

## **Project Overview: Sharia and the Kərdār System in Yārsān Religion**

Sharia, traditionally understood as a religious legal discourse, is rooted in sacred texts such as the Quran and Prophetic tradition. It has historically been central to Islamic societies, where clerics derive legal imperatives using the hermeneutical framework of Fiqh. The unparalleled status of Sharia in both premodern and modern Islamic contexts, particularly its role as the only legitimate legal framework for fundamentalist movements, underscores its importance. These movements aspire to establish societies governed entirely by Sharia principles, reflecting its enduring influence.

The prominence of Sharia has led to extensive scholarly investigations, utilizing historical, hermeneutical, critical, post-colonial, and feminist approaches. However, these studies predominantly focus on orthodox Islamic traditions, neglecting the role of Sharia within heterodox Islamic sects. This gap is significant given that the first critiques of orthodox Sharia, along with alternative conceptions of divine law, emerged from gnostic heterodox sects, including Isma'ilism, Nusayrism, Khattabiyya, and Khuramayya. These sects, often labeled as Shia-Ghulat (exaggerators), were characterized by their radical rejection of Sharia and the introduction of new divine legal discourses.

Among these heterodox sects, the Yārsān religion, an *extremist* Shia sect, stands out for its radical nullification of traditional Sharia and the development of its own legal framework, known as the Kərdār system. While Yārsān has been the subject of scholarly attention since the 19th century, research has predominantly focused on its religious and cultural aspects, leaving the nature and function of its divine legal system largely unexplored. My proposed project seeks to address this gap by thoroughly examining the Kərdār system, its theological foundations, and its practical implications within the Yārsān community.

### **The Kərdār System: A Gnostic Sharia**

The Kərdār system, which can be understood as a gnostic Sharia, arose in response to specific theological and political motivations within Yārsān. Central to Yārsān's rejection of orthodox Sharia is its unique conception of the sacred, its views on divine reward and punishment, and its understanding of religious community. In Yārsān, traditional Sharia is deemed obsolete, tied to an absent, transcendent God whose prophecy and manifestation have ended. In contrast, Yārsān's divine legal system, Kərdār, is considered vibrant and relevant, grounded in a conception of God who continuously manifests throughout history, never fully concealing himself. This belief in the continuous manifestation of the divine, known as mazharyyat (manifestation) or boruz (emergence), leads Yārsān to reject the finality of prophethood and, consequently, the Sharia associated with it. Instead, they establish a new legal discourse based on an infinite and ever-present manifestation of the sacred.

The Kərdār system is not a fixed set of divine laws but a dynamic regulatory framework that governs divine legislation in various contexts. It functions as a logonomic system, regulating the ethical and social discourses within the community. The Kərdār system comprises three main

components: ethical principles, symbolic rites, and sacred scriptures. These elements interact to produce emergent divine and legal obligations tailored to specific contexts.

## **Ethical Principles and Symbolic Rites in Kerdār**

The ethical dimension of Kerdār is built upon four key principles: *rāsi* (truthfulness), *nisi* (nothingness or modesty), *pāki* (purification or cleansing of the soul), and *redā*. The first three principles are straightforward, emphasizing truthfulness, modesty, and spiritual purification. However, the fourth principle, *redā*, is more complex and may trace its origins to the ancient concept of *rata*, the eternal sacred and religious *order* underlying the universe. This principle suggests that believers should align their lives with the cosmological-spiritual order revealed in Yārsān teachings.

The spiritual order emphasized by *redā* is expressed and maintained through symbolic rites, which are central to the Kerdār system. These rites serve multiple functions within the Yārsān community. For example, ceremonies like Jashn-i Xāwankār, Qoltās, and Nazr-e 2 shāhi help forge a collective memory and identity, while the initiation ceremony of Sarsepāri shapes the social fabric, determines power and status, and establishes the legal positions that form the basis of community governance. These symbolic acts, in conjunction with the ethical principles and sacred scriptures, form the foundation of Yārsān's divine legal system.

## **Research Plan and Objectives**

My research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Kerdār system, exploring how its ethical principles, symbolic rites, and sacred texts interact to produce social and legal codes within the Yārsān community. The monograph I intend to complete as part of this fellowship will be structured as follows:

1. **Introduction to Yārsān Religion:** This section will provide a detailed overview of the history, beliefs, and principles of the Yārsān religion, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of its legal system.
2. **Analysis of the Kerdār System:** Here, I will delve into the structure and function of the Kerdār system, examining how its ethical principles and symbolic rites contribute to the formation of divine and legal obligations.
3. **Sacred Texts and Legal Codes:** This section will analyze the religious texts of Yārsān, focusing on their role in the creation and enforcement of legal codes within the community. I will explore the dynamic relationship between these texts and the Kerdār system's ethical and symbolic components.
4. **Comparative Analysis:** Finally, I will compare the concept of Sharia in Yārsān with its counterparts in Sunni and Shia Islam. This comparative analysis will highlight the unique features of the Kerdār system and its implications for our broader understanding of Islamic legal traditions.

## **Conclusion**

This research will fill a critical gap in the study of Islamic legal systems by exploring the overlooked but significant contributions of heterodox sects like Yārsān. The completion and publication of this monograph will not only enhance our understanding of the Yārsān religion but also offer new insights into the diversity of Islamic legal thought. I am confident that this fellowship will provide me with the resources and intellectual environment necessary to complete this important work.