

“Is this truly a return? Or a migration? David Chettan replies: “Is there a difference between the two? They say it is a return, don’t they? To Jehova’s holy land. Who knows from where we came? Return means going back to the place you came from, is it not? How can you say for sure it is the place you say it is? (272)

At the individual level, the loyalty of the Jewish community is to the host land which welcomed them and safeguarded them these years. This individually and emotionally experienced homeland gets into conflict with the collectively transmitted idea of the promised land. As a result, the people are caught and torn between the imagined and narrated home land and the real experienced home land. On the back cover of Sethu’s novel, *Aliyah*, K Sachidanandan writes:

“An alluringly graphic narration of a little-discussed chapter of Kerala’s—and the world’s—history: the migration of the black Jews to the promised land of Israel. It is a moving tale of the reluctant migrants torn between two loyalties: to their native soil and to their Jewish identity. Fiction here turns into a site for raising some of the vital ontological questions of the post-globalized world: about identity, being, becoming and belonging. A gripping novel that moves from the past to the future and from strange dreams to stranger reality”.

*Aliyah: The Last Jew in the Village* by Sethu documents the psychological, social and cultural dilemma of the Jewish diaspora in Kerala. It is also the documentation of the dichotomic experience of the diaspora at individual and collective levels. While majority of the Jewish community in Kerala shares a sentimental affection with the land of Kerala, some are having the yearning to return to their homelands. *Aliyah* portrays the personal dilemma of the characters torn between loyalty and attachment towards the host land which is more of a native land and the prospects and hopes of return to the ‘homeland’, which is more of an alien land. The protagonist, Salamon ultimately chooses to remain in his host land which he has already accepted as his real homeland. “Thus finally the Ephraim family too was preparing to leave the land....No one knew the name of the first one to come. But perhaps someday someone might engrave on the wall of the synagogue the name of the last one. Evron’s son Solomon called Salamon. He was born here and he was buried here. To merge,

melt into the soil of one's birth – could there be a greater blessing than that?" (394). Thus the novel portrays in a very touching manner, the dilemma experienced by the Jewish diaspora in Kerala after the formation of the nation of Israel. It also shows how the concept of home land has become complex and polyphonic against the monolithic and homogenized imagining and forging of the same.

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## **The Element of Socialism in the Novel “*Al Tha’ir Al Ahmer*” (The Red Rebel) by Ali Ahmed Bakathir**

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### **Summary**

“*Al Tha’ir Al Ahmer*” (The Red Rebel) is a historical novel by Egyptian author and playwright Ali Ahmed Bakathir, in which he narrates the events of an era of Islamic history between 200-300 AH. The novel tells the story of the emergence of the *Batini* sect of Qarmatians and its founder Hamdan al-Qarmati, and their revolt against the Abbasid dynasty, which was going through a state of stagnation at that time and the feudal lords were in control of many of the reins of affairs. The novelist tries in this work to decode many of the ambiguities surrounding the events of those era as the history of Qarmatians is full of dubiety as well as most of the historians who documented that period of time in the history were scholars having allegiance to the Abbasid Caliphate. This paper deals with the phenomenon of socialism and its various manifestations in the novel, “*Al Tha’ir Al Ahmer*” (The Red Rebel) and its impact on Arab society in that period of time.

### **Ali Ahmed Bakathir**

He is Ali bin Ahmed bin Muhammad Bakathir al-Kindi (1910 - 1969), an Indonesian-born Egyptian poet, playwright, and novelist, author of many epic poetic and prose plays, the most famous of which is “*Mahlamat Umer Bin Al Khattab*” (the epic of Omar Ibn al-Khattab) and many historical novels, the most famous of which are *Wa Islamah* (Oh My Islam!), and “*Al Tha’ir Al Ahmer*” (The Red

Rebel). He was a great interpreter and translator who translated the famous work *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare. He has won many awards and accolades including the first Egyptian Appreciation Award, shared with Naguib Mahfouz.

### **Summary of the Novel “*Al Tha’ir Al Ahmer*” (The Red Rebel)**

Hamdan Qarmat, a worker in the fief of the feudal lord called Ibn al-Hutaim, is the sole breadwinner of his family consisting of a mother, two sisters, a wife and sons. His cousin Abdan proposes his sister Alia and their engagement is done. At that time, a chaotic revolt prevails in the village as the *Ayyars* (a class of warriors in Iraq and Iran from the 9th to the 12th centuries; the word literally means vagabond) unleashed attacks on the residences and shops of the rich people, plundered them and distributed that wealth to the weaker and poorer sections of the society. While the preparations for the wedding were in full swing, the bride Alia, goes out of the house with her sister, Rajia, gathering firewood, where a group of men kidnaps her, and her brother Hamdan began searching for his sister Alia, and the fiancé Abdan becomes seriously ill as a result of this incident.

After many days, Hamdan gets to know a great personality from *Al-Ayyars* and this *Ayyar* commander tells him about the abductor of his sister Alia and informs him that it is his master Ibn Al-Hutaim. So Hamdan attacks the Ibn Al-Hutaim Palace with the help of *Ayyars* after he joined them and saved his sister from there, but she left the house and disappeared from the view of the people for good. Hamdan continued to practice his duties in the *Ayyars* group until he became a great leader of that movement and was put on the list of the most wanted rebels by the government. One night, the government tried to arrest him, but his cousin Abdan was expecting such a movement and he attacked the soldiers and killed them. Then he fled to the city of Wasit, where he spent his life seeking knowledge. There he comes to know a man named Al-Kirmani, who was the leader of a secret organization working for an Imam who is believed to appear in a specific period of time to spread justice and equality. Hamdan was attracted to this movement and joined its ranks only to find out that they were lacking in morality, had very liberal views regarding the sexuality and they observed obscene type of a freethinking. This did

not deter him from continuing there as he had fallen in love with the sister of Al Kirmani called Shahar and had sexual relationship with her without marriage.

A man called Al-Ahwazi comes to the village of Hamdan and he chooses to stay in Hamdan's house. Hamdan becomes one of the leaders of this movement. Then Abdan returns to the village. Though Al-Ahwazi showed off asceticism and humility in the beginning, then his behaviour changes until he had sexual relations with Hamdan's sister Rajia. When Hamdan returns to his village with his lover Shahar, Rajia reveals the secret that a foetus is growing in her womb, and Abdan and Shahar made a statement that this matter was permissible according to the rules of the movement and persuaded Hamdan and Rajiya to understand this doctrine until they convinced them of the idea. Hamdan began to commit adultery with Shahar very often. It was then the Mongols attacked the Arab world and inflicted huge losses on the Arabs and the Abbasid dynasty lost the control and a condition of confusion prevailed in the region.

Hamdan announced the establishment of a state of comprehensive justice under his leadership. He also declared the independence of Kufa and its surrounding areas under his rule, and issued a statement among the people that an Imam would emerge from the Sulaymiyah region in southern Iraq. He appointed Abdan as the jurist for their doctrine, and the movement spread throughout the kingdom and this spread was helped by the migration of the people from various parts of Arabian Peninsula and Gulf region at the time of Abbasid – Mongol wars. This kingdom was characterised by a special religious system devoid of prayer, fasting and other acts of worship; it permitted adultery, incest and sexual promiscuity. This sexual immorality has also affected minors and stemmed from the palace itself, as Hamdan fornicates his daughter and sister and the son of Hamdan fornicates with his aunt Rajia. The people were fed up with this absurd doctrine, they began to flee from the kingdom, and the people became more disaffected after it was announced that there was no imam in Sulaymiyah.

During this period, his sister, Alia, returned along with her daughter, who was conceived by Ibn al-Hutaim from an illegal

relationship. This sister of Hamdan was a pious woman and she tried to convince Hamdan of the fallacy of this movement and won in making him understand it and restore his good sense. He wanted to end this movement and kingdom and opened the way for the people to re-join in the allegiance of Abbasid dynasty and refused to follow the religion imposed by the *Qaddahs* in Sulaimiyah. *Qaddahs* got angry and captured Abdan. Hamdan sent his son and sister Aliah outside the country while his daughter, sister Rajia and Shahar fled to Sulaimiyah and continued to follow the religion of *Qaddahs*. One day Hamdan declared that all people should abandon this movement and declared the end of his kingdom and disappeared into the oblivion.

This novel has already become a hot subject of research and studies, and it raised many opinions about concepts and ideologies discussed in the novel, the most important of which is socialism. A heated discussion took place between Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Maqaleh and Dr. Al-Hazmi about the novel *Al Tha'ir Al Ahmer* (The Red Rebel) and its various ideologies and thoughts. In fact, the name of this novel was "*Hamdan Qarmat, Qissat Al Sira' bain al Ra'smaliyya Wa al Shuyuiyyah Fi al Kufa*" (Hamdan Qarmat, the story of the struggle between capitalism and communism in Kufa) as referred to by Abdul Aziz Al-Maqaleh<sup>1</sup>. This title makes the reader wonder what kind of capitalism? and what communism in Kufa in the third century AH?

The writer was able to read the present from the past events, the wars of the Arabs with the Jews, and the Arab setbacks, the current ones from the pages of ancient history "because Bakathir was very early tendency to read the present from the past, so he did not neglect the Jews and the role of Israel in the novel; In this novel there is a strange and interesting conversation taking place among Hamdan, Qarmat, and the messenger of the rich Jews in Basra".<sup>2</sup>

Dr. Abdul Aziz Al Maqaleh analyzed the character of the hero Hamdan Qarmat in this novel into six elements according to the hero's tendencies in that novel, which can be specified as following. Hamdan the farmer, Hamdan the *Ayyar*, Hamdan, the seeker of the theory, Hamdan the rebel, Hamdan the Socialist, Hamdan the *Ayyar* (Going back to the beginning)

Perhaps this division is correct division as far as the events of the novel and the tendencies of its hero, Hamdan Al-Qarmat are concerned. These events all indicate the political, social and economic situations in the Arab Islamic world in the second phase of the Abbasid Caliphate, when political weakness began to creep into the entity of the dynasty and the leaders and soldiers became the appointees and installers of the Caliph on the throne, then they removed the caliph from the throne and coronated another according to their needs, and the caliphs were mere toys or rubberstamps in their hands with no power to utter a word of dissident.

### **Socialism in the novel**

The socialism that appears in this novel is an old type of this trend and that type of a socialism is never known to have existed in the history. Therefore, this name raises many eyebrows as well as questions about what socialism this is and how it was applied in society in those days. As already mentioned, the writer Ali Ahmed Bakathir was able to read the present from the past events, perhaps this different view has helped him to envisage the emergence and expansion of a socialist theory and its application in Arab society in the third century AH. The writer has explained this old style of socialism in this novel with this sentence: “when Hamdan leaped his greatest leap on the *Al-Qasimiyat* area from the land of *Al-Bataeh*, and he could establish a house at *Mahimabad* after immigration, he divided the lands he had seized among the peasants to cultivate and invest them for themselves, but he required them to follow the system of (*Ulfath*) that he had called them to before, which means that each one of them shall give away anything that remains surplus after meeting his own needs in terms of fruits and grains, so that they are like one family, none of them have any preference over the other in the properties he owns. He had taught them that they do not need to keep the wealth with them, because the whole land and earth is going to be close to them and at their disposal only.

Then he announced in the second year that he had made the land the property of the state, meaning for everyone, then he distributed it to villages and regions, and allotted to each village and region a group of peasants who would not cross it to another region except by

order from him, and they shall work there under the supervision of managers who monitor their work. Each region had a trustee appointed by Hamdan himself to collect the crop and keep it in its common store. The farmer is not allowed to take anything from the crop, but the trustee gives him what he deems sufficient for himself and his family and dependents who work on the land with him.

The same rule was applied on the blacksmiths, carpenters, builders, weavers and other craftsmen and workers; each region was given sufficient numbers of all craftsmen and workers, and the product of their work was collected by the state trustees and kept in the general store.”<sup>3</sup>

Thus, Hamadan Qarmat nationalized the land and business in a system similar to socialism or communism against the financial authority that existed in those countries in the form of capitalism that exists in the present days as opposed to communism or socialism. As for the general public’s attitude towards this new system, it was as expressed by Bakhir: “The peasants, craftsmen and other workers showed their satisfaction with this system, so they were sincere and diligent in their work at the beginning, as there were many peasants who were reeling in misery under the oppression and greed of the landowners and many workers and craftsmen who were suffering greatly due to the oppression of their employers. Therefore, many of them embraced the doctrine of the infallible Imam at the hands of Sheikh Al-Ahwazi and Hamdan after him, and were enthusiastic about the principles of comprehensive justice, and justified their stands and pacified their souls that the era of injustice and inequality is going to end and the principles of comprehensive justice is going to prevail; they dreamt of the end of the era of oppression and disparity among people in terms of sustenance and wealth, and the advent of a new era in which all people are equal, no disparities of rich or poor, strong or weak, as no one is permitted, regardless of his ability, to own anything of land or money.”<sup>4</sup>

This is the socialism that was envisaged by Hamdan al-Qarmat in his place of migration “*Mahimabadh*” after his revolution against the rule of the king, power of money, corrupt feudalism and the oppressive class that dominated the country in those ancient times.



As for these principles that Ali Ahmed Bakathir explained about those days, and the religious and political movement known as the Qarmatians, they were not very successful, as there were also loopholes and breaches in them through which corruption, sedition, and lack of enthusiasm for this social and economic system crept to the minds of the followers of these doctrines, which finally led Hamdan Qarmat himself to isolate himself from this system to other principles later.

### End Notes:

- 1 Abdul Aziz Al-Maqaleh, "*Ali Ahmed Bakathir; Ra'id al Thahdith fi al Shi'r al Arabi wa al Mu'aasir*" (Ali Ahmed Bakathir: Pioneer of Modernization in Arabic and Contemporary Poetry), Dar Al-Kalima Sana'a, 1st Edition, p.: 91.
- 2 Ibid, P. 92
- 3 Ali Ahmed Bakathir, "*Al Tha'ir Al Ahmer*" (The Red Rebel), p. 273 - 274
- 4 Ibid, P. 274

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