

What are the differences between Yarsan and Islam?

The planned project deals with the Yarsan, a religious group which took shape in the west of Iran in the 14th century. Now its followers mostly live in some Kurdish parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. This religion, which is called "Yari", is obviously the outcome of religious movements against the Islamic Caliphate in early centuries of Islam in Iran.

It is noticeable that there are some different names which are applied to the Yarsan, for instance: Ahl-e Haqq, Ali Alahi, Yazidi, Tayfa, Aluwian, Ezidi and Kaka'i. Although Ahl-e Haqq according to Yari texts seems to be an incorrect name for Yarsan, it is more popular than others. The title of Ahl-e Haqq has not any religious origins among the Yarsan and it has not been applied in religious texts of Yarsan. Probably, this title has been adopted only 100 years ago. Ahl-e Haqq is a very general name and probably it has been borrowed from Sufi groups in Iran. But the main name that Yarsan use for their religion is "Din-e Yari" (Yari religion) and the word of "Yarsan" is applied for the community of Yari believers.

Although the role of Iranian ancient religions in the formation of Yarsan beliefs is clear and Yarsan is a religion with a unique worldview and individual rituals which mostly refer to a variety of ancient Iranian religious symbols, we cannot deny the role of some Shiite imams among the Yarsan (because of Don-Na-Don philosophy), and another view of some Yarsanin activists is the most thinkable reason which protect themselves from Islam thus bring into some Islamic imams for pretending that we are Muslim, so that they are generally subsumed under the Shi'i Ghulat sects, despite some important difference between them.

Some researchers believe that Yarsan has Islamic origins and some of them believe that Yarsan has Iranian origins. It is reasonable idea that Yarsan is a syncretistic religion, but for confirmation of all these claims we need comprehensive historical research.

Most of the studies about Yarsan just repeat general sentences about history of Yarsan and then describe their beliefs and rituals or other aspects of Yarsan. In my opinion, before any attempt for understanding Yarsan can be made, the following questions should be answered: Which social and historical circumstances led to formation of Yarsan beliefs? What kind of changes this religion had over the course of history? And are there any traces of Yarsan in historiography or historical documents? I think it is time to avoid the attraction of describing Yarsan rituals and beliefs and to attempt to answer the question of their exact origins. For more information you can read this article: <http://www.yarsanmedia.org/ku/?p=3084>.

The existence of many studies about Yarsan has led to good knowledge about the rituals and beliefs of this religion, but there is still a lack of information about the history and the origins of their rituals cause misunderstanding about Yarsan. Therefore, in this article it will be tried to survey the historical roots and traces of Yarsan and the interaction between this religion and socio-political pressure to assimilation by the surrounding official religion during its history.

Need to mention that these days some researchers and religious activists thought that yari religion (yarsan) is subset of Islam, In other hand the Yari religion are wrongly considered as a

branch of Shiite or called with many difference names like Ahle-hagh, alioalahi, sofi and so on, so let me add something here i don't want to say these activists were wrong or they made mistake but actually the lack of trustworthy source and refer to Islamic source is a reason for counting yarsan as Muslim. this article does not looking for quarrel with Islam but just want to show some differences between them impartially, peacefully and respectfully according to their holy text and religious ritual.

Islam have five pillars which every Muslim must follow it otherwise they are called as unbeliever and yari religious also has four pillars which is different with Islam pillars. Well at first it needs to describe the basic foundations and pillars of Islam and Yarsan that will show up some major important differences between them. For having brief article we will refer to sum up the main points of Islamic principle.

There are five basic acts in Islam, considered mandatory by believers and is the foundation of Muslim life. They are summarized in the famous hadith of Gabriel and they have famous saying: *lā 'ilāha 'illā-llāhu muḥammadun rasūlu-llāh* (لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ) "There is no god except God (and) Muhammad is the messenger of God."

1. **Tawhid** (oneness): Tawhid is the Islamic concept of monotheism. In Arabic, Tawhid means unification, to unify or to keep something unified as one. In Islam, Tawhid means to assert the unity of God, it is not just unity of God Almighty but also uniqueness, as defined in Quran Sura 112, "He is not born of anyone nor gave birth to any one, nor is any one like Him ". It's the belief that there is only one God who nobody able to see or touch.

The most important characteristic of Yarsan cult is a manifestation of God in physical manner, such that the human body at the beginning becomes the place for God manifestation, which distinguishes them from the Islam. One of their basic principle is to believe in Don-Na-Don (cloth to cloth= universe to universe which constitutes their focus cult) that means yarsan followers believe that, the God comes to earth like human which this opinion of yarsan completely different with Islam.

2. **Akhirah or Mäad** (afterlife): **Mäad** is an Islamic term referring to the afterlife. It is repeatedly referenced in chapters of the Quran concerning the Last Judgment. According to Islam, death is transferred from this world to everlasting world, with the withdrawal of the spirit from the body; the soul's life in the Barzakh begins until the day of resurrection. According to the deeds of the believer and disbeliever, their Barzakh differs. According to Yari religion human are made of four elements of fire, dust, wind and water. Yari religion believes that life is a circle, human does not die but they shift the body. This process takes place such the soul can review its journey in a certain period and getting prepare for new journey. If one had followed those basic principles, so he/she promotes to a new position in self-realization and becoming own God. In this way The Yarsan have a famous saying about death: **"mirdan mätersan vä ie siasätah täslim gianan jor ghotäe batah."** Which mean: "Men, Do not fear the punishment of death! The death of

man is like the dive which the duck makes." As the Yari texts mentioned and describe death like diving ducks in the water that death simply occurs.

There is no belief in heaven or hell, because the Yari believes that the human not to die, but that his body will change and his soul will enter into another body (Don-Na-Don philosophy). If he has performed good deeds in his life, his soul will enter into a good, respectable, healthy, body and be comfortable and free. In the case of an Evil person, his soul will be metempsychosis in the body of another human or creature which will go through a harder life condition. One does not need any guide for reaching the self-realization who can control his or her moral and ideal performances. So one is free to choose own destiny.

- 3. Prophecy (Shia Islam):** In Islam, prophecy (Arabic: nubuwwah) is the principle that God has appointed exemplary individuals, prophets and messengers to communicate his guidance to humanity. This is one of the five principles of the principles of Islam religion. But in Yari religion there is no interface between God and human and the god has been in touch with people directly. The followers of Soltan Sahak according to the events told by the Yari religious texts, found the essence and soul of "God" in Sultan Sahak himself. To achieve this they followed the entrance of the divine soul into humans since the earth began, and found Soltan Sahak as their leader and their God. This group of followers became the true leadership of Yari. The first seven followers were called Haftan (seven bodies) and seven counselors were called Hafttevaneh. This topic required more explain to be clear but just this enough for prove that the Yari religion unlike Islam didn't have any prophet or messenger of god because they have being with God and got all thing they need to learned the intrinsic value of good behavior.

The Yarsan have a famous saying: "**yäri chevar chivän baväri vä ja rasti vä paki, nisti vä reda**" that mean Yari religion has four pillars and every Yari follower should keep it.

Yari religion pillars:

- 1) Rasti=Truth (abstinence from falsehood and sin)
- 2) Paki=Purity (internally as well as externally)
- 3) Nisti=Inexistence (degenerating desires to reach to God rank)
- 4) Reda=Magnanimity (means self-sacrificing and providing services to help human being)

Those pillars as mentioned describe Yari religion and their belief as well as their way of thinking about existence; we found out the intrinsic moral value in Yari texts that completely different with Islam texts that just has pointed about afterlife and the god is alone who never born and nor die. The most important difference that Yari texts is written by collective

wisdom and during many years but Islamic texts is written by just prophet during his lifetime.

Sacred texts: The Quran, according Islamic view is the last revealed word of God, is the primary source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It deals with all the subjects which concern human beings: wisdom, doctrine, worship, transactions, law, etc., but its basic theme is the relationship between God and His creatures. At the same time, it provides guidelines and detailed teachings for a just society .It is widely regarded as the finest work in classical Arabic literature. The Yari religion has 40 sacred texts so The Kalâm-e Saranjâm ("The Discourse of Conclusion") is the central religious text of the Yarsan, written in the 14th century based on the teachings of Sultan Sahak. The Yarsan believe the Kalâm-e Saranjâm to be the book of divine guidance and direction for mankind and consider the text in its original Kurdish Gorani dialect to be the literal word of God .but because they have never been permitted to be published, they exist only in original handwritten form. All the books are mostly in Hurami Kurdish dialect (Avestaei), with some in Sorani, Gorani and Turkish. The books are all accomplished by religious writer, who then reproduce them by hand and give them to interested readers. So there is a lot of differences such as language, how to made, who made it, number of sacred texts ... we realize their holy book is different so their religion terms couldn't get into same belief.

Marriage: Marriage is practiced in both Islam and yari religion, for the purpose of reproduction. **A.** There are basically two common types of marriages, polygamy and monogamy. Yarsan people believe in monogamy that a man is permitted to marry only one wife, while Islam believes in polygamy that a man is permitted to marry several wives. **B.** temporary marriage, also known as Sigeheh or Sigheh, is a type of marriage permitted in Islam, where the duration of the marriage and the Mahr(is a mandatory payment, in the form of money) must be specified and agreed upon in advance. Temporary marriage isn't common among Yarsan people. **C.** A Muslim man is permitted to marry with non-Muslim lady but a Muslim lady cannot get married to a man that is not of the same religion with her (Quran 5:5) but Yarsan people don't consider religion as requirement part for marriages. **D.** in Islam, marriage is a legal contract (Literary Arabic matrimony contract) between two people and need to read some Arabic word which makes them as legal couple. But Yarsan people have another agreement between them and carrying out by Yari ceremony and with kurdish language in addition, wedding ceremony required fun and dace but in Islam dance and music prohibited and while Yarsan people dance together (men and women are mixed).

Worship: Prayer is one of the five pillars of Islam. It is incumbent upon all Muslims, including children aged nine and over, to complete their five daily prayers according to the Islamic method and act of worship be performed individually and daily(It starts at dawn and ends at sunrise). This is an extremely important tenet of Islam and has been enjoined with great emphasis both in the Holy Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad and according to one saying of Prophets,

the daily prayer (Namaz) is the borderline between a Muslim and a non-believer. The name of Islamic praying place is mosque. In Yari religion practices (every Thursday) take place in Jamkhaneh (specific place for performing Yari praying like mosque). But any place can act as a Jamkhaneh, provided that it has sufficient space for constructing circular seating (adaptation of sky circular) for participants. The circle center is considered to be God's place, from circle center God shines to all prayers similarly. Jamkhaneh ceremony has its own rituals. In Jamkhaneh, Sarkalam (who prays for others) along with Tambour (a kind of music instrument such as guitar) playing reads kalameh haq (religious book). At the time of performance of blessing, participants are not allowed to leave the assembly. Until the ceremony ends, the number of participants should not be less than seven persons. The participants should be mature, wise Sarsepordan (literally a person who entrusts his head means a process they should pass to allow to participate and enter to this religion something like Baptism in Christianity). Participants should observe the following rules: wearing cap to observe cleanliness, and wearing the fasting belt as a symbol of readiness to help other people and the connection of individual souls to each other's body. Finally there is obvious difference in how praying which means praying in Islam performed individually, but in Yari religion performed in group.

Fast and Festivals: fast in Islam known as Ramadan, is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and is observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting to commemorate the first revelation of the Quran to Muhammad according to Islamic belief and take one month based on the visual sightings of the crescent moon which every year changes and there is no specific month for fasting. After finishing Ramadan the Muslim celebrates last day as called Eid al-Fitr.

The followers of Yari are bound to fast for three days in Aban (October/November). This is observed because in this month Sultan Sahak and his followers were besieged. The followers give their spiritual and moral commitment to fasting, and after three days have a spiritual solidarity with the poor and indigent, and can understand their hunger. Thus on the day, which is called Khawendkar, a rooster and some of rice are blessed. The Yari are bound on this day not have any animosity towards none, and to kiss very sincerely the hands of all men and women old and young, for loyalty, peace and brotherhood. So for what Yari religion bound to fast? Sultan Sahak and his followers were obliged to take refuge in a cave in Perdiver. This region is a rugged, mountainous zone, where attacked by Chi-Check trips a group opposing tribal leaders. Sultan Sahak and his followers staved off the attacks by using their environment to their advantages. The groups of forty, including one woman, Razbar Khatun were besieged in the cave for three days without food, but they continued their resistance and were able to defeat the attack. After the failure of the tribes the group of Yarsan consolidated their positions and gradually became active. They became famous in Kurdistan, Iran, and other dissatisfied groups, whose ancestors had become Moslem by force, joined the movement of Sultan Sahak.

The Yari's religious songs called Kelam, for the establishment of spiritual growth, to bind together the followers and to keep their moral commitments alive. The different songs are selected from the religious books and are accompanied by music on the Tambur. They can be

sung in groups or solo. There is a special sang for any certain ceremonial events like death, or praying and so on... in Islam music and any kind of music instrument is taboo.

Yarsan celebrate two festivals which are, Newroz (Kurdish New Year) and Xawenkar. Newroz is traditional and ancient Yersinias' national feast which is highly regarded as sanctified and special. Although Muslim followers celebrate and mourning some Islamic ceremony but there is no mourning in Yari belief and as mentioned just have two festivals, I think this is clearer for claim that the Yari religion is completely separated from Islam.

Places of pilgrimage: A pilgrimage is a journey or search of moral or spiritual significance. Typically, it is a journey to a shrine or other location of importance to a person's beliefs and faith. Many religions attach spiritual importance to particular places: the place of birth or death of founders or saints. The pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) is one of the five pillars of Islam and a mandatory religious duty for Muslims that must be carried out at least once in their lifetime by all adult Muslims who are physically and financially capable of undertaking the journey. There are countless shrines in Islam but the most important one is mentioned.

Sultan Sahak shrines is located in the village of Shaykhan in the western Iran where about 6km south of Nosud on the road to Paveh is a turn-off to the shrine of Sultan Sahak, the Yarsan followers greatly venerate Sultan Sahak and visit his shrine occasionally and consider him to be one of their most prominent holy man and the last manifestation of God. In conclusion the main shrine of Islam is located in Saudi Arabia while the Yarsan one is located in Iran. Visiting the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) is obligatory and mandatory while it's no compulsory in Yarsan for visiting the Sultan Sahak. Everyone who wants to go to Mecca requires wearing specific clothes and shaved head for men and covering it for women, in while pilgrimage of Yarsan places isn't complex unlike Muslim do but Yarsan instead of those Islamic rituals, doing sacrifice includes bull, sheep and cock. So when Yarsan don't follow the important rituals of Hajj pilgrimage thus there is no in common belief.

Apostasy: Apostasy in Islam includes the act of converting to another religion by a person who was born in a Muslim family or who had previously accepted Islam. For this part we should refers to Quran and sleep on it to explain obviously. The Quran discusses apostasy in many of its verses. For example: *But those who reject Faith after they accepted it, and then go on adding to their defiance of Faith, never will their repentance be accepted; for they are those who have (of set purpose) gone astray(Quran 3:90). Make no excuses: you have rejected Faith after ye had accepted it. If we pardon some of you, we will punish others amongst you, for that they are in sin (Quran 9:66).*

Yarsan community with liberal and democratic opinion believes that everyone is free to choose Yari religion or reject it and according to Yari texts always is pointed to freedom of belief and respect to the other religion. So apostasy in Yari religion doesn't mean exactly.

Khums and Zakat: In Islamic tradition, khums refers to the historically required religious obligation of any Muslim army to pay one-fifth of their annual salary to the government. Zakat is a form of alms-giving treated in Islam as a religious obligation or tax, and as one of the Five Pillars of Islam, zakat is a religious obligation for all Muslims who meet the necessary criteria of wealth.

Unlike Islam, Yari religion contains no religious precepts and just insists to keep four important Yari pillars and nothing more but Islam has more than thousand Islamic precepts.

Appearance: Shaving the beard results in a series of Islamic violations, as is obvious from Allah's Book and his Messenger, so Shaving the beard with a razor is taboo according to some hadith (a collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad) of the prophet: *“Trim your moustaches and let your beards grow.”*, *“Whoever does not remove any of his moustache is not one of us.”*. *“It is forbidden to shave the beard, and no one does this except men who are effeminate”* And we can find a number of ahaadeeth as evidence over the internet so in Islam has been ordered to keep beard and shave moustache and it shouldn't shave with razor.

The Yari followers charged to keep their moustaches, so that other followers can recognize them. The evident symbol of this people is to keep unshaven moustache, male individuals are not permitted throughout their life to shave or trimming their moustache. They consider this sign to keep them apart from outsiders. Another reason was mentioned is that moustache brings veil and modesty for men. It seems they have different view about face appearance. Another mentionable issue is veil which is recommended in Islam. The compulsory veil is one of the Islamic principles and they are always forced to cover their heads and bodies although the veil for Yarsan people is meaningless but given the political attitudes towards minorities and especially towards Yarsan for this purpose they were forced to keep Islamic veil beside the other Muslim people.

Eventually, although the differences between Islam and Yari religion are more than mentioned but our purpose only show the important and thinkable differences which is high sensible .Needless to say again that the Yari religion is completely separated from Islam, and the followers are not bound to do any of Islamic precepts as fasting during Ramadan, prayer, belief in heaven or hell and its prohibitions. Every individual of Yari followers are free to drink, eat or do what they may like just not breaching those four mentioned principles. Yari religion has a set of special boundaries relating to commune order, saints such as dishonor, theft lying, killing or destroying nature and inhumanity are unforgivable in the community.

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