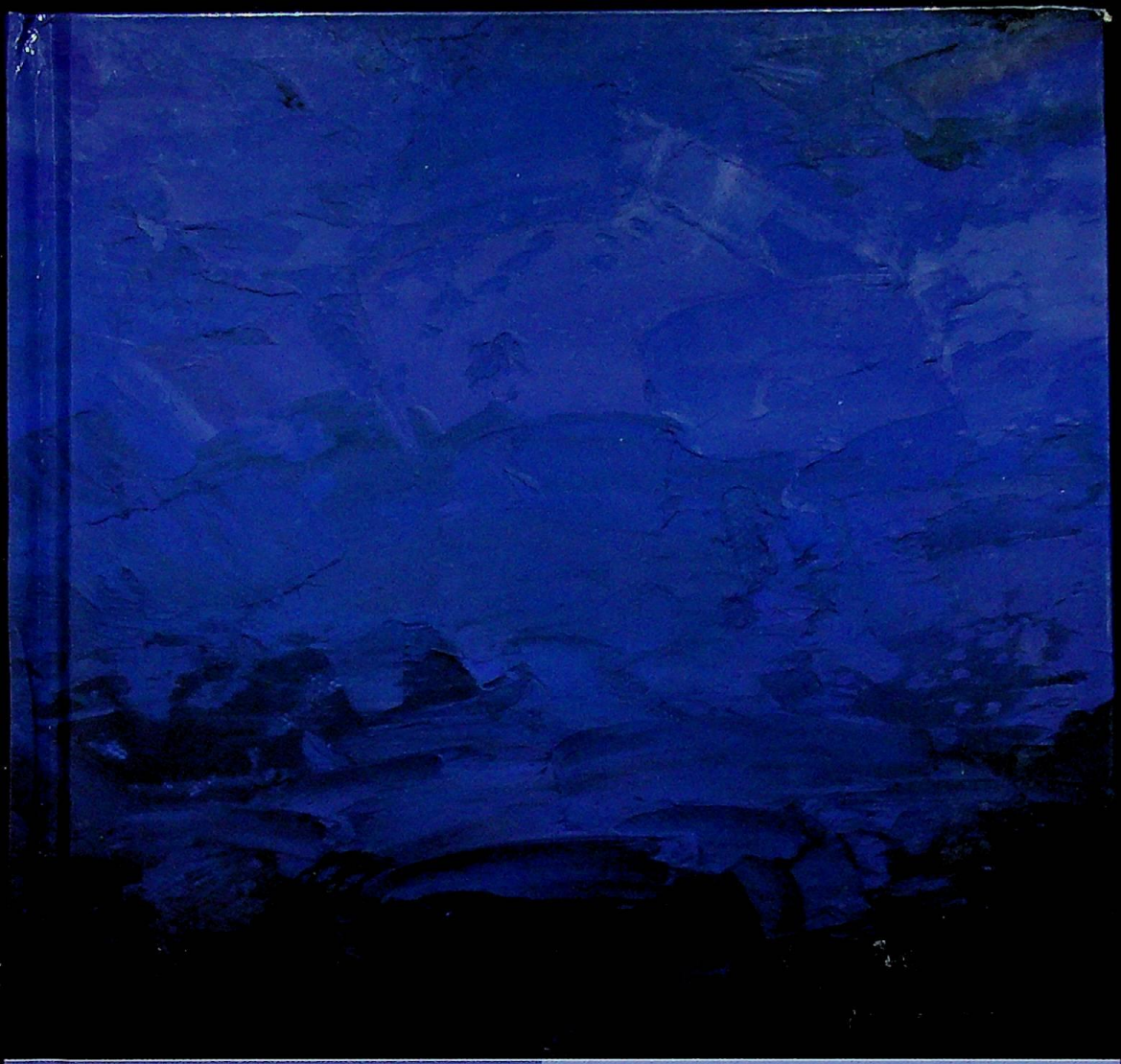


NISHAT ZAIDI

Karbala

A HISTORICAL PLAY BY PREMCHAND

OXFORD

In seventh-century Arabia, Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Imam Hussain, sacrificed his life and his family members and companions in the desert of Karbala, Iraq, to resist the debauched ruler Yazid. In twentieth-century India, when the communal conflict was at its peak, Premchand wrote a play about this pivotal event of Islamic history and transformed it into a nationalist narrative.

This first-ever English translation of Premchand's outstanding play *Karbala* (1924) is an illuminating blend of historical facts and imagination. It reveals Premchand's profound understanding of the communal conflict in early twentieth-century India and his unique way of imagining the nation, in tune with Gandhian principles of communal harmony and co-existence of religions.

"A marvel of Urdu-Hindi literary spheres, Premchand's *Karbala* serves both as a brilliant historical imaginaire and a captivating devotional treatise on martyrdom and Indian nationalism. (It) is complemented further by a remarkable flair for highlighting and elevating cross-linguistic conversations within and around the text."

Syed Akbar Hyder, Associate Professor of Asian Studies and Islamic Studies, University of Texas at Austin.

"Nishat Zaidi's expert translation brings Premchand's unique Indian version of the tragic killing of Hussain in the Karbala battle to the English-reading public."

Hans Harder, Professor of Modern South Asian Languages and Literatures, Heidelberg University.

NISHAT ZAIDI is Professor and Former Head of the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia. A scholar, critic, and translator, she is the recipient of several prestigious grants. She has published 13 books and several research papers and reviews.

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A Historical Play by Premchand
(July 1923–January 1924;
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Translated, Edited, and Introduced by
NISHAT ZAIDI

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To the memory of my father, Syed Raunaq Raza Zaidi (1939–2019)

To the memory of my father, Syed Ramay Raza Zaidi (1939–2019)

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Preface

Karbala is not among the best known of Premchand's writings. Nonetheless, it singularly embodies the epistemological and ethical views of Premchand in all their ambivalences and complexities. It contains all the major markers of Premchand's oeuvre. Written in the prime of Premchand's literary career, in a genre in which the writer had not been able to make much of a mark, *Karbala* is a cross-cultural text. At the height of communal tensions in colonial India, Premchand had the temerity to take up a significant event in Islamic history and transform it into a nationalist narrative. A tale of man's inhumanity to man, Karbala is a tragedy for all. The play *Karbala* evinces the playwright's consummate faith in his vision of a nation which refuses to buckle before any unjust power and rises up against the forces of tyranny, orthodoxies, and oppressive regimes of all hues.

As a personal prelude, I must foreground that the desire to translate the play was a compelling one. Yet, no sooner than I had begun translating the play into English, albeit slowly and with trepidation, I realised that the task entailed the challenge of treading the tightrope of three cultures and literary traditions. It involved recasting into English, the ethos of Urdu ghazals and marsiyas, on the one hand, and the patriotic songs written in chaste, Sanskritized Hindi, on the other. Besides, having grown up in a practising Shia family, where mourning the martyrdom of Imam Hussain is an integral part of life, and Karbala is an articulation of faith, each reading and re-reading stirred deep feelings anchored in my own emotional connection with the tragedy that befell Imam Husain and his kin. Further, as we Shias participate in Majalis [gatherings] right from our childhood to mourn for Imam Husain, each word, each scene of the tragedy of Karbala is etched in our consciousness as an intertwined act of memorializing and mourning. I was, therefore, faced with the challenge of having to reconcile with the liberties Premchand has taken with the story, and the interpolations that he has placed into the frame story of Karbala, to recast it as a nationalist text. But the same challenge,

disconcerting as it was, also served as an impetus to the task of translation, as it ushered newness despite familiarity, and rendered real the images cast in history and memory.

In the process of translation, as its etymology declares, a culture is "borne across" or "transported" to audiences of a different culture. In this sense, a text originating in a culture/location different from the culture/location of the language in which it is written also falls under the rubric of translation.[1] Premchand's play *Karbala* reveals how cultural translation can act as an efficacious tool in nation-building. In Premchand's hands, it becomes a *representational* strategy. His aim is not to assimilate an "other" but rather to come to terms with alterity; not to erode boundaries and barriers, but to respect them. He aspired to pave the way for a harmonious dialogue and co-existence of Hindus and Muslims as he deemed it a necessary precondition for the freedom struggle and the future survival of his country. A response to the challenges thrown up by the prevailing sociopolitical milieu of his times, Premchand's *Karbala* articulates the Gandhian dream of an inclusive and syncretic nation.[2]

Like many other Premchand's writings, the Urdu version of the play *Karbala,* published many years after the Hindi version, is at variance with the Hindi version—their differences go beyond the vocabulary. Instead of obsessing about the original or nitpicking about the translation, the attempt here is to produce one translation out of both the texts. In the Appendices, however, a comparative analysis of the two texts is given for the benefit of the reader.

In Premchand's play, the Muslim characters use a vocabulary closer to Hindustani, with a hint of Persianized diction, while the Hindu characters speak chaste, Sanskritized Hindi (a distinction more pronounced in

[1] I have used these views expressed by Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Carol Maier in their book *Between Languages and Cultures: Translation and Cross-Cultural Texts*, Ed. Anuradha Dingwaney and Carol Maier. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995, 359p. However, while they have used the notion in relation to postcolonial literature where two languages and cultures share a power relationship. I have generalized the notion to include all such interrelations.

[2] A year before his death on 1 December 1935, Premchand wrote in a letter to Banarsi Das Chaturvedi, "I have not stopped dreaming," in *Premchand, Chitthi Patri*, Ed. Amrit Rai. Illahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1962, Vol. II, p. 93 Sudhir Chandra writes about this that "Premchand's was the dreaming of a man who had seen the pervasive ugliness of reality; but without losing faith in the liberating effect of hope." "A Historiographic View," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 16, No. 15 (11 April 1981), pp. 669–675.

the Hindi text of the play than in Urdu). This recognizable shift in diction, by no means without implications, is difficult to convey in English translation. An attempt has been made here to retain the poetic quality in the translation of long excerpts of marsiya by Mir Anis (1803–1874) and songs written in chaste Hindi by Shridhar Pathak (1859–1928). The translation of the play is followed by Appendices that include the translation of two pieces written by Premchand in defence of the play; a note comparing the Hindi and Urdu versions and the translation choices made here; and the Urdu/Hindi originals of the poems and marsiya used by Premchand. In addition, a glossary of names, places, and the Hindi–Urdu words used in the play has been added for the benefit of the reader.

Premchand happens to be one of the most translated Hindi writers. And yet, only half of his novels are available in English translation, whereas not a single one of his plays has been translated into English. The present translation is a humble effort to fill this gap in Premchand scholarship. The flaws are all mine.

Acknowledgements

This book is much more than just a translation. It is a labour of love; it is my humble attempt to express gratitude to all those who made Karbala, a part of my being, a guiding light in the entanglements of daily living. I have dedicated this book to my father, a true nationalist, a lifelong Gandhian and a *Zakir-i-Hussain*. My debt to my mother, Dr Abedi Shahnaz Ibnehasan, is endless. When I was a child, she meticulously copied excerpts from the Marsiyas of Anis, Dabir, Josh, and others in my little diary, which I enthusiastically recited in the local ladies' Majalis and which, in the process, became a part of my consciousness.

I owe hugely to Nafay, Alizia, and Mojiz for joyously participating in my work. Alia Zaidi, Taj, Alinaz, Fatima, and Zainab, I can't thank you enough for filling my world with love and hope.

I am grateful to Syed Akbar Hyder for writing a brilliant book on Karbala that opened up a new possibility of academic discourse for me. I also owe my gratitude to Agha Shahid Ali for his poignant poems on Karbala that break one's heart every time one reads them.

I am grateful to Malati Mathur, A. Sean Pue, Alok Bhalla, and Asra Mamnoon for reading the manuscript and giving their feedback. Kanishka Gupta has been invaluable in finding a publisher. I am thankful to him and to the team at OUP, especially Darshana Sarkar, for their patience and rigour.

Lastly, I am grateful to all my students and colleagues at Jamia Millia Islamia for their graciousness and goodwill.

Acknowledgements

"Foreword" to the Hindi Play

by Premchand

In the history of every community, there are events that have sparked the literary imagination, and the literary community finds myriad ways to rediscover them. They are expressed in words, verses, poems, essays, folklore, and speeches. Yet, there remains scope for new writers to explore them afresh. In the history of the Hindus, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* are such stories. Among the Muslims, Karbala is placed on the same pedestal. Urdu–Persian literature is replete with writings about this crusade to the extent that, like many poets of Hindi literature who spent their lives singing paeans to Ram and Krishna, many Urdu-Persian poets committed their lives to composing only *marsiya*. But, as far as I can remember, there has been no play written on this subject in any language. I have dared to write a play on the subject in Hindi.

It is a matter of utter shame and regret that, despite living together with the Muslims for centuries, we are largely ignorant about their history. One of the reasons for the Hindu–Muslim discord is that we Hindus don't know about great Muslims and men of good character among them. Whenever Muslim kings are mentioned, it invariably brings Aurangzeb into the picture; but good and bad people have existed in every society and always will. There have been many large-hearted, great souls and judicious kings among the Muslims, too. There is no doubt studying about the great men of a community paves the way for cordial relations with that community.

Drama is performed as well as read. But in my opinion, you cannot draw a line between the two. Performed by good artists, every play can be entertaining and capable of conveying a message. The most important aspect of any play is its intensity; the rest is immaterial. It is inappropriate to call a play good or bad, based on the immediate interest of the audience. People throng to watch *Nautanki* and *Dhanush-Yagya*, but this can't be called an ideal attraction. I have not written this play to be staged. But if someone wishes to stage it, it can be achieved with a few edits.

This is a historical and religious play. There is little space for imagination in historical plays. The more popular a story, the lesser is the scope for the imagination. This event [Karbala] is so popular that each of its aspects and every word spoken by its characters have been written thousands of times. You cannot deviate from the narrative even an inch. I have not deviated from the historical facts anywhere. Wherever there was a need for imagination to fulfil the demands of a *rasa*, I have used unfamiliar and immaterial characters to do so. The reader would be surprised to see the entry of Hindu characters. It is not a product of my imagination, but a historical fact. How and when the Aryans reached there [Arabia] is disputable. Some are of the view that after the [events of the] *Mahabharata*, the descendants of Ashwatthama went and settled there, while others believe that the Aryans in Arabia were the progeny of the Hindus who were captured and taken there by Alexander. Whatever the case, there is historical evidence to suggest that some Hindus participated in the crusade of Karbala alongside Imam Hussain and attained martyrdom.

There are few depictions of women characters in this play. Mr D. L. Rai has used his imagination to compensate for the lack of women characters in his purely historical plays. Karbala is not just historical but religious as well. Hence, it was not possible to create any woman character, as there was an apprehension that it might not go down well with our Muslim brethren.

This play is a tragedy. For a tragedy, the hero must be a brave soul who, upholding faith in the principles of justice, meets a painful end. A hero's heart-rending story, however, does not alone suffice to make a play a tragedy. We do not mourn the catastrophe that befalls him, but rather we feel elated over his moral victory. The apparent defeat of the hero is, in fact, his triumph. In tragic plays, the feelings of sorrow and delight get strangely mixed up. We shed tears watching the hero die, but those tears are not the tears of grief but elation. A tragic play is a story of self-sacrifice, not only a source of grief but also of pride. That being the case, the hero needs to be a brave soul so that we can feel pride and dignity in his unflinching love for principles and his supreme courage.

Music is necessary for a play, but not so much that it seems out of place. We sing and cry, both in times of grave difficulty and immense joy. I have arranged for singing on such occasions. It would have been awkward to see Muslim characters sing *dhrupad* and *vihag*, so I have used the ghazals

of Urdu poets. In a few places, I have quoted from the marsiyas of Mir Anees. I am indebted to these supreme masters for the same. There is an extract from the great poet Sridhar Pathak, so I thank him, as well.

I would like to say something about the language of this play. It is not the language of Hindi literature. It would not have been suitable for Muslim characters to use the chaste Hindi language. Therefore, I have used the language generally used among the civilized people and is spoken and understood equally by the Hindus and Muslims.

(Translated from the Hindi)

Introduction

Nishat Zaidi

Dhanpat Rai Srivastava alias "Nawab Rai," / "Premchand" enjoyed the extraordinary privilege of being located at the interstitial space between the two dominant strands of North Indian culture, Hindi and Urdu, and their literary traditions. Credited with the unique distinction of having launched both into their modernist phase, Premchand's life and works reveal the complexities of the nation-making processes. His writings embody a literary aesthetics attuned to his milieu, the socio-political upheavals of his times and the moorings of common people reeling under colonial rule. Concomitantly, it served as an instrument to propagate the political ideals upheld by him. Premchand's play *Karbala* unfolds the making of a modern intellectual involved in the profound task of imagining the nation.

Premchand, the Man, the Times

Zahid-e tang-nazar ne mujhe kafir jaana
Aur kafir ye samajhta hai musalma.N hu.N mai.N
[*The narrow-minded Muslim considers me an infidel*
And the infidel thinks of me as a Muslim.]

This couplet by Iqbal, Premchand's favourite Urdu poet, sums up Premchand's quandary as he negotiated his way through Hindi–Urdu, Hindu–Muslim divisions during his lifetime, as well as his critics' dilemma over his legacy ever since.[1] No matter how much his critics couch

[1] Whether or not there existed any tension in Premchand's own life vis-a-vis writing in two languages, the scholars of these languages have continued to lock horns over Premchand's

Karbala. Nishat Zaidi, Oxford University Press. © Oxford University Press India 2022.
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their formulations on either side, one can easily see emerging either a rabid Hindi–Hindu supremacist who used Urdu and Muslim culture merely as a vehicle to establish himself as a writer and thinker, jumping the boat when the time was opportune, or a pseudo-secular who loved Urdu and Muslims at the cost of his own culture, ignoring both the glorious past of Bharat and the present and past acts of aggression that Hindu culture faced from Muslims. It is exigent to track his transition from Nawab Rai to Premchand and understand the milieu that shaped Premchand's creative consciousness to resolve these contrarian opinions.[2]

Premchand was born on 31 July 1880 at Mandwa Lamhi, a tiny hamlet a few miles from Benaras, the hub of language debates and literary activism in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. His father, Ajaib Lal, a clerk in the post-office, and his mother, Anandi Devi, named him Dhanpat Rai, but lovingly called him Nawab at home, a name he used when he began his literary career. At the age of five, Dhanpat Rai began to learn Urdu and Persian from a Maulvi in the neighbourhood who, among other things, taught him *Gulistan* and *Bostan* of Sheikh Sa'adi.[3] In 1888, his mother Anandi Devi passed away and a few years later, Ajaib Lal married again. In 1892, after Ajaib Lal's transfer to Gorakhpur, Dhanpat began his English education. Having lost his mother at an early age, he experienced a discordant domestic life after his father's second marriage, which became worse when his father married him at sixteen

literary legacy. Jafar Raza of Allahabad University in his 1969 book (based on his Ph.D. thesis) *Premchand: Kahani ka Rahnuma*. Ilahabad: Ramnarain Beni Madhav, 1969, characterised Premchand as being "basically and originally an Urdu writer," whose status in Hindi was that of a writer in translation. Kamal Kishor Goenka in *Premchand ki Hindi-Urdu Kahaniyan* (1990) refuted Jafar Raza's claim based on substantial evidence. Shailesh Zaidi, in his book, *Premchand ki Upanyas Yatra: Ek Navmulyankan* (based on his post-doctoral work at the Aligarh Muslim University) claimed that Premchand wrote all his works originally in Hindi. Urdu works were later either translated by Premchand, or revised in the light of Hindi works, as in the case of *Premashray* and *Sevasadan*.

[2] See Shivrani Devi, *Premchand Ghar Mein*. Dilli: Atma Ram and Sons, 1956; Amrit Rai, *Premchand: Qalam Ka Sipahi*. Ilahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1962; *Premchand, Chiththi Patri [Letters]*, Ed. Amrit Rai and Madan Gopal, Vols. I and II. Ilahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1962; Madan Gopal, *Premchand: Qalam Ka Mazdoor*. Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1965; Shailesh Zaidi, *Premchand Ki Upanyas Yatra: Ek Navmulyankan*. Aligarh: University Publishing House, 1978; Qamar Rais, *Premchand Ka Tanqeedi Mutaale'a, Bahaisiyat ek Navelnigar*. Delhi: Education Book House, 1952; *Premchand Rachnavali*, Ed. Jabir Hussain, Ram Anand et al., 20 Vols. New Delhi: Janvani Prakashan, 1997.

[3] Sa'adi influenced Premchand so much that later he wrote an entire book titled *Mahatma Sheikh Sa'adi* (published in 1918).

to a girl from the prosperous Zamindar family of Ramvapur village in Mehdaval Tehsil. This marriage proved unhappy for Dhanpat. At thirteen, he had read thousands of pages of *Tilism-i-Hoshruba*, as well as the writings of Ratan Nath Dhar "Sarshar" (b. 1846 or 1847—d. 21 January 1903) and Maulana Sajjad Hussain (b. 1856–d. 1915). Ajaib Lal passed away in 1897, after which Dhanpat decided to stay in Benares to pursue higher education. In 1899, he accepted a teaching position in the Mission School in Chunar. Later, in 1900, with the help of Mr Bacon, who was the Principal of Queen's College in Benaras, Dhanpat got the much-coveted Government job of a school teacher, and it was around this time that he began writing for the Urdu journal, *Zamana*.[4] Some of his early writings include: *Asrar-i-Ma'abid* (serialized in the Urdu weekly *Awaz-i-Khalq*, 8 October 1902–February 1905), *Kishna*, and *Hamkhurma-Wa-Hamsawab*. In 1902, during a two-year stint at the Training College Allahabad, Dhanpat cleared the Urdu and Hindi exams from Allahabad University. In 1905, he was transferred to Kanpur where he found himself drawn to a circle of intellectuals that included editors and writers, like Daya Narain Nigam (b. 1882–d. 1942), Naubat Rai "Nazar," Durga Sahai "Suroor," and Pyare Lal "Shakir," as well as closely followed nationalist leaders, such as Vivekanand, Tilak, Gokhale, and Ranade. Around this time, Dhanpat married a child widow, Shivrani Devi, whose father was a follower of Arya Samaj. In June 1906, Dhanpat Rai joined the Editorial Board of *Zamana*. During this phase, under the name Nawab Rai Banarasi, he published a provocative piece on Gokhale (*Zamana*, November–December 1905), an essay on the life of Garibaldi (*Zamana*, 1907), his first short story *Duniya Ka Sabse Anmol Ratan* (1907), and his first novel in Hindi, *Prema* (allegedly the translation of *Hamkhurma-Wa-Hamsawab*, 1907, Indian Press Allahabad).

Premchand's first collection of short stories in Urdu, *Soz-i-Watan* (Zamana Press, Kanpur), was published in 1910. A collection of five stories brimming with patriotic fervour, *Soz-i-Watan* immediately drew the attention of the British colonial regime. He was threatened with sedition charges; all 700 unsold copies of *Soz-i-Watan* were confiscated; and he was forced to sign a bond that he would not publish anything

[4] In a letter to Daya Narain Nigam, editor *Zamana*, Premchand wrote on 17 July 1926 "I began my literary career in the year 1901. I was writing for *Zamana*" Premchand *Chitthi Patri*, Vol. 1, p. 162.

without due government approval. In 1910, he anonymously published three stories in *Zamana*. It was in this context that Dhanpat Rai decided to change his name from Nawab Rai to Premchand. The name was suggested by his editor friend Daya Narain Nigam.[5] "Bade Ghar ki Beti" was the first story to be published under the new name "Premchand." *Jalwa-i-Isar* was the last work that Dhanpat Rai published under the name Nawab Rai.

The communalization of the Hindi and Urdu public spheres[6] and their subsequent assertion of distinctive lineages[7] have been cited as Premchand's reason for switching from Urdu to Hindi.[8] Indeed, Premchand was alert to this shift in cultural consciousness shaping the rising demand for greater public use of Hindi.[9] When he was writing *Bazar-i-Husn*, he attributed his decision to publish the novel first in Hindi to the dearth of publishers in Urdu.[10] Later, *Sevasadan* turned out to be a huge success in Hindi and was hailed by most critics as the best novel ever written in Hindi.[11] It even earned him the title of "Upanyas Samrat." Thereafter, when *Premashray* was published, 12,000

[5] In a letter dated September 1910, he wrote to Nigam, "Premchand sounds good. I like it. The only regret is that the efforts spent in the last five years on popularising Nawab Rai will now go waste. This gentleman has always been a popper when it comes to good fortune and will remain so."*Premchand Rachnavali*, Ed. Jabir Hussain, Ram Anand et al., Vol. 19, p. 18, Delhi: Janvani Prakashan, 1997.

[6] For details, see Christopher R. King, *One Language, Two Scripts: The Hindi Movement in Nineteenth Century North India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994; Paul Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. Cambridge University Press, 1974; Tariq Rahman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996; Vasudha Dalmia, The *Nationalization of Hindi Traditions: Harischandra and Nineteenth Century Benaras*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996.

[7] Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi wrote in *Hindi Pradeep*, "Urdu continues to hold its sway in courts. Apart from its natural sons, it has entangled its stepsons in its net in such a way that ties them to its unnatural love; they do not bother to even glance at their natural mother, filled with all genial qualities, Nagri" [May 1882, No. 8]. Pandit Pratap Narayan Mishra's famous slogan "Japo Nirantar Ek Zaban/Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan" [Chant in only one tongue/ Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan] articulates the identity anxiety associated with Hindi language.

[8] Alok Rai and Mushtaq Ali in their edited volume assert that Premchand had inherited a divided legacy. See Alok Rai and Mushtaq Ali, Eds. *Samaksh: Premchand ki Bees Urdu-Hindi Kahaniyon ka Samantar Paath*. Allahabad: Hans Prakashan, 2002.

[9] In a letter of September 1, 1915, Premchand wrote to Daya Narain Nigam, "Survival is difficult in Urdu. It seems I too would spend my life writing in Hindi like late Balmukund Gupt. Which Hindu has earned fame by writing in Urdu that I would?" Premchand, *Chitthi Patri*, Vol. 1, p. 46. Illahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1962.

[10] He wrote in a letter to Nigam on 8 August 1917, "I am finishing a novel. I have decided to publish it first in Hindi. There is a dearth of publishers in Urdu." *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 62.

[11] See Premchand's letter to Nigam, "My novel has been very very successful and most critics have hailed it as the best novel in Hindi." *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 80.

copies were sold straightway.[12] This was no mean feat at that time. In contrast to this success in Hindi, Premchand continued to face difficulties in Urdu. When Urdu publishers showed reluctance in publishing his play *Shab-i-Tar,* Premchand was distraught. In an article published in *Zamana* in March 1920, he expressed his disappointment with the Urdu readership and publishers who had failed to appreciate the drama, and wrote, "Not that I regret that *Shab-i-Tar*, was not accepted for publication. While translating the play, I was conscious that Urdu readership will not value it. Nor did I translate it for popular consumption. But I had not imagined that the editors of journals and periodicals will treat it so casually. I regret the ignorance of Urdu scholars."[13] Again, in a letter dated 17 February 1923, Premchand reiterated, "It seems impossible for good Urdu magazines to sustain."[14] In fact, Premchand was so disappointed with the attitude of Urdu publishers that, at one point, he even decided to set up his own printing press to publish his Urdu books.[15]

Besides pecuniary concerns, Premchand also disapproved of the Urdu reading public that still wallowed in the fantasy world of *Tilism* and *Dastan* or the sentimental glories of the Muslim past. The catalogue of books published towards the end of the nineteenth century by the Naval Kishore Press (one of the largest commercial printing press in North India),[16] bears out that Urdu publishing in this period bristled with the kind of literature that Leonard Wolf disparagingly described as "the fodder on which the subalterns chew the cud in the cantonments of the

[12] Premchand wrote to Nigam on 1 October 1922, "You will be happy to know that 1200 copies of the novel have been sold." *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 140.

[13] In an article published in *Zamana* in March 1920, he expresses his disappointment with the Urdu readership and publishers who had failed to appreciate the drama, and wrote, "Not that I regret that *Shab-i-Tar* was not accepted for publication. While translating the play I was conscious that Urdu readership will not value it. Nor did I translate it for popular consumption. But I had not imagined that the editors of journals and periodicals will treat it so casually. I regret the ignorance of Urdu scholars." *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 202.

[14] *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 142.

[15] Premchand wrote to Nigam on 14 August 1924, "I have decided to publish my Urdu books myself. I am planning to buy a small Litho press myself." *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 151.

[16] For the catalogue of books published towards the end of the nineteenth century by the Naval Kishore Press (one of the largest commercial printing presses in the North India) see *Fahrist-e-Kutub Matba-i-Munshi Naval Kishor, 1896*, Ed. Chander Shekhar and Abdul Rashid. Delhi: Dilli Kitab Ghar, 2012.

empire."[17] Premchand's early education in Urdu, his teenage love for the novels of G. W. M. Reynolds (b. 1814–d. 1879)[18] in Urdu translation, and the *Dastan* literature he devoured in his youth were not enough to mould his future literary aesthetics. He soon outgrew the trappings of fantasy in these writings that were far removed from the realities of his own life and the life of the nation.

Premchand's early writings arose from his sensory responsiveness to the textures of his immediate environment. His literary impulses led him to a deep concern with the political and social milieu in which he lived. Even as Premchand published in Urdu journals and magazines like *Awaz-i-Khalq*, *Adeeb*, *Azad*, and *Zamana*, he never shied away from expressing his opinions, such as his preference for Sarshar over Sharar,[19] and published thought-provoking articles on political topics. Premchand was increasingly becoming disillusioned with the classical orientation of Urdu magazines and journals,[20] so much so that when *Zamana* dedicated its 1910 issue to the Urdu poet Khwaja Haider Ali Aatish (b. 1764–d. 1846), Premchand castigated its editor Nigam for it.[21] Premchand was convinced that the "revolution of word" was not enough. He desired that "*Zamana* should [rather] be an up-to-date political paper."[22] Premchand's tenacious urge for the "worlding" of his immediate environment was not

[17] Qtd in Priya Joshi, "Reading in the Public Eye: The circulation of Fiction in Indian Libraries, c. 1835–1901," in *India's Literary History: Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, Ed. Stuart Blackburn and Vasudha Dalmia. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006, pp. 280–326.

[18] For influence of Reynolds on Urdu fiction, see C. M. Naim, "'The Magic-Making Mistar Rinalds' and the Development of Urdu Prose Fiction," *Journal of Urdu Studies*, Vol. 1 (2020), pp. 3–21.

[19] In his essay "Sharar Aur Sarshar," Premchand wrote "Sarshar took upon himself to cure those social diseases which had infested the society and were strangulating it. Like any experienced physician he provided the bitter antidote by mixing it in the concoction of sugar". Amrit Rai, Ed. *Vividh Prasang*, Vol. 1. Illahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1962, p. 59.

[20] In a letter to Mushfiq, written on 25 August 1923, Premchand wrote "There are many newspapers and periodicals in Urdu but there is a dearth of good publishers. Those who are there are no good. Their world revolves around a few trash novels which are of no use to the language and the nation." *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 106.

[21] He wrote to Nigam, "The subject of literature is delineation of culture, manners, expression of emotions, revelation of truth and unravelling the feelings of heart. Poetry that ties beauty and love to the imagination of mirror and comb, dagger and doomsday, the green of newly growing beard and mouth and waist definitely does not deserve our attention today. Those who are temperamentally inclined towards it have every right to chant praises of Atish or Nasikh, Rind or Amanat. But how far is it fair to force the readers of *Zamana*, who have varied tastes, to participate in this chant?" *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 20.

[22] Ibid., p. 21.

favourably received in Urdu, which perhaps compelled him to switch to Hindi.

Defying cultural dichotomisation, Premchand continued to publish all his writings in Urdu, even if it often entailed having to contend with disapproval and resistance from the Urdu editors and publishers. No wonder that, at a time when the proponents of Hindi were aggressively engaged with the task of chastising the language and liberating it from the clutches of the local dialect, he carefully chose his pseudonym as Premchand, and not the Sanskritized Premchandra.[23] He was of the firm opinion that Urdu was an Indian language and did not belong to any community.[24] In his presidential speech at the April 1936 Progressive Writer's Association meeting, Premchand not only dared to cite many couplets of Iqbal but even expressed his worldview in Iqbal's words, "*Ramz-i Hayaat Joi Juz Dar Tapish na Yaabi.*" (If you are in quest of life's mysteries, you will find them nowhere except in struggle and strife.) Premchand assailed any attempt to propagate communalism in the name of culture. He wrote, "Communalism tends to invoke culture. It is perhaps ashamed of exposing itself in its true shape and hence like a donkey that donned the skin of a lion to impress other animals, it appears in the garb of culture."[25] This view of culture as "temporal and emergent"[26] was far ahead of his times.

Premchand resigned from the government service in 1921 and started a printing press of his own in 1923, called Saraswati Press. He worked as the editor of the important Hindi journal *Madhuri* (1927–1931) and his own journals, *Hans* (1930) and *Jagaran* (1932), which he continued to publish until the end of his life, despite being plagued by government restrictions and beset by heavy debt. He could not complete his last work, *Mangalsutra*. However, by the time he breathed his last on 8 October

[23] See Zaidi, *Premchand Ki Upanyas Yatra*.

[24] In the context of the controversy about translations of English works into Urdu, commissioned by Hindustani Academy, Premchand wrote, "Urdu is neither owned by Muslims nor Hindus. Both have a right to learn it. Hindus have a greater right over it because it is a branch of Hindi, Hindi soil and water have nurtured it. The addition of a few Arabic and Persian words cannot alter this reality." Premchand, *Vividh Prasang*, Part 2, Illahabad: Hans Prakashan, 1962, p. 361.

[25] Editorial, *Jagaran*, 15 January 1934. "Communalism and Culture," *Vividh Parsing*. Vol. 3, p. 232.

[26] James Clifford, "Introduction: Partial Truths," in *Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkley, Los Angles, London: University of California Press, 1986, p. 19.

1936, Premchand's imposing body of work included thirteen novels, some three hundred short-stories, three plays and several translations of European literature, a large number of essays, some screenplays and film scripts. Almost all his fictional writings were published both in Hindi and Urdu.

Premchand's Tryst with Drama

By the 1920s, Premchand's fame as a novelist and storywriter was well established. He had also firmed up his position in the arena of non-fiction prose by publishing numerous essays and articles on matters of contemporary socio-political importance. In 1919, Premchand decided to translate into Urdu, a French play *Les Aveugles* (1890) by Maurice Maeterlinck, a Belgian playwright, essayist and poet (b. 29 August 1862–d. 6 May 1949). The translation, *Shab-i-Tar,* was published in *Zamana* in 1919. Later, around 1922, Premchand again set out to write a play, this time in Hindi. This play, *Sangram*, was published in 1922. It was followed by *Karbala* (1924) and *Prem ki Vedi* (1933; the Urdu version was published as *Roohani Shadi* by Ismat Book Agency, Delhi in September 1933). Premchand's other engagement with the genre was through translation. He translated three of Galsworthy's plays into Hindi, and the Urdu translation of Galsworthy's *Justice* was published under the name of Daya Narain Nigam.

Premchand averred that even as he was ignorant of the stage technique and other prerequisites for drama, he was forced to choose the genre because of the nature of the story. Because drama required a sense of music, which he did not have, Premchand decided to write closet plays meant to be read and not performed. He was of the view that performance diminishes the significance of the written text of the play. As he wrote in the Foreword of his play, *Sangram*, "Familiarity with music is a necessary prerequisite to writing drama these days. A fair degree of poetic ability is also needed. I am exceptionally deficient on both fronts. But such was the nature of this story that I could not give it the shape of a novel ... this is my first and last effort in this genre of literature. I am convinced that this play can be performed on stage. Of course, a sensitive stage-manager will have to make a few alterations. Writing a play was no less of a misadventure to

me. Writing it for stage performance would be unpardonable. This is not the end of my mistakes. I have committed a third mistake as well. Even though ignorant of music, I have inserted a few songs here and there."[27] Premchand's views about drama resonate with Henry A. Beers, who in his 1907 essay "Retrospect of the Drama" had argued in favour of the legitimacy of closet drama.[28]

Karbala, beyond doubt, is the best known and most important of all of Premchand's attempts at writing drama.[29] Though the play has drawn the attention of critics in Hindi, the Urdu world has largely undervalued it. English critics have not paid due attention to it, as is the story of criticism in English about most of the Indian language literatures.

Premchand's *Karbala:* Allegorising the Nation

i. Print journey of the play

Premchand began writing *Karbala* in July 1923 and finished it in January 1924. The play was first published in Hindi by Ganga Pustak Mala in November 1924. Two years later, it was serialized in *Zamana* from July 1926 to April 1928, but with some alterations. The play was translated into Urdu partly by Premchand himself and partly by Premchand's associate Munir Haider Quraishi.[30] It was later published in book form in Urdu by Lala Lajpat Rai and Sons, Lahore, six years after Premchand's death. In opting to publish first in Hindi, a play about a significant event of Islamic history that unfolded in seventh-century Arabia, and in recasting the story to convey the ideals of his nation and his national pride, Premchand transfers the imagined community of the nation into a transnational zone, where neither language nor religious rituals act as the guiding principles of unity, rather, unity here is achieved by the shared ideals of humanity.

[27] Premchand, "Foreword," *Sangram*. Kashi: Hind Book Agency, 1939, p. 2.

[28] Henry A Beers, "Retrospects of the Drama," *The North American Review*, Vol. 185, No. 619 (19 July 1907), pp. 623–634.

[29] Premchand in his letter to Daya Narain Nigam claimed it to be the best drama in Urdu. "I can claim with certainty that there won't be a more interesting play than this in Urdu." *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 160.

[30] Madan Gopal informs that a draft of the play is preserved in Ramratan Bhavan Pustakalaya, Benaras, where pages 65–111 are preserved.

When *Karbala* was published in Hindi in 1924, Hindi magazines welcomed the play. But Premchand found it difficult to get it published in Urdu. Nigam consulted Syed Ahsan Ali Sambhali, Assistant Editor of *Zamana*, and his Muslim friends, who advised him against publishing it in its current form due to its inconsistencies with the dominant history. Incensed, Premchand wrote a long letter to Nigam on 22 July 1924, in which he lambasted Nigam for his trivial objections and concerns, such as the use of the profane genre of drama for the sacred story of Karbala, or the charge that the liberties taken by the playwright might hurt religious sentiments, or Shias would not like it, and so on. Strangely, neither Premchand nor Ahsan Sambhali seems to have been aware that in Iran, the dramatisation of the events of Karbala is an old practice. In the theatrical genre of Ta'ziyeh, the tragic events of the siege and massacres of Karbala are re-enacted.[31] Premchand, in his letter, rejected these allegations on the basis of evidence.[32] But, all along, he did take the precautions to avoid any controversy. In his Preface to the Hindi play, Premchand announced, "I have not written this play for the stage, but if someone wants to perform it, it could be done, with a little modification." However, when the play appeared in Urdu two years later, Premchand further modified his position and declared that the play was "only to be read, not to be performed."[33] Premchand's interpolations underscore the fictional aspect of the play, reminding his readers that this is drama, not history, as he wrote to Daya Narain Nigam, "History and historical drama, you would agree, are two different things. Drama is not history." Indeed, drama, as Earl Miner points out, is the only genre that is necessarily fictional.[34]

[31] Premchand was perhaps not aware of the fact that in Iran dramatisation of Karbala is an old practice. The genre known as Ta'ziyeh, enacts the tragedy of Karbala with great fanfare. Often conflated with Christian passion plays, "Ta'ziyeh is more a performance of mourning—as its name clearly indicates—that has historically spread over a whole constellation of dramatic and ritual performances." For details see Hamid Dabashi, "Ta'ziyeh as Theatre of Protest," *The Drama Review*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Winter 2005), pp. 91–99. Also see "Time Out of Memory: Ta'ziyeh, the Total Drama" by Peter Chelkowski. https://asiasociety.org/time-out-memory-taziyeh-total-drama accessed on 30 June 2020.

[32] See the letter in the Appendix.

[33] Syed Akbar Hyder explains it thus, "The free-floating theatrical space enables each reader-listener to enact Karbala on his or her own terms while the concrete theatricality of Karbala is disavowed, partly in consideration of the pejorative connotations that the theatre/stage has for some, at times, and partly as a distancing strategy." *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 179.

[34] See Earl Roy Miner, *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural essay on Poetics of Literature*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 40.

ii. The Karbala paradigm in India's literary imagination

The term "Karbala" refers to a seventh-century event in Islamic history. The younger grandson of Prophet Muhammad was martyred, along with his kinsmen and close friends in the desert of Karbala (Iraq) by the forces of the tyrannical and sinful caliph, Yazid bin Mu'awiya bin Abu Sufiyan. For Shia Muslims, the memorializing of the event through Muharram commemorations has resistive resonances.[35] But beyond this, Karbala has appealed to the wider world and has lived on in the popular memory, both through the oral as well as written literature, whereby generations of interlocutors—reciters, poets, and writers—have, time and again, renewed the story of Karbala by recasting it in various discursive forms rooted in their contemporary contexts, lending it a new meaning and currency.[36]

The symbolism of Karbala has lent itself to liberal, leftist, third-world, and anti-imperialist rhetorics. It has also integrated itself into revolutionist dogmas influenced by Western political philosophies. In Urdu marsiya,[37] for instance, a genre that flourished under the patronage of the Shia nawabs of Awadh, poets have skillfully rendered the story of Karbala in all its lyrical poignancy.

While the linear framework in most of these renditions is the same, marsiya poets have taken creative liberties in portraying finer details, often, even lending local colour to the story. From rites and rituals to flora and fauna, everything in the marsiyas of poets like Dilgir (b. 1781–d. 1846), Khaliq (b. 1774–d. 1814), Sauda (b. 1713–d. 1781), Mirza Dabir (b. 1803–d. 1875), and Mir Anis (b. 1802–d. 1874), is entirely local.[38] Not only this, poets like Iqbal, Ali Sardar Jafri, and many others have made

[35] See Vernon Schubel, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam: Shi'i Devotional Rituals in South Asia*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993; Francis Robinson, "Introduction: The Shi'a in South Asia," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, THIRD SERIES, Vol. 24, No. 3, Special Issue: Isna 'Ashari and Isma'ili Shi'ism: from South Asia to the Indian Ocean (July 2014), pp. 353–361.

[36] See, Gopi Chand Narang, *Saniha-i-Karbala, Bataur Ek She'ri Istayara*. New Delhi: Education Book House, 1984; Syed Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

[37] See C. M. Naim, "The Art of Urdu *Marsiya*," *Islamic Society and Culture*, Ed. N. K. Wagle and M. Israel. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1983, pp. 101–116.

[38] For instance, Sauda's "*Chaanv bhai aye banre Kaasim / aa banri teri yaad me rove*" [It's evening, O groom Qasim, Come back, your bride wails in your memory] or Mir Anis's "*Zahra tumhare baagh ki kheti hari rahe/ sandal se maang bacchoN se godi bhari rahe*" [Zahra may

non-sectarian use of the Karbala as a metaphor for other semantic fields, such as revolution, social justice, and so on.[39] During the nationalist movement, political leaders also invoked the Karbala paradigm. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad wrote *Shahadat-i-Hussain* to pay tribute to the paradigm of Truth and Justice represented by Karbala. Mahatma Gandhi invoked the figure of Imam Hussain at the time of the Salt Satyagraha. Before Premchand, Mir Musharraf Hussain wrote his famous and possibly the first modern Bangla novel *Bishad Sindhu* (1888–1891) based on Karbala. After Premchand, Ismat Chughtai wrote a novel based on Karbala, *Ek Qatra Khoon* (1976). Written during the Emergency (1977), the novel is a moral and political allegory. Chughtai's preface to the novel makes this amply clear:

> This is the story of those seventy-two men who took a stand against imperialism to defend human rights. This is not a 1,400-year-old story. It is the story of today. For even today, man's biggest enemy is man. Even today, the standard-bearer of humanity is man. Whenever a Yazid raises his head in any part of the world, a Hussain steps forward and crushes him. Even today, light wins against darkness.[40]

Indian-American poet Agha Shahid Ali used the trope of Karbala in his English poetry to express his nostalgia for his homeland, Kashmir. Here is an excerpt from Ali's lucid prose poem "Karbala: A History of the 'House of Sorrow'":

> And Jesus wept. And as if the news has just reached them—fourteen hundred years after the battle of Karbala (near ancient Babylon, not far from the Euphrates) in the year A.H. 61/A.D.680—mourners weep for "the prince among martyrs," Hussain, grandson of the Prophet and

the your garden blossom forever/ May the sandal paste on your forehead, children in your lap, flourish forever] clearly relocate the characters of Karbala in Awadh culture.

[39] Mushirul Hassan explains, "The Karbala paradigm itself communicated profound existential truths not only to the Shias but also to the Sunnis and Hindus. They all commemorated Muharram with equal solemnity." (*From Pluralism to Separatism*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 37.) Also see, J. R. I. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiism in Iran and Iraq 1772–1859*. Berkley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1989, pp. 115–118.

[40] Ismat Chughtai, *Ek Qatra Khoon*. Fan Aur Fankar, Bombay 1976. Available in English Translation by Tahira Naqvi *One drop of Blood*, Kali for women. New Delhi, 2002.

son of Ali ("Father of Clay") and Fatima (the Prophet's only surviving child). Memorializing Hussain on the tenth of Muharram (*Ashura*) is the rite of Shi'a Islam—so central that at funerals those events are woven into elegies, every death framed by that "Calvary." For just "as Jesus went to Jerusalem to die on the cross," Hussain went to Karbala to accept the passion that had been meant for him from the beginning of time.[41]

Therefore, Premchand was neither the first Indian writer to undertake a literary rendering of the historical event of Karbala, nor was he the first to indigenise the characters of Karbala. Premchand was, also, not the first Hindu writer to write about Karbala. Several Hindu marsiya poets,[42] like Munshi Chunnu Lal Lucknowi who wrote under the pseudonym of Dilgir, Lala Balwant Singh Lala Ram Prasad, and Roop Kumari, have written devoutly about Imam Hussain's love for Justice and Truth. Some, like Nathan Vilal Wahshi, even drew parallels between *Insaan-i-Kamil Imam* Hussain and *Maryada Purushottam Rama*, the ideal hero and ideal king.

What, then, distinguishes Premchand's play from all other retellings of Karbala? The answer lies in his location and context, his unique positioning within the literary cultures of Hindi and Urdu and his choice of genre and language for rendering the story of Karbala.

iii. The Karbala narrative: Premchand's "re-telling"

Premchand rests the main plot of his play on the established and reliable scholarly authorities of Islam, such as Amir Ali. The opening scene of the play foregrounds the environment of revelry and licentiousness that permeates Yazid's court. Yazid is surrounded by a fleet of sycophants like Zuhaq. When Yazid seeks advice regarding the possibility of allegiance by Hussain, Zuhaq counsels Yazid "*Ya Maula*! My submission is that even if Hussain agrees, sparing his life is as dangerous for the clan of Abu Sufiyan as killing a snake but nurturing its offspring." When Yazid's pious wife

[41] Agha Shahid Ali, *The Veiled Suite: The Collected Poems*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2010, p. 250.

[42] Kalidas Gupta Raza's *Shaoor-i-Gham* is a study of many such Hindu marsiya Poets.

Hinda warns Yazid, he dismisses her by saying, "Hinda, all these ideas are apt for religion, not for the material world. My grandfather [Abu Sufiyan] embraced Islam because it fetched him wealth and esteem." These discussions throw light on the root-cause of events that culminated in the martyrdom of Imam Hussain at the hands of the followers of Islam, something that Premchand found quite befuddling, as he states in *Katha Sar*, "Rarely has it happened in history that the grandsons of any religious leader had to suffer such atrocities at the hands of the followers of their own grandfather." The debauchery of Yazid's court, coupled with his lust for power, misuse of wealth and complete absence of principles, is juxtaposed with the representation of Hussain. Right from the beginning Hussain is seen, even by the followers of Yazid, as a man of honour who always keeps his word and never tolerates lies or injustice. Thus, the contrast between the widely used metaphors of *Yazidiyat* and *Hussainiyat*, representing the poles of tyranny and righteousness, respectively, is established.

The linear frame of the story in Premchand's play, for the most part, follows the popular versions represented in the marsiya tradition and orally transmitted in *Majlis*[43] by *Zakirs*.[44] Premchand's portrayal of Valid as a good man trapped on the wrong side, which is contrary to the popular oral tellings of the narrative of Karbala in *Majalis* that portray all the commanders of Yazid as evil, reaffirms Premchand's claim to have read extensively about the life of Hussain. Premchand wrote in a letter to Daya Narain Nigam, "I read about the life of *Hazrat* Hussain. His willingness for sacrifice moved me. The result was this drama."[45] However, there are departures in the play as well, such as the age of Ali Asghar, representation of Abbas as a cousin and not a brother, and the presence of the Imam's daughter Sughra in the desert of Karbala. Ali Asghar, who is said to have been six months old at the time of the tragedy of Karbala in all scholarly sources, is seen in Premchand's play as participating

[43] Congregations of assembly to mourn the tragedy of Karbala. The genres that constitute a majlis are *Soz*, *Salam*, *Marsiya*, *Zikr*, and *Nauha*. While four of these are poetic forms, Zikr, also known as Bayan or Hadis by Zakir is the only prose narrative. See Akbar Hyder, *Reliving Karbala: Martyrdom in South Asian Memory*, p. 10.

[44] Zakir, is the scholar who narrates the Karbala narrative in a *Majalis* Assembly. Usually the narration is divided into two parts, The *Fazail* in which the merits of the Prophet's family are established and *Masa'ib* in which the Zakir moves on to lament the tragedies that befell the Ahl-i-Bait.

[45] See the letter in the Appendix.

in family discussions. Abbas, who was the brother of Hussain, is presented as a cousin, and the Imam's daughter Sughra is shown as being present in Karbala whereas evidences suggest that she did not accompany Imam Husain due to her illness. Not only this, none of the scholarly writings on Karbala have suggested that anyone in Hussain's family ever even thought of pledging allegiance to Yazid, but Premchand makes Abbas give this advice to Hussain. While these may be deemed minor digressions, the major one comes in the form of insertion of two subplots in the Karbala story. Neither is purely fictional, as there are extant historical sources and oral narratives supporting both. While these subplots may stand on their own, they gain relevance and currency only in the context of the main plot of the play. The first subplot concerns the dilemma that a commoner youth, Waheb, faces due to his love for his newly wedded wife, Naseema, and serves the purpose of adding poignancy to the tragedy.[46] However, the second subplot introduced in scene VII of Act I, whereby Hindu characters Sahas Rai and his brothers are inserted in the story of Karbala, is quite significant. Indeed, many oral narratives suggest the participation of a community of Brahmins (Dutt Brahmins or Mohiyals) in the battle of Karbala, and Premchand's subplot seems to draw from them.[47]

As soon as Sahas Rai and his brothers appear on stage, the setting changes. Premchand describes the scene thus: "A village in Arabia—a big temple, a pond with concrete ghats, a pleasant garden with birds and animals such as peacocks, deer and cows strolling around. Sahas Rai and his brothers performing evening-*havan* and prayer near the pond." This scene appears hardly any different from that of any village in gangetic planes. The scene opens with the brothers singing a patriotic song written in Sanskritized Hindi *"Bharat Tan Man dhan Sara ho/ Uski seva sab dwara ho."* [May Bharat be our body, soul and wealth/May it be served by all.] Sahas Rai's prayers reflecting his desire to "sacrifice everything in defence of Truth and justice," directly align the brothers with the camp of Imam Hussain. The moment Sahas Rai learns about Yazid's accession to

[46] Premchand says in the Preface, "I have not deviated from historical facts. Only where the requirement of rasa called for a play of imagination, I have expressed it through unknown and insignificant characters."

[47] See Abu Talib, "Dutt Brahmin: Imam Hussain se Rabt-o-Zabt," *Reg-i Surkh*, pp. 63–71. Qtd in Akbar Hyder, p. 179; Also see Intizar Hussain, *Justuju Kya Hai*. Lahore: Sang-i-Meel, 2002.

the caliphate, he readies himself to join Hussain. The two subplots intersect when Sahas Rai, en route to Karbala with his army, meets Waheb and Naseema, who, for the fear of death, are trying to migrate to a distant land. Inspired by the valour and virtue of a non-Muslim, Sahas Rai, Naseema's heart changes, and she gives consent to her husband to sacrifice his life for the *Imam*. Later, after Waheb is killed on the battlefield, Sahas Rai addresses her as *Sati* and *Devi*. When the brothers reach Karbala, they shield *Imam* Hussain from the arrows of the enemy, while the *Imam* performs his Namaz. When these brothers march to the battlefield, they sing in chorus a patriotic song with a refrain of "Jai Bharat" written by one of the leading figures of the Hindi Movement Sridhar Pathak (1859–1928), at which Abbas hails them as "true Muslims." The *Imam* praises Sahas Rai, calls his religion "a true religion," and prays for the glory of this religion. The *Imam* makes sure that the last rites of his Hindu supporters are performed following their religious practices. At the funeral pyre, he lauds these warriors, their religion and their nation, praying, "May our valiant ones always shed their blood for this community."

Yet another interpolation occurs when Premchand inserts the character of a Yogi, who has come to Arabia from India to pay his respects to the Prophet of Islam. The Yogi introduces himself as a mendicant or a "sadhu" and says, "Maharishi Muhammad made the whole universe reverberate with that same sound .... I've come from Bharat to pay my respects to that same great soul." When the Yogi bends forward to touch the feet of *Imam* Hussain, he is stopped by the *Imam*, who insists that humans should prostrate before God alone. At this, instead of feeling offended, the Yogi praises the *Imam*. In this way, Karbala attains the quintessence of a morally charged universe, resonating the highest ideals upheld in Vedantic philosophy, and becoming an inspiration for a people oppressed by colonial rule to rise and stand for Truth and Justice.

Premchand's play suffers from several generic weaknesses, such as unevenness of the length of scenes, poor stage direction, dialogues not attuned to stage performance, and so on. At the same time, it grips the reader through the deployment of *rasas* and *bhavas*. It is very easy to read *Karbala* to run down the playwright as an outsider who did not completely understand the legacy of the event and its real worth. It is also easy to pick holes in Premchand's craft by analysing the text from the limited perspective of his stated progressive standpoint as the raison d'être of this

endeavour, or its generic weaknesses. However, it is hard to ignore the flashes of genius throughout the play. At the great personal risk of being misunderstood by various interlocutors, Premchand transformed the story of Karbala into his story, a text fostering communal harmony based on a human desire to work together for a greater cause, without bothering about the consequences. The play is a testament to Premchand being a master-storyteller, ahead of his time, and a sincere arbiter who did not bother about how he would be perceived by one group or another, did what he considered right and chose a method of expression which was his own.

iv. Premchand's *Karbala* and the making of the modern intellectual

Premchand wrote *Karbala* in the backdrop of rising anti-colonial sentiments and communal discord, ostensibly to promote communal harmony. The 1920s were rife with protests against the repressive colonial regime. The Rowlatt Act Satyagraha (February 1919), the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (April 1919), Khilafat—Non-cooperation (1919–1920), Civil Disobedience (1921), Chauri-Chaura violence, and the suspension of the Non-Cooperation movement (1922)—all these had a deep impact on Premchand's mind. After listening to Gandhiji's speech on 8 February 1921, when the latter visited Gorakhpur and addressed a rally in Ghazi Mian Ka Maidan, Premchand was so moved that he resigned from government service on 16 February 1921.[48]

The decade that followed the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements witnessed an unprecedented surge in communal hostility.[49] Many blasphemous books about Prophet Muhammad were published around this time,[50] which appalled Premchand. When Acharya Chatursen Shastri

[48] On 29 December 1921, he wrote to Imtiaz Ali Taj, "I am also a non-cooperative. My mind is buzzing with these issues these days. My stories reflect these ideas." Premchand, *Chitthi Patri*, Vol. 2, p. 134.

[49] Hindu Mahasabha was founded in 1922. In 1923, Swami Shradhanand, the Arya Samaj leader, launched the Shuddhi Movement intending to reclaim Malkana Rajputs, who had converted to Islam under Aurangzeb. This resulted in a series of communal riots across northern India.

[50] Pt Kalichanran Sharma published his *Vichitra Jivan* in 1923. *Rangila Rasool* was published by Raj Pal, Lahore in 1924.

published his book *Islam Ka Vish Vriksha (The Poison Tree of Islam)*, a shocked Premchand wrote to Jainendra, "What's wrong with Chatursen that he ended up writing *Islam Ka Vish Vriksha*? ... We will have to confront this communal propaganda with full force."[51] Premchand never approved of this hate-mongering. He wrote to Nigam, "I have almost stopped writing in Urdu these days. There is no free time. But, I am writing a short piece on Shuddhi. I have strong objections to this movement. I'll send it to you in a few days. Arya Samaj followers will frown. But I'm sure you'll give it a place in *Zamana*."[52] As expected, all hell broke loose when this essay was published. Shri Ram Sharma's response was published in *Zamana*. Emotions ran high. Premchand wrote to Nigam, "Riots continue. I had predicted it. It is proving true."[53]

Premchand daringly aired his explosive views in an article titled "Qahtur Rijal," which was published in the February 1924 issue of *Zamana*. In that article, he openly praised Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar and Shaukat Ali Jauhar, leaders of the Khilafat Movement, whom he addressed as the "Ram-Lakhan duo." He wrote, "I insist that had there been even a single Kichlu, Muhammad Ali or Shaukat Ali among the Hindus, there wouldn't have been such a proliferation of Hindu organisations and the warming up of the Shuddhi Movement. Alas! Congress also has not objected to individual participation in these movements, though collectively it has maintained a distance."[54]

Appalled at the escalating tension between the two communities, Premchand felt duty-bound to sensitize the Hindus to the worthy aspects of Islam and Muslims. In July 1923, he published an essay in *Prabha* titled "Hazrat Ali."[55] The essay reveals Premchand's grasp of Islamic history. Based on historical facts, the essay presents a biographical sketch of *Hazrat* Ali, highlighting the strength of his character, his tireless sympathy for the oppressed, his valour, and his sense of justice. The essay

[51] Premchand, *Chitthi Patri*, Part 2, pp. 32–33.
[52] *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 170.
[53] *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 9, p. 168.
[54] Premchand, *Vividh Prasang*, Vol. 2, pp. 351–352.
[55] Bhartendu Harishchandra, considered the progenitor or Hindi-Hindu communal agenda had also published an essay titled "Panch Pavitratma" in which he had praised Prophet Muhammad and his family. Bhartendu Harishchandra, *Bhartendu Harishchandra Granthavali*, Vol. IV. Ed. Om Prakash Singh. Delhi: Prakashan Sansthan, 2008. For more on similar instances see Nishat Zaidi, "Flows, counter-flows across the artificial divides: The case of English-Hindi-Urdu," *Indian Literature*, Vol. 59, No. 2 (286) March/April 2015), pp. 158–178.

opens thus, "The brightness of *Hazrat* Ali's fame and the flawlessness of his character has no match. He was not a mendicant or a sage. He also cannot be called a politician or a conquerer. But the reverence he commands, from both Shias and Sunnis, is unparalleled." In 1924, he again published a story in the March issue of *Saraswati* titled "Nabi Ka Niti Nirvah." In April 1925, *Madhuri* carried his story "Mandir Aur Masjid," advocating Hindu–Muslim harmony. In his novel *Kayakalp*, published in 1926, Premchand articulates his views thus:

> "Islam has never hurt the sentiments of followers of other religion."[56]
>
> "There is no community in the world as unbiased as Hindus."[57]
>
> "People unnecessarily malign Muslims. They are as afraid of riots as Hindus. Some people think that Muslims are dreaming of ruling over the Hindus. This is rubbish. Muslims have begun to fear that Hindus want to settle old scores with them and are scheming to wipe out their existence."[58]

Premchand's response to the Hindu–Muslim question has often been viewed by his critics as marked by ambivalence. Premchand has been accused of harbouring the idea of the majority being sympathetic towards the minority, instead of equal citizenship.[59] The point, however, is that to Premchand, the ideal universe is not the one without differences, but rather the one in which differences do not lead to fissures.

Endeavours directed at fostering Hindu–Muslim unity elated Premchand. When Khwaja Hasan Nizami published his book on Lord Krishna, Premchand forthrightly praised it. He, now, wanted to place

[56] Premchand, *Kayakalp*. Ilahabad: Saraswati Press, p. 33.
[57] Ibid., p. 35.
[58] Ibid., p. 49.
[59] Geetanjali Pandey writes, "In its treatment of Muslims, Premchand's work reveals some inconsistent trends. Where they are dealt with directly, a respectful attitude is generally adopted towards them .... In certain other contexts, however, Premchand betrays a tone that does not exactly square with his commitment to Hindu–Muslim unity .... The Muslims are not seen as the Hindus' co-sharers in the offensive. ... Constituting a different cultural universe, the Hindus seem to stand apart from the Muslims." See Pandey, "North Indian Intelligentsia and Hindu-Muslim Question: A Study of Premchand's Writings," in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 19, No. 38 (22 September 1984), pp. 1664–1670, 1664. Sudhir Chandra has also discussed the paradoxes in Premchand's advocacy of the cause of the oppressed. See Sudhir Chandra, "Premchand: A Historiographic View," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 16, No. 15 (11 April 1981), pp. 669–675.

the hero of Islamic history before Hindu readers in the same way that Nizami, a Muslim, had placed a Hindu hero before Muslim readers. In the Foreword to the play, he directly plunges into the centre of the Hindu–Muslim and Hindi–Urdu controversy and positions himself at a unique juncture where these binaries are rendered meaningless. He draws an analogy between Karbala and the great Hindu epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, an analogy that was perhaps aimed at establishing a familiar entry point for his audiences. He castigates "we Hindus" for painting all Muslims in the image of Aurangzeb, and underlines the necessity of inter-communal dialogue as the foundation of a friendly relationship between the communities. He also does not mind linking Hindi and Urdu with a religious identity as he mentions the oddity of making Muslim characters use chaste Hindi. In this manner, no attempt is made by Premchand to de-centre us/them binarism, not because he believed in it, but rather because he did not consider it important enough to engage with it. To him, religious and national identities were to be defined by the moral fibre and not geography or ritualistic practices. Premchand's play *Karbala* is an articulation of this foundational principle.

By the time *Karbala* was published in Urdu, Premchand had already published his novels *Rangbhoomi* (he had begun writing the novel on 1 August 1922 and finished it on 1 April 1924) and *Kayakalp,* both of which took a sharp dig at the conservative Pandits and Maulvis. *Asrar-i-Ma'abid* and *Prema* were Premchand's earliest critique of them, but in *Jalwa-i-Isar,* we get his first satirical attack on them (in the character of Moteram). Referring to his story "Mandir Aur Masjid," which caused a great furore among the radicals of both communities, Premchand wrote to Nigam, "It has exposed the poison of sectarianism. It has criticised the orthodoxy of Hindu Pandits and priests on the one hand and Muslim clerics on the other without any concession. In the garb of religion, both have become victims of self-service. If some people have objections, what can I do about it?"[60] Premchand's play *Karbala* offers a trenchant critique of these orthodoxies, as Premchand hits at the root of ideological underpinning behind the imperial and feudal structures of society. If Premchand's fiction embodies his empirical concerns and his

[60] Madan Gopal, *Qalam Ka Mazdoor.* Delhi: Rajlkamal Prakashan], 2006, p. 152.

reform agenda, in *Karbala*, he allegorises those concerns by using the multi-vocality of Karbala symbols, such as the antagonist Yazid's identification with oppressive colonial regimes, secularisation of religion, and redefining of Hindu–Muslim identities by their participation in the conception of "just self."

It is impossible to ignore the irony that many of Premchand's works, written in the backdrop of the Gandhian non-violent resistance movements like the Non-Cooperation Movement, draw their titles from martial metaphors, such as *Sangram*, *Rangbhoomi*, and *Qalam, Talwar Aur Tyag*. It may appear as an anomaly for a Gandhian like Premchand to choose such titles until one directs one's attention to the *leitmotif* of *Karbala*. It is the story of a battle between Truth and Justice pitted against terrible injustice and brutal corruption. Karbala, thus, becomes the touchstone by which all other values are to be tested, actions to be judged, and the new nation to be imagined. In other words, Premchand transforms a seventh-century event of Islamic history into a "national allegory." The battle of Karbala is a battle of ideas wherein a politically conscious writer like Premchand must take sides to produce liberating knowledge for his people caught in the clutches of the tyrannical colonial rule and rising communalism.

Premchand neither subscribed to the Western notion of nation, nor to the Western idea of the secular. In the play, when Qazi castigates the rebel citizens of Kufa, bent on punishing him, by telling them that, "It is unlawful for a Muslim to kill another Muslim" he is told that he is not a Muslim as he does not have the character of a Muslim. Similarly, impressed with the strength of character of Sahas Rai and his brothers, Abbas remarks, "Today I discovered that Islam exists beyond the boundaries of Islam."

Syed Akbar Hyder has argued that "a work like *Karbala* supplants the nationalist exclusionary imagining"[61] critiqued by Partha Chatterjee. No doubt, Premchand unsettles the dominant normative discourses by translocating the story of Karbala in a de-territorialized ideal space where mutual understanding and respect

[61] ". . . Premchand goes beyond the simplified polarities of syncretism and separatism to locate the nation in the abstract theatre, sacred and solemn, capable of shifting its spatial foci from Arabia to India, as long as it can constitute a site where mutual respect, especially the sensitivities toward minorities, plays itself out." Hyder, p. 179.

dictate the inter-communitarian interactions between the faithful of both communities.[62]

Conclusion

When quizzed about his political affiliation, Premchand's response was, "I belong to that future party which is driven by the purpose of political edification of the underdogs."[63] This echoed the famous Kenyan decolonial writer Ngugi Wa Thiong' O.[64] Early in his career, Premchand embarked on the arduous task of the political awakening of his people. Compelled by the lived experiences of his people undergoing a radical shift, Premchand privileged political views over religious sentiments,[65] and the play *Karbala* is no exception. "The aim of the drama and of the principal character's portrayal is to make the Hindus pay tribute to *Hazrat Imam* Hussain. That's why this drama, which, apart from being religious, is political as well,"[66] Premchand wrote with justifiable relish to Daya Narain Nigam. His avowal of the political nature of the play is anchored in the backdrop against which the play was written and the objective with which it was written. At the time when Gandhiji gave a clarion call to oppose the repressive apparatus of the colonial regime by taking recourse to moral authority, the story of Karbala naturally found resonance with Premchand. In his hands, the battle between a righteous man and a debauched caliph is transformed into a moral allegory defining the national identity. The dramatic register of *Karbala* frames Gandhian nationalism and resolves its central paradoxes—non-violence in the face of

[62] Khwaja Hasan Nizami praised the play as an instance of Premchand's secular views and described him as "an unprejudiced Hindu who, having drawn the sword of his pen, rose to the field of action, in order to save his community from literary prejudices." (Khwaja Hasan Nizami, "Urdu Hindi Aur Risala-i-Zamana," in *Yadgar-Jashn-Sad Saala Munshi Daya Narain Nigam*, Ed. Sri Narayan Nigam. Lucknow: Sri Narain Nigam, 1981, 19 qtd in Hyder, p. 177.)

[63] *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 142.

[64] See Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, "He (African writer) must reject, repudiate and negate his roots in the native bourgeoisie and his native spokesmen and find his true creative links with the African masses over the earth in alliance with all socialist forces of the world." *Writers in Politics: A Re-engagement with Issues of Literature and Society*, Oxford: James Currey, 1997.

[65] In 1924, on being asked by an editor friend to contribute an article in the Vijay Dashmi special issue, Premchand's response was, "Ram's exile has been a common theme. ... I would rather write about the current political conditions. Why should all articles be about Ramchandra ji?" [*Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 9, p. 167].

[66] *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 160.

violence, a passivity that entails active agency in the face of the brute force of the colonial regime, penance, and Satyagraha as instruments of morality that underpin the political—through the charismatic figure of the *Imam*. Karbala invites active emulation in the form of rebellion against corrupt rulers, answering to the call of the oppressed, promoting Good and rejecting Evil, and propagating ideas of true religion and identity as moral obligations incumbent upon all.[67]

To Premchand, commitment to the political warranted disavowal of Bhartendu-style[68] religiosity and an eschewal of the *Dastan* and *Kavya*[69] style of effete aestheticism. Political literature offers the vision of an ideal political possibility. Of all Premchand's writings, *Karbala* occupies a unique position, as it was meant to serve as a utilitarian vehicle to cement Hindu-Muslim unity that hinged on moral values. The play epitomizes the sincere political concerns of a sensitive writer in colonial times. Sahas Rai and *Imam* Hussain are bound together by the power of Truth and Virtue, in a relationship of mutual admiration and cooperation, set against the brute and villainous forces of Yazid. Premchand does not attempt to erase or undermine differences between the religious practices of the two communities, thereby suggesting that unity does not mean homogeneity. Both the communities may retain their distinctive identity and yet have respect for each other. The geographical expansiveness evident in the ideoscape explored in *Karbala* is aimed at expanding the mental map of his readers, turning them away from a claustrophobic idea of the nation. Premchand translates Karbala, a story based on Islamic

[67] See the views of Morteza Motahhari cited in *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shii Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*, Ed. Kamran Scot Aghales. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2004.

[68] Bhartendu Harishchandra (9 September 1850–6 January 1885 CE): A leading figure in the Hindi Movement of the late nineteenth century, he is said to have used the Vaishnava devotional approach to define a coherent Hindu religion. He is credited by critics like Vasudha Dalmia as having laid the foundation of the religious basis of nation and language as articulated in the slogan "Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan." See Vasudha Dalmia's *The Nationalisation of Hindu Traditions: Bhartendu Harishchandra and Nineteenth Century Banaras*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2010.

[69] "Dastan" refers to the story (in Persian). "For about a century, from 1830 until 1930, dastan narration (dāstān go*ī*) reigned in North India as an enormously popular, highly sophisticated 'art of extemporaneous speech.'" Pritchett, 13. (See France W. Pritchett, *Marvellous Encounters: Folk Romance in Hindi and Urdu*, 1985.) "Kaavya" is a Sanskrit term used to designate poetry variously characterised as classical, ornate, courtly, or stylized. See *Indian Kavya Literature* by A. K. Warder. Delhi: Motilal Benarasidas Publishers Pvt Ltd, 1972.

history, into a nationalist narrative about the greatness of India's past. *Karbala* characterises the heroic self-fashioning of Premchand.

Premchand's literary career and his social concerns are so intricately interwoven that they cannot be considered apart. His literary activism defines him as a modern intellectual, who dared to not only make radical interventions in the discourses emanating from the effects of colonialism, but also carved out a new path for the literary endeavour in both Hindi and Urdu. He delinked his writings from pressures of religious orthodoxies and classical aestheticism, on the one hand, and of blind mimicry of Euro-modernism, on the other. He, thus, inspired both Hindi and Urdu literature to test the rough terrains of realism and prepared them for future challenges.

1

The Play

Cast

Male Characters

Hussain: Son of *Hazrat* Ali[1] and grandson son of *Hazrat* Muhammad, also known as Shabbir[2]

Abbas[3]: *Hazrat* Hussain's Paternal Cousin

Ali Akbar: *Hazrat* Hussain's Elder Son

Ali Asghar[4]: *Hazrat* Hussain's Younger Son

Muslim: *Hazrat* Hussain's Cousin (Paternal)

Zuber: A Nobleman of Mecca

Waleed: The Governor of Mecca

Marwan: Waleed's Deputy

Haani: A Nobleman of Kufa

Yazid: The Caliph

Zuhak, Shams, Saljuq Rumi: Yazid's companions

Ziyad: The Governor of Basra and Kufa

Sa'ad: The Commander of Yazid's Army[5]

Abdullah, Waheb, Kaseer, Mukhtar, Hur, Zaheer[6], **Habeeb etc.**: *Hazrat* Hussain's supporters

[1] Honorific like *Hazrat* have been retained in the translation.

[2] Shabbir is yet another name for *Imam* Hussain. His brother Hasan was called Shabbar.

[3] Abbas was not Hussain's cousin but his step brother from the second wife of Ali, Ummul Baneen, whom he married after the death of Fatima, the only surviving child of Prophet Muhammad. Abbas is famous in Islamic history, especially among the Shi'as, for the valour he displayed at Karbala.

[4] Ali Asghar, as per extant historical accounts, was the youngest son of Hussain, six-months old at the time of the tragedy of Karbala. Premchand shows him to be a slightly older child in the Hindi text. This error has been addressed to an extent in the Urdu text.

[5] Umar Bib Sa'ad is alternatively referred to as Sa'ad or Umar-i-Sa'ad in the play.

[6] Zaheer appears in both the Hindi and the Urdu texts of the play and hence, has been retained in translation. However, most probably Premchand was referring to Zuhair Ibn Qa'in, who fought alongside Hussain in Karbala.

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Hajjaaj, Haaris, Ashas, Qais, Bilal etc.: Yazid's supporters
Harjas Rai, Singh Dutt, Ram Singh, Bheeru Dutt, and Sahas Rai: Hindus settled in Arabia
Mu'awiya: Yazid's father

Female Characters

Zainab: *Hazrat* Hussain's Sister
Shahr Banu: *Hazrat* Hussain's Wife
Sakeena: *Hazrat* Hussain's Daughter
Qamar: Wife of Abdullah
Tau'a: An Old Lady of Kufa
Hinda: Yazid's Wife

Others

Messengers, soldiers, and hangman, etc.

Act 1

Scene 1

[Time—9 in the night. **Yazid**, **Zuhak**, **Shams**, and other courtiers are seated. Flasks, filled with wine and wine-cups are laid out.]

Yazid: Have the town criers announced my caliphate?

Zuhak: There isn't a street, square, road, mosque, *bazaar*, or cemetery where the announcement hasn't been heard. Its echoes can be heard across the borders—in Hijaz, Yemen, Iraq, Mecca, and Medina. Our enemies are trembling with fear at the news.

Yazid: Let the town criers be rewarded with robes of honour.

Zuhak: Very well, *Amir.*

Yazid: Have the people been ordered to pledge allegiance to my caliphate?

Zuhak: *Amir* needn't worry about such trifles. Tomorrow before sunrise, all of Syria will be in attendance to pledge their allegiance to you.

Yazid: (Sipping wine from the goblet.) The Prophet declared wine sinful. What a grave injustice to this divine elixir! The prohibition was justified when people had no leisure for such luxury. But things are different now. One would rather cease being a caliph than forbid this blessing. Tell me, **Zuhak**, has a courier been dispatched to Medina?

Zuhak: *Amir*'s order was awaited.

Yazid: By God, **Zuhak**, I'll never forgive this delay. Send a courier at once and write a stern message to **Waleed**. He should secure Hussain's allegiance for me and, if **Hussain** refuses, kill him. Let there be no delay!

Zuhak: *Ya Maula*! I believe that even if **Hussain** submits, he'll remain a threat to the house of **Abu Sufiyan**. Why kill the serpent but nurture its offspring? **Hussain** will certainly stake his claim one day.

Yazid: **Zuhak**, do you seriously believe **Hussain** will ever swear an oath of allegiance to me? That's unlikely. In fact, impossible. **Hussain** will never pledge allegiance to me, even if you were to cut down his body into pieces and feed it to the crows. Yes, if the wheel of destiny could unwind, a river could change its course, and Time could stop, then possibly **Hussain** too could pledge allegiance to me. But once he does it, **Hussain** will never stake his claim to the caliphate again, though the wheel of destiny may rewind, the river may go back on its course, and

Time may resume its movement. Allegiance is just a ruse to ensure his departure from this world. **Hussain** is my only rival. I'm not scared of anyone else—not even of all the armies of the world! But I'm afraid of that unarmed **Hussain**! (He refills his goblet with wine and sips from it.) He's robbed me of my inner peace, of my sleep. The descendants of **Abu Sufiyan**, will never yield to the progeny of **Hashim**. We'll not let the caliphate pass into the hands of those clerics. They erased the difference between the upper and lower classes. Every commoner on the street began to imagine he was worthy of the caliphate and had a right to dine with the rich. My late father dispelled this illusion. Today, the splendour and grandeur of the caliph can't be matched by any emperor in this world. Gone are the days when caliphs mended shoes, ate dried bread and praised their Lord.

Zuhak: God forbid, if those days were ever to return.

Abdul Shams: We'll avenge the blood of **Usman** on the house of **Hashim**.

Yazid: Throw open the gates of the treasury to win our people's hearts and minds. Money removes the fear of God. Invite the entire city to a feast. Worry not, even if the treasury is emptied. Satiate every soldier and, if anyone remains churlish, kill him. I will buy faith and devotion with my wealth.

[*Hinda enters.*]

Yazid: **Hinda**, why did you bother to come at this hour?

Hinda: I've come to dissuade you from your plans. Promise me, in the name of your father, *Amir* **Mu'awiya**, that you won't ruin your faith, your honour, and your salvation. You're bent on killing the grandson of God's Messenger. How can you forget that he brought you the light of Islam; his sermons awakened your soul, and redeemed you from the dark pit of ignorance? He showered the sunlight of his grace upon you.

Yazid: Silence, **Hinda**!

Hinda: How can I remain silent? I can't watch you fall into the abyss of hellfire. Don't you realise, the Prophet's soul in Paradise would curse you for this injustice? You won't be able to show him your face on the Day of Judgement. Don't you see, you're closing the doors to your own salvation?

Yazid: **Hinda**, don't mix up matters of religion with affairs of state. My grandfather embraced Islam because it brought him wealth and esteem. I, too, refuse to accept Islam only as a means of salvation.

Hinda: *Amir*, please, for God's sake, don't utter such blasphemy. You know how easily Islam lifted the dark veil of ignorance from the Arab world. One man single-handedly wiped out the infidels. Could that be possible without God's will? Never! You know the Prophet loved **Hussain** so much that he let **Hussain** sit on his shoulders and play with his glorious beard. You want the forehead, which the Prophet kissed, to bow at your feet! By inviting **Hussain**'s wrath, you are sowing thorns in your own path. The caliphate belongs to the one chosen by the majority. It's not something you inherit. Go to Medina! Find out to whom the community wishes to assign this responsibility and then swear your allegiance to the one elected! If the community bestows this honour on you, you can happily live in Medina and serve Islam. But for God's sake, don't wreak havoc.

[*She leaves.*]

Yazid: Summon Saljuq **Rumi**.

[**Saljuq** comes and pays his respects.]

Yazid: I'm grateful to you for your unflinching loyalty to my late father. But, now I need you more than ever. Whom do you recommend as the Governor of Basra?

Rumi: May you live forever! In my opinion, it will be difficult for you to find anyone better than **Abdullah Bin Ziyad**.[7] **Ziyad**'s devotion to *Amir* **Mu'awiya** can never be forgotten. **Abdullah** is the son of that same father and an equally loyal slave of the family. Send him a messenger at once.

Yazid: I bear a grudge against **Ziyad**'s son. He hasn't kept me informed about the plans of the people of Basra. I'm convinced they will rebel against me.

[7] Premchand has referred to Ubaidullah Bin Ziyad as Abdullah Bin Ziyad in both Hindi and Urdu versions of the play. He is alternatively referred to in the play as Ziyad or Ibn Ziyad.

Rumi: Your misgivings about **Ziyad** are unfounded, *Ya Amir*. Your advisers won't come to you on their own. You must seek them out, plead with them, or offer generous concessions. Only those who want something from you will come to you uninvited. You won't get a better person than **Ziyad**'s son for this position.

Yazid: I'll think about it. (**Lifts his goblet of wine.**) **Zuhak**! Sing something sweet that may lift the worry that burdens my heart like a slab of stone.

Zuhak: As you wish!

[*He plays the daf as he sings.*]

Song

Weary physicians give up their endeavours,
Well-wishers raise their hands in prayers.
Loyalty is sought by the faithful,
But the fickle ones remain deceitful.
Their mantle from dust, they must save,
Li'l they know of the ordeals suffered in the grave.
They never stand by anything they say,
These cruel tormenters, who always betray.
Don't be surprised if they administer poison,
These physicians refuse to see reason.
Warn those who confide in others,
Unfeasible now is secrecy.
Who knows what they are up to next,
Idols these days claim Divinity.

Scene 2

[Time—Night. The Governor of Medina, **Waleed**, is seated in his court.]

Waleed: (**Soliloquy**) What a selfish man **Marwan** is! Though lower in rank, he tries to order me around. If I'd followed his advice, the entire Medina would have turned against me by now. He has always been hostile to the Prophet's family.

[*A Messenger enters.*]

Messenger: Ya *Amir*, here's a letter from **Yazid**, the Caliph.

Waleed: (Perplexed) **Yazid**, the Caliph! What happened to *Amir* **Mu'awiya**?

Messenger: This letter will apprise you of everything.

[*Hands over the letter to* ***Waleed.***]

Waleed: (After reading the letter.) May God rest *Amir* **Mu'awiya's** soul in Heaven! But I can't fathom how **Yazid** became the caliph. There hasn't been an assembly of tribal heads, and no one has offered allegiance to him. All hell will break loose when the news reaches Medina. **Hussain** will never accept **Yazid** as the caliph.

Messenger: (Giving him the second letter.) Your Excellency, read this one as well.

Waleed: (Takes the letter and reads it aloud.) "**Waleed**, the ruler of Medina is hereby directed to secure **Hussain's** allegiance as soon as he reads the letter. If **Hussain** refuses to swear the oath of allegiance, slay him and send his severed head to me."

[*He takes a deep breath and collapses on the ground.*]

Messenger: What are my orders?

Waleed: Go and wait outside! (**Soliloquy**) *Ya Allah*, may I never see the day when I've to treat the Prophet's grandson in this loathsome manner! **Waleed** is not such a heretic. He hasn't forgotten God and His Prophet. May these hands fall off before my sword lands on **Hussain's**

neck! I wish I had foreseen *Amir* **Mu'awiya**'s death and the troubles that were to follow. I'd have resigned and gone away. I don't want to see **Marwan**'s face, but it'll be catastrophic to go against his will now. He'll send every bit of news to **Yazid**. No one will believe me. A commander who fears his subordinates is worse than the subordinates. It's a thousand times better to graze camels in the forest than to be a minister whose slave is a close confidant of the king.

[*Summons his slave.*]

Slave: What is *Amir's* command?
Waleed: Go and summon **Marwan**.
Slave: As you command.

[*Exits.*]

Waleed: (**Soliloquy**) What a benevolent soul **Hussain** is! I've never heard him speak ill of anyone. He has never harmed anyone. How can I force him to offer his allegiance!

[*Marwan enters.*]

Marwan: Never send for me at such late hours of the night! My life is not so cheap. Why do you want to give rebels a chance to kill me by stealth?
Waleed: Why should you provoke anyone to kill you? The messenger's brought news of **Mu'awiya**'s death and this letter from **Yazid**. I want your counsel on the matter.

[*Gives him the letter.*]

Marwan: (After reading the letter.) Oh, **Mu'awiya**, your death was untimely! Your name will always shine in the annals of history! People will mourn you for a long time and recall your good deeds! It is good that **Yazid** has taken the reins of the caliphate into his own hands. I think we must summon **Hussain** right away.
Waleed: Do you think he will pledge his allegiance?

Marwan: Impossible. Asking him to do so is like asking him for his head. But the news of **Mu'awiya**'s death should not leak out.

Waleed: Let's think hard about all this.

Marwan: There's no need to think. If I were in your place, I wouldn't even ask for his allegiance. I'd immediately kill him. **Yazid** can never be at ease as long as **Hussain** lives. Remember, if the news of **Mu'awiya**'s death comes out, our life won't be safe either. You may be friendly with **Hussain**, but he'll not spare your life.

Waleed: Do you think he'll come here at this hour? He might get suspicious.

Marwan: If Hussain trusts you, he'll come even at this hour. But you must sharpen your sword and firm up your resolve. This is the time to act. If we support **Yazid** now, the star of our fame will shine bright.

Waleed: **Marwan**, I'm not **Yazid**'s slave, but a servant of the caliph. And a caliph is the one who is chosen by the community. Instead of sacrificing my religion and honour, I'd rather spend the rest of my life making copies of the Qur'an.

Marwan: *Ya Amir*, beware of **Yazid**'s wrath. It's in our interest to follow his order. That is our duty. Let's not get confused. Summon **Hussain** right away.

[*He calls the slave.*]

Slave: What are my orders, *Ya Amir*!

Marwan: Go and summon **Hussain-Bin-Ali**. Tell him that the *Amir* is waiting for him.

[*The slave exits.*]

Scene 3

[Time—Night. **Hussain** and **Abbas** are sitting in the mosque, talking. A lamp is lit.]

Hussain: When I consider how my *Nana* could, single-handedly, vanquish mighty rebellious kings and establish a grand caliphate, I'm convinced of God's hand in this. No mortal could accomplish that without God's Will. The empire of Alexander fell apart after his death, Caesar's kingdom barely survived after he died—they were not blessed by God's Will. They conquered nations under the spell of their greed. *Nana* raised the standard of Islam, and he succeeded.

Abbas: Who can ever doubt that he was the Messenger of God! Good heavens! Such deep darkness of ignorance had engulfed this country when the *Hazrat* raised the voice of Islam. It was indeed the voice of God that came through him, and captivated every listener's heart, as soon as it dropped into their ears. Followers of other faiths accuse Islam of spreading its message on the strength of the sword. If only they'd heard the *Hazrat's* voice! I can bet there isn't a single verse in the Qur'an which hints at wielding the sword to spread the message of Islam.

Hussain: But alas! The community has already begun to forget his preachings; that apostate occupying his revered seat drinks alcohol in full public view.

[*Entry of the slave.*]

Slave: May God bless you, O Prophet's grandson! The *Amir* has summoned you to discuss a matter of great urgency.

Abbas: But this is not the time for **Waleed's** court.

Slave: *Huzoor*, it's an urgent matter.

Hussain: Alright, you may leave. We'll be there on our way back home.

[*The slave exits.*]

Abbas: *Bhaijaan*! I'm baffled by this untimely summon. This is not the time for **Waleed's** court. Something seems wrong. Can you guess why they have called you?

Hussain: I suspect **Mu'awiya** is dead.

Abbas: You mean **Waleed** has summoned you to seek your allegiance to **Yazid**?

Hussain: Why would I pledge allegiance to **Yazid**? **Mu'awiya** signed a treaty under oath with *Bhaiyya Imam* **Hasan**[8] that he will not appoint a caliph from his progeny. After **Hasan**, I have the rightful claim to the caliphate. **Yazid**'s appointment as caliph after **Mu'awiya**'s death would be treason against Islam and me. **Yazid** is a sinful drunkard, a liar, a heretic who sits with dogs in his lap. I will never swear an oath of allegiance to him, even if I have to die for it.

Abbas: It's a grave matter. **Yazid** is capable of anything. I wish we'd got the news of **Mu'awiya**'s illness and death sooner.

[*The slave enters again.*]

Slave: *Huzoor*, why didn't you come? The *Amir* is waiting for you.

Hussain: Curse on you! Did you go back at all or return mid-way?

Slave: *Huzoor*, when I went back and informed the *Amir* that you'll come in a while, he was satisfied, but **Marwan** argued that **Hussain** would never come and was disobeying his orders. The *Amir* admonished him and told him that **Hussain** always keeps his word and does what he says.

Hussain: **Waleed** is an honourable man. You may go. I'll come in a while.

[*The slave leaves.*]

Abbas: Will you go?

Hussain: One should not suspect others' motives without a reason.

Abbas: *Bhaiyya*, may I be your ransom! I fear they might send you to prison.

Hussain: I trust **Waleed**. Even though he is a son of **Abu Sufiyan**, he is a pious and decent man.

Abbas: You may trust him, but I will never advise you to go there. If he betrays you in the dead of the night, no one will even hear your call for

[8] Hussain's elder brother with whom Mu'awiya entered into an agreement that Mu'awiya will rule as per Shariat and that he will not appoint any of his relatives as his successor to the caliphate—a promise he did not keep as he appointed his wayward son Yazid as the caliph.

help. You know how treacherous and sinful **Marwan** is. I keep away even from his shadow. I'm not going to let you go alone unless I'm convinced that the enemy will not touch you.

Hussain: Abbas, don't worry. I wield the power of Truth. Why only **Waleed**, the entire army of **Yazid** cannot harm me. If I call out for help, I'm sure thousands of slaves of God and devotees of the Prophet will rise in response. And even if they don't, I'm strong enough to kill a hundred of them. The Son of **Haider**[9] can't cower before such foxes. Come, let's pay a visit to *nana's* grave.

[*Both of them stand before the grave of Hazrat* **Muhammad**, *respectfully recite prayers and leave the mosque for home.*]

[9] Hussain's father, Hazrat Ali, was also known as Haider, which was literally means a lion.

Scene 4

[Time—Night. Waleed's court. Waleed and Marwan are seated.]

Marwan: He [Hussain] hasn't come. I warned you that he won't.

Waleed: He will come, sure he will. I trust his word.

Marwan: Is it possible that he has already come to know of *Amir*'s death and is busy gathering his companions to fight us?

[*Hussain Enters.* Waleed rises and comes forward to receive him at the gate. Marwan keeps sitting.]

Hussain: May God bless you! (Looking at Marwan seated there.) Consensus is better than discord, harmony better than conflict. Why've I been summoned?

Waleed: Forgive us for the inconvenience! You'll be sad to hear that *Amir* Mu'awiya has passed away.

Marwan: And Yazid, the Caliph, has commanded you to pledge your allegiance to him.

Hussain: It's improper for a man of my position to take an oath of allegiance in private. It neither suits me nor will it serve Yazid's purpose. It would be better to summon a general assembly, invite all the eminent and wise men of the city and propose the question of Yazid's allegiance in front of everyone. I'll be in attendance and will be the first to express my views.

Waleed: I agree. Indeed, if you pledge allegiance here, it will not serve Yazid's purpose. Some will believe it, others won't. And it will take a long time to establish the truth. So, should I call a meeting?

Marwan: *Amir*, I warn you, don't let him mislead you with his words. Don't let him leave here without securing his allegiance, or else you won't be able to get it until rivers of blood have been shed. This spark will consume the entire caliphate.

Waleed: Marwan, for God's sake, be silent!

Marwan: Hussain, as God is my witness, I'm not your enemy. I advise you as a friend: Pledge allegiance to Yazid so that you are not harmed. You must end this conflict and save the lives of thousands of innocent servants of God. The Caliph would be delighted to hear the news of

your allegiance. He will treat you in a way that nobody in the entire caliphate will be your equal! I assure you, I'll have your pensions and *jagir* doubled. You can live with honour at the feet of the Prophet in Medina.

Hussain: Enough **Marwan**! I haven't come here to listen to your friendly advice. You've never been a friend of *Ahl-i-Bait*. And even now, God will not be displeased if I dismiss your advice as treachery. Has Islam declined to the extent that the Prophet's grandson is being forced to pledge allegiance to **Yazid**?

Marwan: What objections do you have to his allegiance?

Hussain: He is a drunkard, a liar. He is treacherous, debauched, and barbaric. He insults clerics. Wherever he goes, he takes along a monkey dressed as a cleric riding an ass. I can never pledge allegiance to such a man.

Marwan: *Ya Amir*, will you get him to pledge allegiance or not?

Hussain: No one has authority over my allegiance.

Marwan: By God, you can't leave this place without swearing an oath of allegiance to **Yazid**. I'll kill you right away.

[*He draws his sword and moves forward.*]

Hussain: (Rebuking him sternly.) How dare you raise your sword at me? Back off. One step forward, and your wicked head will be squirming on the ground.

[*Abbas enters with thirty armed men brandishing their swords.*]

Abbas: (Leaping towards **Marwan**.) You cursed soul, take this; the gates of Hell have opened on you.

Hussain: (Coming between **Marwan** and **Abbas**.) **Abbas**, sheath your sword! My fight is with **Yazid**, not **Marwan**. I'm happy to see his loyalty to his master.

Abbas: How dare this wretch assault your holy being! By God, I will suck blood off him.

Hussain: *Bhaiyya*, control your anger. It's unlawful to kill a fellow Muslim.

Waleed: (To **Hussain**) I regret you were humiliated in my presence. May God punish me for this!

Hussain: **Waleed**, I'm destined to suffer the worse. This is just a prelude to the bigger battle that lies ahead. You and I may never meet again, so farewell! I'll never forget your courtesy and graciousness. I urge you, do not create further obstacles in my departure from here.

[*Both embrace each other and bid farewell.* ***Abbas*** *and thirty other men also leave.*]

Marwan: **Waleed**, I was humiliated because of you.

Waleed: How ungrateful! I saved your life; else your mortally wounded body would've been writhing on the ground at this moment.

Marwan: Today, you snatched away the caliphate from **Yazid** and handed it to **Hussain** on a platter. You are a progeny of **Abu Sufiyan**, still you've betrayed his family. In the eyes of God, you'll be held accountable for the massacre, imminent after your act of ignorance and generosity.

[*Marwan exits.*]

Scene 5

[Time—Midnight. **Hussain** and **Abbas** are sitting in the courtyard of the mosque.]

Abbas: Thank God, it's over. That scoundrel had almost killed you.

Hussain: You came in just in time. I'd no clue of their treacherous plans. Be prepared for the worse now. They won't let me stay in peace; I feel I'm destined to meet the same fate as *Bhaiyya* **Hasan.**

Abbas: God forbid!

Hussain: Medina is no longer safe for us. Living here would be like walking on a bed of thorns. *Bhaiyya*, it seems prophets' progenies are destined to be martyred. Maybe, even the prophets of God are unable to foresee the impending doom. How else could those enemies of Islam have succeeded *nana*? They pretend to be Muslims for their selfish gains. I'll ask the Prophet himself whether I should continue to live here in Medina or go away somewhere else. (Going to *Hazrat* **Muhammad's** grave.) O God, this is the resting place of your Prophet. And I'm his daughter's son. You are well aware of my state. I've always acted in accordance with your Will and the wishes of Your Prophet. Have mercy on me, and for the sake of the Holy Prophet, who rests in this grave, guide me as to what I should do!

[H*e weeps resting his head on the grave. Then he sits up with a start.*]

Abbas: *Bhaiyya*, let's leave this place now. People at home must be worried.

Hussain: No **Abbas**, I can't go back home now. *Nana* just appeared to me in my dream, embraced me and said, "In a few days from now, you'll be killed by men who claim to be Muslims, but actually aren't. I have chosen the desert of Karbala for your martyrdom. You will be thirsty when your enemies come to kill you, but they won't give you even a drop of water to drink. You have an exalted position here (in paradise) but that can't be attained without martyrdom." *Nana* disappeared after saying this.

Abbas: *Bhaiyya*, Oh, *Bhaiyya*, was this a dream or a prophecy!

[*Entry of Muhammad Han'afiya.*]

Muhammad: Hussain, what've you decided?

Hussain: It's God's Will that I be killed.

Muhammad: God alone knows His Will. I suggest you go to some other town and send out your envoys into the neighbouring areas. If people pledge allegiance to you, be thankful to God. Even if it turns out otherwise, your honour will remain unsullied. I only fear that you might get trapped at a place where you have foes in the guise of friends. No blow is as lethal as a stab in the back; no serpent as dangerous as the one in your bosom; no ear as receptive as that of a wall; no rival as terrifying as a betrayal. Beware of them.

Hussain: Which place would you advise me to repair to?

Muhammad: In my view, there is no place better than Mecca. If the community pledges allegiance to you, there'd be nothing better! Else, the hills and valleys will serve as fortresses, and you'll live a life of freedom with the help of a few supporters. God willing, soon, people will lose interest in **Yazid** and turn to you.

Hussain: Should I leave my family behind?

Muhammad: Not at all! Take everyone along.

Hussain: Please keep me abreast of the situation here.

Muhammad: Rest assured.

[*Muhammad embraces Hussain and leaves.*]

Abbas: *Bhaiyya*[10] let's go home now—or do you wish to stay awake the whole night?

Hussain: Abbas, I've already told you, I'm not going back home.

Abbas: Allow me to say something. Do you consider me a true friend?

Hussain: I swear upon God, there is no better friend than you in the whole world.

[10] According to popular narrative, **Abbas** never called **Hussain** "*Bhaiyya*." He always addressed **Hussain** as *Aaqa* (Lord). In fact, when **Abbas** was dying, **Hussain** expressed his desire that **Abbas** should call him *Bhaiyya* at least once. Such was **Abbas**'s reverence and devotion for his half-brother.

Abbas: Why don't you swear allegiance to **Yazid** for now?[11] God is Almighty. **Yazid** may die a natural death after some time, and then you will automatically get the caliphate. You may bide your time patiently during his rule, just as you did during **Mu'awiya's** reign. It's also possible that, weary of **Yazid's** oppression, people may rebel against him, and you may get a chance. Patience eases all troubles.

Hussain: What are you saying, Abbas? If, I swear allegiance to **Yazid** out of fear, I would be the worst enemy of Islam. How will I show my face to the Prophet, my father and *Bhaiyya* **Hasan**? *Abbajaan* accepted martyrdom but did not swear allegiance to **Mu'awiya**. *Bhaiyya* also deemed it unlawful. Why should I tarnish my family's name? An honourable death is far better than a life without honour.

Abbas: (mesmerised) I swear to God, this is not **Hussain's** voice; the Prophet speaks through you. And these are not **Hussain's** words; these are **Ali's** words. *Bhaiyya*, God has blessed you with wisdom. I'm your servant. Please forgive me if my words caused you hurt.

Hussain: (Embracing **Abbas**.) Abbas, may I earn God's wrath, if I think ill of you. Your advice was well-meant. I don't doubt that in the least. But you're wrong to imagine that my oath of allegiance will douse the flame of vengeance that sears **Yazid's** heart. It's just a ploy to kill me. Had he known I'd accept the oath of allegiance, he would've thought of something else.

Abbas: If this be his plan, I swear upon the Holy Book, I'll shed my own blood and strike with my sword until both my hands are severed.

[*Entry of **Zainab**, **Shahr Banu**, and other family members.*]

Zainab: **Abbas**, don't utter such words of despair! (**To Hussain**) *Bhaiyya*, I urge you, give up your plans; stay on in Medina near the Prophet's grave. Don't let yourself be blamed for the collapse of Islam.

[11] There is no historical evidence that **Abbas**, **Zainab**, or anyone from the close family of **Hussain** even vaguely suggested that *Imam* **Hussain** should pledge an oath of allegiance to **Yazid**. To the contrary, when at Karbala, **Zainab** once asked **Hussain** if there was no way at all to avoid the war. Hussain said, "Yes, there is!" Zainab was glad to hear that and wanted to know what it was. Hussain said that war could be avoided if he agreed to pledge allegiance to **Yazid**. To this **Zainab** said, it can and should never happen and that she was ready to face every calamity that came her way before and after **Hussain's** killing.

Hussain: **Zainab**, please keep such thoughts away! So long as there is Heaven above and the earth below, I can't pledge allegiance to **Yazid**. Do you think I'm in the wrong?

Zainab: No *Bhaiyya*, you're not in the wrong. God will never let His Prophet's grandson go on the wrong path. But you know how full of guiles this world is. What if people rebel against you?

Hussain: Sister, one can survive the contempt of the entire world but not of his own faith. You're worried that my dissent will cause schism in Islam, but you must understand that Truth is better than accord. Accord without the Truth is like a body without the soul. Righteousness is the essence of a community; no community can survive for long without it. I have already made up my mind. Bid me farewell. My allegiance to **Yazid** will tarnish the honour of Islam, my martyrdom will restore it. I'll sacrifice myself for the glory of Islam.

Shahr Banu: (Sobbing) Do you want to separate us from yourself?

Ali Akbar: *Abbajaan*, if martyrdom is the only solution, why are we denied that honour?

Muslim: Ya *Amir*, the object of our life is to submit ourselves at your feet. If you don't ask us to come with you, we'll compel you to take us along.

Ali Akbar: [12]*Abba*, I always take up my position behind you when we pray. How will I perform *namaz* if you leave us behind?

Zainab: *Bhaiyya*, is there no hope left for us? Is there no one in all of Medina who can lay down his life to protect the Prophet's grandson, the honour of the Prophet's daughters? Is there no one willing die for the sake of Truth? The light that emanated from this city illumined the whole world. Has that light of Truth gone out so soon? Why don't you send messengers to Hijaz and Yemen?

Hussain: Alas **Zainab**! God has other plans. There is no peace for me in Medina now. It's only due to **Waleed**'s kindness that I stand here today; Else, **Yazid**'s armies would've surrounded me by now. I must leave Medina before dawn. **Yazid** has nothing against my family; he only fears me. Bid me farewell. I'm sure he'll not trouble you.

[12] In the Hindi text, this is spoken by Ali Asghar. In the Urdu text by Ali Akbar. Here, I have followed the Urdu text. As per the history of Karbala, Ali Asghar (the youngest child of *Imam* Hussain) was only six-months old and was killed in Karbala by Hurmula when *Imam* Hussain brought him before Yazid's army and asked for water for the infant dying of thirst.

Unlike **Yazid**, the followers of Islam still have some shame left in them. Their blood would boil to see the defilement of the Prophet's women folk.

Zainab: *Bhaiyya*, this is impossible. We will come along. If the son of Islam will save the honour of Islam by his valour, we will also elevate its glory with our forbearance, endurance and tolerance. *Jihad* is unlawful for woman, but we know how to die when the time comes. I swear by the Holy Prophet, you'll not see tears in our eyes, or hear us cry, and our hearts will not mourn. You want to save the honour of Islam by dying for Truth; how can we sully the image of Islam by living under a sinful and evil leader?

[*On the road, a small contingent of soldiers is seen approaching.*]

Hussain: Abbas, are these **Yazid's** men? Has **Waleed** also betrayed us? Oh, we don't even have our swords with us. O God, have mercy upon us!

Abbas: I swear by the Holy Book, these scoundrels dare not come near you.

Zainab: *Bhaiyya* (To **Hussain**), please step aside.

Hussain: Don't worry **Zainab**! I'll show them how valiantly **Ali's** son embraces death.

[*Abbas goes ahead and speaks to the commander of the army*]

Abbas: Commander, whose misfortune compels you to come near *Hazrat* **Hussain**?

Commander: *Ya Hazrat*, we have been asked to flag march in the city to keep an eye on the movements of rebels.

Hussain: I must leave without any further delay. Let me bid farewell to *Ammajan*. (On **Fatima's** grave) O mother, your unfortunate son, whom you raised and nourished with love, is parting from you today, and he may never see you again! (Weeps)

[*Entry of the residents of Medina.*]

All: *Ya Amir*, why are you depriving us of your company? We will not leave you. We would rather endure the ordeals of exile in your company

than suffer the tyranny of a sinful and oppressive caliph. You are the "sun" of the Prophet's family. Deprived of its light, how will we protect ourselves against the dreadful beasts in the dark? Who will show us the right path? Who will offer us guidance? Don't leave us behind! (Wailing).

Hussain: Friends, I'm not leaving of my own will. It is my destiny that takes me away. I can't bear to see the streets of Medina turn red with the blood of Muslims. I must protect my beloved city from this catastrophe. My parting advice to you is, preserve the honour of Islam. Don't betray your people for the lure of wealth and money! There is no greater sin in the eyes of God than this. I may not get to see Medina and these faces again. Yes, I may never see the faces of these elders again, who were once companions and supporters of my *Nana,* and many of whom carried me in their arms, when I was a child. Brothers, I'm too frail to express the waves of grief and sorrow surging in me. The thought of leaving the soil of Medina breaks my heart. Darkness descends before my eyes, as I part from you. But I'm helpless. It's the Will of God and His Prophet that the sapling of Islam be watered with my blood; that the Prophet's harvest blossoms with the blood of his own grandson. I have no choice in the matter but to submit to the Will of God.

Citizens: Ya *Amir*, please don't leave us. Oh, *Amir*! Oh, grandson of the Prophet of God! Who will give us the strength to survive? How can we stay calm? If we don't cry today, which day do we save our tears for? Can there be a worse calamity than this?

Hussain (AT THE GRAVE OF **Muhammad**): Farewell, O Prophet of God! Your son is in deep misery. Help him.

The world has forsaken me alas,
Your grandson cannot find solace
Your servant cannot find reprieve anywhere,
My *maula,* there is no relief, anywhere
No sorrow, no torture spares me now
Guide me to your resting place somehow
There is no respite in the world we dwell
Your slave is here to bid you farewell,
Call me back, if you want to save;
Nana! Hide your grandson in your grave.

[*At the grave of his brother [Hasan]*].

Hear O brother, Shabbir departs
You have found rest in *Amma's* proximity
Our graves will now be miles apart
Let's see where I am driven by my destiny.

I don't want to risk even an ant's life. I appeal to my kin, my womenfolk, and my friends, do not grieve for me. I go where God Wills.

Abbas: Ya *Hazrat*, for God's sake, don't be so harsh on us! We will never part from you, so long as we live.

Zainab: *Bhaiyya*, may I die for you! If you leave the womenfolk behind, you won't find them alive when you come back. Your three delicate flowers—your daughters—are wilting in grief. **Shahr Banu**'s condition is no secret to you. Medina will be deserted without you, and the walls of our house will tear us asunder. Can the daughters of the Prophet of God betray their chief in times of trouble? Don't disgrace us with the blot of this infamy. We'd rather starve with you than enjoy sweet delicacies without you! Our bodies may suffer, but our hearts will be content.

Ali Akbar: *Abba*, we won't let you face this tribulation alone. We will partake in it. If we stay back, who will see the sheen of our lances? To whom shall we show our valour? No, we won't let you feast on this grief alone.

Abdullah Bin Hasan: [13]*Ammu*, allow me to ride with you on your horse and hold the reins; I'll make it gallop so fast that even the wind won't be able to catch our dust.

Hussain: Oh, what can I do if I'm destined to see my loved ones suffer in pain? If God Wills that my garden is ruined before my eyes, what can I do about it? Dear God, stand witness to how mercilessly the Prophet's progeny are being sacrificed for the honour of Islam!

[13] In the Hindi text, Ali Asghar says this. I have followed the Urdu text here.

Scene 6

[Time—Evening. A house in the city of Kufa. **Abdullah**, **Qamar**, and **Waheb** are in conversation.[14]]

Abdullah: What a calamity! The soldiers of the Syrian Army are arresting the city dwellers and presenting them before **Ziyad**.[15] They are being forced to pledge allegiance to Yazid.

Qamar: But why do they agree?

Abdullah: What else can they do? The lure of estate and titles has weaned away the majority of *Amirs* and the Nobles. What can the poor people do? If they don't pledge allegiance, they are beaten up and banished. Preparations are on to initiate a stern action against a handful of prominent men, who have refused to pledge allegiance to **Yazid**. But **Ziyad** wants a civil war in Kufa. That's why he hasn't taken any strict action so far.

Qamar: **Yazid** has no rightful claim to the caliphate; he is claiming it by wielding his sword. As per the *Sharia*, **Hussain** is our caliph.

Abdullah: That's quite obvious. But you know the people here. At first they make such a hue and cry as though they are prepared to sacrifice their lives for the *Imam*, but bribe them a little, and all their enthusiasm evaporates. Except for a few, everyone else is taking an oath of allegiance to **Yazid**.

Qamar: Are we also going to face this ordeal?

Abdullah: That's what worries me. I can't think of a way out.

Qamar: What is there to think of? Don't pledge allegiance to **Yazid** at any cost.

Abdullah: It's not a matter of personal choice.

Qamar: What will happen?

Abdullah: Our stipends will be withheld.

Qamar: Stipends weigh nothing against faith.

[14] According to the popular narrative, **Waheb** was a Christian who was travelling through Karbala with his newly wed wife and after watching **Hussain's** plight, fought alongside him and was killed. Premchand has a different take on this as he shows the family as Muslims living in Kufa.

[15] **Ubaidullah Bin Ziyad** is alternatively referred in short as **Bin Ziyad** or **Ziyad**.

Abdullah: Our *jagir*, though not large, helps us survive. It will be immediately confiscated. How we toiled to plant our orchard! Can we bear to see others enjoying the fruits of our labour? I swear by the Holy Book, my orchard is the envy of the rich and the mighty.

Qamar: If faith has to be traded for the orchard, it'd be a sin to even look at it.

Abdullah: Qamar, the matter is not as simple as you imagine. People kill each other for property and wealth; brothers turn enemies for it. The wealth creates a rift between father and son, and husband and wife. If people could forsake it so easily, the world would turn into Paradise.

Qamar: True. But when it comes to faith, it is not just wealth, even life has no worth. Worldly assets will forsake us one day, but faith will remain with us forever.

Abdullah: If we are banished, our house will be confiscated. It was built only last year. We will have to wander in villages and forests like Bedouins. Do you consider exile a trivial matter?

Qamar: People have abandoned empires, offered up their heads, and gone to the gallows with a smile to protect their faith. Faith has always conquered the world in the past, and it will continue to do so in future.

Abdullah: Waheb, do you hear your *Ammajan*?

Waheb: Yes, and I am proud to be the son of such an upright mother. In fact, I was almost ready to pledge allegiance, after I saw eminent men like Qais, Hajjaaj, and Ashas doing so, but Mother, your words have given me courage. Now I'm prepared to face all adversities.

Abdullah: Waheb, faith is for old people like us who've had their share of worldly pleasures. This world belongs to the youth. You've just been married; your wife's bridal bangles are still untarnished. You know she is the daughter of a rich man and raised with great care; do you want her to suffer the miseries of exile? Qamar and I will proceed on Hajj; you will inherit my wealth and property and I'll be content that my hard work did not go waste. I'll be deeply disappointed if you followed your mother's advice. Go and ask Naseema first.

Waheb: I needn't consult anyone in matters of my faith. I firmly believe that *Hazrat* Hussain is the rightful claimant to the caliphate. I'll never swear an oath of allegiance to Yazid. I don't care whether I lose my wealth or life.

Qamar: *Beta,* may your mother die for you! Your words have filled my heart with joy. I must be the most fortunate mother in the entire world today. But son, your *Abbajaan* is right. You should ask **Naseema** as well. I don't want to impose our faith on her which will make her wander in the forests. You must honour her wishes.

Waheb: I'll ask her if you insist. But, I must warn you that I won't be a slave to her consent. She can happily stay back, if she prefers the luxuries of life over faith, but I'll never accept the disgrace of allegiance.

[*Opens the door and leaves*]

Scene 7

[A village in Arabia—there is a grand temple, a pond with concrete *ghats*, a pleasant garden; birds and animals such as peacocks, deer, and cows are wandering around. **Sahas Rai** and his brothers are conducting the evening *havan* and prayer near the pond.]

Song (Eulogy)
May faith in God be dearer than life
May the Omnipotent, Omnipresent God
Bring joy and benevolence in life.
May the Allayer of Fear, Shiva, protect the masses,
Immortal, miraculous knowledge may He possess!
O God! may Thee be my only support
May faith in God be dearer than life;
May in strength, resolve, and valour, we never fail
May True Faith on this earth forever prevail.
May the sound of the Vedas unite us all
May in wealth, wisdom and art, our nation excel.
May the stream of love surge and swell;
May faith in God be dearer than life.
May Bharat be our life and soul,
May one and all serve it well.
May its honour be dear to us like our own,
May with its light, all eyes illumine;
May we devote to it our lives
May faith in God be dearer than life.
[*Sahas Rai is praying.*]

Dear God! Give us the strength to fulfil our vows. May the descendants of **Ashwatthama** follow the path of service to humanity! May each drop of our blood be shed in defending the feeble; May we lay down our lives for Truth and Justice. And Lord! May the day come soon when, liberated from our penance, we may return to the holy land, Bharat, and redeem our lives by serving the *rishis*. O Lord! Give us wisdom so that we may stay steadfast on the path of right action; May the glory of our fame erase the blot of infamy brought upon our race by our ancestor. When we travel

to our country, may our faces radiate with pride; may our countrymen happily welcome us back and may we spend our life there not in contempt, but with dignity!

[*Entry of a servant.*]

Servant: Your honour, the news has just arrived that **Yazid**, the son of *Amir* **Mu'awiya**, has usurped the caliphate.

Sahas Rai: **Yazid** has usurped the caliphate! How is that possible? What right does he have over the caliphate? It should've gone to *Hazrat* **Hussain**, the son of **Ali**.

Harjas Rai: Yes, indeed, this is **Hussain's** right. **Mu'awiya** himself had signed a treaty to this effect earlier.

Singh Dutt: This must be **Yazid's** mischief. I know he is an arrogant, greedy and lecherous man. He is always sunken in lust. We can never accept the caliphate of such a wicked man.

Punya Raj: (To the servant) Any news about **Hussain's** plans?

Servant: O friend of the poor! He has migrated from Medina to Mecca.

Singh Dutt: That's his mistake; he should have promptly mobilised the people of Medina, killed the Governor appointed by **Yazid** and declared himself the caliph. By leaving Medina, he seems to have conceded his own defeat.

Ram Singh: **Hussain** is a pious man. He doesn't want to spill the blood of his own brothers.

Dhruva Dutt: Killing human beings is a deadly sin. No matter how grave a crisis, a man of God never wavers in his commitment to nonviolence.

Bhiru dutt: violence for the cause of justice is no sin. killing people is better than killing Justice.

Sahas Rai: If **Yazid** has usurped the caliphate, it's our duty to side with Justice. Of course, **Yazid** is powerful, but we can't disregard our own commitments. We should send an envoy to him and then decide on the way forward.

Singh Dutt: When it's evident that he has committed injustice, why delay matters by sending him a messenger? We must wage war against him right away. Injustice seldom fails to find tricks to validate itself.

Harjas Rai: Why are we already talking of war? Arms should be taken up after exhausting all other political options. Besides, our financial

situation does not allow us to rush to the battlefield for the sake of our pride. Arms should be the last resort.

Singh Dutt: The purpose of wealth is to protect the soul.

Harjas Rai: Soul is a big word. Wealth only protects *dharma*.

Ram Singh: *Dharma* cannot be protected by shedding blood but by kindness, humility, truth, compassion, and cooperation. We've personally experienced this.

Singh Dutt: In politics, these virtues succeed when they are backed by weapons. Else, they count for nothing more than the war booty.

Sahas Rai: We neither wish to show off our valour and statecraft nor are we tethered to non-violence. We have vowed to crush injustice by all possible means. Hence, we should first find out **Yazid's** plans by sending him a messenger. We will decide our course of action after that. **Ram Singh** and **Bhiru Dutt** may kindly proceed on their journey this very evening.

Act 2

Scene 1

[**Hussain**'s caravan reaches a place near Mecca. The hillocks of Mecca are visible in the distance. People are waiting at the entrance of the mosque at Kaaba to welcome **Hussain**.]

Hussain: Here we are, in the holy city of Mecca, the sacred place where our Prophet was born. These hills, where he offered his prayers, were purified by the touch of his forehead and illumined by his tears. **Abbas**, the very sight of Kaaba makes my heart pound—as though a lost traveller is returning home after ages.

[*All alight from their respective horses.*]

Zuber: Welcome, *Hazrat* **Hussain**, please set your foot on the soil of our city and illumine it.

[**Hussain** embraces everyone.]

Hussain: I'm grateful to you for your hospitality.

Zuber: May our lives be sacrificed for you! You have brought a glow to our eyes and a lilt of joy into our hearts. As God is our witness, you bear an uncanny resemblance to the Prophet. Welcome! The city of Kaaba is waiting for you with open arms.

[Everyone enters the mosque. Women proceed towards the Harem.]

Abdullah: [16]Ammu, can we see our house from these hills?

Hussain: No, son, we are far away from home. Have you eaten anything?

Abdullah: No. I was hungry a while ago but now my appetite has vanished.

Hussain: You should stay here forever then.

Habeeb: *Ya Hazrat*, you should also rest a little. We have a long-cherished desire to offer namaz following your lead.

[16] In the Hindi text, Ali Asghar says this. Here, the Urdu text has been followed.

[All except **Zuber** and **Abbas** go off to perform ablution.]

Hussain: Well, **Zuber**, what is the opinion of the people here?

Zuber: Please don't ask me that. I'm embarrassed to speak of the situation here. Although they all swear they will die for you and appear keen to pledge allegiance to you, their hearts are not pure.

Hussain: Do you suspect betrayal?

Zuber: I can't say. There is no evidence of it so far. But we know from the grapevine, their intentions are not unsullied. It will be no surprise if **Yazid** lures them with *jagir* and wealth in the days to come. They'll surely betray you then. I'll advise you to return to Medina.

Hussain: I don't sense any sign of betrayal. There is a diffidence in betrayal, which I don't see on anyone's face here. Betrayal invites doubt just as sympathy invites trust.

Zuber: But you also know that, like a chameleon, betrayal never appears in its true colours. It kisses hands, extends a very warm welcome and showers sweetness like sugar . . .

Abbas: . . . advises in the guise of a friend, pushes others into the stream while it stands safe on the bank, laughs but reduces others to tears, and always appears in the garb of a pious man.

Zuber: By God, you are pointing the finger at me. You wouldn't suspect me of betrayal if only you knew how much regard I have for *Hazrat* **Hussain**. Had I been on the side of **Yazid**, I would've been rich by now. If I had intended to pledge allegiance to him, I wouldn't have remained quiet so far. By casting aspersions on me, you've broken my heart.

Hussain: **Abbas**, your words put me to shame. **Zuber** has always refrained from politics and never interferes in anybody's affairs. People often begin to suspect such solitary men. You probably don't realise that betrayal prefers company over solitude.

[Entry of **Habeeb**.]

Habeeb: *Ya Hazrat*, I just came to know that **Yazid** has been informed of your arrival here, and **Marwan** is being sent as the Governor of Mecca.

Hussain: It appears that **Marwan** will chase me to death. He'll not let me remain at peace, even if I were to cover myself under the veil of this earth.

Abbas: His misfortune brings him here. I swear upon the Holy Book, he will not go back alive. Though bloodshed is prohibited on the soil of the Kaaba, if it is of a blackguard like him, it is lawful even here.

Habeeb: Waleed has been removed. The Governor of this city is moving to Medina.

Hussain: I regret Waleed's removal. He was a true friend of Islam. I knew that such an honest and pious man would have no place in Yazid's court. Abbas, Waleed's removal forebodes my death.

Habeeb: I've also heard that Yazid's son, who is your well-wisher, has been placed under house arrest. He'd openly opposed Yazid's unjust actions and even declared to Yazid that he had no rightful claim to the caliphate. Yazid was furious at this. He wanted to kill his son, but Rumi saved him.

Abbas: A tyrant like Yazid deserves to be killed.

Hussain: Abbas, this is the second sign of God's will. It's Yazid's misfortune that destiny has chosen him to be the cause of my martyrdom. No man happily incarcerates his son. Who can be more wretched than the one humiliated by his son?

Zuber: I think you'll have no dearth of followers if you set out towards Kufa.

Habeeb: *Ya Hazrat*, I belong to a place near Kufa and I know the ways of the people there. You should be wary of them as deception runs in their blood. They will send messages proclaiming their allegiance to you. Messenger after messenger will arrive to mount pressure on you. They will write letters pleading that the entire town is ready to die for you. But never trust their words. Never make the mistake of going to Kufa. I urge you not to step out of Kaaba; you'll be safe from troubles, so long as you are here. The people of Kufa are devoid of loyalty.

Hussain: I know the people of Kufa well. Thank you for alerting me.

Habeeb: I've come here for this purpose alone. Please, reject their pleas, even if they fall at your feet crying. They are no doubt brave, religious, and hospitable, but they are a slave to wealth. This singular flaw has eclipsed all their merits. The lure of stipend and jagir and the fear of its withdrawal can make them commit acts not expected of human beings.

Hussain: Habeeb, I'll always keep your counsel in mind.

Zuber: **Habeeb**, you are right about the denizens of Kufa. Since you're a friend of *Hazrat* **Hussain**, I've no qualms in telling you that the people of Mecca are no better. Their words and actions cannot be trusted. Kufa still has a large population, and if they decide to join hands, they can wreak havoc on **Yazid's** army. On the contrary, Mecca's small population, though loyal, cannot deliver much. Two thousand Syrian soldiers are enough to overpower them. Goodness or evil doesn't lie in any land or community. An army that demonstrates valour in one battle could well abandon the battlefield at the sight of the enemy in another. The fault lies not in the army but its Commander. If he is brave, he can instil the spirit of confidence and courage in his army. If infirm, he can dampen its valour. *Ya Hazrat*, you are the Prophet's grandson. God has blessed you with the same wisdom and honour. How can they remain uninfluenced in your presence? Why only Kufa, you can even set Truth on the right path. In my view, you needn't doubt anyone at all.

Abbas: **Zuber**, no matter how good, a counsel fails to serve its purpose if it reeks of expediency.

Hussain: If you wish to seek allegiance from the people of Medina, you may do so. I will not stand in your way.

Zuber: *Ya Hazrat*, as God is my witness, I've never ever considered myself worthy of the caliphate. I'll never pledge allegiance to **Yazid**. But may God deny me salvation if I ever fostered any ambition to challenge you.

Habeeb: *Ya Imam*, please come to the courtyard, the *azan* has been called. People are waiting for you to lead the prayer.

[Everyone proceeds to perform *namaz*.]

Scene 2

[Yazid's court—Yazid, Zuhak, Rumi, Hur, and other members of the court are in attendance. Two dancing girls are serving wine.]

Yazid: Can any of you guess where Heaven is?

Hur: The Prophet said it's on the fourth sky.

Shams: I don't believe in fourth-fifth skies. Heaven is in God's grace and kindness.

Rumi: God's grace is not a graveyard where the dead can be buried. Heaven must be where people are buried.

Yazid: Master, you've also missed the mark. You can try later. Now it's Zuhak's turn. Tell me, *Sheikhji* where is Heaven?

Zuhak: Shall I tell you? In this glass of wine.

Yazid: You are close. Try harder.

Zuhak: In the wine-cup served by a charming damsel.

Yazid: Bravo! Give me a clap! That exactly is Heaven. Intoxicating wine and the delicate hands of a dainty damsel—for this Paradise, I'd sacrifice thousands of heavens offered by the Prophet. Now tell me, where is Hell?

Hur: *Ya* Caliph, it's not proper for you to blaspheme against our righteous faith.

Yazid: Hur, you've spoiled all the fun. I swear on my eyes, you don't deserve a place in my assembly. You've turned all pleasure to dust. Any mention of faith is forbidden in front of Yazid. Faith is for those *mullahs* who languish in mosques craving for the meat-bones. Faith is for those who, driven by their misfortunes, have lost interest in life; for those who are needy, helpless, famished, enslaved, and flogged. Faith is for the old men, widows and bankrupt traders. Their faith wipes their tears and comforts their hearts. Faith is not for kings who do not depend for salvation on the mercy of the Prophet of God. Their salvation is in their own hands. So, friends, who is our spiritual master?

Zuhak: The master of the wine-house.

Yazid: Well said! Our master is the cupbearer, from whose merciful hands we receive this bliss. Now, who is going to answer my next question? Where is Hell?

Shams: In the potbelly of a moneylender.
Yazid: Incorrect!
Rumi: In the Caliph's fury!
Yazid: (With a smile) Your answer is worthy of reward but incorrect.
Qais: In the *namaz* of a *mullah* who, even while rubbing his forehead on the ground, keeps looking around in search of bread.
Yazid: By God, what an answer, but it's also incorrect.
Zuhak: In the displeasure of a ravishing maid!
Yazid: Correct! Absolutely correct! You've made my day. (To the dancing girls) **Nargis**, reward him for this answer. **Zuhra**, kiss *Sheikhji's* hands. Sing a song which has the fragrance, intoxication and warmth of wine!
Nargis: I will ask the Caliph for a big reward today.

[*Sings*]

O cupbearer, throw open the tavern door today
I'll bless thee, fill my goblet to the brim today
Impassioned, ecstatic, elated, swaying
A cloud comes swinging towards the tavern today.
Shower kisses for my beauty, O stone-hearted,
Don't torment me with your scorn today!
See the force of my eyes brimming with love
It makes my lover fall at my feet today.
May God have mercy on my fortunes
My lovelorn heart finds no solace today.
Bismil! Aren't you afraid of the preacher?
You dare go to the mosque, drunken today.

[*Entry of a messenger.*]

Messenger: *Assalamalaikum Ya Imam*, **Bin Ziyad** has sent me to you from Kufa.
Yazid: Have you brought a letter?
Messenger: I didn't bring a letter, lest the rebels should capture me on the way.
Yazid: What message have you got?

Messenger: **Bin Ziyad** has informed that the people of Kufa are not willing to pledge allegiance to *Huzoor* and may rebel. They are inviting **Hussain Bin Ali** to offer their allegiance to him. Three messengers have already been sent, but **Hussain** has not obliged. Many noblemen of the city are going to him now to persuade him.

Yazid: Tell **Bin Ziyad** to kill those who refuse to pledge allegiance to me. He doesn't need my permission.

Rumi: Clemency towards a foe is futile. **Ziyad** should use his sword without further ado.

Hur: I fear it'll cause a rebellion.

Rumi: Punishment and force are the two most effective tools of governance. I've spent my life managing the affairs of kingdoms and I've found no better way of dealing with these matters. Even God needed Hell to establish His reign. The fear of hell keeps the world going. God's mercy and justice give hope to the poor and the helpless. Fear alone is the foundation of His Sultanate. Mercy ruins the stature of a sultanate. People become churlish, and anarchy reigns supreme. Ask **Ziyad** to massacre people in ways that may inspire terror in their hearts. Pierce them with arrows, let dogs tear them asunder, have them skinned alive, burn them with red-hot iron rods, and have the tongues of those who utter **Hussain's** name pulled out from their roots! A punishment that is not harsh is no punishment.

Yazid: I affirm this order. Go away, and don't bother me again with these trifles!

[*The messenger leaves.*]

Yazid: **Hussain's** arrival in Kufa augurs the end of my life. I swear by my eyes, if I could have my way, he will not be able to enter Kufa.

Shams: Strange, that the people of Kufa sent three messengers, but **Hussain** did not yield.

Yazid: He must be preparing for it. Had **Waleed** not been the son of my uncle, I would've gouged his eyes out. He deliberately allowed **Hussain** to go to Mecca. Would I've faced this difficulty had he killed **Hussain** in Medina? Who can go and arrest **Hussain**?

Hur: I'm at your service.

Yazid: If you can accomplish this, I'll grant you a province that will be the envy of Paradise. Take along a thousand of the best soldiers from my army, and when the sun rises tomorrow, you should have traversed a distance of 20 *farsakh*.

Hur: *Inshaallah!* God Willing!

Yazid: Search for **Hussain** like a hunter seeks out his prey! Look for him everywhere—on barren roads, in blind valleys, dense forests, and deserts. You can relax during the day, but at night, keep away sleep from your eyes like a pious man shoos away dogs from his door.

Hur: I'll follow your command. (**Aside**) **Yazid** is sinful, profane and a drunkard, but he has managed to hold the caliphate together. Allegiance to **Hussain** would create fissures among Muslims. It will cause bloodshed and wipe out the caliphate. My first and foremost duty is to defend the caliphate. Who and what kind of caliph should take over can be decided later.

[*Hur leaves.*]

Yazid: **Nargis**, the devout among the drunkards has left. Now sing a *ghazal* that may fill us with joy. I wish there'd been no worries of the Sultanate. I would've spent my entire life drinking cups of wine from your hands.

Nargis: A nightingale trembling with fear cannot sing songs of joy. If it's on a tree, it'll fly away; if trapped in a cage, it'll die. I've seen gardens becoming desolate due to fear. Kufa is my country, and I know the people of Kufa well. By inflicting atrocities on them, you are inviting **Hussain** to go there. If **Hussain** enters Kufa, you'll lose Iraq forever. You may win over the people of Kufa with concessions, *jagirs*, recompense and a pat on their backs but not with brutality. If you don't believe me, try your force on me. Even if your ten fingers turn into ten swords, you cannot force me to sing a single note. Kufa is in trouble, I can't stay here any longer.

[*She leaves.*]

Scene 3

[The court of Kufa—the **Qazi** and other officials are in attendance. The **Qazi** has a turban on his head; he is wearing a gown, with a belt around his waist. The soldiers are wearing long *kurtas*. There is a mosque at a short distance from the court. Petitions are being heard. Some people bring in a nobleman in handcuffs.]

Qazi: What is his crime?

One Soldier: *Huzoor*! this man was standing in the mosque, urging people not to join the army.

Qazi: Is there any witness?

A Man: *Huzoor*, I heard it with my own ears.

Qazi: Take him away and kill him.

Accused: *Huzoor,* I'm innocent. These two soldiers were lifting bales of cloth from my shop without paying for it. I snatched it back from them, and they arrested me. *Huzoor,* you can inquire from the shopkeepers around my shop. An innocent man is being falsely implicated. My children will be ruined.

Qazi: Take him away.

Accused: (Shouting) O Prophet of God, You must decide between me and this killer on the Day of Judgement.

[*Two soldiers take him away. There are voices coming from the mosque.*]

Voices: O God, we have come here to seek your help. Please deliver us from the shackles of oppressors.

[*Four soldiers bring in around fifteen to twenty handcuffed men, flogging them all the way.*]

Qazi: What's the charge against them?

One Solider: *Huzoor*, these men have been accused of sending messengers to **Hussain.**

Qazi: It's a serious charge. Any witness?

One Soldier: We can't find witnesses, *Huzoor.* No one is willing to testify as they are afraid of the townsmen.

Qazi: Put them under arrest and present them again after you find a witness.

[*The soldiers take them away. Then, two soldiers bring a woman whose wrists are tied up.*]

Qazi: What's the allegation against her?

One Solider: *Huzoor,* when we were arresting people who have just been taken away, she called the Caliph a tyrant.

Qazi: Any witness?

One Woman: *Huzoor*, may God never show her face again to anyone; she has a foul tongue.

Qazi: Confiscate her house and pull out her hair.

Accused Woman: Your honour, may I turn blind if I've uttered anything against anyone! This woman is my rival, my husband's other wife. She has implicated me out of jealousy. God knows that I'm innocent.

Qazi: Take her away!

A Youth: (Crying) *Ya Qazi*, please don't be so harsh on my mother. You are also your mother's son. How would you feel if someone ordered the pulling out of your mother's hair?

Qazi: Catch hold of this cursed soul and give him 200 lashes.

[*Some soldiers bring in a group of people tied up together with a rope.*]

Qazi: Which of God's Commands have they disobeyed?

One Soldier: *Huzoor*, these people were lamenting in the mosque opposite the court.

Qazi: Weeping is a sin; gouge their eyes out.

[*Hundreds of men come charging from the mosque towards the court with swords and spears in their hands and surround the court.*]

Suleman: Kill this cursed traitor! Occupying the highest seat of law, he is slaughtering Justice.

Musa: No, Arrest him! We will burn him alive.

[*Many people attack the Qazi.*]

Qazi: Have you forgotten, it's unlawful according to the Sharia to kill a Muslim?

Suleman: You're not a Muslim! Make sure none of those soldiers run away.

One Soldier: *Ya* **Suleman**, what's our fault? If we don't obey the command of our master, how will we earn our livelihood?

Musa: Hack the belly that forces you to inflict pain on God's creatures.

[*Soldiers and rebels fight.*]

Suleman: Brothers, you've given these scoundrels the treatment they deserved but don't forget, **Ziyad** will surely relay this news to **Yazid**. The Syrian army would certainly come after us. Are you prepared to face it?

One Voice: Even if we aren't at this moment, we'll prepare ourselves for it.

Suleman: We haven't yet pledged allegiance to **Yazid** and we never will. We sent many messengers to *Imam* **Hussain** but he hasn't come. What should we do now?

Haani: A few of our prominent men should go and bring him along.

Mukhtar: We've betrayed the Prophet's family so often that we aren't trusted anymore. I fear that *Hazrat* **Hussain** will never come here.

Suleman: We must try one last time. Let's go and plead with him; tell him that we are being killed, looted, our women are being disgraced. When **Hussain** learns of our plight, he will surely sympathise with us; he can't be so heartless.

Mukhtar: But if out of pity, he comes here and you don't support him, you'll be sinners in the eyes of God. The predicament we face today is the consequence of our past actions. If we commit the same blunder again, we won't be able to show our face in this world and hereafter. Think hard; would you be able to abide by your decisions? If you're convinced about your decision, I promise you that I'll bring him here. But if your hearts are infirm, if you're not prepared to sacrifice your lives, and you fear succumbing to temptations, then you'd better let him stay in Mecca.

Hajjaaj: We swear to God, we'll sacrifice our lives at his feet.

Haaris: We'll wipe out the blot of past ignominy.

Mukhtar: Take oath, with God as your witness, that you will keep your word.

Many People: (In one voice) *Allah-o-Akbar*! We'll lay down our lives for **Hussain**.

Suleman: Then let me write him a letter.

[*Writes a letter.*]

Hajjaaj: You must mention that we seek his mercy and assistance in the name of his grandfather **Muhammad Mustafa**.

Haaris: Also, write that he has not come despite countless appeals from us. If he doesn't come even now, we'll seek answer from him on the Day of Judgement in the presence of the Prophet of God.

Hajjaaj: And we'll plead then that **Hussain** was harsh on us and kept quiet while we were being persecuted. How will he explain himself, and what face will he show to the Prophet?

Qais: One thousand young men of my tribe are waiting for **Hussain** to come and lead them.

Hajjaaj: **Ziyad** might gather a few people by the end of the day.

Haaris: He'll keep quiet for now. He'll attack us only after **Yazid's** army arrives.

Shimr: Why don't we finish him off right away? It'll be the end of the story.

Haaris: Of course, as though he'd still be there waiting for you!

Suleman: I've written out the entire account. Who will carry this letter to *Hazrat* Hussain?

Shimr: I can do that.

Suleman: Who among you has a camel that never tires and can run like **Ziyad** runs towards the war booty?

A young man: I've one which can fetch us a reply in three days. It's my duty to offer this service; no one else is as oppressed as I am. My mother's hair has just been pulled out at the *Qazi's* command.

Suleman: Surely, you have the right. Take this letter and set off for Mecca even before our sweat dries.

[*The young man leaves.*]

Suleman: Let's go and offer *namaz* in the mosque. **Hussain's** reply will reach us in three days, and it'll take *Hazrat* **Hussain** at least a month to arrive. **Ziyad** too won't come back before that. We should spend this

period preparing ourselves because Yazid's caliphate will be decided in Kufa. He'll either ascend the throne of the caliphate or descend into a tomb where the ignorant ones will pray. Kufa will be remembered in the annals of history if it succeeds in restoring the caliphate to the Prophet's grandson.

[*Everyone leaves.*]

Scene 4

[Place—Kaaba, men's sitting room. **Hussain, Zuber, Abbas, Muslim, Ali Asghar,** and others are in attendance.]

Hussain: This is their fifth envoy. More than a thousand letters have come, and no less than fifteen thousand men have signed them.

Muslim: And all these men are leaders of large tribes. **Suleman, Haaris, Hajjaaj, Shimr, Mukhtar,** and **Haani** are not ordinary folks.

Zuber: I've already submitted that the whole of Iraq is eager to pledge allegiance to you.

Hussain: I can't trust them yet. God knows why I suspect them of betrayal. Besides, I can't ignore what **Habeeb** said when he was leaving.

Muslim: Forgive my insolence. Your suspicion is baseless. What other proof of their loyalty do you want to see? They pledge, promise and write clearly that they're ready with twenty thousand brave men waiting to join you. What more do you expect?

Zuber: I, for one, wouldn't waste a moment after such proofs.

Abbas: I won't trust these *Kufis,* even if all twenty thousand of them came here and swore allegiance to you. I'll stay far away from them, even if they swear with the Qur'an in their hands.

[*Tariq enters*]

Tariq: *Assalamalaikum ya* **Hussain!**

Hussain: God bless you! Where are you coming from?

Tariq: The oppressed people of Kufa have sent me to beg you to listen to their plight. I left after sunset yesterday, reached here around sunset and must leave before sunrise tomorrow.

Muslim: Did you ride the wind or the throne of Solomon? I swear upon the Holy Prophet, I can offer five thousand *dinars* for that horse.

Tariq: *Huzoor,* it's not a horse but a camel that never tires during the journey.

[*Hands over the letter to* ***Hussain.***]

Hussain: (Reading the letter) Oh, what a heart-rending letter! They have poured their hearts out. What a poignant statement to make, "if you don't come, we'll seek justice from you in the hereafter." Ah! They have sought help in my *nana's* name. In his name, I can lay down my life as readily as a greedy soul sells his faith. Such tyranny! Such repression! Plunder in broad daylight! Brazen defilement of women! Execution of people for trifles! **Abbas**, I can't bear it anymore. I may never have gone there to seek allegiance, but if I don't go now to help the oppressed, my sense of honour will never let me rest in peace.

Muslim: Ya *Bhaiyya*, please don't grieve. I'll go along with this messenger and apprise you of the situation there. You may decide after you get my letter.

Hussain: By then, God knows how many more cruelties **Yazid** would've inflicted on those poor people. I'll have to bear the guilt of all their sufferings. Imagine, when they plead on the Day of Judgement, what face will I show *Nana*? What answers will I have when Nana will ask me why I watched in silence while his people were being tortured? Was my life so dear to me? **Muslim**, I must come with you.

Muslim: I'm convinced that a man like **Suleman** can never betray.

Zuber: Never.

Muslim: But I still think I should go there first and satisfy myself.[17]

Hussain: All right **Muslim**, you may leave tomorrow morning. Take five slaves along with you as you may need them during the journey. I'm writing a letter for the people of Kufa; please give it to them. *Inshaallah*, we'll soon meet again. Be on guard there. Stay in disguise and be with someone whom you can trust. Send me a letter every day.

Muslim: Pray that I receive God's guidance. I'm carrying a huge responsibility on my shoulders. I'll proceed after the morning prayers. **Tariq's** camel will also get some rest in the meantime.

[17] Between this speech of Muslim bin-Aqueel and the following speech of Hussain, the Hindi text has the following dialogues which have been deleted in the Urdu text followed here:

Hussain: Children often have a premonition of what is to come. Let's leave this decision to Ali Asghar. Why, son, should I go along with Muslim or stay back and wait for his letter?

Ali Asghar: No *Abbajaan*, for now, let Chacha Muslim go. If you decide to go, many days of preparations will be required. What if they lose hope in the meantime?

Abbas: *Son*, may you live long. You have taken a good decision. May God save you from evil eyes!

[*Hussain writes and hands over a letter to Muslim. Muslim proceeds towards the door.*]

Hussain: (Walks with **Muslim** to see him off at the door.) It's a dark night.

Muslim: The light of hope shines in our hearts.

Hussain (Embracing **Muslim**.) Okay, *Bhaiyya*. Go! My heart will go with you. I know what is going to happen. I've already received the tidings, but I cannot alter destiny. I don't know what to make of it? If it's ordained by God, why does it come in disguise, hiding like those who betray? Does God not send His command openly? Why does He target His helpless creatures from behind the bushes? Even as I ask you to go, my heart wishes to hold you back. I wish you'd refused. But destiny has silenced you. So, goodbye! I hope God will grant us martyrdom together.

[*Muslim exits. Hussain enters the harem wiping tears from his eyes.*]

Zainab: *Bhaiyya*, did another messenger come today?

Hussain: Yes, **Zainab**! **Yazid** is inflicting tyranny on the people of Kufa. I must go there. Though I've sent **Muslim** today, I want to be there soon myself.

Zainab: Why have you suddenly changed your mind? At least, wait till you hear from **Muslim**. I won't let you go at any cost. Do you remember the dream that you had at *Nana's* grave?

Hussain: Yes, **Zainab**! I clearly remember it and that's the reason why I'm in a hurry to go. That dream unravelled my destiny to me. Is it possible to run away from one's destiny? Can God's command be averted? I can give up the desire for the caliphate, but I can't compromise my honour. I can't look the other way and ignore the helpless people.

Shahr Banu: Why do you bring God and destiny into everything? Why do you want to go there knowing that the people of Kufa will betray you? Your destiny is not dragging you there. It's certainly your duty to assist the helpless. Why merely yours, it's the duty of every human being! But, who will take care of your family? A man's duty towards his family comes before everything else.

Hussain: Well, read this letter first and then tell me if my decision is correct or not (hands over the letter to **Shahr Banu**). What does it prove?

If even half the number of those who have signed this letter join me, I'll make **Yazid**'s life miserable. The caliphate is such an exalted position in Islam that dying for it is no disgrace.[18] If I miss this chance to punish a sinful and wicked man, it'd be timidity of the first order. When the house is on fire, it is foolish to jump into it, but it is greater foolishness not to douse it if water is available.

Sakeena: But *Abbajaan,* the month of *Muharram* is approaching. *Phuphijaan* has a long cherished desire to be here in Mecca during this month.

Hussain: I don't plan to take you all with me.

Zainab: *Bhaiyya,* is it possible that you go there, and we stay back here! God knows what might happen next.

Sakeena: *Abbajaan* said it in jest and all of you took it seriously.

Kulsoom: I don't know about anyone else, but I'm definitely coming with you. I wish to reprimand **Yazid** at least once.

Sakeena: I can't wait to write panegyrics on our victory.

Shahr Banu: You think if we come with you, you'll face troubles. But tell me, if the enemy attacked us here, would you be at peace?

Zainab: **Asghar** will die pining for you.

Sakeena: People will say that the Prophet's sons sacrificed their lives for Islam, but his daughters sat safely in the *harem.* We won't endure this disgrace.

Hussain: (Soliloquy) **Shahr Banu** is right. If the enemy attacked the *harem,* what will I be able to do from there? Leaving them here is as perilous as leaving a chink in one's own fortress. (Aloud) I'll not force you to stay back. You may come with me, if you so wish.

[18] This is not in line with the dominant accounts of Karbala. **Hussain** or any other progeny of the Prophet never made any violent claims to the caliphate.

Scene 5

[**Yazid**'s court. **Mu'awiya** [Yazid's son] is in chains. Four slaves surround him with naked swords. **Saljuq Rumi** is seated near **Yazid**'s throne.]

Mu'awiya: (Aside) Such cruelty on the Prophet's grandson! I'll be avenged for this. After all, a son must atone for his father's sins. But will my blood suffice to erase the stains of this tyranny? Not at all. Our family will be wiped out, and not a soul will survive to offer *fatiha* on our graves. Oh! Such cruelty on the Prophet's grandson! Instead of licking the dust at their feet, such calamity is being inflicted on them. O Holy Prophet, I'm innocent. (Aloud) Do you know *Maulana* Rumi, how long will I have to wait for my father?

Rumi: He'll be here any moment. He is in a meeting with **Ziyad**.

Mu'awiya: My father wants me to join this battle. If it were for overthrowing a tyrant to restore Truth, I'd have been the first to draw my sword; the first to raise the flag of *jihad*; but I'll never unsheathe my sword to slay Truth; my tongue will never stop condemning such an act, even if it were pulled out for it. The Prophet of God brought the light of guidance upon the world. He laid the foundation of the nation of Islam. His seat cannot go to a man who defiles faith and defames humanity, even if that man happens to be my father. The caliph of Islam should be a man who is the pride of mankind, who is faithful, virtuous, wise, benevolent, a shining example for humanity, and respected by all for his virtues and actions—not feared for his might and oppression.

[*Yazid, Zuhak, Ziyad, Sharik, Shams, and others enter.*]

Yazid: Look gentlemen, here's my worthy son who considers his father filthier than a dog. He is the only thorn in my flowerbed; the only fly in my platter of delicacies. I've summoned all of you here to reason with him and convince him. Please tell him that a caliph needs statecraft more than faith. Faith is for *mullahs*, not for kings. Statecraft and faith are two contraries that cannot coexist in one person.

Mu'awiya: If one is required to murder faith in order to gain power, I'd prefer a mendicant's begging bowl. Statecraft seeks to preserve Justice and Truth, not throttle them.

Yazid: Do you hear him? He is giving me lessons in statecraft. His lunacy has not waned yet. Take him back to the dungeon. It's dangerous to free such a man, even if he is the heir to the throne. Sometimes one must save a man from himself. A mad man, if not bridled, bites into his own flesh. (The slave takes **Mu'awiya** away.) **Ziyad**, now tell me your tale. I cannot pardon you unless you prove that you ran away from Kufa, not to save your own life, but in my interest. At a time like this, when the city is simmering with rebellion, each officer of the Sultanate—from the governor of a province to the gatekeeper of the royal palace—must stand his ground and fight to the finish, even if his body is riddled with arrows.

Ziyad: *Ya* Caliph, I am aware of my duties. I've come here to forewarn you that if you use force at this volatile moment, the situation will go out of hand. When the threat of a rival claimant looms over a kingdom, the king ought to shower kindness on his subjects and win them over to his side. A rebellious subject is like a straw that readily catches fire from a spark. I suggest that we try to win people's hearts and minds; shower such favours upon them that they can't raise their heads again.

Yazid: My army can stamp out the rebellion.

Rumi: Force alone can save the sultanate. That is what is needed now more than ever before.

Zuhak: A king's subjects are like his wife. You may surrender to her, caress her feet, shower affections on her but the moment you see her talking to a rival, your sword comes out of the scabbard and strikes at the rival or the wife, or both.

Rumi: Indeed! Wreak havoc on Kufa. Set it ablaze.

Yazid: Destroy Kufa! Declare curfew as soon as you get back. Keep one thousand soldiers ready, kill all the rebels and arrest their leaders at once. Order the army to flag march in the city everyday. Silence them. Even poets should not be allowed to recite poems. Forbid sermons in mosques. No child should be allowed to go to school. Humiliate

the rich, disgrace the famous as much as you can. Insult is the best punishment.

[*Entry of a messenger.*]

Shams: Where have you come from?

Messenger: My *salaam* to the Caliph. The Governor of Mecca has dispatched me to deliver the news that **Hussain's** cousin, **Muslim** has left for Kufa.

Yazid: Have you brought a letter?

Messenger: The Governor, fearing my arrest, did not give me any letter.

Yazid: **Ziyad**, leave for Kufa at once! You may ride the swiftest of my horses. If only I could, I'd have sent you astride the wind.

Ziyad: I'll offer my life to you, *Ya* Caliph! Please excuse me from this campaign and be so kind as to depute **Zuhak** or **Shams** for this work.

Yazid: You mean I should pluck out one of my eyes?

Rumi: What is it that you want?

Ziyad: My humble submission is that, under the present circumstances, the public should be treated with kindness; tribal heads should be given *jagirs* and their stipends should be increased. Care should be provided to orphans and widows; I've closely observed the conduct of the people of Kufa. They're not men of honour, brave or loyal. Barring a few, all others are greedy and selfish. They neither keep their promises nor die for their honour. Brothers readily kill each other for petty gains. It's easier to placate dogs with a bone than with a stick. They all fall upon it and rend each other to pieces. A few thousand dinars will not empty the Caliph's treasury, but spending it will put the entire province in our control. The use of force works in favour of the feeble like twisting a straw. Instead of exercising force on the straw, we can use the wind to blow it away. An army can crush another army but not a nation.

Rumi: I favour the use of force and will continue do so.

Sharik: A good healer alters his medicine according to his patient's ailment. Haven't you heard of the healer who always prescribed the cutting open of the veins? He was once in the process of doing this with an eccentric fellow who pressed the throat of the healer so hard that

his tongue popped out. The policies of governance must alter in accordance with the situation.

Yazid: **Ziyad**, I give you a free hand in this matter. I, too, have a suspicion that **Hussain**'s promises might lure the people of Kufa. Do what you will, but beware! If we lose Kufa, you'll lose your life. Do you accept this condition?

Ziyad: Yes, I do!

Yazid: Remind **Hur** not to pray too much and to search **Muslim** like a miser searches for his lost hen. Your generosity should not seem flattery, a sign of weakness. It should retain the grandeur of authority. Go now.

[*Ziyad, Sharik, and the messenger leave.*]

Yazid: **Zuhak**, summon **Nargis**, let's forget our sorrows. (Taking the goblet of wine from the slave.) This is to celebrate my victory.

Rumi: Congratulations! (Aside) **Ziyad** will sink you and then you will know the real taste of generosity.

[*Nargis enters seated on Zuhak's back.*]

Yazid: Bravo, **Nargis**, Well done! What a mule! Think of a simile for this, **Shams**.

Shams: Crown on the head of a rooster!

Rumi: A fly sitting on the dung!

Nargis: (Jumping off **Zuhak**'s neck.) *Lahaul-vala-quwwat*! Curse be upon you!

Yazid: Wallah, what a delightful simile! **Nargis**, this calls for an intoxicating *ghazal*. Sing! May God let your lovers sacrifice their lives for you!

[*Nargis sings.*]

Someone's tantrums on the night of reunion
Someone's efforts to please the cross one
Let none eye my heart with lustful eyes

Lest impudence be shown by the arrows of someone!
If only you could hold on to yourself
I'll relate to you the tale of someone.
O hunter, you should also come and watch
Whose life is being taken, anon.
A thought came to him, and he joined in
After her funeral procession had begun.
O 'Bismil' when rough weather befalls
No one comes to offer company, none.

Scene 6

[Time—Evening. The sun has set. The city of Kufa—many camel drivers are entering the city with loads of camel-feed.]

First: *Yaar*, let's take the narrow lane. If a soldier catches us, we'll suffer months of forced labour.

Second: Yes, yes, they are terrible. If they have nothing to load, they take a free ride for 20–30 miles. Such things never happened before. Forget your wages, get kicked and abused instead.

Third: These are tricks to fleece money. God knows where these dogs came from and joined the army. High and low, all are in the same league.

Fourth: If you go to the *Amir* with a complaint, you are showered with more abuses. It's a strangely precarious situation. This curse will not go off our heads unless *Hazrat* **Hussain** arrives.

[*Muslim comes from behind.*]

Muslim: Well, friends! Is there a kind soul in the city who can provide shelter to this traveller?

First: Don't ask about the rich here! There are a couple of them, but none pays full wages. But yes, they do abuse less.

Muslim: Isn't there a single true Muslim in the entire city?

Second: *Janab*, we are not the city's *Qazi*. But we've heard that **Mukhtar** is a pious man. Though he's not affluent, God has given him courage. No poor man leaves his place unfed.

Third: I've heard that his *jagir* has been confiscated?

Muslim: But why?

Third: Because he hasn't yet pledged allegiance to **Yazid**.

Muslim: Can anyone take me to his house?

Fourth: *Janab*, It is time to milk the camels! We don't have the time. Go straight, and you'll see a red mosque. His house is right next to it.

Muslim: May God bless you! I'll now be able to get there.

[***Mukhtar's house near the mosque.***]

Muslim: (To an old man) Isn't this the house of **Mukhtar**?

Old Man: Yes. This poor soul is called **Mukhtar**. Please come in, where are you coming from?

Muslim: From the Holy City of Mecca.

Mukhtar (Embracing **Muslim**.) Forgive me! An old man's eyesight is as weak as the remorse of a drunkard. It's such an auspicious day today when *Hazrat* **Hussain** has answered our prayers. I hope he is well?

Muslim: (Getting off the horse.) *Yes*, God has been kind.

Mukhtar: God knows, you've brightened up my eyes. By when does the *Hazrat* plan to come here?

Muslim: (Takes out the letter and hands it over to **Mukhtar**.) He's written down the details here.

Mukhtar: (Touches the letter reverentially to his chest and eyes.) What good fortune! The *Hazrat's* presence will redeem the city. I will pledge my allegiance to him. There can't be any doubt about my friends' intentions as well.

[*Calls his slave.*]

Slave: What makes my Master summon me?

Mukhtar: Go right away to the houses of **Haaris, Hajjaaj, Suleman, Shimr, Qais, Shees**, and **Haani** and fetch their responses to my note.

[*The slave takes the note and leaves.*]

Mukhtar: I used to think that I'll go mad with joy when I receive a messenger from *Hazrat* **Hussain**, but here I am, sitting in silence before you. A poet has rightly said, "the joy of waiting is greater than the joy of union." The thought of Paradise is so alluring, but once you ascend there, it may not feel as great. Come, let's offer *namaz*. After that, you should rest a little. We'll not get to relax after that.

[*Both of them enter the house. **Muslim** and **Mukhtar** are seated.*]

Muslim: How many people are ready to pledge allegiance?

Mukhtar: Well, all of them would be here in a while. If **Yazid's** tyranny and excesses continue, the number of our supporters will increase

with each passing day. But if he starts appeasing people, our success won't come easy.

[*Entry of Suleman.*]

Suleman: *Assalamalaikum Hazrat* **Muslim**, our gloomy eyes are lit up by the news of your arrival. A hundred men of my tribe are eager to pledge allegiance, and they are those who would not hesitate to give up their lives to keep their word.

Muslim: May God grant you salvation! Ask them to gather in the central mosque tomorrow. *Bhaiyya* was so sad to read your letter. He'd decided to spend his life by the grave of the Prophet, but your last letter unsettled him. He couldn't turn his face away from the oppressed seeking his help.

[*Shees, Qais, Shimr, Sa'ad, and Hajjaaj enter.*]

Shees: *Assalamalaikum Hazrat*, your presence gives comfort to my heart.

Qais: *Assalamalaikum*, your arrival has rejuvenated our desolate houses.

Hajjaaj: *Assalamalaikum*, you have brought back life into a lifeless body.

Muslim: (Embracing everyone) *Hazrat Imam* **Hussain** has sent me to you with this letter.

[*Shimr picks up the letter and reads it aloud, as everyone listens with bowed head.*]

Shees: It's our good fortune. I was still at the *dastarkhwan* when I got the news. I came running to have a glimpse of you.

Hajjaaj: I've just returned from Basra. I had not even rested for a moment when I got the news of your arrival. Many people of my tribe are waiting outside to offer their oath of allegiance.

Muslim: Call them over to the *Jama Masjid* tomorrow.

Shimr: When shall we see the day when we'll be free from the clutches of **Yazid's** tyranny?

Shees: *Hazrat* **Hussain** has responded to the call of the poor. The days of our misery will now be over.

Qais: Our stars will now shine. I am keen to see **Ziyad's** head under my feet.

Shimr: I have taken a vow to blacken **Ziyad's** face and haul him around the city.

Qais: I wish to chop **Yazid's** nose and place it in his hand.

[*Entry of Haani, Kaseer, and Ashas.*]

Haani: May God bless you, *Ya* brother of **Hussain.**

Qais: May Almighty God keep you under His shadow. We've been waiting for you.

Muslim: My revered brother has sent with me this letter for your gratification.

[***Haani** picks up the letter and touches it to his eyes. He then puts on his spectacles and reads.*]

Shimr: Now, I'll take **Ziyad** to task.

Qais: I'll put chilli powder in **Yazid's** eyes and watch him suffer.

Muslim: You may call your tribesmen to the *Jama Masjid* tomorrow. Do you think you will be able to gather four thousand men?

Shees: May God stop me from lying; it should be ten times the number.

Haani: The grace of the Prophet's grandson is matchless. Can you find such charm, manners, and forbearance anywhere else?

Qais: Look at **Yazid.** He looks like a savage.

Hajjaaj: **Ziyad** is almost like a camel-driver.

Muslim: So, tomorrow's congregation at the *Jama Masjid* is decided then.

Shimr: Let's go and prepare to gather our tribesmen so that even those who are not here may join in.

[*Everyone leaves.*]

Muslim: **(Soliloquy)** All these are eminent chieftains of Kufa. We'll definitely win, and, for once, destiny will be defeated. If we secure the allegiance of twenty thousand men, who can stop **Hussain** from attaining the seat of the caliphate? **Hussain** will be the Caliph.

Scene 7

[Several shopkeepers are chatting in a square in Kufa.]

First Man: Did you hear? *Hazrat* **Hussain** is arriving today.

Second Man: Yes, there was a huge gathering at **Mukhtar**'s house yesterday. Someone from Mecca has brought the news of his arrival.

Third Man: May he come soon! We will somehow get rid of these oppressors! Though I've already pledged allegiance to **Yazid**, I'll withdraw it as soon as the *Hazrat* arrives.

Fourth Man: They say he is coming with a lot of preparations. He has infantry, cavalry, camels loaded with tents, and so on with him.

First Man: Let's shut down the shops and go there. Whatever was to be sold has been sold already. It's time we worried about the hereafter. (Surprised) Oh, where are these sounds of drums coming from?

Second Man: He may have arrived.

[*All start running. A procession led by* **Ziyad** *appears.* **Ziyad** *then takes up his position on a raised platform.*]

Many Voices: Congratulations, *Ya Hazrat* **Hussain**, Congratulations!

Ziyad: Friends, I'm not **Hussain**. I'm a petty slave of **Hussain**, ready to sacrifice myself at the feet of the Holy Prophet, your humble servant **Bin Ziyad**.

One Voice: It's **Ziyad**, the cursed **Ziyad**.

Second: Drag him down the pulpit, bring this traitor down.

Third: Aim your arrows at him! Silence this tyrant forever.

Fourth: Be quiet, be quiet! Let's listen to what he has to say?

Ziyad: If you think I'm a tyrant, you may happily aim your arrows at me, pelt stones at me, and even kill me. I stand here before you. Tyrants deserve to be killed, and to tolerate tyranny is dishonourable. I'm elated that you have the pride and the courage to oppose oppression.

Many Voices: Listen, listen. Quiet!

Ziyad: It's true—I don't fear dignity and pride, for these are the virtues that can save a nation from the clutches of a tyrant. For God's sake, don't disregard the tyranny which awakened your sense of honour! This is what I wanted, this is what **Yazid** wanted and I thank God that

our wish has been granted. Now we're convinced that we can trust you. There're times when you need a teacher to be cruel. A positive, pious and venerable soul like *Hazrat* **Hussain** couldn't have taught you this lesson. Only vile and selfish men like us could accomplish this. If we had ill intentions, I wouldn't have stood here proclaiming the relief measures that I'm going to announce right away. The announcement will prove the veracity of my words.

Many Voices: Quiet, Quiet; Listen, listen!

Ziyad: **Yazid**, the Caliph, decrees that every adult man of Kufa and Basra will receive five hundred *dinars* per annum from the treasury.

Many Voices: *Subhanallah, subhanallah*!

Ziyad: And that every adult woman of Kufa and Basra will receive two hundred *dirhams* until the time of her *nikah.*

Many Voices: *Subhanallah, Subhanallah*!

Ziyad: And every widow will receive hundred *dirhams* annually until she dies or marries again.

Many Voices: *Subhanallah, Subhanallah*!

Ziyad: Here is the decree from the Caliph in my hand. Anyone, who does not believe me, can come and see it for himself. One hundred *dirhams* annually have been fixed for every orphan until he attains adulthood. Every young man and woman, at the time of their marriage, will be given a one-time gift of a thousand *dirhams.*

Many Voices: May Caliph **Yazid** live long! How generous of him!

Ziyad: Listen further, and then decide whether **Yazid** is a tyrant or a kind ruler. He's ordered that every chieftain should be given land on the river bank as far as he can shoot his arrow.

Many Voices: We agree to pledge allegiance to **Yazid. Yazid** is our Caliph!

Ziyad: No, **Yazid** doesn't want to bribe you for your allegiance. Allegiance is your choice; you can pledge it to anyone you desire. He also doesn't want any conflict with **Hussain.** He's ordered the waiver of taxes on the river banks.

Many Voices: We accept **Yazid** as our caliph.

Ziyad: No, no, **Yazid** will never seize **Hussain's** right. **Hussain** is the master—a learned, pious and devout man; **Yazid** has no claim to any of these virtues. His only distinction is that he knows how to oppress people that too at a critical time like this, when there is no one to

protect their lives and property, and everyone is busy staking a claim to their rights.

Many Voices: The tyrant **Yazid** is our only caliph. We pledge our allegiance to him from the bottom of our heart.

Ziyad: Think, and think hard. What would've happened to our country if, like other claimants to the caliphate, **Yazid**, too, had withdrawn into a corner, worrying about allegiance? Who would've protected your lives and property? Who would've saved the country from external attacks and internal feuds? Who would've provided security on the roads and ports? Who would've been responsible for the honour of our women? Does the man who singularly brought such benefits to his people and his country at a critical time, the man who did not wait to become the caliph to take upon himself such heavy tasks, deserve to be called accursed, a heretic? Should he be openly abused?

One Voice: We repent it. May God forgive our sins!

Shimr: We've been unjust to **Yazid**, the Caliph.

Ziyad: You certainly have been unfair to him. I can say without fear that a man like him deserved better treatment. **Yazid** and I respect **Hussain** no less than anyone else. If you accept him as your caliph, congratulations! We are pleased and so is our God. **Yazid** will be the first to pledge allegiance to him, and I will be the next. The Holy Prophet laid down the condition of election to the caliphate. But that does not apply to **Hussain**.

Qais: It does. The condition applies to everyone.

Ziyad: If that is so, what better occasion shall we have than this for the election? You elect whoever you want as caliph by your own free will, without any fear or favour. I will go by the majority and inform **Yazid**.

From one side: We accept **Yazid** as our caliph.

From another side: We pledge our allegiance to **Yazid**.

From the third side: **Yazid, Yazid, Yazid!**

Ziyad: Quiet! Who considers **Hussain** as caliph?

[*There is absolute silence.*]

Ziyad: You know, **Yazid** is not a pious man.

Many Voices: We don't need a pious man.

Ziyad: **Yazid** is not learned, virtuous, or a Hafiz.

Many Voices: We don't need a learned, and a virtuous man.

Hajjaaj: He is so generous!

Shimr: No other caliph has been so generous.

Shees: A pious man is never generous.

Ashas: *Aji,* don't ask. Just look at the *mullahs* in the mosques. They fight to death over a few crumbs of bread.

Ziyad: Well, you have elected **Yazid** as your caliph, but what if the people of *Hijaz, Misr,* and Yemen elect someone else?

Many Voices: We will lay down our lives for our caliph, **Yazid.**

Ziyad: It's likely that they will elect *Hazrat* **Hussain** as their caliph. Will you still keep your word?

Many Voices: We will. None other than **Yazid** can be our caliph.

Ziyad: I've heard that *Hazrat* **Hussain** has sent his cousin **Muslim** to secure allegiance for himself. And he is probably also coming here. **Yazid** would rather retreat to a corner and remember God than ignite the fire of discord in Islam. There's still time. You should reflect on it.

Shimr: We have reflected enough.

Hajjaaj: Why is **Hussain** lusting after the caliphate? Why can't he sit back and remember God?

Qais: **Hussain** can never treat us the way he would treat the people of Medina.

Shees: His arrival spells doom.

Ziyad: If you want peace in the country, beware! No one should go to the *Jama Masjid* today. **Hussain** is most welcome to come here. We will pay our respects to him and serve him, but if he stakes his claim to the caliphate, we'll need your help in maintaining peace in the kingdom. That will be the moment of your trial, and the future of Islam will depend on how you fare in it.

[*He descends from the pulpit.*]

Shees: It was a blunder to write letters to **Hussain.**

Shimr: I will not go to the *Jama Masjid* now.

Qais: Who wants to go there!

Shees: If only these measures had been announced earlier. Why would one have written those letters?

Shimr: Let the overfed people fret over faith! The worries of this world are enough for us.

[*Everyone leaves.*]

Scene 8

[Time—9 in the night. Kufa's *Jama Masjid*. **Muslim**, **Mukhtar**, **Suleman**, and **Haani** are seated. A few men are sitting at the gate.]

Suleman: People haven't turned up yet!

Haani: There's little hope now.

Muslim: **Ziyad's** return today has wreaked havoc. He must have lured them with false promises.

Suleman: This is called politics.

Muslim: These tyrants have divorced faith from politics. Previous caliphs kept them united and purged politics of treachery.

Mukhtar: *Hazrat* **Muslim**, please commence your speech. People may start trickling in then.

[*Muslim goes to the pulpit and begins his speech.*]

Muslim: Thank God for giving us the opportunity today to elect as caliph, a revered soul who is a true friend of Islam . . .

[*Many people rush into the mosque.*]

One Man: Enough of it, *Hazrat* **Muslim**, please hold your tongue.

Second Man: *Janab*, please leave quietly for Medina. **Yazid** is our caliph, **Yazid** is our *Imam*.

Suleman: I know that **Ziyad** has stroked your backs and lured you with promises of green pastures. But beware, there is a trap beneath all that green grass.

[*Stones and pebbles start raining in from outside.*]

One Man: Kill him, kill him. He is the enemy of the people.

Suleman: Tyrants! This is the house of God. Be mindful of its sanctity.

Second Man: This is no house of God; this is the den of the enemies of Islam.

Third Man: Kill him, kill him! He hasn't stopped speaking yet.

[*Suleman is injured and falls down.* **Muslim** *comes out and addresses them.*]

Muslim: O unfortunate people, if you can forget the teachings of the Prophet so quickly that you can't distinguish between Good and Evil; if you can forget the tyranny and humiliation unleashed on you so soon, you can never succeed in this world.

One Man: He is an enemy of Islam.

Second Man: No, no, he is the cousin of *Hazrat* **Hussain**. Don't insult him.

Third Man: Let's catch hold of him and throw him in some dark alley. We'll not have his blood on our hands.

[*Many people attack* **Muslim**, *drag him away and leave him in darkness.*]

Muslim (SOLILOQUY): Where am I? Where have these tyrants dumped me? I can't see a thing. I don't know the way around. Where do I go now? There is no one I could ask for directions.

[*Haani is seen coming towards him.*]

Muslim: O virtuous servant of God, please tell me the way out of here.

Haani: *Hazrat* **Muslim**, are you still standing here?

Muslim: Is that you **Haani**? I swear by the Holy Prophet, I feel as though life is back in my body. Some people caught hold of me and abandoned me here.

Haani: They were my men. I thought it apt to get you out of there, when I saw the developments. But I had asked them to escort you to my house.

Muslim: They might have been your men in the past but not anymore. **Ziyad's** speech had an impact on them as well.

Haani: Never mind, my house is just round the corner. We've been beaten by **Ziyad** in politics. He first spread the rumour that **Hussain** is coming here. Tricked by it, the people gathered, and this gave him a chance to mislead them.

Muslim: Now, I can only see darkness everywhere.

Haani: **Ziyad's** speech has turned things around. Even those who wrote letters to the *Hazrat* have been misled.

[*Suleman and Mukhtar come in. Suleman has his head bandaged.*]

Mukhtar: Thank God that you reached here safely. **Ziyad**'s men are searching for you.

Muslim: **Haani**, I don't want to risk your life by staying here in this situation. Bid me adieu. I'll spend the night in some mosque.

Haani: *Mu'azallah*, God forbid! What are you saying! This is your house. I can sacrifice myself and all my possessions at the feet of *Hazrat* **Hussain**.

[*Entry of Sharik.*]

Sharik: *Assalamalaikum, Ya Hazrat* **Muslim**. I'm also among the slaves of **Hussain**.

Haani: *Hazrat* **Muslim**, you'd have heard of **Sharik**. He is an old servant of *Hazrat* **Ali** and has written many panegyrics in his praise.

Muslim: (Embracing **Sharik**) Who'd be so unfortunate as not to have read your poetry?

Sharik: I'm a servant of the *Hazrat* and a slave of the Prophet of God. I had gone to **Yazid** with a petition from the people of Basra. There I came to know that you'd left Mecca. I accompanied **Ziyad** hoping I could be of some help to you. **Yazid** has now resorted to appeasement in place of force. After watching the impact of **Ziyad**'s speech today, I'm convinced that the people here will betray *Hazrat* **Hussain**. We must counter deceit with deceit.

Muslim: How?

Sharik: It's very easy and simple. I'll inform **Ziyad** of my illness. He'll definitely come here to enquire about my health. You go ahead and kill him.

Muslim: God Almighty commands that it is unlawful for a Muslim to kill a fellow Muslim.

Sharik: God Almighty also commands that to provide refuge to the unfaithful is like raising a snake.

Muslim: My compassion doesn't permit this.

Sharik: Killing the unfaithful is pure virtue. There's no scope for kindness in *jihad*; the path to righteousness is not free from dacoits and robbers. And if you fear them, you should never step onto this path. You must think over it.

[*A mob breaks open the door of* **Haani's** *house and rushes in.*]

One Man: These are the men who sent letters to **Hussain**. Arrest them.

Muslim: (Coming between them) Go away!

Second Man: This is *Hazrat* **Muslim**. Arrest him.

Muslim: Yes, I am **Muslim**. I'm your offender. Kill me if you wish! (taking out his sword from the scabbard). Take this; now you should have no fear of me. If my blood can please your Caliph, so be it. But for God's sake, send across a message to **Hussain** not to come here. He doesn't lust after the caliphate. He only wanted to help you. He was willing to risk his life for you. He doesn't have any army or weapons, just the resolve to die for you, and that is why he agreed to leave his house. Now that you don't need him, please stop him from coming here. If you call him here and kill him, you'll have nothing but regret and despair. It's not difficult to kill him. He will die of shock and sorrow on his own when he comes to know of the situation here. He'll not blame you, but himself that the same people who swore to die for his grandfather are now after his life. This sorrow will be enough to devastate him. Yours and your *Amir's* wishes will be fulfilled. Tell me, do you agree? Shall I write to him saying that the people for whom you agreed to lay down your life are now planning to kill you? And that you should not come this way? (No one says anything) Silence is half-consent. Do you agree that this should be conveyed to him?

Many Voices: No, no, this isn't required.

Muslim: Do you want to see his dead body lying in front of you?

One voice: *Mu'azallah,* God forbid! *We*'ll not be among the killers of *Hazrat* **Hussain**.

Muslim: Please don't utter such words, else, it will hurt the Prophet even in Heaven. You are slaves of your desire, slaves of wealth. The Prophet always preached forbearance and fortitude. His simplicity is known to you. You know about the first caliph; you are also aware of *Hazrat* **Farooq**'s lifestyle. Alas! You've forgotten the Prophet of God, faith in whom is the second most sacred principle in Islam after the oneness of God.[19] Else, you wouldn't have been trapped in the snare of stipends

[19] The fundamental pillars of Islam or *Usool-i-din* include: (1) *Tawhid*, Belief in oneness of God; (2) *Nubuwwat*, Belief in the Prophets; (3) *Qiyamat*, 'Belief in the Day of Judgement"; (4) *Adl*, Justice of God; and (5) *Imamat*, the successorship of the Prophet.

and *jagirs*. You didn't think even for a moment where those stipends and *jagirs* would come from. Others, who have exercised their rights over their lands for generations, will be forcibly evicted so that it could be offered to you. Others will be forcibly fleeced to pay you the stipends. They will get an excuse to ruin others in order to please you. You want to satiate your greed by snatching away the rights of your brothers? This is neither faith nor even brotherhood. There is some other name for this.

Many Voices: No, no. We don't want unlawful wealth.

Muslim: I'm neither an enemy of **Yazid** nor of **Ziyad**. I'm a friend of Islam. I'm the enemy of everyone who wants to crush Islam under his feet—be it **Yazid**, **Ziyad**, or **Hussain** himself. Anyone who dishonours the Qur'an and the Prophet is my enemy.

Many Voices: He is our enemy as well. He is not a Muslim but an infidel.

Muslim: No doubt! And no true Muslim will ever accept an infidel as his caliph, even if that caliph showers gems and jewels on him.

Many Voices: Indeed! Indeed!

Muslim: A truly devout man, even in rags, will be a far better caliph.

Many Voices: No doubt, no doubt!

Muslim: Do you now agree that the caliph should be a person who is a true follower of Islam, not the one who robs one to please the other?

Many Voices: Of course, of course.

Muslim: There can't be a greater shame for a Muslim than accepting anyone as his leader on the basis of wealth or empire. What's the most important qualification for an *Imam*? To be a true follower of Islam. Islam has always considered wealth trivial. The day Islam surrenders to wealth, will be the day of its demise. May God not keep us alive to see such a day! It's your duty to investigate before you pledge your allegiance, whether the person you are electing follows the Prophet's instructions or not. Find out whether he drinks wine.

Many People: [20]Does Caliph **Yazid** drink alcohol?

Muslim: It's your job to find out. Find out if he is a fornicator.

Many People: Is Caliph **Yazid** a fornicator?

[20] There is discrepancy between the Hindi and the Urdu text. I have, in this section, followed the Urdu text as the Hindi text seems erroneous, for it reads as follows: **Many People:** Is it your duty to investigate? Investigate whether our Caliph is a fornicator or not?

Muslim: It's up to you to investigate. Find out if he performs *namaz*, observes fast and respects learned men; does he not misuse the treasury? If without investigating these, you pledge allegiance to someone, just in the hope of stipends and *jagirs*, you will face humiliation before God. How will you respond when He asks you why you misused your right to elect a caliph? What face will you show to the Prophet when he grasps your robes and asks why you destroyed His Faith that he'd left in your custody?

Many People: **Ziyad** deceived us. We reject the allegiance to **Yazid**.

Muslim: You must first investigate thoroughly. I don't blame anyone. Who can stand up and say that **Yazid** is free of these evils?

Many People: We've already examined the issue.

Muslim: To whom do you offer your allegiance?

Many Voices: To **Hussain**, to the grandson of the Prophet of God!

Muslim: Have you examined him on these parameters? Are you convinced that **Hussain** is free of these evils?

Many Voices: We've examined him. **Hussain** knows no evil. We accept **Hussain** as our caliph. **Ziyad** has misled us.

One Man: Kill **Ziyad**.

Second Man: He surely misled us.

Muslim: No, for the sake of the Holy Prophet, shedding a believer's blood is unlawful for another believer.

[*All the men sit and pledge allegiance to* ***Hussain*** *over* ***Muslim's*** *hand.*]

Scene 9

[Time—Afternoon. **Haani's** house. **Sharik** is lying on a cot. On a cornice in the front are kept bottles and medicine bowls. **Muslim** and **Haani** are sitting on the floor.]

Sharik: **Ziyad** will be here any moment. **Muslim**, keep your sword ready.

Haani: I would've killed him myself, but old age has made my hands infirm.

Sharik: Do not hesitate—even If a river of blood is spilled in defence of Truth, Islam and the nation, the angels will perform ablution in it and the souls of sages will bathe in it. The hand which does not act in defence of Truth is worse than a sightless eye, an extinguished lamp, and the moon during daytime. You'll never again get an opportunity like this to serve Islam; perhaps nobody ever will. By capturing Kufa and Basra, you can confront the mightiest armies of **Yazid**. **Yazid's** caliphate will take Islam towards a materialistic world and **Hussain's** caliphate will guide it towards righteousness and Truth. Do you want Islam to be destroyed at the hands of **Yazid**?

[*Ziyad comes in and Muslim hides in the adjacent room.*]

Ziyad: *Assalamalaik Ya* **Sharik**! You seem to be terribly ill.

Haani: He hasn't opened his eyes since yesterday. He has spent the whole night groaning.

Sharik: God says, "The one who picks up the sword for Truth has the gates of Heaven open to him."

Ziyad: **Sharik, Sharik**! How are you feeling?

Sharik: My lust prodded me, but my will did not give in.
I was in a dilemma and so was my assassin.

Haani: Open your eyes. The *Amir* has come to see you.

Sharik: How could I writhe, when they'd wrested
from me, my power to squirm?
One end of the dagger was in my heart,
the other in the hand of my assassin.

Ziyad: Was he in this condition last night as well?

Haani: Yes, he kept muttering like this.

Sharik: Why don't you cut the throat with the dagger?
O custodians of Truth watching over!

Ziyad: We should call a *Hakim*.

Sharik: Who has come, **Ziyad**!
My wishes have heightened my restlessness.
O you who hide! How long will you shy away from your assassin?

Ziyad: Shall we inform the members of your family?

Sharik: I'll die here, all alone!
My joy makes the sky laugh with me, why not?
I sit back relaxed in the company of my friend.

Ziyad: May God never let a poor soul fall sick in a foreign land. **Haani**, I've heard that **Muslim** has come here from Mecca. The Caliph has ordered me to arrest him. You are an honourable man of the town; please let me know if you get any news about him. I've faith in you. You can imagine the kind of commotion and chaos his presence will cause in the province. If anyone provides a clue regarding his whereabouts, I swear by the Holy Book, I will shower him with gems. I'm going now to see what I can find out about him. You also watch out!

[*Ziyad Leaves.*]

Sharik: *Hazrat* **Muslim**, you'll regret to your last breath, the mistake you made today, and later on the Muslim community will pay dearly for it. You've no idea of the damage you have done to Islam. Perhaps it is the Will of God that the garden nurtured by the Prophet be destroyed at the hands of **Yazid**.

Muslim: **Sharik**, I've never deceived anyone, and I'm convinced that *Hazrat* **Hussain** would have never approved of it. The sapling of Islam has sprouted from the seed of Truth. If we water it with deceit, it might wither away. Better to stick to the path of Truth and let Islam perish than save it by deceit. (To **Haani**) Shall I inform my revered brother that 18000 men here have pledged allegiance to him?

Haani: Sure, my slave is ready for the task.

Muslim: (Aside) Can so many men break their oath of allegiance? Impossible! Everything seemed bleak till yesterday. Today, I see the light all around. It was on my advice that **Hussain** agreed to come here. Thank God that my claim has been proved right, and my expectations have been met.

Scene 10

[Time—Evening. Ziyad's *durbar*.]

Ziyad: Is there anyone among you who could get any information on **Muslim**? I promise I'll offer 5000 *dinars* to that man.

One Courtier: *Huzoor*, there is no clue anywhere. We do know that thousands of men have sworn allegiance to **Hussain** on his [**Muslim's**] hand. But no one knows his whereaouts.

[*Entry of Muwakkil.*]

Muwakkil: May *Huzoor* live long! I've brought some good news. I'd gone out of the city with my camel to collect fodder when I saw a man on a camel rushing out. I recognised that it was **Haani's** camel as I've served him for many years. Suspicious of where this man was headed, I intercepted and captured him. When I threatened to kill him, he confessed that he was carrying **Muslim's** letter to Mecca. I snatched that letter from him. Here it is. Allow me to present the messenger before you.

Ziyad: (After reading the letter) I swear by God, I'll not let **Muslim** live. Eighteen thousand men have already pledged allegiance to **Hussain**, while I am present in the city. (To the messenger) Whose servant are you?

Messenger: My Master's.

Ziyad: Who is your Master?

Messenger: The one who bought me from the Egyptians.

Ziyad: Who bought you?

Messenger: The one who paid the money.

Ziyad: Who paid the money?

Messenger: My Master.

Ziyad: Where does you Master live?

Messenger: In his house.

Ziyad: Where is his house located?

Messenger: Where his ancestors built it.

Ziyad: By God, you are Satan. I know how to treat people like you. (To the hangman) Take him away and kill him.

Muwakkil: *Huzoor*, I know very well, this camel belongs to **Haani.**

Ziyad: If you provide information on **Muslim**, I will free you with a reward of 5000 dinars.

Muwakkil: (Aside) These big rulers are easy to fleece. They have no brains at all. What's the difficulty in finding the owner when you have the camel in your possession? I must have looked upon the countenance of some good man today. Let me unbridle the camel and ride it. It will reach the owner's house on its own. There I'll also get to know **Muslim's** whereabouts.

Ziyad: (Aside) If this is **Haani's** camel, then clearly, he is a part of this conspiracy. I considered him a friend. Oh, God, one can't even tell a friend from a foe! I just visited his house. If **Sharik** is also **Haani's** supporter, one will have to say that no one can be trusted in this world.

Scene 11

[Time—10 in the night. **Suleman**, **Mukhtar**, and **Haani** are walking on the road in front of **Ziyad's** palace.]

Suleman: Did you notice the change in **Ziyad's** behaviour?

Mukhtar: Yes, why else would he invite us for consultations?

Haani: I fear he might've got the news that **Muslim** has secured allegiance from people. What if his intentions are foul?

Mukhtar: Trust and suspicion don't go together. He wouldn't have come to your house, if that were the case.

Haani: He might have come there in search of a clue. I made a mistake by not bringing along a few men of my tribe; I'm not even carrying my sword.

Suleman: It's all in your imagination.

[*They all enter the palace of Ziyad. Qais, Shimr, Hajjaaj, and others are sitting there.*]

Ziyad: *Assalamalaik*. Please come, I wanted to discuss an urgent matter with you. Why, *Sheikh* **Haani**, after all the concessions **Yazid** extended to you, was it proper for you to host **Muslim** at your house and encourage people to pledge allegiance to **Hussain**? We elevate your status and honour while you are busy cutting our roots!

Haani: *Ya Amir*, God knows, I didn't invite **Muslim**; he came to my house at night and asked for shelter. It would have been inhuman to throw him out of my house. You may please consider my situation and ask yourself if I was wrong.

Ziyad: You knew that **Hussain** is an enemy of **Yazid**, the Caliph.

Haani: Even if my own enemy asked me for shelter, I wouldn't have turned him away.

Ziyad: If you want to be safe, hand over **Muslim** to me. Else, I swear by the Holy Book, you will not see the light of day.

Haani: *Ya Amir*, I'll not hand over **Muslim** to you, even if you hack my body and burn the pieces. My values will never allow me to hand over to his enemy, the man who sought shelter from me. This is against civility, against the dignity of Arabs. I will fall in my own estimation if I

did that. It will tarnish my honour forever and my future generations will curse me.

Qais: (Taking **Haani** aside) Think of the consequences, **Haani**? You, your clan, your tribe will have to bear the consequences of your action. What kind of wisdom is this that you sacrifice so many to save the life of one man?

Haani: **Qais**, such words don't befit you! I'll never betray **Hussain's** cousin even if my entire clan is killed.

Ziyad: You seem to have lost interest in life.

Haani: Are you threatening to kill me after inviting me to your house? I warn you, even a drop of my blood will shake the foundations of this grand edifice. **Haani** is not powerless, weak, or helpless.

Ziyad: (Striking **Haani's** face with his whip) Caliph's Deputy will not stand contempt from anyone, even if he is the leader of 10,000 tribesmen.

Haani: (Wiping blood from his nose) Tyrant! Aren't you ashamed to attack an unarmed man? I wish I could have foreseen your deceit; you wouldn't have been alive today.

Suleman: **Ziyad**, I warn you, if you arrest **Haani**, you'll not remain safe.

[*Ziyad gets up to hit Suleman, but Hajjaaj stops him.*]

Ziyad: What are you waiting for? Arrest this old man. (There is commotion outside.) What noise is this?

Qais: (Looking out of the window.) An army of rebels is marching towards us.

Ziyad: How many men?

Qais: By God, not less than ten thousand.

Ziyad: (**Summons a soldier**) Take **Haani** and lock him up in a cell where the rays of the sun can never reach.

Suleman: **Ziyad**, beware of the day when you might be locked up in that same dungeon.

[*Suleman and Mukhtar leave.*]

Qais: A huge army of rebels is fast approaching—not less than 20,000 men. **Muslim** is leading them, bearing a flag.

Ziyad: Lock all the doors! Be ready with your swords. By God, I will counter this rebellion with words. (He climbs up to the terrace and addresses the rebels.) Why are you shouting?

One Man: We are here to avenge **Haani**'s blood.

Ziyad: I swear upon the Holy Book, no one has ever avenged the blood of a man who is alive. I may be a liar but your city's Qazi cannot lie. (Calling out to Qazi downstairs) Tell the rebels that **Haani** is alive.

Qazi: O *Amir*, I can't testify to this unless I see **Haani** with my own eyes.

Ziyad: I swear upon the Holy Book, I will pack off all *mullahs* to hell. Go and see, quickly.

[*Qazi goes downstairs and comes back after a moment.*]

Qazi: O residents of Kufa! I testify on my faith that *Sheikh* **Haani** is alive, though his nose is bleeding.

Muslim: March on! Climb up to the palace! What did you say, no stairs? When do brave men depend on stairs? You must form a human staircase.

Ziyad: (Aside) These ruffians are climbing on each other's shoulders. (Aloud) Friends, why are you making this hue and cry? I'm not an enemy of **Hussain** or **Muslim**. Congratulations, if you've pledged allegiance to **Hussain**. He is welcome to come here. I'm not **Yazid**'s slave. Instead, I'm the slave of the man whom the people elect as their caliph. But all this cannot be settled by creating a commotion, or by demolishing this building. Had it been so, I would've been the first person to strike at it. Killing me will not resolve the issue either. If it would, I'd be ready to cut off my head with my own hand. The matter can be settled only by discussion.

Muslim: Hang on, we are almost there. You will be victorious as soon as you climb up to the top.

Suleman: Oh, where are these people running away to? Stop, stop, what's the matter?

One Soldier: Listen, **Qais** is saying something.

Qais: (Looking out of the window) Brothers, we are all dwellers of the same city. Will you stain your swords with our blood? Many of you are my childhood friends. Is it proper for us to shed each other's blood! We haven't pledged allegiance to **Yazid** for wealth, rank or authority, but only to ensure that blood is not spilled in the streets of Kufa.

Many Men: We want to fight **Ziyad**, not our own brothers.

Muslim: Hold on! Don't listen to this traitor.

Suleman: Alas, no one is paying any heed. They all are running away. How wretched is the man whose followers can be so easily deceived!

Muslim: It was imprudent of us to trust these people.

Suleman: How can I show my face to *Hazrat* **Hussain**? People who were steadier than fate are betraying us. **Qais** has left, **Hajjaaj** has left, **Haaris** has left, **Shees** has betrayed, **Ashas** has betrayed; All friends have turned foes.

Mukhtar: We're left with merely thirty men.

[*Yazid's soldiers come out of the palace.*]

Mukhtar: God save us from these tyrants! *Hazrat* **Muslim**, I can't think of any house now where you can be safe. Even the soil of this city smells of betrayal.

Kaseer: This poor man offers his house.

Mukhtar: All right! *Hazrat* **Muslim**, please go with him. Bid us farewell. A couple of us must live so that we may die for *Hazrat* **Hussain**. We've no love for our lives, but we'll have to save our lives for the sake of **Hussain**.

[*Both of them disappear into a lane.*]

Scene 12

[Time—9 in the night. **Muslim** is standing in a dark lane. A lamp flickers in the distance. **Taua** is seated at the door of her house.]

Muslim: (Soliloquy) Oh, this oppressive heat! As if all the blood in my body is aflame! The whole day has passed, and I haven't had a single sip of water. A day, just a day ago, 20,000 men pledged allegiance to **Hussain**. Today, I dread to ask anyone, even for a drop of water, for fear of arrest. Shadows loom large like enemies. Now, I can only pray to God that **Hussain** does not leave Mecca. Oh, **Kaseer**! May God rest your soul in Heaven! So brave, so fearless! Who else could have so valiantly helped a friend! Both you and your son were too good to survive in this world of deceit and treachery. Houries will offer *fatiha* at your graves. Oh, this thirst is killing me. Being killed by an enemy's sword is not as harrowing as dying of unbearable thirst. I see the light of a lamp. Let me go there and ask for water. I might get it. (Aloud) O kind *bibi*, I'm dying of thirst, please give me a little water.

Taua: Come, sit down, I'll get some water for you.

[*She brings water.* ***Muslim*** *drinks and sits leaning against the wall.*]

Taua: O man of God! Haven't you quenched your thirst yet?

Muslim: I have.

Taua: Go back home, then! It's not safe to sit here alone. **Ziyad's** soldiers are keeping a vigil; they might arrest you under suspicion.

Muslim: I'll go now.

Taua: Yes, *beta*. These are bad times, go home.

Muslim: I'll go now.

Taua: It's well into the night. Please leave so that I may shut the door.

Muslim: I'll go now.

Taua: *Subhanallah*! You are a strange man. I'm asking you again and again to go back home and you don't stir. I don't want you lying about here. If anything unpleasant happens, I'll be a sinner in the eyes of God.

Muslim: O kind *bibi*, where can a homeless person go? Where can he find a place to stay when not just to houses but even entry to roads has been banned for him? Please give me shelter, if you have space in

your house and compassion in your heart. I might someday return the favour.

Taua: Who are you?

Muslim: I'm the unfortunate man being searched for in every nook and corner. My name is **Muslim**.

Taua: *Ya Hazrat,* may I sacrifice myself for you! As long as **Taua** lives, you needn't go to anyone else's house. It's my fortune that I've had a glimpse of you before my death. Why should I fear **Ziyad**? I've no other desire but to die. Please come, let me take you to a part of my house where no one can find you. (**Muslim** goes with **Taua**.) Please rest here. I'll get you some food.

[*Entry of* **Balal**.]

Balal: *Amma*, today **Ziyad** pardoned everyone. He offered solace to the people and assured them that they won't be punished. Who knows what happened to *Hazrat* **Muslim**?

Taua: How can **Hussain's** enemy be trusted?

Balal: No *Amma*, he was kind to everyone. He spoke in a manner that every word he uttered struck a chord with the people. I think **Muslim** will now find it difficult to escape. In a way, I also feel that *Hazrat* **Muslim's** arrival here has caused a rift among us. **Ziyad** has announced rewards for the person who gives any clue about *Hazrat* **Muslim**.

Taua: *Beta*, have you changed sides? By God, I'll not pardon you the debt of milk I breast-fed you.[21]

Balal: *Amma*, God Forbid that I should ever change sides! I was speaking in a general way. Today, the entire city is praising **Ziyad**.

[***Taua** goes in and serves food to **Muslim**.*]

Balal: I wish that *Hazrat* **Hussain** doesn't come this way. I'm afraid people will betray him.

[21] "Debt of milk" or "doodh ka qarz bakhshna" is a regular trope in Karbala *Majalis*, poetry and narration. See Amy Bard, "No Power of speech Remains: Tears and Transformation in South Asian Majlis Poetry," in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, Ed. Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, pp. 145–164, 150.

Taua: Don't say that! Wash your hands and face. Aren't you hungry or has **Ziyad** offered you a feast?

Balal: God save me from his banquet! Fetch me some food.

[*Taua serves him food, picks up something in a bowl, goes in and gives it to Muslim.*]

Balal: *Amma*, why are you going to the backyard so often?

Taua: Just some chores, *beta*!

Balal: Who knows what happened to *Hazrat* **Muslim!**

[*He (**Balal**) lies down on the cot after finishing his dinner. **Taua** picks up a mattress and goes out to spread it on **Muslim's** cot.*]

Balal: *Amma*, you carried something to the backyard again. What's the matter? Do we have a guest at home?

Taua: *Beta*, if there were a guest, why would he not have a place here with us?

Balal: But there is definitely something! Do you need to hide it from me?

Taua: Go to sleep. Why do you bother?

Balal: I won't sleep until you tell me about it.

Taua: Then promise me, you won't tell anyone!

Balal: Don't you trust me?

Taua: You've got to swear first!

Balal: I swear by God, I'll not tell anyone.

Taua: (Whispers into his ears) *Hazrat* **Muslim** is here.

Balal: *Amma*, we'll be ruined if **Ziyad** comes to know of it.

Taua: How will he know! Obviously, I'm not going to tell him. I'm not so sure about you though. What else could I do—he is a traveller, that too **Hussain's** brother. Had there been no space in my house, I would've offered him my heart.

Balal: (**Aside**) Amma's made a mistake by divulging the secret. And I made a mistake in stubbornly asking her to tell me! How can I hold back! If a single move could result in kingship, who wouldn't go for it? If one word could fetch wealth and fulfil all life's desires, who would remain silent? O my heart, don't yield to temptation! I've taken a vow. Don't put the albatross of shame around my neck! Whatever is

destined is bound to happen. If **Muslim** is destined to live, he'll be saved even if the whole world turns against him. But if he is destined to die, he'll die even if the entire world tries to protect him.

[*He gets up, glances at* ***Taua's*** *bed, opens the door quietly and leaves.*]

Taua: (Gets up in a state of shock.) Oh, the merciless man has betrayed his mother. You didn't even mind the disgrace of having **Hussain's** brother arrested in your house. How will you face God on the Day of Judgement? **Kaseer** sacrificed his own life, and his son's, to save his guest, and here's the wretched me whose son is going to hand over the same guest to his enemies.

[*There is commotion outside.* ***Muslim*** *comes to* ***Taua's*** *room.*]

Muslim: **Taua**, what noise is this?

Taua: *Ya Hazrat*, what can I say, my son has betrayed me. It was such an ill-fated moment when I gave you shelter in my house. If I'd been uncivil at that time, I could've saved you from this peril. If any mother has ever regretted giving birth to a son, that unfortunate mother is me. If I knew he'd betray me like this, I would've killed him even before he was born!

Muslim: Kind lady, don't regret it. It is not your son's fault. All this was destined to happen, and I was aware of it. But every true Muslim must sacrifice his life to defend justice, honour, and faith. God spreads the seeds of guidance through His prophets and nurtures them with the blood of martyrs. Martyrdom is the highest honour God bestows upon human beings. I only regret that something that should've happened a day before, is happening today after the blood of two righteous men has been shed.

[*Outside,* ***Ziyad's*** *men set ablaze* ***Taua's*** *house.* ***Muslim*** *comes out and launches a fierce attack on the enemies.*]

First Soldier: A sword? No. It's a lightning bolt. May God save us!

[*He receives a blow from* ***Muslim*** *and collapses immediately.*]

Second Soldier: Now he is coming towards me like a roaring lion in heat. I'd rather go home—who wants to die!

[*Runs away.*]

Third Soldier: Oh, oh, oh, *Hazrat*, I'm only a poor traveller who came this way to see what was happening.

[*He receives a blow from Muslim and collapses.*]

Fourth Soldier: To hell with this profession. A man is supposed to fight men not monsters. *Ya Hazrat*, I'm not here to fight, I've come only to pledge my allegiance at the hands of *Huzoor*.

[*He receives a blow from Muslim and collapses.*]

Fifth Solider: Where to run, there is no way out. *Ya Hazrat*, I'm the only son of my mother; if you spare my life, I'll serve you forever.

[*He collapses as soon as he receives a blow from Muslim's sword. Pandemonium breaks out among the soldiers.*]

Qais: Soldiers, don't lose your nerve. There are three hundred of you. What a shame that you fear a lone man.

One Soldier: If you are so brave, why don't you go ahead and confront him? Why are you hiding here with your tail tucked in? Are you the only one who loves his life?

Qais: *Hazrat* **Muslim, Ziyad** has ordered that if you drop your weapon, you'll be given refuge. (To the soldiers) All of you climb up the building and pelt stones from the top.

Muslim: O enemy of the Prophet of God, I don't need your refuge. I haven't come here to seek refuge, I've come to bring you back to the right path. (Is hit by a stone on the head) O misguided ones! After forsaking Islam, have you abandoned decency and compassion as well? Aren't you ashamed of throwing stones at a relative of your Holy Prophet? Such wickedness towards me!

[*People pounce on him with swords as he sings.*]

On the street of Kufa I've become a beggar
A martyr for Truth, I fear death no longer.
Faith is my creed, deceit and treachery I abhor
I've forsaken this world; loyalty I revere.
Why kill those, who fearing their death,
Have strayed from Truth and turned traitor.
Every man in this world has to die one day
Heaven belongs to those who to loyalty adhere.

Qais: I swear by the Holy Book, we'll not betray you. May we not receive salvation if we lie to you!

Muslim: By God! You won't be able to arrest me and make me a victim of Ziyad's taunts.

Qais: (Mumbling) This lion is not easy to tame. To face him is to become a morsel in the jaws of death. Dig a trench here! It should be ready by the time he comes here, slaying others on the way. It's dark. As soon as he reaches here, he'll fall into it.

First Solider: A curse on Ziyad who sent us to fight this lion. Ya Hazrat! Have Mercy on us! Mercy!

Second Soldier: May God have mercy! Who knew we'll have to face death here? I've no one else to take care of my family.

[*Muslim falls into the ditch.*]

Muslim: Tormentors, you've finally tricked me!

Qais: Capture him, arrest him, don't let him slip out. Don't kill him; capture him alive.

Ashas: I claim the right to his sword.

Qais: His shield will be my share.

Ashas: Take off his armour. I'll give it to Sa'ad.

Muslim: Water! I'm very thirsty. For God's sake, give me some water!

Qais: You won't get even a drop of water now; the hellfire awaits you.

Muslim: Shame on you, O tyrant! You can't even slaughter someone decently. Is this the way to talk to a dying man? Alas!

Ashas: Why regret now? It's the fruit of your own doing.

Muslim: Oh! I'm not sad for myself. I lament for **Hussain**, to whom I persuaded to come and help you; who left his house on my appeal. When all others in the family were warning him about your betrayal, I prevailed upon him to come here. I lament the betrayal that has ruined me and will soon annihilate him and his family. Don't you think it's a matter worth lamenting? Shall I ask you something?

Ashas: You can ask us anything except for allegiance to **Hussain**.

Muslim: Please, inform **Hussain** of my death.

Ashas: We will.

[*Many soldiers tie **Muslim** in ropes and take him away.*]

Scene 13

[Time—Morning. **Ziyad's** court. **Muslim** is brought in chains.]

Muslim: My *Salaam* to the one who pursues the right path, is concerned about the hereafter, and follows the true king.

Orderly: **Muslim**, say Salaam to *Amir*.

Muslim: Keep quiet! My *Amir*, my lord, and my *Imam* is **Hussain**.

Ziyad: You came to Kufa to topple the sultanate established by the rule of law. You incited rebels and caused dissent in the state.

Muslim: Kufa is not a sultanate established by the rule of law; it never was. I am the envoy of the man who is the lawful *Amir* by virtue of election, inheritance, and ability. The people of Kufa chose him as their *Amir*. Your command would've been binding, for sure, if you were honest with the people. People's mandate overrides legal privileges. The oppression you unleashed on the people here far exceeds Caesar's. You punished innocent people, confiscated their property and wealth in the garb of penalties, and killed their leaders on the pretext of peace. A tyrant like that, on whatever basis he rules, does not have any right to do so because evil forces cannot claim rights. It's the duty of every believer to wipe out such a regime. Those who shy away from this duty, for fear or greed, are guilty in the eyes of God and His people. I tried my best to free the citizens from your clutches. If given a chance, I'll do it again.

Ziyad: By God, you will not get a chance again. You've rebelled against the state. The punishment for revolt is death. And to set an example for the rebels, I'll have you killed in a manner that has no precedence.

Muslim: Indeed! You are capable of just that!

Ziyad: Take away this villain and kill him on the highest terrace.

Muslim: **Sa'ad**, you know that you're my relative?

Sa'ad: I know.

Muslim: I want to hand over my will to you.

Sa'ad: As you wish.

Muslim: I'd borrowed money from some people to spend on my needs. This paper has their names and details. Sell my horse and weapons to pay off my debts, or else I'll face humiliation on the Day of Judgement.

Sa'ad: You shouldn't worry about that.

Muslim: You must bury my dead body.

Sa'ad: I don't have the power to decide that.

[*The hangman comes and takes Muslim away.*]

Ash'as: Ya *Amir*, **Muslim** has been executed. There's no fear of rebellion now. Please forgive **Haani** and allow him to live.

Ziyad: I swear by the Holy Book, I'll not release **Haani**, even if it leads to my salvation.

Ashas: What if there's an uprising?

Ziyad: When the chieftains are with me, I needn't fear the subjects. (Calls the hangman.) Have you killed **Muslim** or not?

Hangman: *Amir's* command has been obeyed. By God, I've never seen anyone give his life so valiantly. He first offered his *namaz* and then told me with a smile—"you can complete your task now."

Ziyad: Why did you let him offer *namaz*? By whose order?

Hangman: O Provider for the poor! The curse of stopping someone from offering the *namaz* is a huge burden, even for a hangman. Severing the head from the body is not as grave a sin as preventing someone from praying before God.

Ziyad: Shut up, you idiot. You don't even know who should be punished and in what manner. To honourable men, spiritual disgrace is much more painful than being killed. Now take **Haani** away and kill him at the roundabout.

One Man: My lord, allow me this opportunity to serve you.

Ziyad: Who are you?

The Man: I'm his slave. He's been so evil to me that I am thirsty for his blood. With your kindness, I'll be able to fulfil this long-cherished desire. I'll kill him in such a way that those who watch will close their eyes in dread.

Ziyad: I swear by the Holy Book, I'll definitely oblige you.

[*The slave gets hold of* **Haani** *and takes him away. Many soldiers with swords accompany him.*]

The Slave: (To **Haani**) My dear lord, I've served you all my life. I committed so many mistakes, but you never gave me an angry look. I can't

bear to see any cruel killer desecrating your body. I want to serve you even in these trying moments. I'll release your soul from the body in such a way that you won't feel any pain. May God send you to Paradise, and forgive your wrongs.

Act 3

Scene 1

[Time—Afternoon. **Hussain's** caravan halts in a desert. White cranes are flying past. **Hussain** is standing at the doorstep of his tent with **Asghar** in his arms.]

Hussain: (Soliloquy) Oh, this heat! The eyes burn. These rocks are emitting fire, and the scorching heat has dried up the lakes and wells. The hot wind sears the body. How lustreless the faces of children have become! This blanched land, this vast desert! Does it have an end? Those who anxiously drank excessive water to quench their thirst have pain in their innards. There's no sign of any messenger from Kufa. God knows what happened to **Muslim**. It appears that the people of Iraq have betrayed and martyred him. What else could this silence mean? If he is in Heaven, my future is decided—Martyrdom is waiting for me. I can see someone coming to meet me.

[*Entry of* ***Farazdaq***.]

Farazdaq: *Assalamalaikum ya Hazrat* **Hussain**! I strived hard to catch a glimpse of you in Mecca, but all my efforts went in vain.

Hussain: If you're coming from Iraq, what's the news from there?

Farazdaq: *Ya Hazrat*, the news there is as you expected. People's hearts are with you because you are on the right path; their swords are with **Ziyad** because he has money.

Hussain: And have you brought any news of my brother **Muslim**?

Farazdaq: His soul rests in Heaven, and his severed head hangs from the ramparts of the fort.

Houses of Muslims have been in mourning of late,
His body is in the ditch, his head at the citadel gate.

Hussain: (With his hands on his chest) Oh! **Muslim**, my premonition has come true. You weren't even given a burial. Was this the reward for your sincerity? Oh! You spent so much time with me, but I didn't realise your worth. I became the cause of your death, I let you die. My dear friend,

we were warned about the people of Kufa, but I didn't pay any heed. Now, I've lost you. How will I console your wife and children?

[*Entry of Muslim's daughter* **Fatima**.]

Hussain: Come, *Beti*, sit in my lap. Have you eaten anything?

Fatima: *Phuphi* gave me bread and honey. *Chacha Jaan*, how long will it take us to reach *Abba*? Five to six days have already passed.

Hussain: (Aside) Alas, my heart feels like it will jump out of my chest. How do I respond to her questions? How do I tell her that now she'll meet her father in Heaven? (Aloud) *Beti*, whenever God wills.[22]

Fatima: Why do you have tears in your eyes? Why are you showering so much love on me? Only orphans are addressed in this manner.

Hussain: (Crying) God has called back your father.

[*Fatima runs back to her mother, crying. Women start wailing.*]

Zainab: (Coming out) *Bhaiyya*, what calamity befallen?

Hussain: Sister, what can I say; tyranny has been unleashed. **Muslim** has been killed. The people of Kufa have betrayed us.

Zainab: So how can we expect support from such disloyal people? I'd rather suggest that you return from here. The people of Kufa have never been loyal to us.

[*Entry of* **Abdullah**, *son of* **Muslim**.]

Abdullah: *Phuphi*, I'll not retreat, even if Providence comes to prevent me from moving ahead. It'll be a shame for me if I don't avenge my father. Alas, a man who never did any wrong to anyone, who had such a clean heart, that he never suspected anyone, should be so mercilessly killed.

[22] The Hindi text has the following dialogues before this, which are deleted in the Urdu text. I have followed the Urdu text here for consistency:

Ali Asghar: Oh, you're sitting in my Abbajaan's lap. Get off quickly.
Fatima: I'll also push you off when you sit in my *abba's* lap.
Hussain: *Beti*, I'm like your *Abbajaan*, let him blabber.

[*Abbas enters*]

Abbas: Certainly, going back now, without punishing the people of Kufa for their betrayal, will be an indignity that will keep our heads hanging in shame forever. Whatever God Wills will happen! All of us may die, with no trace of the Prophet's family left behind, but we'll not let the world laugh at us for retreating from here. I'm sure this is the mischief of the rich and elders of Kufa. They have been lured by **Ziyad's** promises. When you enter Kufa, the people will defy their leaders and submit to you, and that day is not far when the cursed head of **Yazid** will be severed from his body. You should proceed in the name of God. This is not the time to procrastinate. Even angels long to be martyred for Truth.

Zainab: *Bhaiyya*, may my life be sacrificed for you. Let's return home.

Hussain: Alas, it's no longer in my power to go back from here. I already see the dust of the enemy's marching army. They have blocked the way back as well. There is no sign of habitation for miles to the left and right. We can't go anywhere except Kufa. Whether we get the throne or the gallows, there is no other alternative for us. **Abbas**, go and inform my friends that I gladly allow them to go wherever they like. I'll not hold any grudges against anyone. Come, pull down the tents.

Scene 2

[Time—Evening. **Hussain**'s caravan is passing through a desert.]

Abbas: *Allah-o-Akbar!* We can now see the foliage of the city of Kufa.

Habeeb: Kufa is still far off; this might be some other village.

Abbas: By the Holy Prophet, it's the army marching towards us. I can clearly see the tips of their spears.

Hussain: Yes, it's the army. Our enemies have sent it to us as a gift from Kufa. Let's pitch our tents near that mound. It won't be a surprise if our fate is decided here.

[*The caravan halts. The tents are pitched. Ladies begin alighting from their camels. The enemy army closes in.*]

Abbas: Beware! No one should take even a step further. There are tents of *Hazrat* **Hussain** here.

Ali Akbar: I'll go and reprimand these vile men.

Hussain: **Abbas**, ask them who they are and what they want.

Abbas: (To the army) Who is your commander?

Hur: (Coming forward) My name is **Hur**. I'm a slave of *Hazrat* **Hussain**.

Abbas: A friend, who comes in the guise of the enemy, is an enemy.

Hur: *Ya Hazrat*, I'm bound by the decree of the ruler and by the fetters of my allegiance to him, but at heart, I am **Hussain**'s slave.

Hussain: (To **Abbas**) *Bhai*, let him come; his speech bears the mark of truth.

Hur: *Ya Hazrat*, the people of Kufa have betrayed you. Both **Ziyad** and **Yazid** are preparing to kill you, and a huge army is being mobilised. The leaders of Kufa are ready to fight you.

Hussain: First, tell me why your soldiers are so worn out and distraught?

Hur: What can I say! We haven't had a drop of water for the past several hours. All of us are dying of thirst.

Hussain: (To **Abbas**), *Bhaiyya*, offering water to the thirsty is a much more pious act than one hundred *rakats* of *namaz*. If you have water, quench their thirst. Though my enemies, they are Muslims after all and ardent followers of my *nana*.

Abbas: *Ya Hazrat*, this water is for our women and children.

Hussain: Give them water; God will take care of our children.

[***Abbas, Ali Akbar, and Habeeb** bring waterskins and offer it to soldiers to drink.*]

Abbas: (To **Hur**) Now tell me, do you want a truce or war?

Hur: *Hazrat*, I've neither been sent to fight with you nor to negotiate a truce. I've been sent so that I could take *Hazrat* to **Ziyad** and not let him go anywhere else.

Abbas: This means, you want to fight. No caliph or governor can compel us to go anywhere. The kingdom belongs to God. We are free to go wherever we wish, and if anyone dares stop us, we'll remove him like a thorn.

Hussain: It's time for *namaz*. Let's offer *namaz* first. We can talk later. **Hur**, will you offer *namaz* with me or with your soldiers?

Hur: *Ya Hazrat*, I can't miss the spiritual gain of praying behind you, even if my soldiers abandon me.

Scene 3

[Time—Evening. **Naseema** is sitting in the garden humming a song in a low voice.]

When they lifted my corpse from my house to bury me
I wish, from your abode, you too could've glanced at me
My breath is over; I have departed from this world
Oh, now, from my couch, you've come to lift me
Why are you removing my body, remove my desires
Which brought me from my house to your company
Let me shed tears on my bed, O death!
On the night of separation, it was my only company.
O Taskin, I vividly remember the moment
When death separated me from my lover's company.

[*Waheb enters. Naseema stops singing.*]

Waheb: Why did you stop? I came in to hear you sing.

Naseema: I sing to let out my emotions. Why should I express my pain, my only companion in my loneliness, when no one is willing to heed it!

Waheb: Naseema, I should be the one complaining; you're taking away that right from me.

Naseema: You're mine. All that you have is mine, but all this is hard to believe. I worry all the time that you'll forget me; you'll lose interest in me and scorn me. Howsoever hard I try to overcome this feeling, like a drenched cat, it refuses to go away. Surrounded by gloomy thoughts, I start crying. I don't know what magic spell you have cast over me that I've lost control over myself. I fear that our happy days are numbered. I beg of you not to scorn me else my heart would shatter. I never knew the frailty of my heart, until I came here.

Waheb: I feel the opposite. I feel a new strength in my heart, such that no worry or desire of the world can now overpower it. There is no force on this earth that I cannot overcome. Your presence has made my heart very strong. I don't even care about death now. Love has made me brave, fearless, and strong. I feel love is the elixir that strengthens the heart.

Naseema: **Waheb**, your words scare me to death; perhaps these are forebodings of our impending ruin. **Waheb**, I won't let you go. I swear by the Holy Book, I won't let you go anywhere. I don't care who becomes the caliph or *Amir*, and I don't care about wealth or *jagir*. I want you, only you.

[*Entry of Qamar.*]

Qamar: See what the bullying soldiers of **Ziyad** are doing outside. They have arrested your father and are dragging him towards *Jama Masjid.*

Naseema: O God, this is why I was feeling so miserable.

[*Waheb stands up. Naseema holds his hand to stop him.*]

Waheb: Naseema, don't worry, I'll be back soon.

Naseema: No, no, you can't leave me behind, alive. I know **Ziyad**, and I know you as well. You can't come back alive after you come face to face with **Ziyad**.

Qamar: *Beta*, if **Naseema** doesn't want you to go, don't go. But remember, this will taint your name forever. I'll have to go. **Naseema**, farewell, we may never meet again! **Waheb**, I hand over our house and property to you. May you live long and may God give you the opportunity to do good deeds!

Waheb: *Amma*, I'm also coming.

Qamar: No, your wife deserves your protection the most.

Waheb: Naseema, for God's sake....

Naseema: No, my lord, not by leaving me behind alive.

[*Qamar leaves. Waheb sits with his head hung low.*]

Naseema: My dear, I'm guilty of loving you; punish me as you wish. Love is selfish. I want to protect my garden from the storm. I wish destiny hadn't brought me to this garden. Alas! Had I not built my nest here, I could've escaped the fear of lightning and the huntsman. You will suffer humiliation because of me. I wish I were dead.

[*Naseema places her head at Waheb's feet.*]

Scene 4

[Time—Midnight. **Abbas** is standing guard at **Hussain's** tent. **Hur** comes very quietly and stands near the tent.]

Hur: (Soliloquy) How will I face God, and how will I face the Prophet of God? Ah, my cursed slavery. It's disgraceful to wage war on the son of the pious man who showed us the light of faith, taught us to pray to God, and elevated us to be superior human beings. I know, if I rebel, **Yazid** will become my sworn enemy, my *jagirs* will be confiscated, my children will become destitute, but I will rise in the eyes of the Prophet by rejecting the comforts of this world. I didn't know that swearing an oath of allegiance to **Yazid** would jeopardise my hereafter. But now, this life will be sacrificed for **Hussain**—whatever be the consequences. **Yazid** has no rightful claim over the caliphate. I committed a blunder by pledging allegiance to him. I'm not duty-bound to follow his orders. That will make me a sinner in the eyes of God.

[*He advances.*]

Abbas: Who is it? Don't you dare take a step further or your body will be lying on the ground.

Hur: *Ya Hazrat*, this is your slave, **Hur**. I wanted to submit a request to *Hazrat* **Hussain**.

Abbas: It's time for him to rest.

Hur: It's critical for me to meet him right now.

Abbas: (Aside) I don't suspect anything devious. Let me also go with him. (Aloud) Alright. Come with me!

[***Abbas** calls **Hussain** out of his tent.*]

Hur: *Ya Hazrat*, please forgive me for bothering you at this inappropriate hour. I've come here to urge you to not go towards Kufa. It's nighttime, and my soldiers are sleeping; you can go in any other direction as you please. Please grant me this request!

Hussain: **Hur**, this is not the time for us to save our lives; it's a question of protecting the honour of Islam.

Hur: You can go towards Yemen; you'll find sufficient support there. I've heard that **Suleman** and **Mukhtar** are gathering soldiers to help you.

Hussain: Will the same greed that prompted the chieftains of Kufa to betray me not show its impact in Yemen? Ignorance of people is common everywhere. There is no way for me other than Kufa. If you don't let me go, I will do it by force. I know I'll attain martyrdom there. I've heard this from my *nana*. Should I decline the honour of martyrdom out of fear?

Hur: If you're determined to go, at least send the womenfolk back home.

Hussain: Oh, had it been possible, no one would've been happier than me. But not one of them is ready to leave me.

[*A sound of Om, Om comes from somewhere.*]

Hur: *Ya Hazrat*, where is this voice coming from. It seems to overwhelm me.

[*Entry of a* **Yogi**, *with ash smeared over his body, long hair and deerskin on his shoulder.*]

Yogi: Lord, I want to visit the grave of the great saint **Muhammad**.

Hussain: Who are you? What've you done to yourself?

Yogi: I am a *Sadhu*, a *Hindu* ascetic. I'm coming from a country where the voice of God was first heard. *Maharishi* **Muhammad** made the whole universe reverberate with that same voice. His call for the Unity of God awakened even the sages from their meditation. I've come from *Bharat* to pay my respects to that great soul. Please direct me to the place!

Hussain: Please come! I'm fortunate to have met you. It's very late in the night and dark. Please rest here for the night. I'll send a man to escort you in the morning.

Yogi: (Looking closely at **Hussain's** face) No, Your honour! I've taken a vow that I'll not rest until I have reached that sacred spot. Lord, I see in your radiant face the reflection of the glow of the same *Maharishi*. Are you his relative?

Hussain: Yes, I'm his grandson. But you haven't seen my *nana*; how do you know that I resemble him?

Yogi: (Laughing) Lord, I haven't seen him physically, but I've had a spiritual glimpse of him. His holy sayings have moved my soul. I can see that same spirit manifest in you. Please allow me to bow my head at your sacred feet and purify it.

Hussain: (Stepping back) No, no, I'm a mere human being; the Holy Prophet taught us that it's not for humans to pray before fellow humans.

Yogi: What a high ideal of the divinity of the human race! The flame of knowledge, which rose from this land, will radiate across the globe and make Truth and Justice shine far and wide. Yes, the progeny of this *Maharishi* will protect justice. Now please allow me to leave. I've been truly blessed to get a glimpse of you.

[*The Yogi leaves.*]

Hussain: Now, I don't regret death. The followers of my *nana* will support Truth and Justice. This is why perhaps the Prophet decided to sacrifice his progeny to protect Truth. **Hur**, did you hear the prophecy of this *fakir*?

Hur: *Ya Hazrat,* I've never appreciated your honourable status as profoundly as I did today. *Huzoor*, please pray to the Prophet of God for me so that God may forgive my sins.

[*Leaves.*]

Hussain: **Abbas**, we should inform the people of Kufa about our arrival there.

Abbas: Right.

Hussain: Who can go?

Abbas: Shall I send **Saidavi**?

Hussain: That will be good.

[***Abbas calls in Saidavi.***]

Abbas: **Saidavi**, you'll have to go to Kufa with the news of our arrival there. I needn't tell you that it involves grave risks.

Saidavi: *Ya Hazrat*, why should I fear anyone when I am under your grace?

Hussain: Good, take this letter and give it to a chieftain who is a true follower of the Prophet. Go, may God protect you through the journey!

[*Saidavi leaves.*]

Hussain: (Soliloquy) **Saidavi**, you are going, but I doubt if you'll come back alive. You don't have the obligation to protect Faith or Truth, you aren't surrounded by enemies and you could lead a comfortable life. Yet, if you are ready to jump into the jaws of death to uphold the virtue of friendship, I have no reason to fear death!

Why should the faithful worry about death,
Once to faith, with pure intent, they surrender!
When do wealth or fear bother the brave,
Great is the soul whose mantle is pure.
Why should I regret, if I remain alive,
Why should I grieve, if I do not survive?
Let my enemy suffer infamy here, sorrows hereafter,
He will lose his faith, he'll face dishonour.

Scene 5

[Time—Night. **Hussain** is asleep in his tent. He suddenly wakes up with a start and looks frantically around him.]

Hussain: (**Soliloquy**) I can't see anyone here. It's just me, this candle and my pounding heart. Then whose voice did I hear? Oh, my head is reeling! Someone was here. It can't be a dream. People in dreams are like pictures wrapped in veils of mist. Voices in dreams sound as though they're coming from under the crevices of the earth. When are they ever clear like this! Let me see if someone is standing outside. (Coming out of the tent) Oh, such dense darkness, as if my eyes have never seen any light. What a haunting silence, as if I'm devoid of the power of hearing; as if the world has just emerged from a deep cavern. (Aloud) Anybody out there?

[*Entry of* ***Ali Akbar***.]

Ali Akbar: I'm here, *Abbajaan*. What do you want?

Hussain: Did anyone pass by, riding a horse?

Ali Akbar: If my senses serve me right, no living being came by.

Hussain: How Strange! I was lying in bed. I hadn't slept a wink when a man riding a dark horse appeared to me and said, "O **Hussain**! You are in a hurry to go to Iraq and death is following you." *Beta*, it seems my death is near.

Ali Akbar: *Baba*, aren't we on the right path?

Hussain: Indeed, we are on the right path. Truth is with us.

Ali Akbar: Why fear death when we are on the right path! Why should we care whether we go towards death, or death comes towards us?

Hussain: *Beta*, you have really made me glad. May God grant you the best reward that a father can give his son!

[*Entry of* ***Zaheer, Habeeb, Abdullah Kalabi*** *and his wife*.]

Ali Akbar: Who is it?

Zaheer: We're travellers. Do these tents belong to *Hazrat* **Hussain**?

Ali Akbar: Yes.

Zaheer: Thank God we've reached our destination. We're coming from Kufa just to have a glimpse of him.

Hussain: The one whom you've come to see from Kufa is himself on his way to Kufa to meet you. I'm **Hussain**, son of **Ali**.

Zaheer: It's our good fortune that we got a chance to have a glimpse of you. We are your slaves. Even the walls of Kufa have turned your enemy these days. Please don't go there. We left Kufa because we realised that by staying there, we couldn't do anything for you. We've witnessed the gory killing of **Muslim**, **Haani's** beheading, and poor **Taua's** body being cut into pieces. People who swore by your friendship have become the right hand of **Ziyad**.

Hussain: May God show them the right path! Destiny is taking me towards Kufa, and now no power can stop me from going there. You should take some rest. Tomorrow is an auspicious day because I'll reach the place where martyrdom awaits me.

[*Everyone leaves*]

Scene 6

[Place—the desert of Karbala. The river, Furat, is flowing on one side. **Hussain** is standing in the desert of Karbala. **Abbas** and **Ali Akbar** are also with him.]

Ali Akbar: Let's pitch our tents at the riverbank; it'll ensure a cool breeze.
Abbas: These surroundings are so refreshing.
Hussain: (With tears in his eyes) *Bhai*, the sight of the flowing river fills my heart with grief. I remember, once the army of our late father had camped here. *Baba* was very sad. He was not able to control the tears flowing from his eyes. He neither ate nor slept. I asked, "*Ya Hazrat*, why are you so miserable?" He gave me a tight hug and said, "*Beta*, one day, after I'm gone, you'll visit this place. You'll understand the reason for my agony then." Today, I'm reminded of his words. He didn't weep without reason. It's here that our blood will be shed; it's here that our sisters and daughters will be put in chains; it's here that my people will be killed, and we'll be humiliated. By God, it is here that my throat will be slit, and my beard will go red with blood. It is this place that my *nana* pledged to God Almighty, and it is destined to happen here.

[*Laments.*]

Where will a handful of my dust find rest?
Who will nurse this soul in distress?
The cage has a hundred doors, yet I'm captive,
Look at the shelter offered to this homeless!
Who has the heart to come and see,
the candle on my grave doused under duress?
Death ends the tale of my night of sorrow,
By closing the eyes that counted the stars countless.
First, the hope of a call from the garden and after me,
The voice of spring, the skies suppress.
Where is comfort when the sun of the desert of grief
Spits fire at every tree that offers relief from distress.
Why do you bother to erase the marks of my grave?

When skies themselves are up against faithfulness;
Before the calamity that may render me silent,
Listen, to the story of my heart, restless.

[*Zainab steps out of her tent.*]

Zainab: *Bhaiyya*, what place is this? The very sight of it evokes such fear that my heart jumps into my mouth. **Banu** is distraught as **Asghar** refuses to suckle.

Hussain: *Bahen*, this is the desert of Karbala.

Zainab: (Beating her head with both hands) *Bhaiyya*, the star of my eyes, let my life be sacrificed for you. Why has destiny dragged us here? Why don't we go somewhere else?

Hussain: *Bahen*, where can we go, we are surrounded and besieged from all sides. It's **Ziyad's** orders that my caravan cannot camp anywhere else. I'm helpless; I don't want to be the one to start a war.

Zainab: Oh, *Bhaiyya*! This is an ominous place. I've known about it ever since I was a child. Oh, *Bhaiyya*, it's here that you'll be separated from me. I will be forced to watch in silence as you will be struck with spears. You won't go back with us to Medina. The progeny of the Prophet will be wiped out; his daughters will be dishonoured here. Oh, destiny!

You will part from me in this desert, O Bhai!
I won't find you, even if I scan its dust, O Bhai!
You won't escort your sisters back to Medina
I will watch as you'll be hit with spears, O Bhai!
This is the place where Banu will lose her offspring
Where the Prophet's family will endure suffering.
[*She faints. People sprinkle water on her face.*]

Ali Akbar: *Ya Hazrat,* where should we pitch our tents?

Abbas: I suggest the riverbank.

Hussain: No *Bhaiyya*, our enemy won't allow us to camp near the river. Let's pitch our tents in this field. God is everywhere. His purpose will prevail.

[*Women carry **Zainab** into the tent.*]

Banu: Oh, Oh, *Baji jan*, what happened! O God, we are facing grave misfortune, please have mercy upon us.

Hussain: **Banu**, she's not a sister but a mother to me. If idol-worship were not forbidden in Islam, I'd be worshipping her. She is the shining star of my family. Can there be a more fortunate brother than me, to be blessed with a sister like her!

[*Sprinkles water on* ***Zainab's*** *face.*]

Scene 7

[Time—12 in the night. **Naseema** is sitting alone in her room.]

Naseema: (Soliloquy) He [**Waheb**] hasn't returned. I sent a slave to fetch him, but the slave, too, didn't return. May **Waheb** come back soon! How can one remain unmoved by the recent events? When your neighbourhood is on fire, you can't keep safe by shutting yourself inside the house. I tried hard to escape these clashes; I kept my doors closed even when *abbajaan* and *amma* were exiled for not pledging allegiance to **Yazid**. But, nothing worked. The albatross of allegiance hangs around our necks. **Waheb** is willing to do anything for me. He would have even agreed to pledge allegiance to **Yazid**, however hard it may have been for him. But after watching everything, I'm no longer inclined to accept allegiance to **Yazid**. I hate him. How brutally **Muslim** was killed; how cruelly **Haani** was executed! After all this, if I pledge **Yazid's** allegiance, my conscience will never forgive me. Ah, I can endure my pain, but I can't bear to see the mental torture **Waheb** is enduring. I've been harsh on him; I won't tighten my love's noose on him anymore. Ever since *abba* and *amma* were banished, I've never seen **Waheb** happy. He's lost his spark. Though he still laughs and sings with me, I know it's only to make me happy. Whenever I see him, I find him sad and distressed ... He's arrived. Let me go and open the door.

[*She opens the door. Waheb comes in.*]

Naseema: Thank God you are back, else I'd have gone looking for you. I was really worried. Where have you left the slave?

Waheb: He's been killed. **Naseema**, I've never seen anybody give up their life so valiantly. Nobody would even throw a morsel before a dog the way he threw himself before death. I'm forced to think he was some sort of saint.

Naseema: Ah my faithful, poor **Saalim**! May God rest you in Heaven! Why did the cruel men kill him?

Waheb: The poor man died for my sake. There were thousands of men gathered in the *Jama Masjid*. The confirmed news is that *Hazrat* **Hussain** is arriving here from Mecca to seek allegiance. The tyrants

have become ruthless. Those who had not pledged allegiance to **Yazid** earlier are being forced to do so now. I agreed when **Ziyad** asked me to swear allegiance. Had I refused, I'd have been put in prison straight away. **Ziyad** was pleased with me. He praised me, made me sit at a prominent position among the supporters of **Yazid**, increased my *jagir,* and also declared his wish to confer some position on me. He wanted all the supporters to sit in a row, to make everyone take a pledge in one go; this is what held me back. In the middle of all this, **Saalim** arrived and started badmouthing me when he saw me sitting among **Yazid's** supporters. He called me unfaithful, opportunist, shameless, and God knows what all, and in that fit of rage, expressed disdain for both **Yazid** and **Ziyad**. He sarcastically said to me, "Today, I've been liberated from your service; I can die, but I can't accept the lordship of someone who is a slave himself." **Ziyad** ordered that this mischief-monger should die, and then the hangmen killed him in that same courtyard. Ah, he was killed right before my eyes, and I couldn't even utter a word in his defence; his bleeding body was dragged and thrown to dogs in front of me, and even then, my blood didn't boil. This wellbeing comes by driving a very hard bargain.

Naseema: Undoubtedly! Have you already pledged your allegiance?

Waheb: Not yet. It was getting late as the number of people kept increasing. Finally, the decision was made to postpone the oath-taking. Everyone has been summoned again tomorrow.

Naseema: You should never pledge allegiance to these oppressors.

Waheb: No, **Naseema**. We don't have a choice, now.

Naseema: I plead before you:you should never do it!

Waheb: You are forcing yourself to say this to make me happy.

Naseema: No **Waheb**, I won't be happy even if you did it with full conviction. I'm also a human being, **Waheb**, not a sheep. My feelings haven't gone numb. I won't let you bow down before these tyrants. I know the *jagir* will be confiscated, rewards will be withdrawn, and we'll be exiled. I'm prepared to face all these catastrophes with you.

Waheb: But what if the tyrants didn't stop at that?

Naseema: Ah **Waheb**! If this is inevitable, then, for God's sake, let's leave this place right away. We needn't carry our belongings. Let's go far away from here; we'll spend our life wandering in forests, but won't buckle down before these oppressors.

Waheb: (Embracing her) **Naseema**, may my life be sacrificed for you! The oppression of tyrants has worked in my favour. Now I've no complaints against their brutality. We have physically embraced each other so many times, but today, our souls, too, are united. There will be barricading on the roads at this hour.

Naseema: The servants of tyrants are generally not loyal. I'll offer fifty *dinars* to the guard, and he'll offer his horse and lead us out of the city.

Waheb: Think it over! No compassion will be shown to rebels. There's only one punishment for it, and that is death.

Naseema: **Waheb**, human beings are resilient—if required, a man scared of earthworms can twist the neck of a snake, and men used to a luxurious life can be happy in rags. I always imagined that danger lies in leaving the nest, and comfort is only at home. But now I know that the huntsmen's hands can reach the nest as well. Our salvation is not in running away and quitting but in fighting it out. Your companionship, the situation in the kingdom and the leadership of the degenerate chieftains have taught me that in this place well-being comes at the cost of faith, and safety at the expense of Truth. True well-being and happiness lie in defending Faith and Truth. A poet has summed it up well.

There is no charm in living, no joy in death
The joy lies in enduring the pain of a bleeding heart.

Waheb: Forgive me **Naseema**, I failed to understand you. Let's prepare for our journey.

Act 4

Scene 1

[Time—Dawn. **Ziyad** is sitting on the floor, thinking.]

Ziyad: (Soliloquy) What's the use of loyalty if it doesn't reflect in actions? All the chieftains of Kufa are reluctant to fight **Muslim-Bin-Aqeel**. Nobody is willing to finish this mission. All of them are hiding behind excuses of the hereafter and salvation. What kind of wisdom is it that prompts people to sacrifice this world for the imagined fruits of the hereafter? Ah, Religion! How many acts of foolishness pass for piety in thy name; how have you reduced man to be an infirm worshiper of the unseen?

[*Entry of Uma-e-Sa'ad.*]

Sa'ad: *Assalamalaikum Ya Amir*, why have you summoned me?

Ziyad: I wish to seek your counsel on an important matter. You know how fertile, populous and flourishing the province of "Rai" is?

Sa'ad: I know very well, *Huzoor*. I've lived there for some time; the entire province is full of orchards of nuts and dotted by mountain streams. The inhabitants of the province are decent and courteous. A visit to the place turns a sick man into a man of strength.

Ziyad: I wish to make you the governor of that state. Would you accept it?

Sa'ad: (Bowing down) With all humility. I'll be grateful to you forever for this recognition and reward.

Ziyad: Apart from a decent annual stipend, you'll receive horses, servants, and a slave from the government.

Sa'ad: This is sheer kindness. May God keep you happy forever!

Ziyad: Then I'm going to ask the scribe to issue the order in your name; you may go there and take charge of the place.

Sa'ad: I'll be indebted to you, forever.

Ziyad: I'm sure you'll prove as valuable and faithful as I expect you to be.

[*Calls the chief scribe, who writes the order to be issued in Sa'ad's name.*]

Sa'ad: (Taking the order) Should I leave tomorrow?

Ziyad: No, no, not so soon. You'll have to prove your loyalty before you proceed. Such a high position can only go to the person who has proven himself worthy of our trust. It's the compensation for an important assignment you'll have to perform.

Sa'ad: I'm ready for anything with my heart and soul. Send me on a mission that no one else could achieve. God willing, I'll come back victorious.

Ziyad: Indeed! This is what I expect from you. You know that **Hussain Bin Ali** is on his way to Kufa. I'm apprehensive about his intentions. You'll have to go and fight him.

Sa'ad: *Ya Amir,* please excuse me from this mission. I'll have no objection to anything else that you command me to do.

Ziyad: Why? What qualms do you have in fighting **Hussain**?

Sa'ad: I'm your servant, but I'll forever be indebted to you if you could spare me from this.

Ziyad: As you wish. I'll send someone else in your place. Give me back the order and sit at home. The estate of Rai belongs to the man who can accomplish this mission. You can't go to Paradise without going through death. The man who has one foot in the boat of this world and another in the hereafter can never reach the shore.

Sa'ad: (Aside) The estate of Rai is on one side and salvation on the other; there is wealth and power on one side, and there is curse and humiliation on the other. (Aloud) *Ya Amir,* give me a day. I'll think it over and let you know by tomorrow.

Ziyad: Very well. Think about it.

[*Both leave.*]

Scene 2

[Time—Morning. Sa'ad's house. Sa'ad is sitting all alone].

Sa'ad: (Soliloquy) My friends, relatives, and strangers all have advised me against fighting **Hussain**. My wife thinks it's better to end up with nothing in this world than to have **Hussain's** blood on one's hands. I promised **Ziyad** to get back with my answer today. I spent all night thinking about it, yet I've failed to arrive at any decision. It's a peculiar dilemma. My conscience doesn't permit me to kill **Hussain**. I have pledged my allegiance to **Yazid**, but I've no enmity towards **Hussain**. He's such a pious and honourable man. We're the ones who invited him here by sending him petitions and messengers, and now, when he's coming to help us, we are bent upon taking his life. Ah, cursed selfishness! You make us close our eyes to faith and disbelief, good and evil. What a grave sin it is to raise the sword against the grandson of the Prophet of God! May God never make me go astray like this! How fertile the region of "Rai" is! Just a short stay there could make me rich. What a lavish life I will lead! Oh, shame on me! Lured by wealth and power, I am willing to commit such grave sins. No, I cannot perform such a heinous act. "Rai" may be a Paradise, but I don't want it at the cost of slaying the Prophet's grandson.

[*Entry of Ziyad.*]

Sa'ad: *Assalamalaik*! *Amir* **Ziyad**! Why did you take the trouble of coming here?! I was going to appear before you on my own.

Ziyad: I was doing the rounds of the city. It's crucial to keep a strict vigil on the rebels. I've heard that **Habeeb, Zaheer, Abdullah**, and others have secretly left us and joined **Hussain's** battalion. If we don't stop this, the rebels will be emboldened. **Hussain** has very few people with him, but I wouldn't be surprised if half the city joins him when he reaches here. A lion, even if in the cage, should be feared. The grandson of the Prophet wouldn't hold back for want of an army. Tell me, have you decided? I cannot wait any longer.

Sa'ad: *Ya Amir*, my own conscience does not permit me to carry out your orders, and my family members are also advising me against taking

on **Hussain**. As you have offered me the governorship of "Rai," it is my duty to follow your command. But please don't send me to slay **Hussain**.

Ziyad: **Sa'ad**, there is no gain without pain. With honey comes the poisonous sting. You want to enjoy the honey, but you don't want to endure the pain of the bee's sting. You want to go to Heaven, but you don't want to go through the pain of death. I don't want to force you. There is no dearth of people who can fight **Hussain** to grab this reward. Return the *farman* and happily sit at home and worship the Prophet and God.

Sa'ad: Ya *Amir*, think of how much it will sully my name as the news of my appointment as the Governor of "Rai" has spread in the entire city. My friends have already congratulated me. Now, what will people think if this *farman* is repealed!

Ziyad: You should ask this question to your conscience.

Sa'ad: *Ya Amir*, give me some more time.

Ziyad: Stop these delaying tactics. I swear upon the Holy Book: I will now be stern with you. If you're not prepared to fight **Hussain** by the evening, I'll confiscate your property and have your houses looted; this house will be demolished, and your life will not be safe.

[*Ziyad exits.*]

Sa'ad: (Soliloquy) It looks like I'm destined to be a sinner. Now it's not just the question of the governorship of "Rai." It has become a matter of my own life and property. That cruel man killed **Haani** so brutally. **Kaseer** also paid a heavy price for his principles. The people of the city did not raise their voice, not even in the case of a relative of **Hussain**. This is much more serious. **Ziyad**, in rage, can do anything. I can sacrifice "Rai" for faith, but I can't sacrifice my life and property. I can't muster the courage that **Haani** and **Kaseer** had.

[*Entry of Shimr.*]

Shimr: *Assalamalaikum* **Sa'ad**. What's bothering you, what response did you give to **Ziyad**?

Sa'ad: My conscience doesn't allow to me to fight **Hussain**.

Shimr: You won't get a golden opportunity like this to acquire power and wealth ever again. Such occasions don't come every day.

Sa'ad: What about salvation?

Shimr: God is merciful and benevolent; you can't doubt it. Why would He be called merciful if He didn't forgive us our sins? How will He show His beneficence if we don't commit sins?

Sa'ad: God will not forgive such grave sins.

Shimr: If someone loses faith in God's forgiveness, he'll not remain a Muslim anymore. Of what use is fasting, praying, and helping the poor with *Zakat* and *Khairat*, if it can't get our sins forgiven?

Sa'ad: How will I face the Prophet of God after death?

Shimr: Sa'ad, if you think we're free to act as we desire, you're mistaken. We are all prisoners of our destiny. We can't even move a finger without His approval. This is not a question of rewards or penalties. Don't delay, else you'll regret it.

[*Shimr Exits.*]

Sa'ad: (Soliloquy) **Shimr** sounded sensible. Undoubtedly, God forgives the sins of His slaves; otherwise, Hell will run out of space, and sinners won't even find a place to stand. God certainly Wills that I should go and fight **Hussain**; why else would **Ziyad** propose this to me? If God so Wills, what option do I have but to submit? Whatever be the consequences, now I've jumped into the fire. What does it matter, whether I succumb to it or am saved?

[*Calls his slave and writes an acceptance letter to* ***Ziyad***.]

Slave: *Huzoor* has perhaps accepted the governorship of "Rai."

Sa'ad: What have you to do with these matters?

Slave: I knew you would accept it.

Sa'ad: How did you know?

Slave: I wouldn't reject such an offer myself, howsoever cruel I may have to become for it!

Sa'ad: (Aside) This man is so right!

[*The slave leaves, and* ***Sa'ad*** *starts singing*]

Separated from you, I mourn the grief of parting,
Sitting back at home with all my earnings.
Heart, soul, life, faith, all can one name,
That cruel soul has usurped so many things.
God alone can forgive me when the saqi himself
Prods me to drink, saying, "why are you bothering"?
My night of grief doesn't end, despite You
Whither lies O God, Your Divine Being?
He turns around to relay my words to others
God knows which old affinity he's been nurturing!
Friends, preacher's words have worked on Desire:
It sits on a tattered mat in the mosque, praying.

Scene 3

[Sa'ad's battalion is camping on the bank of the river, Furat. Two miles from the bank of Furat is the contingent of **Hussain**. Sa'ad has placed a regiment between the river, Furat and **Hussain's** camps to block water from reaching them. It's morning time. **Shimr** and **Sa'ad** are sitting in the tent.]

Sa'ad: I'm still not prepared to fight **Hussain**. I wish a truce could be worked out, but none of the three messengers I've sent so far has been able to bring a reply to my letters. One of them refused to go to *Hazrat* **Hussain**; the second was so ashamed that he disappeared; the third went and offered his allegiance to **Hussain**. I'm wary of sending more messengers lest the same happens again.

Shimr: If **Ziyad** comes to know of it, he will be furious.

Sa'ad: I think **Hussain** hasn't come here to wage war; he came because people invited him to come. It would be against humanity to betray him after inviting him over.

Shimr: I suspect that annoyed by your procrastination, **Ziyad** might recall you. Only God can save us from his fury then. **Ziyad** had urged us to ensure that **Hussain's** contingent shouldn't get a single drop of water! But here, his men freely take water from the river and dig wells without any objection from our side. Do you think such things will remain a secret from **Ziyad**?

Sa'ad: I don't know who divulges all the information to him?

Shimr: He has many spies who keep him posted about everything.

[*Entry of a messenger.*]

Messenger: *Assalamalaik* **Bin Sa'ad**! I've brought an order from the *Amir*.

[*Gives Sa'ad a letter from Ziyad.*]

Sa'ad: (After reading the letter) Go and wait outside; the reply will be sent. (The messenger leaves.) This reiterates the same instruction: don't let **Hussain** access water and don't delay the matter even for a moment. See what he writes:

"Now, there is no excuse left for not fighting **Hussain**. The deficiency of troops was an obstacle earlier, but that too doesn't exist anymore. You now have 22,000 horsemen and troops."

Shimr: He's right. I'll give strict orders that not even a bird from **Hussain's** camp should come near the river. Issue orders at once to your troops to start the combat!

Sa'ad: You know well how so many of my 20,000 men have already deserted, fearing the curse of the hereafter, and so many continue to do so daily.

Shimr: Which is why it's all the more critical to start the battle. Otherwise, the entire army will slowly vanish like clouds. I've heard that **Ziyad** has had the absconders arrested, and they'll soon come back and join the army. He has also ordered that deserters' property will be confiscated, and they will be exiled along with their families. This order has had a good effect: No one will now dare desert the army. I've also received news that **Ziyad** has had many people killed.

[*Entry of another messenger.*]

Messenger: *Assalamalaikum* **Bin Sa'ad**. *Hazrat* **Hussain** has sent this letter and asked for a response. (Gives the letter to **Sa'ad**.)

Sa'ad: (After going through the letter) Go and wait outside. You'll get the reply in a short while.

Shimr: (Peeping in to read the letter) What does it say?

Sa'ad: (Folding the letter) Nothing, it only says that **Hussain** wants to meet me.

Shimr: It's his new trick. I swear upon the Holy Book, you will regret it if you answer his call. You'll not make it back to your camp.

Sa'ad: Are you suggesting **Hussain** will betray me? The son of **Ali** can never deceive anyone.

Shimr: I didn't mean that. He might want to propose a way out. His speech has a magician's charm; I'm afraid he might trick you. Would you mind if I also come along?

Sa'ad: This is a personal matter. I'll do what I deem fit.

[*Calls the messenger and hands over the reply to the letter.*]

Shimr: He has called you at night, hasn't he?

Sa'ad: You should've guessed as much.

Shimr: (Standing up to leave) Don't forget what I said. (Aside) His behaviour shows he'll be trapped by **Hussain**. I must inform **Ziyad**.

Sa'ad: (Aside) May God's wrath be upon you, tyrant! You are a few steps ahead of **Ziyad**. I know it's you who relays the information to **Ziyad**. **Hussain** will deceive me?! **Hussain** is not among those who deceive anyone. He is himself, instead a victim of deception.

Scene 4

[Time—Evening. Women of **Hussain's** family are sitting and chatting.]

Sughra: *Amma*, I'm feeling very thirsty.

Ali Asghar: Water. Water, *phuphi*!

Hanfa: May I die in your place *beta*; how much water do you need? I'll get it. (She goes to check the water containers and comes back beating her chest). *Ya bibi*, may I sacrifice my life for you, there is not a single drop of water here. What do I give the children to drink?

Zainab: Is there no water left?

Hanfa: *Bibi*, I'll offer my life for you. All the water skins and pitchers are lying empty.

Zainab: What a calamity! The river was already blocked, now those tyrants don't let us dig wells.

Ali Asghar: Water. Water, *phuphi*!

Shahr Banu: O God! What curse has fallen upon us? How do I console these little ones?

Hanfa: *Bibi,* I'll go to the river and fetch water. Who can stop me; I will char their faces. How can I let my children die of thirst while the river flows?

Zainab: Don't you know that six-and-a-half lakh horsemen have been posted to block water from reaching us?

Hanfa: May my life be sacrificed for you *Ya bibi!* Who can stop me? Wouldn't I take them to task? Will the progeny of the Prophet go thirsty?

[*Hanfa picks up a water cask and proceeds toward the river; she comes back after a while—her hair pulled out, clothes torn and the cask missing. She sits on the ground wailing.*]

Zainab: What happened, **Hanfa**? Why are you in this terrible state?

Hanfa: *Bibi*, May the curses of God befall these sinners! Those tyrants stopped me, snatched my water cask and unleashed a dog on me! I ran and somehow made it here! Oh! Why don't the heavens fall on these offenders. I've never been treated so badly.

[*She weeps.*]

Hussain: (Coming in) **Hanfa**, why are you crying? Oh, who tore your clothes?

Zainab: This poor, unfortunate woman had gone to fetch water as the children were dying of thirst. Those tyrants nearly killed her.

Hussain: **Hanfa**, please don't cry. I swear by the feet of the Prophet, the heads of those tyrants will soon be lying at your feet, even if all of my kin and I have to die for it. The punishment for dishonouring a woman is death—even if she is a helpless slave. I'll show to these tyrants that the honour of a slave-girl is no less precious to me than the honour of women of my own family.

[*He goes out brandishing his sword, but* **Hanfa** *holds him by his legs.*]

Hanfa: My lord, may I die for you! I don't want to take my revenge in this world hellfire would be much more dreadful, and the punishment much more terrifying in the hereafter. I don't want them to be let off so easily as by dying by your sword.

Hussain: **Hanfa**, such arguments are for those who can't take their revenge in this world. Why only seventy-two, even if I had lakhs of men, I'd have sacrificed them to protect your honour! Let me go; I fear my wrath will annihilate me.

Hanfa: (Aside) I wish those tyrants were here to witness the kind of respect the woman, upon whom they had unleashed their dogs, commands in the eyes of **Ali's** son. (Aloud) No, my lord, I don't want the enemies to have such a dignified death. I want them to be incinerated in hellfire....

[*Entry of* **Ali Akbar**.]

Ali Akbar: *Abbajaan*, **Sa'ad** is here; he wants to meet you.

Hussain: Yes, I'd asked him to come at this time. But first, I've to make sure that **Hanfa** gets blood money from the men who humiliated her.

[***Hussain and Ali Akbar go out.***]

Ali Akbar: *Ya Hazrat*, I'll come along.

Abbas: I will also come.

Hussain: No, I promised Sa'ad that I'll meet him alone. I can't go back on my commitment by taking you along.

Ali Akbar: He has brought along more than a hundred men who are standing by. We'll not let you go there alone.

Abbas: I don't trust Sa'ad.

Hussain: He's not so mean as to betray me. Anyway, you can come with me; you can stay at a distance if he doesn't object to it. He'll also be allowed to bring along two of his men with him.

[*All three arm themselves and go out. The scene changes.* ***Hussain*** *and* ***Sa'ad*** *stand between the two armies.* ***Hussain*** *is accompanied by* ***Akbar*** *and* ***Abbas;*** ***Sa'ad*** *is with his son and the slave.*]

Sa'ad: *Assalamalaikum, Ya* grandson of the Prophet of God! I'm thankful to you for the opportunity of an audience with you. What do you want to tell me?

Hussain: I have troubled you because I wanted to understand—what do you want from me? Your father was amongst the companions of the Prophet; as the son of your father, I believe you'd have taken the virtue of compassion from him. Don't you know who I am? I want to hear it from you.

Sa'ad: You are the grandson of the Holy Prophet.

Hussain: And yet you want to fight with me. Don't you fear God at all? Have you no sense of justice? Why do you want to fight me, when you know that I am trapped here due to the betrayal of your people, and I want to go back? Why do you want to act in a way that leads to dishonour in this world and punishment hereafter?

Sa'ad: *Ya Hazrat*, what can I do? God knows how helpless I've been in coming here.

Hussain: Sa'ad, no man has ever been forced to act against his will. By killing me, you believe you will receive the forsaken kingdom of "Rai," making you rich. But Sa'ad, the wealth gained through unlawful means has never proved anybody's friend. You can't be an exception. Give up your greed and allow me to go home.

Sa'ad: In that case, my days are numbered in this world.

Hussain: If that's what you fear, I can take you along with me.

Sa'ad: *Ya Hazrat*, the tyrants will destroy my property and my house, the best in the city.

Hussain: *Subhanallah*! Your speech is beneath your dignity. If your house is demolished because you remained devoted to Truth, then it's not such a huge loss. People have lost much more for the sake of Truth; they didn't fear even death. I promise you: I'll have a better house built for you.

Sa'ad: *Ya Hazrat*, I have fertile and rich *jagirs* which will be confiscated, and my children will get nothing.

Hussain: I can give you more fertile and richer *jagirs* in Hijaz. Trust me; I will not harm you in any way.

Sa'ad: *Ya Hazrat*, may I sacrifice my life for you! I have twenty thousand horsemen and foot soldiers with me. **Ziyad** has made big promises to their elders; even if I come over to your side, they will still fight you. Therefore, it's better if I write to **Ziyad** about whatever you wish to propose. I will recommend a peace treaty in my letter, and I'm sure **Ziyad** will accept my suggestion.

Hussain: God will grant you recompense for this in the hereafter. My first condition is that I should be allowed to go to Mecca; if this is unacceptable, I'm ready to go towards the borders and live peacefully. If this is not possible too, let me go and meet **Yazid**; the most crucial condition is that we have complete freedom to fetch water from the river for as long as we are here. I will never swear an oath of allegiance to **Yazid**. If you don't confirm these conditions for my return, I would rather get martyred here. But if your objective is to kill me, then remember, you'll have to pay a heavy price for my life.

Sa'ad: *Hazrat*, your conditions are fair.

Hussain: Until when should I wait for your response?

Sa'ad: My messenger will present himself before you at the dawn.

[*Both men return to their respective armies.*]

Scene 5

[Time—8 in the night. **Shimr** and **Ziyad** are in discussion.]

Ziyad: What? I'd issued strict orders that no one from **Hussain's** camp should be allowed near the river.

Shimr: That is correct. But I've seen **Hussain's** men regularly fetching water from the river. And when I issued an order in my own right to guard the river, **Sa'ad** didn't like it.

Ziyad: I trust **Sa'ad**. He must've felt pity watching people dying of thirst; were I in his place, I, too, may not have been so cruel. It doesn't prove that **Sa'ad** is in two minds.

Shimr: I'm not here to complain against **Sa'ad**; I only wanted to convey to you the situation developing there. **Hussain** has called **Sa'ad** for a meeting today. Let's see what transpires.

Ziyad: What? Has he also been meeting **Hussain**? Can you prove this?

Shimr: *Huzoor*, I needn't prove anything. His messenger should be arriving here any moment.

Ziyad: Have there been more meetings between them?

Shimr: I certainly know about today's meeting, but perhaps there have been more meetings in private.

Ziyad: Was there no one with him?

Shimr: I wanted to go along, but my request was not granted.

Ziyad: I swear upon the Holy Book, I won't tolerate this. I sent him to fight **Hussain** and not to negotiate peace with him. **Sa'ad** will have to explain this to me.

Shimr: The favours that *Huzoor* granted him and the reward for this task would have been enough to turn a foe into a friend. But everyone has his own character.

[*Entry of a messenger.*]

Messenger: *Assalamalaikum Ya Amir*! I've brought a letter from **Umar bin Sa'ad.**

[*Hands over the letter to* **Ziyad** *who starts reading it. The messenger waits outside.*]

Ziyad: This negotiation has produced good results. **Hussain** has agreed to go back and **Sa'ad** has recommended it saying there is no fear or danger from **Hussain's** side. This is what Caliph **Yazid** also wants. **Sa'ad** has gained victory without a war.

Shimr: Indeed, what a victory!

Ziyad: Why? Isn't it a victory? Why are you so sarcastic about it?

Shimr: What you consider as your victory is not a victory, but defeat—a defeat that won't let you prosper again. A fire in a haystack can't be as dangerous as **Hussain** will be once he is free from this cordon. A lion has entered the city chasing its prey. You can kill him by surrounding him from all sides, but who can dare approach its claws once it's back in the jungle? Once out of Karbala, **Hussain** will be the swollen river that breaches the dam to flood its surroundings, and you will be that dam.

Ziyad: Yes, there is no doubt that **Yazid's** caliphate will be destabilised if **Hussain** reaches Hijaz and Yemen. But there is one more condition—that he should be allowed to go and meet **Yazid**. Why should we object to that?

Shimr: If the falcon gets close to the pigeon, then no power on earth can save the pigeon from its clutches. **Hussain** is truly his father's son. The Caliph can't beat him in wisdom and logic. It should not come as a surprise if today's prisoner becomes tomorrow's caliph, and the present caliph is forced to pledge allegiance to him.

Ziyad: You have a point. Had I known the extent of your loyalty, I'd have made you the commander of the army.

Shimr: If **Sa'ad** had heard me with the same sagacity, there wouldn't have been any need for me to come here and bother you.

Ziyad: You must leave in the morning and tell **Sa'ad** to immediately commence the war.

Shimr: *Huzoor* should issue a written order. Giving an order to an officer through a subordinate is akin to making the officer go for the blood of the subordinate.

Ziyad: All right, I'll give you a letter.

[*Ziyad writes a letter and hands it over to Shimr.*]

Shimr: Has *Huzoor* written anything in the letter that could arouse **Sa'ad's** suspicion that it has been written on my recommendation?

Ziyad: Absolutely not! But yes, I've mentioned that if he doesn't follow my order then **Shimr** will replace him as the commander-in-chief of the army.

Shimr: How can I pay my gratitude to *Huzoor* for this appreciation!

Ziyad: There is no need for it. **Sa'ad** had better follow my order or else he'll be removed, and you'll replace him as the commander of the army. Your first task would be to behead **Sa'ad**'s and send his head to me.

Shimr: (Getting up) I salute you!

[*Shimr leaves and Ziyad retires to his room.*]

Scene 6

[Time—Morning. The Syrian battalion. **Hur** and **Sa'ad** are inspecting the army on their horses.]

Hur: Hasn't **Ziyad** replied to your letter yet?

Sa'ad: I've been waiting for it so anxiously that I couldn't sleep the whole night. Every time I heard footsteps, I thought it was his messenger. I'm confident that *Amir* **Ziyad** will accept my suggestion.

Hur: I hope so, too, for if it comes down to war, many soldiers may refuse to fight.

[*Shimr is seen approaching, astride his galloping horse.*]

Sa'ad: Well, the messenger has also arrived. May he bring some good news! Oh, this is **Shimr.**

Hur: Yes, it's **Shimr.** May God have mercy upon us! If he went to meet **Ziyad,** I doubt your proposal would have been accepted.

Shimr: (Coming closer) *Assalamalaik*! I went home yesterday for some work. When *Amir* **Ziyad** came to know of my visit, he called me and handed over this letter to you.

[*Gives the letter to* ***Sa'ad.*** *Sa'ad reads the letter and puts it away in his pocket. He takes a deep breath.*]

Sa'ad: Shimr, I thought you will bring the news of a peace treaty.

Shimr: You were mistaken. You are well aware that once *Amir* **Ziyad** makes a decision, he doesn't go back on it. What's your plan now?

Sa'ad: I've no other choice but to follow his command.

Shimr: Shall I order the battalions to prepare?

Sa'ad: As you deem fit.

[*Shimr leaves and goes towards the army ranks.*]

Hur: May God never blacken a man's soul!

Sa'ad: All of it is this gentleman's doing. **Ziyad** has always trusted me.

Hur: Even the thought of fighting the grandson of the Prophet is dreadful to me.

Ziyad: **Hur**, you're right. I know whoever fights him will go to Hell. But I'm helpless; even if I don't bother about "Rai," I can't abandon my family commitments. Alas, I was consumed by greed. Had I been strong enough not to get swayed by the governorship of "Rai," I'd not have been here, facing the son of the Prophet. **Hur**, will there be any hope of forgiveness for us after this war?

Hur: How will the bloodstains of the Prophet's grandson be washed off our hands?

Sa'ad: **Hur**, I'll fast so much that my body will be cleansed; I will offer *namaz* more than anyone has ever done. I will donate all the income from "Rai" to charity. I'll perform *Hajj* on foot; I'll sit by the grave of the Prophet and cry in repentance; I'll forgive sinners and won't harm even an ant. Oh! Tyrant **Shimr** isn't even allowing me time to think. The troops are being positioned for combat. **Qais**, **Hajjaaj**, **Shees**, and **Ashas** are arranging their platoons in rows. Lo, the war drums are beating now.

Hur: I will also go and prepare my men for the battle.

[*Slowly walks off.*]

Sa'ad: O God! I wish You had made me a blackguard like **Shimr** or given me the heart of **Haani** and **Kaseer** to sacrifice my life for others. Even a weak man knows what to do and what not to do. A man who doesn't have the authority over his own will is worse than a slave. My tribesmen have already begun the line formation. Let me go and lead them, and follow **Shimr's** orders because now it is **Shimr**, not I, who is in command.

[*Walks slowly and stands ahead of the army.*]

Shimr: (In a loud voice) All those who want to protect the caliphate by sacrificing their own lives, march forward in the name of God, for the enemy is right before you. He is the grandson of our Prophet, and we bow before him in reverence to this association. But drenched in greed, he wants to crush under his feet the Prophet's command

regarding the caliphate; without bothering about the allegiance of people, he wants to destroy the caliphate in the name of his own claim; he cannot be a Muslim despite being the grandson of the Prophet. For us, the honour of the Prophet's command is more binding than the honour of his grandson. It's our duty to save the Caliph from the attacks that are being launched to satiate greed, for we have pledged our allegiance to him. March on in the line of duty!

[*The sky resounds with battle drums, and the entire battalion marches towards* **Hussain's** *camp.* **Sa'ad** *marches ahead and reaches near* **Hussain's** *camp.*]

Abbas: (Coming out of **Hussain's** tent) **Sa'ad**! This is deceit! While we've been awaiting your response, you are launching an attack on us? Is this the code of warfare?

Sa'ad: *Hazrat*, I swear by the Holy Book, I haven't come here with the intent of betrayal. (Handing over **Ziyad's** letter to **Abbas**) Please read this first and judge me accordingly. I'm the commander only in name; the real authority now lies with **Shimr**.

Abbas: (After going through the letter) So you finally chose this world over the Other. Be warned, it's not **Shimr** but you who will be found sinful before God.

Sa'ad: Ya *Hazrat*, I know that, but I can't confront **Ziyad's** fury. If he is a cat, I am a rat; if he is a falcon, I am a pigeon. He can wipe out my entire family with a mere gesture. The thought of my own safety has made me vulnerable and wrecked my faith.

Abbas: Does that mean you now want to lay siege on us? Don't move from your place, let me first go and inform *Bhai Sahib*.

[*Abbas goes towards* **Hussain's** *tent.*]

Shimr: (Approaching **Sa'ad**) Is he up to another ploy?

Sa'ad: No, he has gone to inform **Hussain** about our arrival and purpose.

Shimr: This looks like a ruse to snatch away the opportunity from our hands. They are possibly planning to seek help from other tribes. Even a day's time could give them the opportunity of a lifetime.

[*Abbas returns.*]

Abbas: I delivered your message to *Hazrat* **Hussain**. *Hazrat* is sad to learn that none of his proposals has been accepted. He could do nothing more to achieve a truce. Though we're ready to fight, he has requested a day's reprieve; he wants to spend time praying and offering *namaz*. We'll act in accordance with God's Will tomorrow morning.

Sa'ad: I will consult the other commanders of my army.

[*Abbas leaves for his tent, and* **Hur, Hajjaaj, Ashas** *and* **Qais** *come and stand near* **Sa'ad**.]

Sa'ad: **Shimr**, what do you say?

Shimr: This is his ploy. But you are the *Amir*. You may decide.

Sa'ad: (Addressing other commanders) *Hazrat* **Hussain** has solicited a day's ceasefire. What do you suggest?

Shimr: This can alter the course of events.

Hur: There is no scope for dilemma in accepting the demand for respite.

Hajjaaj: Even if **Hussain** were a non-believer and pleaded for a reprieve, it would've been our obligation to accept it.

Qais: It's possible that by tomorrow he takes the oath of allegiance to **Yazid** after consulting his kin. We will be spared this unnecessary bloodshed.

Shimr: But what if Bani Asad and other tribes come over to his aid by the evening?

Shees: *Hazrat* **Hussain** hasn't sought military assistance from any other tribe; else, we wouldn't have been standing here so comfortably.

Sa'ad: Why only Bani Asad, we can't force him to fight even if all the tribes of Iraq were to join him. This is against humanity. In future, you will have the authority to decide, but, for now, this is my decision.

[*Sa'ad, full of rage, leaves.*]

Shimr: Do you all agree that the fight should be postponed until tomorrow?

Hur: All present here have expressed their opinions. The commander of the army has also left. In such a situation, what else can be done except to grant a reprieve? If, of your own volition, you want to fight, you are most welcome.

Shimr: (Aside) Who says **Hussain** has been betrayed? Everyone present here is his friend. They should've been in **Hussain's** army instead of being a part of this force. I won't be surprised at all if, tomorrow, all of them drop their weapons and fall at **Hussain's** feet. I should at least apprise **Ziyad** of this postponement.

[*Sa'ad's messenger leaves with the message of postponement and goes towards Hussain's camp. Shimr proceeds towards his tent.*]

Scene 7

[Time—8 in the night. **Hussain** is sitting on a chair in the plain. His friends and relatives are sitting on the ground. A candle is lit.]

Hussain: We thank God Almighty for granting us the radiance of Faith, which allowed us to accomplish Good and refrain from Evil. Today, my sons, brothers and nephews, friends and supporters, all are with me. I pray to God for all of them. I'm grateful that He blessed me with such loyal kin and companions who are keen to sacrifice their lives for me. You've honoured the highest virtues of friendship and proved that you don't care about your life and property when it comes to upholding Truth. Your names will shine forever in the annals of Islamic history. However, I cannot bear the thought that those who deserve to live and are yet to accomplish many things in life will be martyred tomorrow because of me. I'll be happy if you could relieve me of this burden. I release you from all your obligations. I don't have any right over anyone. I gladly allow each one of you to go anywhere you wish. I, rather, plead before you to accept my offer. Our rivals have no enmity towards you, and you will get respect wherever you go. You'll be a living martyr, which is no less honourable than being a martyr after death. Our adversaries are thirsty for my blood alone as I'm the stumbling block in their path. If Truth and Justice can be preserved with my blood, why shed more blood for it? This was the reason why I asked **Sa'ad** for a day's reprieve. Here, I've snuffed out the candle so that you don't feel embarrassed about leaving this place.

[*All of them start crying; no one moves.*]

Abbas: *Ya Hazrat*, we'll not leave you, even if you push us away. May we never see the day when we are separated from you! We can't imagine our lives without the shelter of your care and affection; we can't imagine doing anything without you.

Ali Akbar: *Abbajaan*, what are you saying? We've come here to die at your feet, not to leave you alone. The very idea is detestable to our conscience.

Habeeb: By God, I can't leave you until I've thrust my sharp spears into the hearts of your enemies. If my weapons fail, I will support you by pelting stones at these villains.

Abdullah Kalabi: Even if I were burnt alive seventy times for supporting you and then brought back to life to be burnt again, I would not abandon you. The eminence I'll gain by dying at your feet could never be achieved by countless such lives.

Zaheer: *Hazrat*, I can't express the grief you've caused me by your words. Even if our hearts are lured by the greed of this world, our feet will refuse to go anywhere. Do you want us to live in this world as disgraced and sinful people?[23]

Hussain: Oh! I wish the Holy Prophet were alive and could see his progeny and his *ummat* willing to sacrifice their lives for Truth. I pray to God, may Islam never have any dearth of people willing to be martyred for Truth. Friends, come, let's offer *namaz*. This may be our last prayer together.

[*Everyone starts to pray.*]

[23] After this speech the Hindi play has the following speech by Ali Asghar, which has been removed in the Urdu play. I have followed the Urdu play here:
Ali Asghar: You have never eaten anything without sharing it with me, and now will you enjoy the fruits of Paradise all by yourself? Please light the candle; we can't see you in this darkness. Asghar, Hussain, *beta*, come, may your father die for you; you and I will taste the fruits of Paradise together.

Scene 8

[Time—Morning. **Hussain's** army is preparing for combat.]

Abbas: We've joined our tents and dug up trenches around them, which we have filled with wood. Shall I order the beating of war-drums?

Hussain: No, not yet! We will not initiate the attack. I'll make one last attempt for peace. I'm yet to address the Syrian army, as I've been trying to convince its commanders so far. Now, I want to address their soldiers face to face. Prepare the camel.

Abbas: As you command.

[*Goes out.*]

Hussain: (Praying) O God! You can make even the sinking ships float. I have only Your shelter; You alone I trust. I beseech You for help in grief that weakens my heart. At a time when the catastrophe refuses to be deferred, when there is no alternative left to me, You are my only hope!

[*He emerges from his tent.* ***Habeeb*** *and* ***Zaheer*** *are practicing spear-fighting.*]

Habeeb: *Ya Hazrat*, I pray to God that this spear pierces **Sa'ad's** heart and the desire for the governorship of "Rai" gushes out of his body with his blood.

Zaheer: He will certainly become a governor. My sword will decide whether it will be the governorship of Hell or of "Rai."

Habeeb: Oh no, he's my target. Don't you set your eyes upon him! I've left **Shimr** for you.

Zaheer: By God, if he confronts me, I'll chop off his nose and leave him like that. Men like him deserve a more severe punishment in this world than that of hell.

Abbas: And who have you marked to be my prey?

Zaheer: I offer **Ziyad** to you.

Hussain: And what about me? Shall I be a mute spectator?

Zaheer: You won't get any prey.

Hussain: Why this injustice?

Zaheer: Because we don't want to add to the number of shareholders in our luxuries of Paradise. You are already the grandson of the Prophet.

Hussain: I'll first go and address **Sa'ad's** army; we'll settle this matter later.

Habeeb: It's useless to talk to those scoundrels. Their hearts have been so hardened that no words are going to affect them.

Hussain: Nonetheless, it's my duty to try.

[*Hussain is standing before the soldiers astride his camel.*]

Hussain: O brave soldiers and commanders of Kufa and Syria! Listen to me, don't act in haste. It's the pious duty of a believer to avoid slaying his own brother. I'm not inclined to indulge in bloodshed unless I've endeavoured to dissuade you as much as I'm duty-bound to do. I wish to steer clear of the blame, both in the eyes of God and His subjects, for a war in which brothers are going to kill each other. Don't you already know the reason why I came here? Did I attack Iraq or Syria? If my kin and companions can be called an army, then surely, I've launched an attack. If you fear God and value Faith, heed my words and introspect. I came here on the invitation of your chieftains. I had decided to renounce worldly affairs and spend the rest of my life praying to God. But it was your call of distress which forced me out of my seclusion; I could not turn a deaf ear to the appeals of the Prophet's *ummat*. If the punishment for this is death, then I offer my head; you are welcome to kill me. I ask **Hajjaaj** .... Did you not write me letters?

Hajjaaj: I did not write you any letter.

Hussain: **Qais**, do you also deny that you wrote me letters?

Qais: When did I ask you for help?

Hussain: And **Shimr**, you even signed those letters, didn't you?

Shimr: Absolutely not. It's a lie.

Hussain: As God is my witness, I've never told a lie in my life, but now I'm accused of this too?

Qais: Why don't you take an oath of allegiance to **Yazid** and save Islam from chaos and corruption forever?

Hussain: Is there no other way to resolve this matter?

Shimr: No, there is not.

Hussain: In that case a truce is not possible. By God, I'll not bow down before you in disgrace, and fear cannot force me to offer an oath of allegiance to **Yazid.** You are free to act as you wish. We're ready for combat.

Shimr: (Shooting an arrow) I want the honour of shooting the first arrow. A voice comes from somewhere, "You'll also have the honour of being the first to enter Hell."

[*Hussain turns his horse towards his army.* ***Hur*** *comes out of the ranks and follows* ***Hussain*** *slowly.*]

Shimr: By God, **Hur,** your cautious tread is making me suspicious. I've never seen you tremble like this in the course of any battle.

Hur: I stand between Hell and Heaven, and the truth is, I don't consider anything equal to Heaven, so what if I'm killed for it? (He kicks his horse and gets closer to **Hussain.**) O son of the Prophet! I'm coming with you. I'll sacrifice my life for you! I tried to send you back midway. By God, I didn't expect these people to treat you in the manner they have and reject all your conditions of truce; else, I wouldn't have let you come here. I am shocked by their actions. I wish to sacrifice myself in your support. Will I be forgiven?

Hussain: I'll pray to God that He accepts your penance!

Hur: I'm convinced that I'm not doing anything wrong by withdrawing my allegiance to **Yazid.**

[*Both of them leave. There is a rain of arrows.*]

Scene 9

[Time—Night. A village in Kufa. **Naseema** is sitting in a palm-tree garden, singing.]

O grave, you press down the ones already fallen,
When you know the body is powerless, sunken;
Even though humble nest boasts no riches
I do not enjoy the comforts of the prison;
Who cares if anyone demolishes it or lightning strikes it—
When I don't have to dwell in it, why make a mention?
Ask your own heart about my precarious state;
My tongue cannot do justice to my affliction.
I will suppress my emotions from now on
Why lament when no one is paying attention
I mourn, O God, my past actions,
My abode has nothing but ruins and destruction.

[*Entry of* **Waheb.**]

Naseema: You're so late. I was getting bored sitting here alone. Did you get any news about them?

Waheb: Yes, **Naseema**, I did. That's why I got late. You were right. They are with *Hazrat* **Hussain**.

Naseema: Has the army of *Hazrat* **Hussain** arrived?

Waheb: Why call it an army? There are only seventy-two men, including the old, the young and the children. About five to ten people have joined from Kufa. Their tents are pitched in the inhospitable desert of Karbala where the tyrant **Ziyad** has surrounded them with nearly twenty-five thousand men. He neither accepted **Hussain's** offer of a peace treaty nor allowed them the passage to go anywhere else. He hasn't even allowed them to fetch water from the river. He has posted five thousand soldiers to guard the river. The battle might start by tomorrow.

Naseema: Twenty-five thousand soldiers for such a small contingent of people! What grave injustice! I will crush **Ziyad** under my feet if I find him.

Waheb: He insists that **Hussain** must take an oath of allegiance to **Yazid**. *Hazrat* **Hussain** has refused.

Naseema: *Hazrat* **Hussain** is the grandson of the Prophet; he will give up his life to keep his word. If I were there, I would've given **Ziyad** a response he'd never forget. I would've agreed to pledge allegiance, returned, raised an army and taught **Yazid** a lesson. The Holy Prophet should have provided a few concessions for calamities like these. Everyone in *Hazrat's* camp must be worried and anxious.

Waheb: Absolutely not, **Naseema**! All of them are elated at the prospect of martyrdom. But the scarcity of water is very painful. Little children are dying of thirst.

Naseema: Oh, how cruel! May God punish those devils!

Waheb: **Naseema**, please bid me farewell. I can't take it anymore. I'm also going to die at the feet of *Hazrat* **Hussain**. Come, embrace me, for we may never meet again.

Naseema: Oh, **Waheb**! Will you leave me behind? I'm also coming with you.

Waheb: No, this flower will wilt in the sweltering heat of Karbala. (Embracing her) O my heart is losing its resolve again. I've been trying to convince it all the way here. **Naseema**, push me away. God, why did You create the emotion of love?

Naseema: (Crying) **Waheb**, what use would this flower have? Who will inhale its fragrance, who will embrace it? I'll also sacrifice myself at the feet of *Hazrat* **Zainab**.

Waheb: That unbearable thirst, excruciating heat, and chaos—how can I take you there!

Naseema: Why can't I bear the pain that *Saidanis* can? Don't make excuses **Waheb**; I'll not let you go alone.

Waheb: **Naseema**, my feet will not move towards the battlefield while my eyes behold you.

Naseema: (Resting her head on **Waheb's** shoulder) Dear! Why don't we go to someplace where we can enjoy our life quietly? If you go and, God forbid, something happens to you, then my life would be spent in mourning. *Hazrat* **Hussain** cannot win this battle. They are only a hundred men confronting an army of twenty-five thousand; what difference can one addition make!

Waheb: O **Naseema**, you've hit the most vulnerable spot in my heart. I also wish to retire to a safe corner and enjoy the fruits of life. But the tyrant's cruelty boils my blood and prompts me to die in support of *Hazrat* **Hussain**. In the eyes of God, one who does not stop a tyrant and watches the oppression helplessly partakes in that crime.

Naseema: May I offer my life for you! Please don't confuse me with these questions of good and evil. Reflect a little; is it not cruel that our life should end so soon? My wedding robe is still unfrayed; the colour of henna on my palms is yet to wear off, and still, you don't pity me? Are my eyes only meant to shed tears? Is this how my life should end?

[*She locks her arms around* ***Waheb's*** *neck.*]

Waheb: (Aside) Help me God; now it's up to You! If the pleading of a lover doesn't calm the heart of the beloved, her demands will destroy faith.

[*The contingent of* ***Sahas Rai*** *is seen approaching.*]

Naseema: Oh, where is this contingent coming from? I've never seen such unique uniforms. What are these red marks on their foreheads! I swear by these eyes, I've never seen such handsome and good-looking men ever.

Waheb: I'll go ahead and enquire who these people are. (He comes forward and asks a soldier) O soldiers, are you men or angels? We've never seen such men in Arabia. Your faces are so charming. Where are you headed?

Soldier: Have you heard of *Sultan* **Sahas Rai**? We are his servants and heading to help *Hazrat* **Hussain**, who is besieged in the desert of Karbala. Have you paid allegiance to **Yazid**?

Waheb: Why would I pledge allegiance to that tyrant!

Soldier: Then it's surprising that you are not in the army of *Hazrat* **Hussain**. You look like a man of free will; why this cowardice then?

Waheb: (Apologetically) We're also going there.

Soldier: Then come along; let's go together.

Waheb: I have womenfolk with me. You go ahead; I'll follow.

Naseema: Who is this **Sahas Rai**?

Waheb: I don't know, but I can say there is nobody in this world as truthful, brave and willing to die for Justice as he is. I haven't seen in him any reluctance when it comes to serving the vulnerable. I don't know which religion he belongs to, but whichever religion and nation produces such holy souls, is for the good of the whole world.

Naseema: Don't they have kin?

Waheb: They've a large family. They are seven brothers.

Naseema: And they are going to offer help to *Hazrat* **Hussain** despite being non-believers?

Waheb: Yes, of course!

Naseema: How shameful of us that we're turning away from it!

Waheb: My dear **Naseema**, we can do that later. But before that, shouldn't we enjoy life, at least for a few days?

Naseema: No **Waheb**, let's not procrastinate, even for a moment. God will reunite us in Heaven, and we will enjoy eternal union there.

Waheb: **Naseema**, let's wait at least for a day!

Naseema: No, not for a single moment; **Waheb** don't test me again. Fetch your horse! Let's leave right away.

Act 5

Scene 1

[Time—9 in the morning. Both the armies are ready for combat.]

Hur: *Ya Hazrat*, please allow me to go into the battlefield and take on the enemy. I can't suppress my desire for martyrdom any longer.

Hussain: **Hur**, you've just come in. Why do you want to leave again? How can I bid you farewell without a chance to extend any hospitality to you?

Hur: O Prophet's grandson, I'm not your guest but your slave. I've come here to die at your feet.

Hussain: (Embraces **Hur** with tears streaming from his eyes) If this is what you desire, then go ahead. I entrust you to God's care,
May your name shine among the martyrs in this world!
May you find rest in Heaven and solace hereafter!

[*Hur proceeds towards the enemy's forces. Hussain comes up to the curtain of the tent to see him off. Hur kisses the feet of Hussain and leaves.*]

Hur: (After reaching the battlefield)

The slave of *Hazrat* **Shabbir** has come to the battlefield.
O God, my master stands for Faith; He will not yield
Let the one keen to die come forward to face me
To spill his blood, I raise my sword, my shield.

[*Safwan comes from the other side.*]

Hur: **Safwan**, how shameful of you that you've come to fight the Prophet's grandson!

Safwan: **We're soldiers. We want wealth, money, *jagir* and status; what do we have to do with faith and the hereafter? Be on your guard!**

[***Both launch an attack on each other.***]

Abbas: There he strikes! **Safwan's** chest is slashed, and he is writhing on the ground in pain.

Habeeb: All his three brothers are rushing in.

Abbas: Bravo, my lion! One brother succumbed to **Hur's** sword, the other also fell, and the third one is running away.

Habeeb: O God, have mercy! **Hur's** horse has fallen.

Hussain: Send another horse quickly.

[*A man goes to Hur with another horse.*]

Abbas: Such valour in this old age! I've never seen such a brave man. His sword swipes like a lightning bolt.

Hussain: See how the enemy retreats. It's not easy to confront those prepared to lay down their lives. This is valour at its pinnacle.

Abbas: Alas, now he can't raise his hands. His body is pierced with arrows.

Shimr: Rain down arrows, kill him. Shame on you; you're scared of a lone man. There, he has fallen. Sever his head and throw it towards **Hussain's** contingent.

[*Many men move forward to sever Hur's head, but they see Hussain riding towards Hur.*]

One Soldier: **Hussain** is coming. Run for your lives!

Hussain: (Embracing **Hur's** wounded body)

Your body is in pieces; you're so severely wounded, O brother!
Speak to me! I've come to your mortally wounded body, O brother!

[*Hur opens his eyes and Hussain cradles Hur's head against his chest.*]

Hur: *Ya Hazrat*, may I die at your feet; my life has attained its purpose.

I am blessed; my head is resting on your chest, O Master!
I was a worthless speck; you've turned me into a bright sun, O Master!

Hussain: Alas! My valiant friend has left this world. What a brave-heart to sacrifice his position and wealth for Truth; to shun the world for faith!

Such men who die for Truth, bring glory to Islam, and will always do so! Go, O beloved of **Muhammad**, Paradise awaits you with open arms! Go and enjoy life hereafter! Tell my *nana* that soon **Hussain** is going to come to him, with all his companions. Mothers who give birth to such sons deserve our reverence.

Scene 2

[Place—battleground. Two warriors—**Yasar** and **Salim**—come forward from **Sa'ad's** side.]

Yasar: (Throwing down a challenge) Who will come to meet the fate of **Hur?** Whoever wants to taste death, come forward! Even death is terrified of our swords.

[*Abdullah Kalabi*[24] *rides forward from Hussain's army.*]

Yasar: Who are you?

Abdullah: I am **Abdullah bin Amir Kalabi** whose sword is always thirsty for the blood of the unfaithful.

Yasar: I feel ashamed raising my sword at you. Go back and send **Habeeb** or **Zaheer.**

Abdullah: How can someone who has spent his life in **Ziyad's** slavery fight those brave commanders? Aren't you ashamed of challenging those chieftains? I'm enough for ruffians like you.

[*Yasar rushes at him with a naked sword.* ***Abdullah*** *kills him in a single assault. Then* ***Salim*** *attacks him. All of Abdullah's fingers on his right hand are cut off, and his sword drops to the ground. He picks up his spear in his left hand and thrusts it into Salim's chest, who then falls down. Many soldiers come out of* ***Ziyad's*** *army and surround* ***Abdullah.*** ***Qamar,*** *who has been watching from* ***Hussain's*** *side, runs towards them with a log in her hand.*]

Qamar: May I die for you; You die fighting for the grandson of the Prophet. I'm coming to your rescue.

Abdullah: No, no, **Qamar**! For me, your prayers are enough; don't come here.

Qamar: I'll kill these devils with my log. They sent two men against one, and when both of them were dispatched to Hell, the entire army rushed in. What kind of combat is this?

[24] Waheb's father.

Abdullah: I'll kill them all with just one hand! Go back to the tent.

Qamar: I cannot leave you, as long as I'm alive; I insist, I'll present myself before the Prophet with you.

Hussain: (To **Qamar**) O pious lady, may God bless you! If you go into the battlefield, who will take care of the womenfolk here? *Jihad* is not for women. Go back and see how valiantly your husband is confronting so many with just one hand. Well done, my lion! We'll never forget how you served your Prophet. God will reward you for your valour. Alas! The wicked have brought down the poor man with arrows. May God grant him a place in Heaven!

Qamar: *Ya Hazrat*, I will not grieve over my husband, who died for you. Can there be a better death than this? I wish I could've gone with him. My Hero! True fighters go to Paradise. Oh, you, who never turned back a beggar, whose intentions were always pure, and who never cast an evil eye on anyone, go and rest in Paradise!

Hussain: **Qamar**, we have to bear it with fortitude.

Qamar: I don't grieve his death. I'm rather happy that he died to defend Truth. If I had a hundred sons, I would have sacrificed them for you. I wish **Waheb** had not been such a woman-worshipper...

[*Entry of Waheb.*]

Waheb: *Assalamalaikum Ya Hazrat* **Hussain**.

Qamar: (Embracing **Waheb**) Why didn't you come a while ago, *Beta*? You could have had one last glimpse of your father! Where is **Naseema**?

Waheb: She is standing there, behind the tent.

Qamar: I was talking about you. *Beta*, won't you bring glory to your father's name? I have a greater claim over you than your wife. You have grown up feeding on my heart's blood. Will you not justify the milk that I fed you from my breast? It's my wish that you sacrifice your life for **Hussain** so that the name of Qamar[25] shines like the sun in the world, one whose son and husband were martyred for Truth.

Waheb: *Ammijaan*, I always wanted it and still do. I don't want my father's name to be sullied, but what should I do with **Naseema**? The thought

[25] Qamar literally means sun.

of her painful life after my death weakens my resolve. I'm going to ask her. If she agrees, nothing else can be more comforting.

Qamar: *Beta*, you know her and still you want to go and ask her? It seems you yourself are scared of going into the battlefield.

[*Waheb approaches Naseema.*]

Naseema: I wish we'd reached here a while ago; we would have received the final blessings of *Abbajaan*.

Waheb: It's our misfortune!

Naseema: I know you've come to bid me goodbye. Go dear, glorify the name of your father like a good son. I wish women could take part in *jihad*; I'd also have sacrificed my life for Truth along with you. Ever since I've seen the holy face of the Prophet's grandson, my heart is illuminated, and its radiance has wiped out all worldly desires. Go dear, and sacrifice yourself for Truth. So long as **Naseema** lives, she will offer *fatiha* and prayers on your grave! Go, don't forget me in Heaven! Trapped in the snare of lust, I diverted you from the path of duty. Please ask the Holy Prophet to forgive my sins. Please go, don't bother about my tears; they might douse your passion for sacrifice. I'll have to mourn for a long time now; don't worry about me. Go, I entrust you to God's care .... Oh. My heart is tearing apart. How do I remain patient?

[*Waheb leaves, wiping his tears.*]

Naseema: *Ammijaan*, it was unfair of the Holy Prophet to make *jihad* unlawful for women; otherwise, I'd have been standing next to **Waheb** at this moment. Oh, see how cruelly the enemies are shooting arrows and spears at him! They don't have the spine to come and challenge him one on one. See how swiftly his hands are moving! Whoever gets one blow from him fails to rise again. Oh, the enemies are running away in fear. Yes, cowards and impotent beings! Oh, he is coming towards us; his body is soaked in blood; his head is also bleeding.

[*Waheb comes near the tent.*]

Waheb: *Ammajaan*, are you pleased with me now?

Qamar: *Beta*, may I die for you a thousand times. You have brought glory to your father's name, but I don't want you to let the enemy rest so long as you have strength in your arms!

Waheb: (Soliloquy) Ah! It's not so easy to die for Truth as people think. (Aloud) *Amma*, I wish the same, but the thought of **Naseema's** tears dragged me here. (**Qamar** leaves) **Naseema**, the desire to catch one last glimpse of you pulled me here from the battleground. The worshipper of the beloved can only die for her; Faith and Belief, Truth and Justice, all look like trifles in comparison. Love is the strongest fetter in the world, the toughest shackle. (Surprised) A fighter has come to the battlefield, throwing out a challenge. Oh! Shame on those who crush Truth and force thousands of innocents to die young! **Naseema**, goodbye forever! Look at me once with glances suffused with such love that it may remain etched in my memory until the Day of Judgement.

Naseema: Alas my darling! My heart is fluttering rapidly.

[*Waheb leaves for the battlefield.*]

Naseema: God! I wish I'd died before I beheld this heart-wrenching scene. My fearless husband is going into the valley of death in front of me. Why doesn't the Earth swallow me; why doesn't a lightning bolt hit me? There, a devil attacks him with his sword. O God! Have mercy on this unfortunate soul! Get off, tyrant, go straight to Hell. There, the cursed **Shimr** is running towards him with his men. Alas, traitors have besieged him. O God, You are watching this injustice; why don't You unleash Your terror on these sinners. What kind of war is this, where an entire army is fighting one man? Oh, it's so terrible! I can't bear it anymore!

[*She starts crying, beating her breast. **Shimr** cuts off **Waheb's** head and throws it away. **Qamar** rushes forward, places his severed head in her lap, and kisses it.*]

Qamar: My good son; what an auspicious moment for me to watch you die for Truth. Today, you have repaid the debt of your mother's love, and my wishes have been answered; I've emerged victorious in life, and I've been compensated for all my pains. May God place you

among the martyrs! **Naseema**, my darling, today you've found your true union, and you'll remain married until the Day of Judgement. My son, *houries* will welcome you now, and angels will adorn their eyes using the dust of your feet like kohl.

[*She puts Waheb's head in Naseema's lap; Naseema, with the head in her lap, mourns and cries.*]

To brighten each day, I'll apply in my eyes
Kohl that I'll make from the dust of your grave
How can I extinguish the flame of my heart's wound?
My tears have dried up; my sorrow is so grave!
Who else, besides Thee, will care for this wretched one
Where else could I've come, if not to your grave!
The sword cries out to the youth of the nation,
For so long, I've been searching for your waist, O brave!
I'll give up my prayers now, O God, for how long,
for their answers in this world, can I crave?
Had not your doorstep offered me this honour
How could I, with such pride, behave?

Naseema: Oh, my love! How unfaithful of you, to have left me alone in this world. Let me also come to you. Not so soon; wait for a while.

[*Entry of Sahas Rai.*]

Sahas Rai: *Sati*, I salute you.

Naseema: Sahib, you've arrived just in time. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your words inspired me to rise to this stature. In your country, women don't live after their husbands' death. They are indeed fortunate.

Sahas Rai: *Sati*, please bless us.

Naseema: (Laughing) Ah, you are placing me on such a high pedestal! O God, I owe all this to **Waheb** and his martyrdom. O God, may there never be a dearth of martyrs in my community. There should never come a time when Truth needs heroes and there is none left to die for it. May Islam, my cherished Islam, always remain rich with martyrs!

[*She takes out a needle from the hem of her chadar and dips it into* ***Waheb's*** *blood.*]

Naseema: Sahas Rai, the *Sati* burns in the flame leaping out of her husband's pyre in your country. Can death not occur without fire?

Sahas Rai: Naseema, you are a *devi*. The *darshan* of such goddesses is rare. Gods are showering flowers over you from the sky.

[***Naseema*** *runs the needle (dipped in* ***Waheb's*** *blood) through her eyes, lets out a painful cry*[26] *and collapses*!]

[26] Naseema committing *Sati* here seems another interpolation probably to build some common ground between the Indian and the Islamic traditions.

Scene 3

[Time—Afternoon. *Hazrat* **Hussain** is standing outside the tent with **Abbas** inspecting the battlefield.]

Hussain: So many fearless friends have been slain, and so many continue to die. We are dying of thirst, and these tyrants don't even give us time to offer *namaz*. A loyal friend like **Zaheer** has died; **Muslim bin Ausaja** fought passionately even at such an old age. How many more names can I recount?

Abbas: *Ya Hazrat*, I suspect that **Shimr** is planning to launch another attack. Look there; he is moving towards us with a large contingent of soldiers.

Habeeb: (Shouting) **Shimr**! Beware! If you take one step further, dogs will cry over your dead body. Cruel one, aren't you ashamed of conspiring to attack the tents of *Ahl-e-bait?*

Shimr: We'll finish the battle with this attack. Soldiers, rain down arrows.

Hussain: Alas, our horses are dying. Kneel down and repel the attack!

Shimr: March on; we'll finish this in a moment.

One Soldier: Don't you see our lines are disappearing! Are these the arrows or God's wrath? We've come here to fight men, not devils.

Shimr: Burn wood. Hurl fireballs on these tents; Throw burning logs; burn them to ashes.

[*It starts raining fire. Women run out of the tent, wailing.*]

Zainab: Shame on you, tyrant! Instead of men, you show your valour against women.

Hussain: **Sa'ad**, what tyranny is this? I am your enemy. Fight with me. There are no men in the tents, only women and children. If they are unable to run away from the tents, we'll be forced to go and protect them instead of fighting you. It's pathetic that even with such a large army, you are indulging in such unlawful acts!

Shimr: Throw fireballs! May I burn in hellfire if I don't burn down all these tents!

Shees: **Shimr**, you are violating the code of war. You will be held accountable for it on the Day of Reckoning.

Qais: Stop your men.

Shimr: I'm responsible for my decision. Rain fire, burn down the tents.

Qais: Sa'ad, how will you show your face to God on the Day of Judgement?

Habeeb: Friends, let's attack **Shimr** and his men like falcons. Sacrifice yourself to protect the women of **Hussain's** household. Strike with lances, all at once!

[*Habeeb and ten others attack* ***Shimr*** *with spears.* ***Shimr*** *runs away, and his contingent disperses.*]

Hussain: Habeeb, you saved the honour of *Ahl-i-bait* today. May God reward you for it!

Habeeb: *Ya Maula*, the attack has been averted for a while. It's time for *namaz*. We're keen to offer our last *namaz* with you. We will not get this opportunity again.

Hussain: May God bless you. Call out the *azan*. *Ya* Sa'ad, have you forgotten the *shariat* of Islam? Won't you allow us the respite for *namaz*?

Shimr: I swear by God, never. You'll be killed without having performed *namaz*. *Shariat* is not for traitors.

Habeeb: *Ya Maula*, let's begin our prayers. Let this sinner [**Shimr**] brag. He doesn't have the guts to get in the way of our *namaz*.

[*People begin their namaz.* ***Sahas Rai*** *and all his seven brothers stand behind* ***Hussain*** *and shield him from the enemy's arrows. Namaz comes to an end.*]

Hussain: My dear friends, who share my grief, this *namaz* will be etched in the annals of Islamic history. We couldn't have completed our prayers without these good servants of God standing behind us to shield us from the arrows of the enemy. O Worshippers of Truth! We salute you! Even though you're not of the believers, your religion, which produces such followers of Truth who are willing to sacrifice themselves to defend Justice and who think so little of their lives that they readily offer their heads in defence of the persecuted is a true religion of God. May this religion always flourish, and along with the light of Islam, may its light also spread in all directions!

Sahas Rai: *Bhagwan*! We thank you for the kind words and blessings you have just showered upon us. I, too, pray to Almighty God that whenever Islam needs our blood, men of my community should be ready to have their chests ripped apart. Please give us permission to go into the battlefield to fulfil our vow by laying down our lives for Truth.

Hussain: No! My friends, as long as we are alive, we'll not allow our guests to go into the battlefield.

Sahas Rai: *Hazrat*, we're not your guest, but your humble servants. To die for Truth and Justice is the sole objective of our lives. This is our obligation, not favour to anyone.

Hussain: Alas! How can I let you go! May God forever preserve the edifice whose foundations you and I are going to lay down with our blood in this field. May it never be ruined, and may its songs of glory resonate in the air forever. May the sun always shine over it!

[*All the seven brothers go singing into the battlefield*]

Hail to thee, O Bharat! All Hail to thee!
Hail to thee, O protector of my life,
O crown of the world, O benevolent to all alike!
Hail to thee, O Bharat! All Hail to thee!
The grand, marvellous Himalayas adorn your splendid forehead.
When the morning sun rays fall on you, a golden gleam is spread.
Hail to thee, O Bharat! All Hail to thee!
O nurturer of sages, whose actions fill the galaxies with radiance,
O promoter of knowledge, O allayer of ignorance.
Hail to thee, O Bharat! All Hail to thee!
The four Vedas glorify your hallowed visage, O knower,
O spring of elixir of peace, of eternal Good, O harbinger!
Hail to thee, O Bharat! All Hail to thee!
O supreme among the wise, the fame of thy knowledge is spread afar
O bearer of the standard of Faith, follower of the Vedic path,
Hail to thee, O Bharat! All Hail to thee!
O invincible, O miraculous, matchless is thy power,
O treasure of the milk of love, possessor of villages and bower.
Hail to thee, O Bharat! All Hail to thee!

O beloved, revered country, we salute thee!
Be kind to accept our humble offering, prithee!
Hail to thee, O Bharat! All Hail to thee!

Abbas: Such remarkably brave men! Now I know that Islam exists outside the realm of Islam. These men are true Muslims, and the Holy Prophet would surely intercede on their behalf for their salvation.

Hussain: How bravely they're fighting!

Abbas: They fearlessly enter the ranks of the enemy. We've not seen anyone so boldly enter the battlefield.

Ali Akbar: If we'd had only five hundred such men with us, we'd have been triumphant.

Hussain: Alas! There, **Sahas Rai** falls from his horse. See how devious **Shimr** has attacked him from behind. This sinner brings such disrepute to Islam!

Abbas: There, the second brother also goes down.

Hussain: We'll have to cremate their dead bodies, as per their customs. Prepare the pyre.

Ali Akbar: The third one, too, is slain.

Abbas: The tyrants have besieged them, but what good archers they are! Their arrows emit fire.

Ali Akbar: God, their arrows emit fire! It's complete pandemonium out there; All the soldiers are running away.

Abbas: Ah, those four warriors are going towards the enemy's tents. The enemy ranks are completely disoriented and falling apart. Oh, they've set the enemy tents on fire.

Ali Akbar: O God, all the four disappeared in a flash.

Hussain: Perhaps they fell in the trenches dug in front of the enemy tents.

Abbas: Yes, I think so.

Hussain: Prepare the pyres! Had they not been deceived, they would've burnt down the entire army of **Ziyad**. Are these arrows or miracles?

Abbas: There are people in this world who die for Truth without any selfish motive.

Hussain: They are from the Holy land that first resounded with the sound of Oneness of God *or Tauheed*? May God grant them the highest status among the martyrs! There, the flames rise from their pyres! O

God, may the memory of this love never be wiped from the heart of Islam; may our brave men always shed their blood for this nation. May the seeds of friendship, sown by the flames rising from these funeral pyres, flourish till the Day of Judgement.

Scene 4

[Time—Evening. **Zainab** is sitting in her tent.]

Zainab: (**Soliloquy**) All *Bhaiyya's* companions left us one by one, sacrificing their lives for him. Only **Abbas** and **Ali Akbar** are left behind now. Oh! Oh! Youths like **Qasim**, **Muslim's** sons, Abbas's brothers, *Bhaiyya* **Hasan's** four sons—all have left us. We are ruined. Alas! Our blooming garden is desolate; our flourishing house, wrecked. The mothers of these martyrs are content, and their fathers pleased. I'm the only wretched one whose wishes have not been fulfilled! God has blessed me with two sons, but how can they comfort my heart if they aren't of any use? I wish I'd been barren rather than give birth to such sons. At least, I would've been spared the ignominy of betrayal; Hussain raised these boys like his own sons, but now they have abandoned him in his misery, just as one's shadow departs in darkness. What is it, if not treachery? What would *Bhaiyya* think? What if he feels that I stopped them from going into the battlefield? What if it leads him to think that what I spoke was merely lip service, only to meet my own goals? Ah! I wish I could tear out my heart to let him see the gnawing anxiety I have for him, but I cannot keep my offspring in line. For the shame you two bring to me, I'll not forgive you the debt of my milk.[27] Oh, why have they become such cowards? Their grandfather wreaked havoc on in the battlefield, and their father evoked terror in the hearts of enemies. How can these boys be so passive and weak? It's my misfortune; what else can it be? When they do not wish to fight, why do they mock me by carrying arms? How will I face *Bhaiyya* and look him in the eyes?

[*Entry of both her sons.*]

Aun: *Ammajaan*, please resolve this matter for us. I want to go into the battlefield first, but he insists that he'll go first. We've been arguing over this since morning, but he doesn't let up. Tell me, is it fair for the younger brother to die first?

[27] For reference see footnote 21.

Muhammad: *Ammajaan*, how can the elder brother lay down his life, and the younger mourn over his dead body? *Amma*, I can't accept it, whether you like it or not. He thinks I'm young and can't fight. But, God-willing:

If in one strike I don't wreak havoc upon the enemy's army,
O mother, the debt of your milk, don't you ever forgive me
I will sacrifice my head at the feet of the *Shah*, or else
I will return from the battlefield with severed heads of our enemy.

Ammajaan, without being biased towards either of us, please decide who should go into the battlefield first?

Zainab: Was this was the reason you delayed going into the battlefield? My dear sons, doubts had filled my mind; please forgive your mother for questioning your courage. Come, I'll settle the dispute. In the name of God, go together and show the enemies that your love for **Shabbir** is no less than anyone else's. My honour and the honour of our family rests on you.

It's demeaning for lions to fear the sword
Strike enemies on the battlefield with a brave heart
If wounded, remember your love for **Shabbir**—
Such a death is better than life, my dear
May the honour of Islam live long in this world
Whether you live or die, let Islam shine forever!
Let me see who beheads millions of enemies
Who can match your grandfather in valour?
Let me see who does what to the enemy ranks
Let's see who pays off the love of this mother
May your hands display your swordsmanship
From behind the veil, I'll watch your valour.

I'm advising you because you are so young, though I know you are mature enough to make a name for yourselves. Go, I entrust you to the protection of God!

[*Both ride into the battlefield and start the combat; Zainab watches them from behind the curtain.*]

Shahr Banu: Oh, sister, what calamity is this? You have thrown these tender ones into the battlefield. **Ali Akbar** and **Abbas** are yet to go. What was the hurry?

Zainab: As though anyone could stop them. Armed with their weapons, they had been waiting since yesterday; they spent all night sharpening their weapons. Why else had they come here? If they are destined to live any longer, they'll come back. I won't regret their death—how else could they serve the cause? *Jihad* does not differentiate between the young and the old. At least I can face the Prophet of God on the Day of Judgement!

Shahr Banu: Oh, see! How the enemies have surrounded them both. Why is no one going to fetch them back? **Shabbir** is watching the spectacle instead of sending someone. They're so young, but how they dazzle like fish out there! Oh, Abbas is now rushing towards them.

[*Abbas rushes into the battlefield.*]

Zainab: (Coming out of the tent) **Abbas**, I beseech you, in the name of the Holy Prophet: Don't bring them back. Go cheer them on if you wish. Don't you wish to share the rewards of martyrdom with me? *Bhaiyya*, you've never been this selfish before.

[*Both the brothers are killed.* ***Hussain*** *and* ***Abbas*** *go to fetch their bodies, and* ***Zainab*** *faints with a scream.*]

Scene 5

[Time—12 at night. The war has been halted for a while. The enemy is inattentive. **Abbas** is standing near the river holding a waterskin.]

Abbas: (Soliloquy) We are so close to a raging river, and yet we've not had a drop of water for two days. Children are dying of thirst. Women's lips are parched. *Hazrat* **Hussain** is in a dire state. But our people don't talk of their miseries to each other. I hope these tyrants remain inattentive for a while so that I may sneak in with my waterskin! I feel like gulping down the whole river, but my conscience doesn't allow me this. How can I drink water when all my kin are dying of thirst? Alas, my horse also refuses to drink water. Faithful animal! If you are so honourable, even though a beast, how can I, a human, act dishonourably?[28]

[*He carries water from the river and proceeds towards the bank.*]

A soldier: Who is this man carrying water?

[*Abbas remains silent.*]

Many Soldiers: Is someone fetching water? Who is it? Stop where you are.

[*Many soldiers besiege Abbas.*]

One Soldier: This is someone from **Hussain's** camp. Who are you?

Abbas: I'm **Abbas**, brother of *Hazrat* **Hussain**.

Many Soldiers: Seize his waterskin.

Abbas: It's not that easy. You'll have to trade one of your heads for each drop of water. Water may have never been sold at such a high price.

[28] Most accounts of Karbala don't match this account of Abbas trying to fetch water stealthily. As per the authentic sources, whenever Abbas asks for permission to fight, Hussain stops him on one pretext or the other. Finally, when Hussain runs out of excuses to stop Abbas, he asks him to go and fetch water for the children. Abbas goes towards the river in broad daylight.

[*Abbas takes out his sword*[29] *from the scabbard and attacks the enemies in an attempt to escape their siege. Shimr comes running.*]

Shimr: Be vigilant! Circle him from all sides! Strike his waterskin with spears! Hit the waterskin!

Abbas: O heartless tyrant! You are a believer, and yet you are unleashing such miseries on the family of the Prophet of God! Children are dying of thirst; *Hazrat* **Hussain's** condition is desolate, yet you show no mercy.

Shimr: A Muslim, who rebels against the Caliph, doesn't remain a Muslim any longer and deserves no mercy. My brave men! The war is going to be over this very moment. After we catch **Abbas, Hussain** will be left alone.

[*Soldiers attack* ***Abbas*** *with spears, and he strikes back with his sword. Entry of* ***Sa'ad.***]

Sa'ad: Hold it, hold it! There's more to be gained in befriending the enemy than in killing him. **Abbas!** I want to speak with you. Please sheathe your sword. A brandishing sword ceases the possibility of negotiation.

Abbas: If you want to negotiate peace, why don't you go to *Hazrat* **Hussain**? Though this prospect has dimmed now, as four of his nephews have been killed, scores of his companions martyred; *Hazrat* has lost interest in life and is prepared to die.

Sa'ad: In that case, you should value your own life even more. Someone must survive to continue the line of Ali.

Abbas: It's useless to live after my brother has gone.

Sa'ad: Brothers do not go to the grave together
Brothers do not die for each other.

Abbas: Brothers sacrifice their lives for each other
Wherever one goes, follows the other
When one is under the sword, does the other falter?
When one's life is in peril, happily dies the other.

[29] According to the dominant historical account, Abbas only carried a spear, not his sword, so as to make it clear that he was only going to fetch water, not to fight.

Sa'ad: The Caliph has no malice towards you; if you accept his allegiance, it'll be in everyone's favour. You'll get whatever position you desire, and you'll be considered *Hazrat* **Ali's** successor.

Abbas: When a peace-loving person like **Hussain** didn't pay heed to you—though he never allows anger to come near him, is never inclined to initiate a war, and even today advised me to refrain from going towards the river without permission—then how can I, someone who doesn't possess a single one of his virtues, agree to your proposal?

Sa'ad: As you wish.

Shimr: Attack him, kill him.

[*One soldier comes from behind, attacks* **Abbas** *with a sword and cuts off his right hand.* **Abbas** *holds his sword up in his left hand.*]

Shimr: Whoever cuts off his hand will be rewarded with one lakh *dinars*.

[*The sound of the painful cries of wounded soldiers can be heard from all directions. As* **Abbas** *rides towards* **Hussain's** *tents, tearing through the enemy lines and killing soldiers on the way, a soldier cuts off his other hand with a sword.* **Shimr** *pierces his chest with a spear while* **Abbas** *holds the waterskin with his teeth. Then, hit by a mace on his head,* **Abbas** *falls off his horse.*]

Abbas: (Shouting) *Bhaiyya*, your slave is departing from this world; accept his last salutations.

[***Hussain*** *comes out of his tent, runs towards* **Abbas**, *and places Abbas's head on his bosom.*]

Hussain: Oh! My dear brother, my strength, your death has shattered me. Oh! There is no one now to help me. Your presence gave me the reassurance that a child feels in his mother's arms. You were my backbone. Oh! Whose face will I look upon to comfort my distressed soul? Oh! If you had to go so soon, why did you not let me go first? Oh! I have been protecting you from troubles, as one protects a candle during a windstorm, but who can control destiny? Oh! Why didn't I go instead of you to fetch water from the river? Alas! My only comfort is that I'll meet you soon, and then we will not separate until the Day of Judgement.

Scene 6

[Time—Afternoon. **Hussain** is standing in his tent, surrounded by **Zainab**, **Kulsoom**, **Sakeena** and **Shahr Banu**.]

Hussain: Oh, **Zainab**, after **Abbas**, **Ali Akbar** was the solace of my heart. Who will I look upon now to draw comfort? Oh, my young son died thirsting for a drop of water. He rode into the battlefield with such dignity, charm, and valour. **Zainab**, he always had a pleasant smile on his face and never despaired. Oh, my eyes, if you weep, I'll gouge you out. This is the Will of God! It seems nature herself is conspiring to ruin me! This scorching sun that you can't look towards, this burning sand, this raging gust of heatwave and this thirst! Oh, this pain is much worse than the wounds of arrows and spears.

[*Ali Asghar comes in, faints, and falls on the ground.*]

Shahr Banu: Oh, what happened to my son!

Hussain: (Lifting up **Asghar**) Alas! This flower is wilting without water. God forgive me, if I utter blasphemy in my grief, as I have lost control over myself. I would barter Paradise in return for a little water for this child.

[*Comes out of the tent carrying Asghar in his arms.*]

O tyrants, if I'm a traitor in your eyes, this child has done you no wrong. Give him a little water to drink! I'm your Prophet's grandson; if you have doubts about this, you can at least consider me a helpless traveller from Kaaba. If you don't want to consider that either, then I'm a believer, at the very least. If even this is not acceptable to you, then, surely, I can be taken as a humble servant of God. Don't you have any pity for my dying child?

I don't ask you to fetch water for me
Bring a handful of water to revive this baby
He is dying; bring him back to life
For God's sake, douse my heart's fire
Whenever he looks at my face longingly

O tyrants, smoke rises from my heart in agony.

[*Shimr shoots an arrow which, piercing through the neck of Asghar, hits Hussain's arm. Hussain quickly pulls out the arrow, and Asghar dies as soon as the arrow is out. Hussain brings Asghar to the tent.*]

Shahr Banu: Oh! my flowerlike baby.

Hussain: His thirst has been quenched forever. (Throwing the blood in his palms towards the sky.) God, Be a witness to all my afflictions! Is there anyone left now to take revenge on those apostates?

[*Sajjad gets up from the bed and drags himself towards the battlefield.*]

Zainab: Alas, Son, you have been delirious for months; you're too frail to stand on your feet. Where are you going?

Sajjad: It's better to die on the battlefield than in bed. When everyone else has left for Heaven, can I lie back?

Hussain: *Beta*, for God's sake, have mercy upon your father and go back! You are the only man left in the family of the Prophet of God. You have the responsibility to protect the women of the family. Oh! Who else will do this? As you are my heir, I entrust them to your care. *Khuda Hafiz*! Oh, **Zainab**, Oh **Kulsoom**, Oh, **Sakeena**! My last salutations to you!

[*Zainab weeps as she embraces Hussain.*]

Sakeena: How will I live now?

Hussain: **Zainab**!

Even after I die, I'll never forget your favours,
Has a sister ever sacrificed her children for her brother?
You showed no affection to those dearer than life
Strange are the ways of the love of a mother.
Love now demands that you permit me to go
In hunger and thirst, allow me to face spears
Which brother would make his sister grieve?
But the son of Asadullah is helpless, my dear!

Anguish and sorrow have shattered my heart
I cannot put into words the grief I suffer.
Shabbir grieves over the ruin of this house
In you, he parts from his dear mother
[*Raises his hands in prayer.*]
O Lord, I entrust this house of *Sa'adat* to Your care
Many heart-broken widows to Your care
I entrust my helpless ailing son to Your care
I entrust these pearls of my ocean to Your care

[*Rides into the battlefield.*]

Shimr: (To his army) Alert! Beware! **Hussain** is coming. Everyone, be on guard! Know that victory now belongs to you.

Hussain: *Standing before the enemy soldiers:*

I am the son of Ali, grandson of the Prophet of God
Everyone looks up to my mother for salvation
My father is revered by every creed, every nation
I am the son of Ali, grandson of the Prophet of God
If my father, Haider, had not set out to fight
The idols from God's house wouldn't have taken flight
I am the son of Ali, grandson of the Prophet of God.
Is there a war where he did not decimate warriors?
Is there an army, which he did not conquer?
I am the son of Ali, grandson of the Prophet of God.
Had we not purged this earth, it'd have remained impure
In this earth made of dust, only dust would have endured.
I am the son of Ali, grandson of the Prophet of God.
Where were these calls for prayers five times a day
Before our birth, where was Islam, say?
I am the son of Ali, grandson of the Prophet of God
You are duty-bound to honour the Prophet's family
O tyrants! Don't eliminate them so cruelly.
I am the son of Ali, grandson of the Prophet of God

[*Launches a fierce attack on the enemy.*]

Shimr: Cowards, why are you running away? He is not a lion who can devour you.

One Soldier: Come forward to confront him, and you'll know. It's easy to preach from a distance.

Second Soldier: Oh, he is coming towards us. May God save us!

Third Soldier: Our hands refuse to pick up the sword against him. His looks inspire awe in our hearts.

Fourth Soldier: I am shooting arrows in the air. What face will I have in the hereafter, if my arrow kills him?

Fifth Soldier: I am also shooting in the air.

Shimr: Shame on you! You should hang your heads in disgrace. Why don't you surround him and attack him with your spears?

Sa'ad: (To **Shimr**) It's as arduous for us to besiege him as it is for rats to besiege a cat. He may go down fighting on his own due to thirst and fatigue, but who can dare stand up to him?

Shimr: (Shooting an arrow) Why are you running away? Why do you want to blacken your faces? Aren't you ashamed of what the world is going to say?

Qais: The entire army is panicking; it's difficult to hold our ranks together and make them stand up to the challenge.

Shees: After **Ali**, I have never seen anyone fight so valiantly.

Shimr: (Shooting an arrow) Spread out our soldiers in all directions and let him exhaust himself pursuing them.

Hussain: **Sa'ad** and **Shimr**, I give you yet another chance to allow me to go home. Why do you want to extinguish the lives of these poor people? You have been routed. I challenge you to come forward to face me and settle the battle, once and for all.

Sa'ad: **Shimr**, go ahead and confront him?

Shimr: Why should I go? I haven't come here to die!

Sa'ad: Because if I go, I won't be able to fight him.

[*Hussain turns his horse towards the river.*]

Shimr: This is more worrying. God knows what havoc he will wreak if his thirst is quenched. We should instruct **Hajjaaj** to not let him get close to the river.

[*Summons Hajjaaj.*]

Shimr: Hajjaaj, make sure Hussain is not able to reach the river.

Hajjaaj: (Aside) Why should I take this curse upon myself? I will also need the Prophet's help on the Day of Judgement. (Aloud) Yes sir, I am gathering my men.

[*Hussain eases the bridle of his horse, but it doesn't go towards the water to drink; it turns its head and pulls at Hussain's saddle.*]

Hussain Oh! My speechless, dear friend! Even though a beast, you show such respect for your master, and they, even though human, are thirsty for the blood of their Prophet's grandson. I will not drink water unless you drink it. (He is about to drink.[30])

Hajjaaj: Hussain, you are drinking water here while the army is about to attack your tents.

Hussain: Are you telling the truth?

Hajjaaj: Go and see for yourself if you don't trust me.

Hussain: (Aside) Can anyone deceive me in this hour of calamity? Nobody will ruin his own honour by lying to a dying man!

[*He turns his horse around and rushes towards the tents.*]

Oh! The devil turned out to be much more malicious and black-hearted than I had imagined. He deceived me in this dire state and that, too, to distract me from drinking water.

[*He returns to the battlefield and launches an attack on the enemy; soldiers start running helter-skelter.*]

Shimr: (Shooting an arrow) You are destined to be killed by me.

[30] This, too, is a deviation from the accepted historical accounts. Hussain did not attempt to drink water when he reached the river.

[*The arrow hits Hussain in his face, and he falls off his horse. He gathers himself to get up and starts brandishing his sword again.*]

***Sa'ad*: Shimr**, your soldiers are advancing towards **Hussain's** tents. This is unlawful.

Shimr: It's not my duty to protect their women.

Hussain: (Wiping blood from his beard) **Sa'ad**, you may not be a man of faith, but at least you are a human being, and you have a family. Won't you stop these scoundrels from entering my tents?

Sa'ad: I won't let anyone enter your tents, so long as I'm alive.

[*Stands before the tents*].[31]

Zainab: (Coming out) **Sa'ad, Hussain** is being brutally killed, and you are watching like a mute spectator? Is the wealth of this world so dear to you?

[*Sa'ad turns his face away and starts crying.*]

Shimr: Shame on you, soldiers! You can't kill a single man on foot! Why are you petrified? **Hussain** has no strength left. He can't raise his own hands; his limbs are trembling; his eyes are dim, and you still consider him a lion?

Hussain: (Aside) I don't know how many men I killed or can still kill, but they all are my *nana's ummat*. They all are Muslims; why should I kill them and for what? Who's left in this world to live for? Oh, **Akbar**!

What calamities I've suffered; what tragedies befell,
Has any father survived such a son, please tell?
O **Abbas**!
I am losing consciousness; I am so thirsty
My love has brought me again to thee

[31] This is again a deviation from the dominant account. While Sa'ad did have this dilemma between the faith and loyalty towards the grandson of the Prophet of God on the one hand, and wealth on the other, and was also keen to avoid war, he did not attempt to safeguard the tents of Hussain. In fact, as per the dominant narrative, Yazid's army did enter Hussain's tents and plundered them and finally set the tents on fire.

Place your lips on my parched lips
If you've water in your waterskin, quench me
Why're you lying on earth, with your face buried in the sand?
You are unconscious, brother; how do I wake you up?
My standard-bearer, I'd be happy if you marched ahead
Won't you offer n*amaz* behind your brother?

I have been fighting the whole day, and now I can't even raise my hands. Let me offer my last *namaz*. I wish my head were severed while I am offering *namaz*.

[*Hussain bows down to pray; Ashas comes from behind and hits him on the shoulder with his sword; Qais attacks his other shoulder with a sword. Hussain gets up and falls again; there is deathly silence in the army ranks.*]

[*Everyone comes and surrounds him.*]

Shimr: Yazid, the Caliph, has asked for Hussain's head. Who wants to earn this honour?

[*One soldier comes forward brandishing his sword. Muslim's little daughter comes running from the tent and puts her hands on Hussain's back.*]

Naseema: [32]Oh wicked man, are you going to kill my uncle?

[*The sword hits Naseema's hands, and her hands are cut off. Shees comes forward, but as soon as he looks at Hussain's face, his sword slips off his hands.*]

Shimr: Why did you drop your sword?
Shees: When he opened his eyes and looked at me, I felt those were the eyes of the Prophet. I lost my senses.
Qais: I will go and end this.

[32] Her name has been mentioned as Fatima earlier in the play. Here, it seems to be a printing error.

[*He comes forward, but his sword drops from his hands, and he comes back, trembling.*]

Qais: That face is not **Hussain's**, but that of the Holy Prophet. That grace on his face paralysed me. O God, don't consign me to hellfire!

Shimr: He is destined to be killed by me. All of you have weak hearts.

[*He picks up the sword and sits on* ***Hussain's*** *chest.* ***Hussain*** *opens his eyes and looks at him.*]

Shimr: I am not like those cowards who were terrified by your looks.

Hussain: Who are you?

Shimr: My name is **Shimr**.

Hussain: Do you know me?

Shimr: I know you very well. You are the son of **Ali** and **Fatima** and the grandson of **Muhammad**.

Hussain: Do you still want to kill me?

Shimr: I value *jagirs* more than Paradise.

[*He strikes him with the sword.* ***Hussain's*** *head is severed.*]

Sa'ad: (Crying) **Shimr**, tell **Ziyad**, I don't need the *jagir* of "Rai." I might be forgiven.

[*He pierces his spear into his chest and falls to the ground, dead.*[32] *Many soldiers of Ziyad's army hide their faces with their hands and cry. The sounds of wailing emerge from the tents.*]

The End

[32] This, too, is not based on historical accounts. Sa'ad did not kill himself out of guilt at Karbala.

Appendices

Premchand's Defence of the Inclusive Nature of the Play

(Premchand wrote this in response to the critical reviews of the Play.[1]*)*

My esteemed friend Ramchandra Tandan while taking a critical view of my play *Karbala* questions my inclusion of Hindu characters in the play. He says, "Including Hindu characters will neither placate the Hindus nor will it please the Muslims. Hence there would have been no harm if Hindu characters were not included." This is a historical play, and history tells us that a few Hindu warriors fought and died in support of *Hazrat* Hussain's cause. Therefore, it would not have been reasonable to exclude these characters. As for the argument that neither the Hindus nor the Muslims will be happy with the inclusion of Hindu characters, why should the author be blamed for this? Today, there is discord between the two communities, and hence, such a composite representation may not go down well with either. However, if we analyse the play carefully, nothing in it could be objectionable to either Hindus or Muslims. Suppose Hindus are not glad to see their ancestors sacrificing themselves for a right cause in a just war. In that case, what else can be said except that we have no sense of veneration for our own heroes—a sign of irredeemable decadence for any community!

So long as we admire and respect heroes like Arjun, Pratap, and Shivaji, there is still some hope for our resurgence. If we were to have such a low sense of self-esteem as to start objecting to an act of valour by our ancestors, we'd slip into despondency. I can't even imagine such a scenario, such cynicism about our glorious past. I am convinced that Hindus, however

[1] From *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 7, pp. 304–305, titled Karbala-2. First published in *Madhuri*, 25 January 1925, also included in *Vividh Prasang*, Vol. 2.

reluctant, will be happy and proud of it. But, I cannot speak with the same conviction about the approval of the Muslims. Much the same, since, I have included these Hindu characters based on the accounts of Muslim writers, I assume they should be pleased. If Muslims had reservations about receiving help from the Aryans at a time of great catastrophe, why at all would they record it? Even the weaker sections of society today have no hesitation in acknowledging the help they receive in difficult times. Therefore, there is no reason why Muslims would discredit the help from the Aryans. Yes, if the Hindus start bragging about it before the Muslims, then the Muslims may possibly feel offended and, instead of gratitude, they may develop a sense of hostility towards the Hindus. They may even try to erase this event from their memory.

The other concern that my esteemed critic raises is that if it's established that Aryans went and settled in Arabia, could it have been possible for them to preserve their religious practices from the time of the *Mahabharata* until the days of Hussain? How could they build temples? How could they build an empire? In other words, their language, culture, and attire should have been similar to Arabs. How could they follow their faith living amidst the idol-breaking tribes of the Arabs?

My friends, you must know that Arabia or Iran was not unfamiliar to Aryans during the *Mahabharata* period. There were regular exchanges among them. Islam was not yet born, and Arabs were immersed in idol worship; not one but many gods were worshipped. It is quite possible that their clothes were also similar. Sidian, Hun, Kushan, and other communities from the North-West merged with the Aryans. This evinces remarkable similarities among them. One may surmise that during the time of the *Mahabharata*, idol worship was not prevalent, and there is no evidence to suggest any major difference between the Arabs and Aryans, as one finds today. At the time of Hussain, Islam had been around for not more than fifty years. Iran was also not entirely captured by Islamic armies. We know that Ashwatthama's Arab-origin ancestors were idol-worshippers. Why should we imagine, then, that the Muslims would unnecessarily be hostile to them? In short, there is nothing peculiar about those Aryans doing their duty. Also, I didn't invent these names. I've included only those names that I found in the annals of history. This is yet further evidence that, even after the lapse of such a long time, those Aryan brave-hearts had not forgotten the traditions of their ancestors. When we

see that Parsis follow their religion and tradition even after living in India for centuries, it is futile to have such disquiet about the Aryans in Arabia.
(Translated from the Hindi)

Premchand's Letter to Daya Narain Nigam about the Play

(Premchand wrote this letter to Daya Narain Nigam [Editor, Zamana] in response to his postcard about their objections to publishing the play in Urdu.[2])

You had better not publish the play. I would not suffer any loss by this; Nor am I willing to invite this trouble upon myself without reason. I read about *Hazrat* Husain, and I felt reverence for him. His spirit of sacrifice cast a spell upon me. The result is this play. If Muslims are not favourably disposed to the pen and tongue of a Hindu engaging in the praise of their religious leader, then I won't insist upon releasing it. It would be futile to respond to your postcard,[3] but I wish to say a few things about *Hazrat* Ahsan's objections. He writes that Shias would not like the dramatisation of the life of their religious leader. If Shias can read *masnavis*, stories, and *marsiyas* about their religious leader, what objections could they possibly have to a play? Is it because it's written by a Hindu?

There is a difference between history and a historical play. As you yourself admit, no one can tamper with the main characters in a historical play, but one has the liberty to make changes in the minor characters as per the requirement, and even to invent them if needed. *Hazrat* Asghar was six months old at that time, but some oral traditions present him as being six years old. I have chosen versions that suited my purpose. And even if, suppose, there is no such version, *Hazrat* Asghar is not an important character in the play.

[2] Ibid., Vol. 19, p. 164.

[3] Letter written on a postcard in which Daya Narain Nigam informed Premchand about the objections of Muslims to his play and communicated the inputs received from the sub-editor of *Zamana*, Ahsan Sambhali.

Yazid's character has been portrayed much worse by many chroniclers. I couldn't have presented it differently. I have only talked about his love for alcohol and debauchery. A wine-drinker he was, indeed. After the first four caliphs, all the caliphs who followed drank wine and drank it openly. Notice what Sayed Amir Ali writes about Yazid,

> Yazid was both cruel and treacherous; his depraved nature knew neither pity nor justice; his pleasures were as degrading as his low and vicious companions. He insulted the minister of religion by dressing up a monkey as the learned divine and carrying the animal mounted on a beautifully caparisoned Syrian donkey. Drunken riotousness prevailed at court ....

I am sure you consider Amir Ali a reliable source. Have I degraded Yazid any more than he has? You write, "He was a Muslim" What an argument! By that logic, the Nawab of Rampur was also a Muslim.

You have objected to the inclusion of Sahas Rai from a historical perspective. No doubt, old histories make no mention of him. But there is one tradition which I have borrowed from the periodical *Aaina*, Allahabad. This version may be incorrect. But even if we presume it was written to suit the narrative, what's wrong with it? Drama is not history. The inclusion of these characters does not belittle the status of any historical personage. The purpose behind including these characters is to show Hindus sacrificing their lives for Imam Hussain. They have come into existence for this sole objective. This drama is historical as well as political.

I agree with your objections about the literary aspects. I have never laid any claim to be a litterateur. People unnecessarily paint me as a creator with a magical pen and whatnot. I delineate my subject matter in a straightforward/direct manner and simple language. Making it colourful and ornate is beyond me. And when the play is written to reach out to the common folk, flowery language seems even more out-of-place. In any case, I am not adamant about the publishing of the play. Hence, let's cut short this discussion.

Khwaja Hasan Nizami wrote *Krishnabiti*. A Hindu critic praised it on the grounds that the Maulana had expressed his reverence for Krisna in it. I, too, had the same intent. If Hasan Nizami has the liberty to do that

but not me, I don't care. Please be so kind as to return the manuscript to me. Yes, I forgot to mention that drama is of two kinds: one for reading, and another for the stage. This play was written to be read and not to be performed.[4]

A Comparison of Hindi–Urdu Texts and General Notes about the Translation

There are a large number of variations between the Hindi text of the play and the Urdu text. This translation has mostly adhered to the Hindi text, as it was published first.[5] However, in certain cases, the Urdu text has been followed to avoid discrepancies in the Hindi text.

Ghazals and Songs: While the Urdu text of the play has retained the marsiyas and elegiac poems, romantic ghazals have been removed to sanitise it of supposedly blasphemous elements. The following ghazals and songs present in the Hindi text, have been removed from the Urdu text:

Act I, Scene 1—*Safi thank ke baithe*
Act I, Scene 7—*Hari Dharm Pran se pyara ho*
Act II, Scene 1—*Haan Kuhle saqi dar-i-maikhana aal*
Act II, Scene 5—*Shab-i-wasl who rooth jana kisi ka*
Act III, Scene 4— *Maut ka kya usko hai jo musalmaN ho gaya*
Act III, Scene 6—*Dega Jagah Koi mere musht-i-ghubar ko*
Act IV, Scene 2—*Koi tumse juda dard-i-judai le ke baitha hai*

The reasons for this would become clear through Premchand's following letter to Nigam:

> Please begin the publication. You won't have to reduce the Ghazals. I haven't made *Hazrat* Husain mouth a love lyric. Ghazals have been sung in Yazid's court and this is not out of place. If you do not like the choice of ghazals, please go ahead and replace them. You can ask Ahsan

[4] *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 164.

[5] This translation is based on 1997 edition (Hindi) of the play published by Janvani Prakashan, New Delhi. The Urdu text used here is from *Kulliyaat-i-Premchand* Vol. 15 Edited by Madan Gopal, New Delhi: NCPUL, 2000, pp. 29–190.

Sahib to choose better ghazals instead. But isn't this ghazal by Safi good enough?

HaN khule Saaqi dare maikhana aaj

Khair ho bhar de meta paimana aaj. [Isn't it a beautiful mystical poem?]

Or

Sabhi thak ke baithe dawa karne wale

The hath uthakar duo kerne wale [Isn't it good?)

Don't bother about the delicateness of ideas. Pay attention to whether the ghazal is written in sonorous, facile, uncomplicated language or not. Can it be sung? Ghazals by Ghalib, Nasikh, Aziz, or Chakbast do not lend themselves to music easily. Usually, the surfeit of inflections [*izafatein*] and similes make them too difficult for the common folk to follow.

If Mirza Zafar Ali Khan has made a few changes, I have no objections to that. The fact is that I haven't done the translation from Hindi myself. I have a friend at Normal School, Munshi Munir Haider Sahib Quraishi, whom I approached for help, and I got it done by him. Now I will translate the remaining parts myself.[6]

It is clear the Urdu editors were wary of elements that might lead to any kind of controversy.

Interpolations in the Play: While the Urdu version has retained the Sahas Rai episode and the Waheb episode, the Urdu editors decided to remove the brief episode in Act III, Scene 4 in which a Sadhu meets the Imam, informs him that he has come from India to pay his respects to the Prophet of Islam, and asks for directions to the place where Prophet Muhammad is buried. In this translation, the Hindi text has been followed.

Characters of Ali Asghar and Sughra

The Hindi text of the play is anomalous in regard to the character of Ali Asghar. As per recorded history, Ali Asghar was an infant at the time of the battle of Karbala. In the Hindi text, while he is presented as participating in family discussions, later in a speech by the Imam's sister (*H*)

[6] Ibid., p. 166.

Zainab, he is referred to as an infant suckling at his mother's breast. Urdu editors tried to address this anomaly as per the following details:

- In Act I, Scene 5, Ali Asghar's statement "Abba, How will I offer my namaz behind you, if you leave us here?" has been ascribed to Ali Akbar and his statement, "Abba, let me hold the reins of the horse..." has been ascribed to Abdullah Bin Hasan.
- In Act II, Scene 1, Ali Asghar's statement "Abba, can we see our house..." has been ascribed to Abdullah.
- In Act II, Scene 4, after Muslim's statement "I still feel I should go there first" is directly followed by Hussain's statement "All right Muslim. You may leave in the morning." In the Urdu version, Hussain's intervening conversation with Ali Asghar has been removed.
- In Act III, Scene 1, Ali Asghar's speech in which he objects to Muslim's daughter sitting in Hussain's lap has been removed in the Urdu text.
- In Act IV Scene VII, Ali Asghar's speech and the Imam's reference to it in his speech have been removed in the Urdu version.

Similarly, according to recorded history, Imam Hussain's daughter Sughra did not accompany the family members, and, due to her illness, the Imam had left her behind in Medina. In the Hindi text, however, she is present along with other womenfolk. The Urdu text of the play has addressed this anomaly by ascribing her speech to Sakina (the only speech assigned to Sughra in the Hindi play is at the beginning of Act IV, Scene 4).

The present translation has followed the Urdu version in the above instances. The sections of the Hindi text which have been dropped are added in the footnotes.

Editing/Removal of Scenes

Certain scenes of the Hindi text of the play have been either edited or removed from the Urdu text. For instance, in Act II, Scene 8 has been split into two scenes in the Urdu version. Scene 8 ends after some people drag Muslim into a dark place and abandon him there. Starting with Muslim's speech, "Where have these tyrants dumped me?" to the point

where Sharik enters, dialogues have been dropped from the Urdu play. Scene 9 of the Urdu play begins with Muslim thanking Haani for his foresight which saved his life, and Haani praising his men. This is followed by Sharik's entry after which the Hindi and Urdu texts are the same. Due to this change, Scenes 9, 10, 11, and 12 of the Hindi play become Scene 10, 11, 12, 13 of the Urdu play, while Scene 13 of the Hindi text has been removed from the Urdu version. A few other dialogues have been added, modified, or dropped in the Urdu text. For instance, in Act II, Scene 11 (Scene 12 of the Urdu play) after Suleman warns Ziyad against arresting Haani, the conversations between Ziyad and Qais have been dropped in the Urdu version, and instead, Ziyad asking his men to close the gates, directly follows. Additionally, there are minor variations of language and phrases in the Urdu text. The present translation has followed the Hindi version in all the above instances. The Urdu text has also added honorific like *Hazrat*, *Alaihissalam*, etc. before the names of revered personages, like Abbas, Zainab, and Hussain.

Printing Errors

Apart from a general misspelling of names and places (Furat is written as Kairat, Zuhair as Zaheer in the Hindi/Urdu texts of the play), there are a few other misprints also. For instance, in the Urdu text, Act IV, Scene 3 is mentioned as Scene 4, and hence the Act has 10 scenes instead of 9. This is clearly a printing error.

A Note on Translation and Transliteration

The present translation has aimed to create one translated text of the play out of the two originals[7] available as per the choices mentioned above. The endnotes draw attention to the playwright's deviations from the dominant accounts of Karbala. A glossary of names, places, and non-English

[7] See Harish Trivedi, "Premchand in English: One Translation, Two Originals" in Premchand in World Languages: Tanslation, Reception and Cinematic Representations. Ed. M Asaduddin. New Delhi: Routledge, 2016.

words has been provided with the aim to help the readers who are unfamiliar with the historic-cultural context of the play. There are a number of poems, ghazals, and marsiyas in the text. To avoid any snag in the reading, only translations are included within the text. However, considering the untranslatability of poignant poetry, and for the benefit of bilingual readers, the original poems have been included in the Appendices. While writing the play, Premchand was careful to give Muslim characters an Urdu vocabulary, while Hindu characters speak chaste Hindi.[8] It is difficult to reflect this difference in the English translation.

Finally, the scholarly apparatus here utilises a system of footnotes. The transliteration method is designed to be easily understandable to the twenty-first-century international audience. I have transliterated words and phrases from Urdu and Hindi into a basic phonetic English approximation, free of diacritical marks. However, in the transliteration of poetry *nun ghunna* of Urdu and *bindu* of Hindi is denoted by N. hamza/Ain of Urdu is denoted by (') and Izafat by "i" and, standard phonetic spellings are used for consonants.

[8] Premchand wrote, "Though the script of *Karbala* is Hindi, its language is totally Urdu. The Hindi public may not value it but I thought it would not be fit to make Muslim characters mouth chaste Hindi speech. With every word, I have been careful that it should not hurt the religious sentiments of Muslims. The purpose (of this play) is political; it aims to promote mutual harmony, nothing else. ... I can claim with certainty that there won't be a more interesting play than this in Urdu. ... The incident itself is so interesting and sorrowful that it is a fit subject for drama." *Premchand Rachnavali*, Vol. 19, p. 160.

Original Poems/Ghazals/Marsiya Used in the Play

Act 1, Scene 1

[Safi thak ke baithey dawa karney waley
Uthey haath utha kar du'a karney waley
Wafa par hai.N martey wafa karne waley
Jafa kar rahe hai.N jafa karney waley
Bacha kar chale Khaak se apna daman
Lahad par jo guzri hawa karney waley
Kisi baat par bhi to qayam nahi hai.N
Yeh zaalim sitamgar daghaa karney waley
Ta'ajjub nahi.N hai jo ab zahr de dei.N
Yeh zich ho gai hai.N dawa karney waley
Samajh le.N ki dushwar hai raazdari
Kisi ka kisi se gila karne waley
Abhi hai buto.N ko khudaai ka daawa
Khuda jane hai.N aur kya karne waley]

Act 1, Scene 5

Sab log mujhe chhod ke pehle hi sidhaare
Milta nahi aaram navaase ko tumhaare
Khaadim ko koi amn ki ab ja nahi.N milti
Rahat koi sa'at mere maula nahi.N milti
Dukh kaun sa aur kaun si eeza nahi.N milti
Hain aap jaha.N raah woh mujhko nahi.N milti
Duniya mei.N mujhe koi nahi.N aur thikaana
Aaj akhiri rukhsat ko ghulaam aaya hai nana
Bach jau.N jo paas apne bula leejiye nana,
Turbat mei.N navaase ko chhipa leejiye nana
———
Sun leejiye Shabbir ki rukhsat hai biraadar
Hazrat ko to pahlu hua amma.N ka mayassar
Qabre.N bhi juda hongi yahaa.N ab to hamari
Dekhe.N hame.N le jaye kaha.N khaak hamari

Act 1, Scene 7

Hari dharm praan se pyaara ho
Akhilesh, anant vidhata ho, mangalmaya, modpradata ho
Bhaya-bhanjan shiv, jan trata ho, avinashi adbhut gyata ho
Tera hi ek sahara ho
Hari dharm praan se pyara ho
Bala, veerya, parakram twesh rahe, sad-dharm dhara par shesh rahe
Shrut-bhanu, ekta-vesh rahe, dhan-gyan-kala-yut desh rahe
Sarvatra prem ki dhara ho
Hari dharm pran se pyara ho
Bharat tan-man-dhan sara ho, uski sewa sab dwara ho
Nij maan-sammaan dulara ho, sabki ankho.N ka tara ho
Jeevan sarvasya hamara ho
Hari dharm pran se pyara ho

Act 2, Scene 2

Haa.N khule saqi dar-i-maikhaana aaj
Khair ho bhar de mera paimaana aaj
Naaz karta jhumta mastaana war
Abr aata hai sue maikhana aaj
Bosa-i-lab husn ke sadqe mei.N de
O but-i-tarsa hamei.N tarsa na aaj
Ishq-i-chashm-i-mast ka dekho asar
Paon padta hai mera mastana aaj
Meri seero ki ilahi khair kar
Hai bahut muztar dil-i-diwana aaj
Mohtasib ka dar nahin "bismil" tumhe.N
Su'e-masjid jatey ho rindaana aaj

Act 2, Scene 5

Shab-i-wasl woh rooth jana kisi ka
Woh roothe ko apne manana kisi ka
Koi dil ko dekhe na tirchhi nazar se
Khata kar na jaye nishana kisi ka
Abhi thaam loge tum apne jigar ko
Suno to sunae.N fasana kisi ka
Zara dekh le chalke sayyad tu bhi
Ki utthta hai ab aab-o-dana kisi ka
Woh kuchh soch kar ho liye uskey peechhe
Janaaza hua jab rawaana kisi ka
Bura waqt jis waqt aata hai "Bismil"
Nahi sath deta zamana kisi ka

Act 2, Scene 8

[*Shauq kahta tha ki ha.N, hasrat yeh kahti thi nahi.N*
Main idhar mushkil mei.N tha, qatil udhar mushkil mei.N tha]
[*Salb ki quwwat tadapne ki tadapta kis tarah*
Ek dil mei.N doosra khanjar dil-i-qatil mei.N tha]
[*Gale par chhuri kyo.N nahi pher detey*
Haqiqat pe apni nazar karne waley]
[*Hujuum-e-aarzu se badh gayee.N betaabiya.N dil ki*
Arey o chhipne waley yeh hijaab-i-ja.Nsita.N kab tak]
[*Meri khushi par aasman ha.Nsta hai aur hanse na kyu.N*
Baitha hu.N jaake chain se dost ki bazm-i-naaz mei.N]

Act 2, Scene 12

Kufey mei.N raste ke ab hum gadaa hue hai.N
Kya khauf maut ka hai, haq par fidaa hue hai.N
Ima.N hai apna maslak, makr-o-dagha se nafrat
Duniya se pher kar munh, naqsh-i-wafa hue hain
Kya un pe haath uthau.N, jo maut se hain khaif
Jo raah-i-haq se phir kar sarf-i-daghaa hue hai.N
Duniya.N mei.N aake ek din har shakhs ko hai marna
Jannat hai unki jo yaa.N waqf-i-jafa hue hai.N

Act 3, Scene 1

Matam hai kai din se Musalmano ke ghar mei.N
Khandaq me.N hai laash unki, sar qile ke dar mei.N

Act 3, Scene 3

Dafn karne le chale jab mere ghar se mujhe
Kaash tum bhi jha.Nk letey rauza-i-ghar se mujhe
Sa.Ns puri ho chuki duniya se rukhsat ho chukka
Tum ab aaye ho uthaane mere bistar se mujhe
Kyo.N uthata hai mujhe meri tamanna ko nikal
Tere ghar tak khee.Nch laayi thi yahi ghar se mujhe
Hijr ki shab kuchh yahi munis tha mera ai qaza
Ek zara ro lene de mil-mil ke bistar se mujhe
Yaad hai taskeeN ab tak woh zamaana yaad hai
Jab chhudaya tha falak ne mere dilbar se mujhe

Act 3, Scene 4

Maut ka kya dar hai usko jo musalma.N ho gaya
Jiski niyat nek hai jo sidq-i-ima.N ho gaya
Kab dilero.N ko sataaye fikr zar aur khauf ki
Azm sadiq uska hai jo paak damaa.N ho gaya
Kya nidamat ho mujhe duniya meiN gar zinda raha
Jaaye gham kya hai jo nazr-i-tegh-o-burra ho gaya
Ho udoo duniya mei.N ruswa aakhirat mei.N gham naseeb
Munharif dee.N se hua aur na.Ng-i-duniya ho gaya

Act 3, Scene 6

Dega jagah koi mere musht-i-ghubaar ko
Baithega kaun leke kisi beqaraar ko
Dar saikdo qafas mei.N hai.N, phir bhi aseer hu.N
Kaisa makaa.N mila hai gharib-i-dayar ko
Dilsoz kaun hai jo zamaane mei.N zulm se
Dekhe meri bujhee hui sham-i-mazar ko
Aakhir hai dastaan shab-i-gham ki baad-e-marg
Karta hai band deeda-e-akhtar shumaar ko
Awaza-i-chaman ki umeed aur mere baad
Chup kar diya falak ne zabaan-i-bahaar ko
Rahat kaha.N naseeb ki sahra-i-gham ki dhoop
Deti hai aag har shajar-i-saayadar ko
Khud asma.N ko naqsh-i-wafa se hai dushmani
Tum kyu.N mita rahe ho nishaan-e-mazar ko
Is haadse se qabl ki mai.N kuchh na kah saku.N
Sun lo bayaan-i-haal-i-dil-i-beqarar ko

Act 3, Scene 6

Is dasht mei.N tum mujhse bichhad jaaogey bhai
Gar khaak bhi chhanu.N to na haath aogey bhai
Bahno.N ko madine mei.N na pahu.Nchaoge bhai
Main dekhu.Ngi aur barchhiya.N tum khaaogey bhai
Aulaad se Banu ki yeh chhutne ki jagah hai
Namus-e-Nabi ki yahi lutne ki jagah hai.

Act 3, Scene 7

Lutf marne mei.N hai baqi na maza jine mei.N hai
Kuchh agar hai, woh yahi khun-i-jigar pine mei.N hai

Act 4, Scene 1

Koi tumse juda dard-i-judai leke baitha hai
Woh apne ghar mei.N ab apni kamai leke baitha hai
Jigar, dil, jaan, ima.N ab kaha.N tak naam le koi
Woh zalim saikdo.N cheezei.N paraayee leke baitha hai
Khuda hi meri tauba kar jab saqi kahe mujh se
Arey pi bhi kaha.N ki parsai leke baitha hai
Tere kaate shab-i-gham meri barso.N se nahi kat-ti
To phir tu ai khuda nahaq khudai leke baitha hai
Kahu.N kuchh mai.N to woh munh pher kar kahta hai duniya se
Khuda jaane yeh kab ki aashnai leke baitha hai
Amal kuchh chal gaya hai shauq par zahid ka ai yaaro
Ki masjid mei.N puraani ek chatai leke baitha hai

Act 4, Scene 8

Dabe huo.N ko dabati hai ye zami.N-i-lahad
Yeh Janti hai ki dum jism-i-natawa.N mei.N nahi.N
Qafas mei.N ji nahi.N lagta hai aah phir bhi mera
Ye janti hu.N ki tinka bhi ashiyan mei.N nahi.N
Ujaad de ya use phoonk de koi bijli
Yeh janti hu.N ki rahna ab ashiya.N mei.N nahi
Khud apne dil se mera haal poochh lo sara
Meri zaba.N se maza meri dasta.N mei.N nahi.N
Karengey aaj se hum zabt chaahe jo kuchh ho
Yeh kya ke lab pe fugha.N aur asar fugha.N mei.N nahi.N
Khayal kar ke khud apne kiye ko roti hu.N
Tabahiyo.N ke siwa kuchh mere maka.N mei.N nahi.N

Act 5, Scene 1

Duniya ke shaheedo.N mei.N tera naam ho bhai
Uqba mei.N tujhe raahat-o-aaraam ho bhai

———

Ghulam-i-hazrat-i-shabbir run mei.N aata hai
Wahi jo deen ka banda, woh mera aaqa hai
Woh aaye tho.Nk ke kham jiski maut aai hai
Usi ka peeney ko khu.N meri tegh aai hai

—-

Tukde hai badan zakhm bahut khaye hai.N bhai
Ab hosh mei.N aa lash pe hum aaye hai.N bhai

———-

Takiya terey zaanu ka mayassar hua aaqa
Zarra tha yeh ab mehr-i-munawwar hua aaqa

Act 5, Scene 2

Kajal bana ke teri khak-i-dar ko mai.N
Raushan karu.Ngi apni sawad-i-nazar ko mai.N
Ansu bhi khushk ho gaye Allah re soz-i-gham
Kyu.Nkar bujhau.N aatish-i-daagh-i-jigar ko mai.N
Terey siwaa hai kaun jo bekas ki le khabar
Aati na terey dar pe to jati kidhar ko mai.N
Talwar kah rahi hai jawanan-i-qaum se
Muddat se dhoondthi hu.N tumhaari kamar ko mai.N
Baaz aai mai.N du'a hi se ya rab ke kab talak
Karti phiru.N talaash jaha.N mei.N asar ko mai.N
Gar teri khaak-e-dar se na milta yeh iftekhaar
Karti na yu.N baland kabhi apne sar ko mai.N

Act 5, Scene 3

Jai Bharat, Jai Bharat Jai Mam Pranpatey
Bhal Vishaal Chamatkrit Sit Himgiri Raje
Parsat Gaaj Prabhakar Hem-Prabha Braje
Jai Bharat.....
Rishi-Muni Punya Taponidhi Tej-punj-Dhari
Sab Vidhi Adham Avidya Bhav-bhay Tamhari
Jai Bharat.....
Jai Dev Chaturmukh Akhil Bhed Gyaata
Suvimal Shanti Sudha-nidhi Mud-Mangaldaata
Jai Bharat.....
Jai-jai Vishwa-vindawar Jai Vishrut Naami
Jai-jai Dharm Dhurandhar Jai Shruti Path Gaami
Jai Bharat.....
Ajit Ajeya Alaukik Atulit Baldhaama
Puran Prem Payondihi Shubh Gun-gun-graama
Jai Bharat.....
Hey priya Poojya Param Man Namo-namo Deva
Vinayvat Adham-papi Jan Graham Karahu Seva
Jai Bharat.....

Act 5, Scene 4

Ik hamle mei.N gar ham na ulat dei.N saf-i-lashkar
Phir doodh na apna hamei.N tum bakhshiyo madar
Shah ke qadam-i-pak pe sar deke phire.Ngey
Ya run se sar-e-Shimr-o-Umar leke phire.Ngey

———

Shero.N ke liye na.Ng hai talwar se darna
Maidaan mei.N tan-tan ke sipar seeno ko karna
Har zakhm pe dam ulfat-i-Shabbir ka bharna
Qurban gai jeene se behtar hai woh marna
Duniyan me bhala izzat-i-Islam to rah jai
Tum jeete raho ya na raho naam to rah jai
Nana ki tarah kaun wagha karta hai dekhu.N
Sar kaun hazaaro.N se juda karta hai dekhu.N
Haq Kaun bahut maa.N ka ada karta hai dekhu.N
Ek-eik saf-i-jung mein kya karta hai dekhuN
Dikhlaaiyo haatho.N se safaai ka tamasha
Mai.N parde se dekhu.Ngi ladaai ka tamasha

Act 5, Scene 5

Maabain lahad sath biradar nahi jaata
Bhai koi bhai ke liye mar nahi jaata

———

Bhai ke liye ji se guzar jaata hai bhai
Jaata hai biradar bhi jidhar jata ha bhai
Kya bhai woh tegho.N se jo dar jata hai bhai
Aa.Nch aati hai bhai pe to mar jata hai bhai

Act 5, Scene 6

Mai.N yeh nahi kahta hu.N ke paani mujhe laa do
Tum aan ke chullu mei.N ise aab pila do
Marta hai yeh martey hue bachche ko jila do
Lillah kaleje ki merey aag bujha do
Jab mu.Nh mera takta hai ye hasrat ki nazar se
Ai zalimo.N uthta hai dhua.N merey jigar se

———

Kisse kahe.N jo khuun-i-jigar hamne piya hai
Baad aise pisar ke bhi kahi.N baap jiya hai

——

Markar bhi na bhulu.Nga mai.N ehsaan tumharey
Beto.N ko bhala kaun bahan bhai pe warey
Pyar na kiya unko, jo they jaan se pyarey
Bas maa.N ki muhabbat ke ye andaaz hai.N saarey
Faaqe mei.N hame.N barchhiya.N khaane ki raza do
Bas ab yahi ulfat hai ki jaane ki raza do
Hamsheer ka gham hai kisi bhai ko gawara?
Majboor hai lekin Asadullah ka pyaara
Ranj aur museebat se kaleja hai dopara
Kisse kahu.N jaisa mujhe sadma hai tumhara
Is ghar ki tabaahi ke liye rota hai Shabbir
Tum chhut-ti nah.N maa.N se juda hota hai Shabbir

——

Yarab hai yeh saadat ka ghar terey havaley
Raa.Ndei.N hai.N kaee khasta jigar terey havaley
Bekas ka hai bimar pisar terey havalay
Sab hai.N merey dariya ke guhar terey havaley

——

Beta hu.N Ali ka wo nawaasa Rasool ka
Maa.N aisi ki sab jiski shafa'at ke hai.N muhtaaj
Baap aisa sanam khano.N ko jisne kiya taaraj
Beta hu.N Ali ka wo nawaasa Rasool ka
Ladne ko agar Haider-i-Safdar na nikaltey
But ghar se khuda ke kabhi baahar na nikaltey
Beta hu.N Ali ka wo nawaasa Rasool ka

Kis jung mei.N seene ko sipar karne na aaye
Kis fauj ki saf zer-o-zabar karne na aaye
Beta hu.N Ali ka wo nawaasa Rasool ka
Hum paak na kartey to jaha.N paak na hota
Kuch khaak ki duniya mei.N siwa khaak na hota
Beta hu.N Ali ka wo nawaasa Rasool ka
Yeh shor aza.N ka sahar-o-shaam kaha.N tha
Hum arsh pe jab they to yeh Islam kaha.N tha
Beta hu.N Ali ka wo nawaasa Rasool ka
Lazim hai ke sadaat ki imdad karo tum
Ai zalimo! Is ghar ko na barbaad karo tum
Beta hu.N Ali ka wo nawaasa Rasool ka

Ghash humko hua jata hai ab pyaas ke marey
Ulfat hame.N le ayee hai phir paas tumharey
In suukhe hue hoto.N se hoto.N ko mila key
Kuch mashk mei.N paani ho to bhai ko pila dey
Letey hue ho ret Mei.N kyun mu.Nh ko chhipa key
Ghaafil ho biradar tumhe.N kis tarha jagaaye
Khush hu.Nga mai.N aage jo alam leke badhogey
Kya bhai ke peechhey na namaz aaj padhogey

Glossary

Names

Abbas: Abbas Ibn Ali (647 CE–680 CE) was the son of Ali Ibn Abi Talib and Fatima Bint Hizam, commonly known as Umm-ul-Baneen, meaning, "Mother of the Sons." He was very close to his brother Hussain since childhood. Known for his legendary bravery, Abbas is also known as *Alamdar* (standard-bearer). He is highly revered for his loyalty to his brother Husain, his respect for the Ahl-i-Bait (household of Muhammad), and his role in the Battle of Karbala.

Abu Sufiyan: Abu Sufiyan was a tribal leader from the progeny of Banu Umayyid, sworn enemies of Banu Hashim, to which Prophet Muhammad and Ali Ibn Abi Talib belonged. Abu Sufiyan always opposed Prophet Muhammad and fought many battles against him. At the time of the victory of Mecca, Prophet Muhammad forgave Abu Sufiyan and many other Meccans. Abu Sufiyan converted to Islam in return. Yazid was his grandson, who became the caliph after his father Mu'awiya, as Mu'awiya had appointed him an heir-apparent.

Ali Ibn Abi Talib: (599 CE–661 CE) was the first cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad; the fourth of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs; and the first of the Imams deemed by all Shia Muslims to be appointed by divine mandate. Ali was born inside the sacred sanctuary of the Kaaba in Mecca, the holiest place in Islam, to Abu Talib, and Fatima bint Asad. He was the first male to embrace Islam.

Ashwatthama: Ashwatthama or Drauni was the son of guru Dronacharya and the grandson of the sage Bharadwaja. Ashwatthama fought on the Kaurava side against the Pandavas in the Mahabharata War.

Banu Hashim: The pre-Islamic Arabs classified themselves according to their tribe, clan, and their house/family. Banu Hashim is a clan of the Quraish tribe, to which belonged Prophet Muhammad Mustafa; his great-grandfather was Hashim Ibn Abd Manaf, after whom the clan is known as Hashemites or Al-Hashimi.

Banu Umaiyya: The Banu Umayya were descendants of Umayya ibn Abd Shams. They were a prominent clan of the Meccan tribe of Quraish in the pre-Islamic period. They initially opposed the Prophet but embraced Islam before the latter's death in 632. Mu'awiya I, son of Abu Sufiyan, belonged to this clan and after the assassination of Ali Ibn Abi Talib in 661 and abdication by Ali's son Hasan, he established the Umayyad caliphate with its capital in Damascus, Syria. Banu Umaiyya occupied the caliphate in Damascus between 661 and 750 and later in Islamic Spain between 756 and 1031.

Farzdaq: Hammam Bin Ghalib, most commonly known as Al-Farazdaq, or Abu Firas, was an Arab poet. He is famous for the poem that he recited when Imam Ali Sajjad bin Hussain bin Ali Bin Abi Talib entered the Haram of the Kaba. The poem is extremely powerful.

Fatima: Fatima Bint Muhammad, commonly known as Fatima Zahra, was the only surviving child of Prophet Muhammad and Khadija. Her husband was Ali Ibn Abi Talib, the first Imam, and her children included Hasan and Hussain, the second, and the third Imams.

Hasan: Hasan Bin Ali Bin Abi Talib (624 CE–670 CE) was the eldest son of Ali and the Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima, and was the older brother of Imam Hussain. He is revered as a grandson of Prophet Muhammad and the second Imam. Hasan was elected to the caliphate after his father's death, but abdicated after six or seven months in favour of Mu'awiya I, the father of Yazid. After this, the caliphate turned into a kingship. Hasan was known for his charity, his kindness to the poor and the slaves, and for his knowledge, tolerance, and bravery. Hasan was poisoned at the age of 45 by his wife, Ja'da bint al-Ash'at, at the instigation of Mu'awiya. He died in the year 670 CE and was buried in the Jannat al-Baqi cemetery in Medina.

Marwan: Marwan Ibn al-Hakam, commonly known as Marwan I, was the fourth Umayyad caliph, ruling for less than a year in 684–685. During the reign of Yazid, Marwan organized the defence of the Umayyad realm in the Hejaz (western Arabia) against the local opposition.

Mu'awiya I: Mu'awiya Ibn Abu Sufiyan was the founder and the first caliph of the Umayyad caliphate, serving from 661 until his death in 680. Mu'awiya and his father Abu Sufiyan had opposed Prophet Muhammad, until the latter captured Mecca in 630, after which they converted to Islam. He fought the battle of Siffin against *Hazrat* Ali, and, after Hazrat Ali's death and the abdication of *Imam* Hasan through a treaty, he became the caliph. However, he defied the condition of the treaty—according to which he was not to appoint heir to the caliphate which was to be decided democratically thought the election—by nominating his son Yazid to be the caliph.

Mu'awiya II: Mu'awiya Bin Yazid bin Mu'awiya succeeded his father Yazid as the third Umayyad caliph and the last caliph of the Sufyanid line. He ruled for a very brief period—between twenty days and four months—in 683 CE–684 CE. It is said that he was very critical of the tyranny unleashed by his father on the Ahl-i-Bait and refused to ascend his throne saying it reeked of the blood of the Prophet's family.

Mukhtar: Mukhtar ibn Abi Ubaid Al-Thaqafi (622 CE–687 CE) was a supporter of Ali Ibn Abi Talib. A revolutionary based in Kufa, he hosted Muslim Bin Aqueel at his house before the arrival of Ubaidullah Bin Ziyad. The latter was appointed to replace Mukhtar's father-in-law, Nu'man ibn Bashir, as a governor, due to Ibn Bashir's benign attitude towards Muslim Bib Aquil and his followers.

Muhammad Han'afiya: Ali Ibn Abi Talib's son, from his wife, Khawlah bint Ja'far, also known as Han'afiya for belonging to Banu Hanafi; half-brother of *Imam* Hussain.

Muslim Ibn Aqeel: He was the son of Aqeel ibn Abi Talib and a cousin of Hussain ibn Ali. The people of Kufa called upon Hussain to overthrow Yazid's caliphate. Hussain, who was on his way to Mecca for the Hajj

pilgrimage, sent his cousin Muslim Ibn Aqeel, as his ambassador to Kufa to observe the situation and ascertain the loyalty of the Kufans.

Sajjad: Imam Hussain's eldest son (also known as Imam Zainul Abedeen and Sayyad-ul-Sajedeen), who survived the tragedy in Karbala and was arrested along with his other relatives and taken to Syria, via Kufa. Two years later, the prisoners were released and he returned to Medina via Karbala. He is the fourth Imam or the vice-regent of God.

Shahr Banu: She was a daughter of Yazdegerd III, the last Sassanid emperor of Persia, and was captured during the Muslim conquest of Persia, after which she was married to Imam Hussain. It is said that one of her siblings, Mihrbanu, was married to Chandragupta, the Indian king of Ujjain. She lost her son Ali Asghar in the battle of Karbala, and her daughter Sakina died in prison in Damascus.

Shimr: Shimr Bin Zil-Jawshan, a chief of the tribe of Hawazin and one of the Tabi'un, is one of the most hated characters because of his role in the tragedy of Karbala. In the beginning, Shimr was one of the companions of Imam Ali (A.S.), but later became an archenemy of the Imam (a) and his family.

Ubaidullah Bin Ziyad: Ubaidullah, the son of Ziyad. Here, he has been referred to alternatively as Ziyad, or Bin Ziyad.

Umar-Bin-Sa'ad: Umar Bin Sa'ad was the son of Sa'ad ibn Abi Waqqas, a companion of Prophet Muhammad. He was a clergyman and took orders from Ibn Ziyad. He was one of the leaders of the troops who killed Hussain Ibn Ali in the Battle of Karbala in 680. The character of Umar-i-Sa'ad shows a typical Kufan, torn between the lure of worldly gains and the fear of hell involved in fighting Imam Hussain. Though it is rarely mentioned in popular narratives, Umar-i-Sa'ad almost clinched a deal and tried to avoid the war in all sincerity. He ultimately fell to Shimr's machination and had to eventually fight with the Imam.

Usman: Usman Ibn Affan Ibn Abi al-Aas belonged to the prominent Meccan clan, Banu Umayya of the Quraish tribe and converted to Islam

in 611 CE. When the caliph Umar Ibn Khattab died, Usman, succeeded him and was the second-oldest to rule as Caliph. He was assassinated in 656 CE.

Waleed: Waleed Bin Utba Bin Abu Sufiyan (died 684 CE) was a family member of the Umayyad ruling family and statesman during the reigns of the caliphs Mu'awiya I (r. 661–680) and Yazid I (r. 680–683). He served two terms as the Governor of Medina in 677/678–680 and 681–682. He was dismissed during his first term for failing to secure an oath of allegiance from Imam Hussain Bin Ali.

Yazid Ibn Mu'awiya: Yazid Ibn Mu'awiya, commonly known as **Yazid I**, was the second caliph of the Umayyad caliphate. He ruled from 680 until his death in 683 CE. His appointment was the first hereditary succession in Islamic history. His caliphate was marked by the slaying of Muhammad's grandson Hussain Ibn Ali in the desert of Karbala.

Zainab: Zainab Bint Ali was the daughter of Ali Ibn Abi Talib and Fatima Bint Muhammad and was a member of Ahl-i-Bait. Zainab was married to Abdullah Bin Ja'far. When her brother, Hussain, left Madina, she accompanied him on the journey along with her two sons, Aun and Muhammad. At Karbala, where the large army of Yazid Bin Mu'awiyah surrounded Imam Hussain in 680 CE (AH 61), Zainab scarified her two sons. She played an important role in Karbala. After the battle, when the women and children were taken prisoner along with the Imam's ailing son Sajjad, and were taken to Damascus via Kufa, Zainab protected her nephew and even delivered a *Khutba* in Yazid's court in which she launched a fierce attack against him. She died in 681 CE.

Ziyad: Ziyad Ibn Abihi, literally meaning "Son of the unknown," was the commander, who was allegedly born out of an illegitimate relationship between Abu Sufiyan and a concubine, before the advent of Islam. Mu'awiya accepted Ziyad as his brother in full public view of his Durbar, recalling his father's relationship with him. Ziyad turned out be a trusted lieutenant of Mu'awiya for the rest of his life. Ubaidullah Bin Ziyad, important character in this play, was his son.

Zuber: Abdullah Ibn al-Zuber was born in Medina. He was the eldest son of Zuber Ibn Awwam, a *ṣaḥābī* (companion) of Prophet Muhammad. He belonged to the Banu Asad clan of the Quraish. He refused to recognise Mu'awiya's nomination of his son Yazid I as his successor in 676. When Waleed asked him to pledge allegiance to Yazid, he evaded the authorities and escaped to Mecca where he was later joined by Hussain. After Hussain's death, he began clandestinely recruiting supporters, and by September 683 he had taken control of Mecca.

Places

Karbala: Karbala, literally meaning "the land that causes affliction," is a city in Iraq. The Battle of Karbala was fought on October 10, 680 CE (10 Muharram 61 AH) in the desert when Imam Hussain, on the way to Kufa, was besieged by Ibn Ziyad's army of 30,000 horsemen under the command of Sa'ad. Imam Hussain, his kinsmen, and his companions were killed in the battle, and the womenfolk were taken prisoners. In 63 AH (682 CE), Yazid Bin Mu'awiya released these prisoners. On their way to Mecca, they stopped at the site of the battle. The pilgrimage to the site is said to have begun as early as 65 AH (685 CE). Karbala began as a tomb and shrine to Imam Hussain and has since grown into a city in order to meet the needs of pilgrims. Today, tens of millions of pilgrims visit the site.

Basra: The Iraqi city was founded in 636 CE and began as a garrison encampment for Arab tribesmen constituting the armies of the Caliph Umar. In 664, Mu'awiya I appointed Ziyad Ibn Abu Sufyan, who became infamous for his draconian rules regarding public order. On Ziyad's death in 673, his son Ubaidullah Bin Ziyad became the Governor. In 680, Yazid I ordered Bin Ziyad to keep order in Kufa as a reaction to Hussain Bin Ali's popularity as the grandson of Prophet Muhammad.

Kufa: Kufa is a prominent city in Iraq, about 170 kilometres south of Baghdad. Ali Ibn Abi Talib made it his capital during his caliphate. It is located on the Bank of Furat (Euphrates) river.

Hijaz: It is the western region of the present-day Saudi Arabia and better known for the holy cities of Mecca and Madina.

Madina: Al-Madinat al-Munawwarah or "the Enlightened city" is the second holiest city in Islam. After Muhammad's migration from Mecca—the event known as *Hijrat*—it became central to Islam. The original name of the city before the advent of Islam was Yathrib.

Misr: Misr is the original name of Egypt. Arabs conquered Egypt in 639–642.

Syria: By AD 640, Syria was conquered by the Arab Rashidun army led by Khalid ibn al-Walid. In the mid-seventh century, Mu'awiya Bin Abu Sufiyan, who was the longest serving governor of Syria, declared his caliphate and made Damascus the capital. The family members of Imam Hussain, taken to prison after the battle of Karbala, were brought to Yazid's court in Damascus.

Yemen: Yemen is a country at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula in Western Asia. It accepted Islam in seventh century and, during the reign of Marwan, played a crucial role in the consolidation of Umayyads.

Rai: Rai is the capital of Rai County in Tehran Province, Iran. Siyavash, the son of Mehran and the last King of Rai in the Sasanian Empire, was defeated fighting the Muslim invasion in 643 CE, and the province was occupied by the Muslim rulers.

Kaaba: Kaaba, also spelled Kaabah, is a shrine located near the centre of the Great Mosque in Mecca and considered by Muslims to be the most sacred spot on Earth. Muslims orient themselves towards this shrine during the five daily prayers, bury the dead facing its meridian and acknowledge Hajj (Pilgrimage) to the Kaaba one of the basic tenets of Islam.

Furat: Also known as the Euphrates, Furat is the river along which the city of Kufa was located. It is one of the longest rivers in Western Asia. The battle of Karbala took place near the bank of this river.

Others

Abba: Father

Abbajaan: Dear Father

Ahl-i-Bait: "People of the House," the epithet is applied to the family members of the Prophet- mostly, he, his daughter Fatima, her sons, Hasan and Hussain and her husband Ali.

Aji: Hey

Allah-o-Akbar: God is great. Also used to seek divine help.

Amanat: Custody

Amma: Mother

Ammijaan: Dear Mother

Ammu: Uncle

Arre: Oh

Assalamalaik/Assalamalaikum: Islamic way of salutation. Literally means may you have peace.

Azan: Call for prayers.

Baji Jan: Dear elder sister.

Bazaar: Derived from the Persian, meaning "the place of prices." Bazaar refers to the market.

Beshak-Beshak: A term used to show absolute agreement with what is being said. Literally means Undoubtedly.

Beta: Son

Bhai: Brother

Bhaijaan: Dear brother

Bhaiyya: Another affectionate term to address a brother

Bibi: Madam, lady

Chacha: Uncle (Father's brother)

Chachajaan: Dear uncle

Daf: A small tambourine

Darshan: Darsan or Darshan is a Sanskrit term meaning "sight" (an instance of seeing or beholding), vision, apparition, or glimpse. One could receive a darshan of the deity in a temple or from a great saint or guru.

Dastarkhwan: Literally meaning "tablecloth," the word implies the place where people eat their meals in the house.

Deen Bandhu: Well-wisher of the downtrodden; kind and generous

Dharma: Duty. A Sanskrit word that encompasses a wide range of meaning. Refers to law in the universal or abstract sense.

Dinar: An early Islamic coin corresponding to the Byzantine *denarius auri*. It is the official currency of many gulf countries.

Dirham: A unit of currency in several Arab states.

Durbar: A Persian term meaning the king's noble court or a formal meeting place where the king discussed matters of state.

Fakir: Muslim Sufi ascetic or a wandering Dervish teaching Islam and living on alms. Now the term has become common for a beggar.

Farman: An official mandate or decree issued by a king or governor.

Farsakh: A measure of about 18,000 feet.

Fatiha: Prayers offered for the dead at the grave or in absentia. It also refers to the first or the opening sura of the Koran, which is the central prayer of Islam and used on all special occasions, as well as during the five daily prayers.

Ghat: Steps leading down to something as small as a pond or as large as a major river. There are several famous ghats on the rivers Ganges and Jamuna.

Ghazal: A short poem, usually on a love theme.

Habashi: An Abyssinian or Ethiopian, a Negro, a slave.

Hafiz: Someone who has memorised the Qur'an end to end.

Hakim: Traditional physician and surgeon. Those medical practitioners who use Unani medicine and methodology.

Harem: Refers to the sphere of women, usually enclosed quarters which are forbidden to men. It is also used for women of a family or clan.

Hazrat: Honorific used to honour a person; used with the names of prophets and Imams.

Imam: Prayer leader; also extended to denote the leader of the community of Muslims. Twelvers among the Shia Muslims believe in twelve Imams or the divinely ordained leaders, beginning with Imam Ali and ending with Imam Mehdi.

Inshaallah: God willing.

Jagir: Land given by the government as a reward for services, a pension (in the form of land).

Jama Masjid: This refers to the mosque in which juma (Friday) prayers are offered. It is generally the central mosque or the main mosque in a town or a city.

Ji: Expression of respectfully agreeing.

Jihad: Just and fair war.

Kafir: infidel, non-believer.

Khairat: charity.

Khuda Hafiz: Goodbye. It means "May God protect you."

Kufis: People living in Kufa, a prominent city in Iraq.

Kurta: A generic term used in South Asia for several forms of upper garments for men and women, with regional variations of form.

Lahaul-vala-quwwat: An expression of contempt at hearing or seeing something abhorrent. It means "nothing has power and strength except God."

Ma['']azallah: God forbid.

Marsiya: An elegiac poem usually composed in six-line stanza form, known as *Musaddas,* describing the tragic event of Karbala.

Maula: Lord.

Maulana: Religious leader.

Mullah: A Muslim doctor of law. Clergyman.

Muharram: The first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. The battle of Karbala was fought on the tenth day of Muharram. For Shia Muslims, it is the month of mourning.

Namaz: Namaz is a form of worship that Muslims are supposed to perform five times a day.

Nana: Maternal grandfather.

Nath: Hindi word for Lord.

Phuphi: Aunt (Father's sister).

Phuphijaan: Dear aunt.

Pir: Refers to the spiritual guide. Also, used for spiritual leaders.

Qazi: Judge who administered Islamic religious law (Shariat).

Rakat: A rakat consists of prescribed words and movements during the Namaz.

Rishi: The Sanskrit term referring to sages. Rishis are said to have composed divine hymns of the Vedas.

Saadat: Descendants of Prophet Muhammad.

Sadhu: Holy man. Denotes an ascetic, a wandering monk. They often wear saffron-coloured attire, which symbolises *sanyas* (renunciation).

Sahib: Sahib originally Arabic meaning master, friend, gentleman etc. Has passed on to Urdu and Hindi and many other languages of the subcontinent. The word is mostly used as a polite address like "Mister" is used in English. Also used with words like Bhai to make it Bhai Sahib.

Saidani: Ladies of the household of Prophet Muhammad.

Salam: Islamic way of salutation.

Saqi: Cup bearer.

Sati: Feminine of "sat," which means Truth. A practice where a widow would immolate herself at the funeral pyre of her dead husband. The practice was banned by the British in 1829. Sati is also a goddess, Shiva's first wife.

Shariat: The path to be followed; the divine law based on the Qur'an.

Sheikhji: Often used for a Sufi who guided disciples.

Subhanallah: "God is Glorious" Used while appreciating anything to express one's testimony that there is no partner in the divinity of God and that all creations are owed to Him.

Ummat: It literally means "community" or "the people." Muslim Ummat refers to the unity of Muslims all over the world.

Yaar: An informal term to address friends.

Zakat: Zakat is as important as Salaat (prayer or namaz) in Islam. It implies that every Muslim is obliged to give 2 ½% of his/her total income in charity.

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