, or similarly, that loyalty to Husayn is loyalty to Muhammad, the Prophet of God; 3: that to give up Husayn is to denounce Islam, which was revealed by his grandfather, the Prophet; 4: that betrayal of Husayn this day would cause them to perish on the Day of Judgement and would deprive them of the intercession of the Prophet. The essence of all three aspects, however, is that in their thinking there was an Imam or central authority who was the focal point for the love normally directed to the person of the Prophet himself.

On the day of 'Ashura, shortly before the fateful battle began, Hurr b. Yazid, a respected commander of the Umayyad army, the first who confronted Husayn and forced him to halt at Karbala as mentioned above, was himself now confronted by his own conscience and feelings. A great conflict arose in his mind: he was forced to choose between either wetting his hands in the sacred blood of the grandson of the Prophet or giving up his rank, power, and a bright career lying before him. His feelings ultimately won him over and he chose the latter. He suddenly spurred his horse towards Husayn's camp, threw himself at Husayn's feet, and exclaimed: "O son of the Prophet! Here is the man who did you great injustice in detaining you at this place and causing you so much trouble. Is it possible for you to forgive a sinner like me? By God, I never imagined that these people would go so far as to shed the blood of the grandson of their Prophet. I only thought that they would accept one of these three options you offered; and thus some sort of reconciliation would ultimately prevail, and in this way I would be able to retain my rank and position. But now, when all hopes for peace are gone, I cannot buy Hell for this worldly gain. Forgive my mistake and allow me to sacrifice myself for you. Only by doing this can I redeem myself in the eyes of God for my sin against you."

Husayn embraced Hurr and said: "You are as free-born and noble (Hurr) as your mother named you." Hurr then at once went before the Umayyad army and addressed his fellow men in a long speech in favour of Husayn. Condemning their sacrilegious actions against the grandson of the

Prophet, he put them to shame and reminded them of the Day of Judgement. Consequently, Hurr was among the first to give his life for Husayn. The defection of Hurr to Husayn shortly before the battle began and his being killed by the Umayyad army is as historical as the event of Karbala itself; to his defection all the sources bear unanimous testimony.

The physical defection of Hurr from the established order was, however, not of much importance. It was the principle on which Hurr defected from the Umayyad army which should be considered seriously. This was, perhaps, the greatest visible victory for the Shi'i point of view, for which the companions of Husayn were fighting to the death. The working of Hurr's mind at this last moment, as expressed in his statements mentioned above, was exactly the same as that of the companions of Husayn. This again supports the view that there was a particular way of thinking directed to the Shi'i doctrine.

5 Not of least importance in this connection are those rajaz verses exchanged between Husayn's companions and their opponents. Among the most illuminating are the following:

1: The same Hurr, when engaged in battle, proclaimed: “I will strike my sword on your heads in the cause of that Imam who is the best among all the inhabitants of Mecca.”

2: Nafi' b. Hilal al-Jamali, of Husayn's camp, came forward and asked for his combatant, proclaiming: “I am from the tribe of Banu Jamal, and I am of the religion of 'Ali (din 'Ali).” From the opposite side one Muzahim b. Hurayth came forward, saying: “I will fight with you; I am of the religion of 'Uthman (din Uthman).”

Nafi' retorted: “No, you are of the religion of Satan.”

3: When Zuhayr b. al-Qayn came to fight he said: “I am Zuhayr, and I am the son of Qayn; I will defend and protect Husayn with my sword.”

Turning to Husayn he said: “I will proceed leading to a rightly guided path the day when I meet your grandfather, the Prophet, [and the day] when I will meet Hasan and 'Ali al-Murtada and the one of the two wings [reference to Ja'far at-Tayyar].”

The war poetry in rajaz pronounced by the combatants of both sides, which has come down to us from reliable sources to be examined later, makes useful reading and provides important points. We have quoted only three of them for the sake of brevity. These pronouncements, however, sufficiently indicate that the Shi'i trend of thinking was fully active among those who chose to die with Husayn. The statement of Hurr that Husayn was an Imam, the best of all the residents of Mecca, and Nafi' and Zuhayr's declarations that they were of the religion of 'Ali and on the rightly guided path, are complete explanations in themselves and require no further comment.

Yet the pronouncement of Husayn's followers that they were of the religion of 'Ali does not fail

to suggest that they meant this term in a strictly religious sense, in contrast to those who had also called themselves by the same name at Al-Jamal, at Siffin, and on other occasions with 'Ali, but on political grounds, and who with the changing circumstances assimilated with the ruling majority who were now going to kill the son of 'Ali.

On the other hand, by looking at all these quotations referred to above we find that throughout the incident of Karbala there had been a persistent and continuous doctrinal tendency among the followers of Husayn, based on their declaration of being of the religion of 'Ali. This very tendency in course of time, as we shall see later, was translated into a more elaborate form of Shi'i tenets and developed its own theological doctrine (kalam) and legal system (fiqh) in opposition to the rest of the Jama'a.

Commenting on the tragedy of Karbala, even a scholar like Philip Hitti lets himself write that “Shi'ism was born on the tenth of Muharram.” All the information derived from our sources and all the evidence given above totally reject this view. Instead, a careful study of the material handed down to us from the sources of different schools of thought confirm the fact that the Shi'i doctrinal stand had been in evidence right from the time of the death of the Prophet, and the death of Husayn only “set the seal of an official ShT'ism.”

For that purpose we have gone into the detail of citing from those speeches, pledges, and war poetry pronounced before the death of Husayn, all of which clearly demonstrates the nature of the existing tendencies prevailing before the tragedy occurred. What is really true to say, however, is that the tragedy did play an immensely important role, not in the creation of Shi'ism, but in the consolidation of the Shi'I identity. The fate of Husayn was destined to become the most effective agent in the propagation and comparatively rapid spread of Shi'ism. It is also undoubtedly true that the tragedy added to Shi'i Islam an element of “passion”, which renders human psychology more receptive to doctrine than anything else. Henceforth we find that this element of “passion” becomes a characteristic feature of the Shi'is.

The tragedy of Karbala in its immediate and far-reaching consequences created three thousand Tawwabun (penitents) who let themselves die as a way of repenting for their inability to fulfil their commitments to the grandson of the Prophet. It provided a ground from which Mukhtar was able to launch his movement. It provided an effective slogan to the 'Abbasids for overthrowing the Umayyad regime. And ultimately, the name and memory of Husayn became an inseparable part of Shi'i moral and religious fervour.

A brief comment on the authenticity of the sources of our information for the whole account of Karbala, including the speeches, pledges, and rajaz material pronounced by the supporters of Husayn, is in order. The main source of our knowledge of the tragedy is Abu Mikhnaf Lut b.

Yahya (died I 57/774) the first to produce a comprehensive account of Karbala. This work was entitled Maqtal al-Husayn, and in the list of Abu Mikhnaf's numerous works this one is unanimously mentioned by all bibliographers.

Abu Mikhnaf, one of the earliest and best Arab historians, has been thoroughly and critically studied by scholars such as Welihausen and others, and recently by Ursula Sezgin in an admirable work entitled Abu Mikhnaf All have found him generally the most reliable and authentic writer on the annals of Kufa and Iraq under the Umayyads. It is now established that, as a rule, he does not take his material from predecessors or far-distant sources, but rather collects it himself by enquiring in the most diverse directions from all possible people who could have first-hand information or who had been present to see and hear for themselves. The chain of transmitters with him is a reality and not merely a literary form, and it is always very short. Writing shortly after the events he describes, Abu Mikhnaf often relates from an eyewitness account with only one intermediary between himself and his source. Gibb suggests that Abu Mikhnaf presents an Iraqi or Ku fan, rather than purely Shi'i!, point of view in his narratives. In this his sympathies are no doubt on the side of Iraq against Syria; for 'Ali, against the Umayyads. Yet in the opinion of Welihausen there is not much of a bias noticeable, at least not so much as to positively falsify fact.

The Maqtal of Abu Mikhnaf has come to us through numerous sources. It is, however, Tabari who used this work in full for the first time and thus becomes our main source of the text. In most cases Tabari quotes Abu Mikhnaf directly, but quite a few traditions he quotes from Hisham b. Muhammad al-Kalbi, most of these, no doubt, going back to Abu Mikhnaf himself. Tabari sometimes begins his narrative by saying: “Abu Mikhnaf said from so-and-so…”; and other times by saying: “Hisham (b. al-Kalbi) said from Abu Mikhnaf from so-and-so…,, This indicates that in the former case Tabari is quoting directly from Abu Mikhnaf's work, while in the latter he quotes Abu Mikhnaf in the recension of Ibn al-Kalbi. Besides Abu Mikhnaf and Ibn al-Kalbi, Tabari also quotes quite a few traditions transmitted from other traditionists, which add a few variants to the preceding ones and in most cases confirm Abu Mikhnaf.

Another source for Abu Mikhnaf is Baladhuri (died 279/892-893), whose Ansab al-ashraf pertaining to Husayn has not yet been published, but has been used by Veccia Vaglieri in her long and thorough article on Husayn in the new edition of the Encyclopaedia of Islam. Vaglieri finds that “Al-Baladhuri almost always used the same sources as At-Tabari, but often made resumes of them, introducing them by qalu (they said), and he provides some additional verses.” Our own examination of the manuscript leads us to agree with her findings, thus detailed references to the Ansab manuscript seem unnecessary.

Besides these two, who have used Abu Mikhnaf in full, we have also referred to Ibn Kathir (died 774/1372-1373), a pupil of Ibn Taymiyya and a committed Sunni of the Syrian school, often very critical of the Shi'i, whom he often refers to as the Rawafid. Ibn Kathir, often selective, naturally ignores those parts of Abu Mikhnaf which are directly against his interests, such as the references to 'Uthman, etc.; otherwise he accepts most of the material of Abu Mikhnaf. On the other hand, early Shi'i writers, like Shaykh al-Mufid (born 336/947, died 413/1022) in his Irshad, and others, relate the tragedy of Karbala, apart from Abu Mikhnaf from their own sources, often going back to 'Ali b. al-Husayn. This son of Husayn, twenty-three years old when he was present at Karbala, could not take part in the battle due to his illness and was thus saved from the general massacre. This makes him a major narrator of the tragedy. It is indeed very interesting and useful to note that in general outline and in all the major events, the renderings of Shaykh al-Mufid, a very committed die-hard Shi'i, are closely paralleled by those of the Syrian Ibn Kathir.

In examining Abu Mikhnaf's Maqtal al-Husayn one must particularly take into consideration the time factor to the author's advantage. We do not know precisely the date of his birth, but at the rising of Ibn Ash'ath against Hajjaj in 80-82/699-701, Abu Mikhnaf had already reached manhood.

The tragedy of Karbala took place in 61/680. This means that Abu Mikhnaf must have been born about the year of the tragedy, and at the time of Ibn al-Ash'ath's revolt he must have been somewhere between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two. It is certain that many of those who took active part in the battle of Karbala on the Umayyad side were still living, and thus the author had the opportunity of meeting and interviewing personally those who had witnessed the event themselves.

For this reason, in the Maqtal Abu Mikhnaf cites his authority with the clear observation wa kana qad shahida qatl al-Husayn (and he witnessed the murder of Husayn). Without exception, throughout his narrative he uses the verb haddathani (he told me); and if his report is not directly from an eyewitness, he cites only one or two intermediaries who had received the account from the eyewitness himself. Thus in our quotations above concerning the statements of loyalty, pledges, and rajaz, the isnad runs:

1: Abu Mikhnaf-Muhammad b. Qays (eyewitness).

2: Abu Mikhnaf-Harith b.Hasira and 'Abd Allah b. Sharik al-'Amiri (eyewitnesses).

3: Abu Mikhnaf-'Abd Allah b. 'Asim and Dahhak b. 'Abd Allah (eyewitnesses).

4: Abu Mikhnaf-Abu Jana-b al-Kalbi and 'Adi b. Hurmula (eyewitnesses).

5: Abu Mikhnaf-Muhammad b. Qays (eyewitness).

Often he further strengthens his isnad by citing more than one eyewitness, for instance in 2, 3, and 4 above. Reporting the pledges of the supporters of Husayn on the night of 'Ashura, he says that 'Ali b. al-Husayn said: “I was lying sick in my bed and heard my father's speech and the replies of his supporters thereto.”

The Maqtal al-Husayn of Abu Mikhnaf must have soon received widespread popularity, and numerous copies must have been made and circulated. This is evident from an examination of the isnads and reference to sources in which the work is used by other authors. Tabari source was no doubt mainly Hisham b. al-Kalbi directly.

But Mufid, Abi'l Faraj (Maqatil al- Talibiyin), Ibn Kathir, and many others give different sources and names through whom the work reached them. For example, Mufid often begins his narrative with the prefatory comment: “What is reported by Al-Kalbi, Al-Mada'ini, and others than these two from among the biographers (ashab a-b as-Siyar).”

Similarly, Abu'l-Faraj quotes Abu Mikhnaf from Ibn al-Kalbi and Mada'ini, and additionally from sources such as Husayn b. Nasr, the son of the famous Nasr b. Muzahim al-Minqari, the author of Waq'at and 'Awana, the famous historian. Abu'l-Faraj alone uses about five different isnads going back to Abu Mikhnaf, and quite a few other independent isnads going back to 'Ali b. al-Husayn, and then as usual summarises the accounts of all of them together. Basically, however, Abu'l-Faraj's source for Abu Mikhnaf is Mada'ini. Likewise still other authorities and different sources are given by Ibn Kathir, through whom he was able to use Abu Mikhnaf.

Mention must finally be made of the four manuscripts of the Maqtal, located at Gotha (No.1836), Berlin (Sprenger, Nos. 159-160), Leiden (No.792), and St. Petersburg (Am No. 78). It was from the first two that Ferdinand Wustenfeld made a German translation of the work entitled Der Tod des Husein Ben 'Ali und die Rache (Gottingen, 1883). Wustenfeld, while convinced of the early origin of these manuscripts, doubts that the author was Abu Mikhnaf. The foremost argument he puts forward is that it contains some miraculous and supernatural types of stories, such as terrible manifestations of grief in natural phenomena: reddening skies, bleeding sands, and so forth. Ursula Sezgin questions Wustenfeld's criticism at several points and suggests that while the existing manuscripts may be the recensions or rewritings made by some later unknown writers, the fact remains that Tabari's main source of Abu Mikhnaf was Ibn al-Kalbi.

However, some of these miraculous stories or fantasies have found a place even in Tabari, which suggests that these might have been originally written by Abu Mikhnaf himself or may have been incorporated by Ibn al-Kalbi when he rewrote his master's work. But to cast doubts on Abu Mikhnaf's authorship of the Maqtal only on the grounds that some supernatural and

miraculous events are recorded, as Wustenfeld is inclined to suggest, would mean to ignore certain tendencies of the age.

It would perhaps be a grave error to expect that a book written in the early eighth century about a great religious personality would not accept supernatural occurrences as a matter of course, especially when the main event itself is so charged with emotion and suffering. The Near East has produced an enormous number of books on the miracles of saints and holy men, and it would be strange indeed if Islam had not followed in the footsteps of its predecessors in glorifying the deeds of its Prophet and his family, even at the expense of their human greatness.

Moreover, as explained in the first chapter, the Arabs always believed in certain supernatural powers endowed on some sacerdotal families. Similarly, certain reactions of natural elements in certain conditions were also a commonplace factor in the system of Arab beliefs. After the Arabs' conversion to Islam, the miraculous stories were growing in narration right from the time of the Prophet, to which the Sira of Ibn Hisham bears testimony.

The most extraordinary circumstances of Husayn's death, immediately followed by the Tawwabun Movement highly charged with passion and remorse, and the propaganda carried out by the Tawwabun and by Al-Mukhtar naturally produced some supernatural stories alongside the accounts of the tragedy. We can, therefore, conclude that even if a few popular legends and supernatural events related to the tragedy are described in the Maqtal, this does not mean that the work is not of Abu Mikhnaf's authorship, nor that the whole account is unreliable.

The inclusion of such stories does not eclipse the fact that the Maqtal also contains and comprises the efforts of a prominent Arab historian to collect and preserve the most reliable and the most contemporary historical accounts of Husayn's martyrdom available to scholarship at a time when many participants in the events were still alive and able to contribute their knowledge to Abu Mikhnaf's research.