RELIVING KARBALA

MARTYRDOM IN SOUTH ASIAN MEMORY



SYED AKBAR HYDER

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Martyrdom in South Asian Memory

SYED AKBAR HYDER

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To the memory of Ammi and Pappa
For Puneet, Hussain, and Raza

Kullu arzin Karbala
Kullu yumin ashura

Every land is Karbala
Every day is ashura

Jafar as-Sadiq

Preface

> Merī taʿmīr meñ muẓmar hai ik ṣūrat ḳharābī kī
> hayūlā barq-e ḳhirman kā hai ḳhūn-e garm dahqāñ kā
>
> Hidden in my construction is an expression of ruin—
> The source of the harvest-destroying lightning is the
> farmer's hot blood
>
> Mirza Ghalib

Karbala is not only a part of my academic heritage; it is also part of my personal world. I am a product of a milieu in which the remembrance of Karbala, the seventh-century battle between the younger grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, Husain, and the political authority of that time, Yazid, consoled mourners during funerals and brought sobriety to weddings, buoyed arguments of socioreligious reform during heated discussions, and loomed large in the literary, visual, and aural aesthetics to which my family subscribed. While holding the status of the master narrative of martyrdom, its invocations also appeared in a potpourri of forms that fulfilled mundane needs and desires that had no seeming relationship with spirituality or metaphysics. Like many others who grow up in a world where Karbala holds similar currency, I too had my favorite characters from the Karbala story. One of them was Hurr, a general from Yazid's army who defected to Husain's camp just hours before the actual battle began. Out of all the stock characters from the Karbala story, Hurr seemed to be the most realistic: his faith wavered and he made mistakes; he pondered his actions in terms of gains and losses in this life and in the hereafter; he broke forth from the power structures of his time. In keeping with the spirit of his name, he was "free" and liberated in an existential sense. So fascinated

was I with Hurr that I decided to take him up when embarking on my graduate studies. I sought to gauge Hurr's legacy by tracing it through various cultural traditions of the Near Eastern and South Asian worlds, concentrating especially on the genre of Urdu elegies. However, after beginning my doctoral studies at Harvard, I was convinced by the late Annemarie Schimmel to broaden my research project from a study of Hurr to a larger study of Karbala's legacy, not just for Muslims but also for non-Muslims.

When I started working on this project a decade ago, few Westerners outside academic circles knew what Karbala meant. Since then, however, fueled by the United States' military involvement in Iraq, the mass media have duly propelled Karbala into headlines that are often marred by reductive assumptions, without appreciating its presence not just in Iraq, but in other parts of Asia and Africa as well. So when thousands of people in South Asia demonstrated against the United States' military campaigns in areas surrounding Karbala and Najaf, many people in the West missed the symbolic significance of these cities to regions beyond the Middle East.

This book, among other objectives, seeks to engage the strait-jacketed manner in which Muslim societies are represented in the western world, not just through the mass media and government propaganda but also with the assistance of many institutions of higher education. In the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States and July 7, 2005, in London, the reified image of the Islam-martyrdom-violence nexus has gained more currency than ever before; and such images do not augur well for any thoughtful or honest assessment of the cosmopolitan cultures and histories of Muslim peoples', nor have these images propelled discussions regarding power relations, alienation, and disenfranchisement forward. Moreover, a discussion of Islam in the West is disproportionately shaped by the assumption that the Middle East (with fewer than 40 percent of the total Muslim population) is an exclusively representative sample of Islam. I break decisively from the ranks of those who imagine the location of Muslim societies along a single "perimeter,"[1] and refute any unified readings of Islam by exploring the multifaceted developments and readings of Karbala and its symbolic status vis-á-vis the idea of martyrdom. Rather than locating my discussion exclusively at the node of the trite mantra of "Islam has many faces," I emphasize moments of tension and fissures, along with instances of collaboration and appropriation. Ostensibly about Karbala and martyrdom, this book makes a broad appeal to those who wish to explore how religions, like human beings, live their lives through temporal and contextual changes, doubts and certainties, concords and aporias. It is my hope that this study, by setting forth a paradigm for reading an event from seventh-century Iraq, will help students and scholars of religion, culture, and literature open a window on some of the dynamic interpretive strategies that shape the social milieus in which more than a billion people live.

The formal research for parts of this book began in May 1993 and drew to a close in March 2005. During this time, I had the good fortune of benefiting from innumerable consultants, critics, friends, family members, and teachers based in India, Pakistan, Iran, Syria, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, the

United Kingdom, and the United States. One of the most difficult tasks in conducting this study was selecting the material that I would include in the book. Many whom I consulted wanted me to write a book that would alter the state of the Muslim community for the better; they felt that I should not examine popular and controversial aspects of religion when writing about Karbala. Rather, they envisioned my study as a work that might be considered authoritative among the well-read practioners of Islam. In fact, a religious authority told me that I should not even mention a certain South Asian Muslim neighborhood, lest I embarrass Muslims around the world: "What they do is not true Islam; that is not what the Quran says; that is not what Karbala is all about. You know, Islam is the best religion with the worst followers, even George Bernard Shaw said this. Even if you talk about those un-Islamic things, you should categorically say what those people do is not Islam." The religious and literary authorities who spoke with me had little appreciation for the manner in which Karbala is perceived by laypeople. They wanted me to concentrate exclusively on written texts of history, philosophy, and aesthetics. While they did not hesitate to blame and criticize others for depicting Islam as an invariably violent and intolerant force, ironically, they rejected readings of Islam which were at odds with their own understanding. Many of their discourses were more exclusivist than pluralistic. Although it is obvious to me that such attitudes are an expression of concern that Islam has been misunderstood in the West for a very long time, and a belief that a singularly neat reading of this religion would vindicate its worth, I could not do justice to this project without mentioning those "embarrassing" moments of history and cultural practices that afford us telling insights into how religions manifest themselves in flesh, beyond their scripted existence. Moreover, I could not assign thousands of people the role of stray or insignificant devotees, simply because they live religion that is not rooted in authoritative texts. Regardless of whether or not I heeded advice and warnings, I am most indebted to all those who allowed me entry into their worlds of devotion, mysticism, criticism, and humor.

Previous incarnations of parts of this book have appeared in *Cultural Dynamics* ("Iqbal and Karbala: Re-Reading the Episteme of Martyrdom for a Poetics of Appropriation"), Volume 13, no. 3, pp. 339–362, Sage Publications, 2001; *Sufi Illuminations* ("Revisiting Wine and the Goblet in South Asian Martyrdom and Mysticism"), Volume 3, no. 1, pp. 14–33; *The Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam* ("Sayyadeh Zaynab: The Conqueror of Damascus and Beyond"), ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie, 2005, Austin: University of Texas Press; and *A Wilderness of Possibilities* ("To You Your Cremation, To Me My Burial: The Ideals of Inter-Communal Harmony in Premchand's Karbala"), eds. Kathryn Hansen and David Lelyveld, 2005, Delhi: Oxford University Press. I thank all these publishers and editors for granting me permission to publish revised versions of these articles here. I am also grateful to M. F. Husain and Arun Vadehra for allowing me to use Mr. Husain's painting *Karbala*.

The council of several individuals has been essential to this project; these people, in many ways, are responsible for helping bring this book to fruition.

Professor Patrick Olivelle, as an exemplary scholar, mentor, and friend, provided generous resources and wise guidance to me for the past five years. Simply put, this book would not have come into existence without his encouragement. My thanks are due to Professors Ali Asani, Diana Eck, Ayesha Jalal, Roy Mottahedeh, and Wheeler Thackston, for their incisive remarks during the initial stages of this study. Professor Asani especially made my graduate school experience delightful by providing me with ample opportunities to teach, research, and explore life in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He so generously offered his time and guidance, whether at Iruña or at the Barker Center, that I shall forever remember and appreciate the very personal dimension of academia. I would be remiss if I failed to mention the late Professor Annemarie Schimmel, whose erudition has inspired so many from my generation. My thanks also go to Professors Mahdavi Damaghani, William Granara, William Chittick, Wolfhart Heinrichs, Alma Giese, Sugata Bose, and Cornel West for their advice and support during my days at Harvard. Professor Gail Minault of the University of Texas at Austin initiated me into the world of South Asian studies and has remained an invaluable advisor for more than a decade.

I want to record my unbounded appreciation for the support I have received from the following people who are, unfortunately, not with us today. I was fortunate enough to be blessed by the company of Ali Sardar Jafri and Saeed Shahidi Saeed, two savant-poets who shared with me anecdotes, poetry, history, philosophy and the ideals of justice to which they subscribed. Their wisdom, along with the insights of Akbar Ali Baig, Vahid Akhtar, Taqi Hasan Wafa, Sadatullah Khan "Nazir," and Syed Ali Murtuza defy captivity in words. The *qawwals* from Delhi (Meraj Ahmed in particular), Fatehpur Sikri, Gulbarga, Hyderabad, Lahore, and Sewan Sharif spoke to me for hours on the authority of their experiences. A few of my consultants requested that they remain anonymous for various reasons.

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To my parents, siblings, and their families, I am beholden for their support for a somewhat wayward family member. To them I owe what words cannot express. I have never thought of the family of my mother's sister as a separate unit for I was nurtured in their loving embrace. Likewise, my father's siblings and their family members shared with me their lives and Karbala-related memories. My uncles, Syed Abul Hasan Asif and Syed Mohammad Zaki, through anecdotes provided me with refreshing knowledge that is beyond the written word. The latter exemplifies the mystical spirit that is often uncomfortable with orthodoxies of any stripe. I must, in good conscience, single out the Naqi family, especially Amina apa and Zulfi, for being present in times of need. Naaz baaba, in his uniquely graceful way, contributed to this project more than perhaps he realizes by asking me questions that I have attempted to answer here. I offer my deepest gratitude to the Kohli family for all their love and support. My goddaughters Sarah and Salma brightened up my life, whether through e-mails, telephone conversations, or meal meetings.

This work is dedicated to the memory of Mir Mujtaba Hussain (Pappa) and Bashirunnisa Begum (Ammi), my maternal grandparents, whose love and memories have sustained me; and to Puneet Kohli, Ali Hussain Mir, and Raza Mir, three people who have been critical to my growth and brought joy into my life by sharing with me their worlds and panels.

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Notes on Transliteration

For simplicity's sake, personal names, place names, and naturalized English words are not transliterated. Although I have presented most poetry only in translation, I have provided original verses when the verses are especially poignant and their translation cannot capture the complete significance of the original. I hope that the Persian and Urdu-Hindi communities will appreciate the presence of the originals in these cases. Persian words are transliterated as they are pronounced in Urdu. Technical terms and concepts are transliterated at their first occurrence. When citing other transliterated texts, I have modified transliterations for consistency and clarity (for example, Husayn has been changed to Husain). Shii is used as an adjective and Shia as a noun. A list of prominent persons in the Karbala story and technical terms and concepts appears in a glossary at the end of the book.

alif:	*a,*	*i,*	*u,*	*ā*
b	*p*	*t*	*ṭ*	*ṡ*
j	*ch*	*ḥ*	*ḳh*	*d*
ḍ	*ż*	*r*	*ṛ*	*z*
zh	*s*	*sh*	*ṣ*	*ẓ*
ṯ	*ʐ*	*c*	*ġh*	*f*
q	*k*	*g*	*l*	*m*
n				
vāʾo:	*v,*	*ū,*	*o,*	*au*
h	*ī*			

baṛī ye: y, e, ai
nūn ġhunnah: ñ
hamza: ʾ
iẓāfat: -e

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Reliving Karbala

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Introduction

> Do not think of those who are slain in God's way as dead.
> Nay! They are alive and receive their sustenance from their Lord.
> Quran, 3:169

In 680 C.E., Husain b. Ali, the younger grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was martyred on the plains of Karbala, Iraq. The martyrdom of this scion of the Prophet's lineage, who was slain together with his closest family members and followers, has held an existential importance in a wide variety of cultural spheres in which Muslims participate. As the single most significant historic event in the lives of millions of Muslims, Karbala has left an indelible symbolic mark on devotional practices, on the transmissions of Islamic history, and on subsequent developments in aesthetics, mysticism, and reform movements throughout the Muslim world. Just as Muslims see their Prophet Muhammad as *uswa ḥasana*, the beautiful model of conduct, for many of them, Husain also looms large on the horizon as *sayyid al-shuhadā'*, the prince/lord of martyrs, who offered his life and possessions during the righteous struggle (*jihād*) in God's cause. Apart from its significance for Muslims, the event of Karbala continues to appeal to those from secular and non-Muslim traditions. By surveying the configurations of Karbala within multiple contexts, I explore the meaning of this event as it varies with shifting locales, ideologies, and memories and the way in which the language of religion is negotiated through intertwined and conflicting idioms. Such a project challenges the ease with which we absolutize concepts such as "religious," "secular," "Islamist," and "fictional."

This study has two main objectives: to provide an insight into the multiple, interdependent lives of Karbala as they furnish a sense

of interlocking communal, religious, and literary identities; and to offer an ethnographic prism through which the lived contexts and spirited memories of many Muslims and non-Muslims can be refracted over the expanses of time and space. In pursuit of these objectives, I have examined the aesthetic considerations, established conventions, narrative licenses, epistemological orientations, patronage patterns, and larger ideological forces that shape the narratives of Karbala. Although such an exploration positions my work at several temporal and contextual interfaces, I focus on South Asia, a region of the world with the largest population of Muslims, and also many non-Muslims who speak in the language of Islamic historical and cultural idioms. I attend to Karbala's significance in religiously cosmopolitan settings—settings in which particular readings of Islam are inflected by other religious and cultural traditions. Since cultural institutions and discourses stemming from South Asia extend beyond historically porous national and regional borders to diasporic communities and (via mass communication) even beyond them, I will also consider the interaction of South Asian Karbala-related discourses with other regional discourses pertaining to Karbala.

The Event of Karbala

zinda Islām ko kiyā tū ne
ḥaqq o bāṭil dikhā diyā tū ne
jī ke marnā to sab ko ātā hai
mar ke jīna sikhā diyā tū ne[1]

You resurrected Islam
You showed us truth and falsehood
Everyone knows how to die after living
But you taught the world how to live after dying

With these words, a twentieth-century devotee endorses the actions of Husain b. Ali, who is often hailed as the preeminent embodiment of martyrdom. The word that most commonly signifies martyrdom in the Islamic cultural lexicon is *shahādat* (witnessing); the word for martyr is *shahīd* (witness). Far from connoting death, these words thrive on their dynamic semantic synergy.[2] Husain's martyrdom, attained in the scorching heat of Karbala, bears witness to truth, justice, love, devotion, faith, and endurance; and this act is forever etched into the historical memories of his devotees. Devotional lore has it that until their last breath, Husain and his small band of followers fought valiantly against the forces of Yazid b. Muawiya, the reigning political authority (caliph), whose rule they felt is an affront to true Islam. Although Islam can boast of many martyrs and struggles, the standing of Husain and Karbala within the pantheon of these "witnesses" and struggles is unique.

Before embarking upon a discussion of Karbala's lasting imprint upon various cultural contexts, this event must be situated within the contentious setting of early Islamic history. As long as the Prophet Muhammad received divine revelations in the form of the Quran (from 610–632 C.E.), the Muslim community was bound together in the belief that the omnipotent God of Adam,

Abraham, Moses, and Jesus had chosen Muhammad as a messenger through whom divine tenets and precepts could be transmitted. The Prophet Muhammad, his community believes, served ideally in his capacity as God's messenger (*rasūl Allāh*), a Muslim (one who submits to God), a husband, a father, a trusted friend, a just arbiter, and a compassionate community leader. After being subjected to persecution in his native city of Mecca, the Prophet migrated to Yathrib (later renamed *Madīnat al-Nabī,* or the City of the Prophet, and usually referred to in its shortened form, Medina), thus marking the formal beginning of the Islamic calendar. In Medina, the Prophet established the Muslim community as a sociopolitical unit, acted as the head of this community, and maintained his status as the Messenger of God. He was both the spiritual guide of his people and their temporal ruler. As long as he lived, he attempted to unite many disparate tribal and ideological groups under the aegis of Islam. But this unity, to whatever degree it existed under Muhammad, did not outlive him. His death precipitated bitter divisions within his community over the issue of Islam's future leadership: Who was qualified to lead the Prophet's community, and more importantly, how should such a leader be determined?[3]

Even though the process of prophecy came to an end with the Prophet, the relationship of most Muslims with Islam was affected by their allegiances to particular post-Muhammadan discourses and leaders. For one group of Muslims, subsequently identified as Sunnis, the Prophet's appropriate successor was his father-in-law and one of the first converts to Islam, Abu Bakr; for another group of Muslims, identified as Shias, the rightful successor of the Prophet was Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law, and also one of the earliest to embrace Islam. In Shii opinion, Ali had been explicitly appointed by the Prophet according to God's command. The Sunnis consider themselves to be people who followed the customs of the Prophet (*sunnah*) and received legitimacy through consensus (*ijmaʿ*) of the Muslim community, hence securing for themselves the longer designation *ahl al-sunnah wal-jamaʿ,* or the People of the customs [of the Prophet] and consensus. While such claims might have provided the illusion of religious consensus, neither consensus nor conformity existed after the Prophet. The Shias were the most prominent of those who resisted the Sunni claims. The designation *Shīʿa* is derived from the Arabic word for "party," since the Shias claim allegiance to the party of Ali (*shīʿat ʿAlī*) and his designated descendants. These descendants they called the *imāms,* or the righteous leaders. In spite of the differences that have existed and still, to varying extents, exist between the Sunnis and the Shias, especially over questions of legitimate leadership, we should not allow these differences to outweigh the many common beliefs and practices that these communities share.

Although we can speak today of the Sunni and Shii sects within Islam, any discussion of these divisions should be marked by one caveat: These two groups gained their modern standings as self-identifying sects many years after the Prophet's death, as a result of long-drawn-out debates, confrontations, and other historical experiences. Under the rubric of each label, a number of sub-

sects and divisions exist. Moreover, even within a subsect, all members do not subscribe to a fixed reading of religion. When discussing Shii-Sunni differences, we should also remember that Islam did not unfold exclusively under the impact of polarized sects.

Muslim peoples' belief systems were also governed by more nuanced mystical readings of Islam that presented a hermeneutic vision in which true Islam transcended the Sunni-Shii divide, beyond the visible and the empirical. Such readings often triumphed over the exclusivist claims that were made by Islamic religious orthodoxies of all stripes. Islam was formulated in these mystical circles either in terms of a direct relationship with God, or in terms of interaction with God through a spiritual guide, who could be either the Prophet, one of his descendants, or a learned teacher. Music and prolonged solitary meditation, modes of devotion shunned within many Shii and Sunni circles, became the *modus operandi* for a number of these mystics, many of whom came to be known as "Sufis." Within particular geographical and temporal contexts, Shii and Sunni influences impinged upon Islamic mysticism, and vice versa.

As the consolidation of Islam took place along and beyond these divisions and allegiances, the nascent religious community began to spread to the far-flung corners of Asia, Africa, and Europe: By 639 C.E., Jerusalem was under Muslim control; by 653 C.E., the Muslim realm had moved eastward to the River Oxus; in 711 C.E., Muslim administrative and political control took hold in the South Asian region of Sindh; by 756 C.E., a Muslim dynasty had established its rule in Spain. Of course we must always bear in mind that identities other than those grounded in religion—such as the local, linguistic, professional ones—often tended to outweigh the religious ones. They did so in the past, as they do in the present.

As Muslim merchants, scholars, travelers, exiles, and warriors inhabited lands farther from the Arabia of the Prophet, they had to reckon with cultural assimilations, inflections, and collusions. Some Muslims bemoaned the conquest of lands in the name of Islam as a dilution of pristine Islam. Others attempted to gain insights into the extra-Islamic belief systems they encountered by adopting aspects of these systems into their own familiar doctrines. Within Muslim communities, at many points in time and space, the power of religious leaders, political authorities, and seemingly hegemonic ideologies was diffused and contested. Views that were considered recondite and repellent in one place at one time became commonplace and acceptable in other places. For example, music and visual images of the Prophet and his household remain vital components of several South Asian Muslim devotional traditions, while holding at best a limited currency in parts of the Arab lands. Many norms, taboos, and beliefs of people living hundreds of miles away from the Prophet's Arabia were shaped more by their local environs than they were by the customs of the Prophet or the first Muslim community. Historical understandings, whether of larger social institutions or pivotal religious events, became as much a product of local politics as of historic texts and literary imagination. When charting the course of history or expounding Islamic doctrines,

the interventions and complicities of the present, and the power structures that patronized and censured words, could scarcely be avoided.

I have attended to the wide-ranging panorama of Islamic history and cultures in order to ascribe contexts to the event of Karbala as it is transmitted and received. In the (transnational and transregional) worlds of Islam and the worlds touched by Islamic culture, domains that the historian Marshall Hodgson has described as *Islamicate,*[4] the contours of Karbala have been mapped and remapped in innumerable colors by succeeding generations of chroniclers, poets, mystics, reformers, and devotees. From the Tartars of modern-day Azerbaijan to Tunisian playwrights like Muhammad Aziza, from Musa al-Sadr in Lebanon to the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran,[5] from the first English poetry anthology of Pakistani writers in the diaspora to the festive Muharram processions of Trinidad, Karbala and its heroes have been envisaged and invoked, commemorated and celebrated, enacted and emulated time and again, although not always with apparent consensus. The longevity of this event's legacy is tied to its malleability, which itself inheres in its symbolic resilience.

In this book, I tell a story without seizing exclusively upon a single narrative mode; I unite an eclectic array of sources into a cohesive narrative. The sources that are brought within the realm of this narrative range from the classical works of Islamic history and Perso-Indian literature to the oral Shii, Sufi, and Marxist discourses of the twentieth century, as well as South Asian nationalist and antinationalist theatrical and fictional imaginaries. When choosing these sources, I have considered both the aesthetically-acclaimed and the popularly-invoked ones. Mir Anis, Mirza Dabir, Rashid Turabi, Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, Muhammad Iqbal, Muhammad Ali Jauhar, Munshi Premchand, Mahatma Gandhi, Ali Sardar Jafri, Sadat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, and Parvin Shakir—all feature as prominent South Asians whose engagement with Karbala has not been previously studied in a systematic or an analytical manner. I have also interviewed and gained insight from many laypeople whose authority vis-á-vis Karbala rests solely on devotional and perceptive experience. This judicious mix of sources has far-reaching implications for Shii, Sufi, and Sunni reformist as well as Marxist spheres within South Asia, because it challenges the assumptions that have shaped previous readings of Karbala, martyrdom, and Islam.

Inspired by the tales of Shahrazad—that ultimate narrator of *The Thousand and One Nights,* whose life hinged upon her words—this story of Karbala is told through many other stories that show the folly of claims to exclusive legitimacy. The world of a story is constituted by absences and omissions (some conscious, others not-so-conscious) as much as it is constituted by emphases and elaborations. Most of all, this narrative world must content itself as it is, circumscribed by time and space. Still, it must be welcoming enough to accommodate the multiple claimants who continually aspire to bring it to fruition. In many ways, stories are like the banyan trees described by the Indian writer and poet Rabindranath Tagore: "To study a banyan tree, you not only must know its main stem in its own soil, but also must trace the growth of its greatness in the further soil, for then you can know the true nature of its

vitality."[6] Like banyan trees, stories grow from each other's trunks and roots. In order to assess a story, one must remember that like a banyan tree it overgrows its spatial origins in manifold modes, and outlives its original temporal framework. Devotion and imagination can sprout around a banyan tree, as they can around a story. Such devotion and imagination are frequently suffused with a poetic sensibility, with a versified evocation of feeling.

Poetry, Poetics, and Karbala

Islamicate poetry has been embraced by discourses ranging from politics to devotion. Gail Minault, a historian of Islamicate societies, elaborates on the cultural authority of poetry in the South Asian subcontinent:

> It is very difficult for someone from a different culture to grasp the importance and power of Urdu poetry in Indo-Muslim culture. Whether religious, historical, or lyric, the prevalent form of literary expression in India, as in most of the Muslim world, was poetry. The ability to compose poetry extemporaneously and to drop couplets at appropriate points in a conversation were the marks of a truly cultivated individual. One of the favorite forms of social gathering among gentlemen was the *mushāʿira* or poetic recitation. Paralleling this elitist tradition of public recitation was the popular tradition of singing devotional poetry at religious festivals and pilgrimage sites. Lyric poetry was thus accessible to the illiterate many as well as to the lettered few. As poetic recitations became part of political mass meetings as well, poetry became a means of communicating between the politicized elite and the throngs in their audiences. It is virtually impossible to estimate the impact of political poetry on the popular mind in terms of actual ideas conveyed or numbers swayed. Poetry, however, was a form of literary expression that spoke to the emotions. As such, it was an ideal medium for reaching the hearts of many Muslims who remained unmoved by political discussion.[7]

Poetry employs its own apparatus—an apparatus constituted by particular idioms, tropes, and symbols. This apparatus is constituted by language, through the aesthetic and devotional maneuvering of words, through the incorporation of other texts, and so on—in ways that take advantage of their multivalence. When speaking of "texts," I mean both oral and written expressions. The study at hand is concerned with the multiple levels of texts generated by the Karbala event. How does one text bear the influence of another, and how does one text shape and refashion another? This interaction among texts is what I, following many other literary critics, call "intertextuality." When discussing Karbala, I will be using such intertextual interactions as one of my chief objects of investigation. Roland Barthes, a well-known proponent of this approach, explains intertextuality: "Any text is a new tissue of past citations.

Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc. pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text."[8] Since no work of literature is historically unconditioned or free of foundation, when one text leaves its lexical/semantic traces in another one, either directly or obliquely, harmoniously or adversely, the relationship is intertextual. Of course, in determining intertextual relations, it is not always possible to cite the author or the original moment of a text.

Through intertextuality, one text can avail itself of another by alluding to it, reinscribing it, disavowing it, encroaching on it, or even undermining it. In essence, texts are in an interplay with not only their predecessors but also with their future counterparts.[9] Through intertextuality we recognize the importance of interdependent communication. As befits students of literature in any language, we must elaborate on those trends, traces, aspirations, and inspirations that have constituted the literary terrain of that language. We can never attain a nuanced, culturally grounded understanding of texts without a foray into this intertextual world, or without the consideration of the contexts in which, and for which, texts are produced.

Indeed, we must never forget that the signification of events and symbols is tied to the context of their signification. This context is not an inert background against which various readings of Karbala emerge, but the very fabric of life from which no writer/reciter could escape. Thus, when I speak of "context" I am, in effect, speaking of what Stanley Fish calls "interpretive communities."[10] Three complementary significations in which I read the event of Karbala are taken as corresponding to broadly recognizable contexts, or interpretive communities, in which Karbala is construed; though such divisions can and often do overlap. The three contexts are: (1) the commemorative Shii context; (2) the celebratory Sufi context; and (3) the socioreligious reformist context.

Part I: Commemoration of Karbala

For the majority of Shii Muslims,[11]Karbala is the cornerstone of institutionalized devotion and mourning (*ʿazā dārī*), since it is a substantive component of their historical memory, theological understanding, and religious identity. Karbala's tale of martyrdom and suffering is vividly recounted in the Shii commemorative assemblies (sing. *majlis,* plur. *majālis*)[12] during the first two months of the Islamic calendar, Muharram and Safar (also known as *ayyām-e ʿazā,* or the days of mourning),[13] and throughout the year in various other contexts, such as when personal losses are mourned. Karbala bestows on Shiism a sense of legitimacy; it provides a language of martyrdom and suffering, while bolstering the argument that the succession of the Prophet should have remained within his family.[14] One of the primary purposes of the majlis gatherings is to express condolences to the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, who is believed to be present in the assembly. All the textual and oral discourses at

these gatherings are meant to move the participants to tears by recounting the tragic events in the most vivid details.

In the three chapters of this section, I examine the institution of Shii commemoration. In the first chapter, I orient the readers toward the texts and contexts of the majlis by reflecting on Shii commemorations. I discuss the aesthetics of the majlis by focusing on Karbala's contribution to Urdu literature and poetics. This discussion entwines itself around issues of shifting cultural and regional codes, that in turn facilitate a localization of Karbala in South Asia. I also draw attention to the ways in which Karbala is invoked to mediate the personal sorrows of the devotees. The second chapter takes us from South Asian accounts to an appraisal of the Shii commemorations of Texas. Thus, we see the reflection of Karbala's legacy across temporal and geographical sites, interweaving memories of home and migrancy. In the third chapter, I explore the ways in which majlises serve to historicize Karbala and bring to the fore a variety of social concerns. Since the issue of the succession to the Prophet has its repercussions on the way many Shias read Karbala, by recalling the Karbala event, these Shias emphasize an alternative and resistive reading of Islamic history. It is through such a discourse of resistance that a sectarian Shii identity is reinforced. A significant part of this chapter is reserved for a discussion of gender dynamics that shape the narratives of femininity through the elaboration of the role of Husain's sister, Zainab. One of the first appraisals of Karbala is presented from Zainab—who had accompanied Husain to Karbala and was her brother's comrade in spirit. Thus traditions of devotion and resistance are ascribed to her.

Part II: Celebration of Karbala

Sufism also supplies us with discourses of resistance, although this resistance does not usually apply itself to issues of the succession to the Prophet. Rather, the resistance struggles against impediments to spirituality and piety. Many Sufis have praised Husain and his companions as ideal lovers, who annihilated themselves in the Divine (*fanā fi'llāh*) in order to attain subsistence in God (*baqā bi'llāh*) by receiving God's promised sustenance for the martyrs. Within this discourse, the emphasis on the tragic and sorrowful elements of the Karbala narrative is lessened. Thus, the martyred Imam Husain and his followers are given a new life after Karbala. In the context of *qawwālī,* Sufi songs and musical assemblies of South Asia, such sentiments are frequently voiced. Husain and his followers are not resigned to martyrdom, but instead rejoice in martyrdom. Martyrdom signifies the death of the "ego" self and its resurrection in eternity. In this section of the book, I discuss the larger context of Sufism, and then delve into images of martyrdom, often improvised through arbitrary versified insertions, and the manner in which these images seek to sublimate the base self into the higher, loving self of God's creation. Karbala in qawwalis appears in a panorama of poetic citations that are con-

jured up at the discretion of the performer(s), and often also according to the stipulation of the patron.

Part III: Emulation of Karbala

The martyrs of Karbala and their surviving family members have remained archetypal heroes for Muslim, as well as non-Muslim socioreligious reformers of the twentieth century, who sought to transform their communities in a positive manner. For nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Asian socioreligious reformers, Karbala is often the medium by which ideal reformist conduct, nation-building endeavors, and class consciousness are shaped and defined. This reformist ideology permeates the Karbala image and revivifies it. This part of the book consists of two chapters. The first one analyzes the role played by Muhammad Iqbal, the most prominent twentieth-century exponent of pan-Islamic socioreligious reform, in marginalizing a Shii-coded reading of Karbala in favor of a more transsectarian one. Iqbal, a Sunni, brings to a reformist fruition the discourse of martyrdom cultivated by Sufis. The second of the two chapters in this section deals primarily with Urdu Progressive Literature, and shows how this important twentieth-century literary movement, in spite of its claims to secularism, frames Karbala as an unavoidable ecumenical corollary to both transsectarian and transnational revolutionary struggles. This chapter also provides the reader with an understanding of how the symbol of Karbala became transcommunal during the heyday of Indian nationalism, and how its invocation played an important part in the discourses of non-Muslim reformer-writers like Munshi Premchand and Mahatma Gandhi. The Progressive and nationalist contexts foreclose an exclusively religious or localized reading of the Karbala event, instead making it a present- and future-oriented ecumenical project that is an outlet for ideas of universal justice, resistance to colonial and postcolonial categories, and the building of transnational solidarities. Many of these writers find themselves in the paradoxical position of rejecting religion for Marxist reasons, while at the same time laboring to use language redolent with religious connotations.

Although the Shii commemorative dimension of Karbala in South Asia has been the subject of a spate of anthropological works, more serious attention needs to be given to the expansive freedom with which this event/symbol has been deployed. Also, few works in English discuss how Karbala has stimulated South Asian, and more particularly Urdu-related literary and artistic sensibilities. An impediment to studying the image of Karbala in its fullness has been that certain genres of literature, like the Sufi qawwali, have been neglected or marginalized (even in Urdu scholarly traditions) because they are not recited in the Shii mourning gatherings that have been seen as the normative forum for invoking the Karbala event. The notion that the Karbala motif is the exclusive property of a group of Shias and can only be recited in religiously sanctioned gatherings has deflected attention from the tremendous influence this

image has exercised on the overall cultural and literary landscape of South Asia, at times quite independently from the idiom of formulaic devotional literature. The attention to self-flagellation and to the icons linked to Muharram has eclipsed the premium that is put on this event outside the Muharram gatherings.

In understanding Karbala through a varied assortment of sources such as elegiac texts, mystical performances, and Marxist poetry, I hope to not only enlarge and diversify the symbolic frame of reference for this event, but to also open up spaces in which we can appraise other symbols, images, and events grounded in Islam. Karbala opens a window on religion, history, idealism, and a number of dynamic interpretive strategies and politics. By situating the discussion of the symbol and images of Karbala within the South Asian context in general, and the idiom of Urdu-Hindi language in particular, I intend to convey not only the rich and varied trajectory of this symbol, but also the idea that the multiple readings of Karbala highlighted in this study are not as wildly random as they may seem on first perusal. These readings are enabled by particular historical moments, aesthetic inclinations, and political expediencies. In bringing out the dynamic relationship between this religious symbol and its creators, readers, proponents, detractors, and listeners, I also discuss tensions generated among the various deployments of Karbala and the manner in which these tensions are at times resolved and at other times left unresolved.

I

Visions and Re-visions of Karbala

Hai kahāñ tamannā kā dūsrā qadam yā rab
ham ne dasht-e imkāñ ko ek naqsh-e pā pāyā

Where is the second step of longing, oh Lord?
We found the desert of possibility to be one footprint
Mirza Ghalib

In my view, history as a discipline is in bad shape today because it has lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination. In the interest of *appearing* scientific and objective, it has repressed and denied to itself its own greatest source of strength and renewal.
Hayden White

This book began, and for the most part is written, in the third person. I considered the idea of including my own experiences with Karbala, but foregrounding these with readings of age-old texts, prolific and profound poets, scholars, and performers seemed presumptuous to say the least. Yet, omitting my experiences, simply because they are my own—a subjective, first person narrative—is a violation of my commitment to relay the polyvocal life of this event. So, in this chapter and the next, albeit with great hesitation and reservations, I have composed a narrative from several sources: my memories of growing up with Karbala in a Shii household; conversations with members of the Shii community living in South Asia and North America; popular Shii texts used in the Shii commemorative gatherings; and secondary sources that shed theoretical light on many aspects of these narratives. The styles of Shii mourning, the texts and formats of the commemorative gatherings, and the general discourse surrounding Karbala vary over time and space, and what

appears in this chapter are just a few reflections of Shii commemorations. This chapter lends itself to my overall arguments by bringing to light the imaginative aesthetic and devotional frameworks within which Karbala and martyrdom are articulated, re-articulated, and localized within Shii contexts; and by exposing the intertextual manner in which various genres of literature foreshadow the idioms in which Karbala is couched. A necessary historical and cultural background—with its fault lines and fissures—provides the larger framework within which my arguments are placed.

The Beginning—A Vision of the Crescent

ibtidā-e ʿazā hai vāvailā
māh-e ġham rūnumā hai vāvailā[1]

Alas! Mourning has begun
Alas! The moon of grief has shown her face

The appearance of the crescent moon during the last days of the twelfth Islamic month signals the beginning of the month of Muharram. I vividly remember the significance of this portentous event for Shii households in Hyderabad, India, where I spent my childhood. Days before the crescent moon came into view, families would begin preparations for the ayyam-e aza, the days of mourning, by whitewashing the walls and roof of the room that would house the Muharram activities, and by warming up their vocal cords to recite pain-ridden elegies. As soon as the crescent could be seen by the naked eye, more solemn elegies would resonate in Shii houses as standards (*ʿalams*) representing the martyrs of Karbala were erected. Shii men and women donned black for the first commemorative assembly (majlis) of the year, as they would for many more majlises over the next two months. The Shii new year begins with mourning; it is a much anticipated event. For two months and eight days, joyous occasions, whether weddings or birthdays, were not celebrated in Shii houses of Hyderabad.

As children, we never felt excluded from the mourning process. Not only did we lend a hand setting up of the alams on wooden spears (*nēza*), but we also participated in the recitation of elegies. My grandmother had a silver alam built in the name of each of her children and grandchildren. These alams were erected to honor the members of the Prophet's family, who had suffered at Karbala. So, along with the alam honoring the Imam Husain, our house had alams in honor of the Imam's brother Abbas, his two sons Ali Akbar and Ali Asghar, his nephew Qasim b. Hasan, his sisters Zainab and Kulsum, and his daughter Sakina. Many of these names conjured up images and stories for us as children: The Imam Husain was an omnipotent hero determined to save Islam from the teeth of Yazid, who, we imagined resembled the stray neighborhood dog that was called Yazid by a few adolescent cousins. The Imam's illustrious pedigree stretched back to his grandfather, the Prophet of Islam,

and included his parents—Imam Ali, the doughty warrior of Shiism, and Fatima, the purest and noblest of women. Husain was assisted by his loyal and courageous brother Abbas, a tiger-like figure, who was very dear to the Imam's four-year-old daughter Sakina. Sakina's sleeping abode was the Imam's chest and she was Husain's favorite. Husain was also fond of his eighteen-year-old son Ali Akbar, who bore a striking resemblance to the Prophet Muhammad and was raised by Husain's dear sister Zainab. The most poignant moments for the Imam were those when his six-month-old son, Ali Asghar, was struck by an arrow shot by Yazid's forces while the Imam held the baby in his embrace. The only respite in Karbala's tragic narrative was constituted by the wedding of the Imam's nephew, Qasim, to the Imam's daughter Fatima Kubra, just moments before Qasim, along with most of his family members, became a martyr. These heroes of Karbala, the Shii devotees were continually reminded, would intercede on behalf of their devout Shii community on the Day of Judgment in the court of God, in exchange for the tears that flowed from their devotees' eyes.

My grandmother would consecrate a red thread by touching it to the alams representing those martyrs who had confronted Yazid head-on, and then tie it around our wrists, occasioning our rite of passage into the court of the Karbala martyrs, as well as providing us with a talisman against evil. She told us that for the rest of the year we were under the protection (*ẓamānat*) of these martyrs. The red thread around our wrists was supposed to protect us, not unlike the protection of the threads around the wrists of some of our Hindu friends. Of course my grandmother showed her disapproval by facial expressions whenever an uncle, lax in religion, playfully suggested the comparison between the Shii red thread and the sacred Hindu thread: the Shii images in the forms of alams and the Hindu images in the forms of "idols," or the Shias who flocked to the alams for *ziyārat* (religious visitation) and the Hindus who desired *darshan* (vision) of their divine images in a similar manner. Deeply disturbed by the uncle's comments, she would say: "Unlike the Hindus, we do not worship the alams. The alams remind us that the banners that the Imam's side carried still live on, in spite of the fact that the Imam Husain is not with us."

On the seventh day of Muharram, I, along with other cousins, would play the *faqīr,* or beggar, in the cause of the martyrs. Around our necks would be placed the mendicant's green pouch containing sugar-coated nuts (*nuqqal*) and a few coins that we were free to spend at our own discretion. We were told that all the grace and blessings that we would receive for the rest of the year would have the Prophet's household as its source. Some adult relatives prayed on this occasion: "May God not make us beg from anybody except from Himself and from the Prophet's martyred family." For a young child who did not receive regular "pocket money," the immediate rewards of being a beggar in the path of the martyrs were not only obvious, but much appreciated. It was only after many years that I understood that the concept of *faqr* (poverty) and the practitioners of this poverty (faqirs) were inextricably linked to the Prophet Muhammad and his family, who, according to their devotees, had joyfully em-

braced a life of poverty in order to feed and clothe the less fortunate in their world. The ritual of the red thread was thus a ratification of the Prophet's sentiment: "Poverty is my pride."[2]

Muharram was also a time when we traveled around the city more than usual. Since we lived in the newer part of Hyderabad (where only about 25 percent of Hyderabad's 150,000 or so Shias lived), it was customary for us not only to attend the majlises at the houses of relatives living in the old city, but also to visit the various sacred Shii sites of commemoration (*ʿāshūrḳhānas*) located in that part of Hyderabad. The ashurkhanas of Hyderabad and in other parts of South Asia are also referred to as *alāvas, dargāh,* and *imāmbāṛas*. Some of the Hyderabadi ashurkhanas constitute the city's architectural landmarks, built by Golconda's Qutb Shahi Shii dynasty (r. 1518–1687 C.E.), which oversaw the planning and establishment of the city of Hyderabad.

All the ashurkhanas were enlivened during the days of mourning by the raised alams (see figure 1.1) and the throngs of devotees, both Shias and non-Shias, who came to visit them. My fondest memories of Muharram drift back to me with the silent scent of roses, aloe wood, and the burning intoxicating scent of *mastānah agarbattī,* incense sticks that wafted across the ashurkhanas to welcome us. Also lacing the alleyways were flower vendors eagerly reminding the pilgrims to buy their products as offerings for the alams. All these scents moved the mourners into a liminal, twilight state in which the ashurkhana blended into an extension of the bridal chamber, thereby blurring the divide between sorrow and joy. While breathing the commemorations of Muharram in Hyderabadi ashurkhanas, many of the devotees of the Imam Husain hoped that fate would grant them the opportunity to visit the most sacred earth of Karbala.

Indeed, throughout their lives, Shias, during the performance of their devotions, prostrate time and again on the clay tablets fashioned from this holy earth.[3] That a pilgrimage (ziyarat) to the place of martyrdom of Imam Husain would secure for his devotees rewards far more promising than even the annual Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*) was never doubted. Many of us were captivated by the visual images of Karbala that hung in so many Shii houses and by the detailed accounts from the mouths of the pilgrims (*zāʾirīn*) who came back from Karbala. For example, we heard that the Shah of Iran had bestowed expensive Persian carpets on the Imam's shrine, but had asked the caretakers (*ḳhuddāms*) to remove these carpets during the high season of pilgrimage, to prevent them from being soiled by the thousands of people who would walk on them carelessly. That same night, one of the khuddams had a dream in which the Imam Husain told him to remove the carpets permanently if keeping them meant any restriction was imposed on the pilgrims. That the Imam loved his devotees, in whatever shape or form they might visit him, much more than he loved a king's lavish gift, was borne out in this anecdote.

My grandfather, who was never able to visit Karbala in his lifetime, willed that his corpse be sent there; indeed, within eleven months of his death his remains were flown across the Arabian Sea. We were assured by those consoling us that burial in Karbala would guarantee my grandfather's salvation,

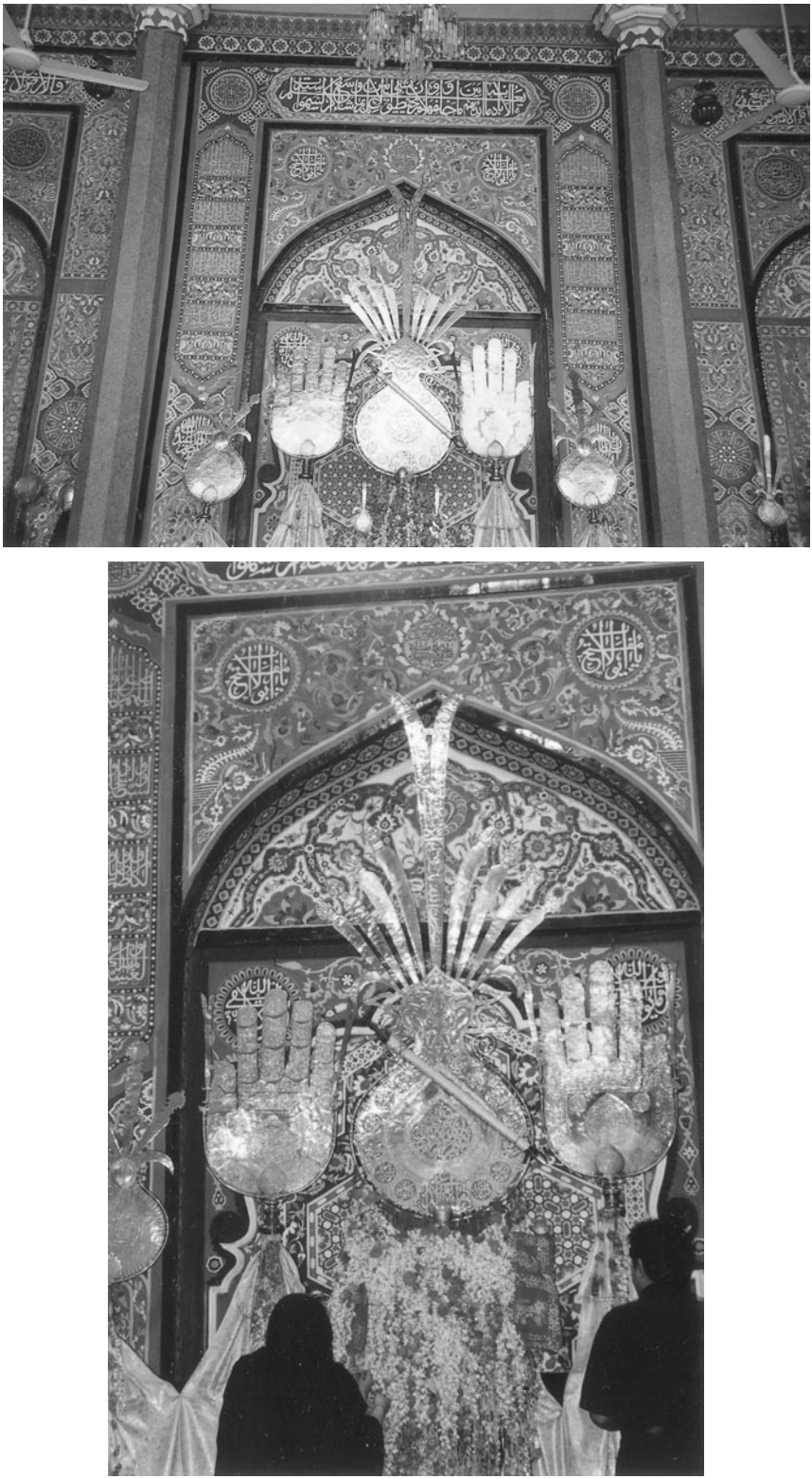


FIGURE 1.1 Alams at Badshahi Ashurkhana, Hyderabad, India.

as it would guarantee the salvation of any true believer buried there. To verify such a guarantee, one could flip through the pages of the tome of the greatest Shii scholar of the subcontinent and judge in the court of the Mughal emperor Akbar, Qazi Nurullah Shustari, popularly known as *Shahīd-e Ṡāliṡ* (1549–1610 C.E.):

> Never is the one who rests at Karbala debased
> No matter his state, though he be reduced to dust
> For he shall be taken up and fashioned into a rosary
> A rosary, worn about pious hands[4]

Tasbīḥs (rosary-like prayer beads) are common gifts that pilgrims from Karbala bring back for friends and family. Many of these tasbihs are fashioned from Karbala's clay. In the verses cited above, the poet commends the corpses interred in Karbala for their cherished survival on earth in spite of being buried under it. Fancying such a fate for their loved ones, and in spite of a relatively heavy financial cost, hundreds of Shias used to send the bodies of their deceased relatives to Karbala for burial—before Saddam Hussein restricted such practices in the late 1970s.[5] Although Karbala remains the ideal destination for Shias, in life and in death, the pilgrimage to this city is not a prerequisite for salvation. Ubiquitous on Shii epitaphs is the widespread eschatological belief: "One who dies in the love of the Prophet's family, dies a martyr." (See figure 1.2.) Doesn't such a belief make martyrs out of all those who love the Prophet's family? Martyrdom from such a perspective does not necessarily concern physical combat or armed confrontation; it relates to the love for the Prophet and his progeny. The best way to prove this love, many Shias would say, is by holding majlises.

It is important to remember that the majlises are not limited to the mourning months of Muharram and Safar—although they are held more frequently in these months. Majlises are held in commemoration of deaths or as memorial services for family members and friends, as well as in remembrance of the Shii Imams. In fact, majlises in many Shii households are held every Thursday evening (a time considered special because it marks the beginning of Friday, the most auspicious day of the week for Muslims). In a number of families, happier occasions of life, such as weddings and housewarmings, begin with a majlis; the justification for this is that even in times of joy, the suffering that the Imam Husain and his family endured for the cause of Islam cannot be forgotten. As far as the gendered make-up of the majlis is concerned, in many household majlises, men and women mourn together. When the majlis is public, however, it is divided along gender lines. Children, of course, move freely between the gendered domains. Although much of what I say about the majlis tradition holds true for women's majlises as well, my observations and analyses in this chapter, by and large, concern unisex majlises and men's majlises.



FIGURE 1.2 An epitaph on a Shii grave reads, "One who dies in the love of the Prophet's family, dies a martyr." The names of Allah, Muhammad, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain are also engraved on this tombstone, along with the poetry of this deceased poet, Hilmi Afandi.

Antecedents of the Hyderabadi Majlis

To many Shias, the precedent of mourning the martyrs of Karbala predates the event of Karbala and was set by Adam himself. Adam, as a prophet, had foreknowledge of Karbala, and he mourned for his descendants (through the bloodline of the Prophet Muhammad) as much as he mourned for himself, after being expelled from Paradise. The shedding of tears and acts of mourning are hence integrated into the very essence of the human self. From this perspective, Adam's progeny is fated to carry not his "sin" but rather his tears. Husain is not only Adam's progeny, but a divine light that emanates from God. God foretold the cosmic proportions of the Karbala tragedy to all the pious prophets and saints who worship Him. Karbala was to be the ultimate battle between the believers and the infidels—a battle that Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ismail, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad fought on various levels. Husain was the designated final warrior for this battle, and through his sacrifice the legacy of all the prophets would receive perpetual assurance of safety.[6] Husain, to his devotees, constitutes the "merciful cloud" that nurtures the communities of all the prophets through the virtue of his sacrifices for the righteous cause.[7] The prophets, in turn, salute Husain in gratitude through their tears.

The Shii community believes that the Prophet Muhammad himself as-

sured the perpetuity of the commemorative gatherings for Husain. According to one source, when the Prophet received foreknowledge about Husain's martyrdom, he wept until the archangel Gabriel came to console him. Through Gabriel, God had revealed the "most beautiful" of the Quranic stories, a perennially cherished motif of Islamic literature, *Sūrat Yūsuf*.[8] This tale of temptations, including a married woman pining for a man other than her husband, was revealed to amuse Allah's beloved messenger by momentarily deflecting his attention from the agonies that would eventually befall his daughter's household. Thus, the aesthetically privileged chapter of God's eternal Word becomes an intertext of Karbala, rendering it an interface that accommodates martyrdom, sorrow, beauty, consolation, and most of all, permanence. Karbala is a text authored by God Himself. Its significance is further underscored in that it is revealed to God's messenger along with the most beautiful words of God, ensconced in Surat Yusuf. The Prophet conveyed to Fatima the seminal importance of Karbala, reminding his daughter that Husain's sacrifice would be the greatest in the cause of Islam and remembered till the end of time: "Till the Day of Judgment there will always be groups of men and women among my followers who will weep for him and hold meetings to commemorate his slaughter."[9]

Such commemorative majlises, when they became a reality, did not always take place in the most congenial of settings. Those who wanted to suffer for Husain were made to suffer further by being forbidden to suffer. Certain authorities of the Umayyad dynasty (r. 661–749 C.E.) and the subsequent Abbasid dynasty (r. 749–1258 C.E.) saw the Shii majlises as explicitly political, because they affirmed the claims of Ali's progeny to the legitimate leadership of the community. Hence the Abbasid caliph, al-Mutawakkil (d. 861 C.E.) not only proscribed gatherings commemorating Shii martyrs but also demolished the shrine of Husain at Karbala.[10] Lest there be another uprising like that of Karbala, the imams after Husain remained under the surveillance of the Umayyad and Abbasid governments, at times imprisoned, tortured, or killed.[11] One group of Shias (the Twelvers) believes that in 870 C.E. the twelfth Imam went into occultation; he will emerge before the end of time to avenge the wrongs done to Islam, most notably at Karbala.

With the emergence of the Shii Buyid dynasty (r. 934–1062 C.E.) in Baghdad, the mourning gatherings received state patronage. The day-to-day affairs of the state ceased on *ʿāshūra,* the day of Husain's martyrdom, Buyid rulers, such as Muizz al-Dawlah, themselves walked in the mourning procession for the martyrs of Karbala. Numerous aspects of present-day Muharram commemorations can be traced back to the tenth century. These include buildings that were explicitly constructed for the mourning gatherings, *Ḥusainiyyāt*; professional mourners, who traveled from place to place to recite the Karbala story and induce sympathy for the martyrs; women loosening their hair and rending their garments; and the works of narrative literature (*maqātil*) that recounted the tragedy in all its pensive details.[12] The Buyids acquired for themselves an illustrious reputation in the annals of Shii history, not only for their patronage of Muharram rituals, but also for overseeing the burgeoning Shii scholarship

of Nasir al-Din Tusi (d. 1067 C.E.), Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 1022 C.E.), and others.[13] Mourning processions have also been documented from this time in the neighboring Hamdanid state of Syria and in Fatimid Egypt,[14] both Shii in orientation.

Many a historic majlis witnessed both the Shii and the Sunni presence. We would do well to recall that Muhammad b. Idris al-Shafii, the founder of one of the four major Sunni schools of law, lavished extensive praise upon the martyrs of Karbala in his elegies (still quoted in the subcontinent)[15] and defended his love for the Prophet's family.[16] Historic accounts testify to Sunni participation in mourning assemblies in the Iranian regions of Rayy and Hamadan. A number of these participants were *manāqib ḳhwāns* (popular eulogizers of the early heroes of Islam),[17] who traveled from place to place reciting events related to the tragedy of Karbala. In fact, the Persian text most responsible for shaping the future narratives and imagery of Karbala in the Persian-speaking world and the South Asian subcontinent was composed by Husain Waiz Kashifi (d. 1504 C.E.).

Rawẓat al-Shuhadā

No other text has dominated the popular perceptions of Karbala in South Asia more than *Rawẓat al-Shuhadā,* or *The Garden of the Martyrs.* That its author was possibly a Sunni never attenuated its importance within the Shii world, and the fealty of later narrators to Kashifi can hardly be exaggerated. Soon after this work was produced, the Safavid dynasty mounted an effort to convert Persia to Shiism; within a century, Shiism became a pivotal religious force for the Persians. Sections of the *Rawẓat al-Shuhadā* were recited in commemorative gatherings which themselves derived their names, *rawẓa ḳhwānī,* from Kashifi's work. This book constitutes a comprehensive romantic treatment not only of the martyrs of Karbala but of many prophets as well. It refigures creation by placing it in the context of Karbala. By alternating between prose and verse, Kashifi blends disparate incidents into his text, continually transgressing boundaries among genres. He works into the Karbala narrative symbols and images distilled from the most popular poetic genre of his time, the *ġhazal* (love lyric). The monorhymed, multithemed ghazal is one of the most prized genres of literature in many parts of the Islamicate world, and has been for the past millennium. Usually written from the perspective of a forlorn lover acutely sensitive to the various modes of suffering that have become his lot, the ghazal dons the garb of rhetorical and prosodic finery to manifest itself as a tapestry of playfulness, pride, sorrow, and love. Mostly due to the cherished veneer of ambiguity that characterizes good lyrics, the ghazal can mediate the world of religion just as it does the profane world. The metaphors and images that have come to constitute the ghazal universe also struck the creative chords of those who wrote explicitly religious poetry or historical narratives. Kashifi is one of the many chroniclers of Karbala who brought the ghazal universe to bear upon his narrative.

Take for instance the quatrain recited by Fatima Kubra, Husain's daughter, who was wed to Qasim as he departed for the battlefront on the tenth of Muharram:

O laughing rose, I am left behind.
From my sight, why do you go?
I am torn like a rose thrown on a skirt, why do you go?
You are a cypress, where is your place save near the stream?
So from the stream flowing from my weeping eyes, why do you go?[18]

The identity of the beloved springs from the metaphors of the rose and the cypress tree—he laughs like a rose and stands gracefully like a cypress tree. Kashifi thus fittingly describes Qasim as a cypress tree in the garden of the martyrs. As we will see in our discussion of the Urdu elegy, subsequent writers in the subcontinent made powerful use of such imagery.

The reverberations of *Rawẓat al-Shuhadā* have been felt from Turkey to the Deccan region of South Asia. Subsequent elaborations of the Karbala narrative, whether in the genre of *marṡiya* or in illustrated paintings narrating this event, not only in Iran but in other Islamicate cultures, owe a tremendous debt to this early sixteenth-century text. The eminent Turkish poet Mehmed b. Suleyman Fuzuli (d. 1556 C.E.) rendered this work into Turkish as *Ḥadīqat al-Su'ada,* or *The Garden of the Blessed*. One of the main reasons that Fuzuli gives for his rendition is that he did not want the Turkish people to be deprived of the Karbala narrative.[19] In 1596 C.E., this work was illustrated under the patronage of the Ottoman Sultan Murad III.[20] Kashifi's martyrology was also recited widely in the subcontinent, where there was a strong proclivity towards Shiism among the ruling families of Bijapur and Golconda (the region of South India referred to as the Deccan).

When discussing the Karbala event in Urdu discourses, we must note from the outset that it developed with major thematic alterations. One of the earliest works of Deccani Urdu, Ashraf Biyabani's monorhymed linear narrative, *Maṡnavī-e Nausarhār,* (written in the sixteenth century) states that the *raison d'etre* for the battle of Karbala was not community leadership. Rather, it was Yazid's desire to marry a certain woman, her refusal and choice of the Imam Husain over Yazid.[21] This work is more preoccupied with describing a woman's beauty than it is with concrete political or theological issues of Islamic history. That Karbala was placed firmly within the unfolding struggle over a woman's love in *Nausarhār* should tell us something about the ease with which narrative license was exercised in fashioning this symbol. Although many Shias take umbrage at the thought that Karbala was actually a battle over a woman, the liberal narrative licenses that finesse discussions of Karbala in works like the *Nausarhār* also shape the discourses of the Shii majlis, to which I now turn.

Before parsing the majlis context, which manifests itself in diversified modes throughout South Asia, it is helpul to highlight the formative stages through which the majlis audiences pass. The audience usually sits on the floor during the first part of the majlis and remains standing during the second

part. The first part begins with a call for blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad and his progeny, then the majlis proceeds to a short elegiac recitation called *soz,* then to a longer nonlinear monorhymed narrative called the *salām,* which leads the majlis attendees to a much longer linear narrative, the marsiya. The first part comes to a close with the only prose narrative of the Karbala tragedy, the *żikr,* also known as *bayān* or *ḥadīś*. The second part begins with the attendees rhythmically beating their breasts as a sign of lamentation, while they hear more versified recitations in the dirge (*nauḥa*) form of the calamities that befell the Prophet's family. The second part draws to a close with a recitation of the ziyarat, a blessing in which the right index finger is used in "salutation" or tribute to the martyrs of Karbala, the Shii Imams, and other members of the Prophet's family. With this summary of the stages of the majlis outlined, I move on to discuss the structure and content in more detail.

Ṣalavāt: The Introduction to the Majlis

The majlis begins with a *ṣalavāt,* or *durūd,* a call for blessings upon Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad: "O God, bless Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad." The epistemological claim for such a pronouncement is rooted in the Quran and the Prophetic tradition, or hadis. The Quran (33:56) commands believing Muslims to send their salutations upon the Prophet Muhammad, since God and all of God's angels do the same.[22] In addition to being the invocation with which all the majlises begin and end, these words are invoked, at times by way of praise, whenever the merits (faẓā'il) of the Prophet's household are recounted. This invocation at the beginning of the majlis remains, in many ways, the creed of the majlis for it evokes devotion in the audiences for the duration of the commemorative gathering.

Segment 1 of the Majlis: The Soz

Having set the mood by tapping into the devotional energy of the audience, the salavat reciter can move on to the soz, literally "burning," a type of lamentation poetry without stringent or consistent rules of content or form. The soz is recited[23] in a melodic tune (*laḥn*). It usually comprises the recitation of a *rubā'ī* (quatrain), a *muḳhammas* (a five-line stanza), or a *musaddas* (a six-line stanza) that concisely expresses one of the topics of the majlis:

> The Kaba testifies, faith's direction of worship is Husain
> The Quran that the Prophet committed to memory was none other than Husain
> Husain, the remedy for every cureless pain
> Husain, the resplendent star in the constellation of nobility
> His manifestation illuminates both heaven and earth
> His light created from the light of the Creator[24]

The author expresses Husain's position in this soz: The Kaba, that holiest of Muslim sanctuaries in Mecca, which is also the *qiblah* (direction of worship) for a billion Muslims, testifies that its own significance is synonymous to that of Husain. Furthermore, the Word of God revealed to the Prophet in the form of the Quran, and the spirit which the Prophet understood best, is also naught but Husain. The reference to the Quran is particularly significant in this context; it is more than the concrete, written text that is sold in stores and kept on bookshelves. It is said that at the Battle of Siffin, when Muawiya, Yazid's father and the archenemy of Husain's father, Ali, commanded his forces to raise leaves of the Quran on their lances,[25] Ali commanded his troops to keep fighting, declaring, "I am the speaking Quran."[26] As Ali's son and successor as Imam, Husain had equal claim to be "the speaking Quran," equal claim to formulate a hermeneutics (*tāwīl*) that transcends the written word and accommodates the allegorical and the metaphysical. After all, the Prophet himself had declared in a famous tradition that the two legacies he leaves behind, the Quran and his progeny, would never be separated until they met him in Paradise at the fountain of *Kawṡar,* a much-coveted spot in heaven.[27]

In addition, the poet tells his audience that two of the most sacred religious symbols for Muslims, the Kaba and the Quran, are defined by Husain. With such attributes, Husain becomes the antidote for all maladies. He not only dwells on God's earth in the form of the Quran and the Kaba, but is also the best of luminaries in heaven. His light holds sway over the heavens and the earth, for he is a part of the divine light. This soz lays down the Shii ontology of Husain, who is first and foremost an Imam. Imams within this tradition are created from the divine light. Immune from sin (*maʿṣūm*), they are sufferers, oppressed, wronged (*maẓlūm*). All good flows from them, and they are untouched by evil. Along with these qualities, Husain, for his devotees, is also surrounded by a halo of miraculous lore. For example, at Husain's birth, God is said to have sent a band of angels to congratulate the Prophet. While soaring through the skies, these angels saw the angel, Futrus, who had fallen from God's favor and was expelled from Paradise. Futrus desired to accompany these angels to the Prophet's house, and the other angels agreed. Upon arriving at the cradle of the young Imam Husain, Futrus touched the infant so as to be blessed by him. Consequently, the angel's wings, which had fallen off as a sign of God's curse, were miraculously restored, as was his angelic status. Such stories, wherein God's angels, as well as prophets, are devotees of the Imam Husain, abound in Shii traditions.[28] When such supernatural attributions to Husain and other Shii Imams first emerged, however, is still hotly debated among scholars. While some historians of Shiism encourage the idea that such attributions were present in Shii lore from the very beginning of this movement,[29] other scholars question this and contend that only later developments (almost two centuries after the event of Karbala) within and around Shiism produced such traditions about the Imams' supernatural powers.[30]

In the South Asian majlis context, however, the battle of Karbala is, first and foremost, the righteous struggle (jihad) of the most perfect of God's creation, the object of veneration for angels and prophets, the Imam Husain. In

this context, as the above soz indicated, Husain is the manifestation of all perfections and virtues, the protagonist-hero of Karbala.[31] As far as the afflictions that befell him, Husain could have easily averted them, but refrained from such an action, lest the childhood promise (*ʿahd-e ṭiflī*) he made to the Prophet would be violated: The promise that Husain and his family would suffer in order to save the religion of Muhammad and set an example for subsequent generations of Muslims. Karbala, in this sense, becomes the fulfillment of a promise (*īfā-e ʿahad*.)[32] Usually one person recites the soz and a few others provide its droning baseline.

Segment 2 of the Majlis: The Salam

The soz is followed by a salam (salutation/benediction), a lyrical elegy wherein scattered descriptions of the Karbala event are strung together with random thoughts about life, death, and pilgrimage. Each couplet of the salam is self-sufficient; it contains a complete idea and does not rely on the couplet preceding or following it. The only unifying factor in the salam, as in the ghazal, is the monorhymed scheme (aa, ba, ca . . .). In many salams, structural aspects of the ghazal stand out, as do the intertextual proliferation of ghazal imagery—the imagery that echoes through classical works of martyrology, such as the *Rawẓat al-Shuhadā*:

> The thread of love is extremely delicate
> So why do those who realize this drag me into it?
> The rose that the nightingale once protected even from the wind
> Now endures the cruelty of autumn
> In order to lighten the load of the grandfather's community,
> He [Husain] pulls a heavy burden in old age[33]

The first couplet from this salam, composed by one of the finest elegy writers of nineteenth-century India, Mir Anis, could pass for couplets of a ghazal in its notions of love and the playful language through which the lover complains of being pulled into the fragile bonds of the beloved's affections. Following a similar theme—although it is not required to do so—the second couplet brings out the twists and turns of fate that prove deadly for the beloved rose, ever protected and loved by its faithful nightingale.[34] In the ghazal world, the rose frequently stands for the beloved and the nightingale symbolizes the lover.

The third couplet clearly draws out the connection between the Imam Husain in Karbala (fighting to preserve the integrity of his grandfather's community) and the rose protected by its nightingale (the Prophet). This ability of the salam to intertextually accommodate a number of themes makes it one of the most popular genres through which devotees of the Imam Husain, whether Shia, Sunni, or even non-Muslim, pay tribute to the martyred Imam and his companions. In fact, one of the most popular salams recited in Hyderabad is the one written by the sixth Asif Jahi ruler, a Sunni, Mehboob Ali Khan (d. 1911), who used the pen name "Asif":

Greetings to he whose name is Husain
May I be his ransom!
My helper, my master, my Imam Husain
The zephyr carries my prayers to his shrine
Oh God! May Husain accept my greetings
Alas! Not a single stone-hearted fiend heard
The plea that was made a hundred thousand times
"I am the Prophet's grandson, my name is Husain!"
I have but one desire, O Asif
That I may become the slave of Husain.[35]

A ruler desiring the privilege of serving Husain—this has also been a common trope in the poetry that honors the Prophet (*naʿt*). Moreover, within the nat tradition, as within the salam tradition, the *ṣabā,* that gentle breeze (zephyr) blowing from the east, is accorded the status of a messenger carrying the heartfelt devotion and prayers of the devotees living far away in the subcontinent. How could these devotees forget Uwais al-Qarani, a Yemeni contemporary of the Prophet, whose luck did not bear the fruit of the Prophet's vision but who nevertheless conveyed his affection to the Messenger of God through the breeze saba? The Prophet, without meeting Uwais in person, communicated with his Yemeni devotee, just as Mehboob Ali Khan hopes the Imam Husain will communicate with him. A salam can be recited as a solo, or by a chorus; or a solo line can be followed by a line in which the chorus joins.

Segment 3 of the Majlis: The Marsiya

While the salam situates Karbala in the broader context of life, the marsiya, usually recited in the majlis after the salam, is a more tightly woven, more linear, and longer elegy. The marsiya deals with a specific topic, either the death of a particular character from the Imam's side or a specific sorrowful event, like the parting conversation between the Imam Husain and his young daughter Sakina:

In the event that I do not return at eventide
It is because I have had to go far away
If you love me, do not cry little one
Tonight you will experience the first moments of separation from your father
Lay your head meekly on mother's breast and go to sleep
The days of contentment have passed
How the season has changed!
Now you will have to live as an orphan
Thirsty, her tiny hands folded, she asked
"Tell me, what is an orphan?"
Weeping tears of blood, the Imam said
By evening you will know all about this pain and sorrow

Hush little one, ask not, for this is a mighty calamity
An orphan is a child whose father has died[36]

In these lines we see the avowedly human side of the Imam highlighted by his paternal words. It is as though the human aspect of the Imam is deeply embedded in his superhuman self. The more abstract ideals of Karbala are, at least for a moment, subsumed in a talk between a father and his daughter. Even when Husain emerges as the loftiest of God's creation because of his strength to defend Islam, he is still the most caring of fathers, the most loving of brothers, the most conscientious of husbands, and the most forgiving of believers. Aesthetically, there is also a beautiful *tajnīs* (word play) at work: The word *shām*, translated here as "evening," also means "Syria" and thus predicts the terrible suffering that the Imam's little daughter will have to undergo upon reaching the tyrant Yazid's capital in that land.

In one of his marsiyas, Mirza Dabir (d. 1875) reflects upon the forgiving side of the Imam by recounting an incident that took place during the time of the caliphate of Husain's father, Ali b. Abi Talib. At that time Shimr, who eventually cut off Husain's head in Karbala, was imprisoned in Kufa, Ali's capital, for commiting a crime. As Husain passed by the prison, Shimr called out to Husain. He asked Husain to intercede on his behalf for Ali's forgiveness, and assure his freedom. Husain first asked Shimr if he had substantial food, water, light, and air in the prison. Upon being reassured by Shimr of the relative comfort that the latter had in prison, Husain then asked his father to forgive Shimr. Ali, as the Imam of the time, had foreknowledge about Shimr's forthcoming crimes against Husain. The following marsiya stanzas are a versified account of the conversation between Ali and Husain:

Ali said, "This prisoner will be your murderer!"
Husain replied, "If this be fated by God, then we have no say in it
Though he may be my murderer, I approve his release
I'll act as is my nature
Neither do I begrudge an enemy, nor do I despise a murderer
My heart is like a clean mirror to all."
Ali said, "That he will abuse you is certain."
Husain replied, "So let him."
Ali said, "He'll stab you in the heart."
Husain replied, "So let him."
Ali said, "He will make you mourn for Ali Akbar."
Husain replied, "So let him."
Weeping, Ali said, "He'll burn this house down."
Husain replied, "So let him."
Ali said, "Since the beginning of time, oppression has been his lot."
Husain responded, "[But] Mercy and forgiveness have been ours."[37]

Husain proceeds to defend the merits of such grace and mercy, in spite of his father's admonitions that releasing Shimr would cause Husain and his family great suffering in the future:

An ocean washes away blackness
The people of mercy are those who forgive sins[38]

Within the text of this marsiya, Shimr is released, and all of Husain's followers are reassured of the oppressed Imam's intercession on their behalf on the Day of Judgment. If Husain treated his enemies with such goodwill, then surely he would plead for the forgiveness of his devotees. Flowing from many marsiyas are the ethics (*aḳhlāq*) of forgiveness and the etiquette (*adab*) of compassion. Also, words of reverence for Husain's noble ancestry and panegyrics for his piety almost always lace these texts. Although the marsiya is usually recited in tune, at times it is also read as *taḥt al-lafẓ*, without melodic tunes. Many of the marsiyas are, like the sozes, set to classical Indian melodies, or *rāgās* thus creating an aesthetic fusion of music and poetry written in the martyrs' honor.[39]

In the marsiya tradition, we also see how social and political contexts, with their prodigious capacity to generate insightful and creative imaginations, furnish a number of elaborations that depict the event of Karbala in indigenous South Asian imagery. Perhaps the major theme that emerges from such depictions is a validation and ratification of life-affirming rituals, established social norms, and rites of passage. By ascribing the rituals of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century India to the seventh-century heroes of Karbala, the marsiya writers demarcate India and its culture as morally legitimate. At times, these poets use amusing anachronisms in their attempts to show the Islamic basis of certain rituals. The finest panegyrist and satirist ever to write in Urdu, Mirza Muhammad Rafi Sauda (d. 1780 C.E.), left a mark upon the genre of marsiya by saturating it with local ceremonial and cultural idioms. When reading Sauda's marsiyas, it is difficult to conceive that the stories concern Arabs or Islamic theology; they are more like family dramas that capture the mundane elements of marriage and death rites, never daring to wish away social hierarchies of eighteenth-century North Indian elite lives.

It is the wedding of Husain's daughter, Fatima Kubra, and Hasan's son, Qasim, moments before the battle of Karbala, that gave the tragedy characteristics of an ill-fated romance in Sauda's marsiyas. Even though this wedding narrative most likely did not appear in Arabic or Persian sources prior to Kashifi's rendering of it in *Rawẓat al-Shuhadā* (almost eight centuries after the event of Karbala), in South Asia, Qasim's wedding holds tremendous popular currency. Sauda embellishes his marsiyas by depicting the wedding of Qasim in terms of North Indian weddings. The texts of the wedding scene and rituals are all incorporated into the Karbala narrative. These rituals include the *sehra* (the veil of flowers that the groom and the bride wear on their wedding day), the *ārsī muṣḥaf* (the ritual of the "mirror and book" through which the bride and the groom cast glances at each other through a mirror placed on the Quran),[40] and the demand for *nēg* (money given by the groom to his sister before he approaches his bride). Furthermore, Sauda's use of *lagan* (the bronze or copper pan used for cooking sweet rice before a wedding), *naubat* (the music played during cheerful ceremonies), lighting of the houses, traditional colorplay prior to a wedding, and the *sāchaq* (the ceremony before a wedding

wherein the groom's family brings gifts, including the wedding garments, for the bride) give the seventh-century wedding of Karbala a subcontinental flavor.

Sauda also incorporates the beliefs and superstitions prevalent in his day about widowhood:

> The mother of [Qasim's] bride would lament and say:
> The gossip of our acquaintances is even harder to bear
> Than my daughter's widowhood
> They claim the bride's feet were inauspicious for the groom . . .
> "The bride's countenance turned out to be inauspicious for the groom
> The vision of her face, in arsi mushaf set his destiny for heaven . . . "
> Some will say "So strange is the bride's fortune
> She was called a widow as soon as she got married"
> How can I look the groom's mother in the face
> When this wedding has taken the apple of her eye?[41]

Sauda discusses the mother of Qasim's bride as if she were a North Indian woman, overpowered by pangs of remorse, concerned with the reputation of her family after the doomed wedding of her daughter, and embarrassed to be culpable for her son-in-law's death.

Sauda wrote in a literary milieu in which the liberal Urdu rendition of *Rawẓat al-Shuhadā,* Fazal Ali Fazli's *Karbal Kathā,* which was one of the earliest prose works of North Indian Urdu (compiled around 1756 C.E.), privileges the pain and suffering of Muslim widowhood over Hindu widowhood.

> Widows who commit sati burn to death on the pyre
> but this is falsehood, not truth—indeed, it is infidelity!
> truth is that by which we are burned[42]

In Fazli's verses, Muslim women endured far greater hardships leading a widow's life than did many of their Hindu counterparts whose life simply came to an end.[43] The practice of *sati,* or widow-burning, as Lata Mani states, was a "predominantly upper-caste Hindu practice" that was by no means the fate of all Hindu widows. The scriptural basis for this practice was and still is open to debate. The position from which Fazli assesses the institution of sati, however, is that of a Muslim man, who sees sati as a badge of honor for a reified/idealized Hindu woman. By throwing herself on her husband's funeral pyre, this Hindu woman lives up to the highest ideals of a self-sacrificing wife. Since sati is not a practice endorsed by Islam, how is the Muslim widow to show fidelity to her husband? She must prove to the world that she can endure as much suffering in life as a Hindu woman endures in the process of ending her life. But what does Fazli conclude of the Hindu woman who does not go through sati? Is her suffering, and the abuses to which she is frequently subjected in the Indian subcontinent, any different from those of her Muslim counterpart? Although we do not have an answer from Fazli, as Lata Mani has pointed out in her excellent work dealing with this practice, the voices of wid-

ows/women are not heard in this discourse of honor and sacrifice. These discourses give men the advantage of capturing the sacrificial moral high ground for their women, at the expense of any real concern for those who live the lives of widows or those who are fated to die as its consequence.

The stigma attached to widowhood and widow remarriage in parts of India was much greater than in the Arab world. The Prophet himself married several widows and early Islamic discourses reflect no protest whatsoever against such a practice. But in Sauda's Karbala narrative, as in Fazli's, South Asian norms and taboos hold the literary field. Although Urdu literature has, historically, shown extensive kinship with its Persian and Arabic counterparts, when we look at the works of the likes of Fazli and Sauda, we are also bound to acknowledge their somewhat maverick use of symbols as influenced by their environs on the subcontinent. Such usages were especially encouraged by the rulers of the North Indian state of Awadh.

Awadh and the Evolution of the Marsiya Tradition

With the advent of the eighteenth century, Mughal rule became increasingly weak and decentralized, and there emerged a number of successor states that quickly gained considerable autonomy. For our purposes, the successor state of Awadh and its power center, the city of Lucknow, are the most important for it was here that the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century marsiya genre blossomed in its finest forms. The rulers of Awadh, from Burhanul Mulk (d. 1739 C.E.) onwards, energetically advocated the privileged position of Ali and his progeny in Islamic culture. Shii luminaries from Iran gravitated to this region. The rule of the Iranian Safavid dynasty was at an end, and its scholars and artists had migrated in search of patronage. As with the Iranian influx into the Deccan in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the arrival of these Iranians, too, was facilitated by an aristocratic attitude that ennobled the newly-arrived Iranians. That Burhanul Mulk (the first semi-autonomous ruler of Awadh) was himself ethnically Iranian only helped in legitimizing the privileged status of these people.[44] Two of the finest marsiya writers who received patronage from the Awadh rulers, and without mention of whom the history of Urdu literature simply cannot be written, are Mirza Dabir and Mir Anis.

Mirza Dabir

Mirza Dabir (1803–1875) was born in Delhi, then moved to Lucknow.[45] His teacher Mir Zamir was, according to many Urdu critics, the inventor of the modern marsiya, in that he extended the length of the marsiyas from its original 50 stanzas, to 58–72 stanzas.[46] It was around the time of Dabir that the marsiya developed those desirable components that enhanced its artistic status and lent it an epic-like aura.[47] The ideal marsiya opens with a *chehrā,* the section that leads the reader/listener into the subject of that particular marsiya through

a verbal sketch of the description of a particular time of the day, the difficulties of traveling in a desert, or the praise of Allah (*ḥamd*), Muhammad (nat), or Ali and the Imams (*manqabat*). This section is followed by a *mājara,* an incident that introduces the virtues of the main character of the marsiya. The *sarāpā*, a vivid head-to-toe description of the main character, follows the majara. After this description comes the narration regarding the hero's farewell, or *ruḳhṣat,* to his relatives. Then comes the *āmad,* or the arrival of the hero on the battlefield. At times, this section contains elaborate descriptions of the hero's horse or sword. After arriving on the battlefield, the hero himself resorts to vigorous battle poetry (*rajaz*) in order to defend his valor, ancestry, and (most of all) his reasons for the confrontation. The battle (*jañg*) component of the marsiya begins with such a challenge. In this section the traits of the hero and his adversaries are polarized so as to describe the hero as a god-fearing man of courage and his enemies as mere cowards. The heroes of the marsiyas end up killing scores of their enemies before they themselves attain martyrdom. The hero only "falls" at the command of Allah; for if it were left to him, he would finish off all his adversaries. The death of the hero generates the next marsiya component, the most heart-rending laments (*bain*) of the survivors, especially the women, whom the hero left behind. After these laments, the poet ends the marsiya with a prayer (*duʿā*) for this life (*dunyā*) and the hereafter (*ʿāqibat*), or for the chance to visit the shrines of the imams (ziyarat). Although many marsiyas share this structure, it is not essential; often, all the components up to the bain are bypassed, if time is short. The pathos-laden (*mubkī*) components of the marsiya are more frequently recited in the popular majlis setting than are the epic-like elements drawn from the sarapa or rajaz.

One of Dabir's earliest marsiyas[48] explores this mubki component by underscoring the psychological aspect of a character.[49] The plot of this marsiya is based on an imaginative incident in which Husain's wife and Ali Asghar's mother, Shahr Bano, suffers the pangs of sorrow after the death of her six-month-old son. As the reader/listener is lead into the marsiya, a vivid picture of the mourning mother is painted:

Bano weeps for Asghar as night draws to a close
All God's creatures slumber, she alone remains vigilant
She beats her head and loses all hope
What a strange sorrow this is! Can it not be consoled?
Beating her head, she swoons
As cries of "Ali Asghar! Ali Asghar!" are heard
Sometimes, she sits in a corner, covering her mouth to stifle her sobs
Sometimes she comes out into the courtyard, terrified
Clutching her womb she roams hither and thither
She searches, but where is Asghar?
Her body trembles, her face is pale
Her heart writhes in agony and pain fills her breast
Sometimes she says, "Darkness has engulfed my home
Separation from Ali Asghar has killed me

Alas! I am at home while my dear child is in the jungle
If only death had pity there would be liberation from all of this
How long can my nights be spent in lamentation and weeping?
Oh God! May Ali Asghar remember me now"
With arms outstretched, sometimes she says, "Come my dear one!"
My soul is restive, come, O Ali Asghar, come
My heart writhes in agony, come to my embrace
For the sake of Fatima, come! For the sake of Haidar, come!
You lost your life for want of a drop of water . . .
Come embrace me my son
Extinguish the fire in my burning heart
Let your dry lips touch mine
Let me see that moon-like face of yours just one more time
Off then to heaven
Your mother will never call you back
I won't delay you for more than a moment
I used to sing lullabies to you, O precious one
You used to lie in the cradle and laugh
You used to toddle along
Holding your shirt, I would be there for you
Alas! Fate has snatched you from your parents
It has put you to sleep in a desolated jungle[50]

Shahr Bano is reminded of every movement of her beloved child. She recalls this innocent martyr's virtues and then complains to him that he has forgotten the one who nurtured him. However, she reminds herself that she fell short in serving her son. She neither celebrated his birthday, nor saw him grow beyond infancy.

Even today this is one of the most common elegies recited throughout the Muharram season. The images it evokes of a helpless mother's laments in the wake of her tender son's death are ideal for any commemorative gathering held for the purpose of weeping. At the same time, such an elegy reflects the degree to which the marsiya writers use their own imaginative license to evoke various events associated with Karbala. That the Imam's infant child was murdered mercilessly in the arms of the father is a story passed down for centuries. It is the elegy writer's prerogative to imaginatively render the mother's suffering into verse. The poignancy of martyrdom within these verses is not couched in sophisticated theological language; it is expressed by evoking the toil and tears of those left behind, through lullabies that become nemeses.

Dabir did this masterfully, and his virtuosity is mainly reflected in the way he conveys human emotions. Such a deployment of language and emotions, however, was not always favorably received. For example, Muhammad Sadiq, a much-quoted historian-critic of Urdu literature, claims that the marsiyas of Dabir and his ilk abrogate the lofty status of the Prophet's family, while inflicting on the reader-listener unrealistic, unfair, and contrived language:

> By assigning such a large place to pathos the poets as well as their readers and listeners appear to have overlooked a very important fact, namely, that if the characters are made to wallow in distress, they will come perilously close to losing their dignity, and therefore forfeit the readers' respect.[51]

Far from "forfeiting the readers' respect," the admiration that devotees of the Imam Husain and many students of Urdu literature have for Dabir's poetry undermines Sadiq's assessment of the Urdu marsiya. The marsiya cited above, like the elegiac verses of Sauda, participates in the cultural currents of nineteenth-century South Asia that in turn play their part in creating a particular aesthetic—one that deliberately undermines the Hindu-Muslim divisions within society. This genre helped to secure a transcommunal, religiously cosmopolitan spirit by downplaying the Muslimness/Shiiness of the Karbala heroes. The pliable marsiya narratives of nineteenth-century North India are by and large about topics to which all members of the city, Hindu or Muslim, can relate. Marsiyas were crafted to convey an aura of devotion that accommodates the human, as well as the superhuman, side of the martyrs of Karbala, much as Hindu devotional traditions (*bhakti*) include popularly-crafted loving verses for Krishna, a manifestation of the Divine. It was for this reason, perhaps, that many Hindus, too, were drawn to marsiya writing. In fact, Mirza Dabir provided guidance in marsiya writing to several Hindu students of this art, and Dabir's contemporary and rival Mir Anis applauded two verses of a certain Hindu writer as equal to his own entire poetic corpus.[52] The religiously cosmopolitan culture of Dabir's larger world is reflected by the fine historian of Lucknow, Juan Cole: "Syncretism and cultural intermediaries, such as readers of elegiac poetry, helped create a Shi'i tinged traditional culture in a society where, among the popular classes, religious communal identity was still weak or at least not exclusivist in tone."[53]

Mir Anis

Any discussion of Dabir in South Asia is usually accompanied by comparisons between him and his chief rival, Mir Anis. Mir Anis's masterfully crafted elegies earned the marsiya Graham Bailie's accolade as "the highest form of Urdu poetry."[54] Anis came from an artistic family recognized for its sophisticated use of the language. Anis first entered the world of poetry by composing ghazals.[55] Although we have too few samples to pass judgment on his ghazals, they do contain couplets that show an acute sensibility to diction and *nāzuk ḳhayālī,* or the "delicacy of thought:"

> miśāl-e māhī-e be āb mauj taṛpā kī
> ḥabāb phūṭ ke ro'e jo tum nahā ke chale
>
> The waves writhed like a fish out of water
> And the droplets burst into tears
> When you left after bathing

Not the least of the virtuosity of this couplet is that it conveys the imagery of separation through nuanced water imagery. The writhing of a fish pulled out of water is compared to the restless, fluttering oceanic waves that also seem to have been separated from their source—in the same way that water droplets "burst into tears" as the body is dried after a bath. This couplet is a good example of the much-favored rhetorical device in Perso-Urdu poetry, the *ḥusn-e taʿlīl,* or "poetical etiology," through which the poet provides a fantastic cause for an otherwise routine event.[56] These techniques of ghazal delicacy that Anis mastered early in his life undoubtedly helped him in his later marsiya writings. Here Anis describes the arrival of the Imam's horse, with the most innovative metaphors:

āmad faras kī thī dulhan ātī hai jis ṭaraḥ
tham tham ke nakhat-e chaman ātī hai jis ṭaraḥ
taṣvīr-e āhū-e ḳhutan ātī hai jis ṭaraḥ
yā shamʿa sū-e anjuman ātī hai jis ṭaraḥ
bāham ṭayūr kahte the kabk-e darī hai yeh
ghoṛe chiraġh pā the ke beshak parī hai yeh[57]

The mount's advent resembled that of a bride in all her splendor
Like the gentle blowing of the garden's fragrant breeze
Like the portrait of the gazelle of Cathay
Or perhaps like the candle as it moves towards the assembly
In unison the birds twitter, "Certainly, this is the graceful Greek partridge"
And the horses rear back, neighing, "Doubtless, this is a fairy!"

Lest there be any doubt regarding the prowess of such a horse on the battlefield, Anis amplifies the majesty of the horse through a new set of metaphors in another marsiya:

haiñ yāl ke bāl aise ke sharmiñda ho sañbul
hamsar na ho kākul se kabhī ḥūr kī kākul
asvār hai is kā pisar-e ṣāḥib-e duldul
kahīʾe jo malak is ko nahīñ jāʾe taʾāmmul
hai dosh-e Muḥammad kā makīñ ḳhāna-e zīñ par
is nāz se rakhta nahīñ hai pāʾoñ zamīñ par[58]

Its mane is such that the fragrant hyacinth would be ashamed
The houris' tresses would never compare
Mounted by the son [Husain] of the Lord of Duldul [the Prophet Muhammad]
No confusion would there be, were it said, he is an angel
Upon the saddle is he who mounted the Prophet's back
Blessed with such an honor, the horse's hooves scarce touch the ground!

The horse, in all its majesty and grace, is compared to the heavenly houri promised to pious Muslim men in the afterlife. The mane of the Imam's horse

is similar to the fragrant plant, *sanbul,* to which the beloved of the ghazal is frequently compared. The overall beauty of the horse's mane is such that even the houris' tresses cannot rival it.

Does the horse not also have the privilege of being ridden by Husain, who had the honor of riding on the shoulders of the Prophet? Anis is alluding to the origins of one of the Imam Husain's very common epithets, *rākib-e dosh-e nabī,* or the Rider of the Prophet's Shoulders. Tradition has it that the Imam Husain, as a small child, used to ride on the Prophet's back. One time he even climbed the Prophet's back while the Prophet was prostrate in prayer. The Prophet so loved Husain that he did not rise from his position as long as Husain stayed on his back. The Prophet also pretended to be a camel so that both his grandsons could ride on him. He moved on his hands and knees, as the boys not only rode on his back but also insisted that he give them the reins. The Prophet lovingly provided his hair on demand, and even made the sounds of a camel.[59] Devotional poets frequently edify their audiences by referring to Husain as the son of the Lord of Duldul—Duldul being the name of the mule that the Prophet Muhammad rode when confronting Islam's adversaries. Hence it is not surprising that Husain's horse is so proud that it does not want to step on the lowly earth. Ultimately, Anis explains the horse's swiftness not through any of its own virtues, but because its rider has raised it to heights beyond imagination. In addition to the various rhetorical devices and aesthetic accoutrements, such as the *isti'āra* (metaphor), *tashbīh* (simile), and *madḥ-e muwajja,* or implied praise (praising the horse and by implication praising its rider), the stanzas have an amazing *ravānī* (flow), and *rabṭ* (internal harmony of diction) that render them euphonious.[60]

The two stanzas describing the virtues of the Imam's horse provide us with a good example of the ever-new elaboration of a single topic. Mir Anis himself acknowledges his mastery in presenting incidents and tropes in innumerable ways:

taʿrīf meñ chashme ko samañdar se milā dūñ
qaṭ̣re ko jo dūñ āb to gauhar se milā dūñ
żarre kī chamak mahr-e munavvar se milā dūñ
ḳẖāroñ ko nazākat meñ gul-e tar se milā dūñ
guldasta-e maʿnī ko naʾe ḍẖañg se bāñdhūñ
ik phūl kā maẓmūn ho to sau rañg se bāñdhūñ[61]

My praise of a fountain would cause an ocean of meaning to spring from it
I shall honor a dewdrop such that it overflows with pearls
Such shall I make an atom shine that the radiant sun rises from it
I shall bestow such delicacy upon the thorn that the rose will seek refuge in it
In ever new styles shall I arrange the bouquet of meanings
If the subject is a flower, I would paint it a hundred hues!

Such imagery might seem irrelevant to a discussion of the marsiya, yet, it is important because of the degree to which the ghazal imagery figures into

Anis' and Dabir's elegiac poetry and colors the Karbala narrative that they present.[62]

In addition to the ghazal imagery, the marsiyas of Anis and Dabir also tap the literary energy of their times that flowed through the popular Persian epic tradition, most notably through Abul Qasim Firdawsi's *Shāhnāma,* or, *Book of Kings*. The *Shāhnāma,* which was completed in 1010 C.E., had a strong cultural influence both in Iran and in those regions that have been influenced by Persian cultural traditions. The story of larger-than-life kings and heroes of Persia, most notable of whom is Rustam, is told against the background of the legendary Iranian-Turanian conflict. When versifying the battle of Karbala, references to the heroes and other characters of the *Shāhnāma* were ubiquitous in North India. For example, the name that the marsiya poets give to the horse of the Imam Husain's son (Ali Akbar) is the name of Rustam's horse—Rakhsh, meaning lightning or rainbow.[63] As Shibli Numani has shown in his monumental study of the marsiya tradition, when reading about the heroes and battles of (seventh-century) Karbala, a reader familiar with the *Shāhnāma* cannot miss the allusions to, and influence of, the eleventh-century Perisan epic.[64] The Urdu marsiya writers were heir to Persian literary traditions; and these traditions, whether in the ghazal mode or in their epic form, provided ever-new aspects to the images of Karbala that were projected in the nineteenth century.

Anis and Dabir: Two of a Kind

Anis and Dabir not only used the tropes, similes, and rhetorical devices of the ghazal, *qaṣīda,* and various other popular genres of the time, but also engaged in an *agon*-like contest wherein each vied to surpass the other in the art of the marsiya. With the late nineteenth-century canon formation of Urdu literary history, which was heavily influenced by Muhammad Husain Azad's *Āb-e Ḥayāt* (*Water of Life,* first published in 1880), a discussion of the Anis-Dabir rivalry became commonplace in most histories and criticism of the Urdu marsiya. The invocation of this rivalry is a paean to the fertile and pluralistic literary landscape of Lucknow that nurtured commemorations of Karbala, and to the narratives of Karbala that proceed along diverse trajectories. Many historians of Urdu literature see the versification of Karbala during this period as a product of the Anis-Dabir competitive spirit. These historians tell us that both Anis and Dabir desired recognition as marsiya writers in their own right and superior to the other. Dabir was an established marsiya writer in Lucknow before Anis. The competitive rivalry, also discussed with much delight in Shii literary circles, began when Anis moved to Lucknow from Faizabad, once the cultural center and capital of the rulers of Awadh. The entire city was split into two camps: the party of Anis, or the *Anīsiye* and the party of Dabir, or the *Dabīriye*. Each master wrote in response to the other. For example, they envisioned the last sentiments, humility, and prayers of the Imam Husain in different ways. Mirza Dabir voices one of the sections of the Imam's prayers:

peshkash lāsha-e Aṣġhar hī bhalā lā'e Ḥusain
hāth ḳẖālī tere darbār meñ kyā ā'e Ḥusain

How can Husain bring only Asghar's corpse as a gift?
Yet how can Husain enter Your court empty-handed?

Anis echoes similar sentiments with different inflections:

ko'ī hadīya tere lā'iq nahīñ pātā hai Ḥusain
hāth ḳẖālī tere darbār meñ ātā hai Ḥusain[65]

Husain finds no gift worthy of You
Thus he enters Your court empty-handed

Both poets describe the humility with which the Imam approaches the court of the Almighty through martyrdom. According to Dabir, even the Imam's most painful sacrifice, that of his six-month-old son Ali Asghar, is reluctantly presented by the Imam to Allah just so that he does not have to enter the court of the king of both worlds empty-handed. But Anis's Husain is unable to find a single suitable gift. In spite of his numerous sacrifices, the Imam feels so indebted to Allah that he cannot conceive of an appropriate gift for the Lord. The Husain of Anis competes with the Husain of Dabir, vying to find the most appropriate gift for the Almighty. This example shows us how elegy composers availed themselves of not only the ghazal vocabulary but also of principles such as intertextual theme creation and refashioning (*maẓmūn āfirīnī*), a cherished aesthetic convention that enriches the ghazal universe.[66] Although the themes (*maẓmūn*s) of both couplets cited above are similar (gift-giving and humility), the two poets tread the poetic landscape with different styles. Whereas Dabir's couplet serves to underscore the insignificance/smallness of the gift with which Husain enters the Divine court, thereby demonstrating the Imam's magnanimity, Anis's couplet marvels at Husain's graciousness even further.

When reading such verses, one must take into account how the discourses of Karbala were modeled on and sustained by Indian court rituals that required those entering the ruler's court as official guests or visitors to present a gift, *nażar*, for the ruler.[67] One might also speculate that such religiously-charged descriptions of the court rituals, or the courtly descriptions of religious events, served to legitimize the ruling authority of the rulers/patrons and, by extension, legitimized the authority of God. The agon between Dabir and Anis, far from concerning the merits of the Imam Husain or the rulership of God, must also be viewed as a ritual that affirmed the courtly status quo.

Literary and popular lore has it that there were also occasions when the literary agon between Anis and Dabir degenerated into poetic duels wherein the subject was no longer the Imam or Karbala but *sirqah*, or plagiarism. Dabir proclaims his own undisputed authority:

Don't decree that the thieves of topics be forbidden to go about their jobs
You are the *mujtahid* of poetry
It is their duty to emulate you[68]

Many Shias believe that the guidance of a high religious authority (mujtahid) is essential in spiritual and worldly matters; Dabir considers himself worthy of the same authority in the realm of poetry and playfully ennobles the imitators of his poetry by calling them his followers. Anis, too, complains against the thieves of his poetry:

> Has the wealth of talent ever been safe from thieves?
> When they can escape watchful eyes they take it and flee
> Deliverance from thieves of topics is impossible
> It's true! Has sugar ever been safe from flies?[69]

This rivalry only helped in the advancement of the marsiya genre, since it forced both Anis and Dabir not only to respond to each other poetically, but also to try their hands at superseding each other's craft of language. As Masud Hasan Rizvi writes in his Urdu critical work:

> These literary fields of battle, day in and day out, only enhanced the knowledge of the people by lifting their poetic sensibilities and awakening their critical consciousness. The literary expanse of Lucknow was never so lofty as it was during the time of Anis and Dabir.[70]

The Art of Marsiya Recitation

The tremendous duo of Mir Anis and Mirza Dabir built their legacy on the strength of their compositions, though we must not underestimate their appeal as orators. As Naiyar Masud illustrates so well in his book *Marsiya Ḳhwānī kā Fan* (*The Art of Marsiya Recitation*), the delivery of a marsiya is almost as important as its writing. Once Anis asked his young grandson if he wanted to be a marsiya reciter; when the grandson replied in the affirmative, Anis told him that he would have to learn the language of women and animals to be an effective marsiya reciter.[71] The marsiya reciters of this time had to take on the persona of the different characters present in the marsiya. They had to effectively play the roles of these characters, and thus in some ways partake in the Karbala tragedy, while not completely effacing their own personality.[72] This was a delicate balance to maintain. It was as though the marsiya reciters had to act without becoming "actors." While actors dress and act the parts of their characters, the marsiya reciters perform using only changes in mannerisms, facial expressions, and bodily gestures. A male marsiya reciter cannot, for example, produce a feminine voice or don a woman's garb when narrating a woman's lines, lest he become a jester.[73]

Naiyar Masud also points out that at times, in order to understand all the nuances of a marsiya, it is not enough to read or hear it; rather, one must actually see the marsiya reciter performing. Once Mir Anis recited this quatrain from the pulpit:

pīrī āʾī ʿiżār be nūr hūʾe
yārān-e shabāb pās se dūr hūʾe
lāzim hai kafan kī yād har vaqt Anīs
jo mushk se bāl the kāfūr hūʾe[74]

old age has arrived, the countenance has lost its glow
the friends of youth, once close, have departed
Anis! Remembering the shroud is incumbent at every moment
hair that was black as musk has turned white as camphor

This of course is a meditative quatrain announcing the advent of old age and the departure of youth. A layperson might interpret the second line to mean that with the passage of time, many a friend of youth has been lost to death. However, when Anis recited this line, he pointed to his teeth. Since the teeth also become victims of old age, and in keeping with his physical imagery, we understand that Anis is describing the teeth through the metaphor of "friends of youth" from whom the poet/reciter has been parted.[75] With this example, Masud explains that there are images used by Mir Anis and others like him that can no longer be retrieved, for they were contingent not upon the literary/written aspect of the work but on its presentation in the marsiya performance. It is helpful to see the written narratives of Karbala as part of a dialogic relationship with the performative elements, since many of the written texts became effective through the performance. In view of the significance of dramatic and theatrical traditions in Lucknow under the patronage of the ruling authorities of the time, we can even see a continuum between the marsiya tradition and the theater culture: Marsiyas at times constituted the visualized evocation of Karbala—perhaps in a way similar to that of the *taziyeh* (passion play) in Iran. Although it is close in spirit to the Iranian taziyeh, unlike the Iranian Muharram plays, in which Husain's devotees act out events from the Karbala story using props and sets, marsiya reciters in the subcontinent perform Karbala using hand gestures and voice intonations. Since many Muslims in the subcontinent perceived theater as trivial entertainment, they exercised a certain caution to ensure that the majlis did not become 'merely' a theatrical performance.

During the 1850s, the British annexed the region of Awadh, and the Shii ruling powers that had promoted particular aesthetics tied to the event of Karbala collapsed. Patronage of marsiya writers and reciters declined as Urdu itself became distinctly tied to the Muslim community.[76] With the nineteenth century drawing to a close, the marsiya tradition was also burdened by an increasingly rigid religious exclusivism; the Shii majlis ceased to provide an adequate forum for shared cultural discourses. The practical effect of this exclusivism was the stronger identification of the marsiya tradition with the Shii community. The Shii community felt that its Islamic credentials were on the defensive because of its minority status (not even 5 percent of the total population of Lucknow in the mid-1800s)[77] and the challenges of the Sunni religious authorities. Consequently, Shias acclimatized the majlis gatherings to the emerging polemical altercations, most of them against Sunnis. (This issue will be dis-

cussed in more detail in chapter 3.) The tradition of *żākirī* (sermonizing) in the majlis gatherings developed within this context of minority identity politics and polemics. And although the tradition of zakiri often involves prose narrations of Karbala, the marsiyas of Anis and Dabir stand at the heart of it. Rashid Turabi mastered this tradition better than any other Urdu *zākir*. In fact, some of his admirers considered him *naśr ke Anīs,* or the Anis of prose.[78] A good zakir, apart from rhetorically mastering the polemical Shii worldview, had to abide by the parameters of the marsiya reciter. Thus it is only natural that Rashid Turabi relied heavily upon the aesthetically cherished poetry of Mir Anis and the performative marsiya tradition in order to be more effective.

Segment 4 of the Majlis: The Zikr

The marsiya is usually followed by zikr, or recollection—also frequently referred to as bayan, hadis, or just majlis—this is usually the only prose narrative (although often adorned with quotations of poetry) in the ritual of majlis. The zikr, like the marsiya, has a specific underlying moral that is conveyed by one or two illustrations. It is divided roughly into two parts: (1) the virtues and merits (fazail) of the Prophet's family, including an account of why Shias, who privilege the Prophet's progeny through Ali and Fatima over all others, are a legitimate sect within Islam, and (2) a narration of the hardships (*maṣāʾib*) that afflicted the Prophet's family members when they were safeguarding Islam.

Let us look briefly at a zikr by the late zakir Rashid Turabi. Born in 1908 in Hyderabad, Deccan, Turabi studied philosophy and Islam in Allahabad and Lucknow in the 1930s. After returning to Hyderabad, which was one of the largest Indian princely states, he became involved in politics grounded in the concerns of the Muslims of the region. Turabi was of the opinion that Indian Muslims needed their own state—a state that would guarantee protection to those who wanted to practice Islam. When such a state was created in 1947, after much bloodshed, Turabi decided to leave the princely state of Hyderabad (which soon became part of India) and migrate to Pakistan. In Pakistan, Turabi rapidly gained popularity as one of its foremost orators. His speeches were broadcast on Radio Pakistan, once the medium became widespread in the 1960s. Such is his fame even today that a popular wall calendar published in Hyderabad marks his death anniversary along with the death anniversaries of other prominent members of the Prophet's family—no one else in the past millennium has received this honor.

Let me now turn to a zikr by Rashid Turabi. This zikr, recorded in the early 1970s from Radio Pakistan, is still listened to fondly by Urdu-speaking Shias around the world.[79] Turabi begins with the introduction (*sarnāmah*),[80] usually a verse from the Quran that sets the tone for the zikr by announcing its theme. In the zikr we are discussing, the introduction is drawn from the nineteenth *sūra* of the Quran (*Sūrat Maryam*), named after Mary, Jesus' mother:

> These are they on whom God bestowed [His] bounties, from among the prophets of the posterity of Adam; and of those whom We did

> bare with Noah, and of the posterity of Abraham and Israel, and of those whom We did guide and We did choose; When the signs of the Beneficent (God) were rehearsed unto them, they fell down prostrating and weeping.[81]

The rest of the zikr expands on this introduction by praising those who prostrated in the most exemplary manner, and lauding the sufferings they underwent to safeguard God's path. The topic of this zikr is thus *sajda* (prostration).

Turabi proceeds to his explication of the Quranic verse by attributing prostration to the noblest of God's creation: the prophets, the saints, and the gnostics. The audiences are reminded that the word sajda appears in the Quran 64 times; he quotes a few of these instances. Then he articulates the philosophy behind the prostration: it is the highest expression of worship, an act by which the human essence is annihilated and subsistence in a higher entity is sought. Prostration grants the human being success and victory, providing courage that cannot be obtained otherwise. In order to strengthen his argument, Turabi reminds his audience of a Quranic incident in which Moses is confronted by Pharaoh's magicians. Moses's rod swallows all the magicians' snakes; having witnessed this, the magicians fall prostrate in front of the Almighty. It is the strength of their prostration that sustains them in the face of Pharaoh. Those who do not prostrate, within this discourse, are diabolical. After all, it was Iblis (Satan) who refused to prostrate to Adam at God's command, and was thrown out of heaven as a consequence.

Turabi asserts that since Islam considers itself to be the perfection of all other previously revealed traditions, it is up to Islam to provide the example for prostration. This example is discussed through the verses of two prominent poets of Urdu, Muhammad Iqbal (1873–1938) and Mir Taqi Mir (d. 1810). Both emphasize the importance of prostration by alluding admiringly to "the one who prostrated under the sword." Muhammad Iqbal glorifies Husain in the following Persian verse:

> He who granted faith to the faithless
> He, at whose prostrations the earth trembled

Mir Taqi Mir pays his tribute to genuine prostration in the context of the ghazal, by distinguishing it from ritualistic prostration:

> Lounging around the Ḥaram [Kaba], the Shaykh prays twice the normal time,
> But were he capable of prostrating under the shadow of that sword even once,
> I would salute him[82]

Turabi clarifies his reason for invoking these couplets: not all prostrations are equal. The many prostrations of a shaykh, a religious leader, for hours in the holy shrine of Mecca are insignificant compared to that one prostration performed under the sword—the latter prostration moves up from a ritual act to

bold action. So strong is this prostration that not only does it bestow faith upon the faithless (through example), but the very earth begins to quake in awe of it. Turabi invokes a ghazal couplet that makes no references to Karbala in its original context, yet conveys the historical significance of Husain's prostration.

Thus, with Husain, we transcend a simple ritualized prostration and enter the realm of the most demanding of prostrations—that which is performed under the sword. Now that the virtues (fazail) of the Imam have been firmly established by attributing to him the ideal prostration, Rashid Turabi moves on to lament the calamities (masaib) that befell the Imam as he sought to preserve the essence of the true prostration for eternity.

Having sustained numerous injuries, Husain fought on for his grandfather's religion. His battle for the righteous cause was witnessed by none other than the Prophet's daughter, Fatima, who, in agony over her son's suffering, had abandoned her heavenly abode. Husain then fell into prostration and never lifted his head again. He perfected the tradition of prostration for all eternity. The zikr constitutes a site where Islam's ideals are established. These zikrs are frequently interjected with *dād* (praise) such as *subḥan Allāh* (all praise is due to God), *beshak* (no doubt), *kya kehne* (well said), and the most frequent one, salavat, which generates an *Allāhumma ṣalli ʿalā Muḥammadin wa āli Muḥammad* (O God, bless Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad).

In mourning assemblies exclusively for women, the role of the majlis reciter is usually reserved for a woman. These women reciters (*żākiras*) rely on the conventions of liberal narrative license just as much as the male zakirs do. The zikr*s* themselves, when performed by zakirs or zakiras, are mostly formulaic in their linear narrative, but can be profoundly creative in their mode of narration. Just as a ghazal poet may refashion old tropes and metaphors to suit new rhymes, rhythms, and topics, the zakir/zakira can also underscore particular aspects of the Karbala narrative by invoking cherished poetry (often with no connection to Karbala or martyrdom), and using verbal dexterity. Most Shias who attend these gatherings know by a very young age the basic frame narratives pertaining to the tragedy of Karbala. Thus, the attendees hardly expect to learn something new about the basic Karbala narratives from the majlis. In fact, one can argue that the majlis narratives conform to many characteristics and roles that the Russian literary theorist Vladimir Propp associates with folklore and fairy tales that derive their structural components from a transregional folk register. Like a fairy tale, the Karbala story, in its various versions, has its share of villains and heroes, helpers and dispatchers, princesses, their fathers, and false heroes.[83] Like fairy tales, these narratives come alive not so much because of what they contain but how they are told. The majlis audiences judge the zakir/zakira by the manner in which s/he aesthetically weaves stock characters and narratives into other discourses, such as that of educating or reforming the community, or simply reinforcing the community's sense of its own superiority. This weaving of discourses is often dictated by the assumptions about an "interpretive community," the targeted audience. Even when speaking of the Quran, some of its earliest commentators discussed this revelation as having different levels of meanings for different people.[84] The

mode in which the Quran speaks to lay members of the Muslim community might not be the mode in which it has an appeal to God's chosen prophets, who would presumably read it in the light of their wisdom, knowledge, and privileged status. When the prophets received their revelations, they communicated to their followers the spirit and philosophy behind these revelations, according to the spiritual acumen of their followers. Similarly, the zakirs/zakiras must also have a good understanding of the audience: their level of education, their socioeconomic status, their expectations from the majlis, and so on. At times this can be a difficult undertaking.

When a well-known zakir and scholarly authority of Shiism recounted a tradition, according to which, water (though not clean enough to drink) was available to the Imam Husain until the morning of ashura, his audience was outraged. The majority of Shias of the subcontinent believe that the Imam and his companions were prevented from fetching water from the Euphrates from the seventh of Muharram onwards. Although the aforementioned authority discussed this tradition in passing and in the context of the Imam's ablution, many members of the audience were furious that the Imam's thirst was somehow questioned by such a reference. This mention of water was promptly ejected from the subsequent reprints of his work.[85]

Another novice zakir's words backfired when he suggested in passing that the Imam's brother, Abbas, leaned for support on a few shrubs in the course of the Karbala battle. Although some audience members felt that the zakir meant to highlight Abbas's strategic skills, others were offended by this narration. The latter group had never heard the shrub story and felt that the zakir was implying that the Imam's brother was a coward—he relied on shrubs in order to overpower his enemies. This incident gained much notoriety and became the touchstone to challenge the zakir's mastery of history. When I asked a self-identified observant Shia why the shrub story mattered so much, he replied: "The answer is simple. Bollywood [a reference to India's Mumbai-based film industry] heroes shape religious images in India, whether it is of Rama or of Husain—can you imagine Amitabh or Dharmendra [two macho Hindi film actors] receiving assistance from shrubs when fighting their enemy? We don't want to hear about realistic military strategies; we want to hear the romantic and the exotic ones." A popular source of history for the zakirs suggests that the Imam Husain had more strength than 400,000 able-bodied men. Needless to say, not even the most hyperbolic Bollywood films have been able to depict such a character.

The reverberation between Karbala and Bollywood is also revealed through elegies modeled on popular film songs. The books in which these elegies appear suggest to the readers that particular elegies be recited according to the tunes of a particular film's songs or qawwalis.[86] In such works, Karbala is inserted into a pre-existing matrix of popular culture. Such insertions precipitate dismay in many Shii circles, where Indian films are seen as distorted and vulgar representations of life. However, a number of young Shii women and men with whom I discussed this issue actually found the Bollywood element in elegies helpful; it made the elegies more mnemonic. Furthermore, with the

number of students in the subcontinent studying the classical marsiyas of Anis and Dabir shrinking (Urdu lost a substantial amount of state patronage in India after 1947), an appreciative comprehension of the nineteenth-century marsiya is rapidly eroding. If nineteenth-century teenagers identified the Karbala characters with the epic characters to whom they were exposed, centainly twenty-first-century teenagers can appreciate Karbala through Bollywood's lenses.

But, the line between speaking of Karbala martyrs as though they are Bollywood heroes and exaggerating their prowess so as to make them appear farcical is a fine one. If the zakir is perceived by the audience to excessively exaggerate the pain and suffering of the Prophet's household, then he can also become the object of lasting mockery and skepticism. When a popular zakir of Hyderabad recited details of suffering to which the audience had not been hitherto exposed, the zakir was tauntingly referred to as "Triple M—Masaib [Afflictions] Manufacturing Machine."[87]

While such a "manufacturing" can be valorized through the discourse of narrative license and intertextuality on one level, it can bear the serious stigma of *taḥrīf* (distortion/falsification) on another. It is incumbent upon many zakirs to separate narrative liberty (the narration of Karbala through ever-new couplets and ideological outlooks) from tahrif (presenting Karbala in a way that makes it more fantastic than real), this is particularly true after the Islamic revolution of Iran. The notion of tahrif has rapidly gained negative currency in Iran since the 1970s, when high-ranking Shii scholars like Murtada Mutahhari privileged a "realistic" reading of Karbala over a "romantic" one. The anti-tahrif discourse entails a deep distrust of the autonomous imagination and its poetic license. Scholars like Mutahhari have even tried to alter the reception of historic texts such as *Rawẓat al-Shuhadā* by branding them "a pack of lies."[88] A few attempts have been made, with varying degrees of success, to fix a more realistic version of the Karbala narrative, so that human beings can actually identify with the struggle of the Imam Husain and not dismiss it as a "superhuman" event. In the Iran of the 1970s, the anti-Shah forces deployed the "Karbala paradigm" in the majlis setting as a model for a revolutionary struggle. In the subcontinent, although a realistic narration of Karbala is welcomed in circles that are sympathetic to the Iranian revolution and value the instructive tone of the majlis, it is usually ignored in circles that conceive of the majlis as more devotional than instructional. Moreover, the definition of "realism" varies so much across the majlis audiences that it is impossible to speak of it as a fixed category. The reciters of Karbala are continually positioned along a spectrum that ranges from Karbala the real to Karbala the romantic.

In such a situation, it is apposite to point out that while elegy reciters[89] and even zakirs have great leeway in how much time they spend on recitation and what exactly they include in or omit from their narration, this leeway is only within the bounds of what the audience will find acceptable. When time is short, the soz is often left out; or, from the salam and marsiya, only the mubki verses are recited. The zikr can be as long as three hours, or as short as ten minutes; or, if a zakir is not readily available, it, too, can be omitted. Now, in the age of modern technology, a radio or a cassette-player is a possible

substitute for the zakir. The respect accorded to many zakirs and zakiras by and large flows from their status as narrators in the context of the majlis, and does not always reflect any personal reverence. In fact, in many Shii circles, the first people who are blamed for distorting Islam, Shiism, and the significance of Karbala are the zakirs. These Shii critics insist that the zakirs should be viewed as professional employees of the majlis, whose job it is to make people cry. They proceed to argue that just because the zakirs and zakiras are narrating the events of Karbala does not mean that they are scholars (*'ulamā*) of religion in any sense.

Segment 5 of the Majlis: The Nauha

The zikr is followed by the nauha, a dirge or threnody that can have various poetical structures, recited in tune. Many of these nauhas, like their salam and marsiya counterparts, use the present progressive tense to give the devotees of the Imam a sense that they, too, are willing to suffer for the Imam's cause. Such a tense ritualistically reinforces the immediacy and relevance of the event of Karbala for majlis audiences. For example, the nauha below vividly describes a plundered caravan going through the desert after its leader, the Imam Husain, has been martyred:

> Someone's looted caravan weaves its way through the wastelands of Arabia
> This sorrow clearly shows that someone's house has been wiped out
> Were the bride to raise her downcast eyes, she would see her groom's head on a lance
> Modestly she closes her eyes
> As though the flame of someone's heart has been extinguished
> The expressions on the faces of each and every one say, "we too had friends and helpers"
> But now uncovered heads say, "no longer can we turn to anyone for refuge."
> O my God! Did the children fight as well? I see a tiny head.
> His neatly combed hair shows that someone loved him very much
> Some heads are raised aloft on spears—all suns, moons and stars
> Someone's hair is drenched in blood
> Someone's mouth is open in thirst
> Some women ride as well, but without saddle or canopy
> Some have swooned from weakness
> Some are exhausted with drawn faces
> Ghayur! Ride forth and find out who heaves these cold sighs
> Certainly someone's young son must have been among these victims of sorrow[90]

That not a single name of any martyr, or even Karbala, is explicitly mentioned in the above nauha adds to its innovative, pathos-laden aspect. It is obvious to

the listeners who is described in each instance: the bride with her downcast eyes—Imam Husain's newly-married daughter whose husband of one night, Qasim bin Hasan, became a martyr in Karbala; the tiny, neatly-combed head of a child—Imam Husain's six-month-old son, Ali Asghar; the women riding without saddle or canopy—the women of the Prophet's household, such as Zainab, Kulsum, and Shahr Bano. What this nauha implies is that such was the magnitude of the Karbala tragedy that names cannot be mentioned lest it overwhelm the listeners. The nauha also gives a liberal interpretive license to the imagination of the readers/listeners. Like its structural counterparts, the ghazal and the salam, the nauha also closes with a couplet that incorporates the poet's pen name, in this case, Ghayur (Abid Ali Ghayur, d. 1953). The poet imagines himself as a participant within the unfolding tragedy of Karbala, a bridge between his own time and history, through the medium of his art.

Nauhas, like salams or marsiyas, can be recited solo or in a chorus. However, unlike other genres, they are usually accompanied by rhythmic chest beating (*mātam* or *sīna zanī*), another sign of mourning. It is with the recitation of nauhas in the background that the alams are usually raised. When nauhas are recited on the day of ashura, as the alams are being raised, it is a recreation of the departure of Imam Husain and his companions from their family members. The alams are at times accompanied by the replicas of the mausoleums of the Imams and can be considered yet another iconic means through which the devotees reach out to their objects of devotion. For most people these alams symbolize the resilience of the Imam's cause. These mementos can be seen either as a way to take the devotees back in time, or as a way to bring the incident of Karbala forward in time. It is as though by raising the banners of the Imam's cause, the community travels back in time to seventh-century Karbala to join the Imam's forces. At the same time, the alams are a reminder that the cause that was espoused on the sands of Karbala more than thirteen hundred years ago lives on with the same vitality. Other noteworthy icons that play a part in the majlis setting include the cradle of Imam Husain's six-month-old, Ali Asghar, and the one-of-a-kind horse that the Imam rode in Karbala, Zuljinah. Although in Hyderabad, Zuljinah is not a common Muharram icon, in cities like Lahore, this mount is the pivot of the ashura procession.

In addition to such icons, families also have mementos that they trace back to the lifetime of the Imams. A Shii family in Hyderabad claims to possess a garment worn by the Imam Husain's son, the fourth Shii Imam, Zain al-Abedin. Devotees can still go and pay their respects to it. The family cites as evidence of this shirt's power an incident when the entire house burned down, but not a spark touched the container that held the shirt. The fourth Imam is remembered as the one who was kept chained in prison for a considerable period of time. To pay tribute to his suffering, symbolic fetters are put on devotees during Muharram; thus people identify their cause with that of the Imam.

After the recitation of nauhas, the majlis culminates with the recitation of the ziyarat, or salutations upon not only the martyrs of Karbala but all the Imams and their followers. Depending upon the preferences of those con-

ducting the majlis, various types of consecrated food and juices (*tabarruk*) are served in the name of the martyrs. Some majlises are more popular than others. The majlises that are held on the ninth and tenth of Muharram attract thousands of Shias in Hyderabad, since these two days are perhaps the most solemn days of the Shii calendar. In most houses, the standards affixed to seat-like wooden platforms are raised on the ninth of Muharram to commemorate the Imam Husain's final moments. It is as though the dearest family members of all Shias are about to depart for the battlefield. Most people remain awake the entire night—some emulating the prayers the martyrs themselves prayed that night, others lamenting the imminent martyrdom of the Prophet's family.

The Day of Ashura

The break of dawn on the tenth of Muharram reminds many devotees of the call to prayer of the eighteen-year-old son of the Imam Husain, Ali Akbar. Such a call is once again made, usually by an eighteen-year-old youth, amidst the sobs of the prayer congregations. The rest of the day belongs to Husain. Some Shias sit on the prayer carpet all day long repeating the last prayers of the Imam while weeping intensely. Others go to witness or participate in Hyderabad's largest Muslim procession, in which the most sacred of Hyderabad's standards, the *bībī kā ʿalam,* is paraded (see figure 1.3). Legend has it that within the golden crest of this alam is a piece of wood from the platform on which Ali b. Abi Talib had performed the last rites of his wife, Fatima.[91] This standard, accompanied by a procession of thousands of male Shii mourners, is the object of veneration on ashura. The procession is preceded by drums, as though to announce the arrival of a medieval king. The procession of the bibi ka alam, the devotees believe, signifies several articles of truth: (1) Husain was Fatima's son and the Prophet's grandson, hence through this martyr one can draw closer to the Prophet and God. (2) Fatima herself came down from heaven mourning for her son; even though Husain had lost his worldly life on the plains of Karbala, his banner survives and it is behind this banner that the community walks. (3) And ultimate authority within Islam resides with the martyrs and saints of God like Husain, not with worldly rulers like Yazid. The standard, while evoking sorrow for the suffering of the Imam Husain, reaffirms the Imam's cause and realigns the mourners with this cause.

As children, we watched the procession from a dilapidated old house that had stood for at least a hundred years. Someone from our family had lived there a long time ago, but for the past sixty years it existed only to provide a spiderweb-festooned roof over peoples' heads—once a year, and that, too, for only a few hours. One of the house's columns also functioned as a clock tower in Hyderabad's old city, and several family members never ceased to marvel at this clock because it had never stopped: "After all it was imported from nineteenth-century Europe." Those grandmothers who had seen the house in its heyday reminisced about the glories of the British Raj and the reign of the Asif Jahi rulers, who ruled the large Hyderabad Princely State (after the Qutb

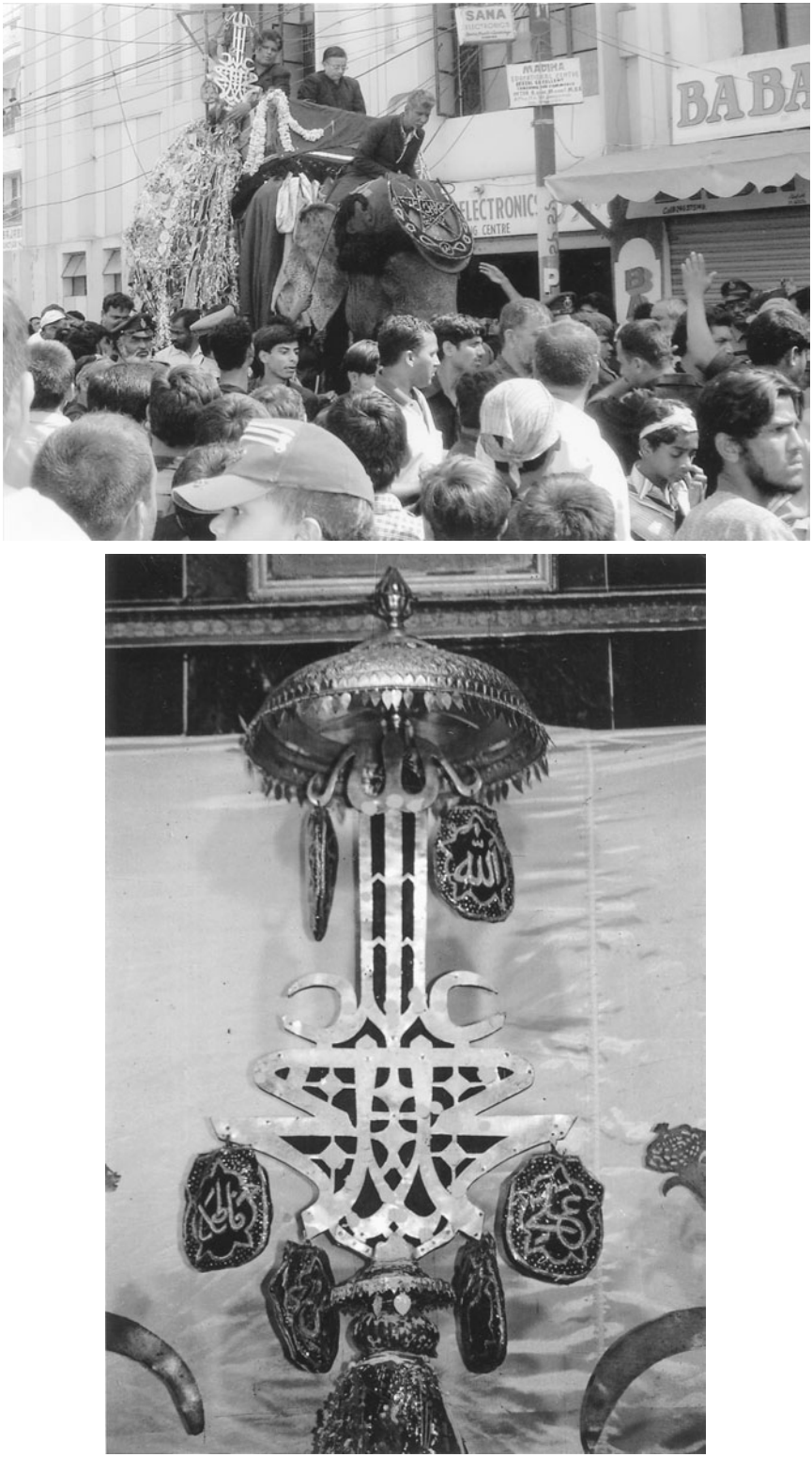


FIGURE 1.3 Bibi ka alam procession, Hyderabad, India; the bibi ka alam.

Shahis) for almost two centuries. The house had several sections but the traffic between these sections was minimal because recurring inter-family conflicts over inheritance, parental favoritism, and marriage decisions left bitter memories for most sides. So while the tenth of Muharram was meant as a day to meditate upon the events of Karbala, at least in our family, it also became an occasion to resurrect familial bickering over lost inheritance and to shed tears at the plight of postcolonial India as symbolized by the family's pitiful old house. Although all the members assembled in the house put on long faces and black clothes that marked them as a community of pensive devotees of Husain, it was obvious, from their unwillingness to mingle with the "other" side, that more mundane matters shaped their loyalties and identities, even on the most solemn of days.

While mourning the demise of a culture, and by extension, the family house, many family members commented on the "carnival atmosphere" that had come to characterize the tenth of Muharram. On this day, the streets of old city teemed with thousands of mourners in black attire and scores of people in hot pink clothes that unambiguously marked them as non-Shias. These non-Shias had come to see the *tamāshā* (spectacle) of the Shii chest-beating that accompanied the bibi ka alam. If one desires to witness the cross-section of Hyderabad life (beggars, flower vendors, expensive cars, camels, elephants, horses, and mules), there is no better occasion than the day of ashura in Hyderabad's old city. What many Shii and non-Shii children share on this day is a desire to purchase toys and junk food from the vendors who set up their booths along the bibi ka alam procession route. While a few grandmothers gave us a rupee or two to buy a small toy, one great-grandmother would severely reproach us for joining the unbelievers in making light of this day.

Amidst the elders' monologues concerning family feuds, unbelievers, and martyrdom, the bibi ka alam would arrive, with much anticipation, on an elephant. The younger family members tried to touch some part of the animal in order to secure the standard's blessings. A few bolder devotees would actually bend down and pass under the elephant's stomach. It was usually 3:00 PM by the time the standard passed our house. A majlis would be held soon afterwards, and then the family would eat its first meal of the day—a vegetarian meal, since many Shias avoided meat during Muharram because of its association with joyous times. The meal on the tenth of Muharram consists of *khichṛī* (rice cooked with lentils), *khaṭṭa* (tamarind soup), and *buttī* (yoghurt rice); butti, although a staple in many South Indian households, is eaten in most Shii Hyderabadi household only during this Muharram meal. Most Shias are hungry and thirsty all day long on the tenth of Muharram. This act of self-deprivation demonstrates solidarity with the Imam's hunger and thirst that marked his suffering for three days before he was martyred. We were cautioned not to call this day of hunger and thirst a fast (*roza*) since that was the designation given to it by those other Muslims, the Sunnis. The signifier roza would give the day auspicious connotations and it would be just like the days of Ramadan for all Muslims, and how could mourning Shias then consider this

day auspicious? We instead called this a day of *fāqa,* a day of poverty and hunger.

Defending Sorrow and Questioning Mourning

Muharram is undoubtedly the time of the year when Shias become most conscious of their sectarian religious identity. While many Sunnis (who are a majority of the Hyderabadi Muslim community) in Hyderabad commemorated Muharram by fasting, holding tributary assemblies for the martyrs of Karbala and consecrating food in their honor, some of my Sunni childhood friends viewed the Shii engagement (especially the ritual of breast-beating) with Muharram with humor or bafflement. It was common for Shii children to hear that the Shias were the ones who killed Husain and our gatherings of mourning were acts of repentance. When I related incidents such as this to my grandmother, she told me never to broach the topic of religion in school, since as a minority community we lacked protection. She said that it was a popular, albeit grossly mistaken, Sunni notion that implicated Shias in Husain's murder. She restated the reasons for commemoration once again: (1) Husain was martyred in order to safeguard the ideals of Islam; he and his family suffered immensely so that their followers could inherit a better world, a world free of Yazid. (2) Mourning was the least a community could do for its beloved leader. (3) The Prophet's daughter herself had ratified this tradition, and it would continue until the end of time. By mourning, whether through wailing or reciting elegies, we were expressing our solidarity with the Imam's cause—we were saying that had we been in Karbala with Husain, we, too, would have fought for him.

My grandmother also frequently asked us children to recite elegies. She had been apprenticed to Urdu poetry at an early age; when she read verses out of the Urdu elegy book, we had to repeat after her. This changed by the time I was eight, for then I could read the Urdu elegies myself, albeit with a less-than-ideal voice. Not only did I recite elegies in the gatherings of the elders, but we children, my cousins and I, would have our very own majlis. It was called *bachchoñ kī majlis* (the children's majlis) and it was not different from the elders' majlises, except in one respect: We children could never cry and wail as our elders did. At times when we tried our very best to cry, our theatrical sobs gave way to gales of laughter, much to our elders' dismay. That sorrow comes with age is self-evident to young Shias!

Mourning in the context of the majlis is obviously different from any other type of personal mourning. The mourners in a majlis never receive consolation from other mourners. Even when the majlis comes to a close, a few people continue to weep intensely for some time. Perhaps the most consolation they can expect is a glass of water. The practical merits of such weeping were often recounted by my grandmother: Fatima the Radiant, the Princess of both worlds, collects these tears and transforms them into pearls; these pearls are used for

the construction of palaces in Paradise, so as to provide accommodation for the mourners in the hereafter. The story that my grandmother repeatedly told was that her own grandmother had willed that she be buried with only two possessions: the soil from Karbala (*ḳhāk-e shafā*) and the handkerchief she had used year after year to wipe her tears during the majlis. The moral of the story was clear: These are the possessions that last in the hereafter, and shedding tears for the martyrs is surely not in vain. We had a running joke in the family that my grandfather's sister, when hosting her own majlis, routinely urged the leading zakira of Hyderabad, Latifunnisa Begum, to continue her oration until women began to faint and she could no longer project her voice in the wail-laden majlis. Before making people cry, the host of the majlis stipulated that the zakira repeat the merits of weeping for the cause of the Karbala martyrs. So instead of counting on the spontaneous generation of tears, the zakira at times induced them, by bribing the devotees with appealing visions of heaven. All the wailing then returned a reward of much anticipated tabarruk, the consecrated food given to the majlis attendees: mouth-watering goat kabobs and yoghurt salad over a large piece of bread.

Although the depictions of heaven as well as the merits of weeping seemed to flow from an endless ocean, and every imaginable reward was forthcoming for the shedding of tears, in our family the interpretation of Karbala was never rigid. That my great-grandfather (my grandmother's father), in spite of his Shii roots, played the piano on the tenth day of Muharram, in what amounted to an act of jubilation, was always a story that his daughter would recount with a smile, perhaps even with pride. The logic of such an act was concisely laid down: Husain was a brave soldier, who fought to save the religion from the hands of Yazid and ultimately won the war. This victory calls for rejoicing, not mourning. Mourning reflects loss and why should Husain's martyrdom be considered a loss?

One of my uncles, well-versed in Islamic mysticism and perpetually lamenting the departure of the British from India, echoed similar sentiments. While the grandmothers, through their playful smiles, pretended to dismiss him, he criticized what he considered an undue emphasis on mourning, especially manifested in chest-beating, while untreated sewage raised a powerful stench in the neighborhood. He lashed out at the religious leaders (*maulvīs*), and professional narrators of the Karbala event (zakirs) at every available opportunity: "They have ruined this religion. They themselves never beat their chests so violently, but they encourage their followers to do so. They will be the first ones who will face the fire of hell." He would then recite the harsh versified attack on the Shii sermon-givers by one of the great Urdu poets of the subcontinent, Josh Malihabadi:

> ʿālam-e aḳhlāq ko zer o zabar kartā hai tū
> ḳhūn-e ahl-e bait meñ luqme ko tar kartā hai tū[92]
>
> You turn the world of ethics topsy-turvy
> You soak your bread in the blood of the Prophet's household.

Debates Regarding Matam and Majlis

The larger debate about the issue of matam still continues to engage the community, and often polarize it. Matam in South Asia is the most significant and sensitive Shii identity marker. Even if Sunnis wore black clothes and attended Shii majlises, what reveals them as non-Shias is that they stand with folded hands while Shias beat their breasts. Matam is the ritual practice much criticized by Sunnis, many of whom believe that the Prophet Muhammad explicitly forbade such acts of mourning. Shias of course disagree, and some go to great lengths to justify this action. Most majlises end with matam, whereby the intensity of mourning is symbolically and physically expressed by beating one's chest with bare hands. A nauha is recited, and the matam rhythmically corresponds to the beat of this dirge. In addition to such dirges, the names of the prominent martyrs are invoked; each name evokes a few rounds of chest beating as if to honor their sacrifice. The matam, according to Shias who participate in it, creates a powerful continuity of suffering in which the community members feel that they have demonstrated their willingness to suffer for the Imam's cause by inflicting pain on their own bodies. Shii men, women, and children all participate in the kind of matam in which only the palm is used to strike one's chest. The criticism leveled at this practice, at times even within the Shii community, is aimed at another kind of matam, the instrumental matam, in which Shii men use chains, knives, and blades to express their sorrow.

In the instrumental type of matam, the male upper body becomes a battleground, as if to proclaim that the devotees would have spilled their blood had they been in Karbala. Most of my friends and I were discouraged from participation in such matam. In fact, no one from my immediate family looked favorably upon this sort of devotion. Implicit in the attack on such matam is the belief that it is not only unnecessary, but also outright unlawful: The blood from open wounds renders the body impure for ritual prayers, so that many of these men, at the very least, were missing one of their five obligatory prayers (*namāz*) by participating in this matam. The most intense matam takes place on the tenth of Muharram, during the third prescribed prayer for Muslims, *ʿaṣr,* since this was the prayer during which the Imam Husain's head was severed from his body. Criticism of the instrumental matam extends back into history, with some prominent Shii authorities of the nineteenth century going so far as to label this practice a "sin."[93] Many Shias feel that the best way to honor the legacy of the Imam Husain is through emulating his prayers, not through participating in actions that nullify the ritual ablution required for obligatory prayers. This discourse is also anchored to these critics' larger concerns: If the Shii community wants to defend itself against those who accuse Shiism of being fanatical, bloody, and unconcerned with issues of cleanliness/purity, then it must call for alternative modes of devotion that do not play into these stereotypes.

According to the elderly teacher (*maulvī ṣāḥab*) who taught us Quranic recitation and Islamic studies (*dīniyāt*) once a week, the obligatory prayers are

much more important than any other Islamic practice, and any matam that interfered with namaz should be questioned. Every year, before the beginning of Muharram, the maulvi sahab would ask us to recite the fundamental principles (*uṣūl-e dīn*) of Shii faith: *tawḥīd* (absolute monotheism), *ʿadl* (God's just nature), *nubuwwat* (the prophethood of the Prophet Muhammad), *imāmat* (the belief in twelve sinless, infallible successors of the Prophet, from Ali to the Mahdi, the last one being alive but in occultation till the end of time), and *qiyāmat* (resurrection and judgment day). In addition to these five principles, the maulvi sahab repeatedly reminded us that ten duties are expected from practicing Shias: five prescribed ritual prayers (namaz); fasting in the month of Ramadan (roza); pilgrimage to Mecca when health and finances permit (hajj); two forms of almsgiving determined by assets, on profit and income (*zakāt* and *ḳhums*); righteous struggle against vice (jihad); enjoining others to do good (*amr bi'l maʿrūf*); forbidding others from doing evil (*nahīʿan al-munkar*); loving the Prophet's family and emulating their deeds (*tawallā*); and condemning the enemies of the Prophet's family (*tabarrā*). The maulvi sahab told us that only after knowing these basics of Shii Islam and performing every single prescribed ritual prayer, can one legitimately identify with Shiism and build solidarity with the Prophet's family through acts of mourning, such as chest-beating. To the maulvi sahab, Karbala was a battle over the preservation and integrity of the obligatory prayers. To underscore this point, he would recite a nineteenth-century Urdu couplet that compared obligatory prayers to the greatest struggle (jihad) in the cause of Islam:

namāz ahl-e yaqīñ kī jihād-e akbar hai
waẓu ke vaqt charḥāte haiñ āstīnoñ ko

The greatest jihad, the battle mightiest of them all,
is constituted by the prayers offered by the true believers, the People of Certitude—
[They gird themselves for battle], rolling up their sleeves when performing ablutions

The struggle to forsake the material world and all its accoutrements and to marshal one's higher self in the service of God in namaz is here identified as the "greatest jihad." The affirmative gesture that precedes this jihad is rolling up one's sleeves during the required ablutions, the act of purification that symbolically evokes the preparation for this struggle. (Such a reading of jihad defies the media-propelled reductionist discourse commonplace in today's western world that imagines jihad as an exclusively violent confrontation.) Through the obligatory prayers, the maulvi sahab told us, Husain's devotees re-enact the devotion of the Imam, and participate in a struggle to defeat their own vices. When these devotees opt for self-flagellation in lieu of prayers, they compromise the highest ideal for which Husain fought: the preservation of Allah's authority and the destruction of Yazid's rule.

A few of my friends—a small but committed community of flagellants—who participated in the blade-chain instrumental matam, felt that such sentiments might be valid on any day other than ashura. They proceeded to defend

their matam vigorously: "The Imam sacrificed his entire family for the cause of the community. Can't the community members shed a few drops of blood in his remembrance?" Usually appended to such a justification was the account of the miraculous recovery of the performers of such matam within hours: "A small wound takes a few days to heal. But in spite of so many scars from chains, knives and blades, no pain is felt; nor do the wounds fester." The very denial of pain lends authority to the performer's body that at once becomes historic, communal, and individual: Historic because it shares its wounds with the martyrs of Karbala; communal since it shares its devotional marks with a strong community that keeps this practice alive; and individual because it brings the individual body into focus as a devotional body that prefigures, what Slavoj Zizek would call, "defiance of the flesh,"[94] as a response to those ideologies that condemn instrumental flagellation.[95] Anyone who has studied the Muharram activities of South Asia, as well as the Perso-Arab worlds of Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon would acknowledge that for many non-Shias, Shii self-flagellation is the most striking signifier of Shii Islam. It was from the context of South Asian Muharram self-flagellations that the famed 1886 Orientalist dictionary of Anglo-Indian words and idioms, *Hobson-Jobson,* acquired its name. Hobson-Jobson was the corruption or mishearing of Hasan-Husain, a frequent invocation in parts of the subcontinent that would mourn not only Husain but also his brother Hasan, who many believe was killed at the instigation of Muawiya, Yazid's father. Although the processions of Muharram self-flagellation aroused both the curiosity and the ire of Orientalists, as well as many South Asian Muslims, who feel that Muharram makes a spectacle out of Islam, the use of the devotee's body as a site upon which specific religious events are re-enacted is unique neither to Shii Muslims nor to South Asia. As Roy Mottahedeh points out:

> Self-mutilation in emulation of the "passion" of heroes who are human yet divine is no stranger to the West: flagellants who whipped themselves both in penance and in remembrance of the scourging and crucifixion of Jesus appeared in almost every western European country in the Middle Ages, sometimes with the disapproval of the church. Sometimes, like the group of flagellants who at the opening of the fifteenth century followed Saint Vincent Ferrer on his journey to preach the need of repentance and the coming of the Judgment, they were at the very heart of what conscientious churchmen most admired. Flagellation survives in Spain and in many parts of the Hispanic world. It survives, in fact, in the United States in New Mexico, where, in spite of a century of horrified disapproval by Protestants and non-Hispanic Catholics, the brotherhood of Penitents commemorate the passion of Jesus by flagellation, the carrying of heavy wooden crosses, and many other forms of discipline, physical and spiritual.[96]

In fact, some Hindus in South Asia not only practice self-flagellation during Muharram but are also drawn to the related practice of fire-walking with

the alam in their hands. The fire-walking ceremony held on the sixth day of Muharram in Lucknow's magnificent Bara Imambara marks this city's Muharram commemorations. Organized as a display of Husain's devotees' determination to even walk on fire in order to prove their commitment to the martyred Imam, Lucknow's fire-walking attracts hundreds of non-Muslims, a good number of whom are prominent political leaders of North India. While the practice, according to the account of those Shias who organize this event, was imported from Burma (when Indians fighting in Burma returned after the Second World War) and South India, it has become an identity-affirmation ritual for devotees of Husain, both Shias and non-Shias. Just like the matam, fire-walking is a spectacle in which individual men show off the strength and resilience of their bodies in the face of real or imagined threats to their devotion and to their community's existence. By highlighting the participation of Hindus, many Shias imagine a community of Husain's devotees that transcends exoteric Shiism. The celebration of such a community also comes at the expense of rebuking those elements of the Sunni community that criticize Shii mourning rituals. But fire-walking and the matam also meet the censure of those Shias who feel that their religion is being reduced to a sham and a spectacle rather than a meaningful and somber reflection on the event of Karbala.

As is the case with fire-walking and the matam, particular types of majlises also earn disapproval from certain Shias for catapulting their community into regressive behavior and inspiring negative stereotypes. For example, since the late 1990s, the caretakers of a popular shrine in Hyderabad have sponsored a majlis that recreates Qasim's wedding. One alam dressed in red brocade stands for Qasim and another one, behind a bridal veil, stands for his newly-wed wife. All the food and accoutrements that are associated with a Hyderabadi Muslim wedding are placed in front of the alams and the grief-stricken devotees who attend this assembly are compelled to cry out and recite verses that mourn the death of the groom as he is about to be united with his bride. This majlis was, apparently, organized after one of the daughters of the shrine's caretakers had a dream in which she was told by Fatima, Husain's mother, to organize a majlis in this particular manner. The girl's family took her dream to heart and organized a majlis that re-enacts a typical Hyderabadi wedding with all its trappings.[97] The parallels between this majlis and the Iranian taziyeh, or "passion plays," wherein the events of Karbala are given concrete and immediate afterlife through actors who play the roles of various Karbala characters, are striking. The difference, however, is that whereas in many parts of Iran, humans play the role of Karbala heroes and villains, in this and other majlises like it, alams stand as icons in place of humans. But just as the Iranian taziyehs are viewed with disdain in particular Shii circles for reducing Karbala to a spectacle, majlises like the one mentioned above, in spite of having oneiric legitimacy in some Shii circles, are vehemently criticized by other Shias not only for making light of Karbala but also for predicating themselves upon idolatrous practices that are forbidden in Islam.

Particular majlises that are governed by the etiquette of weddings and other social events (like birthday celebrations) have also come under fire for

being more concerned with displaying the wealth and social status of the majlis-holder than with sincere devotion. Shii critics categorize these majlises as gatherings held on an "invitation only" basis: The highest echelons of society converge to gossip and consume exquisite food in the name of tabarruk. "How ironic is this," said a Shii critic of such majlises who worked for a philanthropic organization: "Imam Husain was deprived of food and water for three days before he was martyred. He fought the armies of Yazid so as to assure that God's creation doesn't go hungry. And now his so-called followers, in the tradition of the debauched Yazid, eat their fill as an honor to his legend, while beggars in their neighborhood are deprived of a single morsel." I remember a handful of Shias who refused to attend majlises and paid tribute to the martyrs of Karbala in the privacy of their homes. They would rebut the claims that a majlis was an ideal forum for remembering Karbala by pointing out how these gatherings reinforce rather than dissolve social hierarchies. Far from undermining the existing hegemonic structures or acting as agents of ideal social transformations, the majlises keep household servants and other disempowered groups in their usual socially inferior position, just as they leave the social status of the master/mistress of the house intact. In a similar vein as anthropologist Clifford Geertz's critique of rituals,[98] the Shii critics of the majlis say that the people who have controlling shares in Shiism are those who read Karbala not as an economic struggle, but simply as an event that has given them an opportunity, for hundreds of years, to uphold injustice, poverty, and subjugation in the very setting of the majlis ritual. The majlis, to these Shii critics, reflects a conflictual site marred by gross hypocrisy. Josh Malihabadi agrees:

> You gain nothing from the spirit of the martyr of Karbala
> Tresses of cowardice form a noose on your shoulder
> How strange, bereavement-loving professional mourner
> That in the chest of the Lion's [Ali's] follower beats the heart of a sheep!
> What a shameful account for the warriors
> Don't mourn for the Martyr of Karbala in this manner[99]

The discussion of the majlis, and by extension Karbala, in such contexts is thus embedded in a larger social and economic critique.

Although certain types of majlises come under attack for the reasons cited above, Shii defenders of the majlis institution point out that the months of mourning also bring out the generosity of their community. In certain parts of cities like Hyderabad, India, or Karachi, Pakistan, many privately-sponsored majlises keep their doors open to anyone who wishes to attend these gatherings. Regardless of a person's economic stature, or even religion, s/he is provided with food, water, juice, milk, or just sugar. A lower-class person living in Hyderabad's old city told me that she did not have to worry about food for the duration of the two months and eight days of mourning: "Imam Husain himself had assured that his devotees won't go hungry when mourning for him." This consolation circulates in many circles of Shias and non-Shias, who also

benefit from the food distributed after majlises. The institution of the majlis is thus hailed by many of its supporters because it has a much broader purpose than just the commemoration of Husain's martyrdom. Such a utilitarian defense of the majlis also accords with the discourse that celebrates grand architectural monuments in the form of ashurkhanas and imambaras because they serve causes other than those solely linked to devotion. For example, many Shias in and around Lucknow boast of the decorous construction of the eighteenth-century Bara Imambara (see figure 1.4) as a monumental undertaking designed to employ the poor; thus suggesting that the minority Shii rulers of this region were attentive to questions of the larger well-being of their region's population and not just to their own ambition to attain architectural immortality. Defending the grandness of an imambara by linking it to a government's assistance to the city's population during a famine is a means of understanding Karbala apart from reducing it to an exclusively Shii event and Shii rulers apart from their exclusive concern with their own religious community.

Shias also defend the institution of the majlis for the emotional relief it brings them in their personal hardships. Memories of Karbala evoked during majlises provide catharses for Shii families at the death and death anniversaries of their family members and friends. During these majlises, the Prophet's family is asked to intercede on behalf of the deceased in the court of the Almighty, and the family's sorrow is also put into a broader perspective. This perspective renders the suffering of the devotees of the Prophet's family relatively insignificant compared to that of the martyrs of Karbala, or, for that



FIGURE 1.4 Bara Imambara; Lucknow, India.

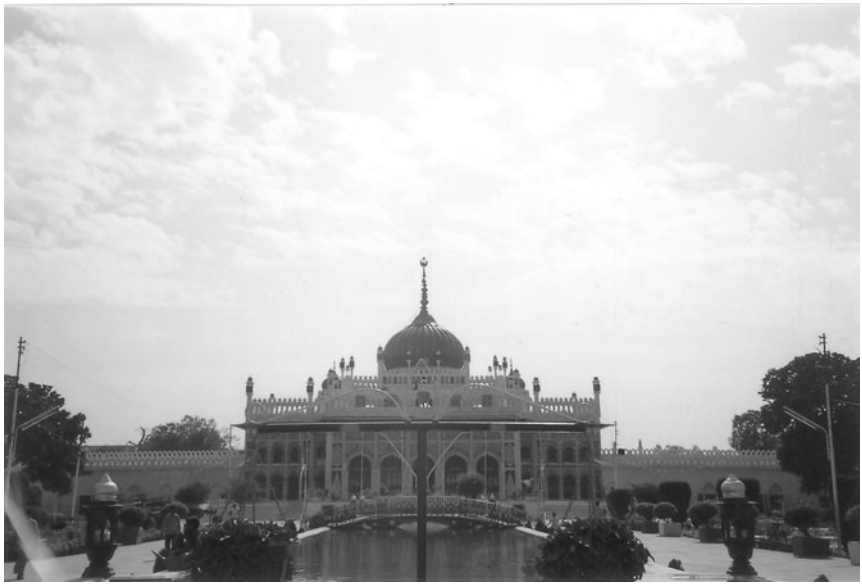


FIGURE 1.5 Chota Imambara; Lucknow, India.

matter, to the suffering of any of the Imams or of Fatima. Even poets such as Mir Anis helped their patrons conceptualize personal losses by speaking of these losses as pale in comparison to what the Prophet's family underwent in Karbala.[100]

Such personalized implications of the majlis, in which victims and sufferers locate themselves in the role of Karbala characters, can even be seen in Benazir Bhutto's autobiography. She is a prominent Pakistani politician whose father, Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, was hanged by General Zia; her brothers were murdered as well:

> In every generation, Shiite Muslims believe, there is a Karbala, a reenactment of the tragedy that befell the family of the Prophet Mohammed . . . Many in Pakistan have come to believe that the victimization of the Bhutto family and our supporters was the Karbala of our generation.[101]

Considering the corruption and criminal charges that mar the Bhutto family's reputation in Pakistan, many Shias would be repelled by such a comparison. However, the fact remains that Benazir Bhutto felt it was her prerogative to read her own life through the lens of the ultimate suffering that took place in Karbala. A cinematic corollary of Bhutto's Karbala-laden suffering narrative is Anwar Jamal's award-winning 2002 Hindi film, *Swaraj* (Self-Government), in

which he aptly compares societal oppression of women to the struggle of the Imam Husain and his companions. Harnessing the energy of Karbala's thirsty martyrs, women in this film struggle for water rights and empowerment in rural India, while the high-caste, male-dominated society never tires of creating roadblocks for those who hold socially inferior positions.

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2

Mourning in Migrant Spaces

> Kas az ahl-e vaṭan ġhamḳhwār-e man nīst
> marā dar dahr pindāre vaṭan nīst
>
> Not a soul from my homeland sympathizes with me,
> It's as though I have no homeland in this world
>
> Mirza Ghalib

Just as the spaces of India travel with the migrant, India too has no vocabulary for separating the migrant from India.

Amitav Ghosh

On March 2, 2004, violence flared up in Iraq and Pakistan, killing nearly two hundred people in the former country and nearly fifty in the latter. Most of the victims of the bomb blasts in the Iraqi cities of Baghdad and Karbala and the Pakistani city of Quetta were Shii Muslims participating in commemorative ashura processions. In Houston, Texas, more than seven thousand miles away from Iraq and Pakistan, a number of black-clad Shii Muslims had assembled to mourn Husain's martyrdom, when they heard about the devastation wreaked on their coreligionists in the Middle East and South Asia. Since this was the first Muharram after two decades of Saddam Hussein's repressive measures against Shii practices had come to an end, many Shias had looked forward to commemorating Husain's martyrdom in a non-threatening political environment. Instead, the live news stories relayed from Iraq and Pakistan found a place alongside tragic narrations from age-old tomes of history and poignant verses of Urdu elegies. With 680 C.E. juxtaposed to 2004, history seemed to unfold in painful circularity as the past overtook the present with an eerie heavy-handedness. The ashura commemo-

rative assemblies of 2004 acquired a doubly-charged, inter-linked tragic significance: More than thirteen hundred years ago, Husain, in order to restore the integrity of Islam, underwent tremendous pain and suffering fighting the tyrannical political authority of his time; and in the world of 2004, devoted followers of Husain, who had gathered in Iraq and Pakistan to commemorate his suffering, continued to suffer in spite of being more than a millennium removed from 680 C.E. To outsiders, perhaps, 680 C.E. Iraq and 2004 Houston will seem discrete and isolated from one another; but to the many Shias who gathered in Texas for the commemorative assemblies, the past had acquired solidarity with the present. History furnished a template for reading the present just as the present became a template to reinforce the importance of history. The relationship between history and the present was mediated by live news reports, "expert" commentaries, and human wreckage filtered through television monitors, presumably at the discretion of news editors. No one voice prevailed as, in dismay, the Shii mourners grasped at a slew of conjectural explanations and conspiracy theories in an attempt to make sense of the crises in Iraq and Pakistan. A self-identified Shia sighed heavily and equated the significance of the past with that of the present: "Every Day is Ashura; every land is Karbala." With this sentiment, the year 680 embraced the year 2004 more tightly and the geography of Iraq was naturalized in global terms—South Asia, the Middle East, and North America met at a common site, a site constituted by the legacy of Karbala.

Lively discussions and debates, whether about the virtues of matam or about the relevance of Karbala in the United States, occupy Shias of the diaspora. After moving to the United States at fifteen, many of my family members and other Shii families continued to preserve the Hyderabadi Muharram. In spite of being transplanted from Hyderabad to College Station, Texas, the patterns and texts of the majlis remained the same. In addition to cooking delicious foods traditionally eaten during Muharram, and many of them only during Muharram, my mother and aunts ensure that no important day of mourning is overlooked. To many of these women, Karbala and the majlises tied to it are literally part of their inheritance, traditions bequeathed by their mothers and mothers-in-law in South Asia. Along with clothes and jewelry, one generation leaves its legacy for the other in the form of the majlis commemorations. To further validate this inheritance, many women in our family recite the elegies that are, in a sense, family treasures and have been for generations. While these elegies bring the Hyderabadi Muharram to the United States for many Urdu speakers, the translation sessions that follow for the benefit of those who do not comprehend poetic Urdu can be quite alienating to those accustomed to the Hyderabadi Muharram.

Even though the size of the majlis gathering in College Station (from twenty to thirty people at most) is a fraction the size of those in Hyderabad, the themes and rituals of mourning have changed little. In America, most men and women in the majlis weep just as they did in India. The alams that my family brought from India are set up in American houses just as they had been in India. My brother-in-law built a remarkable wooden replica of the frame on

which the standards are set. My father shows his love for the poetry of the great nineteenth-century elegists, Anis and Dabir, by constantly repeating it. My uncle enlivens the postmajlis family gatherings by recounting traditions tied to Muharram that have gradually waned in Hyderabad itself: During the first ten days of Muharram, it was customary for women to break their bangles and remove the black-beaded necklace that symbolized their matrimonial ties. It was as though their most cherished and honorable commitment receded into insignificance while the Prophet's grandson suffered in Karbala. Newlyweds abstained from conjugal relations during the first twelve days of Muharram. As a century-old reaction to this practice, my uncle quotes the droll verses that my great-grandfather penned when his bride, abiding by the custom of the time, went away to her parents' house for the first twelve days of Muharram so as to abstain from conjugal pleasures:

jā ke kuch roz jo voh maḥfil-e mātam meñ rahe
mere armān siyāhposh Muḥarram meñ rahe

When she departed for some days to participate in the assembly of mourning
My desires donned the black raiment of bereavement during the month of Muharram

The first few Muharrams in America brought with them a sense of nostalgia for the faraway city of Hyderabad, at least for those of us old enough to remember the Hyderabadi majlises and the grand elephant processions.[1] My first Muharram in the United States, my first majlis in America, brought to life a verse from Boney M's pop hymn-psalm, "By the rivers of Babylon," probably the most popular English song during my years of secondary school in Hyderabad: "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" But unlike the Jewish community of ancient Babylon that felt such pain singing the "Lord's song" in captivity, Shias are continually reminded of the saying of the great-grandson of the Imam Husain that downplays the temporal and geographic containment of Karbala. Furthermore, why should Karbala and its commemorations seem more displaced in College Station than they did in Hyderabad, a city that is also many miles away from Iraq?

Over time, Hyderabad did not even seem far away, thanks to the cassette player, the VCR, and the internet—media through which we not only hear the elegies recited by our Hyderabadi relatives with gifted voices, but also hear one of the essential components of the majlis: the zikr. The person whose narrations my family hears so fondly is Rashid Turabi. We hear Rashid Turabi consistently throughout the months of Muharram and Safar. The one set of tapes we have has been played repeatedly, year after year. Every time it is played, it is as if the audience has never heard it before—it generates afresh the same intense lamentation. Our family has become so used to Rashid Turabi that even when zakirs come from India and Pakistan to the nearby city of Houston, most of us prefer to stay home and listen to Rashid Turabi—paradoxically alive in his death, as are the martyrs about whom he so lovingly spoke.

The Shii community of Houston, from the 1970s onwards, has invited zakirs from India and Pakistan for Muharram. The Houston community grew from a few hundred South Asian Shias in the early 1980s to several thousand in the 1990s.[2] The main difference between the Shii gatherings of Houston and the gatherings of Hyderabad is the ethnic make up—the Shii majlis audience is much broader in the United States. This broad composition of the majlis necessitates a reformulation of the rituals, languages, and sentiments that are tied to the particular places from which the immigrants migrate. In spite of cultural differences, Shii leaders in America seek to project a unified community. These attempts thrive on the parabilization of Karbala: Husain's struggle illustrates the moral lesson that a righteous minority, even if beset by prejudices and repression, can have positive and enduring effects if it remains committed to its foundational principles. Many Shias stress that Karbala should be commemorated publicly to bear on individual and communal lives in order to tell the world that the Shii community is convinced about its ideals and proud of its minority status. No ritual contributes more to this agenda than the julūs, or procession, that Shias take part in, in Houston and in other European and American cities during Muharram. In many of these processions, men, women, and children, clad in black clothes, parade outside their marked religious spaces, carrying banners that say "Live Like Ali, Die Like Husain." More mellow than the Hyderabadi Muharram processions, these marches in North America and Europe doubly serve the community: They honor the legacy of Karbala in public and celebrate the community constituted by devotion to the martyrs of Karbala.

As multiple linguistic and ethnic groups come together in the United States, some religious leaders have presented ideas of pan-Shiism and pan-Islamism that blur nationalist divides. Although many Hyderabadi families cling to the Hyderabadi style of mourning, in many other Hyderabadi-American households the special traditions that once signified Muharram in Hyderabad have eroded. In the pan-religious spirit of the Muslim socioreligious reformers of nineteenth- and twentieth-century South Asia and the Middle East, many immigrants also feel that rituals are encroaching upon the "true faith." What constitutes "true faith," how exactly should a "ritual" be defined, and what precisely does this encroachment mean—these are issues on which the Shii community does not agree.

Within the discourses of the relevance of the majlises conducted in the United States, one issue that constantly seems to frame the benefits of this institution is that of the instructional value of the Karbala narrative to those Shias not born and raised in the subcontinent or the Middle East: How should Karbala be conveyed to people who are unable to understand poetic and theological idioms in Urdu, Arabic, or Persian? To many Shias, the majlis in its realistic mode is more appealing for a younger audience than the majlis in its poetic mode. These Shias would say that it is much more important for the majlis to be educational than it is for it to be poetic.

At a 2004 Muharram commemorative gathering in Houston, with more than fifteen hundred participants, florid metaphors from the ghazal universe

gave way to the jargon of cyberspace, with the proper placement of dots in a web address being compared to an accurate interpretation of the Shii ideals: Just as a misplaced dot can prevent web surfers from reaching their destination, so misjudging the importance of Ali can seriously impair the spirituality of those who do not realize the Imam Ali's true stature.

Within such contexts, Karbala is not about stimulating Urdu literary sensibilities. Rather, it is about shaping the Shii community's present and future. It is unclear whether the community of ghazal aesthetes has considerably diminished in the United States, or whether the aesthetic adjudicators and patrons of majlises simply prefer electronic technology. Without poetry, what will imagination amount to? What will become of history and poetry? Only time will tell.

When offering my retrospect on the Hyderabadi majlis tradition as it compares to the majlises held in Texas, it is clear that the education of Shias from my parents' and grandparents' generation informed them with a dialogics and polyphony that posited one understanding of religion along with another (often conflictual) one. Much like Mikhail Bakhtin's readings of Dostoevsky's novels, nonconformist discourses existed side by side with those that were hegemonic.[3] So the Shii majlis and Josh Malihabadi's critique of it could be elements of the same conversation. While people took great delight in telling stories of Ghalib's love for wine, Ghalib could also be invoked by the likes of Rashid Turabi to legitimize their praise of Karbala martyrs. One may also infer these dialogics in Awadh's crowning literary achievement, the Urdu marsiya, which was not only a genre of mixed cultural pedigree, but its rich poetic insights and flexible versions of a single event provided counterweights to each other. The presence of this multiplicity in the very narrative of Karbala deflects readers and listeners from a single reading of history.

But these dialogics that mediated relationships among devotees of various persuasions, and made the understanding of religion less reified, are easily lost in migrancy, mainly because of the fear that children will hear challenges to the religious practices and principles of their parents and will not appreciate religion. Such a loss can be felt acutely when speaking to those Muslim migrants who adhere to and impart a rigid reading of Islam. Ironically, while countering the singular readings of their faith by the likes of Daniel Pipes and the FOX channel in the United States, many Muslims also lose sight of pluralism by showing an aversion to voices with whom they disagree by branding these voices as un-Islamic. Although it is not an issue unique to Muslim students, many academics who teach Islamic studies at North American universities can also relate to the experience of dealing with undergraduate students who become uncomfortable when any perspective, other than the one they had been taught at their religious institutions, is discussed matter-of-factly.

The result is what C. M. Naim, a professor of Urdu who has lived in the United States since 1957, tentatively calls a "hyper-masculinized" reading of Islam that is mainly imparted in settings outside of one's home, away from one's grandmothers. Recalling the role that Muslim women played in the re-

ligious upbringing of their children in the first half of twentieth-century South Asia, Naim bemoans the erosion of women-dominated spaces in the Muslim communities of present-day North America:

> The diminution of the women's role has removed the poetry, ambiguity, and humility that my generation commonly experienced from the religious experience of my young students. Let me reiterate poetry and ambiguity, for much of the wisdom in the zanana [women's section of a house] consisted of poetry, proverbs, and oral traditions; they contained elements of ambiguity and allowed for contestation of one set of verses or proverbs by another set. Whereas the adult men who exemplify religion for the young Muslim men and women in the United States are seemingly feeding them a scriptural Islam that is exclusionary—filled with sectarian self-righteousness—and, far from being inspired by humility, is aggressively focused on having power and holding on to it. And its insistence on its own certainties are breathtaking, both metaphorically and literally.[4]

As many Shias living in the West decline to appreciate the culture of poetry, proverbs, and ambiguity in their present religious domains, they have also endeavored to embark on a broader course of purification that would presumably cleanse the religion of perceived innovations and accretions. One instance of this can be seen when considering *shabīhs,* the visual depictions of Karbala. When growing up in Hyderabad, I remember that for many Shias, the Karbala narrative derived largely from the visual representations of this event that hung in many ashurkhanas: the Imam Husain burying his infant son, the Imam's tents set on fire after his martyrdom, the Prophet's family in Yazid's prison, and the pictures of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali. This mode of devotional expression made Karbala more accessible, at least to us children. They were also concrete displays of different modes of devotional expressions: While one image of the Imam Husain reflected his veiled face burying his slain son (see figure 2.1), another image captured the Imam as a bearded figure carrying his son as an offering to Allah (see figure 2.2). The veiled sentiments happily coexisted with the unveiled, as many of these visual images conformed to the poetic perspectives that resonate in marsiyas. Some of the artists who drew these images were gifted elegy writers themselves. Baqar Amanat Khani, for example, not only achieved an imaginative literary rapport with the heroes of Karbala, but also painted a visual rapport with his poetry. But in the past twenty years, the importance of these visual images has receded in many parts of the Shii world. The caretakers of one of Hyderabad's Shii shrines, where Baqar Amanat Khani's visual images still hang, talked to me about how the visual representations that have hung in the shrine for decades are now criticized by Shias from the United Kingdom and the United States for being un-Islamic. In fact, some of the artists who visually rendered Karbala into shabihs have forsaken their vocation since it is now considered an un-Islamic indulgence. More and more, these images are accumulating dust, shoved off into storage



FIGURE 2.1 Imam Husain burying his son, Asghar. This shabih retains the theme of Husain's suffering and sorrow.

in the aftermath of Iran's Islamic revolution, which is critical of visual representations. Even though these representations are still popular in the devotional culture of Iran, the mullahs and their followers frequently repudiate some of these visual traditions, calling them excessive. The local Karbala visual aesthetics, in this case of Hyderabad, must now defer to a global aesthetic, carried in part by the Shias who emigrated from Hyderabad to the West and now return to the city with an Iranian-inflected purification impulse.

Perhaps not to the satisfaction of many community leaders, discussions about Karbala in the United States have broadened to embrace not only the immediate crises that American Muslims face but also the larger politics of Kashmir, Palestine, and especially Iran.[5] Many Shias feel that the anti-Shah struggle in Iran testified to Karbala's power to generate a renaissance of Islam. That the Shah had the backing of the most powerful country in the world, the United States; that he had a well-trained army and a shrewd secret service; and that he was immensely wealthy and well-connected, did not matter. His opponents realized that the memory of Karbala could be concretized to counter the Pahlavi tyranny, thereby releasing Iranians from years of suffering and providing for them the Karbala "paradigm"[6] as a liberatory blueprint. Armed with the example of Iran, energized by the rhetoric of pan-Muslim unity that the Ayatollah Khomeini (the leader of Iran's anti-Shah revolution) stressed so often, many Shias are reinscribing Karbala in a diasporic space within the majlis context as a symbol of a just struggle linked to anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism.



FIGURE 2.2 Imam Husain bringing his son to the battlefield. This wall hanging shabih at Hyderabad's Abbas shrine reinforces Husain's image as a gallant warrior and the bearer of innocence, majestic yet humble.

During the Iran-Iraq war (in which Iraqi President Saddam Hussein received support from the United States) not only did the symbol of Karbala frame the discourses of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism in many majlises but the lack of access to this sacred Iraqi city prompted many Shias to speak of the Iraqi president as a modern incarnation of Yazid. That the United States was assisting Saddam Hussein, an Iraqi Sunni, while he brutally suppressed the political claims of the Iraqi Shias (killing them in the thousands) and placed severe restrictions on the mourning ceremonies in Karbala, was not lost upon the sentiments of Shias around the world. It was for this reason that many Shias in the United States, although relieved that Hussein no longer ruled Iraq, are skeptical of the US motivations in overthrowing the Iraqi regime.

Muharram commemorations in the United States have also become occasions when Shias feel that they must defend their sectarian orientation. In a manner reminiscent of conflicts in South Asia, many Shias in the United States feel that their Islamic identity is questioned and doubted by other Muslim groups. A handful of non-Shii groups, including some segments of the Saudi-backed Wahhabis or Salafis, label Muharram commemorations as *bida'*, unlawful accretions to Islam condemned by the Prophet; to these groups, alams reflect Shii polytheism (*shirk*). Elements of such groups also control numerous Muslim Student Associations at institutions of higher education around North America. Bent upon reading Islam in the most exclusive terms, these Muslims refuse to accord respect to Shii devotional traditions and sentiments. It was the ideology espoused by such groups that drove anti-Shii forces in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Arabia to destroy Muslim shrines, including those of particular significance to the Shia (such as that of the Prophet's daughter Fatima), on the grounds that these shrines could easily become objects of worship in themselves, and thereby compromise Islam's monotheism.

The Taliban's massacre of Shias in Afghanistan was the logical unfolding of this kind of intolerance, for many extremist Saudi Arabian elements provided substantial financial and ideological ammunition to the Taliban. Perhaps one of the reasons why Karbala does not appeal to the Taliban and others like them is that it (and all the pageantry surrounding it) is exclusively associated with Shiism, an orientation that is not considered legitimate in any way. The animosity between Shias and these extremist anti-Shii groups at times spills over in the majlis forum. Many Shias reductively use the designation of Wahhabi to mean any Muslim perceived to be a detractor of Shii religious practice. At times, in South Asia and beyond, Shias who have questioned certain Muharram practices/rituals have even been branded "Shii Wahhabis."[7]

Many other Shias take offence when majlises are used as venues for socio-religious reforms tied to particular national agendas or ideological orientations. For example, the Shii community in Houston was horrified in 1991, when an Iraqi religious authority decided to give a lecture on proper sexual practices and child-rearing etiquette in Islam on the ninth of Muharram. Hundreds of people had come to this gathering to hear about the tragic events of Karbala, hopeful that their children growing up in the United States would appreciate

the sacrifices of the Prophet's family. They sat aghast as the religious authority casually discussed human anatomical terms and the ideal positions and times for legitimate sexual relations. Since some Muslims believe that Islam must have its say in all aspects of human life, sexuality might be a logical choice of topic. While many Iraqis and Iranians with whom I spoke did not mind the sexual pedagogy in the context of Karbala, most South Asians discreetly shied away from broaching this topic, saying that such majlises digress from the message of Karbala. They simply refused to listen to this man again; embroiled in other controversies as well, he was soon ejected from the religious center where he was a regular.

While South Asian Urdu-speaking Shias do not always have a comfortable recourse to Arabian or Persian aesthetics and the etiquette of Muharram, the same can be said about the Arabic-speaking and Persian-speaking Shias and their relationships to the South Asian Karbala invocations. Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi recount a Houston Muharram incident involving South Asians and Iranians that reinforces this point:

> Iranians were invited to their [South Asian friends'] ʿĀshūra sessions, but that generated mutual irritation too: the Iranians found the Urdu recitations of the [Karbala] story outlandish and funny, rather than tragic. The deep emotional tones of mourning simply could not be produced for them in the up and down cadence of the Urdu language. And so in the midst of one of these sessions, when the Iranians retired to another room to do one of the namaz prayers, they were accused [by South Asians] of being disrespectful to the martyr Husain.[8]

The succinct observations that Fischer and Abedi make about Iran and Iranians in the United States are applicable not only to Shias coming from other parts of the world, but to immigrant communities in general:

> Iran and Iranian habitations abroad are both "crazy" hybridized spaces: at times fertile and comic, at times sterile and painful; in either case, hard to image, hard to project into a future that gives the present significance. The two settings, Iran and Iranian habitations abroad, mirror each other at acute or oblique angles, mutually affecting each other's representations, setting off mutating variations.[9]

However, many Shias, whether originally from South Asia, the Middle East, Europe or North America, are, like many Sunnis, Hindus, and Christians, wary of the celebrations of hybridity or fluctuating values; in the midst of the discourses of cross-fertilization is an attempt to rescue, retrieve, or invent stability—stability which at times fails to take account of transforming personal identities and flexibility in the language of religion.

This chapter and the previous one are not exclusively auto-ethnographical nor are they a historical study of Shiism in the United States or South Asia. But by beginning such a study with a reflection of and on my own subjectivity,

I hope to unsettle any assumption of the essential fixity of Shiism, the context of majlis, or the readings of Karbala within the majlis, thereby demonstrating that Shiism in its practice is extremely broad. The majlis context has historically constituted a network of overarching, albeit disparate, themes that wind their way through the grids of the Karbala event. It is vitally important to remember that different modes of Shii-Karbala commemorations exist side by side dialogically at times and discordantly at other times, as is true of the larger historical paradigm of Islam in general. Any singular interpretation of Islam, as of Karbala, is overridden by linguistic, regional, and broader contextual discourses. The event of Karbala, like Islam itself, appears in a wide-ranging panorama of devotion, contradiction, conciliation, aesthetic maneuvering, and manipulation. Such is the scope of improvisation inhering within this seventh-century event on the banks of the Euphrates that its charted realms can matter-of-factly extend from the South Asian subcontinent to the United States.

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3

Commemorative Politics and Poetics

My memory keeps getting in the way of your history.
Agha Shahid Ali

Kahte kahte kuch zabān-e be zabānī rah ga'ī
tīr khā ke so ga'e Aṣġhar kahānī rah ga'i

Whilst telling a tale, a bit of the language of silence remained unspoken.
Lulled to sleep by an arrow, Asghar fell asleep—
his bedtime story remained untold
Pyare Sahab Rashid

While I was pursuing my fieldwork for this book in Hyderabad, India, one of my uncles and interlocutors, an observant Shia and an anecdotalist of considerable merit, often narrated an incident wherein a religious authority (*'ālim*), during a particular majlis, was made to swear that he would only narrate "factual" events pertaining to the Karbala incident. The authority climbed the pulpit (*miñbar*) and uttered but one sentence: "On the tenth of Muharram, 61 hijri [Islamic calendar date, corresponding to October 10, 680 C.E.], Husain b. Ali was martyred at Karbala." The alim then excused himself, saying that beyond this proposition, all other elaborations of this incident are subjective and their truth value is contingent upon the belief system of and the informal pact between the narrators and their audiences. Resorting to a play on the dual meaning of *tārīḳh* in Urdu, which simultaneously means date and history, the alim said that the only constant in history (tarikh) is the date (tarikh).[1] Although by no means a reflection of the general attitude of the Mus-

lim community to the incident of Karbala, nor a commonplace assertion of religious authorities and historians, this anecdote affords us space to recognize the multiple readings of Karbala within the context of Shiism itself. It also reminds us that historical narratives are locked into those of power, resistance, and devotion.

This chapter deals with popular interpretations and understandings of Shii history, and calls attention to the role of women through the invocation of the Imam Husain's sister, Zainab. In bringing to light the Shii readings of Islamic history, I discuss various texts that are recited within the context of the majlis—from the different subgenres within the Urdu elegy to the sermons from the pulpit by zakirs. This chapter concerns itself centrally with how the majlis, through the invocations of Karbala, produces and reproduces a counterdiscourse to the hegemonic readings of Islamic history. The frame narrative of Karbala has been widened over time and space, thereby allowing space for intertextuality not only within particular genres but also between the genres and, of course, between the past and the present.

Thus, in the context of the majlis, any historical interpretation of Karbala needs to be continually supplemented with a literary recasting in light of the readers'/listeners' (interpretive community's) situational hermeneutics, the interpretive strategies of the particular communities that sponsor the majlises. These literary configurations, constituted as "historical" works, remain important media for the articulation of history, because it is in these works that the domains of the historian and the poet, the real and the imagined, are creatively elided. Within the majlis, the historian invokes poetry to configure Karbala, just as the poets adorn their language with historical allusions. All of these invocations and configurations make Karbala the preserve of an ever-changing narrative landscape. This landscape is Karbala's historic legacy. To illustrate this point, we could compare Shii historical records penned prior to the tenth century in Iraq with those from Iran of the seventeenth century, and discern the accretions of new Karbala-related incidents as well as new characters whose names were not mentioned as present in Karbala during the battle, even in the earliest accounts of Karbala. As Ali Hussain's work on this subject points out, these accretions were not constituted by newly-discovered historical material that complements or refutes older material. Rather, these accretions underscore how competitive ethnic and religious groups, attentive to issues of their own religious and social legitimacy, want to insert themselves into a significant historical matrix. With the advent of the Safavid rule in sixteenth-century Iran, for example, Karbala narratives become more fantastical; this served to differentiate the Shii Safavids from their Sunni Ottoman and Mughal neighbors. Since a reverence for the Prophet's family also marked Sunni devotionalism, the Safavids distinguished themselves by taking this reverence one step further and fashioned Karbala heroes as superhuman, able to control cosmic forces.[2] Because of the flow of ideas and people between various parts of the subcontinent and Safavid Iran, it is the Safavid readings of Karbala, more than any other Perso-Arabic discourses, that shape the Karbala narratives in South Asia.

The Majlis as a Forum for Alternative Islamic History

The commemoration of Karbala in the South Asian Shii majlis is inextricably bound to the Shii community's collective memory, to the community's sense of history.[3] By "history" I mean the accounts that a community gives of its own past. These accounts can only be accessed through their subsequent narrations, and such narrations are hardly monolithic. The narrative possibilities and historical sensibilities for Shias are constituted by disagreements/disputes with Sunnis over such seemingly basic issues as the Prophet's birthday and death date and the precise number of children that he had. Whereas most Sunni historical accounts and even some Shii scholars suggest that the Prophet had four daughters,[4] most South Asian Shias with whom I spoke refused to believe that the Prophet had three daughters other than Fatima. Some Shias dismissed the importance of this matter by simply calling these other daughters "adopted." An informed Shia with whom I spoke about this matter said that the other daughters do not receive the same degree of importance for three reasons: (1) They did not produce children to carry the Prophet's bloodline into the next generation. (2) Fatima was the Prophet's favorite daughter, hence it is useless to speak of other daughters. (3) Those who speak about these other daughters do so to dilute the importance of Fatima and her family. Shias have thus ascribed a place of importance to Fatima in a manner that occludes the existence of the Prophet's three other daughters.

A matter far more serious to Shias than the number of the Prophet's daughters is Aisha's status in many Sunni sources as the Prophet's "favorite wife." The Shii discourses linked to Aisha are underpinned by scathing polemics that go so far as to blame her for feeding the Prophet something that eventually caused his death. Many Shias conceive of Aisha as a manipulative shrew more concerned with securing the caliphate for her father, Abu Bakr, than with transmitting the teachings of Islam in the Muhammadan spirit.[5] When discussing Aisha's designation (among many Sunnis) as the Prophet's "favorite" wife, a Shii scholar from Hyderabad argues:

> If a man has more than one wife, Allah in the Quran commands such a man to treat all his wives equally. When the Prophet was married to Aisha, he had several other wives. So how could Aisha be his favorite? If there was a wife that the Prophet was very fond of, after the death of Khadija, then that was Umm Salma. Aisha was given the "favorite" status by those who wanted to undermine Fatima's importance in the Prophet's life.

And Fatima's adversaries, according to this Shii scholar, were the very ones responsible for the tragedy of Karbala. With all these sentiments taken into account, the ritual of the majlis redresses Shii grievances by vividly recounting the Karbala tale complete with Shii polemics.

Paul Connerton, in *How Societies Remember,* underscores the importance of rituals: by replaying historical events, they channel historical knowledge and

thereby usher the past into the present.[6] The history of Karbala, as articulated in the majlis setting, whether through raising alams or the zikr, is not only the history of the Imam Husain and his followers as they are remembered, but also of the origins and development of Shii Islam before Husain's martyrdom. The majlises afford no way to speak of Karbala without also alluding to the incidents that led to this event. The goal of these accounts is to show that at least from the death of the Prophet onward, dissent existed within the Muslim community and Fatima's family in particular underwent unparalleled suffering after the Prophet's passing.

Such a view legitimates the sectarian (Shii) orientation of the majlis and takes the origins of Karbala back in time, creating an alternative history. The term "alternative history" is of course a relatively "objective" construct; to the community itself, this is not an "alternative history" but rather "true" history, history as it really happened. I use the term "alternative" in the sense that this history, as articulated in the majlis context, interrogates and disrupts dominant historical understandings within the larger (Sunni) Muslim community. Of course the discourse of these "dominant" understandings should not efface the multifaceted nature of Islamic history and the multiple understandings of this history, nor should it repress the contradictions within these understandings. In other words, a unified, undifferentiated referent that can be signified as "Islamic history," or "dominant historical understanding," does not exist. Thus the dominant other (Sunni) history that the zakir alludes to in the majlis, and which is presumably at odds with the Shii history, is as essentialist as its alterity. Just as communal/sectarian subjectivities and identities are fluid, so are historical narratives and imaginative historical reconstructions. Before discussing Shii historical reconstructions, I offer a brief account of early Islamic history from the popular Sunni viewpoint; this will enable us to clearly understand what the Shias contest.

Sunni Readings of Early Islam

Toward the end of his life, too ill to lead his community during the prescribed prayers, the Prophet Muhammad appointed his dear friend and father-in-law, Abu Bakr, to lead the prayers. For the great fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldun, this was enough reason for the community to choose Abu Bakr as caliph, or leader, after the Prophet's death:

> That the men around Muhammad considered the caliphate as something analogous to prayer and on the strength of that attitude argued in favour of Abu Bakr's caliphate, is merely another proof of the fact that no appointment of an heir [of the Prophet] had taken place. It also shows that the question of the imamate [leadership] and succession to it was not as important then as it is today. Group feeling, which determines unity and disunity in the customary course of affairs, was not of the same significance then as it was to be later on.[7]

According to such a reading of Islamic history, divisions and schisms within the Prophet Muhammad's religion were later, undesirable developments; the Prophet's companions were not complicit in such divisions. Even where the Sunni historical discourses agree that divisions over questions of legitimate leadership came into existence right after the Prophet, they minimize the importance of such divisions. These Sunni discourses are informed by the theme of the elevated status and worthiness of the first four caliphs. Sunnis consider these four caliphs, Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman, and Ali, as the *rāshidūn*, or the rightly guided leaders. The Sunnis privilege all four of these caliphs (although to varying degrees) as the staunchest allies of Islam and its Prophet, whether in the capacity of the Prophet's companion-relatives in Mecca and Medina or through their characteristic piety and wisdom after the Prophet's death: Abu Bakr, the first caliph, was one of the first converts to Islam and the father of the Prophet's favorite wife, Aisha. Abu Bakr accompanied the Prophet at times when his life was in danger, and even saved the Prophet's life. The second caliph, Umar, whose daughter Hafsa was also married to the Prophet, is held in high esteem among Sunnis as the ruler whose policies heralded the spread of Islam from Persia to Egypt, while his firmness in matters of Islamic law remains unsurpassed. Since the beginning of the month of Muharram is the time when Umar was martyred, many Sunnis hold commemorative gatherings in honor of the second caliph, as if to declare that Muharram does not belong exclusively to Husain; the Caliph Umar, and his successor, Usman, also suffered at the hands of Islam's enemies.[8] The Sunni accounts of Usman, who married two of the Prophet's daughters, are replete with examples of kindness and generosity; he is most admired for his work of compiling the Quran. The Quran compiled in Usman's time still holds sway over the entire Muslim community. Ali, in much of the Sunni discourse, is the strong, brave cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, whose courage in battle is proverbial, whose knowledge is indisputable, and through whose children the Prophet's line of descent continues. Historically, as Hossein Modarressi has pointed out, Sunnis positioned many of the Shii imams (descendants of Ali and Fatima) along the grids of religious and spiritual authority, but did not feel obliged to render these imams complete obedience nor did they claim that these descendants of the Prophet could never err. Within many Sunni historical discourses, these imams, along with the four caliphs, are usually considered beyond reproach.

As far as the relationship between Islam and political authority is concerned, for Sunnis, after Ali, the rule of the last of the "rightly-guided" caliphs came to a close, causing Islam's original spirit to be diluted. And this dilution precipitated the events that eventually led to Karbala. When discussing Karbala's chronology, the Sunni view of the event does not link it to the issue of immediate succession to the Prophet. Rather, it begins with the death of the Umayyad caliph Muawiya and his decision to designate his son, Yazid, as his successor.

Yazid, even in most Sunni accounts, is an affront to Islam; Husain, the Prophet Muhammad's sole surviving grandson at the time, refused to pay allegiance to Yazid. When pressured to offer allegiance to Yazid, and detecting

an anti-Yazid support base for himself in the garrison city of Kufa, Husain departed from his home in Medina. En route to Kufa, Husain and his followers were stopped in Karbala by the forces of Umar b. Sad, a general representing Yazid's appointed governor of Kufa, Ibn Ziyad. When Husain refused to offer allegiance to Yazid at Karbala, he and most of his male followers, including his family members, were killed on the plains of Karbala. Husain's severed head was taken, with his surviving family, first to Kufa and then to Yazid's court in Damascus.[9] Although Sunnis as well as Shias agree that these events happened, for the majlis-attending Shias, the timeline of Karbala begins before 680 C.E.; the succession of Yazid was only the last of many injustices inflicted upon the Prophet's family, beginning at the time of the Prophet's death.

Karbala's First Martyrs

To the majlis-attending Shias, the trajectory of Karbala begins on the day of the Prophet's death.[10] Sources sympathetic to the Prophet's family narrate the ensuing happenings in lurid colors. Although direct divine revelation in Islam came to an end with the Prophet's death in 632 C.E., the community nevertheless needed a leader who could be trusted with preserving the message of Islam; no one in the Prophet's community was more qualified to bear the responsibilities of such a task than Ali. The Shias believe that the Prophet, by the command of God, explicitly designated Ali his successor. Ali was the son of the Prophet's guardian and uncle, Abu Talib. Ali was one of the earliest converts to Islam, if not the very first, and for all practical purposes, he was raised by the Prophet. He accompanied the Prophet on many expeditions and his valor and courage were unsurpassed during the early decades of Islam. After arriving in Medina, in order to foster harmony between the Meccan immigrants (*muhājirūn*) and their Medinan helpers (*anṣār*), each Meccan man took a man from Medina as his brother. The Prophet, notably, picked Ali, a fellow Meccan, as his brother.[11] When the time came for the Prophet to decide on a husband for his beloved daughter Fatima, Ali was deemed the most eligible choice for her.[12]

When the Quran challenged the Christians of Najran to bring forward their best, to be compared with the best of the followers of the Prophet, the Prophet took with him Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain. Ali stood for the best of men, Fatima for the best of women, and Hasan and Husain for the best of children.[13] On another occasion the Prophet asked these four to join him under a cloak, thereby securing the Quranic testament to the purity of these noble souls: "Allah wishes to remove uncleanliness from You, O People of the House, and purify You a thorough purification."[14] This incident is usually referred to as the *ḥadīṡ-e kisā,* tradition of the cloak; it is frequently recited in Shii households throughout the year.

There were many other occasions when the Prophet praised Ali: "I am the

city of knowledge, Ali is its gate"; "Ali and I are from the same light (*nūr*)"; "Whosoever hates Ali hates me"; "Whoever abandons Ali abandons me and whoever abandons me abandons God"; "Allegiance to Ali is a prerequisite for the entrance into paradise"; "The Truth is with Ali and Ali is with the Truth".[15] Ali supported the Prophet's mission from a very early age. During the battles of Badr and Khaybar, Ali led the Muslim forces to victory. When the Prophet embarked on an expedition to Tabuk, Ali remained his deputy at Medina. The Prophet compared his relationship to Ali with Moses' relationship to Aaron; hence Ali's sons, Hasan and Husain, are frequently referred to by the names of Aaron's sons, Shabbar and Shabbir, respectively.[16]

These and many more incidences demonstrate Ali's exalted position in the eyes of the Prophet. According to Shias, after returning from his last pilgrimage, while at the pool of Ghadir Khumm, the Prophet explicitly designated Ali as his successor: "He whose lord I am, Ali is his lord. O God, be the friend of him who is Ali's friend and an enemy to him who is Ali's enemy."[17] The day of Ghadir has historically been celebrated by Shias as a day of great festivities (*'id*) on which the Prophet's mission came to an end with the designation of the most worthy of successors, the father of his only grandchildren and the beloved brother, who had been tested over and over in the cause of Islam. Celebrated on the eighteenth day of the last Islamic month, twelve days before the beginning of Muharram, Shias give Ghadir prominence by lighting their houses and holding jubilant gatherings (*jashans*) that reinforce their allegiance to Ali and his household. On a symbolic level, Ghadir also becomes the site where the Self of true Islam, embodied by the Prophet and Ali, is distinguished from its hypocritical Other.

In an act of hypocrisy and defiance of the Prophet's will, Shias say, some of the Prophet's companions gathered in an assembly hall (Saqīfa Banī Sa'īda) in Medina and accepted Abu Bakr as the caliph of the community. Notably, the prophet's entire immediate family was absent from this meeting, since they were busy preparing for his burial.[18] A group of Muslims, the Shia Ali (the Party of Ali),[19] disagreed with Abu Bakr's rise to the caliphate and instead asserted Ali's right to lead the community, both spiritually and politically. Hence the first division within Islam arose over the issue of community leadership. It is essential to remember that Shii identity is inextricably interwoven (at both political and spiritual levels) with this issue of succession.

Shii perceptions of Islamic history posit a series of leadership usurpations, in which the Prophet's descendants were continually displaced from their rightful positions of political and spiritual authority. While Ali was bypassed for the caliphate, his wife Fatima was dispossessed of the inheritance of the Fadak garden, which Shias believe the Prophet had bequeathed her. Even though the Quran provides examples of previous prophets' progeny inheriting their property, Abu Bakr claimed that the garden of Fadak was community property. Fatima went to Abu Bakr and protested in vain. Further, she and Ali were forced to offer allegiance to Abu Bakr and when they refused, wood was stacked around their house in order to set it on fire. The door to Fatima's house was pushed open, causing her physical injury. Consequently, she miscarried

her child and died from the complications of her injuries. She willed that those who caused her misery after her father's death not be allowed to attend her burial.[20]

Fatima's position in popular Shiism is analogous to the position of the Virgin Mary in certain Christian denominations: she is referred to as the "virgin," immune from all sins and impurities; it is through her offspring (Husain) that God's true faith was to be saved. Not only Shias but many Sunnis, such as Muhammad Iqbal, have bestowed on her laurels that privilege her even over Jesus' mother, the most praised woman in the Quran. Fatima also becomes a martyr in Shii Islam. And like other martyrs in Islam, she lives on in spite of dying in the eyes of the world. According to this view of Fatima's afterlife, she is not only present on the battlefield of Karbala supporting her son, but she is also a comrade to her daughters when they are in the captivity of Husain's killers. Moreover, by her presence, she sanctifies every majlis that commemorates Husain.

Those who abuse a revered figure like Fatima receive no compassion from the Shias. If asked, "Who were the sources of misery to Fatima and her family?" many an informed Shia would name the first three caliphs after the Prophet. For Shias, these three caliphs are but harbingers of the eventual breakdown of the Prophet's righteous community. On the one hand, some Shias only allude to their actions (as opposed to mentioning their names) in a disparaging manner, so as to preserve harmony vis-à-vis Sunnis in areas where Shias are a minority. On the other hand, others not only identify the caliphs by name but also chastise other Shias for cowardice, for compromising the dignity of the faith. For example, a leading religious authority and zakir, Ali Naqi Naqvi ("Naqqan Saheb") wrote in the early 1930s in *Shahīd-e Insāniyat* (*The Martyr of Humanity*), about the need to universalize Husain's struggle in order to benefit all of humanity, as well as to unite Muslims in reverence and devotion toward Husain.[21] Subsequently, he was severely reprimanded by members of his own community for glossing over the "crimes" of the first three caliphs in order to appease the Sunnis. Naqvi's critics asserted that any oversight in such matters amounts to endorsing the misdeeds of the enemies of the Prophet's family. One such critic reminds Naqvi that "Husain was murdered at the gathering in which Abu Bakr was elected."[22] Therefore, denying Ali's leadership of the Muslim community after the Prophet is tantamount to murdering Husain.

The caliphate passed from Abu Bakr to Umar and then to Usman. Ali and his supporters took a relatively quietist stance during the period of these first three caliphs, a period which lasted for almost twenty-four years. Eventually Ali did become the caliph, although he governed a state marred by civil strife and rebellions. The first obstacle he faced was the Prophet's wife, Aisha. Consumed with a jealousy that had been ignited by the Prophet's affection toward Ali and Fatima, many a Shia claims, Aisha raised an army against the newly elected Ali, thereby contributing to the first battle (the Battle of the Camel) of Islam's first civil war. Ali successfully overcame Aisha, but the opposition he faced from the forces of Muawiya was far more intractable.

Muawiya, the head of the powerful Umayyad clan, had been appointed the governor of Syria by the second caliph, Umar. Members of the Umayyad clan had been the staunchest enemies of Islam and were among the last Meccans to embrace the religion. It fell upon Ali, as heir to the Prophet's Islam, to combat the Umayyads, led by Muawiya. Muawiya, through the use of his political guile, prevailed over Ali and his followers and forced them to move their power base from the Prophet's Medina to the garrison town of Kufa. It was in the mosque of Kufa that a disgruntled Muslim, who had developed a hatred for factionalism in Islam, assassinated Ali.

In spite of the obstacles he faced, Ali inaugurated a series of policies and practices that helped guide future generations of righteous Muslims. His erudition and justice revealed him as a man who followed the Quran, effected a return to Muhammad's Islam, and brought about justice for all his subjects. Among Ali's bequests, not just for his community but for humanity, is a letter to one of his governors, Malik Ashtar, in which he lays down the guiding principles for a just government. Not only does this letter—often quoted by scholars defending Islamic humanism after the September 11 attacks in the United States—call for the fair treatment of non-Muslims, but it is also concerned with the well-being of society's have-nots. Rashid Turabi translated this letter from Arabic into Urdu and English, fondly quoting it as a reflection of Islam's pluralism and justice:

> Develop in your heart the feeling of love for your people and let it be the source of kindliness and blessing to them. Do not behave with them like a barbarian, and do not appropriate to yourself that which belongs to them. Remember that the citizens of the state are of two categories. They are either your brethren in religion or your brethren in kind. They are subject to infirmities and liable to commit mistakes. Some indeed do commit mistakes. But forgive them even as you would like God to forgive you. Bear in mind that you are placed over them, even as I am placed over you. And then there is God even above him who has given you the position of a Governor in order that you may look after those under you and to be sufficient unto them. And you will be judged by what you do for them. Do not set yourself against God, for neither do you possess the strength to shield yourself against His displeasure, nor can you place yourself outside the pale of His mercy and forgiveness. Do not feel sorry over any act of forgiveness, nor rejoice over any punishment that you may mete out to anyone. Do not rouse yourself to anger, for no good will come out of it. Do not say: "I am your overlord and dictator, and that you should, therefore, bow to my commands," as that will corrupt your heart, weaken your faith in religion and create disorder in the state. Should you be elated by power, ever feel in your mind the slightest symptoms of pride and arrogance, then look at the power and majesty of the Divine governance of the Universe over which

> you have absolutely no control. It will restore the sense of balance to your wayward intelligence and give you the sense of calmness and affability.[23]

After Ali's murder, in an effort to establish a legitimate state, his eldest son Hasan was elected the caliph in Kufa; but under pressure from Muawiya, Hasan had to relinquish this position of leadership. Hasan, along with his younger brother Husain, retired to Medina from Kufa and agreed to remain silent as long as Muawiya held the reins of power. Shias believe that Hasan was eventually poisoned at the instigation of Muawiya.

Political dissent under Muawiya was not a matter taken lightly. He appointed governors who employed all means necessary to assure the stability and legitimacy of the growing empire, which he headed from the capital of Damascus. Ali was cursed from the pulpits of the mosques, lest a counterclaim to the caliph's legitimacy endanger Umayyad authority. Ali's Shias, like Hujr b. Adi al-Kindi, revolted against Muawiya, only to be beheaded.[24]

Within Shii communities, Muawiya, Aisha, and others, who are believed to have conspired against Ali are cursed in incantations known as tabarra; this tabarra has become a doctrinal necessity for many Shias. In some Shii households, certain days of Muharram are selected for tabarra. Muharram has become the ideal time for this cursing, some Shias would say, because it demands allegiance to the Prophet's family and condemnation of those who made this family suffer. Not only has the tabarra become a verbal testimony of commitment to the Prophet's family, but it is followed by actions, such as the burning of effigies (*putle*) of the enemies of Ali and Husain. The effigy-burning, color-throwing, carnival atmosphere marks, for some Shii communities, the end of the two-month eight-day-long mourning period of ayyam-e aza. The ninth day of the third Islamic month is referred to as *navīñ kīʿīd*; on this day, Shias in parts of South Asia celebrate the renewal of their faith, since it is around this time that one of the later followers of Husain, Mukhtar, killed several enemies of the Prophet's family to avenge the tragedy of Karbala. This day is preceded by exuberant recitations of the feats of Mukhtar, which work as a welcome restorative for many Shias. In addition to providing a forum for the recollection of the vengeance unleashed by Mukhtar around this time, in many Shii circles this is also the day on which the last Shii Imam, the awaited savior of the community, assumes community leadership after his father's martyrdom. Devotees believe that the last Imam is present (although in occultation) and is guiding the righteous members of his community. Thus the navin kiʿid occasions a breath of relief—not all was lost in Karbala—and Husain's progeny, in spite of overwhelming difficulties, have survived to guide humanity.

The festivities associated with this day in many parts of South Asia are similar to those associated with the Hindu spring festival of Holi, which is marked by paint-throwing and bonfire-burning to symbolize the victory of virtue and the destruction of vice. Many of these Shii practices can be traced back to sixteenth-century Safavid Iran.[25] The Shii navin kiʿid arouses the ire of many Sunnis, who feel that Shii celebrations on this occasion are an affront to the

first three caliphs, who are cursed in some Shii households during this time. Furthermore, this festival, in the popular lore of many Sunni communities, has acquired a reputation for promoting licentiousness among Shias. For example, stories of Shii wife-swapping are part of the Sunni narratives of this festival, as though to make the point that not only are Shias guilty of cursing the Prophet's companions but such cursing is tied to the Shii community's other sinful actions. Just as self-flagellation during the majlis provides a basis for many Sunnis to criticize Shias for mourning Husain in an excessive (un-Islamic) manner, the joys of navin ki id cause Sunnis to reproach Shias for indulging in unrestrained debauchery. Shias, of course, deny participating in acts that violate Islamic law.

Although the performance of public tabarra, or effigy-burning, exists in South Asia, it should be emphasized that only a handful of Shias, usually those from neighborhoods that are overwhelmingly Shia, participate in such actions. The precise character of such provocative festivities varies from region to region, as it varies from neighborhood to neighborhood. These actions are loudly condemned by many community leaders; they are seen as triggers for Shii-Sunni sectarian violence. Shii-Sunni controversies in the subcontinent have raged for years, largely over the issue of tabarra and effigy-burning. Sunnis have reacted to Shii vilification by praising the companions (*madḥ-e ṣaḥāba*), this in turn infuriates Shias who see this as tantamount to calling the Karbala tragedy an aberration in the history of Islam.[26] In particular contexts of Shii-Sunni tension, such as Lucknow during the late 1960s—when Shias felt targeted not only by Sunnis but by extension by the ruling Congress party that was courting Sunni votes—Shias have sought assistance from right-wing Hindu parties like the Jan Sangh.[27] Even worlds away from the anti-Muslim nationalist political agenda of the Jan Sangh, in order to be heard and elicit action from the government, Shias (as a minority within India's Muslim community) have at certain times forged desperate alliances fraught with unsettling political equations for the present and the future.

When speaking of Shii-Sunni conflicts, I do not wish to essentialize the configuration of conflicts whose origins and causes—as Sandria Freitag and others have shown so well[28]—are disparate and often contingent upon broader socioeconomic factors. However, by mentioning these issues, I underscore Shii perceptions of the need for an alternative, if not oppositional, history within the majlis context.

Justifying an Alternative History

Sayyid Muhammad Murtuza (d. 1999), a friend of Rashid Turabi as well as a student of Turabi's mentor, Ayatollah Haji Mirza Mahdi Pooya (d. 1973), spoke to me about the Sunni "misperceptions" of Shiism and Shiism as an antithesis to Islam.[29] Furthermore, he laid the basis for the necessity of articulating Islamic history from a Shii perspective; Shias, in his opinion, had been historically "victimized" by Sunni readings of Islam, both in India and Pakistan:

> From Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi to Shah Waliullah, from Shah Abdul Aziz to the Deobandis, to Mahmood Abbasi, all have felt threatened by the Shii version of Islamic history and they have gone to all lengths to discredit Shiism. Lately, they [Sunnis] have invented the madh-e sahaba which has no historical grounding and it is simply a slogan to infuriate Shias.[30]

All those mentioned above have contributed to the anti-Shii polemical discourse in South Asia: Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi (d. 1624 C.E.), a contemporary of the Mughal emperor Akbar, often referred to in Sunni circles as *mujaddid*, or "renewer," talked of Shias as "innovators" and "worse than infidels."[31] The Shaykh's rhetoric was fanned in the ensuing century by Shah Waliullah (d. 1762 C.E.) who, according to Athar Abbas Rizvi, "like all other orthodox Sunnis considered Shias to be odious and damned and therefore cut off from Divine grace."[32] Shah Waliullah's son, Shah Abdul Aziz (d. 1824 C.E.) further perpetuated this view of Shias by not only considering them heretics, but also discouraging any form of Sunni association with them, whether through marriage or by eating animals slaughtered by them.[33] The likes of Shah Abdul Aziz inspired the founding of such prominent institutions of Sunni learning as the school in Deoband (founded in 1867).[34] Barbara Metcalf notes in her work on nineteenth-century North Indian Muslim scholars and institutions, Sunni religious authorities were quick to appraise Shias in a negative light, blame weakening Muslim values on Shii and Sufi modes of Islam, and hold these groups more responsible than non-Muslim forces.[35]

The labor to discredit continues in the opinion of the late Murtuza, even in the twentieth century, as evident in the works of Mahmood Abbasi. Mahmood Abbasi defends Yazid's cause[36] by citing traditions that go back to the Prophet. In one such tradition, the Prophet is reported to have said that if the Muslim community is split by allegiance to two separate caliphs at one time, then the second caliph, i.e., the one to whom allegiance was paid at a later time, must be killed.[37] This, in effect, amounts to an apology for Yazid's actions in Karbala, since Husain rose against Yazid only after members of the Muslim community had paid allegiance to the latter. "By reading such books, one would think that the Prophet had condoned the murder of his own grandson," said Sayyid Muhammad Murtuza, wryly.[38]

The need for the majlis to articulate Shii history (according to Taqi Hasan Wafa, Murtuza's cousin and a leading Shii authority of Hyderabad) has to be judiciously placed within the larger colonial and postcolonial contexts that fueled rigid religious categorization, anti-Shii stereotypes, and exclusivist identities. Wafa, who for years headed Hyderabad's oldest Shii institution (Madrasa-e-Jafaria), was directly involved in training students in Shii studies. As a student of Shii history and the supervisor of South India's largest library of Shii manuscripts and books, Wafa is certain that the majlis has grown over the last hundred years as a forum for Shii-Sunni polemics. According to Wafa, and consistent with historical evidence from other parts of South Asia,[39] pre-twentieth-century majlises in South Asia were more about expressing devotion

to Husain than giving Shii faith a legitimate historical grounding by polemically engaging Sunnis. In precolonial times, with a few exceptions, Muharram was allotted a significant role in various South Asian communities, including those of Hindus, Buddhists, and Sunnis. In regard to the symbol of Husain, these heterogenous communities superimposed a universal heroic perspective. By way of example, Wafa mentions that the Hindu Prime Minister of Hyderabad, Maharaja Kishan Parshad, was a Hindu flagellant in Husain's devotion. Legend has it that when this devotee of Husain was cremated, all of his body, save for his palm and chest that were used in flagellation, was reduced to ashes. This syncretic tradition altered with the advent of colonialism; colonial officials, in collaboration with a few chosen representatives of India's religious communities, strategically used the religious cachet to "divide and rule" India.[40]

Hence, the British colonial process began to undermine the events of Muharram, whose parameters were jointly framed by various religious communities and whose existence for centuries enfeebled the very notion of religious boundaries. As rigid religious categories were projected onto the culture of South Asia, in the hope that such categorization would make the running of the colonial enterprise easier, religious orientations appeared in increasingly exclusivist terms. Many colonized subjects in the subcontinent marshaled effective arguments against the British "divide and rule" policies through poetry and other art forms.

For instance, during Muharram of 1908, when harsh polemical relations between particular Shii and Sunni segments of Lucknow gave a gloomy ambience to that city, the *Awadh Punch,* Urdu's premier comic magazine, caricatured Lucknow's Muharram as a "circus." In this circus, the British assumed the role of the "general manager," or ringmaster, who was confounded by the conflict between the police and the masses of Lucknow. Both sides in this conflict lost their humanity to their animalistic nature and religion was reduced to a mere toy in the hands of Lucknow's masses (see figure 3.1). The great Urdu satirist, Akbar Allahabadi, wondered in the same magazine as to how Shii and Sunni communities, both of whom believe in the "same Quran, the same direction of prayer, the same Allah, and the same Messenger" will gain anything in the long run by fighting each other while both remain "enslaved" by the Others [the British].[41]

During the colonial era, discourses of Muharram, especially the flagellation that characterized it, were repressed from a shared spiritual sphere and became anchored in discourses of violence that needed to be managed. Even a fictional work like E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* speaks of Muharram as a moment of mayhem in India.[42] Religious nationalists fulfilled what the colonialists had prefigured.

The invectives against the Shii minority community and its practices only increased with the progress of the twentieth century, even after the British departed from the region in 1947. Muharram is at once a key moment of Shii self-assertion and a syncretic event that facilitates the convergence of Shii and non-Shii devotees of Husain in many parts of South Asia. Therefore, it is not difficult to see how it has become a target of criticism and violence for those



FIGURE 3.1 Cartoon appearing in *Awadh Punch*, 1908. (Left to right: 'Police, General Manager, People of Lucknow with Religion in their hand.') The Urdu caption reads: "The Spectacle of Muharram Circus in Lucknow."

who want to police cultural and religious boundaries, thereby defining Islam anew. The violence-Karbala-Muharram discursive nexus and the concomitant agenda of repressing the Shii community, albeit in shifting patterns, has forced Shias to make the majlis a creative space for political interventions and identity assertions. While particular Sunni groups invoke the likes of Abbasi, Sirhindi, and Waliullah, to sharpen their anti-Shii stances and use Muharram as a coded reference for Shii "heresy," Shias, in their majlises, court an Islamic history that supports their own spiritual and ideological orientations against the correlative workings of colonial discourses and Sunni puritanism.

Modes of Invoking Karbala in the Majlis

When speaking in a public forum like the majlis, Shias are usually careful to frame their arguments so as not to incite violent reactions in other communities. However, Karbala is still seen within its widest interconnections and the speakers of the Shii community do not shy away from negative appraisals of developments in the post-Prophetic community. These appraisals usually occur without mention of certain names: The fact that Ali and Fatima were oppressed is mentioned, but the names of the oppressors are omitted. Or, the narrators resort to the passive tense whereby the subject performing the action is occluded. Even though the oppressors of Ali and Fatima, unlike the oppressors of Husain, are seldom openly mentioned by name, they are clearly understood by the Shii interpretive community to be the first three caliphs and their supporters. Such a concealment of names dates from an early period in Islamic

history and is evident in the writings of the likes of Nasir-e Khusraw (d. ca. 1075 C.E.):

> tū bar ān gozideh-ye Ḵhudā o Payambar
> gozīdī fulān-o fulān-o fulān[43]
>
> In preference to the one chosen by God and the Prophet
> You chose so-and-so, so-and-so and so-and-so.

Implied here is Khusraw's belief that God and the Prophet chose Ali as the successor to the Prophet, but those opposed to Ali picked "nobodies" instead. Such a Shii discourse of "fulān-o fulān-o fulān," or "so-and-so, so-and-so and so-and-so," far from blunting the issue of succession to the Prophet, serves to underscore the absurdity of denying Ali his rightful place in the Islamic community in favor of three "nobodies." The three immediate successors to the Prophet (Abu Bakr, Umar, and Usman) always carry the blame for Karbala on their shoulders. One South Asian zakir says:

> If you look for the beginning links [reasons] of the Karbala incident, then Karbala will appear as the culmination of the beginning at Saqīfa—If after the Messenger, Ali and Fatima had not been oppressed, if their rights had not been violated, then an audacious one like Yazid would not have had the courage to wreak oppression and havoc [on the Prophet's family].—Satan became responsible for the destruction of humanity by not prostrating in front of Adam and Muslims became responsible for the destruction of Islam by not accepting the Caliphate of Ali [immediately after the Prophet].[44]

The zakir, Meeran Sahab, implicitly compares those who "usurped" the caliphate from Ali, to Satan. He argues that the merit of the Prophet's companions should not be judged by virtue of their association with the Prophet during his lifetime, but by their steadfastness to the Prophet's cause, as shown in their treatment of the Prophet's family after his death—treatment meted out to the Prophet's family by Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman, and Muawiya.

From Muawiya to Yazid

After Muawiya's death (680 C.E.), his son Yazid inherited the caliphate and insisted on the allegiance (*bayaʿ*) of Husain, to whom the Alid leadership had passed after Hasan's death (670 C.E.). It was customary at this time for political authorities to legitimize their rule by extracting allegiance from prominent members of the community. Thus Husain, as the Prophet's grandson, accrued unmatched spiritual status and his allegiance was perceived by Yazid and his advisors as essential to the survival of their rule. The political dimension of the struggle between the Alids and the anti-Alids emerges sharply with the rise of Yazid. As far as many pious Muslims of the time were concerned, Yazid had parted ways with Islam and it was up to Husain to provide guidance to the

community. Hence Husain, refusing to pledge allegiance to Yazid, set out for Kufa, whose people had invited him to provide leadership for them. He had also received confirmations of support from his cousin and emissary, Muslim b. Aqil, who had been sent to Kufa to gauge the potential backing for the Prophet's grandson.

Kufa had witnessed several uprisings during the reign of Muawiya, causing the powers in Damascus to look suspiciously at this Iraqi garrison city. Hence the Umayyad power could foresee Husain's arrival in Kufa as a fresh spark in an already combustible political scene. It was to forestall any such uproar in Kufa that Husain was stopped in Karbala, on the banks of the river Euphrates, by the Umayyad forces led by Hurr b. Yazid al-Tamimi. Hurr warned Husain of the death that awaited him if he were to proceed to Kufa. With ferocious assurance, Husain argued with Hurr and made it clear that Muhammad's grandson prized the well-being of Islam over his own life.[45]

Over the next few days, Husain was given grim news from Kufa: Many of his supporters were severely persecuted and his cousin Muslim as well as a staunch Kufan ally of the Alids, Hani b. Urwah, had been executed. The Kufan governor, Ibn Ziyad, soon dispatched a force of four thousand people under the command of Umar b. Sad. With the arrival of this force, an outright battle became inevitable. Great pressure was put upon Husain to reconsider his position against Yazid; he was even denied water. Husain, traveling with family members including young children and women, bore all of this with forbearance. On the ninth day of Muharram, Husain asked for a night devoted to meditation and prayers. Husain's only son to survive Karbala, Ali b. Husain, also known as Zain al-Abedin, later recounted his father's words to his companions:

> I glorify God, the Blessed and Exalted, with the most perfect glorification and I praise Him in happiness and misfortune. O God, I praise You for blessing us with prophethood, teaching us the Quran and making us understand the religion. You have given us ears, eyes, and hearts. You have not made us be among the polytheists. I know of no followers more fitting and more virtuous than my followers, nor of any family (*ahl al-bait*) more pious and more caring about family relationships than my family. May God reward you well on my behalf. Indeed, I think that our final day will come tomorrow through these enemies. I have thought about you. All, go away with the absolution from your oath, for there will be no obligation on you from me. This is a night that will give cover to you with its darkness. Use it as a camel to ride away through it.[46]

Not only did Husain not lose any of his companions, but as dawn broke, he gained a new one: Hurr b. Yazid, the general from the Umayyad camp, who had initially prevented Husain's caravan from going to Kufa.

Hurr's arrival in Husain's camp is a favorite topic of the majlis. Much of Husain's suffering is validated by the arrival of Hurr. Hurr's revolt provides insight into the effect of the Imam's presence and speeches on Yazid's army.

In spite of all the worldly wealth and honor at his disposal, Hurr meditated on the consequences of fighting Husain. When a companion asked Hurr why he was not committed entirely to the cause of Yazid, Hurr voiced his dilemma: "I am deciding between hell and heaven."[47] The choice makes Hurr's path of action clear; a path that will lead him to Husain:

> Fate brought him from fire to light
> Just a moment ago he was an atom
> Now he's a resplendent sun!
> Pleased, the Intercessor of the Resurrection[48] forgave his mistake
> His last moments were spent with his head in the lap of Shabbir[49]
> He attained stature, honor and splendor in the army of God
> When he was reduced to dust, his abode was in the healing dust of Karbala[50]

Hurr was perhaps one of the first ones to attain martyrdom on Husain's side. He is remembered year after year by millions as a paradigm of hope that reflects not only the contemplative aspect of religion but also its emphasis on forgiveness. In spite of Hurr thwarting the Imam's effort to move forward to Kufa, Husain forgave him when his mistake was realized. Hurr's very name means "freeborn," and as Husain himself had pointed out, Hurr lived up to this name—he was not a slave to any Yazid.[51] Hurr's story emphasizes the forgiving and transformational aspects of religion—with one important stipulation: The transformation must be reflected in action not mere words.

Hurr was followed in martyrdom by other loyal companions: the Ethiopian Jawn, the Imam's childhood friend Habib; and finally the members of the Prophet's family. Neither young nor old were spared. Each mother prepared her sons for the battlefield with such spirit that the children themselves vied with each other to attain precedence in martyrdom. Zainab, Husain's sister, sent her only two sons with an admonition: "You must not turn away from the cause of Truth."[52] The children never returned alive. The Imam himself brought their corpses into the women's tent. Upon seeing this, Zainab fell prostrate.

> A mother's children are dearer to her than anything
> But she sacrificed those sons that she adored for the sake of her brother
> She did not breathe a word of complaint when her two loved ones breathed their last
> Nor did she ask, "Who has departed for paradise?"
> Neither did she let fall the scarf from her hair, nor did she furrow her brow
> Bowing low, she prostrated twice to offer thanks[53]

Zainab's forbearance, however, quickly gave way to sorrow when the turn came for Ali Akbar to head for the battlefield. Ali Akbar was Husain's beloved son who Zainab raised as a foster mother for eighteen years. He resembled the

Prophet Muhammad in every respect. The majlises of Rashid Turabi, in which he recited the martyrdom of Ali Akbar, are considered especially poignant. Turabi asserted that at times, when the zakir is discussing an aspect of Karbala, there is an indication to the zakir (perhaps from the Imam himself) that Ali Akbar's martyrdom must be narrated.[54] Also, in Ali Akbar, Rashid Turabi saw the continuation of the family tradition of safeguarding the truth. Ali Akbar was willing to give up his life while protecting his father, just as his great-grandfather Abu Talib had protected the Prophet, his nephew, till the very end.

Once again, the Karbala narrations echo an alternative view of Islamic history. The majority of Sunnis do not believe that Abu Talib accepted Islam in his lifetime. A few of the Sunni traditions also relate that the Prophet, in spite of his love for Abu Talib, pointed out that Abu Talib would not be treated as a believing Muslim on the Day of Judgment, for he had not accepted his nephew as the Messenger of God. The Shias, however, believe that Abu Talib had embraced Islam, but had not declared it openly, in fear of his life. Rather he practiced *taqiyya* (dissimulation), a practice adopted by many Shias when their lives and livelihoods are threatened. While concealing his identity as a Muslim, Abu Talib protected his nephew from the hostilities of the Meccan aristocracy, including Yazid's father Muawiya, and his grandfather Abu Sufyan. While discussing Ali Akbar's determination to sacrifice his life for the cause of Islam, Rashid Turabi often introduces a narrative about the sacrifices of Husain's paternal grandfather for the same cause. Abu Talib's commitment to Muhammad in Mecca can only be paralleled with Ali's commitment to Muhammad in Medina, or Ali Akbar's commitment to Husain in Karbala. The father (Abu Talib) safeguarded the Prophet before he immigrated to Medina, his son (Ali) did so after the Prophet arrived in Medina.

In the sweltering desert of Karbala, Husain's Ali Akbar is determined to stay true to his family's honor: "Ali Akbar is the progeny of Abu Talib,"[55] says Turabi, thereby invoking the ongoing struggle between virtue and vice, allegorized through the narrative of confrontation between Husain's protective son and Abu Sufyan's vicious grandson. The struggle, which started on the sands of Mecca between Muhammad and the Meccan aristocracy headed by Abu Sufyan, reached its culmination on the banks of the Euphrates. Although Abu Sufyan's family had entered Islam after being defeated by the Prophet in the Battle of Badr, its commitment to Muhammad's cause could be measured by its blood-stained hands—hands stained from murdering Muhammad's supporters, including the blood relatives of God's last messenger. Karbala was the test to differentiate between those who simply paid lip service to Islam (the *munāfiqīn,* or hypocrites) and those who struggled and sacrificed for God's final revelation (the *mujāhidīn*, or those who strive in God's way). Karbala was thus a righteous, divinely sanctioned struggle led by Husain, in essence an unveiling of hypocrisy. The mere proclamation of God's unity and Muhammad's prophecy was not sufficient. Husain's opponents proclaimed such a creed but Islam demanded action more than it demanded words. Who but Abu Talib, his son Ali, his grandson Husain, and his great-grandson Ali Akbar could meet this

demand?[56] Ali Akbar was followed by other members of his family, including his cousin Qasim, a son of Hasan, who, according to tradition, had just been wed to Husain's daughter.

The standard-bearer (*ʿalamdār*) of Husain's cause was his half-brother Abbas b. Ali. Abbas resembled Ali in majesty and courage. Husain reminded his brother that the physical war was only to be defensive. The Alids would neither initiate nor prolong it. This point is underscored repeatedly by Shii zakirs of the subcontinent in the wake of assertions by many—including, of course, many Orientalists—that Islam is "a religion of the sword." Sayyid Ibn Hasan Jarachvi, a popular zakir of Uttar Pradesh, with a following in other parts of South Asia, went so far as to call Husain's struggle with the forces of Yazid a *satyagraha,* the term used by Gandhi for his nonviolent resistance to the British.[57] As evidence for this assertion, the zakir cites Husain's speech on the eve of ashura, in which the Imam told all his companions and family members to leave Karbala, since Yazid demanded allegiance only from Husain and not from those who accompanied him. Had the Imam desired a physical confrontation, why would he urge his followers to depart?

The September 11 attacks further stimulated an interpretation of history that identifies the Shii cause with peace and nonviolence. After these attacks, many majlises side-stepped any thoughtful and nuanced discussion of politics and instead reinstated caricatural categories of peace-loving, nonviolent Muslims. Rather than rejecting the polarized images of Islam projected by the US-based mass media, these majlises made reference to violence that was perpetrated against the United States and violence that Shias face in Iraq and South Asia, as if the perpetrators were the same throughout history and the violence were comparable. In a majlis broadcast on a popular cable channel in South Asia and parts of the Arab world on February 15, 2005, Maulana Muhammad Athar, a popular contemporary zakir in South Asia, extolled Husain's war in Karbala as one that was launched to protect the Quranic principle: "There is no compulsion in religion."[58] In this reading of Karbala, Yazid is identified with force and compulsion, for demanding allegiance from Husain. Yazid's actions are also identified as the actions of a terrorist, thereby linking Yazid to modern-day enemies of Shias who participate in violent suppression of Shii mourning, whether in Pakistan or Iraq. Thus a link is forged among modern-day anti-Shii elements (the Taliban, al-Qaida and other organizations with similar anti-Shii agendas), the forces of Yazid, and the powers that usurped the caliphate from Ali. Kalb-e Jawwad of Lucknow also depicts Shiism as a peaceful religion by inviting his audiences to step into the ethical world of Imam Husain during the battle of Karbala. In spite of being deprived of water, when the Imam was asked by one of his companions to physically attack the forces of Yazid, the Imam replied: "We do not start wars."[59] The zakir wants the world to remember this principle of Husain's and believes that if all nations follow its spirit, there would be no war in this world.

In Muharram of 2002, the first after the September 11 attacks in the United States, Athar read ten majlises in Mumbai (generally known as "Bombay" in the West) that were focused on the issue of terrorism. Not only did he distance

Shias from terrorism, but he also defined jihad as a defensive war, as a war that must be fought inside oneself, against one's lower, immoral self, before it is fought against people and ideas outside oneself. For this religious authority, Karbala is an important lesson for all non-Muslims because it reflects two types of Muslim practioners: One on the side of Yazid, who claim to be Muslim, and the other on the side of Husain. Yazid believed in force and compulsion, while Husain believed in justice and peace. Athar pities those Muslims who have been foolish enough to make heroes out of those "Muslims" who attain military victory at the price of Islam's spirituality. The people he names are historically associated with anti-Shii sentiments: Mahmud of Ghazna (the eleventh-century Turkish warrior who raided the temples of Somnath), Aurangzeb (the Mughal ruler who conquered the Shii kingdom of the Qutb Shahis in the Deccan), and Saddam Hussein (the Iraqi leader who murdered many Shias and Kurds). Athar's discourse paves the way to condemning these heroes as belonging to Yazid's side and calls for an alternative set of heroes, such as those who supported Husain in Karbala, especially his half-brother Abbas.

When physical confrontation was forced upon the Imam Husain, Abbas gallantly defended him. Husain and his children were so dear to this son of Ali that he braved a storm of arrows to fetch water for Husain's daughter Sakina and attained martyrdom on his way back to Husain's tent. The faithfulness with which Abbas carried out his brother's mission forever secured his status as the Messenger of Fidelity, the Moon of the Hashimite clan, and the Water-carrier of the holy family. The replicas of his standard became favorite icons of the Shia for centuries to come. They are constant reminders that although Abbas died defending the standard of Islam, that standard itself survived Karbala. Thousands of Shii houses raise replicas of these standards (alams) along with replicas of the shrines of the Prophet's family in memory of those who suffered in the cause of Islam.[60] Although such icons, infused with religious significance, are reminders of the ultimate victory of the cause of justice, they keep the devotees of the Prophet's household always mindful of the suffering that each member of this family endured.

Perhaps no sacrifice of Karbala carries more emotional weight than the martyrdom of the Imam's six-month-old son, Ali Asghar. A popular elegy, with a moving internal rhyme, recited in commemoration of this event, alludes once again to the extent of the opposition's vendetta against Husain:

batātī hai ṣāf yeh shaqāvat ke āj kal kī nahīñ ʿadāvat
kaṛī kamāñ detī hai shahādat ke ek zamāne kī dushmanī hai
thā is gharāne kā ek zamāna ke kalmā paṛhta thā ek zamāna
aur āj hai yeh vahī gharāna ke jis kā bachcha bhī kushtanī hai
na āte yūñ māñgne ko pāni ḳhabar gar Aṣġhar ko is kī hotī
ke ummat-e jadd kī āj ithī baṛhī huʾī nāvak afganī hai[61]

The villainy [of Yazid's side] clearly reveals that this hatred did not begin just yesterday
The arched bow bears witness, this is an age-old hostility

There was a time when the entire world uttered the creed of this [the Prophet's] family,
Testifying to their faith
But today they [the enemies] see fit to murder a child from this very same family
Had Asghar known that his grandfather's community was so bent on shooting arrows,
He would never have asked for water

Another poet wishes that the paradigmatic model of patience, the Prophet Job, had been able to witness a more painful submission to God.

If only noble Job could behold today
How Husain demonstrates the glory of patience![62]

The event of Asghar's martyrdom has become a dominant focal point in Shii commemorative exercises, as the Imam's devotees re-enact the painful, reluctant steps that Husain must have taken toward the infant's mother while carrying the corpse of the youngest martyr of Karbala. With these oft-quoted consoling words from the Quran, Husain makes sense of his latest agony: "From Him we come and to Him we return. I submit to the God-given fate and I accept His commands."[63]

Through this and other distressing incidents, the Imam evinced an exemplary forbearance, praising God for granting him the strength to sacrifice so much for the cause of Islam. As that day drew to a close, the last surviving grandson of the Prophet was murdered while performing his afternoon prayers, by those who claimed to be the Prophet's followers. Karbala, since that moment, was no longer a geographical dot on the banks of the Euphrates; it has exerted its symbolic strength far beyond the boundaries of Iraq for more than a millennium. And although this event has no uniform or consistent interpretation, poets, devotees, detractors, and historians of Islam continue to discuss its legacy.

While the Umayyads restricted the public commemorations of Karbala, they were unable to effectively thwart the remembrance of this event in private. In subsequent years, the memories of Karbala set off and sustained several uprisings against the forces held responsible for slaying Husain. Although later commentators on Karbala, who spoke from political vantage points, advanced the argument that this was a model religio-political struggle at one level, this argument does not seem to feature prominently in the extant early discussions of this event. Amir Moezzi makes this point more forcefully by arguing that the Imams who came after Husain saw his struggle at Karbala more as an uplifting spiritual achievement than a political rebellion:

> As far as al-Husayn's [Husain's] case is concerned, to our knowledge none of his successors interpreted his presence in Karbala as being a "political" act aimed at upsetting the powers that be. According to his own successors, the act of the imam was that of a Friend of God (walī) fulfilling his destiny according to the will of the Beloved (mawlā).[64]

Notwithstanding the existence of such apolitical discourse, we should beware of drawing a straight line of explanations or dismissal over time and across contexts. If we consider that Husain, for whatever reason, was killed while confronting the army of the ruling authority, could it be that the political repression of Husain's followers was such that they had to keep a discreet silence about the reasons behind and the legacy of the event of Karbala?

For South Asian devotional and poetic lore, the historians' perspective on whether Shiism gathered political, mystical, or both forces from the battle of Karbala is irrelevant. For such lore, Fatima, who descended from heaven to support her son during his agony, was seated very close to the Imam and witnessed the horror of Husain's brutal slaying. Such a blight was this incident to God's creation that the sun was eclipsed, the earth quaked, and the clouds wept tears of blood. The desert of Karbala witnessed the arrival of night, *shām-e ġharībān,* or the night of the dispossessed. This night, far from concealing the heroic sacrifices of Husain and his companions, brought to light the figure who would, from this point forward, promulgate Husain's message—Sayyadah Zainab.

Karbala from Husain to Zainab

It was on the night of the tenth of Muharram that Husain's sister Zainab took charge of her desolated household. The majlises commemorating this evening are usually held in the absence of any light. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, this majlis of Rashid Turabi was broadcast around South Asia from Karachi; it thereby created a transnational bond among South Asian Shias. For Turabi, when the time came for Husain to rise as a martyr, it was Zainab who presented her brother as a sacrifice and offered him on Islam's behalf, just as the Prophet Abraham presented his son Ismail. From this point onward, she spoke with paramount authority and unsurpassed courage. Turabi's prose narration of Zainab's endurance in the face of such sorrows was followed by Sayyid Al-e Raza's farewell salam that salutes Zainab:

salām bhejte haiñ apnī shāhzādī par
ke jis ko soñp ga'e marte vaqt ghar sarvar
musāfirat ne jise be basī yeh dikhlā'ī
niśār kar dī'e bachche na bach sakā bhā'ī
asīr ho ke jise Shāmiyoñ ke narġhe meñ
Ḥusainīat hai sikhānā ʿAlī ke lahje meñ[65]

We convey greetings to our princess
To whom the King [Husain] entrusted the house in his dying moments
Her journey reduced her to such straits of helplessness
That despite sacrificing her children
She was unable to save her brother
shackled, encircled by the Syrians [forces of Yazid]

She has to teach the way of Husain
In the manner of Ali

Being the Imam-like and Prophet-like force that she is for her devotees, the focus of Shii commemorations shifts to Zainab at dusk on ashura. For the rest of the commemoration period, no gathering is likely to be void of mention of her. So far in the story of Karbala, Zainab was Husain's strongest supporter. She left her husband behind in Medina to accompany her brother. Husain was always deferential to his sister. Thus writes Anis in his marsiya:

From her elders the rose of Zahra [Zainab] inherited
Fatima's character and the majesty of God's Lion [Ali]
Husain, the Oppressed King, recognized the rank of the second Zahra
And considered her a second mother[66]

So Zainab was the second Fatima Zahra. Moreover, she had the majesty of Ali, the Lion of God. The Imam Husain treated his sister accordingly. Within hours the women of Zainab's household and Husain's only surviving son Ali (Zain al-Abedin, the fourth Shii imam, who was too ill to fight), were taken as captives, first to the court of Ibn Ziyad in Kufa, and then to Yazid's palace in Damascus. Along the way, both Zainab and Zain al-Abedin gave eloquent sermons in support of the cause of those who were murdered at Karbala. Finally, on the first day of Safar, the second Islamic month, Zainab confronted Yazid in Damascus, to redeem her family's suffering and tell the world the reasons for which Husain and his companions suffered. From this moment onward, Zainab evoked the far-flung conquest of Husain, metaphorically turning Damascus into a variant of Karbala. Husain's martyrdom and his physical combat are reinforced through Zainab's subsequent confrontation with Yazid; her battle with words and deeds. Husain and Abbas are the masculine faces of martyrdom; Zainab is its feminine face.

Zainab: The Conqueror of Syria

O God! Answer our prayers for the sake of Zainab,
The patient and wounded woman of Karbala,
Those who are ill, hasten to cure them,
Deliver us from envy and mischief,
Intercede on our behalf, O sorrowful Zainab![67]

When Saddam Hussein imposed restrictions on Shii pilgrimage to Karbala in the 1980s and 1990s, it was to Damascus that thousands of Shias turned. I visited Damascus in 1996 to find a majestically solemn shrine awaiting the pilgrim-visitor as s/he walks through the raucous markets of southeast Damascus. Inside the arched gate of the shrine of Sayyadah Zainab, the gilded dome, along with the ceilings and walls of the shrine, glittered with mirrors.

The tear-filled eyes of the pilgrims reflected the reverence and love that is accorded to this granddaughter of the Prophet. Pilgrims of diverse ethnicities and nationalities recited prayers like those at the beginning of this section. Many came not only to reaffirm their commitment to the cause of Islam, for which Zainab gallantly fought, but also to atone for their sins and ask for Zainab's intercession on the Day of Judgment. Few pilgrims to the shrine of Zainab remain untouched by the intensity of the devotional acts that can be seen as one moves toward the sepulcher of the Prophet Muhammad's granddaughter.

The modes of invoking Zainab are as diverse as the ethnic backgrounds of the thousands of pilgrims who converge at this shrine: from reading the tributary Arabic prayers (ziyarat) that salute the trials and tribulations of Fatima's daughter, to reciting moving Urdu elegies that recount her courage with remarkable vividness. One of the things that struck me the most during my visit to Damascus was the tape recorders that had been brought by several South Asian pilgrims, used to play Urdu elegies and sermons (including those of Rashid Turabi) in honor of Zainab, hence resonating the symbiosis between modern technology and premodern history, South Asia and Syria, Karbala and Damascus.

The sermon that I heard in Damascus on the first day of Safar was perhaps one of Rashid Turabi's most powerful. This sermon was, in many ways, a continuation of his previous sermons that established Zainab as the co-hero of Karbala, along with her brother, the martyred Imam Husain. When recounting the events of this solemn day, Rashid Turabi compares it to ashura: "For me, this day is not less in significance than the day of ashura."[68] "My God! The revolution of time! This household of Muhammad and this treatment [of the household] by his community!"[69] On the day of ashura, Husain's jihad is commemorated; the first of Safar is a commemoration of Zainab's jihad. Husain's jihad was marked partly by swords and arrows; Zainab's jihad was waged through words of eloquence. Husain made Karbala immortal; Zainab assured the immortality of Karbala through her sermons in Damascus. She must have been well aware of the words of her grandfather Muhammad: "The best form of jihad is to utter just words (*kalimat ʿadl*) in the presence of a tyrant ruler (*imām jāʾir*)."[70] Turabi is quick to remind his audience of the oft-cited words of the Prophet to his community: "Certainly, for you, I am leaving two valuable things behind—the Book of God, and my progeny, my household. If you stay faithful to them then you will never be led astray."[71] On this day, the progeny of the Prophet—led by his granddaughter Zainab and his great-grandson Ali b. al-Husain, both of them well-versed in the Book that was revealed to their forefather, both adherent to its commands, even at the cost of immense personal sacrifice—faced Yazid. This majlis commemorates the confrontation between Zainab and Yazid. It is repeated each year, says Turabi, so the world does not fear *Yazīdiat,* Yazidism. The minority must not be intimidated by the majority.[72] Thus Husainiyyat, the way of Husain, remains the model for generations to come.

Turabi's narration of this event can be reconstructed along these lines: The

captured family of the Prophet and the heads of the martyrs were taken into Yazid's presence. Yazid first asked the identity of each of the martyrs and then turned to the captives. Among the captives, Yazid noticed a woman, encircled by other women, whose very demeanor signified defiance. Yazid lashed out, asking, "Who is this arrogant woman?" A surreal silence enveloped the court. The defiant woman rose to respond to this question, and made her way through the women who surrounded her. Finally, face to face with Yazid, she retorted: "Why are you asking them [the women]? Ask me. I'll tell you [who I am] I am Muhammad's granddaughter. I am Fatima's daughter. Ask me, Yazid." The entire court was awestruck by Zainab's introduction; she began her *ḳhuṭba* (sermon) with the praise of God:

> In the name of Allah, the most Gracious, the most Merciful. All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds. May praise and salutations be upon my grandfather, the Leader of Allah's Messengers, and upon his progeny.[73]

Turabi reminds his audience of the three most memorable khutbas in history: the ones given by Fatima, Ali, and Zainab. If Fatima's khutba was incomplete, Ali completed it. If Ali's khutba was incomplete, then Zainab completed it. Fatima's khutba also took place in a court, says Turabi, carefully sidestepping the name of the ruler in whose court the khutba was given.[74] Turabi does not need to mention this name, for his Shii audiences know very well that it was the court the first caliph, Abu Bakr. Fatima, marshaling the verses of the Quran for her cause, argued with Abu Bakr for her Fadak inheritance and for the caliphate of Ali, both of which she believed were bestowed upon her household. By connecting Zainab to her eloquent, knowledgeable, and bold mother, Turabi creates a nexus between Zainab and the Prophet.

The cause of justice was the vocation of the Prophet's family, Turabi wants to stress, and it was in this very spirit that Ali went to Abu Bakr's court to claim the caliphate. Again, Turabi does not need to name the forces that opposed Ali. Ali's Shias know that Ali pleaded his case (for being the most deserving successor to the Prophet) in Abu Bakr's presence, in the sermon of *shaqshaqiyya*; again, to no avail. Just by alluding to the khutbas of Ali and Fatima, Turabi intertwines Karbala and its aftermath with the injustices that befell the Prophet's family after his death. Karbala thus becomes a culmination, the pinnacle of sacrifice in the cause of Islam. It was left to Zainab to proclaim the message of her parents and brothers loudly and clearly. At the same time, it is up to a zakir like Turabi to proclaim the antecedents of the injustices that were the lot of the Prophet's family.

The audience's interest is heightened as Turabi once again speaks the language of Zainab, which has now become the language of the Quran. The Prophet's granddaughter, after sacrificing her family in the way of God, spoke through the language of God to a tyrant gloating at his "victory": "O Yazid! Have you forgotten the words of God? 'Let not those who disbelieve think that our giving them respite is good for their selves; We only give respite to

them that they may increase in sins, and for them is a disgraceful chastisement.' "[75]

After uttering these words from the Quran, Zainab lashed out at the vices of Yazid and his forefathers, especially his grandmother: "What else could I have expected from the progeny of a person whose forefathers ate the liver of my forefathers? This blood [of my forefathers] runs in their blood and the martyrs' blood has nurtured their flesh. What else could I have expected from such a family?"[76]

Turabi reflects on Zainab's words: "Have you seen this? This is an oppressor's court. This is a tyrant's court. This is a despot's court. This is a murderer's court and here is the daughter of the Lion of God [Ali]. It is this sermon of Zainab [at Yazid's court] that has preserved these houses [Shii houses] for centuries."[77]

Through the words of Zainab, Turabi invokes those "historical" events that privilege the Prophet's family at the expense of Yazid's. Zainab is quick to point out the not-so-illustrious ancestry of Yazid: His grandmother, after all, had gnawed on the liver of the Prophet's uncle after the Battle of Uhud, thereby securing for herself the title *jigar ḳhwāra,* the liver-eater. It was several years after Uhud that the Meccan aristocracy, including Yazid's Umayyad ancestors, was defeated by the Prophet's forces, and Yazid's grandfather Abu Sufyan was taken captive. When Abu Sufyan was taken to Muhammad, he fell at the Prophet's feet as an act of apology, and the Prophet freed him. Zainab reminds Yazid of this family's debt to her own family: "O progeny of the freedman of the Prophet! Is this your justice? Your daughters, your slave girls, your dear women are all sitting behind the curtain and the daughters of the Prophet, in shackles, unveiled, stand before you."[78]

Veiling signifies honor and privacy to Turabi and many others. Fadwa El Guindi captures the historical significance of veiling in Islamic societies:

> In general, veiling by women or men communicates, not subordinated gender status or the shame of sexuality, but the group status of the individual, the identity of the group, and the sacredness of privacy. Whether it is the Prophet entering Makka [Mecca] in victory or Aisha in public political speech, veiling becomes a device to formalize communication and a means to ceremonialize one's status and one's group identity.[79]

One of the accusations made against Yazid and his subordinates is that they forcefully removed the veils from the Prophet's family and dishonored them by making them walk unveiled in the streets, markets, and palaces of Kufa and Damascus. But as Zainab's sermon clearly attests, this attempt at dishonor failed miserably. Zainab gained honor and respect in the eyes of her devotees, not on account of her gender or the presence or absence of her veil, but through her discourse. Zainab proceeded in her sermon:

> I swear by Him who has bestowed prophecy upon our house and who has honored us with His book. I swear by Him who has se-

> lected us. I swear by Him who has given us good fortune. O Yazid! You will not be able to efface our account nor will you be able to comprehend our intentions, our goals, and the mystery of Husain's murder. Begone! I don't expect any such thing from you.[80]

Turabi continues in the present tense: "The deluge of tears is sweeping the court audiences to the feet of Zainab." Rashid Turabi compared Zainab's sermon to that of the Prophet when he defeated the armies of Yazid's grandfather: "When Mecca was conquered, the Messenger gave a sermon. Now, having conquered Syria, Zainab is giving a sermon."[81] The Prophet, in his sermon, had freed Yazid's grandfather, Abu Sufyan, who, after the defeat of his army, could have become a part of the booty won by the Prophet. Zainab, today, reminds Yazid of that freedom, as she implicates him in the destruction of Islam. She exposes the hypocrisy that had assumed power. She underscores the insignificance of such worldly power—the wrath that awaits those who ride on wealth and arrogance. Her grandfather completed the cycle of messages that were revealed by God. Her mother and father stood steadfast and confronted the ruling authority of the time (Abu Bakr). Her brother sacrificed his own life and that of his family to preserve the message of God. All these deeds needed to be brought to light, and for that, God had chosen Zainab. Zainab was truly her mother's daughter, and her mother was the Prophet's daughter. It did not matter that no son of the Prophet survived, says Turabi. His daughter Fatima survived him. To Turabi, Fatima is the *wāriṡ* (heir) to the legacies of all the Prophets.[82] Turabi's majlis has as its subject the daughter of Fatima, the honor of the Prophet's house. He makes it clear that this is not because she is a woman, nor is it because her face is publicly unveiled, rather it is because she carries the benefaction of God's messengers and saints, of her parents and of her brothers, a benefaction of virtue, justice, patience, motherhood, sisterhood, sacrifice, love, swordless war, dishonored honor, and so much more. Who in human history, man or woman, could carry all of this with such grace and fortitude? Turabi continually refers to Zainab as a "princess," he says, because she is a princess in God's kingdom of the hereafter, a realm in which the glory of this world fades into non-existence. Indeed, though she deserved the title and honor in this world, it was not her destiny, and ultimately, it is nothing compared to the glory that awaits her.

Zainab's centrality in the readings of Karbala has an important bearing on the gender dimension of this struggle; this is clear from the discourses of other South Asian Shii authorities such as Sayyid Ali Naqi Naqvi, popularly known as "Naqqan Saheb":

> While looking at the merits and circumstances of Zainab the Great, may Allah's peace be upon her, can any person hesitate to say that the stations that she passed [the obstacles she overcame] were more difficult than that station that was crossed by the friends of the Prince of Martyrs [Husain]? Having observed the historical conditions, can any person claim that in those forceful and trying moments, Zainab's tongue had any knots, her heart any intimidation,

> or that she herself had any fear or dread? . . . She is the voice of truth in the face of a tyrannical government and an oppressive sultanate—Can there be any doubt that each and every sentence of [Zainab's] speech was more brutal for Yazid than the wounds wrought by thousands of swords and spears? Can it be refuted that this sermon and many more sermons like this, some reaching us through history and others not, were such powerful weapons that they overturned the ruling throne of Yazid and the Umayyads and rendered them non-existent?[83]

In Naqvi's reading of Karbala—which is quite similar to many of Turabi's sermons on Zainab—not only did Zainab complete Husain's battle, but she became the medium through which Karbala survives for posterity. She became the inspirational rallying cry for the overthrow of the Umayyads that was destined to take place within the next few decades.[84]

At this point, it is imperative to highlight the way in which Zainab is projected among South Asian Shii authorities. Zainab ratifies the cause of Husain by reproaching Yazid in his own palace. The obeisance of the entire court to this woman of the Prophet's house was somehow surreal. Yazid arrogated to himself the status of the ruler of the Islamic world, he gloated over his temporal victories, but Zainab was left to provide a counter to Yazid's reading of his own authority, to set straight the historical record.

Through repeated invocations of Zainab, Shias also project her, along with her mother Fatima, as alternatives to the Sunni ideals of femininity embodied by Aisha. Zainab and Fatima are simultaneously warriors and women, but unlike Aisha, they did not venture into "misguided campaigns" against what is "right." The gendered presence of both these women in the majlis discourses becomes subservient to their agency as spokespersons of Islam. In short, this mother and daughter pair constitutes an interface between womanhood and warrior. They are neither spatially excluded from the constitution of Karbala nor is their physical presence and devotional inscription a patronizing diversion. While Zainab became the first to displace Karbala geographically by continuing to wage her brother's battle in Kufa and Syria, Fatima did not content herself with merely supporting the causes of Ali and Husain in Medina and Karbala: She is present in every majlis, entwining the past and the present, Ali, Husain, and their devotees, into a single matrix. While Zainab's most important legacy is her role as the vanguard of the majlis tradition that orchestrates the articulation of the Shii version of Islamic history, Fatima herself will continue to endorse this tradition for her devotees.

Although many Shias depict Zainab and Fatima as models of female empowerment in the early history of Islam, at times these depictions are constituted with tensions and ambiguities. On the one hand, these women offer powerfully provocative models of courage to the community; on the other hand, these women are so perfect that they lose their humanness and appear as Prophet-like and Imam-like. Can the invocation of these models atone for the

injustices done to women? Can the majlis, as a network of devotion and pedagogy, link Zainab and Fatima to their devotees in a pragmatic way? While many Shias feel that Fatima and Zainab, by virtue of their speeches in the courts of oppressors, provide a template for women's empowerment in Islamic societies, these models can also be disempowering because these women, especially Fatima, are elevated to such levels of perfection that it becomes impossible to emulate them. When these women are discussed in Shii gatherings, their power derives from their status as the Prophet's daughter and granddaughter—Fatima, at times, is even raised above the Virgin Mary, making it impossible for her life to resonate and cohere with the lives of her common devotees. Rashid Turabi and others conceal the ordinariness of the women of Karbala, and these women (Fatima included) are caught between devotional superhumanness and practical humanness, romanticism and realism.

But the discourse of women's empowerment cannot eclipse the comfort that Zainab and her mother offer to their devotees. Their effect is visible in the institution of majlis, founded by Zainab herself, and attended by Fatima. Whether the devotees mourn for Fatima's son, or for the members of their own respective families, they take comfort in the belief that their tears are being collected by the Prophet's daughter whose family embodies forbearance. She is present in every majlis consoling the community of her father and sons. No matter how much the devotees suffer, their suffering pales in comparison to the narratives of Fatima and Zainab's suffering. In this aspect, Shii devotees impart to these women a status matched only by Mary, the mother of Jesus, in many Christian traditions.

While I have focused in this chapter on the modes in which the South Asian Shii community has articulated its history and on the informal pact that exists between the zakirs/zakiras and their audiences, I would also like to draw attention to the problematics of unconditionally accepting the legitimacy of these alternative historical discourses or celebrating these gatherings as ideal and safe minority sites. It is the Shii community's task to reconcile Islamic history, which has sidelined them and challenged their Muslimness, with dynamic interpretive/poetic strategies that are a prerogative of the zakir(a)-interpretive community nexus. This task can also precipitate history creation that is based on an appeal to existing prejudices. A recent incident from South Asia makes this point more assertively: One of the Shii religious authorities in South Asia (whom I shall refer to as Maulana Imran, so as to protect his anonymity), who publishes an Islamic monthly journal in Urdu, quoted a passage from one of the Lebanese religious authorities that suggests Ali might have paid allegiance to Abu Bakr after the Prophet's death. In this case, paying allegiance does not mean that Ali pronounced any endorsement of the moral and spiritual authority of Abu Bakr.

Although the passage made it obvious that this was not Maulana Imran's personal view, he faced serious threats and harassment for not explicitly refuting this view and dissociating himself from it in a clear language. Many of his fellow Shii zakirs also turned against him, resorting to ad hominem attacks against him and his family, and even encouraging the region's rogue elements

to make his peaceful survival difficult. Those Shias who supported Maulana Imran during this controversy claim that the real instigators marshaling forces against him were other Shii authorities envious of Maulana Imran's increasing popularity among a particular group of educated South Asians. Maulana Imran, because of his involvement with various philanthropic and youth-oriented causes, was becoming a threat to the guardian-zakirs of the South Asian Shii establishment; his fellow zakirs wanted to discredit him before he gained a larger following. Maulana Imran, from his minbar, had become a vocal advocate of education for men and women and a staunch critic of majlis gatherings that display the sponsors' worldly wealth more than their spiritual piety. During one of his majlises, he questioned those Shias who spent their money on lavish majlises, yet did not have resources to pay for their children's schooling. To Maulana Imran and those who support him, Karbala is most importantly about education: Husain picked a wide open field to confront the forces of Yazid with his knowledgeable sermons. Before the physical war was imposed upon Husain's side by the forces of Yazid, Husain repeatedly informed Yazid's army about the merits of Islam and how Yazid was violating the sanctity of those merits. Husain's grandfather and father had identified closely with the acquisition of knowledge; the Prophet Muhammad had encouraged his followers to go to all corners of the world in order to seek knowledge.

The metaphor of *dars* (lesson/teaching) is repeatedly invoked by many of these people when they speak of Karbala. Maulana Imran and like-minded fellow Shias keep this instructive value of Karbala in mind when they ask: "What does it mean for the Prophet's community that young people miss classes in schools and colleges to attend majlises that are more entertainment than an opportunity to acquire knowledge? What does it mean to resort to Karbala's emotive appeal while its educational message suffers violent retributions? To what extent do the majlises that are projected on the loud speakers of certain South Asian cities during the middle of the night, disturbing the sleep of both Shias and non-Shias, serve the Shii community in enhancing its spiritual and social status?"

Such questions were central to Maulana Imran's recitations even before his journal article—and by extension his credibility—became embroiled in the controversy regarding Ali's purported allegiance to Abu Bakr. These questions, many Shias from Maulana Imran's camp feel, encroach on the personal interests of those Shii leaders who have exploited their community's ignorance. Shias like Maulana Imran end up doubly challenged when speaking from the minbar: challenged by Sunni attacks on Shiism that aim to discredit the very legitimacy of Shii faith; and challenged by members of the Shii community who feel that Shii history should come neatly packaged with no questioning of that which has been taken as a given for many centuries. Those Shias who sympathize with the plight of Maulana Imran remember similar controversies generated by the discourses of other religious figures, most notably by the books of the late Ali Naqi Naqvi. Naqvi was challenged by members of his community whenever his scholarship did not accord with popular perceptions of Karbala. In this world of challenges, spaces for dialogue, to the extent that

majlises were ever such spaces, are shrinking and any view that questions the hegemonic readings of Shii history is purposefully and forcefully excluded.

So while one part of the discourse surrounding Maulana Imran relates to the way in which history is, or should be, presented, the other part concerns issues specific to particular moments, ideologies, prejudices, and rivalries. That Sunni and Shii views exist in which Ali paid allegiance to Abu Bakr is a reality. What does it mean for some Shias to censor this reality so aggressively? An alternative history or a minority history in this context should be registered with a caution: it can be vulnerable to dangerous revisionism, dogmatic authoritarianism, and regressive parochialism that end up creating and silencing minorities within the minority community.

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4

Lyrical Martyrdom

Shāh ast Ḥusain bādshāh ast Ḥusain
dīn ast Ḥusain dīñ panāh ast Ḥusain
Sar dād na dād dast dar dast-e Yazīd
ḥaqqa ke binā-e lā illāh ast Ḥusain

King is Husain, Emperor is Husain
Religion is Husain, the refuge for religion is Husain
[He] gave up his head but did not give his hand in the hands of Yazid
The truth is that the foundation of lā ilaha [negation of all gods except God] is Husain

Thus wrote the revered Sufi master (*ḳhwāja/pīr*) of the subcontinent, Muinuddin Chishti (d. 1236 C.E.).[1] The Khwaja's words reflect and illuminate the larger framework of Sufism, a manifestation of Islamic mysticism, and the privileged position that the martyr of Karbala, Husain b. Ali, holds in these traditions. In these verses, Husain is the spiritual foundation of the legitimate authority and indeed, the religion of Islam. The truth, according to this thirteenth-century Sufi, is that the very core of Islam, its essential creed of tawhid, or Divine Unity, "lā ilaha illā Llāh Muḥammadan rasūl Allāh," or "there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is His messenger," is Husain. Since Husain refused to pay allegiance to Yazid, in spite of having to make innumerable sacrifices, he is projected as an embodiment of Islam's creed that refuses to acknowledge any power other than that of God. In another poem, the Khwaja goes so far as to claim that Husain's feat in Karbala was greater than the feat any prophet performed.[2] Thus the fortunes of Islam rested with the Prophet's grandson, who posited suffering and martyrdom as the

basis for this religion, and negated the offenses to Islam that appeared in the form of Yazid.

The quatrain above is perhaps the most frequently recited Persian quatrain in South Asia. Not only were these the first Persian verses that entered my memory, but many of my relatives, who do not have a good grasp of Persian, demonstrate their knowledge of it through these verses. Whether during the majlis gatherings or in conversations with those who criticize the majlis for instilling apathy in their community, these words, more than any other, succinctly capture the eternal significance of Husain's struggle. These are also the first words that come to the lips of Meraj Ahmed, Delhi's leading singer of Sufi songs, when he discusses Karbala's significance.

The spiritual and professional identities of Ahmed are simultaneously embedded within two devotional traditions: He is not only an accomplished Muharram elegy reciter, but he is also the chief performer in the mystical-musical assemblies, or qawwalis, at the Sufi shrine of Hazrat Nizamuddin Awliya in Delhi. Ahmed has been able to lend Karbala both a sorrowful aura and a celebratory one, mourning Husain's martyrdom during Muharram and celebrating Husain's accomplishment during the rest of the year. For Ahmed, Karbala's role in the Sufi qawwali texts is aligned with, yet distinct from, its role in the Shii majlis tradition: Whereas the majlis serves as a reminder of what Husain underwent in order to defeat Yazid, the qawwali validates the end result of Husain's suffering—Husain and his companions are annihilated in



FIGURE 4.1 Volunteers serving water during Muharram; on the banner is the verse of Muinuddin Chishti that is quoted at the beginning of this chapter.

the will of God to such an extent that prostrating to Husain is tantamount to prostrating to God. The qawwali and the majlis intersect at the point of praising Husain but the qawwali inevitably emphasizes the results of Husain's suffering while the majlis vividly depicts the suffering alone. Ahmed shores up the differences between the majlis and the qawwali through the metaphor of childbirth:

> When a woman experiences childbirth, she feels intense pain. Her family and friends usually sympathize with her and some even cry with her. But then she brings a new life into this world, all her suffering gives way to a sense of relief. Many women tell us that they cannot even remember their labour pains. They celebrate the child's arrival. Similarly, qawwalis celebrate Husain's arrival in God's court. The majlis functions as a reminder of the path that Husain had to traverse in order to reach God's presence.[3]

Citing a tradition of an important Sufi saint from the Deccan,[4] Ahmed cautions against celebrating Husain's ultimate victory against Yazid on the day of ashura, when other devotees of Husain are shedding tears for the Imam's suffering. While recognizing that the qawwali and the Shii majlis stimulate different emotive responses to Karbala, Ahmed calls for the qawwali to yield to the majlis on that key day.

This chapter is largely concerned with looking at Karbala in the context of the qawwali, for it is the genre of the qawwali that brings Islamic mysticism to the fore for many South Asians. I discuss two qawwalis in which Husain's martyrdom remains the subject and concentrate on the playful intertextual embellishments by which Karbala becomes the point of departure for reflection of a more general mystical nature, as Husain's story is woven into the fabric of broader Islamicate mystical/poetic discourses. In order to fully appreciate these qawwalis, it is imperative to understand the poetic temperament, the mystical outlook, and the general context in which this tradition resides. I divide the qawwalis into various segments so as to make their analysis more manageable.

I heard the first qawwali at the shrine of Salimuddin Chishti, in Fatehpur Sikri, in the summer of 1997. The performers were Muhammad Alam Ali and his brother Safdar Ali. The second qawwali, performed by Syed Adil Hussaini, Saber Habib, Harjit Singh, and Syed Saleemullah, was inspired by the performance of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan in a concert hall in Paris. It was recorded in Hyderabad in February 2005.

Translation of Qawwali I

I

Neither drinking nor serving wine is forbidden
What is forbidden is regaining consciousness after drinking

On the Magian sage's tavern is written:
It is forbidden to offer wine to the weak
So far, I have received no brimful goblet
O Cupbearer! Pour me more wine, more wine, and more wine
O Cupbearer! Pour me more wine, more wine, and more wine
O Cupbearer! Pour me more wine, more wine, and more wine

2

Penniless have I come to your door
I see the beauty of the Lord in your beautiful face
The Kaba of the heart, the direction of my prayer, is your face
Your eyebrows are the place of prostration for lovers

3

The world worships God and praises the One far away
Some search for Him in Mecca, others go to Kashi [Banaras]
Why shouldn't I bow at the feet of my beloved?
Every people [seeks] the right path, the right religion and the right direction of worship,
I, however, straightened my direction of worship toward the tilted cap [of my beloved]
As he drew his bare sword to slay me, my head was in prostration
O wondrous is his dalliance, O wondrous is my offering

4

It is a drop's joy to be annihilated in the ocean,
Pain, having passed the limit, becomes its own cure
But: Ask not about the elation of desirers after they reach the execution ground
The baring of the sword is a feast for their sight
Hence, as he drew his bare sword to slay me, my head was in prostration
Prostration—Prostration is a strange thing
What else is there in the mantle of Islam, besides
The sword of Ali, the Hand of God, and the prostration of Shabbir [Husain]
Hence, As he drew his bare sword to slay me, my head was in prostration
O wondrous is his dalliance, O wondrous is my offering
However, so far I have received no brimful goblet

5

The Cupbearer was heard asking the drunkard:
What wine will you drink O mad man?
That which Mansur drank on the gallows.
Will you drink this?

He said "No."
That which Jesus drank when he revived the dead with "Rise at the command of Allah."
He said "No."
That which Moses drank, having appeared on Mount Sinai
He said "No."
That which Job drank, having squandered his wealth of patience
He said "No."
That which Salman and Abu Zarr drank after arriving in Medina?
He said "Not even this."
[The Cupbearer asked] What then?
He says:

6

That wine which was drunk at Karbala
That wine which was given to the son of Haidar
That, after drinking which, Zahra's beloved
Gave up his life at the will of his master
His body was wounded and he bled
Above him, the shadow of the Most High Lord
Husain was thirsty for three days
However, he was the grandson of the Chosen One [Mustafa]
Why would he ask the enemy for water?
After all, had he not drunk the wine made out of divine light
Having drunk a goblet of "la ilaha"
He laid down his life [he sacrificed his head] in the passion of love
He gave up his head, but did not give his hands in the hands of Yazid
The truth is that the foundation of "la ilaha" is Husain
He sacrificed his head in the passion of love,
The son of Zahra sacrificed his head
My master sacrificed his head
My lord sacrificed his head
The son of Zahra sacrificed his head
He sacrificed his head in the passion of love
O Cupbearer! May it be my fate to receive
The wine goblet of Shabbir
Since, so far I have received no brimful goblet,
O Cupbearer, pour me more wine, more wine, and more wine.

Analysis and Contextualization of Qawwali 1

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 1. In this qawwali, the tavern looms large, as wine drinking remains a recurrent symbol. The qawwal (the performer of a qawwali) employs this rebellious goblet to receive the mystical ideals. In order to fully appreciate the wine imagery in this qawwali, one must keep in mind the in-

terface of religion, mysticism, rebellion, helplessness, and language—an interface that constitutes the mainspring of Sufi poetry. That the realm of language cannot possibly accommodate the profundity of mystical experiences is an age-old complaint. Recognizing the shortcomings of speech and writing, Sufis, and those inspired by them, have resorted to figurative language that attempts to ameliorate this shortage. According to the great Persian lyricist, Hafiz, the pen is unable to speak the truths of love:

> qalam rā ān zabān nab'vad ke sirr-e 'ishq goyad bāz
> varā'e ḥadd-e taqrīr ast sharḥ-e ārzūmande[5]
>
> The pen doesn't have the tongue to speak the secrets of love
> The exposition of desire is beyond the bounds of speech.

As far as his Urdu counterpart, Ghalib, is concerned, Truth must be cast using the imagery of wine and goblet in order to be made comprehensible:

> har chañd ho mushāhida-e ḥaqq kī guftagū
> bantī nahīñ hai bāda o sāġhar kahe baġhair[6]
>
> No matter how much the witnessing of the truth is discussed,
> It cannot be spoken of save through [the language of] the wine and the goblet.

Sufi poetry tends to go beyond the obvious, the manifest, the apparent. At times, going "beyond" the obvious entails parodying it. Hence the signifiers of the obviously religious realm—the mosque, the inspector of morality, the religious leader, the ascetic, and even the Sufi—are given an inverse significance. Similarly, the outwardly forbidden wine and the tavern rise to a noble station.

Thus, as waywardness became the way of mystical poetry, the disruptive mien of the mystic was lyrically canonized, gradually undermining all the revered exoteric manifestations—Jalaluddin Rumi questioned the pilgrims en route to Mecca;[7] Amir Hasan Sijzi turned in prayer toward his beloved, who was wearing his cap awry, instead of turning toward Mecca; and Ghalib desired to build a tavern in the shade of the mosque (*masjid ke zer-e sāyaa ḳharābāt chāhīʾye*) just as the arched brow depends aesthetically on an eye underneath it (*bhauñ pās āñkh qibla-e ḥājāt chāhīʾye*).[8] Although, at one level, extracting meaning from contradictions can be seen as a subtle dialogic discourse that gains power by evoking the very discourses that have been denied legitimacy, at another level, the harmonious blending of the temple and the tavern, the mosque and the ruins, and the drunkard and the priest can be thought of as the very keynote of Sufism—all the disparate elements of creation flowing into a common ocean.[9]

One point I made about Islam in the introduction of this work also holds true for the Sufi dimensions of Islam: They should not be slotted into exclusivist ideological frameworks. Just as Muslims live out Islamic values in many

different ways, mystically inclined Muslims also approach Sufism through a variety of methods. As to what I mean by mysticism, mystic, or Sufi, I shall adhere to the words of a qawwali singer that shed light on these concepts:

> Sufism is a means to know God intimately. It is a vision in which God and His creation enter a relationship that is not solely defined through the creation's obedience to their creator. Although obedience to the Creator's will is essential, the creation must prove to Him that they love Him to such an extent that they are willing to do more than what is required of them.[10]

From a lay student's viewpoint, Sufis can be described as those who want to earn extra credit in God's court, which for many is located within the heart of God's servant. When we turn to more academic works concerning this topic, we see that the earliest Sufis were those who had the spiritual resolve to gain proximity to the Divine, even if it meant personal loss or suffering. Believing the Prophet Muhammad to be the most excellent model of virtue, the first few generations of Sufis spent their nights and days around mosques, often engaged in supererogatory prayers. While the Muslim community was being torn apart in various controversies, many pious Muslims felt that most political authorities after the Prophet—especially those belonging to the Umayyad dynasty—had injured the fabric of Islamic spirituality by subscribing to self-serving readings of Islam. Behind the guise of the language of Islam, these Sufis felt, Islam was compromised. Many Sufis wore coarse woolen garments as markers of their denial of worldly wealth. Since the word for wool in Arabic is *ṣūf,* it is probable that the word *Ṣūfī* has an etymological relationship with this Arabic word. The expression for the way of the Sufis, Sufism, is the Arabic verbal noun, *taṣawwūf.* Sufis project themselves (and have been characterized) as those who effectively disavow greed for worldly goods (symbolized by silk); they see the life of this world as a temporary sojourn, a test in preparation for eternity.[11]

For many Sufis, the essence of Islam rests upon the central principle of tawhid, or the Oneness of God. Muslims believe that this principle was revealed to all peoples through God's chosen messengers, the last of whom was the Prophet Muhammad. As the recipient of the Divine Word of God, the Quran, the Prophet completed the cycle of revelation and perfected the ideals for humanity. In the Quran, God proclaims His mercy[12] for and proximity to His creation: "We [God] are nearer to him than his jugular vein."[13] According to another popular tradition, "God says, 'My heavens and My earth encompass Me not, but the heart of My gentle, believing, and meek servant does encompass Me.' "[14]

In order to fully gauge Husain's importance in the qawwali tradition, it is essential to see the role of Husain's grandfather and father in the Chishti order of Sufism. The very word qawwali derives etymologically from the Arabic word *qawl* (saying) and most qawwalis are ideally based on the qawl of the Prophet Muhammad.[15] Since the Chishti order in the subcontinent trace their lineage

to Ali and accord him a privileged spiritual position among the Prophet's companions, it follows that the Prophet's saying that declares Ali his spiritual successor is musically valorized in the qawwali context: "*Man kunto mawlā fā ʿAli un Mawlā—Whoever considers me his master, Ali is his master too*." Regula Qureshi highlights the importance of this qawl:

> This is the basic ritual song of Sufism in India; indeed one can call it the Opening—or Closing—Hymn of Qawwālī. At Nizamuddin Auliya no Qawwālī event can start any other way, while elsewhere in India and Pakistan the Qawl serves as a conclusion. The hymn expresses a basic Sufi tenet, that the principle of spiritual succession in Sufism was instituted by the Prophet himself, as recorded in one of his sayings (*hadīs*).[16]

Ali, after the Prophet's death, had led a quiet, withdrawn life. Busying himself with the compilation of the Quran and imparting knowledge to a few chosen disciples, Ali manifested exemplary piety and knowledge. The prayer he conveyed to one of his companions, Kumayl b. Ziyad, is still recited as a most cherished example of humility before God. Close associates of Ali, such as Abu Zarr and Salman, are seen by many Sufis as early initiates into Islamic mysticism. Meraj Ahmed claims that the qawwali is the point of entry into the world of spirituality, just as Ali is the point of entry into the world of knowledge. Beginning the qawwali event with a praise of Ali initiates the listeners and the performers into the world of Islam's sacred knowledge (gnosis/*ʿirfān*).[17]

For many Sufis, true life begins with the annihilation (*fanā*) of the base, ego self (*nafs*), and the harmonious subsistence (*baqā*) in the will of and love for the Beloved, the Sustainer, the Creator, Allah. The base nafs, *al-nafs al-ḥaywāniyah* (the animal soul), is actually a referent to two ego selves: *al-nafs al-ammārah* (the egotistical soul that commands humans to compromise God's unity and reject those who are traveling on God's prescribed path); and *al-nafs al-lawwamah* (the soul that generates hatred for God's creation and love for the hypocrites). These two nafses must be demolished in order for the soul at peace (*an-nafs al-muṭma'inna*) to subsist. The struggle against the base self constitutes the greatest jihad (struggle) for the sake of Allah. When speaking on the topic of jihad and martyrdom, the eleventh-century Sufi master, Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 1021 C.E.) gives a higher rank to those martyrs who successfully combated their base nafs and then lived piously than to those who died rightfully fighting other human beings on the battlefield.[18]

In fact, even the physical death of many Sufi masters in South Asia is referred to and celebrated as if it were the *ʿurs*, the wedding day on which the lover and the Beloved are united forever. Hence death itself loses its sense of finality and exults in the union with the Origin. "From Him we come and to Him we return," proclaims the Quran; this simple eschatological affirmation speaks of a common point of origin and return and has become a common Muslim response to the news of any death. It is no wonder that the renowned Sufi martyr, Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922 C.E.), could accord with death so well:

"Kill me, my faithful friends! For in my slaughter is my life—my death is in my life and my life in my death."[19]

The wine drinking trope was one of the most famous that Hallaj used to express his desired proximity and union with God. The delightful sparkle of Alam Ali's art in this qawwali is also a product of this trope. The very first line of the qawwali is provocative; it refutes a commonly held belief about wine drinking in Islam. *"Pīnā,"* which means "to drink," or, "drinking," and *"pilānā,"* the causative of "pina," i.e., "to make someone drink" are both left ambiguous. If the object of "pina" is left unstated, the idiomatic conventions of the language would have us believe that "*sharāb,*" that is wine, is the object. This very ambiguity, however, allows the writers and reciters to play with language that may otherwise cause the orthodox to raise an eyebrow in skepticism. Although from a literal reading the statement is problem-free, its idiomatic nuances make it subversive. The couplet is written in the same vein as much of mystical literature, which is open to a variety of readings and does not impose any sort of closure as far as "precise" meaning is concerned.

The second line, however, when read in conjunction with the first one, makes the couplet more mystically nuanced. By drinking worldly wine, the toper is bound to regain consciousness after his stupor. The intoxication of mystical wine lasts till the lover-beloved/Beloved duality is terminated and the lover lives through the beloved/Beloved. The great fourteenth-century work *Gulshan-e Rāz*, or the *Rosegarden of Mystery*, by Mahmud Shabistari, makes this apparent:

> Drink wine that it may set you free from yourself,
> And may conduct the being of the drop to the ocean.
> Drink wine, for its cup is the face of "The Friend,"
> The Cup is his eye drunken and flown with wine.
> Seek wine without cup or goblet,
> Wine is wine-drinker, cupbearer is winecup.[20]

Not everybody, however, is deserving of this wine. This is clearly spelled out at the door of the tavern that is under the auspices of the Magian elder. For the Magians (Zoroastrians were usually referred to by this name) wine is permissible, hence they are the ones who run the taverns through their elders (*pīr-e muġhān*) and their handsome young men, the *muġhbache*, serve the wine. Schimmel clarifies this further:

> These figures [pir-e mughan, mughbachaha] came to represent the wise master and the lovely cupbearer who introduce the seeker into the mysteries of spiritual intoxication. They are integral to that group of images with which poets try to indicate the contrast between law-bound exterior religion, or narrow legalism, and the religion of love, which transgresses the boundaries of external forms.[21]

Thus the spiritual master, metaphorically cast as pir-e mughān, does not tolerate the drinking of a *kam ẓarf*, an ignoble creature who cannot hold his liquor. Of course in this world of metaphors, kam zarf is the one who has not reached

that spiritual state wherein the base self gives way to the higher self. A case in point: Ghalib, in his usual playfulness with cherished symbols from the Islamic tradition, claims his own superiority over Mount Sinai, at least as far as *ẓarf* (tolerance [for wine]) is concerned:

girnī thī ham pe barq-e tajallī na ṭūr pe
dete haiñ bāda ẓarf-e qadaḥ ḳhwār dekh kar[22]

The lightning of manifestation should have struck me, not Mount Sinai
The drink is poured according to the capacity of the drinker.

Legend has it that when Moses desired to gain a glimpse of the Almighty from Mount Sinai, the mountain was reduced to ashes when struck by divine lightning. This couplet implies that the speaker has the capacity to contain the Divine Light, whereas Mount Sinai could not bear such a force. Here we see an implicit allusion to the superiority of humans over all of God's other creations, since the former accepted the heavy "trust" (*amāna*) of carrying out God's will when all of creation refused.[23]

In this qawwali, the drinker begins with a complaint to the Cupbearer, for he has not, as yet, been served the brimful goblet. The *sāqīyā*[24] (or *saqī*,) in the same vein as pir-e mughan and mughbacha, is a metaphor for that spiritual guide who facilitates the union between the lover and the beloved/Beloved by pouring the wine of love and gnosis into the goblet-like heart of the lover. In fact, there is an entire genre of Persian literature known as the *sāqīnāma* in which the lover-toper desires wine from the beautiful saqi.[25] Both the Prophet Muhammad and Ali b. Abi Talib are considered to be saqis *par excellence*, who will provide for their followers from the heavenly fountain of Kawsar. After all, many Muslims believe that it will be the *shafāʿat*, or intercession, of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali that will lead the believers into eternal bliss. In worldly life, however, spiritual wine is given by the pir, or *murshid* (spiritual master), who himself is the object of great veneration. For many people, qawwalis are legitimate expressions of mysticism only when performed in the presence of this master. The spiritual master has ascended the spiritual ladder himself and unity with him implies proximity to the Beloved. Thus, the greatest of mystics, Jalaluddin Rumi, sang about the destruction of his own lower self by the all-encompassing love of his master Shamsuddin of Tabriz:

Shams-e Tabrīzī! marā kardī ḳharāb
ham tū sāqī ham tū mai ham mai farosh[26]

O Shams of Tabriz, you have ruined me
You are the cupbearer, the wine, and the wine seller.

The next part of the qawwali under discussion is set to the metrical pattern of one of Rumi's most famous works, the *Maṣnavi*. But first the refrain or title verse of the qawwali is sung: "O Cupbearer, pour me more wine, more wine, and more wine." The repetition of this verse here and throughout the qawwali

makes the underlying message of desire articulated in this qawwali more effective, thereby enhancing the affective power of the text.

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 2. In the hope of receiving spiritual wine, the impoverished petitioner (*muflis*) has arrived at the threshold of the master's tavern, at the Sufi shrine. For him, all worldly possessions have lost their glow; spiritual poverty (faqr) requires complete submission to the master and humility in his presence. Few pilgrims to the Chishti shrine at Fatehpur Sikir (where this qawwali was performed) can forget the legend, so movingly captured in K. Asif's 1960 Bollywood blockbuster motion picture, *Mughal-e ʿĀzam* (rereleased in a colored version in 2004 to great acclaim) in which the Mughal emperor, Jalaluddin Akbar, goes to the abode of Salimuddin Chishti in the hope of being blessed with a son. The barefooted emperor, having left behind his palace and entourage of worldly might, walks on the burning desert sand in order to petition the mendicant mystic for his intercession in the court of the "Emperor of Emperors." When Akbar is blessed with a son, he honors his spiritual master, Salimuddin Chishti, by naming the Mughal heir-apparent Salim. One aspect of the mystical discourse, as reflected in secondary hagiographies (*tażkirahs*) as well as primary oral discourses (*malfūẓāt*) has presented the Sufis as those who looked askance at the political authorities of their time and belittled anybody who paid homage to the political order.[27] Muzaffar Alam, a fine historian of medieval India, captures the legacy of Sufis, especially those belonging to the Chishti order, as follows:

> They shunned ritual and ceremony, they spoke the language of the common people, they gave an impetus to linguistic and cultural assimilation. All types of people are reported to have visited the *jamāʿat ḳhānas* (hospices) of the early Chishti mystics, who believed and preached that the highest form of prayer was the removal of misery among those in distress.[28]

However, as the work of Muzaffar Alam, Richard Eaton, and others, suggests, we should not create fixed divides between political rulers and Sufis.[29] If we look at the careers of people like Mir Momin Astarabadi (d. 1625 C.E.), who was a high-ranking minister in the Qutb Shahi court, and was also considered a Sufi, we can see that Sufis not only served as advisors to rulers, they also distinguished themselves as skilled craftsmen and architects.[30]

Mindful of the need to present Sufism in polyvocal idioms, I must emphasize that the discourse of anti-political, anti-establishment Sufis helps us read into Sufism an acknowledged, if not appreciated, resistive dimension. Such an interpretive space is widened when Husain b. Ali, who refused to pay allegiance to the ruler of the time, is semantically enthroned by Muinuddin Chishti—"The King is Husain, The Emperor is Husain." In this qawwali stanza, such power is exercised by the spiritual master that he becomes inseparable from the Kaba, the pivot of Islamic worship located in Mecca. In fact, the petitioner-lover's direction of prayer is toward the master. Even the attributes of the Beloved are manifested through the master's beautiful face. When

the mercy of the Almighty overwhelms his creation, the creation, according to the Quran, falls prostrate. Could any place of prostration be loftier than the one facing the niche-like brows of the master? These verses, attributed to Amir Khusraw, are, according to Alam Ali, very likely in honor of his own master, Nizamuddin Awliya.

When discussing this segment, it should be noted that this one is in Persian, unlike the first one in Urdu. Basking in textual cross-fertilization, the qawwali text can accommodate a variety of literary genres (ghazal, masnavi, rubai, mukhammas) while playing with the literal and the metaphoric, the sacred and the profane. These texts can even transcend linguistic univocality, as is evident from the jockeying of languages (Urdu, Persian, Punjabi, Sindhi, etc.) within the qawwali. This play of words and ideas is made possible through the technique of interpolation, referred to in the qawwali jargon as *girah bañdī,* or knot-tying. This essentially means that the performer-qawwal can juxtapose verses from disparate sources in a single qawwali, as though they are knots in a single rope. The qawwals make the decision as to what is an aesthetically appropriate "flowing knot," usually after considering whether the particular knot will prove to the audience that the performer is a polyglot seasoned Sufi and gain their approval.[31] The counterpart of girah bandi in literature, as Regula Qureshi points out, has been the rhetorical device of *taẓmīn*, whereby one poet inserts another poet's verse(s) in his or her own poetry. Girah bandi, like tazmin, has the triple objective of providing exegetical information for complex ideas; impressing the audience with literary acrobatic feats by interfusing genres and languages; and drawing a genealogy from particular types of authoritative literature of the past, to provide the poet/qawwal with the legitimacy of cherished traditions.[32]

The technique of girah bandi in the qawwali tradition has implications for our larger discussion of intertextuality and the porous boundaries of cultural genres. Given the aesthetic configuration of the qawwali texts through the ghazal texts, the ghazal idiom has found its way into qawwali as it has found its way into the marsiya, nauha, and zikr texts. The qawwals hope to win plaudits not only by tying one Urdu-Hindi verse with another, but also through animating their performance by invoking Persian verses.

For many qawwals, the Persian verses give their performance legitimacy. Since Persian—apart from functioning as the language that bonded elite North Indian cultures from the thirteenth century to the nineteenth century—has long been considered the most fitting of mystical robes of Islamic spirituality, the donning of Persian not only beautifies the performance, it also reflects the qawwal's aptitude in mysticism. After all, the qawwals are the heirs to the legacy of that archetypal devotee, Amir Khusraw. That they tie Persian knots in an Urdu text does not necessarily mean that Persian can be understood by the audience. In fact, an overwhelming majority of the qawwali audience cannot give a grammatical translation for a single verse of Persian. They can absorb these verses because they know the connotations of specific Persian words as they appear in Urdu. Even when they may not understand a single Persian word sung by the qawwal, the melody of the qawwali, along with the melodic

sweetness of the Persian language, make up for the lack of precise understanding of the verses in their original language. Plus, the girah bandi can become a welcome sentient addition to what might be unintelligible verse(s) for some audience members.[33]

It is helpful to mention the issue of authorship of qawwali texts. Although many qawwalis have well-known, identifiable authors, such as Amir Khusraw, Simab Akbarabadi, or Qamar Jalalvi, there are many others whose authorship is disputed or completely unknown. In the course of a millennium, many written texts have disappeared. Other valuable manuscripts are hidden in archives or less-frequented saint's shrines. Oral culture, in many places, retains a privileged position, and the author of an existing text cannot be parted from it simply because of a lack of corroborating written evidence that he is the author. What many scholars and students of South Asian literature also fail to realize is that, similar to many texts of bhakti ("Hindu" devotionalism), those of the qawwali tradition carry the signature of a prominent poet/saint not because they were actually penned by that poet/saint, but more because they emanate from the authoritative spirit popularly associated with him.[34] The authors' nominal identity is framed as a legitimacy-granting "rhetorical personae"[35] that unfolds through the larger sentiments popularly associated with the author. When the qawwal attributes a certain statement to Amir Khusraw, s/he is stylizing this statement to integrate it into the larger framework of authoritative and legitimate mysticism. And when the audience (interpretive community) does not question this attribution, then for all practical purposes, Amir Khusraw is the author. To go a step further, I would even assert that the knot-tying power of the qawwal is so immense that s/he should be considered the authority that created the texts. The discretion these qawwals exercise in bringing multiple texts together under the rubric of one or several refrains make the qawwali text a feat of intertextuality, sustaining the reign of liberal configurations in the Islamicate landscape. Even metrical inconsistencies among these knots can be accommodated with a slight change of the melodic pattern or tune at the discretion of the qawwal.

Thus it is not surprising that the qawwali repertoire, like the majlis, includes a felicitous juxtaposition of Karbala-centered lyrics and tunes from popular film songs. In one popular qawwali sung by Meraj Ahmed and his sons, the literary existence of Karbala flows through the tune of a popular 1968 film *Anokhī Rāt* (*A Rare Night*). For example, a song that Indeevar wrote and Mukesh sung to the musical score of Roshan, when entrusted to the repertoire of Meraj Ahmed, becomes a qawwali that praises Ali, Husain, and Zainab:

Maiñ to nām japūñ ʿAlī ʿAlī kā ʿAlī se hūñ vābasta
ʿAlī ʿAlī mere maulā koʾī aur na
hotā hai kab kisī kā kunba Ḥasnain sā, beṭī ho Zainab jaisī beṭā
Ḥusain sā
kunboñ meñ aisā kunba koʾī aur na

Ali, Ali, I shall recite, to Ali I am tied
Ali, Ali, Oh my master, none but to you I turn,

A family like Hasan and Husain's?! How can one do better?
A daughter like Zainab, a son like Husain,
A family best among families, this one is it!

Meraj Ahmed acknowledges that such eclecticism, at times, incurs the objections of the purists, those who see Bollywood as an anti-spiritual establishment. But qawwals today, Ahmed says, are reconciled to the fact that Bollywood music has tremendous cultural currency and in order for the qawwali to retain its popularity among the masses it has to draw on the Bollywood heritage. Moreover, Ahmed cites a number of Sufi poets, who also wrote for Bollywood films, as evidence that it was Sufi literature and musical traditions that brought in its wake much of the popular songs of modern-day South Asia. As far as Ahmed is concerned, arriving at tenable distinctions between what constitutes true or appropriate spirituality and what opposes it, false spirituality, is a futile enterprise that runs counter to the ecumenical objectives of the qawwali tradition.

The objective of the qawwali texts, according to Ahmed, is to entertain the audience, as well as "amplify" them by raising their consciousness to a higher level (*wajd*), thereby inducing in them a spiritually ecstatic state (*ḥāl*) and bestowing luminosity upon the larger gathering (*qawwālī maḥfil*): "Upon listening to the qawwali, to the lyrics more than to the music, the world of the listener should be transformed at once. Copper should give way to gold. Body must succumb to spirit."[36] As students of Sufism know so well, the prized work of Sufi aesthetics, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali's *The Alchemy of Happiness*, uses the alchemy metaphor to convey this "transformation" that Ahmed upholds. The girahs at the disposal of the qawwal facilitate such a transformation.

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 3. This segment is attributed to none other than that most revered of Delhi's saints, Nizamuddin Awliya, and his students Hasan and Khusraw. The sentiments of religious cosmopolitanism expressed in the beginning of the girah are quite common in modern Indian qawwalis and reflect a spirit that intends to "promote religious tolerance."[37] For Nizamuddin, the propagation of Islam meant living an exemplary life; he could see the virtues of those who worshiped God, in a variety of forms, in the seekers in Kashi (Banaras) or those at the Kaba (Mecca). Legend has it that one day Nizamuddin saw a group of Hindus engaged in worship and spontaneously recited a couplet: "Every community has its own path and faith, and its own way of worship."[38] It was this sentiment that was so lovingly incorporated in a beautiful ghazal by one of the favorite disciples of Nizam and a friend of Amir Khusraw, Amir Hasan Sijzi (d. 1337 C.E.):

har qaum rāst rāhe, dīne o qibla gāhe [words of Hazrat Nizam]
mā qibla rāst kardīm bar simt-e kaj kulāhe.[39] [Hasan's improvisation]

Every community seeks the right path, the right religion, the right direction of worship [words of Nizam]

I turn my direction of worship toward the tilted cap [Hasan's improvisation]

Although these words acknowledge and appreciate religious differences, they do not absolutize them. The Chishtis, especially the contemporaries of Nizamuddin Awliya, are known for their religious openness. Another Chishti saint fondly quotes a couplet of Hafiz in the same spirit:

Ḥāfiẓā gar vaṣl ḵẖwāhī ṣulḥa kun bā ḵẖāṣ o ʿām
bā Musalmān Allāh Allāh, bā barahman Rām Rām[40]

Hafiz, if you desire union, seek friendship with high and low
With Muslims, [say] Allah, Allah, with the Brahmans, [say] Ram, Ram

The "right path" is sought by all, though it might be reached through a variety of paths. Nizamuddin clearly understood the ecumenism within his community, thus he could understand Hasan's choice to turn the direction of his prayer toward the tilted cap of his beloved, instead of toward any other sacred spot. By this time, the beloved had long been envisioned in Persian poetry as a handsome, albeit cruel Turk, with his cap awry and a propensity for ever-changing, teasingly mischievous ways. When the beloved draws his bare sword to test the lover's resilience, as the next knot by Amir Khusraw expresses, the lover falls prostrate. If the beloved insists on having his cruel demands fulfilled, then the lover can glow in his own unconditional surrender. How can any Muslim not recount the executions of God's mandates allegorized in the Quran, most notably in the story of the Prophet Abraham, in which Abraham is willing to sacrifice his most dear son Ismail. It is the lover's privilege to submit to the desires of the beloved. By no longer adhering to his jaded base self, the lover loses his egoism. Again all such tropes are religiously hued and the ambiguity, even tension, between the worldly beloved and the divine Beloved can easily be resolved with the alleged statement of the Prophet after his heavenly journey: "I saw my Lord in the form of a young man with his cap awry."[41] The all-encompassing Reality, whose decrees often remain mysterious, manifests Himself to His creation in an array of forms, and the form of a young handsome Turk is as captivating as any other. It is interesting to note that Nizamuddin Awliya lovingly refers to Amir Khusraw as "Turk Allah," because of his Turkish/Central Asian ancestry. Legend has it that Amir Hasan was quite fond of Khusraw and it is possible that the "kaj kulah" toward which Hasan turns is that of Khusraw.[42] Thus, as we have already seen in section 2, the Beloved is seen through the beloved. So the lover in this qawwali, having fallen prostrate, once again calls out for more wine, more wine, and even more wine.

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 4. The creative autonomy of the qawwal is at its best as he ventures to bring into a playful nexus the poetry of three literary giants of the subcontinent: Mirza Ghalib, Muhammad Iqbal, and Amir Khusraw. The first couplet encompasses the quintessential Ghalibian view of *waḥdat al-wujūd,* the Creator and creation are bound together in various ways and de-

grees. In many other places, Ghalib uses the raindrop metaphor to convey the significance of an individual being. When separated from the ocean, the drop is in agony. It rejoices as this separation ends and it is united with the larger body of water, its original source. The longer it is separated, the longer its agony lasts. Hence, the ultimate end of its agony is vouchsafed in the remedy of its pain—its cure-providing unity with its source. Of course, some drops are more fortunate than others as they are not simply annihilated in the ocean but emerge as valuable pearls from the great body of water. But in order to subsist in a pearl, the drop must go through the grueling existential process whereby it escapes the deadly throats of a hundred crocodiles. Ghalib explains this elsewhere in his corpus:

dām har mauj meñ hai ḥalqa-e ṣad kām-e nehañg
dekheñ kyā guzre hai qaṭ̣re pe guhar hone tak[43]

In every wave, a hundred crocodile throats lay their snare,
Let's see what the dewdrop has to undergo before it is transformed into a pearl.

Hence, agony is a prerequisite for perfection. Subsistence in annihilation is perfection manifested. The pearl is thus a metaphor for any entity that has gone through the pangs of pain to attain annihilation in perfection. The pearl, having demonstrated its strength, comes back in order to provide guidance and beauty for those who are still traversing the mystical path in an effort to unite with their Beloved.

The next couplet is also Ghalib's, wherein the joy of those who desire the ultimate unity is expressed: In a manner similar to those millions of Muslims, who, having seen the crescent moon, rejoice after their last fast of Ramadan, the martyrs-to-be are jubilant to see the crescent-like bare sword of the beloved. The beloved's sword becomes the lover's crescent, and since the crescent is a boon to all those who have endured hunger and thirst during the holy month, the sword also bespeaks the end of the agony of separation between the lover and the Beloved. Tied to this couplet is once again the lover-seeker's adamant prostration, expressed by Khusraw, when the beloved's sword is drawn.

The qawwal then interpolates his own thoughts: "Prostration is a strange/wondrous thing." It is, indeed, especially for the mystics. If love must be explained through intoxicating wine, then submission must be explained through the neck under the sword. And since the meaning of the very word "Islam" is submission, what can signify it better than the sword and the prostration? Thus, for Iqbal, whose couplet has now been knotted into this rich rope, the sword of Ali and the prostration of Husain comprise the only real possessions of religion. Few Muslims need to be reminded that Ali's double-edged sword, *Żūlfiqār,* is second to none. On swords in this part of the world, the popular saying is engraved:

Lā fatā illā ʿAlī lā sayf illā Żūlfiqār
There is no hero save Ali, and no sword save Zulfiqar

This saying is frequently preceded by an invocation to Ali, in the qawwali tradition as *"Shāh-e mardān, Sher-e Yazdān, Qūwwat-e Parvardigār"* or "the King of Men, the Lion of God, and the Strength of the Sustainer." The tradition says that this sword was given to Ali by the command of the Almighty, by none other than the archangel Gabriel.[44] The significance of the sword stems from its mystical dimension as well as from the belief that Ali's physical prowess was enhanced by it. Schimmel once again captures these cultural and mystical nuances in her own riveting manner:

> The movement from the lā ilāh, "no deity," to the positive acknowledgment illā'Llah, "save God," was very inspiring to the Persian writers with their tendency to dialectical thinking, and the graphic form of the first lā (لا) was rightly compared by Sufis, poets, and calligraphers to a sword (in particular Ali's two-edged sword Zulfiqar) or to scissors by which the believer should cut off relations with anything but the One and Only God.[45]

So for Muhammad Iqbal, when this sword of Divine Unity is drawn, the ideal gesture is to offer the head in prostration. Ali controlled this sword of unity, thereby becoming the mystic of the mystics, and his son Husain showed the world how the ultimate Union is attained under the Divine Sword. As from the mystic whose thirst has not been quenched, even from his prostrate position, we hear the plea: "O Cupbearer! Pour me more wine, more wine, and more wine."

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 5. It is now the Cupbearer's turn to speak. The selection of wine at this tavern is wide-ranging. The first type of wine that is offered is the one drunk by Mansur. Husain Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 822 C.E.), the Sufi who danced his way up to the gallows while divulging the mystical secret *"ana'l Ḥaqq,"* or, "I am the Truth." With this bold claim, Mansur partook of divinity, hence ending the duality between the Beloved and the lover:

> I am He whom I love and He Whom I love is I,
> We are two spirits dwelling in one body!
> If thou seest me thou seest Him.
> If thou seest Him thou seest us both.
> Is it thou or I? No, both of us are one,
> I shun and avoid positing duality.[46]

For the Sufis of the subsequent generation, Mansur, whose very name means "victorious," was the exemplary martyr on the mystical path. The sentiments expressed in the verses above became a constant melody in the ensuing Sufi literature. A case in point is Amir Khusraw's well-known couplet:

> man tū shudam tū man shudī man tan shudam tū jāñ shudī
> tā kas na goyad baʿd az īñ man dīgaram tū dīgarī[47]

I have become you, You have become I; I have become the body, you, the soul
Let no one say from now on: "You and I are separate."

The intoxication of the mystical wine that Hallaj quaffed on the gallows still inspires his devoted mystics to rejoice in their master's martyrdom. It is also interesting to note that poets like Attar and Ghalib, along with the Turkish poet Yunus Emre and others like him, juxtapose the suffering of Husain b. Ali to that of Husain Mansur al-Hallaj.[48] Both become eternally-living martyrs on the path of God. Ghalib writes:

> God has kept the ecstatic lovers like Husain and Mansur in the place of gallows and rope, and cast the fighters for the faith, like Husain and Ali in the place of swords and spears: in being martyrs they find eternal life and happiness and become witness to God's mysterious power.[49]

Need we add that Hallaj himself wove the tradition "God has not created anything he loves more than he loves Muhammad and his family," into the rich texture of his mystical work, *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*?[50] Thus the Cupbearer first offers the wine of Mansur to the one who has, so far, been unable to quench his thirst. However, the drinking lover desires something more than the wine of Mansur.

Now the lover moves from the saints to the prophets. The first of the prophets whose wine is offered is that of Isa ibn Maryam, or Jesus, son of Mary. Jesus has a distinction in Islam as the "Spirit from God" (*Rūḥun min Allāh*) and the "Word of God," or *Kalimat Allāh*.[51] His messianic status is a common trope, stemming from the Islamic belief that he will descend before the end of time to redeem the world. It is the combined strengths of these God-given attributes that enabled Jesus to perform miracles. Among his most notable miracle is his act of raising the dead.[52] Hence, Jesus' calling to the dead, "*qum bi iżn Allāh*," or "Arise at the command of Allah," is considered the consequence of quaffing the wine of unity.[53] The lover in this qawwali, however, says "no" to this wine.

The next roving cup of wine that is offered to the lover is the one that Moses drank at Mount Sinai. Moses insisted on seeing the manifestation of God. God replied to Moses, *Lan tarānī,* or "You shall not see me." Mount Sinai was reduced to dust and Moses was rendered unconscious. The overwhelming experience of being struck by the glory of Allah is one of the most frequent allusions in the poetry of the Islamic would.[54] This story is a reminder to many that even the faith of God's prophets wavered at times, and Moses, unable to grasp God's glory that surrounded him, insisted on containing God within a particular time and place. God's reply to Moses is carefully worded: the watchword in this reply is "see." God does not tell Moses that He will not *show* Himself to the Prophet, rather Moses, because of his desire to contain God, will not be able to see the Diving Being in all His majesty. We have already seen Ghalib's use of this trope when he chides the mountain for not having a large enough receptacle to hold the Divine wine. Even though the wine ren-

dered Moses unconscious and reduced Mount Sinai to ashes, the lover wants something stronger, and it is in this spirit that he rejects the wine that was offered to Moses.

The wine that comes to the mind of the Cupbearer next is the one drunk by the Prophet Job. Job is the paradigm of patience, especially as it is transformed into magnanimity. While God tested Job by taking one possession after another from him, Job's resilience in the true faith only became stronger. The more of his prized possessions he squandered, the more intoxicated he became in the love of God. However, such a wine, too, remains undesired by the lover in this qawwali.

The last type of wine that is offered is the one consumed by Salman and Abu Zarr, two devoted companions of the Prophet Muhammad and Ali b. Abi Talib. These two pious companions saw both Muhammad and Ali after coming to Medina (the first established Muslim community), and this sight is compared to the drinking of wine. Alas, the lover does not fancy this wine either.

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 6. When the Cupbearer asks in frustration what better wine could he desire, if not the wine of Mansur, Jesus, Moses, or Job, the lover reveals his choice: the wine which was drunk in Karbala; that wine which was drunk by the son of Haidar [Ali]; and that wine which the beloved son of Zahra [Fatima] drank. After drinking this wine and by the will of God, Husain gave up his worldly life. Even marked by wounds, he was under the protective shade of his Beloved, God. Even thirsty for three days, he was the legacy of Mustafa, the Chosen One, and bore this with patience. Asking the enemy for water was out of the question for Husain, since he was content with the wine of Divine Light. Having drunk the wine of negation (la ilaha) of all existence besides that of one Allah, Husain affirmed the existence of the one True Beloved. The negation (la ilaha, there is no god) in the Islamic declaration of faith precedes the affirmation (illa Llah, or, except for Allah) in the existence of only Allah. By drinking of this wine of negation, and experiencing the intoxication that resulted from it, Husain underwent martyrdom; and martyrdom in this tradition leads to eternal life. The word for martyrdom, shahadat itself literally means "bearing witness," and thus affirms life over death. Thus, it is fitting for the qawwal to enhance the affect of his mystical song by knotting into it the last two lines of Muinuddin Chishti's quatrain, "he sacrificed his head but not his honor, the truth is that the very foundation of *lā ilaha* is Husain." The lover can only wish that fate had allotted him the goblet of Shabbir [Husain]. So far he has been deprived of the brimful goblet in its true sense.

No student of Islamic mysticism will see the metaphor that conflates martyrdom, Husain, the act of loving, and wine drinking as an isolated one. Annemarie Schimmel writes that the "most revealing" lyrics of the distinguished Sindhi poet Shah Abdul Latif (d. 1752 C.E.), at least as far as the martyrs of Karbala are concerned, are as follows:

> In their martyrdom was all the coquetry of Love:
> Some intoxicated people may understand
> the mystery of the case of Karbala.[55]

In order to appreciate Husain's presence in the qawwali tradition, we must also study the model of Husain presented in South Asian Sufi literature of the past millennium.

Karbala in South Asian Sufi Literature

One of the earliest and most influential extant works of Sufism is undoubtedly Abul-Hasan Ali al-Hujwiri's (d. 1077 C.E.) *Kashf al-Maḥjūb li-Arbāb al-Qulūb,* or *The Unveiling of the Veiled for the Lords of the Heart*. The author of this work, who died in Lahore, is still lovingly referred to as Data Ganj Bakhsh or Data Sahab, and his tomb has remained an object of veneration for more than nine centuries. In addition to claiming Ali as the model for all Sufis, the saint praises the Imam Husain:

> He is the martyr of Karbala, and all Sufis are agreed that he was in the right. So long as the Truth was apparent, he followed it; but when it was lost he drew the sword and never rested until he sacrificed his dear life for God's sake. The Apostle distinguished him by many tokens of favour. Thus Umar b. al-Khattab relates that one day [when Husain was a child] he saw the Apostle crawling on his knees, while Husain rode on his back holding a string, of which the other end was in the Apostle's mouth. Umar said: "What an excellent camel Thou hast, O father of Abdallah [Muhammad]!" The Apostle replied: "What an excellent rider is he, O Umar!" It is recorded that Husain said: "Thy religion is the kindest of brethren towards thee," because a man's salvation consists in following religion, and his perdition is disobeying it.[56]

It is worth noting that Husain's significance is articulated by invoking a context that also features Umar. Such a Sufi discourse counters the abuse to which Umar is usually subjected in the Shii readings of Islam. Al-Hujwiri, however, does censure Yazid for the tragedy of Karbala. He also recounts the virtues of several other Shii imams, most notably those of Ali b. Husain.

As far as the influential Sufi saints of Sindh (a region south of Lahore) are concerned, we have the discourses of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar (d. 1252 C.E.), in which Husain occupies the highest mystical station, that of the martyrs. In order to reach such a station, Husain surpasses the stations associated with Adam (repentance), Noah (celebration and praise of God's glory), Abraham (love of God), Ismail (contentment), Jesus (asceticism), Job (patience), Muhammad (gnosis).[57] Not only is it striking that Husain is lodged in the company of the prophets in the spiritual understanding of Lal Shahbaz, but Husain even transcends the station of these prophets, including that of his own grandfather. It is unclear if Lal Shahbaz was familiar with the verses of Muinuddin Chishti, who lived in the same century, and had credited Husain with "infusing spring in the garden of the Chosen Prophet [Muhammad]." Spring adds luster to the garden with roses, and Husain's wounds are metaphorically associated with lush roses.[58]

A modern Sufi master of Pakistan, Wasif Ali Wasif (d. 1993), almost seven hundred years after Lal Shahbaz, assesses the difference between *ṭariqat* (the mystical path of Islam) and *sharīʿat* (the exoteric, legal path) by recalling the event of Karbala: "Praying due to obligation constitutes shariat; praying out of loving desire is tariqat." Wasif elaborates by pointing to the required ritual prayers performed in Karbala on the tenth day of Muharram. He holds that those on Yazid's side, as well as those on Husain's side had said their prayers, but there was a difference in these prayers. Yazid's side prayed out of obligation, to fulfill an Islamic requirement. And in spite of fulfilling the demands of Islamic legal code, they fell short of understanding the very spirit of these prayers—the spirit that motivated Husain's side to not only pray but also to act on the path of God. One could say that even though Yazid's side followed the letter of the shariat, Husain's side sublimated the prayers of shariat through tariqat.[59]

Such a stature of Husain in Sufi literature has stimulated and enriched the qawwali tradition which is central to the Sufi order of Chishtis. One of the means used by the Chishti order to approach the Almighty is *samāʿ* (lit., listening or audition), or a gathering for spiritual music. The sama gatherings have such power over the attendees that they can take them into the world of ecstasy (wajd) wherein the Beloved *par excellence* unites with His lover-devotee. Hagiographic traditions record many such unions, some quite literal. For example, one of Muinuddin Chishti's disciples, Khwaja Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, died ecstatically upon hearing the musical rendition of this verse:

> The martyrs of the dagger of *taslīm* (surrender)
> Each moment get a new life from the Unseen world.[60]

The stroke of the beloved's sword is much desired by the lover, since it leads to proximity with the beloved. The musical rendition of this concept shapes the way in which the symbol of Karbala is incorporated in the qawwali context.

In the interest of my larger argument, I am primarily concerned with the poetic texts used in these qawwalis. I must, however, shed some light on the relationship between poetry and music by invoking Amir Khusraw. In a playful lyrical dialogue, Khusraw captures a brief conversation he has with a *muṭrib* (singer). The singer asks Khusraw if the latter considers music superior to poetry, since music cannot be captured by the pen. Khusraw, adroit in both arts, replies that poetry is superior for it is not contingent upon the voice of the singer or the audition of the listeners. Although music can adorn poetry, poetry is quite complete in itself:

> Poetry can be regarded as a bride and the melody its jewelry.
> There is no flaw if the beautiful bride is without her jewelry.[61]

When examining the qawwali tradition, I limit my discussion to that of the bride.[62]

From Shrines to Concert Halls: Expansion of the Qawwali Context

Sufi shrines, such as that of Salimuddin Chishti, where the first qawwali I analyzed was performed, have historically been home to a wide range of devotional expression, ensured by the confluence of diverse religious traditions, not only those associated with the Prophet Muhammad's Arabia. Notwithstanding their appeal to Muslims and non-Muslims alike, those who guard the code of religious exclusivism resent the inclusivist nature of these shrines. This resentment is characteristic of Shii, Sunni, and Hindu extremists alike, although for very different reasons. For those Sunnis influenced by certain strands of Wahhabi ideology, Sufi shrines draw vulnerable Muslims away from an Allah-centered Islam into the realm of intermediaries and grave-worship. Thus, Sufi shrines and saints stand accused of obstructing monotheism. Many Shias militate against Sufi saints and shrines by accusing them of deflecting deference from Shii imams and the sacred sites associated with the imams' lives. Even though these imams are frequently invoked in Sufi assemblies as the forefathers of saints like Nizamuddin Awliya and Salimuddin Chishti, and praise of the imams, as the qawwalis under discussion demonstrate, is a regular feature at these shrines, many Shias feel that the paramount authority of their imams is diminished when Shias attend to Sufi pirs instead of devoting themselves to the prophets and the imams. Given the extent of the non-Muslim presence at Sufi shrines, Hindu extremists are also complicit in sternly condemning their coreligionists for making pilgrimages to Sufi centers. In fact, during the 2002 anti-Muslim riots of Gujarat, the popular tomb of one of the finest Urdu Sufi poets, Vali Gujarati, was desecrated. Ironically, Vali's poetry is full of lavish admiration for Gujarat's cosmopolitanism as a divine gift to this region.

Even in the face of contempt from extremist elements, Sufi shrine culture permeates the lives of sundry South Asians in the form of spiritual healing and worldly entertainment. The pilgrims to these shrines find the qawwali performances mystically empowering, consoling, and entertaining. But the qawwali culture is itself dynamic and by no means limited to the shrine. It has undergone significant transformations over time and qawwalis have become commercial commodities produced by the likes of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the Sabri Brothers, and Abida Parveen. Such qawwals have moved the genre of spiritual poetry and music from the shrines of South Asia to the concert halls of Paris and New York. These qawwals have expanded qawwalis to non-mystical sites; though the precedent for this expansion and commercialization on the subcontinent goes back to the second half of the nineteenth century at least.[63]

The experience of mystical entertainment began to be created outside the traditional boundaries, with qawwalis leaving their mark upon public gatherings celebrating the lives of saints such as Abdul Qadir Jilani, and upon household functions such as weddings, birthdays, and other auspicious events. Qawwalis have not been limited to Muslim households. Even the popular Parsi theater of nineteenth-century Bombay included qawwalis in its plays.[64]

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the record industry gained

ground in South Asia. Concomitant with the rising popularity of certain record companies, the qawwalis were dispersed into all corners of South Asia and beyond, to a large extent by the South Asian diaspora. With the popularity of the Sabri Brothers (from the 1970s on) and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (from the 1980s on), the demand for qawwali, and the concomitant market, increased apace. Record companies such as World Music marketed the qawwalis with slickly produced recordings. The increasingly diverse qawwali audience comes to terms with the performance and the performers through their own ideological and spiritual background. For example, the hand clapping that provides a beat (of sorts) in the qawwali performance constitutes an interface of cultures for non-Urdu speaking audience members, and becomes a means by which the familiar genres of western music embrace a newcomer:

> It is this rhythmic element and the obvious intensity of the performances that endear qawwali to Western listeners. The syncopated rhythm set up by the hand clapping is so close in feel to the ubiquitous rock 'back-beat' that Western audiences immediately feel at home. This connection is important, because the majority of Western audiences cannot understand the lyrics, traditionally the most important aspect of the performance. However, they can dance to the music. It is not surprising then, that one reviewer of a 1998 Queen Elizabeth Hall concert by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan compared the ecstatic delivery and rhythmic energy of the music to that of James Brown, or that another at WOMAD in 1985 termed it "A sort of scappella [sic] Persian jazz that moved many of the audiences to tears of joy," or that a Welsh critic noted its "cajun-style energy" with "ancient scales that went westwards from the same areas and ended up as Irish reels."[65]

Judging from the qawwali performances in the western world, the themes of mysticism that characterized the origins of the qawwali tradition still remain pivotal to the "new" qawwalis, i.e., those far removed from their shrine origins. The commercially successful qawwals like Khan give many of the same reasons for and accounts of their performances as do little-known qawwals like Alam Ali and Safdar Ali. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan stated in an interview:

> When I sing traditional spiritual songs, I always concentrate on who it is that I'm singing about. For instance, if I am inspired by the Holy Prophet, I concentrate on the Prophet. When I sing, I sing for God and for holy prophets, and their personalities are in my mind. Accordingly, whenever I sing about God, or the prophet Muhammad, I feel like I am in front of him. I feel their personalities and I pray. I feel like I am in another world when I sing, the spiritual world. I am not in the material world while I am singing these traditional holy messages. I'm totally in another world. I am withdrawn from my materialistic senses, I am totally in my spiritual senses, and I am intoxicated by the Holy Prophet, God and other Sufi

> saints. When I sing for God, I feel myself in accord with God. The house of God, Mecca, is right in front of me, and I worship. When I sing for Muhammad, peace be upon him, our prophet, I feel like I am sitting right next to his tomb, Medina, and paying him respect and admitting to myself that I accept his message. When I sing about the Sufi saints, I feel like the saints are in front of me, and as a student, I am accepting their teachings. I repeat again and again that I accept their teachings, that I am really their follower.[66]

This interview bears out the truth according to many Sufis, that sincerity of belief and the devotional words that spring from it can transform any location into the niche wherein the devotee meets the object of his devotion. Perhaps these words of Khan remind one of Simab Akbarabadi's couplet that has a pronounced presence in many qawwalis:

> Ḳhulūṣ-e dil se jo sajda ho us sajde kā kyā kahnā
> vahīñ Kaʿba sarak āyā jabīñ ham ne jahāñ rakh dī[67]
>
> The prostration that is performed in a sincere, heartfelt manner
> What can be said about it!
> The Kaba is drawn to where I place my forehead

When appreciating the qawwali tradition, one also has to keep in mind the degree to which a successful qawwali is dependent upon the interaction that the qawwal has with the audience. The qawwali-attending audience is keen on making requests (*farmā'ish*) and the qawwals try to abide by such requests. The reward for fulfilling the wishes of the audience usually comes in the form of *nazr*, a monetary reward dependant upon the socioeconomic status of the audience members. The social and religious sensibilities of audience members also dictate to some extent the items that are sung. For example, when the late Aziz Ahmad Khan Warasi (himself a Sunni) performed in Shii households, he sang verses that praised Ali with words above and beyond the usual praise:

> zabāñ jab ḥamd meñ khultī hai tab dil thām letā hūñ
> ḳhudā ke nām se pahle ʿAlī kā nām letā hūñ[68]
>
> When my tongue begins to praise God, I clutch my heart
> Before God's name, I take Ali's

Many of the requests made during modern qawwali performances are undoubtedly a result of the widespread use of technology—radioes, television, tape recorders, and compact disc players. Through such media, particular qawwalis, especially those performed by commercially successful groups, gain popularity. Audiences attuned to these qawwalis are likely to request them from other qawwals as well. Thus, a tradition born within the Sufi shrine culture accords with the imperatives of the modern, ever-shrinking world through the initiatives of concert organizers, individual Sufi music assembly holders, and record producers.

But the mass-marketing of qawwalis has caused a decline in the demand

for local works of poetry. Even twenty years ago, local poets could circulate their poetry through qawwali gatherings. Testifying to the power of mass recordings, many qawwals with whom I spoke complained that the qawwalis requested by members of the younger generations in performances are those that have become popular through radio or television broadcasts. These qawwalis represent the taste of a limited number of urban centers like Karachi, Lahore, and Mumbai and do not usually resonate with the poetry and compositions of smaller communities. The qawwals from smaller communities, however, are not the only performers complaining that a globalized aesthetic is negatively effecting the locally established poetry traditions and performers. Not surprisingly, several people who recite various genres of majlis poetry also complain that they have to yield to requests to recite nauhas, salams, and marsiyas that are broadcast on television or radio. At the mercy of globalization, the emerging proclivities within today's qawwali listeners and majlis audiences undercut the time-honored tradition of local poets projecting their voices through the qawwals or majlis-reciters of their communities. The demands made on the local performers often reflect new global standards that have an authoritative standing as a result of large concerts sponsored by corporations, record companies, radio stations, or television channels.

A friend who had accompanied me to the shrine of Shaykh Salimuddin Chishti, requested that Alam Ali, a visiting qawwal, sing *"Sāqīyā aur Pilā"* (the first qawwali discussed). This particular qawwali, composed in honor of Husain b. Ali, was made popular, especially among Shias, by the commercial audiotapes of the Sabri Brothers.[69] Although the performer at the shrine (Alam Ali) did incorporate much of the Sabri Brother's qawwali into the performance, he also added many verses of his own. And even though the thematic rope still looked the same as that of the Sabri qawwali, Alam Ali added his own signature knots and unknotted many knots of the Sabri Brothers. It should be mentioned that the Sabri Brothers themselves did not always sing this qawwali with the same knots; they added and subtracted units depending on the time and place of the performance. For instance, in one of the versions of this qawwali, the Sabri Brothers glorify the esoteric wine and explicitly distance themselves from the Wahhabi tradition because this tradition has shown little tolerance to the Sufi readings of Islam.[70]

The mystically impelled vision of Karbala appears in the next qawwali through the juxtaposition of the symbols of devotion, commemoration, the banishment of ego, and the call for Husainian intercession. This qawwali, a version of which was originally performed by Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan in Paris, not only confirms the lofty status of the Martyr of Karbala, it also broadens the mystical purview discussed so far. Although Syed Adil Hussaini, Saber Habib, Harjit Singh, and Syed Salimullah reproduce most of Khan's qawwali, when singing this qawwali at a private assembly in Hyderabad, they do insert a girah which we encountered in the last qawwali, and this insertion makes their performance a bit different from that of Khan's.

Translation of Qawwali II

1

O Believers! When the world remembers the Martyr of Karbala,
It writhes and sheds tears of blood.
O Husain! O Husain! O Husain! O Husain!
O Husain! O Husain! O Husain! O Husain!

2

Husain is the king, Husain is the emperor,
Husain is religion and Husain is the refuge for religion
He sacrificed his head but did not give his hand [in allegiance to] Yazid
Truly, the basis of "la ilaha" is Husain
Although in prostration he let his head be cut off
Still he sounded the drum of God's name
O Husain! O Husain! O Husain! O Husain!
O Husain! O Husain! O Husain! O Husain!

3

If you desire [the] vision, bow your head in prayer
Banish the ego from the heart, erase your selfhood in prayer
Then you'll see the face of God in prayer
First of all, like Husain, sacrifice your head in prayer.
And say:
O Husain! O Husain! O Husain! O Husain!
O Husain! O Husain! O Husain! O Husain!

4

O Husain! Who has such audacity as to equal you in stature
In your father's house is the imamate, in your grandfather's house, prophethood
Having seen Husain's face, God Himself will say on doomsday:
O the darling of my Mustafa, my Chosen One, the people of Mustafa have been set free
O Husain! O Husain! O Husain! O Husain!
O Husain! O Husain! O Husain! O Husain!

5

It is a drop's joy to be annihilated in the ocean,
Pain, having passed the limit, becomes the cure
But: Ask not about the elation of desirers after they reach the execution ground
The baring of the sword is a feast for their sight

Hence, as he drew his bare sword to slay me, my head was in prostration
Prostration—Prostration is a strange thing
What else is there in the mantle of Islam, besides
The sword of Ali, the Hand of God, and the prostration of Shabbir [Husain]
Hence, As he drew his bare sword to slay me, my head was in prostration
O wondrous is his dalliance, O wondrous is my offering
However, so far I have received no brimful goblet

6

What a ruinous moment must have befallen Karbala,
When the blade of the sword fell upon Shabbir's neck
Even the celestial sphere must have grabbed its heart,
When the spear pierced the heart of Ali Akbar
"Let me take water and go" said Abbas
"Sakina, thirsty for many days, must be crying."
In the whole world, no world of the oppressed has been looted
As the world of Haidar's son was looted at Karbala.
What the grandson of Muhammad did in the shadow of swords—
Not even angels, let alone people, would have been capable of such servitude [to God]
"In exchange for our blood, forgive our followers, O Lord!"
This will be Shabbir's plea on doomsday.
O Husain! O Husain! O Husain! O Husain!
O Husain! O Husain! O Husain! O Husain![71]



FIGURE 4.2 Hussaini and his companions performing at a qawwali assembly.

Analysis and Contextualization of Qawwali 2

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 1. Hussaini begins the qawwali by reminding the audience that any remembrance of the Martyr of Karbala is bound to evoke sorrow among those listening to this tale. The first two lines of the qawwali conjure up the context of the commemorative majlis gatherings with the vocative utterance *momino!* (believers!) and the phrase *ḳhūn ke ānsū* (tears of blood). This phrase also aligns the world that sheds tears of blood with the cause of Husain—the paradigm of sacrifice, who shed his own blood to rescue virtue. Like the majlis audience that forms a relationship with the martyrs of Karbala, the qawwali audience must also suffer vicariously in order to honor and relate to Husain. Remember that singing the praises of Husain and celebrating his ultimate victory does not mean that the elements of sorrow and suffering that are always latent in the account of Karbala must be excluded.

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 2. To convey Husain's great victory, Hussaini, like Alam Ali, adorns his Urdu qawwali with the Persian poetic knot from Muinuddin Chishti. The resounding drum of Husain's victory, of God's name, was sounded when Husain allowed his head to be cut off in prostration. For with this act, Husain no longer lived in separation from the Almighty; he subsisted in the Almighty.

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 3. Hence, if the vision of the Almighty is desired, why not emulate the one who has reached the stage where such vision is possible? The first step in this quest is to bow one's head in prostration, just as Husain did. The Quran provides the remedy for the distance between the Creator and the created by calling upon the created to prostrate themselves to attain proximity with the Creator: "Prostrate and draw near."[72] This very notion of prostration implies the existence of a superior force. Thus *ḳhūdī,* by which the qawwal implies the ego, whose very existence creates a duality between the Creator and His creation, needs to be banished and only then can the vision of God become a possibility. This transcendental vision of God surpasses worldly temporality and is set on eternal permanence. The mystic once again draws his currency from the Quran: "Whatever is on earth is perishing save His face."[73] Yet, empty talk cannot convey such profound mystical truths. These truths can only be grasped through actions. Therefore the qawwali calls out to all those who desire the vision of God to bow their heads in prostration—with the willingness to sacrifice it and the same sincerity as Husain. These lines also resonate with the notions of the fine Persian Sufi poet, Abul-Majd Majiduddin b. Adam Sanai (d. 1131 C.E.). He reminds us that any faithful rendition of Husain's station is not possible unless one is liberated from the base self and one has the strength to emulate Husain's courageous fight.[74]

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 4. In these verses, Husain's status is set apart from that of all other heroes. As if the sacrifices of the martyr of Karbala were not enough to secure for him the highest of accolades in God's eyes, his genealogical line-

age also privileges him over and above all other martyrs. In the house of Husain's father, Ali, resides the imamate, or the spiritual leadership of the community. The institution of the imamate, which holds a theological importance within Shii communities, is also revered by numerous Sufi orders. Many Sufis claim their descent through one of the Shii imams. Evidence of this reverence can be seen in Sufi shrines adorned with the names of these Shii imams. Furthermore, the "father" of all these imams, Ali, is the forebear of Islamic spirituality. Husain not only inherits the imamate from his father, he is also honored by virtue of being born in the Prophet's house—a house upon which God showered His mercy through His final revelation. Thus, when Husain appears in the presence of the Lord on Judgment Day, he will already have accumulated such merits through his personal conduct and noble lineage that the Final Arbiter will say at once: The community of Mustafa [the Prophet Muhammad], is set free from all punishments, and from the chains of ego.

Of course the qawwali is underscoring the redemptive nature of Husain's struggle—redemptive in the sense that Husain underwent the most severe suffering in order to set up a model of love and piety; and all those who emulate this model are guaranteed eternal victory.

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 5. This segment includes the metaphor of the raindrop, the sword trope, and the invocations of Ghalib and Iqbal in the service of Karbala, all covered in segment 4 of the last qawwali. Hussaini basically repeats verbatim stanza 4 of Alam Ali's qawwali.

ANALYSIS OF STANZA 6. In the last section of the qawwali, the qawwal imagines that the suffering of Karbala was so grave that the oppressive celestial sphere, that is a constant witness to the toils of God's creation, would itself have been in agony at the resilience and forbearance of Husain and his companions. So innumerable were the sacrifices on Husain's part that it is difficult to imagine any angel, much less a human, coping with them. The only reward that Husain asks for his blood is that his grandfather's community be forgiven. This theme of Husain's intercession on behalf of faithful Muslims permeates many qawwalis that invoke Karbala. Such qawwalis ineluctably affect the eschatological hopes of the performers, as well as the audiences, by reminding them that Husain is the intercessor by virtue of his suffering and martyrdom. He can relate to the Supreme Lord on the basis of his exemplary character and steadfastness in devotion.

The above qawwali is the locus wherein Husain's paradigmatic and intercessory roles converge into one another. Through his ideal annihilation at Karbala, Husain is freed from the shackles of his worldly existence and united with his beloved, to subsist in the highest of forms—a form which not only inspires others but intervenes on their behalf when they stumble.

Conclusion

Qawwali is just one facet of a large, complex mystical culture. This tradition not only encompasses a range of mystical texts, from simple to quite complex, it also forms a nexus where diverse traditions and peoples converge, thereby facilitating the diffusion of mystical symbols, such as that of Karbala, into wider circles. Along with the continually changing social and cultural backdrops of the qawwalis, the tradition has also accommodated a great deal of creative autonomy on the part of the qawwals themselves. The qawwals find in Husain's martyrdom spiritual themes that correspond to the best of Islamic spirituality: They illustrate, through Husain, the highest standards of spirituality. The meaning of Husain is seen through the lens of his worship and his willingness to live under the sword of God's will. As Alam Ali elucidates for us, invoking Husain's martyrdom means celebrating the death of the base soul and the survival of the higher soul. He argues his case as follows: The symbolic wine imbibed through the remembrance of Karbala causes the demise of consciousness of all entities other than God, so that a state of oblivion (*beḳhabarī*) comes into being. Since the human ego resides in consciousness, through the wine of Husain's remembrance, the ego's abode is demolished.

The major difference between this tradition and the majlis tradition lies in the emotional reaction to martyrdom. The qawwalis are more favorably disposed to view death as a victory, a union with God, than to view death as an event to be mourned. The very context of the qawwali has a built-in celebratory appeal and the qawwalis, in their meditative and contemplative mode, serve to reinforce the celebratory aspect of the union, rather than the mournful aspect of the suffering of Husain and his family and companions. The treatment accorded to Husain in the South Asian qawwali tradition is not much different from that accorded to him in other popular Sufi traditions. Valerie Hoffman-Ladd, in her wonderful work on popular Sufism in Egypt, makes the following observations that can also resonate with South Asian qawwali audiences:

> The [Egyptian] Sufis, however, express their love for Husain and other members of the *ahl al-bayt* not through grief, but through joyful songs and expressions of devotion. The love Egyptian Sufis have for Husain springs from his close relationship with the Prophet, affirmed in many sayings, as well as by adoption, for the Prophet declared Hasan and Husain to be his own sons. After the Prophet, the person who inspires the greatest love among Egyptian Sufis is Husain. His shrine-mosque in Cairo, which allegedly houses the noble head, is enormous and beautiful, and his *mawlid* [birthday] is the largest one of all. His name frequently comes up in Sufi songs, and on the outer wall of his mosque hangs a large, illuminated plaque bearing the saying of the Prophet: "Husain is from me and I am from Husain." The Egyptians do not dwell on Husain's martyrdom, but sing joyfully of their love for him. . . .[75]

It is also worth mentioning that in several qawwalis, the line calling for the celebration of martyrdom and lamenting the obstacles on the path of martyrdom is sufficiently blurred to accommodate a wide band of emotions. Hence, it is perfectly acceptable for qawwalis to cause their audience to weep "the tears of blood" at the tribulations of the lover [Husain] and his followers, as the qawwali by Khan does. However, in the same qawwali, this suffering and sorrow is transformed into rejoicing at the union of the lover and the Beloved. Although there are moments of despair, the persistence of joy overcomes them. The qawwalis that deal with Karbala thus transcend the specific instances of death and suffering and point to the outcome of this struggle: the union between the lover and the Beloved and the lover's willingness to go to any length to accomplish this.

No discussion of Sufi literature, of which qawwalis are an important component, should end without mentioning the influence these tropes had on the overall literary corpus of Islamicate literatures. Sufi literature has historically provided that safe space wherein subtle and enduring forms of resistance to oppression and injustice could be forged. The literary space is an avenue to reactivate and articulate the messages of Husain and others. Such symbols thus constitute a counterdiscourse to the outward appearances of the religion. These poets and performers, by upsetting the existing social equilibrium, set up alternative worlds that are in overt contradiction to the worlds of the religious leaders.

Sufism, through the language of the qawwali, has also transmitted dynamic idioms to generations of poets across various regions, even when their writings were not religious per se. The idioms should not be seen as an already harvested land, but should instead be viewed as fertile soil that accommodated ever-new seeds of creativity. These idioms are thus constantly re-oriented, leaving traces of ambiguity that can be simultaneously profane and spiritual, literal and metaphoric. The Sufis, very early on, carved out a niche so accommodating that subsequent developments in Perso-Indic poetry are easily held within the genres of the qawwali, ghazal, marsiya, salam, and nauha; all abound in imagery that encompasses Sufi discourses in one way or another. Undoubtedly precipitating the anguish of those who wish to safeguard neat religious and ideological categories, the Sufis, a diffuse category of identity in itself, so colored the overall literary and poetic landscape that it became impossible to create boundaries separating the mystical from the non-mystical, Amir Khusraw from Iqbal, Bollywood from shrines, Karbala from wine-drinking, the potential from the possible.

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5

Iqbal and Karbala

Ramz-e Qurāñ az Ḥusain āmūḵhtīm
z-ātish-e ū shoʿla ha añdūḵhtīm

I learned the lesson of the Quran from Husain
In his fire, like a flame, I burn

Muhammad Iqbal

When I began my academic engagement with various South Asian contexts that receive their vocabulary from the event of Karbala, I realized very early that one figure through whom these contexts may be woven together is Muhammad Iqbal. He becomes the most significant interlocutor of the various ideologies of the Islamic world. Although people from disparate backgrounds lavish praise on him, Iqbal's role in the constitution of these ideologies differs in significant ways. In many ways, we can compare him to the elephant in the mystical work of Iqbal's own source of emulation, Jalaluddin Rumi.[1] Like the elephant in Rumi's parable, situated in the dark and surrounded by men who each feel a part of the elephant's body and mistake that part for the whole, Iqbal has been studied, admired, and criticized from the vantage point of various contexts and ideologies. Such multiple approaches to Iqbal make him an intellectual whose legacy is infinitely negotiable, perhaps also like the event of Karbala. Iqbal also warrants his own chapter of this work because he is arguably the most original Muslim reformer-poet hailing from modern South Asia, and one whose evocations of Karbala and martyrdom have become important refrains in the subsequent discourses of anti-colonialism and nationalism.

In the India of Iqbal's time, British colonial rule had assumed a preeminent status from 1857 on, when the last Mughal ruler was ex-

iled. Although the three-century-long rule of the Mughals was relatively decentralized and hardly a reflection of textual Islam dictating the policies of the state (even though some Mughal rulers identified closely with Islamic religious establishments), many Muslims after the fall of the Mughals were concerned about their community's fate in a post-Mughal India under British colonial rule. The very idea of a unified religious community, whether Hindu or Muslim, was, to a great degree, ushered in by colonial discourses that persisted in viewing India as if it were constituted by well-defined religious categories. Ironically, those wrestling with the questions of whether or not colonialism should be resisted, and if so, with what strategies, also generated a prodigious amount of literature that employed religious idioms at the expense of those idioms formulated through linguistic, regional, or class concerns. South Asian intellectuals in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century were acutely concerned with positing the anti-colonial struggle through discourses saturated in religious vocabulary. Iqbal was no exception to this. Yet, he was unique in his mastery of Urdu and Persian reformist language and in the towering shadow he still projects on discussions of South Asian Islam.

Muhammad Iqbal, having lived as a prominent intellectual and poet in the first four decades of the twentieth century, and having witnessed life in both Europe (where he went for his higher education from 1905 to 1908) and Asia, is a fascinating mélange of voices of the East and the West. Drawing from Islamic spirituality, philosophy, aesthetics, and history, as well as from certain discourses of the European Enlightenment, he was a South Asian modernist force who bridged temporal and geographical distances. By "modernist," in the context of Iqbal, I mean that he was a utilitarian configurer of the past who sought to use this past to meet the spiritual and material needs of the present and ultimately secure a brighter future. This reconfiguration of the past is itself rooted in the vision of reconciling Islamicate and European ideologies to progressive ends, ends that are shaped by a desire to wake up the dormant elements in the Muslim community.

Surprisingly, the centrality of Karbala and martyrdom in the discourses of Iqbal has not received due attention, despite the importance of these concepts for Iqbal's concept of khudi, or the desired higher self. In the first section of this chapter, I explore how Iqbal reclaims the symbol of Karbala for a pan-Islamic reformist discourse that transcends sectarian differences. In so doing, I locate Iqbal loosely within the Sufi and Sunni socioreligious reformist traditions (of Muhammad Ali Jauhar and Maulana Abul kalam Azad), while underscoring the poet's important breaks with these traditions. Iqbal constitutes Karbala as a political project to unite and mobilize Muslims, especially the Muslim minorities of the South Asian subcontinent. For Iqbal, Karbala is also a move away from the ritualistic-symbolic realm toward the spiritual-active one.

The second part of this chapter explores how Shias, a persecuted minority in Pakistan, in turn, valorize Iqbal, in an attempt to accrue legitimacy for their own sociopolitical ends. In spite of his Sunni heritage, Iqbal's name becomes an important invocation, and therefore a rhetorical device for validating Shii

readings of Islamic history. This chapter concludes by pointing to the heterogeneity of the engagements with Iqbal's rearticulation of Karbala, in the works of Iqbal's contemporaries and followers, as well as in the writings of modern Iranian intellectuals.

Iqbal and Karbala

> The first Muslim, the King of men, Ali
> The treasure of faith, in the world of love, Ali
> In the affection of his progeny, I live—
> Like a jewel, I sparkle [in his love]
>
> Muhammad Iqbal

With these words, Iqbal sings his panegyrics for Ali b. Abi Talib, in the epic poem *Secrets of the Self*. Iqbal illustrates here the ideal Muslim self through the persona of Ali. As one of the mystically-inclined commentators of Iqbal put it,[2] within Ali, Iqbal sees the embodiment of three of the loftiest human characteristics: knowledge, love, and action. To Iqbal, the scope of Ali's knowledge is evident from the Prophetic tradition: "I am the city of knowledge and Ali is its gate." Iqbal is fully immersed in this Sufi tradition and knows well that according to many Sufis, the Prophet invested Ali with the cloak of spirituality, or the *ḳhirqa*. Although all companions of the Prophet are to be revered for seeing the last Messenger of Allah face-to-face and enjoying his company, Ali's status in the chain of Islamic spirituality is distinct. And it is upon this status that Iqbal founds the concept of khudi or "self." Recall that the second qawwali in the last chapter had also used the word khudi, but as a reference to the base ego that separates God from his creation. In many Sufi discourses, khudi appeared with a pejorative connotation. But Iqbal reclaims this concept in order to articulate a higher self. This triadic self—invested with knowledge, love, and action—derives from that "first Muslim," Ali, and lies latent within all Muslims.

Ali, however, is not alone in manifesting the ideals of the true Muslim self; he is accompanied by his beloved wife Fatima. Had the Prophet not forbidden grave worship, Iqbal declares in his praise for Fatima, "I would have circumambulated her grave and fallen into prostration on her dust." Fatima is not only the center of the realm of love but she is also the leader of all those in the caravan of God's love. Husain's traits are the inheritance from Fatima since whatever jewels of truth and virtue sons inherit, credit is due to their mothers. And Fatima is not only the perfection of all mothers, but of all women; for in addition to her love for her children and husband, she is tied to the toil and labor of this world, having borne a heavy burden in the most excruciating circumstances. Along with action and love, knowledge is also the providence of Fatima: The Word of God rests on her lips as she works her way through life.[3] Fatima, in the world of Iqbal, is Ali's complement, and thus central to the propagation of Islam. It is the son of Ali and Fatima, Husain, who traverses the paths of martyrdom with the lamp of knowledge and an abiding commit-

ment to love, so as to project to the world the manner in which Islamic ideals can be realized.

In his poem "The Meaning of Liberation in Islam and the Secret of the Karbala Incident,"[4] Iqbal first situates Husain in the context of Islam's philosophy of *ʿishq*, or love, as prefigured by both Ali and Fatima: He who enters the divine covenant with the Lord must not prostrate in the presence of anyone but the object of devotion, God. The *momin*, or true believer, emerges from love, and love likewise flows from the momin. Love makes the impossible possible. Love is superior to intellect (*ʿaql*) in every imaginable way. Love captures its prey with no guises, whereas intellect has to lay a snare. The treasury of intellect overflows with fear and doubt, whereas love is an efflorescence of determination and certainty. Intellect partakes of construction in order to deconstruct whereas love causes desolation in order to foster prosperity. The leader of this realm of love is Husain:

> ān imām-e ʿāshiqāñ pūr-e Batūl
> sarv-e āzāde ze būstān-e Rasūl
>
> That imam of lovers, that son of Batul [Fatima]
> That liberated cypress tree from the garden of the Messenger

Iqbal compares Husain's exalted station within the Muslim community to that of *Surat al-Iḫlaṣ* in the Quran. This sura is a fundamental component of Muslim ritual prayers and concisely summarizes the Islamic creed of monotheism: "Say, He is Allah, the One, the Eternal; He begets not nor is He begotten and there is none like Him." Just as the words of this Quranic sura are pivotal, Husain is an integral part of the Muslim community. In fact, according to Iqbal, truth itself survives through the strength of Husain.

Having paid this tribute to the martyred hero of Karbala as the fountainhead of the philosophy of love, Iqbal proceeds to dehistoricize Husain's struggle, at least as far as the Shias are concerned: "When the Caliphate severed its relationship with the Quran [under Yazid] and dropped poison in the mouth of liberation,"[6] Husain rose as the cloud of mercy and then rained upon the land of Karbala. The implication is that before Yazid, the successors of the Prophet had been tied to the privileged Islamic text, and Yazid strayed from the path of his (rightly-guided) predecessors. This is of course a Sunni implication, for as far as the Shias are concerned, the Quran is invariably bound to Ali and his descendants. Since Ali was deprived of his leadership position after the Prophet (except for the brief time span in which Ali became the fourth Muslim caliph), the caliphate was separated from the Quran within moments of the Prophet's death. But Iqbal rescripts Husain as a more cosmic force, a cloud of mercy akin to his Prophet-grandfather, above and beyond sectarian strife and appeals to history. The rain from the cloud of mercy was so nourishing that tulips sprouted and gardens flourished and the despotism of a desolated world was eradicated. According to Iqbal, the suffering that Husain himself had to undergo to nourish the garden of truth transformed him into the very foundation of monotheism:

bahr-e ḥaqq dar ḳhāk o ḳhūn ġhalṭida ast
pas binā-e lā illāh gardīda ast

For the sake of Truth, he writhed in dust and blood
Thus did he become the foundation of lā ilaha[7]

Iqbal, a devout student of mysticism and a devotee of Muinuddin Chishti, the Sufi luminary from Ajmer (discussed in chapter 4), is of course building upon the Sufi hermeneutics of Karbala and identifying Husain as the foundation of Islam's most essential creed of Divine Unity. In addition to living in a milieu where qawwalis, such as the ones we discussed, were commonplace, Iqbal had also received formal exposure to Sufism and Persian metaphysics while pursuing his doctorate at Munich University, in the land of his beloved Goethe.

Iqbal, Karbala, and Persian Sufi Poetry

Iqbal's outpouring of love and devotion to Husain had its precursors in Persian mystical verses, especially those of Abul-Majd Majiduddin b. Adam Sanai (d. 1131 C.E.), Fariduddin Attar (d. c. 1229 C.E.) and Jalaluddin Rumi (d. 1273 C.E.). According to Sanai, Karbala is the archetype of suffering in the path of God, to which the Sufi must look for guidance:

Until they turn away from happiness,
men of purity will not be able to step onto Mustafa's carpet.
How should there be joy in religion's lane when,
for the sake of empire, blood ran down Husain's throat at Karbala?[8]

So the very allegiance to Mustafa, God's Chosen Prophet, entails a willingness to suffer—a willingness similar to that of Mustafa's grandson, Husain. Husain's willingness, as far as Sanai is concerned, is surely unique:

This world is full of martyrs,
but where is a martyr like Husain at Karbala?[9]

But to speak of Husain is a formidable task, for if justice is to be done to the Martyr of Karbala, the individual ego self of the speaker must be annihilated. How can one really know the beauty of the most lofty of stations unless one has actually seen it? The practitioners of annihilation can only carry out the ministration of the cause:

Sanai, since you have not been cut off from your own self,
How can you tell tales of Husain?[10]

The conflict between Husain and Yazid is an allegorical conflict reflecting the tension that exists between the virtuous and the vicious side of all individuals. Thus, all the righteous have to defeat the Yazids and Shimrs[11] of their own vicious, egotistical selves (nafs) with the help of Husain:

Religion is your Husain,
while desires and hopes are pigs and dogs—
yet you kill the first through thirst and feed these two.
How can you keep on cursing the wicked Yazid and Shimr?
You are a Shimr and a Yazid for your own Husain![12]

For Attar, this Husainian dimension is what endears one to God. Husain b. Ali, with his beautiful traits, was friends with God and His Prophet. Friendship implies an intimate knowledge of the friend. Thus Husain is:

āftāb-e āsmān-e maʿrifat
ān Muḥammad ṣūrat o Ḥaidar ṣifat.[13]

The Sun in the sky of gnosis,
With the form of Muhammad, and the attributes of Haidar [Ali].

Such is Husain's station that God's prophets pay tribute to him on the soil of Karbala:

ṣad hazārān jān-e pāk-e anbiyā
ṣaf zadah bīnam baḳhāk-e Karbalā[14]

A hundred thousand pure souls of the prophets,
I see, lined up on the soil of Karbala.

The only station that he desires in relation to the Martyr of Karbala is to be the lowliest of creatures, perhaps a black dog, in Husain's lane.[15] But then again, Attar reconsiders the utility of such a creature and wishes he were more productive to Husain's cause—and had melted into water in the sorrow of the martyr's pain, thereby quenching the Imam's thirst. As far as those who hurt Husain, Attar considers them to be nothing but infidels (*kāfir*).

Attar and Sanai were followed by the most majestic of Persian mystical writers, Jalaluddin Rumi. Rumi is more than anything else, the poet of love. To him, the being of the Beloved *par excellence* is all encompassing:

jumla maʿshūq ast o ʿāshiq parda-eh
ziñdah maʿshūq ast o ʿāshiq murda-eh[16]

All is the Beloved, the lover but a veil
Alive is the Beloved, the lover but dead.

The earthly existence in essence is the separation of the lover from the Beloved: like the reed torn from the reed bed.[17] Such a forlorn existence obviously cannot have a substantial significance in itself. It derives its significance from the loving quest for its Origins, a quest that is often painful. However, the more painful it is, the keener the awareness the lover has of his separation from the Beloved.

The ego of the lover must never be allowed to run amuck, lest it is deluded by its own existence. It must be combated—combated within the prison of the body. Rumi, in the same vein as Sanai, sees the Husain-Yazid struggle as

symbolic of the struggle between the higher self and the lower ego within all humans:

> Night died and came to life, for there is life after death:
> O heartache, kill me! For I am Husain, you are Yazid.[18]

How does Rumi mourn Husain, the exemplary lover who comes back to life after the travails of the dark night of Karbala?

> My heart is Husain and separation Yazid—
> my heart has been martyred two hundred times
> In the desert of torment and affliction (*karb-o-balā*).[19]

In Rumi's verses, Husain wages a war and refuses to pay allegiance to separation, opting instead for union with the Beloved. Thus Karbala should cause people to rejoice, not lament. Rumi cautioned his own followers against mourning his death:

> When you see my funeral, say not "separation, separation,"
> For that shall be the moment of my union and meeting.
> When you entrust me to the grave, say not "farewell, farewell,"
> For the grave is but the veil hiding the gathering of Paradise.[20]

Rumi, in his magisterial mystical poetic compilation, the *Maśnavī,* recounts a tale in which a poet arrives in Aleppo on the day of ashura and is baffled by the fact that the Shias still mourn for Husain after several centuries. This poet believes that Husain's death should be remembered not through lamentations but through celebration. Implicit in the poet's language is the subliminal criticism of those who mourn for Husain, namely the Shias.

> The spirit of a sultan [king] has escaped from a prison.
> Why should we tear our clothes and bite our fingers?
> Since he was the king of religion,
> His breaking of the bonds was a time of joy,
> For he sped toward the pavilions of good fortune
> And threw off his fetters and chains.[21]

Images of a king and a liberated being are skillfully layered on each other so as to draw attention to the archetypal lover. The image of Husain as an ideal lover continued to enrich Islamic mystical poetry after Rumi. Nuruddin Abdur Rahman Jami (d. 1492 C.E.) believes it is necessary for all lovers to pay tribute to the place of martyrdom (*mashhad*) of Husain:

> I turned my eyes toward the place of martyrdom of Husain
> This travel, in the religion of all lovers, is a necessary obligation[22]

Even the most sanctified of the Islamic sites, the Holy Kaba, according to Jami, circumambulates the shrine of this martyred lover of God.[23]

In opting to tie Husain, first and foremost, to the idea of love, Iqbal selectively utilizes these mystical threads of the past. The Husain-Yazid dialectic (in the beginning at least) is more concerned with the inner human conflict than

with any outward political agenda. From this conflict, the higher self (khudi) emerges victorious as it overcomes the base self. Through this spiritual capital of khudi, even the will of ḳhūdā (God/god) becomes subservient to the one who possesses khudi:

ḳhūdī ko kar balañd itnā ke har taqdīr se pehle
ḳhūdā bañde se ḳhūd pūche batā terī riẓā kyā hai[24]

Raise yourself to such a station,
that before any fate,
God Himself shall ask his creation, "What is thy will?"

Thus the "will" of the creation rests comfortably within the agency of the creation and the creator-creation dialectic is puckishly and punningly unsettled—khudi (self) seems to dictate the will of khuda (god/God)!

Just as eternal life is promised to those killed in the way of God, khudi, for Iqbal, is constituted by self-affirming eternity:

ḳhūdī hai ziñda to hai maut ek maqām-e ḥayāt
ke ʿishq maut se kartā hai imteḥān ṡabāt[25]

If the self lives, death is only a station in life
for love tests its affirmation [permanence] through death

Iqbal follows through on this idea elsewhere:

ho agar ḳhūdnagar o ḳhūdgar o ḳhūdgīr ḳhūdī
yeh bhī mumkin hai ke tu maut se bhī mar na sake.[26]

If the self is self-reflexive, self-creating, and self-comprehending,
it's even possible that you will not die from death

This realization of khudi, according to Iqbal, was passed on by Ali and Fatima to Husain, the martyr of Karbala, who, along with his seventy-two companions, lived the concept of khudi by fighting (acting) for the principles of Islam (knowledge) and dying (loving) a martyr's death.

However, in the battle of Karbala, Husain is not the sole object of Iqbal's praise. Husain's companions also deserve to be labeled "godly" in that aesthetically creative way:

dushmanāñ chūñ reg-e ṣaḥra lā taʿddad
dostān-e ū ba Yazdāñ ham ʿadad[27]

Like the grains of desert sand his [Husain's] enemies were countless
While the number of his friends equaled God [Yazdan]

Relying upon the numerical value that is attributed to Arabic letters in the system of *abjad*,[28] the poet transforms the seventy-two followers of Husain into God or *Yazdān*—the value of the letters composing Yazdan is: y = 10; z = 7; d = 4; a = 1; n = 50. It is as though the seventy-two companions are annihilated in the Persian equivalent of Allah, Yazdan (*fanā fī Yazdān*), in order to

strengthen their khudi and ratify the cause of Truth (*Ḥaqq*) that was espoused by Husain.

Continuing in this mystical vein, Iqbal considers Husain's struggle to be a mine of the mysterious sacrificial tradition that the Prophet Abraham prefigured. In fact, one of Iqbal's most fondly remembered couplets regarding Husain treats this theme in Urdu:

ġharīb o sāda o rañgīñ hai dāstān-e Ḥaram
nehāyat us kī Ḥusain ibtedā hai Ismāʿīl[29]

The legacy of the haram is mysteriously simple yet colorful
Ismail is its outset and Husain its climax

Iqbal signifies the revered House of God, the Haram, or the Kaba in Mecca, in terms of Ismail and Husain. Ismail was the product of the constant prayers of his father, Prophet Abraham, who nevertheless was willing to sacrifice his son at God's command. An important part of the annual Muslim pilgrimage, the hajj, is to recall Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. Abraham was called upon to make only one sacrifice, but Husain made countless sacrifices in the battlefield of Karbala to save the ideals of Islam. Hence, if Abraham and Ismail started the tradition of martyrdom, Husain perfected it—not only by providing an eternal example of sacrifice for the world, but by awakening the slumbering Muslim self.

Iqbal is so consumed in Husain's love that the very lessons from the Word of God, the Quran, are imparted to the poet through Husain:

I learned the secret/lesson of the Quran from Husain
In his fire, like a flame, I burn[30]

These words bespeak Husain's importance in constituting an epistemological framework for the Quran. The words of the Beloved, in the form of the Quran, are imparted to Iqbal when he is consumed in the fire of Husain's love. Consumed, though far from immolated, the lover-Iqbal's higher self lives on like a flame. The annihilation reaches its fruition in subsistence and it is this flame of subsistence that guides the spiritually thirsty Muslim community, even beyond the borders of the subcontinent:

reg-e ʿIrāq muntaẓir, kisht-e Ḥijāz tishna kām
ḳhūn-e Ḥusain bāz deh, Kūfa o Shām-e ḳhwīsh rā[31]

The sands of Iraq await, the desert of Hijaz is thirsty
Once again satiate your own Kufa and Syria with the blood of Husain.

The city of Kufa (in Iraq) and the region of Syria were Yazid's two major power bases. Husain was murdered by Yazid's forces before the Prophet's grandson could reach Iraq and incite others to rise up against Yazid. Yazid's fear was that if Kufa fell to Husain, Syria would soon follow.

For Iqbal, Husain's struggle does not completely end with Karbala. Although Husain himself could not go on fighting in Kufa and Syria, it became

incumbent upon the Muslim community to keep this struggle alive. Each and every member of the Muslim community, regardless of his/her sect, gender, or class, has the responsibility to emulate Husain's struggle, for this struggle was the struggle *par excellence* for justice. Karbala, for Iqbal, is a site whereupon the Quran and the Kaba, two of the loftiest religious artifacts for all Muslims, converge, and consequently, all differences within the community should be subsumed within the Husainian struggle. By invoking Karbala as an intrinsic component of an overall Islamic reform blueprint, Iqbal ruptures the previously held sectarian codes of this struggle. By underscoring the degree to which Karbala is bound up with the Quran and the Kaba, Iqbal at once limits the apparently divergent readings of this event. Karbala is thus constituted by a larger and more comprehensive temporal process, the duration of which renders it timeless. Iqbal relocates Karbala away from its original moment (which for Shias is the moment when Ali's rights were usurped after the Prophet's death) and anchors it in an extratemporal fold of Islam. Iqbal could not have agreed more with Husain's great-grandson, Jafar al-Sadiq, the sixth Shii Imam and a pillar of Islamic spirituality for Sufis, who uttered the following words while imputing both timelessness and spacelessness to Karbala: "Every day is ashura; every land is Karbala." To the extent that Muslims conceive of Karbala as timeless, an event transcending its particularity, like the Quran and the Kaba, there is a possibility of using Karbala as a catalyst to forge a more united community. Such a catalyst can only enhance the advancement of reform and justice.

Iqbal is aware that despite their agreement on the pivotal importance of the Quran and the Kaba, the Muslim community of his time was subject to discordant impulses. In dismay, the poet-reformer writes:

> The profits of this community are one, so are the losses
> The Prophet is one, so is the religion and faith
> The sacred Kaba, Allah, and the Quran are one
> Had Muslims also been one, would it have been such a big deal?!
> Sectarianism prevails in some places, factionalism in others
> Is this the way to prosper in the world?[32]

While wishing for a united Muslim front on one level, Iqbal does not isolate this front in any way: Iqbal is determined to locate Muslims within a larger web of cultures and regions:

> China and Arabia are ours, India is ours
> We are Muslim and our homeland is the entire world.[33]

Differences between Muslims can be respected, but under the aegis of a unified community. The edification of this community can take place through paradigmatic struggle, like that of Karbala. The ethos of this struggle is shaped by a determination to act on behalf of the self, as well as the community, and by extension, all of God's creation.

Thus in poetry that bespoke urgency, Iqbal, through finely drawn metaphors, framed his potent appeals for action. This action, rooted in love and

knowledge, gathered momentum by constantly conjuring up Husain's battle and from situating Karbala within the concept of khudi. Karbala for Iqbal became a political project constituted not only by the simultaneity of affirming the higher self and negating the lower one, but also by creating and reinforcing community solidarity. Iqbal implored those who saw Karbala solely as the epiphany of the highest mystical struggle to interpret this struggle via political activism:

> Get out of the *khanqahs* [Sufi residences]
> and perform the ritual of Shabbir [Husain]
> For the poverty of the khanqahs is naught but
> anxiety and affliction[34]

The Sufi centers and residences, khanqahs, have long stood for asceticism, spaces for those who are weary of this world. But, to Iqbal, resigning from the affairs of the world serves neither the individual nor the community—hence one should leave the khanqahs in order to perform the deed of Shabbir, a deed that moves beyond symbolic and ritualistic gesture into the domain of activist social, political, and religious intervention. Khanqah in these verses stands for passive and hollow rituals whereas Husain's action, his willingness to preach under the sword, is the process whereby rituals receive spiritually relevant and activist lives. The mystical fetish for poverty, according to Iqbal, vulgarizes class struggle, and rigidifies it into iniquitous institutions. Material poverty within Sufi lore was valorized so as to create a discourse of worldly apathy and political indifference.[35] Of later developments within Islamic mysticism, Iqbal argued that there was so much emphasis placed on the "other-worldly" rewards that "this-worldly" concerns were neglected. Hence the spirit of poverty that Husain advocated—poverty that invests worldly wealth with loathsome qualities and instigates the search for justice—was sacrificed:

> ek faqr hai Shabbīrī is faqr meñ hai mīrī
> mīrāṡ-e Musalmānī, sarmāya-e Shabbīrī[36]
>
> There is a poverty, that of Shabbir [Husain]
> In this poverty lies Kingship
> The inheritance of Islam
> Is naught but the wealth of Shabbir

For Iqabal, Husain's poverty lay in his righteousness and spirit of sacrifice: He fought Yazid when he had the option of accepting worldly wealth and tolerating the rule of Yazid in silence. Had Husain cherished worldly wealth, he would have accepted it from Yazid rather than give up his life fighting for the community's greater good. Had Husain simply valued poverty, then he would have withdrawn into a khanqah and forsaken political activism. But Husain rose above the dichotomies of wealth and poverty, asceticism and indulgence, to evoke khudi, that higher self that is predicated essentially on love, knowledge, and action. This higher self is conceived in the spirit of social and economic justice at a communal level; it functions in response to the real needs

of the downtrodden. This khudi is then transposed to the community or a social collective (*qawm, millat, ummat*), and the calls for just and loving action are raised:

> uṭho merī dunyā ke ġharīboñ ko jagā do
> kāḳh-e umarā ke dar o dīvār hilā do
> jis khet se dahqāñ ko muyassar nahīñ rozī
> us khet ke har ḳhusha-e gañdum ko jala do[37]
>
> Rise! Awaken the poor of my world
> Shake the doors and walls of the palaces of the rich
> Set ablaze every stack of grain
> In the field from which the farmer receives no sustenance.

These verses, appearing in Iqbal's provocative trilogy, *Firmān-e Ḳhudā, God's Decree,* are Allah's (khuda's) call to awaken the khudi of the poor.

The "decree" of God can be read as a willingness on the part of the Divine to heed the calls for economic justice, raised by both Marx and Lenin. Iqbal, in effect, articulates his ideal of socioeconomic justice by synthesizing what he takes to be the redeeming aspects of Marx's thought, and what he imagines to be Lenin's valid complaints to God. Lenin, through Iqbal, questions God about the fate of the economically less fortunate. Decrying the perpetuation of banks at the expense of churches, he notices gambling in the guise of trade and exploitation in the name of education. In such a world, souls are destroyed by the machine, as technological tools carelessly crush humanity. Vicariously speaking for Lenin, Iqbal closes Lenin's complaint:

> tū qādir o ʿadil hai magar tere jahāñ meñ
> haiñ talḳh bahot bañda-e mazdūr ke auqāt
> kab ḍūbegā sarmāyā parastī kā safīna
> dunyā hai terī muntaẓir-e roz-e makāfāt[38]
>
> You are all-powerful and just,
> Yet in your world
> The slaves of labor suffer through bitter times
> When will the boat of capital worship sink?
> Your world awaits the day of requital.

The day of requital can dawn with the insights of new visionaries like Marx:

> He's the Moses without the light, he's the Messiah without the cross,
> He's not a prophet but yet has a book under his arm[39]

By invoking Marx as a prophet-like entity, by metaphorically according *The Communist Manifesto* a near-holy status, and by passionately speaking for Lenin, Iqbal interpolates Islamically-inflected Marxist-Leninist ideals of social justice into the structure of the Muslim self and community. The higher self learns from the new Moses figures and the new Messiahs, as seen through the lens of the Quran and Islamic spirituality.[40] This khudi, easily learning from other traditions of knowledge, is not shy in embracing sources of virtue that

transcend Islam's traditional realm in order to redress the grievances of the masses. Hence the khudi can comfortably act as a site where Nietzsche's superman embraces a Kantian categorical imperative, where Bergson's social correctives shape Goethe's artistry and imagination, and where Marx's calls for economic justice amplify Lenin's cries. This site, by virtue of its very essential attributes (love, knowledge, and action), is always in an existential flux:

> sukūñ muḥāl hai qudrat ke kārḳhāne meñ
> ṡabāt ek taġhayyur ko hai zamāne meñ[41]
>
> Permanence is impossible in the factory of nature,
> Only change remains permanent in time

Change is borne of inventions, alterations, and reinterpretations. Iqbal, in *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam,* underscores a dynamic, existential interpretation of the Quran: "As in the words of a Muslim Sufi—'no understanding of the Holy Book is possible until it is actually revealed to the believer just as it was revealed to the Prophet.' "[42] No great philosopher or any distinguished mystic can unravel the knots of revelation, as Iqbal says, until individual "conscience" itself becomes the site of revelation. And of course the revelation is signified to Iqbal through Husain. The significance of Husain's struggle is inextricably bound to the significance of the Word of God, and like the Word of God, the struggle also must be interpreted anew in the immediate context of each Muslim individual.

Iqbal's reading of Karbala is in accordance with—although not identical to—the Sufi readings of this event by Sanai, Rumi, and Muinuddin Chishti, more than with any binary Shii reading in which the alignments for the battle of Karbala were made in the hours following the Prophet's death, almost forty-eight years before the actual event itself. In order for such an Iqbalian reading to have any significance within Sunni reformist discourse, the battle of Karbala had to be situated atemporally.

In the subcontinent, the dislodging of Karbala from a Shii narrative sequence occurred within a broader Sunni reformist rhetoric. Another prominent Sunni reformer of the first half of twentieth-century South Asia, Muhammad Ali Jauhar, invoked Karbala as a trans-Shii struggle during his efforts to preserve the institution of *khilafat*. The Khilafat movement attempted to mobilize Muslims, especially in North India, to restore the institution of the Ottoman Khilafat after the close of the First World War. The Ottoman Empire had suffered severe blows at the hands of the Allies after it sided with the Axis powers. The remnants of the authority of the Ottoman caliph, who had become a figurehead leader for millions of Muslims around the world had eroded and the institution itself was finally abolished by Ataturk. One legacy of the Khilafat movement was that it rose above Hindu-Muslim communal tensions and was successful in recruiting such luminaries as Gandhi as a vocal advocate. Although short-lived, it did jolt the British Raj with acts of resistance like the boycott of British goods. As Gail Minault has shown in her work on the Khilafat movement, poetry was crucial in consolidating this anti-colonial movement of sorts.[43]

Within this context, in which the British Empire was seen as a force inimical to Muslim interests, Muhammad Ali Jauhar defined anew the partisans of Husain (*Shiʿān-e Ḥusain*):

ḥaqq o bāṭil kī hai paikār hameshā jārī
jo na bāṭil se ḍareñ haiñ vahī Shīʿān-e Ḥusain[44]

The war between truth and falsehood is eternal
Those who are not frightened by falsehood are the partisans of Husain

The very word Shia is appropriated and expanded by this Sunni with an implied double-bind qualification: Those who are "Shia" are not intimidated by falsehood; those who are intimidated by falsehood cannot be "Shia." This partisan group, according to Jauhar, is quite selective:

Although a thousand might beat their chests, as they do
The world of Karbala is limited to but a few[45]

Thus Jauhar wrests the monopoly of Husain's cause away from those who commemorate the martyr solely by mourning his suffering in an act of ritualistic exchange. Mourning, for Jauhar, also belies Husain's cause, since Husain's battle at Karbala resurrected Islam:

qatl-e Ḥusain aṣl meñ marg-e Yazīd hai
Islām zinda hotā hai har Karbalā ke baʿd[46]

In reality the murder of Husain is the death of Yazid
Islam is resurrected after every Karbala

Hence for the worshipers of truth, Husain left an unforgettable example of a righteous struggle:

His splendid example will remain until doomsday
The truth-worshipers shall never forget their debt to Husain[47]

In a similar vein, the (Sunni) Meccan-born Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (d. 1958), two-time president of the Indian National Congress (1923 and 1940–1946) and prominent among India's "freedom fighters," affirms the meaningfulness of Karbala in his *Shahādat-e Ḥusain* (*The Martyrdom of Husain*). According to him, the paradigm that Karbala presents is that of truth and sacrifice in the path of righteousness and freedom. Adept in mystical cadences, Azad adapts this powerful Persian couplet to his own endorsement of Husain's struggle:

kushtagān-e ḵẖañjar-e taslīm rā
har zamāñ az ġhaib jan-e dīgar ast[48]

The martyrs of the dagger of taslīm [surrender]
Each moment get a new life from the Unseen world.[49]

In chapter 4, we encountered this couplet in the context of Khwajah Qutb al-Din Bakhtiyar Kaki, a disciple of Muinuddin Chishti, who died ecstatically

upon hearing the musical rendition of these words. The "Prince of Martyrs," in Azad's opinion, laid the foundation for such a taslim, and for an honorable struggle against the forces of oppression and tyranny: Husain demonstrated that in order to confront the forces of vice, it is not necessary to have the majority on one's side. Adducing reformist lessons from Karbala, and juxtaposing to them the mystical and devotional values invested in this symbol, Azad attributes to this event an atemporal universality. The "friends" of Husain, however, in Azad's opinion, have not been faithful to Husain's precepts for which he laid down his life: Not only have Husain's enemies oppressed him by not crying for him but his friends, who cried for him, have also oppressed him because they did not emulate his life and actions. Azad enjoins the followers of Husain to contemplate this momentous event in order to model their lives on its basis, not to simply shed tears.[50] The sole purpose of the battle of Karbala, Azad writes, was so that a beautiful model of "truth and virtue, freedom and liberation, enjoining the good and forbidding the wrong" could be presented to the followers of Islam. In short, he calls Karbala the jihad of truth and justice. Azad was one of the dominant figures in the Sunni scholarship of the twentieth-century subcontinent; his most important work being a remarkable translation and interpretation of several parts of the Quran. Azad, like Iqbal, clearly read Islamic history through Sufi lenses. Through these lenses, Karbala was seen in terms of a distinctive worldview in which the Shias, the Sunnis, and the Sufis could participate simultaneously. This tendency to undertake hybrid and synthetic readings of Islamic history and Islamic philosophy, wherein one ideological outlook slides into another one, is the age-old legacy of the great twelfth-century scholar-sufi who Iqbal so venerated, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. IIII C.E.).

Within the Muslim reform discourse of the first four decades of the twentieth century, as evidenced by the words of Azad, Jauhar, and Iqbal, we can also identify a polemical thrust that seeks to reclaim Karbala from Shii hands. The experiences of British colonialism and Hindu nationalism forced Muslims to conjure images to give voice to their struggle as a minority. What reflects a more resistant, righteous-minority versus oppressive-majority struggle, than the battle of Karbala?

What is most fascinating about the way Karbala is invoked in Iqbal, as well as in Jauhar and Azad, is that this struggle of an Islamic historical context is never mediated by or filtered through the ulama (religious authorities). Iqbal, after all, had little faith in the way the religious leaders of his time fostered Islam. Just as Iqbal wrests control of the Quranic interpretation from the ulama, Karbala, too, can be liberally read and then emulated by each Muslim. In his *Mulla-e Ḥaram* (the *Religious Leader of the House of God*), Iqbal vents his dismay at those in charge of formal religious practices:

> No wonder you don't reach God
> The station of man is concealed from your vision
> Neither majesty nor beauty remain in your ritual prayers
> The tidings of my dawn are not professed in your call to prayer.[51]

Whereas Iqbal's address to the Muslim religious establishment rings with an accusatory tone, it is the poet's vocation, Iqbal believes, to provide society with a vision:

> The community, it can be said, is the body; the people its organs
> The workers treading the path of handicraft are its hands and legs
> The concert the government conducts is the adornment of the nation's face
> And the poet who sings colorfully is the visionary eye of the nation
> Whenever any organ is in pain, the eye weeps
> Behold the extent to which the eye sympathizes with the entire body![52]

The ontological status of the poet, in the eyes of Iqbal, is that of a visionary who is always in tune with the rest of society's members and not like the religious authority of Iqbal's time. The insights Iqbal had gained from the past sharpened his vision for the present and future. Poetry could generate the vision for a brighter future by invoking the past. The past has a privileged legitimizing position for Iqbal, as it did for an overwhelming number of socioreligious reformers. Of course, the past's revolutionary aspect could hardly be defined by a symbol more powerful than that of Karbala:

> ḥaqīqat-e abadī hai maqām-e Shabbīrī
> badalte rahte haiñ añdāz-e Kūfī o Shāmī[53]
>
> The station of Husain is the eternal truth
> The ways of the [hypocrites] of Kufa and Syria are ever changing.

The Shii Interpellation of Iqbal: Iqbal in the Pakistani Majlis

> A multi-sided mystery in a state of perpetual flux, Iqbal could not unveil himself in a flash . . . So while his poetic vision enthused many of his co-religionists, turning it into a dynamic principle of Indian Muslim identity meant exposing it to multiple interpretations and appropriations.[54]
>
> Ayesha Jalal

Interpellating[55] Iqbal as a Shii voice became both a political intervention and a strategy of survival for the Shii minority in the nation-state of Pakistan, founded in 1947 (nine years after Iqbal's death) as an Islamic state for Muslims. The dictates of state-sponsored or religious-based nationalism have often compelled the modern nation-state/religion to collapse differences (at multiple levels) in order to constitute a supposedly more united nation. In Pakistan, too, the state, hoping to fulfill its integrationist mission, attempted to elide religious differences as the years passed. Paradoxically, such attempts were also laced by group-specific legislations (especially against the Ahmadis, a Muslim minority that was persecuted at various levels from the 1950s onward[56] and

finally declared "non-Muslim" by the Pakistani state in 1974) that weakened the very idea of a united nation-state. These state actions are borne of a desire to appease the Sunni orthodoxy (important to Pakistan's claim of Muslim credentials) that has continuously issued criticism of religious minorities including the Ahmadis, the Shias, the Hindus, and the Christians. Since Karbala commemorations in South Asia have often flown in the face of those who want to police imprecise religious boundaries, Muharram has become an occasion to instigate violence. But in light of works like those of Muhammad Qasim Zaman, we can also see how Muharram becomes an excuse to act out scripts written about other socioeconomic grievances. As Zaman has pointed out, much of the sectarian violence has deeper roots in economic grievances and alienation. That Sunni peasants join anti-Shii organizations that call for violence has perhaps more to do with the mistreatment of that peasant by a Shii landlord than it has to do with anti-Shiism per se.[57] But Muharram in Pakistan has become more and more caught in a loop of violence where one community's losses fuel violence against the other. Thus, even though Karbala commemorations might be secondary to other grievances of members of the Shii and Sunni communities, Muharram has become a time when the Shias as a community (approximately 20 percent, or 28 million, of Pakistan's population) feel especially vulnerable. Although several prominent leaders of Pakistan (Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Iskandar Mirza, Yahya Khan, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto) were either Shia or had strong Shii connections, the demands of the Sunni religious establishment in the 1960s to give the Sunni Hanafi law a privileged position in the country left the Shii community insecure. Apprehensive of such calls, as well as of rising anti-Shii rhetoric, Shii religious authorities in Pakistan have used the majlis as a forum to further the agenda of the Shii community, especially after General Zia ul Haqq rose to authority in 1977. Zia, too, advocated legal and economic policies that were more in harmony with the Sunni Hanafi school of jurisprudence than with the Shii Jafari school. Strains of sectarian violence have become more and more conspicuous from Zia's time. In 2001, between February and April, fifty people were killed in Shii-Sunni violence.[58] In the Punjab province of Pakistan alone, over six hundred people, mostly Shia, fell victim to sectarian violence in 1989–1999.[59]

Iqbal, as we have seen, strove to defactionalize the Muslim community of the subcontinent by emphasizing a notion of self through which all Muslims could find common ground in a shared prophetic paradigm, regardless of language, culture, or sect. But within three decades of Pakistan's creation, the sectarian, regional, and linguistic differences shattered any pretence that the Prophet, the Quran, or the Kaba was enough to smooth out historical fissures within the religion. As Sunni orthodoxy became evident in the state's rhetoric, Shias began to resist encroachment upon their historical and institutional territories through their own interpretive discourses. These discourses undercut the telos of Sunni hegemony by selectively invoking Iqbal in order to vindicate Shii legitimacy.

In the official imagination of Pakistan, Iqbal is hailed as the intellectual and spiritual father of the country, in spite of ambiguous historical evidence

that supports such a view. Thus, invoking Iqbal's verses in praise of cherished Shii figures is one way in which the Shii minority, by conflating its sectarian identity with nonsectarian eulogies for Karbala, can provide powerful rejoinders to Sunni authorities like Abbasi. No one from Pakistan's Shii minority endeavors to challenge Sunni readings of Islamic history in the way that Rashid Turabi did.

Turabi frequently criticized those who taught history in Pakistani institutions for willfully ignoring or downplaying the merits of Ali and his progeny. In one of his majlises, he cites an incident in which a female student of St. Joseph's College, Karachi, learned in an Islamic history lecture that Ali had only three children: Hasan, Husain, and Muhammad Hanafiya. The students objected to this statement, saying that Ali had more children than just these three, and the most prominent of the children left out was Abbas. The lecturer replied that she, as a teacher in the college, had a greater command of Islamic history than the Shii students who objected to the omission of the names of Ali's other children. When the students began to cite the importance of Abbas because of his participation as Husain's helper in the battle of Karbala, the lecturer replied: "The incident of Karbala is not in the history of Islam." Deploring such experiences in the educational institutions of the Muslim world, Turabi addresses the educators of Pakistan: "If you want to teach our history, first ask us about it and then teach—If you don't understand our [Shii] history or if you have not learned it from anyone [proper authority], then obviously you should ask us [the Shias]."

When laying out the "factuality" of the Shii cause and Ali's place in Islam, Turabi is quick to point to that monumental work of history, Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Many Shias have a penchant for sections of this book, for it projects the Prophet's family, especially Ali and Husain, in a relatively positive manner.[60] About Ali's virtues, Gibbon writes:

> The birth, the alliance, the character of Ali, which exalted him above the rest of his countrymen, might justify his claim to the vacant throne of Arabia. The son of Abu Talib was, in his own right, the chief of the family of Hashem, and the hereditary prince or guardian of the city and temple of Mecca. The light of prophecy was extinct; but the husband of Fatima might expect the inheritance and blessing of her father: the Arabs had sometimes been patient of a female reign; the two grandsons of the prophet had often been fondled in his lap, and shewn in his pulpit, as the hope of his age, and the chief of the youth of paradise. The first of the true believers might aspire to march before them in this world and in the next; and if some were of a graver and more rigid cast, the zeal and virtue of Ali were never outstripped by any recent proselyte. He united the qualifications of a poet, a soldier, and a saint: his wisdom still breathes in a collection of moral and religious sayings; and every antagonist, in the combats of the tongue or of the sword, was subdued

> by his eloquence and valour. From the first hour of his mission, to the last rites of his funeral, the apostle was never forsaken by a generous friend, whom he delighted to name his brother, his vicegerent, and the faithful Aaron of a second Moses. The son of Abu Talib was afterwards reproached for neglecting to secure his interest by a solemn declaration of his right, which would have silenced all competition, and sealed his succession by the decrees of heaven. But the unsuspecting hero confided in himself: the jealousy of empire, and perhaps the fear of opposition, might suspend the resolution of Mahomet [Muhammad]; and the bed of sickness was besieged by the artful Aisha, the daughter of Abubekar [Abu Bakr], and the enemy of Ali[61] . . . The persecutors of Mahomet [Muhammad] usurped the inheritance of his children; and the champions of idolatry became the supreme heads of his religion and empire.[62]

The adjectives modifying Ali, his sons, Aisha, and the political successors of the Prophet are all fitting, in the minds of many Shias. Of course Turabi could not quote such a passage verbatim, partly for fear of inciting Shii-Sunni violence, but he did make reference to the popular history of the Roman Empire, to be consulted by those who desired to know more about Islamic history.[63]

The message of such quotations is clear: One does not need to rely on Shii sources in order to gain an awareness of the superiority of Ali over all other companions of the Prophet. In addition to the works of historians like Gibbon, the cause of Ali's Shiism can also be enhanced by two other prominent non-Shias: Jalaluddin Rumi and Muhammad Iqbal. For Turabi, Rumi and Iqbal (both of whom are widely recognized as Sunnis) were instrumental in configuring Shiism as a legitimate segment of Islam. Turabi fondly quoted Rumi and Iqbal when justifying the privileged position of Ali and Husain within Islamic history. He was fully aware that both these poets were so well-known and well-liked in the subcontinent that anything purported to have come from their pens instantly acquired a status worthy of attention. Rumi, to echo a cliché, was the greatest of Islamic mystical poets, and his *Maśnavi* has the status of the "Quran in Persian." This mystical treatise praises all the prominent companions of the Prophet, including Muawiya, Yazid's father, who is despised by Shias. This, however, is irrelevant to Turabi, for what he wants to underscore is Ali's privileged status. Hence in one of his orations, he urges the youth to memorize these words of Rumi:

> You have seen Ali in darkness
> For this reason you privilege others over him
> I have seen Ali in the light of day
> For this reason I do not privilege anyone over him.[64]

Through Rumi's verses, Turabi would have us believe that Ali's status was higher than that of other companions of the Prophet. In fact, most students of Rumi would immediately detect the silences and the absences in Turabi's usage. Turabi conveys the impression that no similar words of praise were

written for other companions of the Prophet, and surely not for Ali's enemy, Muawiya.

Similarly, Rumi's most famous Indian disciple, Muhammad Iqbal, was also a favorite of Rashid Turabi. The passionate words of Iqbal for Ali, Fatima, and Husain have endeared him to Shias to such an extent that they have even written books focusing exclusively on Iqbal's devotion to the Prophet's household, at times giving readers the impression that the poet might actually be a Shia in disguise.[65] By invoking Iqbal, the best known Islamic reformer with equal support from both Shias and Sunnis, Turabi established his own authority. In short, Turabi's message to the Shias was that even knowledgeable Sunnis like Iqbal agreed that Ali and his household, especially his son Husain, had a privileged status:

> islām ke dāman meñ bas is ke sivā kyā hai
> ek ẓarb-e Yadullāhī ek sajda-e Shabbīrī[66]
>
> The skirt of Islam contains naught
> But the strike of the Hand of God [Ali] and the prostration of
> Shabbir [Husain]

Iqbal, according to Turabi, had himself confessed being a "*bū turābī*" or a follower of Ali:

> ādmī kām kā nahīñ rahtā, ʿishq meñ ye baṛī ḳharābī hai
> pūchte kyā ho mażhab-e Iqbāl, ye gunahgār bū turābī hai[67]
>
> Love's greatest flaw is that it renders a man useless
> You ask, "What would Iqbal's religion be?"
> This humble sinner is a follower of Bu Turab [Ali]

Turabi vindicates the cause of Shias by invoking Iqbal's name in the same way he calls on Rumi to elaborate on the virtues of Ali and Husain. Turabi historicizes Iqbal to undermine the Sunni view of history and legitimize the privileged position accorded by Shias to Ali and Husain. Thus, invoking Iqbal comes to constitute a polemical strategy for Turabi to unsettle the polarizing, mutually exclusive Shii-Sunni narratives of Islamic history. Through historicizing Iqbal as a Sunni appreciative of differences among Muslims, as long as they are under the aegis of a unified community, Turabi posits a strategic continuum linking Iqbal, the nation-state of Pakistan, and the minority Shii community within Pakistan. The edification of such a continuum, or interface, according to Turabi, can be through paradigmatic struggles like that of Karbala. Consequently, the ethos of such struggles is shaped by a determination to act on behalf of the self, the community, as well as the nation-state—in this case, Pakistan. Just as Iqbal retroactively dislodged the battle of Karbala from the issue of succession and situated it within the wider sweep of martyrdom within Islam, so Iqbal himself can be alluded to in the majlis context because of the ambivalence of his own sectarian affiliations.

Although the majlis's validity as a self-affirming ritualistic forum is without question, there are certain problematic limitations built into this forum.

These problematics are primarily rooted in the messy networks of South Asia's majority and minority politics. The religious-majority communities in this region have become the chief guardians of the national identity. Within this context, although the site of the majlis might create a nominal space for asserting and celebrating legitimate sectarian differences, it ends up fracturing one of the other necessities of the Pakistani Shias: asserting a legitimate Muslim, as well as Pakistani, identity. The space of this negotiation actually constitutes the minority dilemma in Pakistan, in that it creates a tension between the assertion of difference and the need to assimilate, that actually necessitates the obliteration of this difference. When asserting the Shii sectarian identity (by reading Karbala differently from the hegemonic Sunni readings), the majlis is speaking in a minority voice, a voice different from the one it uses to validate its national, larger Islamic identity (for the cause of which it is invoking Iqbal). We may then ask the question: Does the assertion of a separatist, minority Shii identity create a downward spiral of alienation from the shared nationalist Pakistani identity? This question in many ways reflects the minority dilemma in South Asia: Having asserted its separatist identity at one level, the minority carries the onus of constantly proving its fidelity at another level. The Pakistani Shia, the Indian Muslim, the Bangladeshi Hindu, and South Asian minorities in general share this burden.

Iqbal's Transnational and Transsectarian Significance

No discussion of the general Urdu socioreligious reform literature of the subcontinent or of some of the important Iranian reformist discourses is possible without acknowledging Iqbal's key influence upon many reformer-writers. Through his deployments of Karbala, Iqbal walks along an ambiguously located mystical-reformist line that blurs all rigid sectarian affiliations. Karbala, for Iqbal, is an epistemological symbol to narrate the existential dilemma of gauging ideal human conduct.

The relevance that Iqbal bestows upon Karbala as a model of and for struggle also dominates much of the subsequent socioreligious reform literature from the subcontinent, most of it circulated under the name of "Progressive" literature. Many writers from this tradition—including socialists of the Progressive Movement, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Kunwar Mahendra Singh Bedi Sahar, Ahmad Faraz, and Ali Sardar Jafri—have interpolated the symbol of Karbala, following Iqbal, into a broader (transreligious) call for justice and action. In his discussion with me, Ali Sardar Jafri, a member of the Progressive Writers' Association, made a direct connection between Iqbal, the idea of a higher Muslim self, Karbala, and a universal struggle:

> The very word Islam in Iqbal's times generated loathing on multiple fronts—the British could not forget the Muslim resistance to the crusades; some Hindus saw Muslims as uncontrollable warriors who invaded their land; the Muslims of Palestine were being

> crushed in the name of injustice done to the Jews of Europe. Why was this happening to Muslims? It was a natural question that any enlightened (*raushan fikr*) soul would ask. Iqbal, however, did not ask this question to indict the rest of humanity for Muslim misery. He asked the question to make Muslims aware of their plight, provide an outlet from this plight, and instill pride and confidence in them. He wanted to raise their self to a better self, to a self that drew its substance from the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Ali and Imam Husain. This self is first and foremost a Muslim self—not a Shii or Sunni self. This self is inspired by Marx's calls for justice yet does not send either God, the Prophet, Imam Ali or Imam Husain into exile—as some would say Marx did with historic religious persons. Iqbal, in one sense, was more progressive than Marx for he realized that religion and history could also impart virtues to the oppressed. How could anyone listen to the story of Karbala, of the oppressed. Husain's fight against the most mighty system of his time, and not be inspired to follow in the footsteps of the Prophet's grandson? Each person could follow Husain in his own way.[68]

Within this discourse, any righteous struggle can be placed within the matrix of Karbala and within the definition of "Islam." The category of "Muslim" intersects the category of the "oppressed," and by identifying with Muslim subjects of colonialism or postcolonialism one can identify with the victims of colonial oppression. In order to resist such an oppression, one can speak the language of Islam through the idiom of Karbala. As such, Iqbal's invocation of Karbala can appeal to a variety of agendas; and Iqbal himself, like Karbala and martyrdom, becomes an iconic figure, not only in the subcontinent but also in revolutionary and postrevolutionary Iran.

Those tied to the Islamic revolution of Iran have shared with Iqbal not only his faith in constituting a Muslim self through the knowledge of the past, but also a penchant for eliding differences within Islam. This is borne out by the repeated invocation of Iqbal by intellectuals like Ali Shariati and Abdol Karim Saroush. Shariati sees Iqbal as a Muslim existentialist, who engages not only in a personal struggle but also in a communal one, carrying forward the standard of Ali. In essence he is a "devotee possessing the light of knowledge who burns with love and faith, and whose penetrating eyes never allow negligence and ignorance to prevail without questioning the fate of enslaved nations. . . . a person who seeks reform, revolution, and a change of mental attitudes."[69]

Saroush, one of the most controversial and dynamic contemporary Iranian Shii thinkers, credits Iqbal for inspiring others to engage in a continual reinterpretation of Islam.[70]

These varied and many-layered invocations of Iqbal serve both to reinstigate notions of a dynamic interpretive spirit and to regenerate forms of pan-Islamic solidarity. Iqbal opens a space in which talk of pan-Islamism and Muslim self-identity can take place. By reconfiguring Karbala as a transhistoric

struggle for justice, as a battle exceeding its particular moment, he subordinates the sectarian issues that have historically charged this event to the concerns of the greater Muslim self and community. These temporally disjunctive appeals to Karbala, within the frame of reference of the Quran and the Kaba, engender multiple avenues of sectarian rapprochement, in which both Muslim identity and the larger Islamic community can be reconstituted. Insofar as minority Shii claims to these nations are concerned, Iqbal helps in affording Shias a legitimate space to position themselves vis-à-vis Sunnis in regions of the world where their survival is threatened. His force is such that it concurrently impacts the discourses of the Shii majlises, Sufi qawwalis, and socio-religious reformist literature. Iqbal himself occupies a site that is in a continual state of formation and this site, like Karbala, cannot be limited to any particular historical moment since it always outstrips history and inflects sectarian orientations. It is the site from which Iqbal inspires, accords with, and prays for the generations to come:

> May the youth have my longing sighs for dawn
> that these, the falcon's offspring, may fly again with agile wings
> O Lord, my sole desire is but this:
> That my luminous vision may belong to all![71]

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6

From Communal to Ecumenical

> Kase ke kushteh na shud az qabīla-e mā nīst
> Whoever is not killed does not belong to our tribe
> Naziri

This verse, culled from the corpus of a seventeenth-century Persian poet, hangs as a badge of honor in Raj Bahadur Gour's house.[1] Two factors kindled my desire to spend time with this proud Communist and Urdu writer: (1) Since he had actively participated in the 1940s peasant struggle in the region of South India known as Telangana, I wanted a first-hand assessment as to the role writers played and the resulting impact they had on mass movements in South Asia. (2) And since I had detected in the writing of Gour and his colleagues an attempt to achieve a sociopolitical rapport with the heroes of Karbala while discursively negating the validity of religious institutions, whether Hindu or Muslim, I wondered about the very utility of religious symbols in a Marxist language that takes these institutions to task. On my first query, I received the answer in the form of Ghalib's couplet—a couplet that was seared into the consciousness of other self-identified Communist Urdu writers in South Asia with whom I spoke:

> If the Tigris[2] is not visible in a drop, and in a part, the whole
> Then it might as well be [as insignificant] as a children's game,
> and not a sagacious eye[3]

A writer's calling, or that of any artist, Gour told me, is to make the world see larger interconnected issues in the confines of limited time and space. Religion, like literature, must be judged in accordance with its transformative impact on common people. When as-

sessing religions in historical terms, we must remember that many of them once provided a useful vocabulary to the movements to empower the weak and the marginalized of the world. This vocabulary can still be deployed in a universal way to make the world a better place. In further expounding these thoughts, Gour turned to several examples of texts and their contexts; the one pertinent to this particular study is a poem of Gour's departed friend, the most well-known Communist poet from Hyderabad, Makhdum Muhiuddin.

On the evening of April 4, 1968, which happened to fall in the month of Muharram that year, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was brutally assassinated at a motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Quite a distance from Memphis, the *Times of India* mourned King's death in its headline report: "Dr. Martin Luther King, an apostle of non-violence and follower of Mahatma Gandhi, died like his guru—a victim of violence."[4] As parts of the United States exploded into riots, Moscow Radio expressed its condolences by calling King a "wonderful fighter for Negro equality in the U.S.A. and against the war of American imperialism in Vietnam."[5] For the dignified widow, Coretta Scott King, her husband's assassination was nothing short of Jesus' crucifixion itself.[6] By combining these and similar sentiments, Makhdum Muhiuddin penned this elegy.

1

This is not just the murder of one man
This is the murder of truth, equality, nobility
This is the murder of knowledge, wisdom, humanity
This is the murder of clemency, chivalry, humility
This is the murder of the alleviators of oppression
This is not just the murder of one or two, but a thousand
The murder of nature's masterpiece is the murder of God
This dusk is the "dusk of the dispossessed"
This dawn, the "dawn of Hunayn"
This is the murder of the Messiah, this is the murder of Husain

2

Even today, those hands exist and wreak havoc
Those hands that raised the poisoned goblet to someone's lips
Those hands that caused someone to mount the gallows
Those hands are at work in the valley of Sinai, in Vietnam
Around the neck of every glass, every goblet

3

The least condition of fidelity is to give up the head, Hafiz
If you are not capable of this, begone![7]

With these haunting words, Makhdum Muhiuddin pays tribute to the slain American civil rights leader. The elegy is semantically divided into three parts: The first expresses the profundity of King's assassination. Couching the assassination in metaphoric language that places King on a par with those who

have been subjugated, Makhdum (as he is known) makes sense of the tragedy. Two allusions from Islamic history lace this first part: sham-e ghariban and *subḥ-e Ḥunayn*. Sham-e ghariban, as we have seen in chapter 1, refers to the night that came in the wake of the Karbala battle, the night when Husain's household was engulfed in a state of sorrow and despair. Subh-e Hunayn refers to the morning of the Battle of Hunayn, a battle in which the Prophet Muhammed himself participated and during the course of which his hypocritical followers fled, abandoning their commitment to Islam's cause.[8] By invoking Hunayn, Makhdum conveys the magnitude of King's tragedy, while in the same verse he reminds his readers that such trying times have historically been occasions when those who pay mere lip service to noble causes run scared. The poet compares the murder of the "Messiah," Jesus, to that of Husain. Islamic religious discourses hold that Jesus was not killed; rather, he was raised to paradise alive and will appear (along with Islam's own "savior," the Mahdi) before the end of time, to reward the pious and punish the vicious. Since Jesus' image is associated with hope and justice, here Makhdum may be trying to convey that the very hope associated with Jesus has been killed with Dr. King. Jesus and Husain frequently appear together in reformist poetry as embodiments of revolutionary struggles. Husain stands alongside Islam's prophets and Christianity's savior. On this note, the poet concludes the first part of this elegy.

The second part of the poem is accusatory in tone: The oppressors of the world are implicated in the murder of righteousness, whether by their activities in Vietnam and Sinai,[9] or by the execution of the innocent (the Rosenbergs).[10] The image of King's murderer(s) is cognate to the image of the United States government—a government whose policies Makhdum and many like-minded reformist poets so vehemently attacked.[11]

The third part of the poem is an insertion, or tazmin, from a ghazal of the great Persian poet Hafiz. This part of the poem is thus a clarion call for activism—for correcting wrongs, even if it means losing one's own life. Hence it is also a vindication, nay celebration, of the causes espoused by the Messiah and the Rosenbergs, by Martin Luther King Jr., and by the "King of Martyrs," Husain b. Ali.

I begin this section with Makhdum's poem because it expresses in microcosm the place of Karbala in the imagination of twentieth-century socioreligious reform discourses in South Asia. Although the subject of the poem is not Karbala, the symbol of Husain's battle and martyrdom becomes pivotal in the expression of the magnitude of a revolutionary struggle. The metaphors of all other uprisings and struggles move towards this metaphor. Karbala is the Ghalibian drop containing the flowing narratives of oppression and injustice around the world.

In this chapter, I discuss the manner in which Karbala has been universalized, or more specifically trans-Islamicized, in twentieth-century Urdu literature. I demonstrate that like the elegy of Makhdum quoted earlier, the use of the Karbala symbol by socioreligious reform writers is also tripartite. It decries oppression, alerts us to its continued presence, and acts as a clarion call to action against it.

In the first part of this chapter, I contextualize the socioreligious reform literature and the most important ideological strain of this movement, the "Progressive literature," to which Makhdum's poem belongs. The Progressive Movement began in the 1930s and continues to this day, albeit in altered and mutated forms. It is constituted more by an attitude than by a rigid literary canon. The Progressives have thrived on literary experimentation, boldness, the disruption of conventions, and the call for justice. The Progressive attitude toward religion has fluctuated: The Prophet of Islam and early Islamic heroes are embraced as heroes worthy of emulation while the religious establishment of the present is often rebuked. Progressive writers have often advocated secularism, but not at the expense of religious identity. To the Progressives, much of the literature of the past is marred by its failure to recognize the importance of justice and class issues. In charting the relationship between the Progressives and Karbala, I first take into account the ideological antecedents of Progressive literature and discuss how Karbala acquires a trans-Islamic significance in Indian nationalist discourses. Then, with Karbala's status established as a symbol of revolution, reform, and sacrifice that appeals to non-Muslims as well as Muslims, I discuss how Karbala constitutes a resistive mode of being and an idiom of solidarity—solidarity posited by linking various sociopolitical struggles on the same discursive continuum.

The Proto-Progressives and Literary Criticism

No nineteenth-century literary critic contributed more to twentieth-century Urdu literary criticism than Altaf Husain Hali (1837–1914). Hali's *Madd o Jazr-e Islām* (*The Ebb and Flow of Islam*) and *Muqaddamah-e She'r o Shā'irī* (*Introduction to Poetry and Poetics*) contain the earliest calls for the reevaluation of contemporary Muslim values, including the aesthetics of literature. A subject of Mughal India until 1857 and then a subject of colonial India after 1857, Hali was undoubtedly influenced by the vicissitudes of the tumultuous nineteenth century.[12] His aesthetic critiques were inflected not only by the notions of beauty held by his old masters (among whom was Ghalib), but also by colonial cultural interventionists like Colonel W. R. M. Holroyd.[13] Hali's harshest critique is reserved for the Urdu ghazal, which he believed became restrictive and myopic after exhausting many of its usual tropes. Urdu poetry, according to Hali, can and must accommodate sentiments other than those of love. One of the ideal reforms would be to transform the Urdu ghazal so that it can become a medium capable of generating a moral renaissance of sorts. Hali also calls for a reevaluation of the most popular poetic genre for the expression of the Karbala tragedy, the Urdu marsiya. He believes that the elegies and odes written for the martyrs of Karbala should also serve a didactic function and rise above their contemporary mode of sorrowful expressions. Hali went even further to say that these elegies and odes can infuse a community (qawm) with the spirit of solidarity (*qawmīyyat*).[14] For Hali, Urdu literary aesthetics need to be judged by a functionalist yardstick: Poetry deserves encouragement and praise insofar

as it stays faithful to the ideals of a given society and enhances the moral standards of the society. What makes Hali's criteria for good literature even more relevant to the development of the Progressive Movement is his insistence that literature be liberated from the hands of the elites and appeal to the masses.

Hali's critique of traditional literature seems mild when compared to that of Akhtar Husain Raipuri (1912–1992), who was vitriolic in his attack not only on Urdu literature of the past and the present, but on the literatures of the subcontinent in general. Whereas Hali took into account the aesthetic critiques and perspectives of colonial literary discourses, Raipuri was disgusted with the colonial standards of beauty, and turned instead to anti-colonial, Marxist aesthetics. Spellbound by the Marxist critiques of literature, especially as articulated by Maxim Gorky, Raipuri questioned the very *raison d'etre* of literature in 1935: "What is literature? Literature for the sake of literature, or literature for the sake of life? What are the purposes of literature?"[15] Raipuri answers these questions: "Literature is a department of life and a reflector of its own environment. The purposes of life and literature are one."[16] As to what these purposes are, Raipuri answers by tying literature to progress:

> Literature is that teacher who teaches the lessons of life to humanity through stories and songs. The purpose of literature should be to reflect those emotions that show the world the road to progress, to reject those that do not allow this progress, and then acquire that manner of discourse which is intelligible to as many people as possible. For the very purpose of life is to benefit as many people as possible.[17]

Such a utilitarian ethics of literature, according to Raipuri, was severely lacking in both past and present literary epochs in the subcontinent, with only a handful of exceptions. He accuses writers of serving the elites and being totally dependent upon their patronage. He goes so far as to compare contemporary art to a prostitute, seductive but not real.[18]

Raipuri attempts to chronicle the way in which literature was severed from life. He caustically assails Urdu poets for their failure to incorporate the most pressing matters of their time into their poetry. Among the incidents that Raipuri cites as being unsuccessful in generating poetry are the 1757 Battle of Plassey, a battle that was instrumental in the consolidation of British rule in India; the defeat of Tipu Sultan of Mysore in 1779 at the hands of the British; and the 1857 Revolt which ended an already pathetically weak Mughal rule in Delhi, thereby formally rendering the British the new sovereigns of the subcontinent: "How many poets versified these bloody events? How many nauhas were written? Where were those battle-song-singing marsiya reciters whose magical recitation caused every gathering of Muharram to become an assembly of intense lamentation?"[19]

Although it is true that most canonical poets were not preoccupied by these events per se, Raipuri exaggerates the dearth of versified sorrowful sentiments evoked by such incidents. In the expression of many such sentiments, not

only was the symbol of Karbala used, but many an elegy written about Karbala invoked the images of other struggles. According to Mohiuddin Qadri Zor, during the seventeenth century, the region was under imminent Mughal threat; Deccani marsiyas of this time bemoaned the region's destruction by mourning for the martyrs of Karbala.[20] Such a trend continued through the nineteenth century when Mir Anis and others hued their marsiyas with implicit allusions to the chaotic state of their own cities.[21] Intizar Husain compares the vignettes of Anis's Arab cities (Medina and Kufa) to those of Lucknow, a city considered a center of India's Islamic heritage, as well as a prominent player during and after the 1857 Revolt. Intizar Husain hence explains Karbala as a "living metaphor of the struggle of the human soul," which raises its head whenever the human soul rebels against oppression.[22]

The metaphor of Karbala is also evident in the genre of *shahr āshūb,* the lament for the city. This is a genre in which poets express the plights of their cities in the wake of such atrocities as those wrought by Nadir Shah in the eighteenth century (1739 C.E.).[23] Satire and threnody frequently exist in the same lament, whether in a tone of resignation or resolution. The shahr ashubs of both Mir and Sauda enlighten us about the volatile state of Delhi and its precincts during their time period. The agony of this region continued for decades after the death of these eminent poets until the British exiled the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah "Zafar" (1775–1862 C.E.) and he became a witness to such heart-wrenching events as the murder of his sons:

> Alas! Before the father they killed the son
> How can this not be a reminder of Asghar's sorrow?
> Delhi evinces the paradigm of Karbala
> Delhi makes the father weep over the son's bier[24]

Implicit in these verses is an analogy of the last Mughal emperor and his sons to Husain and his six-month-old son.

But for Raipuri, literary tropes needed to be much more forthright in their political allegiances and commitments. It was not enough to speak of one's own plight, to vindicate one's own suffering through allusions to the past narratives of suffering. Literature needed to constitute an intersection between the lessons from the past and a progressive agenda for the future.

It was this call for a more radical politics through literary channels that was heeded by Josh Malihabadi (1898–1982). Although Josh (as he is commonly known) took Raipuri's critique of literature to heart, he was also inspired by Muhammad Iqbal's efforts to voice political concerns through religiously charged literature. Josh tilled the literary soil so that the Progressive Writers' Movement could blossom in the subcontinent. Josh and his Progressive friends benefitted from the writings of Raipuri and Hali while making important breaks with the traditions of the past. Whereas Iqbal spoke primarily of reforming the Muslim community and the Muslim self by providing them with a religious footing, Josh and the Progressives invoked religious symbols such as Karbala, but in the service of a universal, trans-religious, reformist agenda. This invocation assimilated struggles that are not particular to Muslim peoples,

thereby forging solidarity among various resistive voices and agendas. While Raipuri remained devoted to a Marxist reading of literature, wherein the language of religion would play a minimal role, Josh and his Progressive friends used religious idioms liberally, even when critiquing religious establishments.

Josh Malihabadi and Karbala

> My vocation is change, my name is youth
> My slogan: revolution, revolution, and revolution.[25]

Securing for himself the epithets of *Shāʿir-e Inqilāb,* the Poet of Revolution, and *Shāʿir-e Shabāb,* the Poet of Youth, Josh took the liberty of framing Husain's image in hitherto unimagined ways.[26] True to the overall spirit of the socioreligious reformist movements and inspired by Iqbal's concerns for the poor, Josh was also preoccupied with the issues of class, the problems of the economically disenfranchised. In a panegyric to Karl Marx, Josh describes him as a boon companion of Husain, and a Moses-like friend of the exiled and the disenfranchised:

> The soul-mate of Shabbir, and the adversary of Yazid
> The Moses of a new Red Sea controlled by the present-day Pharaoh.[27]

According to Josh, it is to Marx that the pulpit legitimately belongs:

> O You who preach from the pulpit of grace and trust
> O blazing torch whose light is a guide to the Merciful One's sustenance[28]

The existing pulpit was tainted, according to Josh, by the traditional religious establishment. In his *"Ẓākir se Ḳhitāb"* or "Address to the Preacher," Josh chastises the zakir who addresses Shii mourning gatherings solely to induce tears:

> You gain nothing from the spirit of the martyr of Karbala
> Tresses of cowardice form a noose on your shoulder
> How strange, bereavement-loving professional mourner
> That in the chest of the Lion's follower beats the heart of a sheep!
> What a shameful account for the warriors
> Do not mourn for the Martyr of Karbala in this manner
> .....
> Think! O Zakir of sorrowful temperament and mild manners
> Alas! You auction off the blood of the martyrs
> Your sighs and wails are a mercantile exercise in every majlis
> Your discourse on the pulpit is begging for "fees."
> You turn the world of ethics topsy-turvy
> You soak your bread in the blood of the Prophet's family.
> .....

Woe! You and your elaborate arrangements for the hereafter
Why do you not say that the rule of vice is forbidden?
You and the fear of prison?! Why O slave of worldly reputation
Do you know how many Imams have been imprisoned?
You cannot die in the manner of the People of the House, so pure
You claim to love them, but cannot emulate them
Look, look at me! I am a libertine, a wine drinker
Neither aware of the rituals of piety nor of obedience
Neither do I sport a turban of honor
Nor a golden mantle
However, I do know death to be a robust life
You make light of the rituals of asceticism and piety
I do not fear death, but you fear prison.[29]

For Josh, the zakir, the one who has the privilege of narrating Karbala in the solemn majlis setting, retains in his profession a prostitute-like devotion. But while the prostitute trades his/her body for financial benefits, the zakir actually derives profit from the insider trading of the martyrs. In spite of his knowledge of Karbala's significance, the zakir uses this knowledge only for his own profit, at the expense of his community's loss. The only consolation that the zakir is able to provide, according to these verses of Josh, is the description of the elaborate arrangements of the hereafter. Far from living up to the ideals of the Imam, the zakir cannot even meet the standards of a libertine wine-drinker like Josh. Not known for his modesty, Josh gives himself credit for following the Husainian way and simply overpowers the zakir rhetorically.

Josh maintains that the contemporary human plight is worse than the one that beset Husain. Thus it is necessary, Josh felt, to use the symbol of Karbala as a means to propagate the view that it is not the pathos-laden event of a bygone era, but a prototype for contemporary revolutionary struggles. It is his sheer dismay with the popular majlis construction of Karbala that becomes the impetus behind Josh's reassessment of this event. Josh's writings during the late 1930s and the early 1940s, when nationalist and anti-colonial feelings ran high in South Asia, had a momentous impact upon his generation in general and on the Progressive Movement in particular. What Josh tries to convey in his writings of this period, more than anything else, is his belief that the youth of the subcontinent have the responsibility to redefine religion, to reclaim a belief system that honors revolutionary struggles like those of Husain.

Josh attempts to galvanize the youth by intertwining their anti-colonial struggle for liberation with Husain's battle:

Yes Josh! Now call out O Prince of Karbala
Cast a glance at this twentieth century,
Behold this tumult, this chaos, these earthquakes
Now there are hundreds of Yazids, yesterday there was only one
In every village, cries arise that might is right
Once again human feet are shackled[30]

Difficult as it may be for those attuned to traditional marsiyas to believe, this stanza belongs to the genre of *jadīd marsiya*, or new marsiya, wherein the importunate nature of contemporary crises is underscored by references to the symbol of Karbala in its various elaborated forms. Thus the pathos-laden elements of the traditional marsiya are submerged in an activist, socioreligious reformist rhetoric. Josh adds a new dimension to the genre of marsiya. The first marsiya of this kind, according to Zamir Akhtar Naqvi, was *Āwāz-e Ḥaqq* (*Voice of Truth*), written in 1918 at the time of the Khilafat and Non-Cooperation movements. Josh called the struggle for freedom from colonialism *Tāzah Karbalā,* or, *A Fresh Karbala,* and the committed determination necessary in such a struggle *ʿAzm-e Ḥusain* (the determination of Husain).[31]

Although Josh was writing, often in an unsparingly acerbic tone, within a politically charged milieu, his marsiyas entered the repertoire of both traditional mourning gatherings and nonreligious mushairas. Josh himself spoke of the effect of his marsiya, *Ḥusain aur Inqilāb* (*Husain and Revolution*), on a majlis gathering in 1941, at a time when the fervor of the Second World War was running high. The entire literati of Lucknow had come to the imambara, including the poets and masters, Sunnis and Hindus as well as Shias. Since the marsiya concentrated on inspiring people through the figure of Husain, the commemorators in the majlis, especially the politically-minded ones, stood up again and again and passionately praised the poetry. So favorable was the reception that the pulpit actually began to shake; it seemed as though the audience was about to jump into the battlefield.[32]

By lacing his marsiyas with metaphors of a revolutionary struggle and by depicting imperialist forces as equal to the tyranny of Yazid, Josh, like Makhdum, gives the impression that the state of the human community is imminently threatened by colonial powers. Thus, anyone raising his head against such power is contextualized in the framework of Karbala.

When Josh heard of Gandhi's assassination, he eulogized India's most famous anti-colonial fighter:

Greetings to you, O splendid pearl of the wave of purity
Greetings to you, O King of Indian martyrs
You were the custodian of compassion, the mirror of offering
You fell ill worrying about the well-being of human beings
The remedy-provider for the Brahman, the sympathizer of the Shaykh
The lord of approbation, the incarnation of peace
Greetings to you, O guardian of Kaba and Kashi
Greetings to you, O King of Indian martyrs
On the high path of truth, your footsteps glow
Your standard is set atop the sky of justice
O majestically holy follower of Husain, son of Ali
O victim of the sadistic oppression of the Yazid of the new age
Greetings to you, O contemporary Jesus of a renewed crucifix
Greetings to you, O King of Indian martyrs.[33]

The Transcommunal Legacy of Karbala

Mohandas Gandhi (d. 1948), Josh's object of praise in the above poem, along with Jawaharlal Nehru and many other non-Muslim literati-reformers, also pursued Karbala as a common denominator of truth, valor, and justice that is vested with a preponderantly resistive, nationalistic, and reformist significance. These reformers have passionately used this symbol in devotional, as well as political discourses, as an ideal readily suitable for a broader vision of a just struggle. As South Asian historian Mushirul Hasan points out: "The Karbala paradigm itself communicated profound existential truths not only to the Shias but also to the Sunnis and Hindus."[34] Gandhi also drew from Karbala and invoked this event when he embarked on his first salt march; like Imam Husain's band at Karbala, his march had approximately seventy-two people in it.[35] According to the Mahatma, the incident of Karbala "arrested" him while he was still young. He claimed to have studied the life of the "hero of Karbala" and came to the conclusion that the people of India must act on the principles of Husain in order to attain true liberation. The historical progress of Islam, according to Gandhi, is not the legacy of the Muslim sword but a result of the sacrifices of Muslim saints like Husain.[36] Gandhi drew from the Hindu epic *Mahabharata* (which contains the *Bhagavad Gita*) by calling it "hopeless" as a history but valuable because "it deals with eternal verities in an allegorical fashion."[37] In the same way, Karbala's value for the shaping of a historical consciousness was irrelevant to Gandhi and his followers when compared to the lessons it provided for people of India about the virtues of suffering and sacrifice that could bind a nation that had diverse histories but a supposedly common socio-moral agenda.[38] Gandhi's close friend and India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, read Karbala as a victory of "humanity's strength of determination." Since Gandhi and Nehru are both respected and well-known figures in anti-imperial and anti-colonial movements around the world, their admiration for Karbala's significance has been rhetorically pursued, even by the leader of Lebanon's Hezbollah, the revered Shii authority, Sayed Hasan Nasrallah. In a documentary charting the ideology and activities of Hezbollah, an organization opposing Israel's policies in the Middle East, Sayed Nasrallah cites Gandhi and Nehru as examples of non-Muslim leaders "who learned about confrontation from Husain."[39] The image of Karbala is the most important historic image conjured up in the discourses of Hezbollah, thus it is fascinating to see how Gandhi and Nehru's invocation of Karbala is invoked in turn by trans-subcontinental Shii authorities, as a way of acquiring legitimacy for their own causes, for their own ideals. Such intercultural, inter-religious exchanges challenge notions that valorize Karbala as an exclusively Shii event, as a purely intramural message: If Gandhi could learn from the subcontinent's Muslims about Karbala's resistive and allegorical power, then the Muslim leaders of Lebanon could draw inspiration from Gandhi about how the Karbala model can assist in resisting oppression.

To Gandhi's friend, the preeminent Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore,

Husain's sacrifice is indicative of the attainment of spiritual liberation. When the relationship between the material world and the world of love is terminated, says Tagore, then spirituality must gain ascendancy through sacrifice. Thus, for Tagore, the material world is the world of the Caliph Yazid whereas spiritual salvation lies with Husain.[40]

In addition to expressing devotion to the martyrs of Karbala, what other functions does Karbala serve these non-Muslim political and nationalist authorities? Why would Karbala, out of all the events in Islamic history, gain this privileged position in non-Muslim discourses? What does the invocation of Karbala in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s mean for the agenda of nation-building that was rapidly gaining ascendancy in India at the time? In attempting to answer these questions, I turn to the distinguished fiction writer of Urdu-Hindi and a central figure in the Progressive Writers' Movement, Munshi Premchand, and his remarkable drama *Karbala*.

Premchand's *Karbala*

The South Asian literary establishment rightly takes pride in Dhanpat Rai Shrivastava (1880–1936), popularly known as Premchand, as a visionary and reformer, who contributed much to twentieth-century Hindi-Urdu aesthetic sensibilities. As a leading figure who helped shape the Progressive Movement, Premchand committed himself to pursuing a utilitarian poetics in which literature is valuable insofar as it enhances society's well-being. The pursuit of this enhancement requires reassessing existing literary standards, including a thorough re-evaluation of notions of beauty. "We must change the standard of beauty," proclaimed Premchand, and the Progressive Movement subsequently invoked these words as the most important clarion call resonating from the subcontinent's literary circles.[41]

The 1920s, when *Karbala* was published, was a tumultuous decade in North India for Hindu-Muslim relations. This decade saw the acceleration of communal tensions at an unprecedented rate. Some of the major events that hastened the decline of intercommunal relations stemmed from the irreverent objectification of the Prophet Muhammad. Relying on the age-old suspicions of many a European that cast the Prophet of Islam as a vicious entity, Pandit Kalicharan Sharma, one of the leaders of the Arya Samaj (a Hindu reformist organization that often took a confrontational course toward the Muslim community) wrote *Vichitra Jīvan* (*A Strange Life*) in 1923, a book in which the Prophet was depicted as an epileptic, experiencing seizures rather than divine revelations. Within a year of *Vichitra Jīvan*, a Lahore bookstore proprietor, Raj Pal, published *Rangīlā Rasūl* (the *Merry Prophet*), one of the most inflammatory works written in South Asia to date. The book drove the wedge further between religious communities, since many Muslims found the treatment accorded to the Prophet, as well as his household, intolerably insulting. *Rangīlā Rasūl* received the Arya Samaj endorsement in 1924, just as *Vichitra Jīvan* had the previous year. Other catalysts for Hindu-Muslim conflicts of the early 1920s

included the 1923 agitation in Saharanpur over the taziyeh processions of Muharram (in which standards commemorating the martyred family members of the Prophet Muhammad in Karbala are carried in public places) and the *Shuddhi* movement calling for Muslim "re-conversion" to Hinduism.[42] Also surfacing then were not-so-understated claims of Veer Savarkar (1883–1966) that posited a neat line between genuine Indians and Hinduism and called for a Hindu state. In such a rapidly deteriorating communal situation, Muslims feared that a systematic assault on their community was underway. Premchand brooded about these growing anti-Muslim attitudes and actions that were, in his opinion, severing the bonds of national unity.[43] In order to mount a successful campaign against communalism and "to cement the bonds of Hindu-Muslim unity," Premchand wrote *Karbala*.

It is not difficult to understand why Karbala has appealed to non-Muslims, given the inter-religious and intercultural spaces that Muharram and the Imam Husain have historically occupied in many regions of the subcontinent. Even today, in parts of the subcontinent, many Hindus commemorate the tenth day of Muharrram through culinary means—they cook particular foods as votive offerings and then distribute it in their neighborhood as food blessed by the memory of the martyrs of Karbala. I remember the excitement of many Shias when they went to a Muharram event in Hyderabad where a Hindu man, with an alam in his hand, walked on burning coals as a demonstration of his devotion. When I spoke to two Hindus, who had come to witness this event—and who were also distributing sweet milk during the fire-walking—about why they commemorate Muharram, they told me that the Imam Husain and his brother the Imam Hasan were *devtās,* divine incarnations. Muharram, to these self-identified Hindus, is more about honoring manifestations of the divine than about any connection with Islam. The discourses of Muharram, especially the Muharram of Lucknow, in Urdu literature (by Quratulain Haidar among others) are often suffused with nostalgia for a bygone syncretic culture.

Notwithstanding the popularity of Karbala's invocation outside Shii circles, for many Hindus wishing to safeguard divisions between their communities and those of Muslims, Karbala and the Muharram commemorations associated with it had become great "bogey-rites" in the 1910s and 1920s. Touted as detrimental to Hindu patriarchy and purity, commemorations of Muharram for these Hindus were parasites upon their community.[44] In defiance of those Hindus who wanted to purge their community of any link with this event, Premchand decided to frame his narrative in the allegorical mode of a nationalistic drama.

Karbala was thus conceived as an act of resistance, with Hindus as the primary intended audience: "The aim of this drama, and of the principal character's portrayal, is to make the Hindus pay a tribute to Hazrat Husain. That's why this drama which, apart from being religious, is political also."[45] The writing of *Karbala* was a twofold utilitarian gesture on Premchand's part: First, he hoped to provide a unifying communal impulse; and second, through the play, Premchand expressed his own devotion to the martyrs of Karbala by paying "tribute" to them.

Karbala appeared in two modes: first in Hindi, and then in Urdu. Although the narrative framework and the plot are identical in both versions of the play, a few differences are worth pointing out: The Hindi play was written in Devanagari script and contains more Sanskrit words than the Urdu play, which was written in Perso-Arabic script. The amount of sanskritized Hindi is tied to the characters' nominal religious markings—the Muslim characters use fewer sanskritized words than the Hindu characters. Premchand asserts in the preface of his Hindi version that in order to be realistic, he could not put too many sanskritized words in the mouths of Muslims; he has tried to keep the language of the play a "shared" communal language that Hindus and Muslims both speak.[46] In making this linguistic point, Premchand suggests that religious identity in South Asia is linked to language.

The 1920s were also a time of bitter Hindi-Urdu language rivalries, as both languages were religiously charged. Given the Muslim claims to Urdu as a privileged lingua franca of Islamic socioreligious reformist discourse of the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century, and the Hindu tendency to see Urdu as a language shaped by the foreign Perso-Arabic script, the language of Urdu now inhabited a Muslim space.[47] Premchand, by first publishing *Karbala* in Hindi (rather than in Urdu) in 1924,[48] validates the Hindi-Urdu polarization at one level; but at another level, he reengages this space by articulating in Hindi an Islamic allegory, already held in reverence by many Hindus. Through the Hindi *Karbala,* Premchand postulates the plausibility of an affectionate nexus between Hindi and Islam, Islamic history and the history of Hinduism, thereby attempting to enervate Urdu's hold on Islam, Islam's hold on Urdu, Hinduism's hold on Hindi, and Hindi's hold on Hinduism. In the play's preface, Premchand describes the battle of Karbala as the Islamic counterpart of the epic struggles of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.[49] By invoking such an analogy at the very outset, Karbala is domesticated, stripped of its foreignness, so as to make it more comprehensible and appealing to Hindus.

That the conceptualization of history no longer entails a shared spirit, Premchand implies, precipitates Hindu-Muslim conflict. "Whenever a Muslim king is remembered, we invoke Aurangzeb."[50] For Premchand, the Indian Muslim by and large existed within a continual state of prejudiced assumptions of Hindus recorded through the Aurangzebian idiom: this fiction had to be countered. Premchand archives the Hindu-Muslim relationship in mutually respective terms that move beyond Aurangzeb and his time into a temporal zone reflecting a more pluralistic Islam. In archiving the Hindu-Muslim relationship in such a way, what Premchand also does is highlight the attitudinal differences within a religious community: He identifies himself as a Hindu, yet disagrees with many Hindus who fail to find virtue in Islam; he provides no apologies for Aurangzeb's alleged religious intolerance, yet refuses to see the Mughal emperor as the ideal follower of Indian Islam. By ideologically fracturing religious communities, he undermines the antagonistic communal bifurcation within the colonial milieu that posited Hindus and Muslims as age-old enemies whose scriptures determined their mode of thinking and living.

Karbala opens with a description of the disquieting revelry and debauchery at Yazid's court. In the first scene, the caliph Yazid is flanked by his advisors/sycophants, most notable of whom is Zahhak. To those familiar with the topoi of Indo-Persian literature, the very mention of Zahhak is an instant reminder of the legendary Iranian tyrant who shouldered two snakes, who were constantly nourished by human brains. The rein of Zahhak was a time of mayhem, when the utility of the human brain was consumed by dreadful snakes. It took the brave Faridun to defeat Zahhak and restore justice to the land of Iran. So in this opening scene, one ignoble caliph, Yazid, is in the company of another beast of bygone days. When Yazid, concerned as he was with securing the allegiance of Husain, asks for Zahhak's advice, the latter suggests the most forceful means to accomplish such a goal. Yazid's wife, Hindah, who according to some sources had once served the Prophet's family, warns her husband against such actions, lest he be consumed by the fire of hell for being irreverent towards the grandson of the Prophet. Yazid dismisses his wife by explaining his show of loyalty to Islam: "Hindah, this talk of religion is [only] for religion; not for the world. My grandfather accepted Islam so that he could receive wealth and honor. He did not accept Islam in order to be redeemed. Nor do I think of Islam as a means of redemption today."[51]

Thus, unconvinced by his pious wife, Yazid sets out to assure his own victory over Husain. The frame text of the rest of the play corresponds closely to the popular understanding of the Karbala story: Husain is forced to pay allegiance to Yazid in Medina; Husain leaves Medina because of the pressure to accept Yazid's authority; Husain's cousin, Muslim, arrives in Kufa to gauge local support and build a base for the Prophet's grandson; Muslim is betrayed by the Kufans and Yazid's governor, Ibn Ziyad, manages to kill Muslim; Hurr, in a place called Karbala, blocks Husain and his companions, who are en route to Kufa; Husain's family is deprived of the Euphrates water; Husain is provided with a night's respite to rethink his determination to oppose Yazid; Hurr, after reconsidering his previous stance, repents and joins Husain, and becomes the first martyr for Husain's cause; Hurr is followed by the rest of Husain's companions and family members—Abbas, Ali Akbar, Ali Asghar, Zainab's sons, and so on; Husain is the last one to attain martyrdom.

Few of Premchand's readers would have qualms about the linear progression and artistic extrapolation of this oft-recited frame text. But Premchand takes narrative liberties with the interpolations within this text. Unlike the writers of *Rangīlā Rasūl* or *Vichitra Jīvan,* Premchand relies on established scholarly authorities of Islam, such as Amir Ali, and also elegist-poets whose marsiyas are often recited in Muharram gatherings. For instance, Premchand depicts Husain's farewell to his sister Zainab by interweaving the verses of Urdu's greatest marsiya writer, Mir Anis, with the prose text of the play:

> Can any brother bear the sorrow of his sister!
> This darling of Asadullah [Husain], however, is helpless
> His heart shattered by sorrow and hardships
> Whom can I tell, how much I grieve for you

> Shabbir [Husain] cries at the destruction of this house
> It's not you he parts from, he parts from his mother.[52]

The women, too, are strong and active participants. When Husain urges his family members to abandon him so as to not incur the wrath of Yazid's army, Sakina replies:

"We will never take such disgrace upon ourselves—disgrace that would be generated if Rasul's [the Prophet Muhammad's] sons have sacrificed for the cause of Islam while his daughters remained seated in the house."[53] Thus the women also contribute to the project of the ideal community/nation by spurning complacency and embracing suffering. Women like Zainab give impetus to the cause of Islam by happily sending their sons to the battlefront, thereby linking temporary suffering with permanent redemption. This discourse that positions women as men's spiritual and ideological comrades not only became the staple of colonial Urdu literatures (Nazir Ahmed and others), but also made itself visible within the marsiya traditions of Lucknow and Delhi, where the likes of Sauda and Anis had complemented Husain's struggle with that of his female relatives: Zainab, Kulsum, Sakina, Bano, and so on.[54]

The point at which Premchand parts company with the popular marsiya narrative of his time is when he inserts a subplot intended to enhance his agenda of "cementing" communal harmony by depicting Husain as a universal hero, who transcends the boundaries of any particular tradition. He thus presents a story about the mingling of the Hindu and Muslim understandings of truth, as personified by "Sahas Rai" and Husain. Sahas Rai and his family of seven brothers, devoted Hindus and originally from India, live in an Arabian village. Premchand probably drew the Sahas Rai interpolation from a legend popular among a pocket of Hindus, that a community of Brahmans (the Dutt Brahmans or Mohiyals) existed in Arabia, contemporaneously with Husain. These Brahmans were said to have come to Hussain's assistance in Karbala. Several of these Brahmans lost their lives and those remaining moved back to India. At times, these Brahmans are also referred to as the Husaini Brahmans since they remain devoted to Husain in spite of considering themselves Hindu.[55]

Disturbed by the news of Yazid's accession to the caliphate, Sahas Rai and his brothers set out to help Husain. They arrive in Karbala, pay tribute to Husain, and take up arms against Yazid's army. First they protect Husain and his companions from their enemies' arrows while the Imam is busy in ritual prayers. Husain, in return, blesses these Hindus for protecting him and his followers:

> Friends! My beloved sympathizers! These ritual prayers will be remembered in the history of Islam. If these brave slaves of God had not guarded our backs against the enemy's arrows then our prayers would have never been completed. O Truth Worshippers! We salute you. Although you are not a believer [in Islam]—a religion of Truth-worshipping followers, willing to die for justice, understanding life to be insignificant, and willing to have their heads cut off in support

> of the oppressed—it is certainly a true and righteous religion. May that religion always remain in the world. With the light of Islam, may its light also spread in all four directions.[56]

When Sahas Rai asks for Husain's permission to confront the forces of Yazid, Husain insists that the newly-arrived guests not become embroiled in the battle. Sahas Rai replies,

> **Sahas Rai:** Sir, we are not your guests, we are your servants. The main principle of our life is to die for truth and justice. This is our duty; not a favor to anyone.
>
> **Husain:** How can I possibly tell you to go [to the battlefield]. God willing, the foundation laid on this ground by our blood and your blood, will be protected from time's evil eye and this [foundation] shall never be ruined. May the sounds of joyful songs always rise from it and may the rays of the sun always shine on it.
>
> (All seven brothers, while singing praises of India [Bharat], enter the battlefield.)
>
> **Abbas [Husain's brother]:** Amazingly strong warriors! Now the truth has dawned upon me that Islam also exists outside the realm of Islam. These are true Muslims and it is not possible that the Holy Messenger will not intercede on their behalf.

Hence all seven brothers from the family of Sahas Rai attain martyrdom, after gallantly defending Husain's cause. Husain has the funeral pyre prepared for his Hindu comrades, and delivers a moving eulogy in their honor:

> These people are from that pure country where the declaration of God's unity (tawhid) was first raised. I pray to God that they receive a lofty station among the martyrs. Those flames rise from the pyre. O God! May this fire never be extinguished from the heart of Islam. May our brave ones always spill their blood for this [Hindu] community. May this seed, which has been sown in fire today, blossom till the Day of Judgment.[57]

Husain speaks in laudatory tones of Hindus as those who are determined to vindicate the cause of truth and justice in the face of immense obstacles. As the words of Abbas testify, the Hindus are metamorphosed into ideal Muslims without effacing their Hindu identity. Premchand fosters a sensitivity that would accommodate the confluence of the two religions—allowing both to cherish, if not embrace, the differences between them. The Hindu brothers do not perform the ritual prayers with Husain's band, but they nevertheless ensure the safety of this group while it is praying. Husain himself oversees the rites of cremation—rites not endorsed by scriptural Islam. The rigidly binary modeling of communalism is unsettled in the same vein as it had been in much of Perso-Indian poetry. After all, Premchand was a devotee of Ghalib, the unsurpassed destroyer of many such binaries:

vafādārī ba sharṭ-e ustavārī aṣl-e imāñ hai
mare butḳhāne meñ to kaʿbe meñ gāṛo barhaman ko[58]

Fidelity with the strength of determination is the core of faith
If the Brahman dies in the house of idols, bury him in the Kaba

The Hindi version of *Karbala* was followed by the Urdu version that was serialized, from July 1926 to April 1928, in the popular and critically acclaimed Urdu journal of the time, *Zamāna* (founded in 1903). Its publisher, Munshi Daya Narain Nigam (1882–1942), had established a reputation for cultivating Hindu-Muslim dialogue; like Premchand, he saw India's well-being tied to intercommunal harmony. In commenting on *Zamāna's* contribution to South Asian culture, Khwaja Hasan Nizami, a prominent scholar of Islam, wrote in the 1928 issue of *Zamāna*:

> I don't know of any journal in India in which Hindu and Muslim writers have jointly written in every single issue, year after year, and it is this distinction of *Zamāna* that ought to be written at the highest level of the history of the Urdu language.[59]

In further praise of this journal, after the Urdu serialization of *Karbala* was complete, Nizami cites Premchand as "an unprejudiced Hindu who, having drawn the sword of his pen, rose on the field of action, in order to save his community from literary prejudices."[60]

Premchand also, however, incurred criticism: Syed Ahsan Ali Sambhi (a staff member and critic working for *Zamāna*) doubted the desirability of publishing *Karbala* as a "drama." Sambhi felt that the theme of the Karbala narrative was so somber that any attempt to mold it into a medium of trivial entertainment (and the very word "drama" was widely associated with such entertainment) was bound to upset the Muslim community. Premchand was especially sensitive to the criticism leveled against him for any aspect of *Karbala* and he retorted to the editors, before the publication of this Urdu drama began:

> It'd be better if you don't publish *Karbala*. There's nothing that I stand to lose, and I am not prepared to undergo these unnecessary pinpricks. I read the life of Hazrat Hussain. His zest for martyrdom moved me and I felt like paying a tribute. The result was this drama. If Muslims do not concede to Hindus even the right to pay tribute to Muslim caliphs and *imams,* I am not keen either. It is no use, therefore, to reply to the letters which have been advising you against publishing the drama. I do wish, however, to say a few things about Ahsan Sambhi's letter. He says that Shia Muslims would not like a drama being written about their religious leaders. If Shia Muslims avidly read or hear *Mathnavis,* stories and elegies on the life of their religious leaders, why should they have any objection to a drama being written on the subject? Or, is it because this one, *Karbala,* is written by a Hindu. . . . History and historical drama,

> you would agree, are two different things. None can introduce changes in regard to the principal characters of a historical drama. . . . Drama is not history. It does not affect the principal historical characters. The aim of the drama, and of the principal character's portrayal, is to make the Hindus pay a tribute to Hazrat Hussain. That's why this drama which, apart from being religious, is political also. . . . Khwaja Hassan Nizami, incidentally, wrote a biography of Lord Krishna. Just because a Muslim divine had paid his tribute to Lord Krishna, Hindu critics lauded the attempt. My purpose was identical. If, however, Hassan Nizami can have the freedom to pay his tribute to one of another religion but the same is denied to me, then all that I can say is that I am sorry. Kindly return the manuscript.[61]

Husain's battle in Karbala thus had an ethically inspirational value for Premchand, who utilized it aesthetically for the enhancement of a more unified Indian national community, while the larger subcontinental community was wracked by communal tensions. Such an ideal community, at least in its imaginary incarnation, was given further impetus by the intertwined discourses of suffering and sacrifice that permeated the Indian nationalist rhetoric. And for Indian nationalists, this is a fitting story with which to regale their nation.

Premchand's allegory *Karbala* empowers a nationalist reading that springs from the sentiments of sacrifice, suffering, and transreligious human bonding. Such readings of Islamic history and the Indian nation are constituted by images from Islam's sacred history together with the Hindu community that participates in the making of this history—the Hindu community is inscribed within Islamic history as a protected, respected, and much-needed minority, in order to set an example for the treatment of India's Muslim minority. Premchand thus allegorically correlates the imaginary minority status of Hindus in seventh-century Arabia with that of Muslims in an ideal, and perhaps just as imaginary, unified Indian nation, in order to synthesize the moral tenor of nation-building. This Indian nation, interestingly enough, not only locates its prototype in the distant past (as Ben Anderson claims modern nations do),[62] but also in the geographical space that accommodates the Euphrates rather than the Indus or the Ganges. Karbala becomes a device whereby the discourses tying geography, religion, and community into a neat nexus are commplicated. Islam exists beyond Islamdom just as Hinduism exists outside India. Both religions become ideals free from geographical shackles. Although the Hindu-Muslim religious communities are reified in opposition to each other, their marked significations overflow the signifiers: Hindus become Muslims through their determination to safeguard Islamic ideals, while Muslims are tied to the land of India since it is here that monotheism first flourished. Modern religious communities are represented as the heirs of Husain and Sahas Rai and each one, in spite of its uniqueness, encompasses and needs the other, yet must not efface the identity of the self or of the other. Respect for minority rights is championed as the basis of nation-building and the nu-

merical weakness of this minority becomes irrelevant. It is as though the nation loses its ethical value when the concerns of its minorities go unheeded. Although cultural and national spaces remain shared, Premchand does not propagate the idea of a shared or syncretic culture as a substitute for addressing serious minority concerns on their own terms. A work like *Karbala* supplants the nationalist exclusionary imaginings about which Partha Chatterjee writes:

> The idea of the singularity of national history has inevitably led to a single source of Indian tradition, namely, ancient Hindu civilization. Islam here is either the history of foreign conquest or a domesticated element of everyday popular life. The classical heritage of Islam remains external to Indian history.[63]

By disrupting this play of nationalist imaginings (that Chatterjee critiques) through his drama, Premchand goes beyond the simplified polarities of syncretism and separatism to locate the nation in the abstract theater, 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. This 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 theater/stage has for some, at times, and partly as a distancing strategy. Since visual representation remains a vexed question in many Islamicate societies, Premchand eliminates the question of staging this play[64] (at least in its current form) lest attention be deflected from its moral. The imminent telos of the play, to hasten the triumph of a people united in diversity, would also be compromised if the playwright's ultimate destination for his work is the stage—because the staging might offend readers otherwise sympathetic to the play's spirit. Dis-anchoring *Karbala* from the holds of the stage by marking the play "only to be read; not to be performed"[65] is also a solemn distancing mimetic strategy used by Premchand, similar to the one used in Iran. There, actors in the taziyeh performance (ironically the only "serious" theater in the Islamic world, according to Peter Chelkowski) hold a script even when they have the lines memorized, so as to avoid any comparison between themselves and the martyrs of Karbala.[66]

Even when exploring Premchand's *Karbala* as a nationalist allegory, we must also acknowledge Sudipta Kaviraj's reading of the narratives of the nation as having limited utility in spite of being "represented as a mystic unity of sentiments:"[67]

> These narratives are explicit and detailed about freedom, sacrifice, glory and such things, and usually very vague about the more concrete and contestable questions of distribution, equality, power, the actual unequal ordering of the past society or of the future one.[68]

Notwithstanding the limitations that attended such nationalist and ecumenical imaginaries, Premchand was instrumental in the growth of reformist

literature and the fledgling Progressive Writers' Movement. His call for a re-evaluation of the existing aesthetic standards set the trend for Urdu literature of subsequent decades. "The writer's aim" wrote Premchand, "is not to cheer the audience and not to provide material for entertainment. Don't degrade him to such a level! He is not even that truth which follows behind patriotism and politics; instead, he is the standard-bearer, who shows the path."[69] Premchand's labor of love was fostering harmony among God's creation and this was not lost on the conscience of several other authors of Hindi and Urdu.[70]

Nathanvilal Wahshi (d. 1968), another Hindu elegy writer, not only includes a subplot resonating with themes of communal harmony similar to those of Premchand, but also recasts Karbala in the mold of the sacred Hindu epic, the *Ramayana*. In the first part of the elegy, he emphasizes religious ecumenism:

The discourse of the home-wrecking preacher is mistaken
The bounties of the lord do not draw boundaries
The sun's rays shine on every home
When a cloud decides to shower its bounty
It does not check to see "this is greenery, that is sand
This is the field of a Muslim, that of a Hindu"[71]

Wahshi narrates the arrival of a helper for the Imam's cause on the eighth day of Muharram. The Imam welcomes him and immediately confirms his Indian identity. Husain then goes on to praise India and its people:

The perfumed fragrance entered the realm of love from your country
The cool breeze came to my grandfather from that garden[72]

Upon inquiring more about the guest's background, the Imam finds out that he is an Indian merchant residing in the nearby city of Basra; his father had been entrusted with the treasury of the war booty by none other than Ali b. Abi Talib. For this reason, the merchant holds himself morally responsible for assisting Husain in any possible way when the latter is in trouble. Husain appreciates this gesture, but discourages the merchant from taking up arms.

Brother, in my opinion you are the beloved of the world
In this country you are the treasure of India[73]

Like the seven brothers in Premchand's drama, at first this merchant perceives Husain's gesture as suspicion on the part of the Imam about his sincerity (because he is Hindu).

With tear-filled eyes, the traveler said:
"I am a Hindu, perhaps my fidelity is not convincing
Master! Even though this heart is the lamp of the idol temple
In it is also lit the light of affection"[74]

The Imam lays to rest any concerns of the newcomer by elevating the merchant to the station of the warrior of truth:

The King [Husain] said: "What have you said in passion,
Why should my eye doubt your fidelity?
My Lord is aware of my conscience
What's the difference between Hindu and Muslim in the quest for truth
This has been the guiding principle for the People of the Cloak:[75]
To us, the world is the family of God."[76]

Like a moth enamored of the "candle of guidance," the Hindu is immolated in the love of the Imam.[77] And in this process of immolation, as he confronts Yazid's army, he sings of the past glories of his countrymen, including the Hindu deity, Rama:

His slogan was: "Why do you stare hither in astonishment
You are the progeny of Ravan, I, the son of Ram
Once again, today, that same tumult of virtue and vice arises
What fear can the men of truth have of falsehood's ambush
With the lightning of our sword, we shall set all aflame—
Not only Kufa but Damascus too shall be reduced to Lanka"[78]

By signifying the battle of Karbala through evoking the *Ramayana,* Wahshi is extending the particularity of Husain's war into a universal struggle of good and evil. The Husain-Yazid polarity echoes that of the Ram-Ravan, in which the Lord Ram defeats Ravan and sets afire the latter's power base, Lanka. Since Damasus and Kufa were both centers of power under Yazid's reign, the Hindu merchant wishes to destroy these cities the way Lanka was destroyed. The merchant, blessed by Husain, fights with all his physical and spiritual prowess, and cries echo through the battlefield:

There was an outcry: the House of God has received assistance from the idol temple
The spirit of Krishna is peeking from heaven[79]

The haram-kanisht (Kaba-temple) juxtaposition, so omnipresent in the mystical aesthetic, is played out yet again in the personified forms of Husain and the Hindu merchant. Witnessing this play is that voice of wisdom from the Hindu epic *Mahabharata,* the Lord Krishna himself. After all, it is Krishna's advocacy for the righteous struggle in the face of obstacles that gives the *Bhagavad Gita* its moral fervor.

Echoing the tone of Wahshi, and looming on the horizons of devotional and supplicational literature addressed to Husain, are the verses of Kunwar Mahendar Singh Bedi Sahar, a fine Sikh poet of Urdu:

You resurrected Islam
You showed us truth and falsehood
Everyone knows how to die after living
But you taught the world how to live after dying!
O Prince of Martyrs! When your name comes to my lips
The cupbearer of gnostic wine arrives with the goblet

If you could only bestow upon me the honor of your servitude
After all, O Master, even a counterfeit coin is of use at times.[80]

"Counterfeit," as he claims to be, in loving devotion to Husain, Sahar beseeches the Prince of Martyrs to accept this non-Muslim admirer in his servitude. He might not be a "genuine coin," in that he is not a Muslim, but little harm could come from such worthwhile "counterfeit" ones!

Husain's uprising, in Bedi's opinion, lives on as a paradigm for those who resist the unjust status quo of their time:

To every old order, the tidings of a new ordinance
Oh you, whose martyrdom is really the death of Yazid[81]

Thus Sahar's view of martyrdom differs little from that of Muhammad Ali Jauhar. It should also be clear, Karbala, for many non-Muslim writers, is embedded in a supra-communal matrix. As Banarsi Lal Varma would say:

It's wrong [to say] that Husain is dear only to Muslims
Husain is a refuge for every sorrowful heart in the world
Such was the sacrifice of this son of the Prophet Varma
That today even Hindus say: "Husain is ours."[82]

The notion that the blood of Husain should always be cherished as a life-bestowing reminder, heralding the causes of righteousness, irrespective of religion, was not confined to Urdu poetry. The well-liked Bengali, Qazi Nazrul Islam, whose revolutionary poetic drumbeat inspired poets like Makhdum to march in step with him,[83] implies that his relationship to the cause of Husain is not unlike that of Abbas to his martyred brother. The river Euphrates, for Nazrul Islam, becomes the metaphor for modern life, likewise desiring sacrifices as great as those of Husain on its shore.[84] He sings further:

Muharram! Karbala! Ya Husain! Ya Husain!
Weep it out, if you please, again and again!
But let not the martyr's blood
By the desert's sun, be dried outright![85]

Thus, the extension of Karbala as a universal symbol was neither limited to Muslims nor to the Urdu language. It was the convenient appeal of the symbol that drew Progressive poets to it.

Karbala in Urdu Progressive Literature

In 1935, in the back room of Nanking, a small Chinese restaurant in London, a group composed mostly of Indian students gathered to lay the foundations of the All India Progressive Writers' Association (AIPWA). The Progressive Writers' Movement was truly hybrid in its constitution. While it was an extension of the socioreligious reform movements of nineteenth- and twentieth-

century South Asia on one hand, it also owed a great deal to Marxist ideals of art and literature.

Initially spearheading this movement were two rebellious young writers, Mulk Raj Anand and Sajjad Zahir. Sajjad Zahir was an active member of the Communist Party of India (CPI), and the son of Sir Syed Wazir Hasan, a distinguished judge of the Allahabad High Court.[86] After receiving his bachelor's degree from Oxford University in 1932, Zahir contributed to and published a controversial collection of short stories, *Angāre, Embers*. The stories irreverently satirized the Muslim socioreligious establishment of the time, kindled a fiery critique of society's hypocrisy, and were banned for "obscenity" in British India.[87] Thus Zahir was already known when he organized the Progressive Writers' Association after his return to England in 1935. Zahir's friend, Mulk Raj Anand, who later became one of the most outstanding English novelists from India, was originally from a Hindu middle-class household of Peshawar, then went on to receive a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of London. A friend of E. M. Forster and also a keen critic of capitalism, Anand joined Sajjad Zahir in nurturing the Progressive Movement.

The vision of the Progressive Writers' Movement was articulated in the first manifesto:

> It is the object of our association to rescue literature and other arts from the priestly, academic and decadent classes in whose hands they have degenerated so long; to bring the arts into the closest touch with the people; and to make them the vital organ which will register the actualities of life, as well as lead us to the future. While claiming to be inheritors of the best traditions of Indian civilization, we shall criticise ruthlessly in all its political, economic and cultural aspects, the spirit of reaction in our country; and we shall foster through interpretative and creative works (both native and foreign resources) everything that will lead our country to the new life for which it is striving.[88]

Premchand, with small variations, published the manifesto from which this quote was taken. Established Indian writers of the time, Rabindranath Tagore, Muhammad Iqbal, and Josh Malihabadi gave more than a nod of approval to the group and its objectives. In spite of the "radical" appearance of this organization, the leftist objectives of the movement were condoned by the "old guard" of literature and prominent anti-colonialist fighters, such as Nehru and Sarojini Naidu.[89] Nehru, writing in the journal published by the Progressive Writers' and edited by Josh Malihabadi, placed the responsibility of a brighter future on the shoulders of these writers: "The writer is responsible for preparing the country for the future revolution."[90] Addressing such writers, he further wrote:

> Please solve the problems of the masses. Please guide them on the right path. But you must convey your ideas through the arts, not through logic. Your discourse should penetrate their [the masses']

> hearts. The logic of art is different. It captures the human being completely. Then reasoning keeps doing its work.[91]

Many subsequent major Urdu writers were affected by these calls that resonated in the early phase of the Progressive Movement. Some of them (Makhdum Mohiuddin, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Ali Sardar Jafri) have been its defining entities; others (Ismat Chughtai and Sadat Hasan Manto), although sympathetic to its objectives, have disagreed with it over many issues; and still others (Vahid Akhtar, Ahmad Faraz, Iftikhar Arif) admitted to being inspired by it, though they were not part of its formal establishment.

The Progressives in particular, and the reformists in general, did not see themselves as ideological orphans utilizing historical symbols and literature in a radical, unprecedented manner. Not only did they often project their combats back in time, but they also drew the rhetoric of their cause from the canonical poets of Persian and Urdu. When in 1999 I interviewed the senior-most Progressive Urdu poet of the time, Ali Sardar Jafri, who had witnessed the various currents within the movement from its inception, he insisted that his "forefather" Ghalib should not be overlooked in any discussion of the Progressives.[92] Jafri pointed towards Sajjad Zahir's words that acknowledge the debt of Progressive ideology to Ghalib:

> The greatness of Ghalib lies in the fact that living in a society and belonging to a class—the nobility-stricken, as it were, with a galloping mortal disease of degeneration and decay—he himself being always in financial difficulties and various other personal unhappiness, yet had the intellectual and moral strength to see the grandeur and greatness of man as such; to doubt and reject boldly the prevailing superstitions of his time; to proclaim with unsurpassed vehemence and with exquisite artistic beauty his faith, in the *elan vital* of human beings, which braving all suffering, misery, persecution and injustices, continuously leads them through struggle to higher and higher spiritual, material and moral heights. . . . It is no wonder, therefore, that of all the classical poets it was Ghalib who became a source of inspiration to progressive writers and poets of half a century or so later.[93]

For Sajjad Zahir, as for other Urdu poets who followed the Progressive path, the revolutionary calls of Karl Marx for a just economic order and Premchand's insistence on the need for a new aesthetic standard were lying dormant in the poetry of Ghalib. These writers did not want credit for originating Progressive ideology. Rather, they claimed to restore what had preceded them.

Such a Progressive view of Ghalib, of course, camouflages the aristocratic social code that had prescribed the poet's life. One has only to turn the pages of Ghalib's letters and other writings to see how distant he was from the rough-and-tumble of any laborious task, save the aesthetic crafting of Urdu and Persian. He coveted aristocratic titles and honors, basked in courtly patronage, and derived pleasure from small personal luxuries.[94] Hence in the nineteenth-

century accounts of Ghalib's life, both biographical and autobiographical, we find little trace of the ideals with which Urdu Progressive writers invested his legacy.[95] But Ghalib's playful poetic subversion was what the Progressives were overly prone to see. A few selected verses of this literary icon obscured all his other deeds and words. By the very act of extracting these carefully chosen relics from the literary edifice erected by Ghalib, the Progressives essentially turned Ghalib himself into a trope of reform, resistance, and subversion. And as far as tropes are concerned, we must remember that there are always elements amiss from their constitution. Nevertheless, there is something about Ghalib—perhaps a core of religious ecumenism, or a clarion call for rebellion against things past, or simply the established and cherished status he has within the Perso-Urdu literary canon—that drew the Progressives to him.

According to Jafri, the nectar of any Progressive ideology is in such couplets of Ghalib:

> By following the masses, one is bound to go astray
> I shall not travel on the road that has seen the dust of any caravan.[96]
> Do not quarrel with me O father!
> Just look at the son of Azar, [the Prophet] Abraham
> A man of insight,
> shall not be happy with the religion of his forefathers[97]

And the most revolutionary, thought provoking couplet of Ghalib is, according to Jafri:

> The jewels were collected from the studded spears of the Persian kings,
> In return, I was given a jewel-scattering pen.[98]

For the Progressive writers, Ghalib's words spelled the doom of the era of spears, swords, and banners, and commenced the pen's reign: Ghalib acknowledged what Zahir would say, "the greatness and grandeur of man," is based not upon the human strength to kill in the battlefield but upon the human ability to fight through the pen as sword. Jafri is keen to point out that these are aspects of Ghalib's poetry that are reflected in the works of the Progressive writers. And with the might of the pen, as proclaimed by Ghalib, in mind, Jafri wrote "Karbala," the rallying hymn of his age.

Karbala

(A Battle Cry)

> Again the cry, "I Thirst!" is heard
> Like a fountain of thundering war hymns.
> Again the caravans of people of the heart,
> Are moving across the desert sand.
> The river Euphrates flows with fire
> The Ravi and the Ganges,[99] stream with blood.
> Whoever the Yazid of an epoch,

Or Shimr,[100] or Hurmula,[101]
Whether he is aware or not,
The day of reckoning is near,
Near is the day of recompense.
O Karbala! O Karbala!
This land is not mute,
Neither is the sky,
Nor are these discourses mute.
If prudence is mute
Then wounds themselves will gain a voice
That blood, the dust's nourishment,
Is radiant and enduring,
In the face of the brazenness of centuries,
Man is alive still,
Alive is the wonder of lamentation.
In every crushed atom,
The sound of the heartbeat is heard:
O Karbala! O Karbala!
The lords of the thrones of arrogance,
The gods of the lands of oppression,
These idols of tin and iron,
These masters of silver and gold,
Clad in cloaks of gunpowder,
Their voices like the roar of rockets,
Oblivious to the storms of sorrow,
Inept and talentless—
They appear armed to their teeth
But fire blazes under their feet.
The weeping sands of Medina
The weeping sands of Karbala
The winds of the east are raging
Ablaze are the plains of Palestine,
O Karbala! O Karbala!
These academies, these universities,
The taverns of learning and craft,
From where have come into them:
These nests of vultures,
These reflections of ignorance,
Twisting and turning endlessly.
Unsure academics,
Custodians of others' institutions,
Eunuchs of words—
Beyond their power,
Is the blood of life's spring,
Beyond their power,
Is the blood of eternal life.

The rose's hue is annoyed with them,
The morning breeze, disappointed with them.
O Karbala! O Karbala!
But these very abodes of wisdom,
The fire temples of love,
The splendid abodes of beauty,
In whose embrace are nurtured
The mountain hewers[102] of the present,
The young saplings of the garden,
Singing like nightingales, soaring like falcons
O Karbala! O Karbala!
Arise, O sons of Sorrow!
Arise, O aspirants!
Through the alleys of their tresses,
Glides the heart's life-bestowing breeze,
The fragrance of the rose,
The fragrance of fidelity
Is young on the sprouts of lips.
Their eyes twinkle with stars,
Their foreheads glow with sunshine,
Their hearts are filled with the beauty of the night of sorrow,
Their faces beam with the majesty of humility
The footsteps of history
Resonate beneath their feet.
Swords raise hands in supplication—
O Karbala! O Karbala!
Before these thirsty ones
They will arrive and they will be brought—
Those unable to see even through Jamshid's goblet,[103]
All those merciless masters,
And their true selves revealed.
Their swords and banners will bow
Before the ambassadors of the pen.
Effulgent is the Kaba's spirit,
Luminous is the beloved's soul!
In Sardar's verses lives
The radiance of the martyr's blood!
O Karbala! O Karbala![104]

In spite of his unabashed endorsement of Marxism, Ali Sardar Jafri acknowledged the relevance of Karbala to his progressive, class-conscious thinking. He nostalgically recalled the days of his youth when he himself wrote marsiyas. In his early teens, he praised the Imam Husain with verses like these:

My God! The beauty of Fatima's moon
The sun's radiance, disgraced, seeks shelter in insignificance[105]



FIGURE 6.1 Ali Sardar Jafri recites "Karbala" at Harvard University.

The source of poetic inspiration for such verses was none other than the marsiyas of Mir Anis. The figurative language of Anis, according to Jafri, continues to resonate in his progressive poetry. Along with the powerful influence of Anis, Muhammad Iqbal's praise for Husain also remains etched on Jafri's aesthetic and reformist understanding. He believes that although Anis and Iqbal play an important role in the construction of Husain's image, at the heart of the Progressive appropriation of Husain lies the need "to secularize" Husain so that he does not become an exclusively Islamic commodity. When I asked Jafri how he defined "secular," a charged idea that is by and large a product of the modern West, he replied that to him, "secular" suggested a way of thinking and acting that did not privilege one religion over another, that viewed all humans as equally deserving of respect and sustenance, regardless of their religious affiliation. Husain has to be secularized so that his example can address the social needs of this world and not just appeal to the enhancement of the hereafter. Husain's role in Progressive Urdu literature, Jafri points out, is different from his role as the martyred Imam in the majlis or the qawwalis, both of which are preoccupied with the afterlife. Husain, according to Jafri, wanted to change this world—for Muslims as well as non-Muslims. If Husain had desired heaven only, he would have prayed and fasted, remaining silent about the injustices around him.

Jafri frequently prefaced the reading of "Karbala" by illuminating the imagery of this poem for his audience: "Two cries were heard on the day of ashura: the cries of 'I thirst,' that were emerging from the tents of the Prophet's house-

hold, and the roaring of rajaz, or the rallying calls of battle, that were ringing from the war front."[106] For Ali Sardar Jafri, his invocation "O Karbala! O Karbala!" conflates the two cries that rose on the banks of the Euphrates over a millennium ago, thereby invoking the rajaz of *aṣr-e ḥāẓir,* the battle cry of the present age.

It was common for Arabs to improvise war songs to rouse the morale of their own side and undermine that of their enemies. The meter of such improvisations, usually short and mnemonic, enthused Jafri to compose his rajaz in the metrical scale of --u-/--u-, *rajaz muzāl*. By invoking Karbala, Jafri embarks on his own battle. Singing the rallying song in such a battle are the rivers of God's natural creation—the Euphrates, the Ravi, and the Ganges. They all stand in opposition to the Yazids, the Shimrs, and the Hurmulas of the modern age. This new enemy is not constituted of flesh and blood, but of metal—not only of steel and iron but also of gold and silver. It is cloaked in gunpowder and it speaks through its rockets. It lacks human traits, it is oblivious to the cries of its victims. The use of such imagery is a veiled attack not only on the capitalist infrastructure, symbolized by the United States, but also on the arsenal of imperialism and the arms races that subjugate and exclude the weak.

According to Jafri, such authorities cannot surface on God's earth without uprisings also surfacing. After all, the earth is very much alive and strong, sustained by martyrs' blood. Just as the martyrs do not die, their blood is assured eternity as well. The earth is also assisted by other forces of nature: the winds blowing from the east, the Third World, and the burning plains of Palestine. Of course, the issue of Palestine and the victimization of the East by the West is high on the Progressive agenda. It would suffice to recall how Makhdum implicates the "hands in Sinai" in Martin Luther King's murder. Jafri's poem was itself written and recited in the 1980s, when the supporters of Palestinians hoped for their victory.

The academics and the academies are the forces that must be countered, according to this poem, because they constitute the support bases of this monstrous, metallic, capitalist enemy. Nested in these once-auspicious taverns of learning are the vulture-like modern forces of vice. They are like those eunuchs (*ḳhwāja sarā*) who are perpetually hanging in liminality, worthy only because of their go-between status. Jafri uses eunuchs as a pejorative metaphor in two inter-related senses: (1) as an impotent person who cannot act in any practical capacity; and (2) as a person who is unable to act on the principles he espouses in words. In South Asia, as in many other parts of the world, eunuchs are projected as either worthless or as the object of patriarchal jokes. Jafri's "Battle Cry" is replete with patriarchal language—in reference to eunuchs, mountain hewers, and legendary kings of Persia.

When speaking to me about this aspect of his poem, Jafri acknowledged the impact of Edward Said's much-acclaimed magnum opus, *Orientalism*—a book published in 1978 that castigated many scholars and scholarly traditions of Europe and North America for being complicit in colonial and imperial projects.

> He [Edward Said] could articulate beautifully in English what many of us knew all along—many educational institutions of the West, far from pursuing objective and altruistic agendas, were instead manufacturing information that could be used against the third world. This agenda was colored by paranoia at one level and ignorance at another.[107]

But within these institutions of learning, Jafri is quick to point out, a confrontational force also exists that can possibly challenge the castrated old guard that symbolically represents Western academics. This force comprises the *koh kins,* or the mountain hewers of the present age. After all, it was the "mountain hewer" *par excellence,* Farhad, who hewed the mountain so as to make a river flow through it. Thus the modern koh kin, the student in the academy, also has this formidable task ahead of him. These students are strong and brave, yet sing like the loving nightingales; they can cut down mountains, yet compete with royal falcons in the quest for ever-new heights. These are the students whom the poet awakens through this battle cry. Hope for the future is in their passion—passion for love and passion for life. Their eyes twinkle so as to light the world; yet they endure many a night disappointed by their beloved. The treasure of their youth is not stolen by arrogance. The guidance they receive is from the echoes of history. Their swords (having been transformed into pens) rise against their enemy in the same determined, petitioning way that hands rise in ritual prayers. Their cry rings out once again: "O Karbala! O Karbala!"

These forces of youth bring the culprits to the court of the thirsty, the martyrs of Karbala. It is here that the people of letters will mete out justice to all those who had sight but no vision (*āsūdgān-e Jām-e Jam*), who shamelessly pretended to be what they were not. At this point, the House of God will once again rejoice and the beloved's face will glow—for the student-lover will emerge victorious from the tribulations of love. Thus, through Jafri's verses, the life-giving blood of the martyrs flows, and continues to provide inspiration for the next generation of students. Hence, just as Ghalib hails the transformation of spears into pens, Jafri salutes the pen's power to write precious words of opposition to untruth and injustice. The new Karbala must now be fought by such warriors of the pen—pens wielded by university students.

The Progressive Movement's deployment of Karbala offers illuminating insights into how a language of religion persists in "secular" vocabulary and how such a deployment can rhetorically disrupt the monopoly of religious institutions that have historically claimed such a language. Finding themselves in the paradoxical position of having simultaneously to renounce the "monopolistic control of priests, pundits and other conservatives"[108] and yet also embrace words tied to such controls, the Progressives did so with the proviso that the ideals of religion must be understood apart from their reduction by the mullahs. The Progressives took opportunities to displace the religious establishment by embracing their language—especially a language like Karbala,

which accords well with minoritarian struggles and legacies of transcommunal commemorations—while criticizing their institutions.

When Jafri was asked to pay tribute to his late Progressive comrade Faiz Ahmad Faiz in 1986, he fittingly chose "Karbala" as his tributory poem. Jafri knew that Faiz was not only influenced by the struggle of the Prophet's grandson, but also believed that the vocation of the poet should be to carry on such struggles.[109]

When Faiz Ahmad Faiz visited war-stricken Beirut in 1982, he compared the carnage he witnessed to that wrought at Karbala. In a poem entitled "A Song for the Karbala of Beirut," Faiz reminds his audience of the similarities between the children dying in Lebanon and those martyred in Karbala. As far as the martyrs are concerned, does not the Quran promise a better afterlife for those who die for the sake of truth and justice? In fact, according to the Quran, the martyrs are not dead: They are alive, continuously sustained by the Almighty. So are the children of Beirut:

> Those mirrors of children's laughing eyes—shattered
> now by the flames of those burning lamps
> The nights of this city are lit,
> and the land of Lebanon is resplendent[110]

When employing the images of Karbala in the discourses mourning the destruction of Lebanon during the 1970s and the 1980s, many Urdu poets invariably tie the tragedies of Lebanon to the dispossession of the Palestinian people. To these poets, the aggressor in both situations is the same: the Israeli government. Thus writes Habib Jalib, a popular Progressive poet of Pakistan:

> The Palestinians are on a course of confrontation with Yazid
> Raising the standard of Husain's way in their hands[111]

When speaking about Palestine or Lebanon during the dictatorship of General Zia (1977–1988), Pakistani Progressive poets not only confronted an international human rights crisis, but also faced tremendous obstacles in their own homeland. The violation of Palestine's integrity became inextricably linked to the violations of Pakistan's integrity. As Shahab Ahmed points out:

> General Zia's government sought legitimacy among the Pakistani populace by presenting itself as Islamic dispensation. In the course of buttressing this claim to legitimacy, the military government made much of its support for what it termed "Islamic" causes such as Afghanistan and Palestine. The Urdu poets of the day seized on the contradiction between the Pakistan government's profession of support for the oppressed Palestinians on the one hand, and its violent suppression of the political aspirations of its own disenfranchised population on the other. The poet Habib Jalib, who, among the most outspoken public critics of General Zia's government, was

> imprisoned and tortured by the military regime. In the opening lines of a poem entitled "Reagan" Jalib denounced General Zia as a client of the same world order that was responsible for the Palestinian condition by condemning the United States' support for Zia and for Israel in the same breath. . . .[112]

On the other side of the Pakistani border, in India, Kaifi Azimi, when versifying the plight of Palestine and Lebanon in the idioms of Karbala, Husain and Yazid, also asks the rhetorical question, "Who seats [such] Yazids on the thrones?" Thus those who condone the policies of the Israeli government and support that government in its persecution of the Palestinian people are charged with a crime far worse than that of Yazid. When Husain's name is invoked in the context of Lebanon and Palestine, whether by Faiz, Jalib, or Kaifi, it is not just an alternative to Yazid's name. It conjures up possibilities of a different form of existence—an existence in which the ruler's name does not matter but his/her policies are all-important. To underscore this commitment to Husain's agenda and not just to his name, Faiz voices in verse what he believes to be Husain's last words:

> We desire neither power, nor authority,
> Nor do we desire grandeur.
> We desire neither throne, nor crown,
> Nor do we desire the standard of victory.
> We desire neither gold, nor possessions
> Nor do we desire monetary rewards.
> Whatever is fleeting, we desire it little.
> We covet neither leadership, nor kingship.
> A word of certainty, and the wealth of faith—
> This is all that we need.
> If we desire anything, it is just truth
> Opposed to falsehood, we worship truth
> We side with justice, virtue, humanity
> If we oppose the oppressor, t'is because we help the feeble
> He who doesn't curse oppression, is himself damned
> He who doesn't resist tyranny, is himself a rejecter of religion[113]

For Ahmad Faraz, who followed Faiz's road to fame, the last words of Husain are not only for history books or pathetic elegies:

> This is not a mere scenario,
> Neither is it a fragment of some tale,
> Nor just an incident—
> For it is from here,
> That history embarks upon its new journey.
> It is from here,
> That humanity commences its flight
> Towards new heights

Today, I stand in this very Karbala,
disgraced—dishonored,
broken, ashamed
Yesterday, it was from here,
that my august guide, Husain,
Departed, with pride—his head held high[114]

For Faraz, Karbala is where history begins. Husain's blood would have flowed in vain if a revolutionary spirit were not breathed into the symbol of Karbala. This is the spirit that he finds missing in the followers of Husain, especially the preachers:

The preacher's religion is but the allegiance to the house of the sultan,
People like us will honor your blood.[115]

Again we see this distrust of the religious establishment that has been expressed so frequently by other socioreligious reformers, especially Iqbal and Josh Malihabadi. Faraz also looks askance at those religious leaders who are silent about their country's political affairs. Faraz's message is clear: These leaders must rise against the "tyrannical" powers of their own time. It is thus their duty to explicitly withdraw their support from an unjust government, even if this entails the loss of life.

Faraz invokes Husain as a model whose behavior, motives, and values set the standard of conduct for all human beings. In addition to being revered as the grandson of the Prophet of Islam, Husain should be seen as a gallant defender of justice. The death of Husain, however, does not mark the end of the struggle. As in the third section of Makhdum's elegy that I quoted at the onset of this chapter, there is a call to action after the death of Martin Luther King or any martyr. In this case, at Karbala, it is Husain's courageous sister Zainab who responds to the call. Karbala would not be Karbala without Zainab. Hence, we now consider the representation of Zainab in the writings of three reform-minded poets: Iftikhar Arif, Parvin Shakir, and Vahid Akhtar.

Iftikhar Arif (b. 1943), who also spent time in Great Britain, is admired by the likes of Faiz and Faraz. He has done much to enhance the cause of Urdu in England, as an active member of the Third World Foundation's Urdu Markaz in London, an organization that furthers the literary appreciation of the language through such activities as the organization of mushairas. The importance of the imagery of suffering in Arif's poetry, especially the suffering of the Imam Husain, is attested by commentators on his work.[116] Along with Husain's suffering, Arif sees Karbala as a testimony to Zainab's courage:

Bear Witness, O Karbala

Bear witness, O Karbala
Fatima's daughter
Transformed her father's courage
Through patience.
Repaid her brother's friendship

In what a manner!
Bear witness, O Karbala.
From the gate of the city of wisdom
Till the tents of victory
Till the assembly of martyrdom
How many names were heard!
How many wondrous stations were traversed!
Those who thought the companionship of truth
To be a duty
Were disposed on the path of the truth.
And Zainab was with them at every step[117]

For Arif, Karbala must be constructed with the inclusion of Zainab. Zainab is the one who has the transformative role in Karbala—the bravery and strength so closely associated with her father are given a new meaning through her patient struggle wherein physical battles are replaced by the battle of words. She leads Islam on a new path by accomplishing a nonviolent victory in the palaces of Kufa and Damascus. Tear-filled eyes testify to the resilience of the traditions of commemoration that Zainab started. Zainab's struggle begins where Husain's ends—during the dark night after the massacre at Karbala, popularly known as sham-e ghariban. Thus sham-e ghariban, within this discourse, although a sorrowful moment in the life of the Prophet's household, must be seen as the revivification of Husain's cause. Even though Husain was killed during the day, his cause passed from his hands to those of his sister. The day belonged to Husain; the night to Zainab. In Makhdum's poem, in addition to the sorrow expressed at the death of Husain, there is an allusion to the greater struggle that began at sham-e ghariban.

For Parvin Shakir (d. 1994), one of the most famous female Urdu poets of twentieth century, Zainab's fight for the cause of justice can also be seen as a paradigm for the countless women who combat oppression in numerous forms. She speaks of Zainab's plight through the deliberate absence of Zainab's name:

Help Me!

From the tent of innocence
As soon as I proceeded towards the city of justice
From their ambush
My killers also emerged
With ready-to-shoot bows, with targeted arrows, with loaded pistols
While giving the arrow shooters on the scaffold command
To be ready
Having grasped the thirsty spears on the highways
The mischievous ones, row by row—
In the city square, the city's judge armed with a dagger
Streets dotted with daggers hidden in sleeves
Every resident of the city in mayhem

Listening to the sounds of my lonely litter
The spiders of ingenuity, weaving the webs around me
Someone desirous of my banner
Someone wanting my head
And someone wanting to steal my veil,
Is about to snatch [it]
The circle of the enemy is about to be fortified
The last battle with death is about to happen
In the Kufa of love
My helplessness
Covering the face with its hair
Folding its hands
Bowing its head
Uttering only one name on its lips
O Forgiving and Merciful One!
O Forgiving and Merciful One![118]

The markets and palaces of Kufa were the first ones through which Zainab passed after her brother's martyrdom. Kufa was the capital of Ali and the city from which Husain received invitations. Zainab had to make the painful passage through the city before she arrived in Damascus, Yazid's capital. Traditional accounts present the most heart-wrenching images of Zainab's suffering in this city: Her veil, the attire of honor for women of that time, was mercilessly snatched and she was forced to cover her face with her hair. Yet, in the face of all this, she invokes the name of the Merciful at every step.

This poem, however, is written in the first person mode with no mention of the name "Zainab." It is as though the poet herself is retracing her steps in history and reading her own struggle into that of Zainab. As Gopichand Narang points out, through such words, Parvin Shakir "speaks" Zainab's language, thereby "erasing the distance of centuries."[119] Shakir views Zainab's struggle in the context of the struggles of women before her, and of those who followed her. Thus, Zainab's suffering is resurrected through the poet's own suffering. Shakir only hopes to remain steadfast, like those who were martyred at Karbala, in such trying times:

May I remain steadfast in the thirst of many an hour
May the soul grant me the strength of Karbala in the desert of affliction.[120]

Vahid Akhtar (d. 1996), who taught philosophy at the Aligarh Muslim University,[121] further elaborates Zainab's contributions to the cause of justice. In the preface to his elegy commemorating Zainab, Akhtar writes:

The tongue of Zainab accomplished a greater task than the swords of Husain and Abbas. In the market of Kufah, in Ibn Ziyad's court, throughout the patience-testing journey till Syria, among the crowds of Damascus, among the throngs of the world at the court of king-

ship, and in the face of Yazid's insults—at all these instances if there was a sword that was raised and then struck the heads of oppression and falsehood, it was either the sword of Zainab's sermons or the miracle of the the tongue of the Fourth Imam.[122]

Zainab, for Akhtar, is the combination of all the heroes of Islam and inextricably bound not only to the cause of Husain but to the overall cause of the Prophet of Islam:

Fragrance is not separate from the rose
Nor is the rose separate from the rose garden
Sorrow is not separate from the soul
Nor is the soul separate from the body
Blood is not separate from the heart
Nor is the heart separate from the heartbeat
Neither poetry from the poet
Nor the poet from the art is separate
Truth is from the Quran,
The Quran from the Messenger of God
Karbala is from the martyrs
The martyrs from Zainab.
. . . . . .
Just as the name of Islam is with the name of Muhammad
The names of Zainab and Shabbir cannot be separated
She is the noblest of women, he is the leader of the caravan of truth
With him martyrdom begins and with her it ends
The life purpose of Zainab and Shabbir is one
The volumes are two, but the style of writing and the meaning of what is written is one.[123]

The preponderance of the ghazal language manifests itself once again. Zainab's authority, in the eyes of Vahid Akhtar, is also enhanced because she pens a "new history"[124] by propagating Husain's cause after her brother's martyrdom. She becomes the guardian of the two most precious things the Prophet left behind, his progeny and the Quran. In the poetry of Vahid Akhtar, as in the poetry of Parvin Shakir and Iftikhar Arif, Zainab becomes the signifier of an everlasting Karbala. She is, so to speak, bound to the aesthetic of preservation. The narrative landscape of Karbala needs a repository in which the remnants of the battle fought on the Euphrates are preserved, and it is Zainab's model that nurtures the future Husains. Through her sword-like sermons, she rallies people to Husain's cause in order to fill the void left by the murder of the Prophet's grandson. By commencing the tradition of commemoration, she preserves the invaluable message of Islam for perpetuity.

The figuration of Zainab in this narrative landscape also evinces the need for a feminine dimension in this story. Again, in this dimension of reformist literature, as in Rashid Turabi's majlis, it is axiomatic that women can complement the struggle of men by waging their own war. While this struggle is

not with a sword, it is just as forceful with the tongue, with patience. In order for Karbala to be the model for an ideal life, it needs to articulate both masculine and feminine ideals. Thus, Karbala is constructed with the feminine as an integral component. After all, reforming the worlds of women had been an age-old concern for the reformists—for if nothing else, these worlds were cradles for future men. In Zainab's war, too, we see the accommodation of her reformist agenda within her overall role as the caretaker of the Prophet's family. She is employed discursively as a model of Islamic femininity, while retaining her signification as a challenge to the most formidable of unjust male authorities.

When Ismat Chughtai pursues the efficacy of Karbala as a universal paradigm in her novel-rendition *Ek qaṭ̣rah-e ḳhūn, A Drop of Blood,* she maintains Zainab's depiction from popular majlis discourses. Although Zainab's voice in Chughtai's work counters the Kufans, and Zainab's words create sheer awe in the audiences who listen to her, the generally iconoclastic Chughtai has remained surprisingly meek in this novel as far as the use of interpretive license is concerned. Dedicated to the great marsiya writer Mir Anis, this novel is a prose recasting of Anis' elegiac poetry. Remaining scrupulously faithful to Anis' versions of Karbala, Ismat Chughtai glorifies the humane, family-oriented dimensions of the heroes of Karbala, especially those of Husain. Yet, the determination of Husain and his companions to fight injustice is never overridden by such glorifications. The stated aspiration of the author is that such battles must be waged at all times and in all places. Chughtai reminds her readers about the utility as well as universality of Husain's struggle in the foreword of the novel itself:

> This is the story of those seventy-two human beings who confronted imperialism for the sake of human rights. This fourteen-hundred-year old story is today's story, for even today a human being's greatest enemy is another human. Even today, the standard-bearer of humanity is human. Even today, in any corner of the world, when a Yazid raises his head, then a Husain moves forward to crush him. Even today, light is on guard to combat darkness.[125]

Insofar as the symbol of Karbala constitutes an attack on the religious establishment, the Progressive writers use this pivotal symbol from the discourse of the religious establishment to attack this very realm. Of course this is not a new phenomenon. Agents of resistance have long appropriated concepts advanced by their oppressors and given them new meanings in order to fight the dominating forces with the weapons provided by these very forces.[126] As we have already discussed, the essence of much Sufi writing involves going beyond the obvious, the manifest, the apparent, and challenging the hegemonic structures. At times, doing this entails parodying the obvious to disinvest it of its monopolizing status. In Progressive Urdu prose, Sadat Hasan Manto (1912–1955), Ismat Chughtai's close friend, performs this function singularly well.

The tumultuous events of 1947 (when the subcontinent was partitioned to create the nation-states of India and Pakistan) provided Manto the raw material for his short story "Yazid."[127] The story centers on Karim Dad, a young man whose father was brutally murdered during the partition violence. Although the entire village reviles the murderers of his father, Karim Dad remains silent. When pressed to comment, he only says: "Whatever has befallen us, it is due to our own mistakes."[128] While the village is still mourning his father, Karim Dad marries a woman whose brother was also killed in partition-related violence. While Karim Dad despises tears, his wife mourns perpetually for her dead brother. "My love, let go of this [sorrow]," Karim Dad tells his wife, "Who knows how many more deaths we will have to see in our lifetimes. At least save some tears in your eyes."[129] The wife ponders how a stonehearted man like Karim Dad could exist. In due time she becomes pregnant and Karim Dad is ecstatic at this news.

Meanwhile rumors are rampant that the people of India are blocking the rivers that supply water to this Pakistani village. When Karim Dad's wife asks him about the consequences of this action, he casually replies: "Our crops will be destroyed."[130] The joy of a potential new family member seems to mask all other concerns for Karim Dad. His wife, however, is afraid that these ominous developments will foment another Karbala. Of course, implicit in this allusion to Karbala is the identification of the Indian side that is blocking water to Pakistan with the side of Yazid. Thus, Karim Dad's village, whose water was being blocked, is identified with Husain's side.

The life of the village is characterized by hatred and name-calling. Some villagers are so transfixed by this rhetoric that they even curse the first Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. On one occasion, Karim Dad is no longer able to bear the venom heaped on India and he warns one of the abusers, "Don't curse anybody."[131] When pressed to explain his stance against casting aspersions, Karim Dad tells the villagers that abuse should only be showered upon the enemy when there is no other constructive alternative because this incessant abuse is self-defeating. When India is signified as *"dushman"* or enemy, says Karim Dad, then all sorts of injustices should be expected from the enemy because the enemy has to live up to its signification. He tells another villager: "Why do you remember that only it [India] is our enemy? Aren't we its enemy too? If it were up to us, we too would block [India's] food and water supply."[132] He thus calls into question the very efficacy of such a rhetoric of animosity.

After explaining his position on this issue, Karim Dad returns home, where he is given the wonderful news of his son's birth. When asked to name his son, Karim Dad thinks for a moment and says "Yazid!" Her anxiety understandably compounded, the wife raises a squeamish scream: "What are you saying? Yazid!" "So what? It's just a name," ripostes Karim Dad. The wife can only say "But whose name?" Karim Dad replies thoughtfully "It's not necessary that this will be the same Yazid. That [Yazid] cut off the river's water. This [Yazid] will restart it!"[133]

By ending his story with an undermining of the most significant of the signifiers of oppression, Manto not only imbues Yazid with the most protean of qualities (at a socio-satirical level, Manto reminds us that Yazid is among all of us) but also rebuts any attempt to reify the signified by essentializing the signifier. The author implies, in effect, that any relationship between the signifier and the signified should not necessarily be irrevocable, nor should it be held hostage to self-interest. Manto rescripts Yazid from a dreadful tyrant into a mother's newborn and invites his audience to identify with the Other not as an incendiary object but as familial. By according the Other, the enemy, the outsider, the rank of one's own product, by enriching the slender narrative of Yazid that we have encountered time and again, Manto's story effects a formidable discourse of the philosophy of ethics and presages the published writings of Emmanuel Levinas (1905–1995) that have similar moralistic overtones. This story also highlights the way the act of naming children has become a disproportionately male prerogative. Although it is the woman who gives birth, her role frequently recedes when the time comes to name the child, as in the case of Karim Dad and his wife.

Arguing for the importance of the discipline of humanities in the United States, Gayatri Spivak, a leading cultural critic of our own time, invokes the sentiments of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., "I have to imagine the humanity of those who are designated my enemies."[134] Spivak says "And this ability to imagine is trained by the teaching in the humanities. Once we trivialize the teaching of the humanities, there is a huge cultural loss." While Manto imagines the humanity of the enemy, of Yazid, better than anyone else in the Urdu literature of the twentieth-century, we must not forget that the wholesale rejection of the "enemy" is something that has itself been rejected in the historical realm of Perso-Indian poetic landscapes.

Manto's rescription of Yazid resonates with the initial verse of the much-celebrated, augury-generating Persian poet, Khwaja Shamsuddin Hafiz (1326–1389 C.E.): "O Cupbearer! Pour more wine, and send one more round of drinks." Not only is this the first verse of Hafiz's poetry collection, but it is also a verse attributed to Yazid ibn Muawiya. Why would Hafiz begin his own work of poetry with a line from the composition of the notorious Yazid? Hafiz's answer was: "Which of you seeing a dog running away with a diamond would not stop him, and take the jewel from his unclean mouth?"[135] Hafiz felt that the verse was beautiful and perhaps he wanted to underscore the point that it does not matter how dreadful or ugly the carrier of beauty is. What is required of the aesthete, like the mystic, is to go beyond the *ad hominem* charges or hero worship and benefit from the beauty of the message.

This stance against blind hero worship, or enemy cursing (past and present) corresponds to the sentiments of Azim Amrohavi's "New Karbala." This poem was written in the aftermath of the 2002 pogroms against the Muslim minority population in the West Indian state of Gujarat. After a train compartment carrying Hindu pilgrims from the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh to Gujarat was cruelly set ablaze, the Muslim population of Gujarat was rocked

by terrible violence. Provoked by the state's negligence, if not by its outright encouragement, these pogroms against Muslims were a serious setback to post-1947 India's cherished claims of secularism. The tragic cadence of this event is charted by Amrohavi in the following:

> New is the thirst, the Karbala and Yazids
> New are the Shimrs, Hurmulas, Khulis
> New houses in flames, living up to the age-old rituals,
> Blood on earth, air filled with smoke of burning corpses
> New spears, new arrows, new daggers,
> New, very new, are all the shimmering swords
> Today, all things are new in the world—
> for the sake of oppression and tyranny,
> for the sake of subjugation and repression,
> for the sake of wrath and anger,
> for the sake of hypocrisy and guile,
> but . . . . . .
> New Husain, the world is unable to create
> Earth calls out to a new Husain,
> Humanity summons a new Husain,
> Countries fetch for a new Husain,
> In vain, you await a new Husain.
> No new Husain will come to this world,
> And hence: Our times demand of us,
> We must not fear the Yazid of our time,
> We shall overwhelm oppression and tyranny,
> the only way we can:
> by embracing the determination of Husain[136]

In these verses, the poet eschews expectations from a single figure, whether religious or political. He does not invest all his hope in a particular person, rather the poet embraces the determination to combat tyranny. This determination is on the same continuum as the signification that Karim Dad bestows upon his son, or that Hafiz bestows upon the verse of Yazid. Names come to naught, deeds count for much.

Conclusion

The presence of the Karbala text invokes two important themes pertinent to socioreligious reform and the Progressive discourses. First, by participating in the discursive practices of various resistive agendas, it provides an emotionally charged metaphor through which ideal reformist conduct is shaped and defined. Second, the very memory of Karbala becomes a subversive force. The continuous use of the image of Karbala keeps up an unyielding resistance to the status quo. Karbala becomes an important model that demonstrates how

those in a minority can redress the asymmetry of power. Whether the ideological spine of the larger resistive projects is provided by Marxism (Josh, Jafri) or re-fashioned mysticism (Manto), by nationalism (Premchand), or by solidarity forged with the Palestinians (Jalib, Jafri), these projects are subsumed discursively in the Karbala symbol.

The symbol of Karbala is universalized to provide a paradigm for all the oppressed peoples of the world. For the reformist-Progressives, who use the symbol of Karbala, the unity of King and Husain, of Marx and Husain, of Gandhi and Husain, of the children of Beirut and Husain, of the ideal student and Husain, of Manto's "Yazid" and Husain, is sustained at a metaphoric level so as to infuse Husain's struggle with meanings relevant for their contemporary age.

While the Progressives explored points of contacts among local, national, and international issues of justice through the symbolic deployment of Karbala, ironically, many of these same Progressive writers were also complicit in regional snobbery and particular types of censorship, especially of literature with explicit sexual themes. Unfortunately, the intolerant attitude that certain Progressive writers had toward other Progressives and reformists sundered their political vision of the ultimate victory of the downtrodden from its triumphant fulfillment. So in spite of the populist spirit enshrined in the ideals of the Progressive Writers' Movement, a mass movement for social justice never reached its fruition under the Progressive auspices. But these shortcomings should not detract us from marking the legacy of this movement as one which made a concrete effort to rescue the language of religion from the hands of religious exclusivists.[137]

The reformists and the Progressives we have discussed in this chapter blur and transfigure the exclusivist religious dimension of Karbala, in what amounts to a reclaiming of the religious language. These writers and poets, like many Sufis, posit a challenge to the signifying process that operates within religious institutions. But although there has been a deliberate repudiation of religious institutions in both the mystical and the reformist contexts, the language of religion remains evident in the literatures of these contexts. Karbala carries implications for reform that do not have to be channeled through the existing religious institutions. The continually reworked figuration of Karbala in the reformist context is akin to its figuration in the mystical as well as the commemorative contexts: It shows the wide latitude of narrative and poetic license that has been at the disposal of generations of authors in all three of these often intermingling contexts. Notwithstanding these similarities, Karbala, at least in the reformist literature that we have surveyed, is neither turned into sectarian polemic nor into an abstract mystical experience.

At times the progressive Urdu writers, like their mystical counterparts, contended with the hostility not only of the religious establishment but also of their respective governments. Makhdum, Manto, Chughtai, Faiz, Jafri, Jalib, and Faraz were censured and maligned. Prison sentences and death threats were all seen as part of redemptive suffering in the cause of justice.[138] As Faiz Ahmad Faiz put it so eloquently:

jo ham pe guzrī so guzrī magar shab-e hijrāñ
hamāre ashk terī ʿāqibat sañvār chale[139]

Whatever happened to us has happened—but, O night of separation!
Our tears have flowed on to adorn you hereafter

Thus the Karbala aesthetic, an aesthetic of righteous suffering, becomes deeply intertwined with socioreligious reform rhetoric and (in Manto's case) with the ethics of dealing with the Other. A richer symbol can scarcely be imagined. Urdu socioreligious reform literature becomes an intertextual intersection between the seventh-century event of Karbala and contemporary society. It provides an episteme and a source of propelling moral convictions for various reform agendas. The present struggles acquire meanings through the rhetorically-deployed past. This past, at times, becomes a part of the vision of the future. The vision of the historic Karbala is transposed onto the present world of the reformer-writer, while the present world provides these writers with the idiom to speak of and for the past. The result is a circularity (with ever-changing concentricity) in that Karbala assumes meaning against the background of current events, and simultaneously invests the contemporary crises with a vision of importunate reform. The signifier-symbol can initiate the rebirth of modern society, just as the signified-event had symbolically rescued Islam in the reign of Yazid.

If we broaden identity politics to include devotional expressions of Hindus and Sikhs, Karbala also looms imaginatively large in the discourse of struggle for universal justice. Through the invocations of this charged symbol, the reformer-poets/writers whom we discussed attempt to rhetorically reconstruct the lives of their imagined forebears, to profit from their examples, and to follow in their footsteps to create a better world. If invoking the struggles of Husain and King means the road to the gallows, then so be it. The final line of Makhdum's elegy, with which we commenced this discussion of the symbol of Karbala in Urdu reformist literature, itself calls for a new beginning:

kamīna sharṭ-e vafā tark-e sar buvad Ḥāfiẓ
baro guzār-e tu in kār gar namī āyad

The least condition of fidelity is to give up the head, Hafiz
If you are not capable of this, begone!

Conclusion

bujhā dī sāre zamāne kī tishnagī jis ne
ʿajīb pyās hai jo Karbalā se miltī hai

That which satiated the parchedness of a whole generation—
It is an extraordinary thirst that comes from Karbala
Mahdi Nazmi

żikr-e ġham-e Ḥusain se maḥfil sajī rahī
gul ho gayā chirāġh magar raushnī rahī

Through the remembrance of Husain's sorrow, the gathering remained vibrant
The lamp was extinguished, but the light remained
Saeed Shahidi Saeed

The last time I saw Saeed Shahidi Saeed (1914–2000) was on January 1, 1999.[1] It was a crisp, sunny day, vibrant with good wishes for a new year. I had last seen Saeed in 1997, on the eve of ashura, in a dimly-lit assembly hall in Hyderabad. That evening, in a pain-ridden trembling voice, amidst the sobs of a thousand or more Shias, Saeed had beautifully rendered the sentiments of Zainab, as she prepared herself for the tragedy about to befall her family: "On the eve of *ʿāshūr*, Zainab said 'O Night, favor me and pass slowly; O Night, please pass slowly—*aʾe rāt żara āhista guzar*.' " Saeed's simple yet poignant language expressed the sentiments of a sister who did not want the night to overtake her momentary comfort, for she knew that in the wake of this darkness, her brother would be taken from her. This nauha was not laced with rhetorical flourishes that call for an employment of elaborate interpretive tools; its innocence spoke to the devotees' hearts. Saeed was famous for writing such verses, verses remarkable for their sincere simplicity and crystal-like inten-

sity. Saeed was, for the last four decades of the twentieth century, one of Hyderabad's most popular poets. A versatile poet, scion of the prominent Hyderabadi Shii family of Shahid Yar Jung, Saeed was also a brilliant mathematician who had secured the highest mark in the 1929 statewide mathematics final exam. Not only did he decipher complex astronomical and mathematical equations and write poignant elegies, he also composed the most widely recited modern ghazals in Hyderabad. On the lips of popular qawwals and the inimitable ghazal singer Begum Akhtar, within the gatherings commemorating Husain's last moments or in those celebrating the Prophet's birthday, Saeed's oeuvre lent memorably to a broad range of performances.

Whenever Saeed's elegies were recited in our family commemorations, people showered praise upon him and speculated as to the possible basis of his uniquely affective poetry. Perhaps the personal tragedy of his young son's death in 1961 had impacted his allusions to Karbala. The verses he composed prior to 1961 reflected *shoḳhī* (playfulness), whereas his verses after that year overflowed with *soz o gudāz* (smoldering pain and sorrow). In reading Saeed's nauhas, then, the audience recalls not only the tragedy of Karbala, but also the tragedy in the life of their contemporary poet, who so lovingly painted the images of Karbala.

Given that Saeed was such a towering figure in Hyderabad's culture, I wished to elicit from him, for the purpose of the present study, his thoughts on the processes and inspirations that molded his Karbala poetry. What specifically spurred his writings? What did he see as the difference between writing nauhas and ghazals? To what extent was he expected to honor the historical and aesthetic impulses of his predecessors? In short, without invoking the term "intertextuality," I hoped to discuss this concept with him.

As our discussion began over tea on that New Year's day, Saeed told a personal anecdote that encapsulated many of the issues in which I was interested. Rather than delving into his personal relationship with Karbala, he took me back in time to an occasion in the 1960s, the precise date of which he had forgotten. At a certain *ṭaraḥī mushāʿira*—a poetry gathering in which the *ṭaraḥ* (a pattern/model verse with a particular meter-rhyme structure or *zamīn*)[2] is given—the participants were asked to compose an impromptu ghazal based on a tarah devised by the master poet of Urdu, Mirza Ghalib: *ghiste ghiste pāʾōn meñ zañjīr ādhī rah gaʾī*. Saeed was naturally familiar with Ghalib's famous couplet in this pattern:

ghiste ghiste pāʾōn meñ zañjīr ādhī rah gaʾī
mar gaʾe par qabr meñ taʿmīr ādhī rah gaʾī[3]

Chafing and abrading, the chains that shackled my feet were half worn away
I died, but [my] construction in [my] grave remained just half completed

Interestingly enough, this pattern couplet was itself inspired by Ghalib's patron, the last Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar, a legendary Urdu poet himself, who wrote:

khiñch ke qātil jab terī shamshīr ādhī rah gaʾī
ġham se jān-e ʿāshiq-e dilgīr ādhī rah gaʾī[4]

O Slayer, when you drew your sword only halfway out of its scabbard
Because of grief, only half a life remained for this heart-stricken lover

Zafar's couplet is a typical ghazal couplet, describing the oppressive beloved who does not pull out the sword at once and kill his lover, but teases half the life out of his victim by drawing the sword only halfway out of its sheath. Ghalib retains the suffering, restless lover as his theme and using the long-established image of the tormented, Qais-like lover in chains,[5] he accounts for the abrasion of the lover's chains or fetters. The lover has been dragged by the throes of love to such an extent that when he dies, his chains are half eroded. However, the half of the chain still remaining signals his incompleteness as a lover. He did not endure all the suffering that was needed for the entire chain to be worn away. So when this half-constructed lover is buried, he complains that life did not give him the opportunity to prove himself a consummate lover. The cruel beloved did not even allow the lover (by granting him a longer time to suffer) to wear his chains away completely so he could pass for a complete lover. Even though the lover suffered till he died, his existential potential was only half-constructed at his death.

When this pattern-verse by Ghalib was performed at the 1960s poetry reading, various poets improvised couplets patterned after Ghalib's. The couplet that framed the above pattern in the image of Karbala, and met with the vocal approval of the audience, was the following one by Saeed:

Karbalā thī muntaẓir takmīl kī is vāsṭe
ḳhwāb-e Ibrāhīm kī taʿbīr ādhī rah gaʾī[6]

The plains of Karbala awaited fulfillment
Because Abraham's dream remained but half-realized

Islamic lore holds that the Prophet Abraham, having dreamt of God's command to sacrifice his son Ismail, was willing to undertake this sacrifice. However, God spared Abraham the agony and replaced Ismail with a ram. While Abraham displayed courageous willingness to sacrifice his son, the Imam Husain concretized Abraham's willingness. The tenth of the last Islamic month, *Żul ḥijja*, is the date when Abraham's determination to obey God is celebrated; and the tenth of the first month of the Islamic calendar, Muharram, commemorates the perfection of the tradition of sacrifice—perfection enacted by none other than a direct descendant of Abraham. Drawing on the traditions of Islamic history and a meter-rhyme pattern set over a century ago, Saeed's verse encapsulates the religious logic of the battle of Karbala. The tradition of martyrdom that God commanded Abraham to initiate needed to be taken to its climax. Husain, frequently referred to as *Wariṡ-e Ibrāhīm*, or the Heir of Abraham, had to manifest, through his sacrifices, the extent to which God's humble servants can go to please the Almighty. Of course, Saeed follows the pattern

of reflecting upon Husain's virtues as superior to the best of the prophets and saints.

Hence, with his improvised couplet, Saeed gives a new dimension to the pattern of love poetry set by Bahadur Shah Zafar and Ghalib. Neither Ghalib nor Zafar made explicit allusions to Karbala in their ghazals, but Saeed, through his sentiments, adds a different ethos to the literature of the past. By recalling the 1960s poetry assembly, Saeed wanted me to see that the writing of both poetry and history is context-bound and one has to resort to imagination when speaking of these discourses:

> shāʿirī aur tārīḳh zamāñ aur makāñ ki qaid se āzād nahīñ ho saktī, magar taḳhayyul kī parvāz gumān ki ḥaddoñ ko pār kar saktī hai
>
> Poetry and history cannot be free from the prison of time and space but the flight of imagination can traverse the limits of thought.[7]

The ability to write good poetry or good history, the poet told me, depends on the educational training (*tāʿlīm*), sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), insight (*baṣīrat*), and devotion/faith (*ʿaqīdah*) of the poet or historian. The rest of our conversation was grounded in the discussion of the poetry of Mir, Ghalib, Anis, Dabir, and Iqbal.

I wanted to ask Saeed about the son he had lost, how that loss affected his poetry, how he read Karbala through his own personal sorrow. But considering the cheerful enthusiasm he showed in discussing poetry, history, and religion, and taking into account that it was New Year's day, I could not bring myself to raise the subject. Perhaps Muharram would have been a better occasion for such a question. Thus, my curiosity regarding the links between Saeed's self-reflexivity and his Karbala-related writings remains unsatisfied. Although I was not privy to his personal mental landscape of suffering a child's loss, which I speculate may be conjured up more by his devotees than by him, I was grateful to him for generously sharing his time and knowledge, providing me with insights into the literary, historical, and religious landscape of Karbala. Our conversations, more than anything else, reinforced the notion that religious concepts accrue meanings through their temporal and spatial "prisons."

In this study, Karbala emerges as a polyphonic symbol that acquires meaning through the social and political apparatuses that engage it. Produced by a collective of factors, it is serviceable for a wide variety of purposes. These factors and purposes are themselves engaged in negotiations, in unison at times, and alone at others. The texts pertaining to Karbala and the contexts of its symbolic invocations are, among other things, amenable to overlapping interpretations and constituted by the shifting ideals of "interpretive communities." In the context of the majlis, Karbala underscores the virtues of the Imam Husain, his companions, and his family members. The devotion expressed to these luminaries of Islam, whether through shedding tears or blood, endorses the heroes' suffering. The very context of the majlis ritualistically bridges the sacred past and the present, the martyrs and their devotees, ideals and realities. Parallels between the circulation of this narrative and popular cultural trends, whether generated by the ghazal universe or Bollywood images, bespeak the manner

in which religious discourses in South Asia are encoded by themes and images of other discourses. A discussion of the Anis-Dabir rivalry offers insights into the creative accretions to Karbala narratives that emerged from the competitive literary spirit of nineteenth-century Lucknow.

The efficacy of Karbala is also evident in the context of qawwali, a context that has the potential to challenge the literalist readings of Islam and Karbala. At times, this forum invokes Karbala in much the same way as a majlis, but is more celebratory in its overall appeal: Karbala is brought to life through a sparkling mix of wine and sword imagery, signifying the felicity that results from partaking of divine love and exemplary martyrdom. Love and martyrdom become desired actualities that the qawwali audiences cherish via knot-laden, musical Sufism.

By building substantially upon Sufi discourses, Muhammad Iqbal, Maulana Azad, and Muhammad Ali Jauhar poise Karbala as an event to draw Muslims into a firm allegiance to a trans-Shii reformist model. These writers also redefine age-old concepts in the light of their own sociopolitical needs: Iqbal, for example, configures the notion of khudi as a hard-won desired self rather than reading it in the Sufi parlance as the ego or conceit that displaces humility and constitutes a barrier between God and His creation. The struggle over religious language continues in the Progressive Movement. Although devotion to the martyrs and their cause invariably permeates the Urdu socioreligious reformist rhetoric and Progressive ideologies that we have discussed, Karbala is, by and large, imagined in this context as a universalized symbol that beckons all righteous minorities to confront oppressive majorities by emulating the struggles of Husain and Zainab. Through Karbala, the reformist writers envisage a better world, born anew each time a similar battle is waged. While speaking through the discourse of the universalization of Karbala, writers such as Premchand take Karbala beyond the framework of Islam and exploit its nationalist cachet. The symbol's most significant use is when it becomes an intertextual locus that accommodates multiple textual as well as contextual loci. It is a story told through many other stories, a pattern set forth by other patterns, and yet it continuously blurs social and generic contours, belying reification.

I have also shown in this study how a single symbol variously serves the functions of building a communal/sectarian identity and transcending that identity, how it is at once tied to a particular self-serving religious language and ecumenical, and how it is riddled with tension between the global and the local. Religious, communal, national, regional, and linguistic identities make incursions into each other through Karbala, broadening their respective domains and proliferating their vocabularies. Thus a study of Karbala attenuates the ease with which we can speak of Shii, Sunni, Sufi, Hindu, religious, secular, or diasporic—all of them implicated within the discourses of each, and existing in an unending bind of reciprocity.

Multiple struggles inhere within the constructed space of this symbol, as Karbala grants endurance to a wide variety of causes: Husain versus Yazid; Zainab versus Yazid; Ali versus Abu Bakr, Umar, Usman, and Muawiya; Fati-

ma versus Abu Bakr; Shia versus Sunni; base ego versus the higher self; Sufi khudi versus Iqbal's khudi; sobriety versus intoxication; affection versus duty; death versus life; Martin Luther King Jr. versus American racism; Gandhi versus British colonialism; Yazid-like capitalism versus Husain-like Marxism; faithful Hindu versus hypocritical Muslim; Sahas Rai and his brothers versus Yazid's army; Manto's signified-Yazid versus Manto's signifier-Yazid; and many more. Although these striking binaries are obviously constitutive of the symbol, the symbol's nuanced overlapping intertextual and intercontextual alignments, quite elusive at times, cannot be effaced. Also, the themes of commemoration, devotion, sacrifice, celebration, reform, and emulation, while remaining overarching in particular contexts, can easily transcend these contexts and be abstracted from the symbol's general textual landscape.

Karbala also emerges as an unyielding site of alterity, a contestation of various forms of hegemony: In the majlis context, Karbala constitutes an alterity by articulating a Shii reading of Islamic history; in the qawwali context, Karbala bids for significance by undermining the outward, at times superficial, expressions of Islam; in the socioreligious reformist context, Karbala persistently and passionately calls for a re-evaluation of the status quo. Hence the symbol of Karbala, through its alterity, symbolically confers agency upon and opens up spaces for many a challenge to dominant discourses. The invariant element of resistance that it brings to the fore is worth stressing.

Thus, born in Iraq, or some might say at that spot on which Ali's right to the leadership of the Muslim community was usurped, the story of Karbala is embraced and nurtured, not to mention redesigned and mobilized, around the world. Its geographical and religious displacements do not necessitate its dilution. It is the fulfillment of a vision, Abrahamic perhaps, as Saeed would say; but it also inspires perennial envisioning. Its supreme hero is undoubtedly Husain, but not to the exclusion of Fatima's womb and Zainab's sword that safeguarded this martyred paragon and his calling; of Muhammad's love and Ali's righteousness that Husain had inherited; of Zain al-Abedin's forbearance, Qasim's grace, Abbas's fidelity, Sakina's innocence, Shahr Bano's agony, and Ali Asghar's thirst that constantly satiates Husain's devotees year after year; of Hurr's overnight transformation on the day of ashura in 680 C.E. that keeps hope alive till the final hour. Its symbolic identity cannot persist apart from its relationship with its other—much like Manto's Yazid. Manto's Yazid plays adroitly with a venerable Sufi sentiment: God's creation, with every breath, is renewed afresh. This renewal takes place in the most far-reaching sense, metamorphosing the enemy into the friend, the provincial into the universal, and vice versa.

But as I conclude my engagement with Karbala in this work, several questions remain. What can we extrapolate from our discussion of Karbala that would contribute to our larger understanding of Islam? What is the utility of a symbol that can serve multiple agendas and retreat into easy platitudes? How wise is it to privilege a religiously informed reading of the world at the expense of readings springing from issues of imperialism, colonialism, class, gender or race? Does Karbala rob its devotees of the imagination to look at the world

through different paradigms? How can we cast a different lens on area studies through these readings of Karbala?

I pursue the last question first: by bringing together ethnographic views of lived contexts and highlighting the traffic that moves back and forth between traditions and regions, this work makes revealing inroads into area studies and religious studies, focusing specifically on how the language of religion is negotiated across contexts and continents. It offers frameworks and analyses that lie beyond the Middle East but still engage in a dialogic relationship with those from that region: Gandhi's deployment of Karbala, Hezbollah's deployment of Gandhi, Iqbal's serviceability for the Iranian reformers, the "dot.com" utility for majlises in the United States, Rumi's presence in qawwalis, or Rashid Turabi's majlises, all are ever more plainly at odds with the imperative to fix cultural boundaries with impunity.

Speaking to whether this discussion of Karbala will contribute to a better understanding of Islamicate cultures, I assert that Karbala, like Islam, is organic. Both the languages of Islam and the languages of Karbala are subject to revisions and re-visionings as one mode of speaking displaces and obscures the other. Zainab's heroism can speak the language of Karbala, but so can Gandhi's satyagraha. Those who speak through the idioms of Karbala, however, like many of those who invoke Islam for particular agendas, do not always labor for common causes. Even though Karbala may appear in the discourses of martyrdom, as Islam may appear within the discourses of jihad, these discourses are not standard or uniform in any way. The recollections and refashionings of Karbala, like those of Islam, are invariably affected by the slant of their sources and contexts.

In the post-September 11 world of rigid and clashing dualities, Islam's predictive value is held in its inability to live with other worldviews. This work calls for a re-assessment of Islam, by looking at the matrices of wider discourses that this religion occupies. Interpretations of Islam, like those of any other religion, are consequent upon various extra-religious factors. Many Muslims feel that provisions for transforming the modes in which Islam exists are inherent within their religion: One could participate in a solemn commemorative gathering for the martyrs of Karbala while rebuking the religious authority who presides over this gathering. One could shed tears over the narratives of Karbala while appreciating the oblique presence of humor in these gatherings. If nineteenth-century residents of Lucknow envisioned the heroes of Karbala as variations of eleventh-century Persian epic heroes, then twentieth-century elegy reciters from Hyderabad can selectively borrow from the tunes of India's film industry. Karbala-related narratives that did not exist in the eighth century can become an integral part of this story for some a few centuries later.

But we must also exercise caution, so as to not make the evocations of Karbala a product of free-ranging speculations or random and fickle aesthetic deployments. It is important to acknowledge that Karbala discourses, like all other discourses, are formulated and enlivened according to factors operative through the entangled mechanisms of power relations in a given spatiotemporal order, and these discourses cannot be purged of the asymmetrical distri-

bution of authority and legitimacy that is not solely a problem of Muslim peoples. A forthright study of the practices of Islam, as of other religions, poses numerous challenges to any reading of religion that does not take into account collateral historical, political, economic, and conventional filters.

For a generation or more of scholars in the social sciences and in literary studies, religion itself was not considered a legitimate and serious expression of cultural understandings and imagination. For those who were drawn to the grand theories of Marxism and Freudian psychology, religion could not provide an analytical perspective on societal functions and thus could be discounted as a discourse subservient to the workings of economics, language, and the subconscious. But the political crises stemming from South America, the Middle East, and South Asia have directed the attention of many of these people to the ways in which religion plays a sociopolitical role. In order to fully comprehend this role, however, complexity must be restored to religion's historical narratives, its lyric perspectives, its dialogic instances, and its embarrassing discords.

This said, I must also sound a cautionary note: We should beware of notions that lock us into the creation of religious explications and apologies for causes and issues that are more about concrete sociopolitical and economic grievances—grievances that might seek refuge in the language of religion, but are, essentially, acts of desperation. Religion should not be over-read and privileged or cast as a convenient alibi, because other explanatory frameworks seem too complicated, risky, or painful to articulate. The struggle over the language of religion that I bring to light in this study is, at one level, a metaphor for struggles over resources, ideas, and identities. Unfortunately many projections of Islam in the West only attribute religious significance to issues that stem from economic and political crises. This religious significance has been exaggerated to such a degree that in many instances, one cannot find space left to speak of the regions of the Middle East or South Asia, or even the day-to-day lives of Muslim peoples, unless one submits to fetishize "their" religious penchants in monologic discourses. Not only does this process of signification strip people of their history, culture, and aesthetics, but it also clouds the amalgam of issues that compel people to speak and act in a particular way. Islam and Karbala then are as much about politics as they are about religious devotion or polemics insulated from the larger world.

Karbala's positive interventions in a world of increasingly exclusivist and colluding narratives are twofold: It instills a dynamic questioning spirit for reading against the grain, and it offers a recourse to imagination. The interventions of a hallowed event turned into a symbol have been sustained by an adoring and richly diverse posterity for over a millennium. Perhaps the longevity of this symbol is borne out by the poignant Quranic verse with which we began this study: "Do not think of those who are slain in God's way as dead. Nay! They are alive and receive their sustenance from their Lord." Life and death, faith and devotion, sorrow and joy, hope and beauty—they defy categorical confinements and transcend any singular mode of being. No closure can be imposed on them.

Glossary

Prominent Personages in Karbala Narratives

When consulting this list and the glossary that follows, readers should remember that each of these terms is open to a wide variety of nuances and interpretations. This glossary is intended to provide basic information about Karbala personages and non-English words used in this book.

ʿAbbās "ʿalamdār": Husain's half-brother, the "standard-bearer" in the battle of Karbala. Husain's daughter, Sakina, was especially fond of him. He was martyred while bringing water to the thirsty children in Husain's camp.

Abū Bakr: First *ḵhalifa* (caliph) after the Prophet Muhammad's death. Sunnis regard him as the righteous, legitimate leader of the Muslim community; Shias see him as a usurper who displaced Ali from his rightful position.

Abū Ṭālib: Ali's father and the Prophet's uncle. His religious identity is a point of contestation between Shias and Sunnis: Many Sunnis believe that he did not embrace Islam, though he provided protection and shelter for the Prophet Muhammad when the latter's life was threatened. Shias believe that he embraced Islam but, for various reasons, practiced dissimulation (*taqiyya*).

ʿAlī: First Shii Imam; father of Husain, Hasan, Zainab, Kulsum, and Abbas; the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law; Fatima's husband; Shii identity is strongly tied to him, for they consider him the rightful successor to the Prophet and identify themselves as his "partisans." Many narrators of the Karbala event state or imply that the seeds of this tragedy were sown on the day Ali was deprived of the caliphate. Also known as **Ḥaidar** (the Lion), **Asadullāh** (the Lion of God), **Amīr al-Mominīn** (Commander of the Faithful), **Qurʾān-e Nāṭiq** (the Speaking Quran), and **Yadullāh** (the Hand of God).

ʿAlī Akbar: Husain's eighteen-year-old son who bore a striking resemblance to the Prophet; he was martyred fighting for his father's cause.

ʿAlī Aṣġhar: Husain's six-month-old son who was martyred in his father's arms.

ʿAun and Muḥammad: Zainab's young sons who were martyred with Husain in Karbala.

Bāno (Shahr Bāno): Husain's Persian wife and, according to some elegy-writers, Ali Asghar's mother.

Fāṭima: The "radiant" daughter of the Prophet; Ali's wife; mother of Hasan, Husain, Zainab, and Kulsum. She is venerated by many Muslims—Sunnis and Shias. She is believed to be present in mourning assemblies conducted for her family members.

Fāṭima Kubrā: Husain's daughter; she was married to Hasan's son moments before the battle of Karbala began.

Ḥasan ibn-e ʿAlī: Second Shii Imam; Husain's older brother; he was forced to give up his rightful leadership position by Muawiya. Shias believe that he was poisoned by forces that collaborated with Muawiya. He predeceased Husain.

Ḥurmala: The archer from Yazid's side who shot and killed Ali Asghar.

Ḥurr: A general from Yazid's army who underwent a spiritual transformation hours before the battle of Karbala and joined Husain's side.

Ḥusain ibn-e ʿAlī: Sayyid al-Shuhadā, the Leader of Martyrs; third Shii Imam; the supreme hero of Karbala and the Prophet Muhammad's younger grandson; also knows as Shabbir.

Muʿāwiya: Yazid's father and the first Umayyad caliph; he waged a war against Ali; he is vilified by Shias as a shrewd opportunist and an enemy of Islam.

Muḥammad: Muslims consider him the last Prophet of Allah who received divine revelation in the form of the Quran; Husain's grandfather.

Muslim ibn-e ʿAqīl: Imam Husain's cousin and emissary who was murdered in Kufa.

Qāsim: Hasan's son who married Husain's daughter Fatima Kubra.

Sakīna: Husain's young daughter.

Shimr: The soldier from Yazid's side who actually beheaded Husain.

ʿUmar: For Sunni Muslims, the second legitimate successor to the Prophet. For Shias, the usurper who succeeded Abu Bakr.

ʿUmar ibn-e Saʿd: Yazid's general who was directly responsible for waging the battle of Karbala.

Umm-e Kulṡūm (Kulsum): Sister of Zainab, Husain, and Hasan.

Umm-e Lailā (Laila): Husain's wife; Ali Akbar's mother.

Uṡmān (Osman): Third legitimate successor to the Prophet for Sunni Muslims. For Shias, a usurper like Abu Bakr and Umar.

Yazīd: Chief antagonist in the Karbala story; as the ruling Umayyad caliph, he demanded Husain's allegiance. When Husain refused, Yazid's forces martyred him and his followers.

Zainab: Husain's sister who became the caretaker of the Prophet's household after her brother's martyrdom.

Zain al-ʿĀbedīn: Fourth Shii Imam; Husain's son who did not fight in Karbala because of bad health.

Glossary

ahl al-bait/ahl-e bait: Members of the Prophet's household; to Shias, this means Ali, Fatima, and their descendants.

ʿalam: Standards used on the battlefield. The replicas of these standards adorn many Shii commemorative sites, especially during Muharram.

ʿālim: Religious authority who presumably has *ʿilm* (knowledge); pl. *ʿulamā*.

ʿāshūra: The tenth day of the first Islamic month of Muharram, the day on which the battle of Karbala took place.

ʿāshūrḳhāna: A commemorative site where celebratory and mourning assemblies for the Prophet's family are held. Also known as imambara.

ʿazā dārī: Practice of mourning for the martyrs of Karbala and other members of the Prophet's family.

Damascus: The capital city of Yazid's empire. Zainab gave memorable sermons in Yazid's court; she is also buried in this city.

fanā fi'llāh: A common Sufi concept that means annihilation in the Divine in order to attain subsistence in God (*baqā billāh*).

faẓā'il: The virtues and merits of the Prophet's family that constitute the first part of the zikr.

ġhazal: The most popular genre of Urdu poetry; it has an AA BA CA rhyme scheme and a prescribed meter; it also has a strong presence in other Islamicate languages. Although it is usually referred to as a "love lyric," it can contain wide-ranging themes, playful ambiguity, mystical insights, and humor. The tropes that inhabit the ghazal universe also influence other genres of Urdu poetry.

girah bañdī: The technique of "knot-tying" in qawwalis that allows the qawwals to interpolate verses from different sources into a single qawwali.

ḥadīs: The traditions and sayings of the Prophet for the Sunnis. For the Shias, this collection also includes the sayings of their Imams. In parts of South Asia, the majlis's sermon is also referred to as hadis.

ḥamd: Poetry in praise of God.

imām: For Shias, the term refers to the divinely appointed descendant of the Prophet who received his legitimacy from the previous Imam's designation. Many Shias also use this term to refer to highly-respected religious authorities who provide spiritual guidance for the community. For Sunnis, imams can be respected community leaders, prayer leaders, or religious authorities.

imāmbāṛa: Same as ashurkhana.

ḳhūdī: In many Sufi discourses, this word connotes the "base ego" that creates a schism between God and his creation, and hence needs to be eliminated. Iqbal, however, resignified this term as the existential "self" that needs to be developed and perfected so as to contribute positively to the larger society.

ḳhuṭba: A respected person's sermon, oration, or speech.

Kūfa: A city in Iraq, the residents of which had invited Husain to come from Medina to provide leadership for them. Husain was on his way to Kufa when he was intercepted and martyred. Many devotees of Husain believe that the people of Kufa did not come to Husain's support when his life was in danger. Several poets and writers discussed in this work use Kufa as a metaphor for hypocrisy and the people of Kufa as a metaphor for hypocrites.

majlis (pl. majālis—pluralized in this work as majlises): In the Shii context, com-

memorative assemblies held in honor of the martyred members of the Prophet's family.

marsiya: The elegy that usually has six-line stanzas with an AAAABB rhyme scheme.

maṣā'ib: The second part of the Shii zikr that recalls the hardships endured by the Prophet's family.

maʿṣūm: Infallible; for the Twelver Shias, this designation applies to the Prophet, Fatima, Ali, and the eleven Imams who followed him.

mātam: Mourning that is usually accompanied by breast-beating.

miñbar: The pulpit from which the zakir speaks in a majlis.

mushāʿira: Poetry readings.

namāz: The five prescribed ritual prayers that are required for Muslims. Husain was martyred while performing his late afternoon prayers.

naʿt: Poetry that honors the Prophet.

nauḥa: A dirge, usually in the last phase of the majlis; usually recited with breast-beating.

qawwālī: Sufi musical texts and assemblies in South Asia. They ideally contain a *qawl,* or, saying, of the Prophet Muhammad.

Rawẓat al-Shuhadā: *The Garden of the Martyrs.* Husain Waiz Kashifi's late fifteenth-century account of Karbala that has dominated the popular perceptions of this event in parts of Iran and South Asia.

salām: Literally, "salutation." A genre of majlis poetry that usually has the ghazal rhyme scheme and imagery.

ṣalavāt (durūd): A call for blessings on the Prophet Muhammad and his progeny. This benediction is usually recited in the beginning and end of the majlis, and as an interjection at various points during these assemblies; the benediction is "*Allāhumma ṣalli ʿalā Muḥammadin wa āli Muḥammad*—O God bless Muhammad and the progeny of Muhammad."

shabīh: In Hyderabad, these are visual depictions of the battle of Karbala, or of the Prophet and his family members. In other parts of South Asia, it refers to the replicas and pictures of the tombs of the Prophet's family.

shahādat: Witnessing. The word that most commonly signifies martyrdom in the Islamic cultural lexicon.

shahīd: Witness. The word for martyr.

shām-e ġharībān: "Night of the dispossessed." The evening of the day of ashura. Commemorative assemblies during this time are usually held in darkness.

soz: Literally, "burning." The traditional majlis usually begins with this genre.

ṣūfī: The term usually refers to Muslim "mystics."

tabarrā: The controversial incantation for "condemning" or "cursing" the enemies of the Prophet's family.

tabarruk: The consecrated food that is distributed in the name of the martyrs of Karbala, or in the name one of the Prophet's family members.

tasbīḥ: Prayer beads, many of which are made from the soil of Karbala.

taʿzīyeh: Replicas of the tombs of Husain and his companions that are usually made from paper and tinsel, but at times also from wood, metal, and glass. The paper replicas are buried on ashura while the more permanent ones are stored like many alams till the following Muharram. This designation also refers to "passion plays" in parts of the Middle East, especially in Iran.

żākir (female: żākira): The majlis sermon-giver who recalls the calamities that befell the Prophet's family.

żikr: In the Shii context, this designation refers to the remembrance of the Karbala tragedy and other tragedies that befell the Prophet's family. In the Sufi context, this refers to the remembrance of God, usually through a recitation of His names.

Żulfiqār: The sword of Ali that Husain also wielded in Karbala.

Żuljināḥ: Husain's horse. In many South Asian Muharram processions, a white horse plays a central role in Muharram processions.

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Notes

PREFACE

1. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 256.

INTRODUCTION

1. K. L. Nārañg Sāqī, ed., *Kulliyāt-e Saḥar: Kuñwar Mahendrā Siñgh Bedī Saḥar* (New Delhi: Kunwar Mahendra Singh Bedi Committee, 1992), 398.

2. Interestingly, the signifying relationship between *shahādat* and witnessing is complemented by the signifying relationship between the Greek word martyr (that is frequently used in the Christian religious lexicon) and its meaning that also conveys the idea of witnessing. To what degree, if any, the Christian idea of martyrdom had an impact upon the Islamic discourse of martyrdom is open to debate. See Keith Lewinstein, "The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam," in *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*, ed. Margaret Cormack (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 78–91. A very useful and concise study that deals with the relevance of Islamic concepts like "holy war" and "martyrdom" to the cultural and geopolitical issues of our time is John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

3. See Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Crisis of Muslim History: Religion and Politics in Early Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 146.

4. The apt adjective, Islamicate, that Marshall Hodgson proposes is very useful when speaking about the complex religious and cultural networks in which the religion of Islam resides. In his own words, this adjective "would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims." See Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and His-*

tory in a World Civilization, vol. 1, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 59.

5. Numerous studies in English discuss Karbala in Iranian cultures as well as the manner in which Karbala acquired ever-new dimensions in this region. For example, see Peter Chelkowski, ed., *Taʿziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1979); Michael Fischer, *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

6. Quoted in Hugh Tinker, *The Banyan Tree: Overseas Emigrants from India and Pakistan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), iii.

7. Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 154–55.

8. Roland Barthes, "Theory of Text," trans. Ian McLeold in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader,* ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge, 1981), 39.

9. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination,* ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

10. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 171.

11. The Shii community itself is divided into various subsects and the Shii dimension of the present study deals exclusively with the Iṡnāʿasharī or the Twelver branch of the Shias. These Shias constitute a majority of the population in Iran and Iraq and minorities in many other countries, including India and Pakistan. Although Husain's martyrdom remains an important part of the general Shii lore, not all readings of Shiism have treated Karbala in a uniform manner.

12. In order to avoid confusion, I will be using the English plural *majlises* instead of the Urdu *majālis.*

13. The period of mourning for most South Asian Shias begins on the first day of Muharram and ends on the eighth day of Rabʿī al-awwal. Thus ayyam-e aza traditionally constitutes a period of two months and eight days and it is this period that I have in mind when I refer to the days of mourning. In addition to these days of mourning, Shias also mourn the deaths of the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, and all the other Imams, except for the twelfth one, who is believed to be alive, although in hiding, and expected to return at the end of time to bring about justice.

14. For the most recent English account of the controversy surrounding the succession to the Prophet Muhammad, see Wilfred Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For a Shii understanding of these events, see S. Husain Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shiʿa Islam* (London: Longman, 1979). For a discussion on the evolution and transformation of Twelver Shia Islam itself, see Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shiʿite Islam* (Princeton: Darwin, 1993); and Mohammad Ali Amir Moezzi, *The Divine Guide in Early Shiʿism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988).

CHAPTER 1

1. Sayyid Turab Ali Rizvi, ed. *Fuġhān-e ʿAzādārāñ* (Hyderabad: Maktabah-e Turabiya, n.d.), 3.

2. Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 121.

3. Shias, in their ritual prayers, routinely prostrate on the soil of Karbala (*khāk-e*

shafā) as a gesture of devotion to Imam Husain's cause. See Ali Naqi Naqvi, *Sajdagāh* (Aligarh: Aligarh Muslim University, 1969).

4. Nūrullāh Shustarī, *Majālis al-Muminīn*, trans. Muḥammad Ḥasan Jaʿfarī (Karachi: Akbar Ḥusain Jivānī Trust. n.d.), 125.

5. See Juan Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism in Iran and Iraq* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

6. Syed Mohammad Ameed, *The Importance of Weeping and Wailing (*Karachi: Peermahomed Ebrahim Trust, 1974), 6.

7. Ṣāleḥa ʿAbid Ḥusain, ed. *Anīs ke Marśiye* (New Delhi: Taraqqī Urdu Bureau, 1990), 161.

8. Sayyadah Jaʿfar, *Yūsuf Zulaiḳhā* (Hyderabad: n.p., 1983), 131.

9. Ameed, *Importance of Weeping,* 11.

10. Mahmoud Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of ʿĀshura in Twelver Shiʿism* (The Hague: Mouton, 1978), 153.

11. See Athar Abbăs Rizvi, *A Socio-Intellectual History of the Isna ʿAsharī Shīʿīs in India,* vol. 1, *7th to 16th century A.D., with an Analysis of Early Shīʿism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1986), 65–66.

12. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam,* 153–54.

13. Also see Joel L. Kraemer, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam: The Cultural Revival during the Buyid Age* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 41–42, 65–68.

14. See Yaacov Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 145.

15. Ẓākir Ḥusain Fārūqī, *Dabistān-e Dabīr* (Lucknow: Nasīm, 1966), 104.

16. Quoted in Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam,* 167.

17. Mohammad-Djaʿfar Mahdjoub, "The Evolution of Popular Elegy of the Imams Among the Shiʿa," trans. John Perry, in *Authority and Political Culture in Shiʿism,* ed. Said Amir Arjomand (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 57.

18. Ḥusain Wāʿiẓ Kāshifī, *Rawẓat al-Shuhadā* (Kanpur: Naval Kishor, 1911), 308.

19. Hamid Demirel, *The Poet Fuẓūlī: His Works, Study of his Turkish, Persian and Arabic Divans* (Ankara: Ministry of Culture, 1991), 114–15.

20. See J. M. Rogers, "The Genesis of Safawid Religious Painting," in *Iran: Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 8 (1970):136. Rogers touches on the permissibility of illustrations in Islam and the Shii influence on Ottoman art.

21. See Ashraf Biyābānī, *Maśnavī Nausarhār,* ed. Afsar Siddīqī (Karachi: Anjuman-e Taraqqī-e Urdu Pakistan, 1982).

22. Sura 33:56.

23. I have consciously used the term "recited" as opposed to "sung," because the Urdu verb used for such a recitation is "*paṛhnā*" (to read/recite) as opposed to *gānā* (to sing). The latter verb, for many, evokes musical and joyous sentiments and is thus antithetical to the solemn spirit of the majlis. Although classical Indian melodies (*rāgās*) are frequently employed in such recitations, they nevertheless are considered outside the usual realm of music. I discuss the issue of music and musicality in more detail in chapter 4.

24. Ḥakīm Shaykh ʿAbulqasīm Ḥussam, ed. *Hilāl-e Muḥarram* (Hyderabad: Kutubḳhana-e Ḥaidarī, 1995), 33.

25. See Athar Abbas Rizvī, *Socio-Intellectual History,* 1:40.

26. Ali is also referred to as *muṣḥaf-e nāṭiq* (the Speaking Book). Ali is considered by his devotees to have a complete command of the Quran. Some traditions go so far as to refer to him as *zabān-e Ḳhudā* (the Tongue of God). According to these

traditions, during the Prophet's heavenly ascent, Allah spoke to the Prophet through the tongue of Ali. Sayyid Ḥāmid Ḥusain, *Urdū Shāʿirī meñ Mustaʿmal Talmīḥāt o Muṣṭaleḥāt* (Bhopal: n.p., 1977), 107, 224. Since the Shii doctrine of imamate gives all imams an equal status, the Imam Husain presumably has such powers as well.

27. See Athar Abbas Riẓvī, *Socio-Intellectual History,* 1:8. Also see Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam,* 57–65.

28. See Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam,* 77. Also see Ḥusain, *Urdū Shāʿirī,* 182.

29. Moezzi, *The Divine Guide,* 42.

30. Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation.*

31. The hero of Karbala has no tragic flaw (*hamartia*) and this is one important reason that the event of Karbala is not a "tragedy" in the conventional Greek or Aristotelian sense. See S. H. Butcher, trans., *Aristotle's Poetics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 75–77. Karrar Husain, however, argues that the "tragic flaw of the hero [of Karbala, Husain] is that he is flawless—too good for the world." Karrar Husain, "The Social and Spiritual Significance of the Urdu Marthīya," in *Al-Ṣerāt: Papers from the Imām Ḥusain Conference—London, July 1984,* 272. Whenever Shias signify the event of Karbala as a "tragedy," it is intended to mean a sorrowful event in that the Imam Husain, his family, and companions underwent terrible hardships and agonies.

32. Ḥāmid Ḥusain, *Urdū Shāʿirī,* 85.

33. Mīr Anīs, *Anīs ke Salām,* ed. Ali Javad Zaidi (New Delhi: Taraqqī Urdu Bureau, 1981), 105–107.

34. Such language and images in the salam led Gopīchañd Nārañg, an Urdu literary critic, to define this very genre as "that ghazal in which devotion to the Imams is expressed." Gopīchañd Nārañg, *Urdū Tanqīd aur Uslūbiyāt* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1989), 114.

35. Ḥussām, *Hilāl-e Muḥarram,* 52–53.

36. Ḥussām, *Hilāl-e Muḥarram,* 293–94.

37. Akbar Ḥaidarī, ed. *Intiḳhab-e Marāsi-e Mirzā Dabīr* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1980), 171.

38. Haidari, *Intiḳhab-e Marāsi-e Mirzā Dabīr,* 172.

39. See for example the marsiyas of Bijapur's Sultan Ali Adil Shah Sani that are accompanied by their ideal ragas in Mīr Saʿādat Riẓvī, *ʿĀdil Shāhī Marsiye* (Hyderabad, India: Abulkalam Azad Oriental Research Institute, 1980), 106–117.

40. A prominent nineteenth-century marsiya writer, Mir Ishq (d. before 1890), for example, takes the origins of arsi mushaf away from the similar Hindu marriage ritual of *samakshanā* (face-to-face) and instead attributes its origins to Imam Husain's wedding. (Sayyid Muḥammad ʿAqīl Riẓvī, *Marsiye kī Samājiyat* [Lucknow: Nusrat, 1993], 21–22).

41. Mirzā Muḥammad Rafīʿ Saudā, *Intiḳhāb az Marāsi-ye Mirzā Saudā* (Allahabad: Ram Narain Lal Beni Madhu, 1962), 41.

42. Fazal Ali Fazli, *Karbal Kathā,* ed. Malik Ram and Mukhtaruddin Ahmed (Patna: Idāra-e teḥqīqāt-e Urdū, 1965), 155. Also see Riẓvī, *Marsiye kī Samājiyat,* 16.

43. Muḥammad ʿAqīl Riẓvī, *Marsiye kī Samājiyat,* 16.

44. See for example, Meer Hassan Ali, *Observations of the Mussalmans of India,* ed. W. Crooke (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1974).

45. Masīḥ Uz Zamān, *Urdū Marsiye kā Irtiqā, Ibtedā se Anīs Tak* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1992), 377.

46. See Akbar Ḥaidar Kashmīrī, *Avadh meñ Urdū Marsiye kā Irtiqā* (Lucknow: Nusrat, 1981), 433–35.

47. For one of the earliest and finest works about marsiya written in English, see C. M. Naim, "The Art of Urdu Marsiya," in *Islamic Society and Culture: Essays in Honor of Professor Aziz Ahmad* ed. Milton Israel, N. K. Wagle (New Delhi: Manohar, 1983), 101–116.

48. The marsiya is considered by many as the first one written by Dabir. See Kashmīrī, *Avadh meñ Urdū Marsiye*, 546.

49. Uz zamān, *Urdū Marsiye*, 378.

50. Ḥussām, ed., *Hilāl-e Muḥarram*, 268–71.

51. Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 211.

52. Mujāwir Ḥusain Riẓvī, "Urdū Marsiye Keġhair Musalmān Shuʿarā" in *Urdū Marsiya: Seminār meñ Paṛhe Ga'e Maqālāt*, ed. Shārib Rudaulvī, (New Delhi: Urdu Academy, 1991), 132.

53. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism*, 117.

54. T. Graham Bailie, *A History of Urdu Literature* (Lahore: al-Biruni, 1977), 69.

55. Sayyid Masʿūd Hasan Riẓvī, *Rūḥ-e Anīs* (Lucknow: Kitab Nagar, 1964), 37.

56. See E. G. Browne, *Literary History of Persia*, vol. 2, *From Firdawsi to Sa'di (1000–1290)* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997), 74.

57. Ḥussām, *Anīs ke Marsiye*, 195.

58. Ḥussām, *Anīs ke Marsiye*, 195.

59. Ḥamid Ḥusain, *Urdū Shāʿirī*, 83.

60. Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness: Urdu Poetry and its Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 86, 87.

61. *Dars-e Balāġhat* (New Delhi: Qaumī Council Press barā-e furuġh-e Urdū Zabān, n.d.), 18.

62. For an excellent discussion of the rhetorical devices in Anis' poetry, see Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *Urdū Ġhazal ke Aham Moṛ* (New Delhi: Ghalib Academy, 1997), 51–56.

63. Ṣāleḥa ʿĀbid Ḥusain, *Anīs ke Marsiye*, 459.

64. Muḥammad Shiblī Nuʿmānt, *Muwāzānah-e Anīs o Dabīr* (Allahabad: Rām Narain Lāl Uran Kumār, 1987), 252–62.

65. Sayyid Masʿūd Ḥasan Riẓvī, *Anīsiyat: Mīr Anīs par Maẓāmīn va Maqālāt* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1976), 172.

66. See Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*, 94.

67. See Stewart Gordon, ed., *Robes of Honor: Khil'at in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003).

68. Masʿūd Ḥasan Riẓvī, *Anīsiyat*, 174.

69. Masʿūd Ḥasan Riẓvī, *Anīsiyat*, 174.

70. Maʿsud Ḥasan Riẓvī, *Anīsiyat*, 175.

71. Naiyar Masʿūd, *Marsiya Ḳhvānī kā Fan* (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1990), 11.

72. The art of marsiya recitation was tremendously indebted to the art of the *dāstān* tradition and many a marsiya reciter, including Mir Anis, came from families that had prominent dastan go, or dastan reciters. Masud, *Marsiyah*, 17.

73. Masʿūd, *Marsiyah*, 43.

74. Masʿūd, *Marsiyah*, 76.

75. Masʿūd, *Marsiyah*, 76.

76. Masʿūd, *Marsiyah*, 123.

77. Cole, *Roots of North Indian Shiʿism*, 90.

78. Amīr Ḥusain Chaman, ed., *Miñbar kā Dūsrā Nām* (Karachi: Print Media Publications, 2000), 95.

79. Rashid Turabi, *Sajda,* audiotape of Rashid Turabi's ashura majlis. Although I could not ascertain the exact year, this majlis was most likely recorded in 1972. Mahfuz Book Agency of Karachi has published the transcribed speeches of Turabi from the ayyam-e aza of 1972 and 1973; the audiotape I have cited corresponds to these transcriptions. For the transcribed version of Turabi's majlis see Rashīd Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī,* vol. 1, ed. Ẓamīr Aḳhtar Naqvī (Karachi: Maḥfūẓ Book Agency, 1987), 29–43.

80. For the best discussion of the various components and genres of the texts of majlis-e aza see ʿAlī Muḥammad Zaidī, *Al ʿAzā,* vol. 1 (Lucknow: Jamīl al-Ḥasan, 1970). For the different elements of *żikr* see ibid., 53–54.

81. The Quran, 19:58. In the Quran, God refers to Himself in the first person singular and plural forms, as well as in the second and third person singular forms. Muslims believe that the Quran, as the revealed word of God, has many unique characteristics; this use of pronouns is but one of many. This particular characteristic is understood as a linguistic reminder that God is not a person and cannot be circumscribed by pronouns used to refer to finite beings.

82. Mīr Taqī ("Mīr"), *Kulliyāt-e Mīr,* ed. Ẓill-e ʿAbbās ʿAbbāsī (Delhi: Taraqqī Urdu Bureau, 1968), 662. The first verse appears in this book with a slight variation.

83. See Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale,* 2nd ed., trans. Laurence Scott. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

84. See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions,* 41.

85. Shahīd Safīpūrī, *Shahīd-e Ẓulm* (Lucknow: United India Press, 1970), 266–67.

86. Muḥammad ʿAqīl Riẓvī, *Marsiye kī Samājiyat,* 196.

87. I have refrained from mentioning the names of particular zakirs who are mocked or who have been engulfed in controversy, as it would serve no purpose in this study. The salient point is that although these religious authorities accrue a certain amount of power, this power is frequently challenged.

88. See Murtada Mutahharī, "ʿĀshūra: History and Popular Legend," in *Al-Tawḥīd* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 41–74.

89. These reciters, in addition to the members of the household, can also be groups (*gurūhān*) of men and women that are formed on the basis of their desire to go from place to place in order to recite the majlis elegies. These guruhan are invited by Shii households to enliven the gatherings through their recitations. Members of the guruhan are also deemed to have appealing voices. These groups train days and weeks before the beginning of Muharram so they are well-prepared at the commencement of the days of mourning. For a more elaborate discussion of this institution, see David Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992).

90. Turāb ʿAlī Riẓvī, *Fuġhān-e ʿazādārāñ,* 91–92.

91. For a discussion of the origins and importance of the Bibi ka alam, see Muḥammad Waṣī Ḳhān, *Ḥusain, Ḥusain,* vol. 2 (Karachi: Meḥfil-e Ḥaidarī Naẓimabād, 1981), 251–55.

92. Josh Malīḥābādī, *Shoʿla o Shabnam* (Delhi: Himalaya, n.d.), 218.

93. See Ali J. Hussain, "A Developmental Analysis of Depictions of the Event of Karbala in Early Islamic History" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2001).

94. See Slavoj Zizek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London and New York: Verso, 1999), 372.

95. See Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford Unviersity Press, 1995), 175–96.

96. Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 175.

97. I observed this majlis at Hyderabad's Abbas shrine (*bārgāh*) on March 25, 2005.

98. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1972).

99. Iḥtishām Ḥusain and Masiḥ Uz Zamān, eds., *Intiḳhāb-e Josh* (Allahabad: Allahabad University, 1967), 78–84.

100. *Dabistān-e Anīs Rāwalpinḍī kā Yādgār Majla Basilsila-e Ṣad Sāla Barsī, 10 December 1974* (Rawalpindi: Nasim Printing Press, 1974), 344.

101. Benazir Bhutto, *Daughter of Destiny: An Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 303–304.

CHAPTER 2

1. See Vernon Schubel, "The Muharram Majlis: The Role of Ritual in the Preservation of Shi'a Identity," in Earle H. Waugh, et al, eds., *Muslim Families in North America* (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1991), 186–203.

2. According to a survey conducted by a Shii organization, the breakdown of the Shii population in 1995 was as follows: total number of Shias in the world, 2,820,000; Shias in the United States, 1,962,000; Shias in Texas, 130,000 (most live in Houston); Shias in Canada, 256,000. Of course not all of these Shias are "Twelvers," hence the Muharram commemorations do not have the same doctrinal importance for them. See Sayyed Mohammad Hejazi and A. S. Hashim, eds., *Ahlul Bayt Assembly of America: Abstract of Proceedings Convention of 1996* (Potomac, MD: Ahlul-Bayt Assembly of America, 1997), 43–46.

3. See Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

4. http://www.outlookindia.com/scripturr11w2.asp?act=sign&url=/full.asp?fname=naim&fodname=20040116&sid=1 (C.M. Naim, OutlookIndia.com, January 2004). Last accessed Jan. 7, 2004.

5. Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Challenges of Being a Muslim in 21st Century North America," in Hejazi and Hashim, *Ahlul Bayt Assembly of America*, 160.

6. Fischer, *Iran*, 12–13.

7. Hosh Bilgirāmī, *Mushāhidāt* (Lahore: Maktaba-e Dār-ul-Kitāb, n.d.), 79. Following Mahmood Mamdani, I must strike a cautionary note with regard to essentializing the category of "Wahhabi." In the reification-ravaged world of post-9/11 United States, the category of "Wahhabi" has surfaced as the Other of the good Muslim. The pejorative connotations that have accrued to the category of "Wahhabi" have once again obscured certain issues and conflicts tied to particular historical moments, political contexts, disenfranchisement, and alienation. See Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: Islam, the USA, and the Global War Against Terror* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 219–20.

8. Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, *Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 272–73.

9. Fischer and Abedi, *Debating Muslims*, 255.

CHAPTER 3

1. Murtada Mutahharī, a leading Shii Iranian scholar, cites a similar incident, of what he considers *taḥrīf,* or, distortion, and how such "distortions" become constitutive elements for most majlises. See Mutahhari, "ʿĀshūra," 47–48.

2. See Hussain, "A Developmental Analysis," 279–88.

3. See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory,* ed. and trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Halbwachs ascribes agency to collective memory, which he argues inflects and shapes the personal memory.

4. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 29–30.

5. See Denise A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of Aisha bint Abi Bakr* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

6. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 45.

7. Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah, An Introduction to History,* trans. Franz Rosenthal, ed. N. J. Dawood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 169.

8. See the *Siasat Daily* (Hyderabad), February 13, 2005.

9. The monumental work of Islamic history that was composed by Abu Jafar Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923 C.E.) *Tārīḳh al-Rusul wa-Mulūk,* echoes past historical works, such as Baladhuri's (d. 892 C.E.) *Ansāb al-Ashrāf* as well as those composed by Hisham b. Muhammad al-Kalbi (d. 819–820 C.E.) and Abu Mikhnaf (d. 774 C.E.). In the same vein, the imprint of al-Tabari's emplotment of Karbala on subsequent emplotments can be seen in works of Shii luminaries like al-Mufid (d. 1022 C.E.) and Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani (d. 967 C.E.).

10. See Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam,* 93.

11. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History,* 1:12.

12. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History,* 1:21.

13. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History,* 1:9.

14. Sura 33:33.

15. Ḥāmid bin Shabbīr, *Kalimatul Ḥaqq* (Delhi: Samar Offset Printers, 1985), 328–40.

16. Ḥāmid Ḥusain, *Urdu Shāʿirī,* 128–29.

17. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History,* 1:18.

18. For a Shii understanding of these events, see Husain Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shiʿa Islam.*

19. According to many Shias, the origins of their community lie in the time of the Prophet. Ali had a devout following before the Prophet's death and most of this following continued to espouse Ali's cause after the Prophet's departure from this world.

20. Sayyid ʿAlī Naqi Naqvī, *Rahnūmāyān-e Islām* (Lucknow: Sarfaraz, n.d.), 64.

21. See Sayyid ʿAlī Naqi Naqvī, *Shahīd-e Insāniyat* (Lahore: Maktaba-e Imāmiya Mission Trust, 1991). According to many South Asian Shias, this is one of the most important books written about Karbala. The author of this book can be counted amongst the leading Shii authorities of the twentieth century. But the authority of Naqvī ("Naqqan" Ṣāḥab) has often been challenged in his own community, for he is accused of making conciliatory gestures toward Sunnis at the expense of Shii historic values. Controversies regarding the discourses of Karbala and the Imam Husain are obviously not unique to South Asia. Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon have all had their share of controversy rooted in this topic. For an interesting case study of how Iranians have

dealt with such controversial topics and books, see Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 190–94.

22. See Shahīd Ṣafīpūrī, *Shahīd-e Ẓulm*, 160–69.

23. http://www.amaana.org/ali/ismaali.html#The%20Different. Consulted on March 10, 2005. http://islampak.freeservers.com/bio.html. Consulted on March 10, 2005.

24. Husain Jafri, *Origins and Early Development of Shiʿa Islam*, 159–69.

25. See Kathryn Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 223.

26. See Nadeem Hasnain and Abrar Husain, *Shias and Shia Islam in India: A Study in Society and Culture* (New Delhi: Harnam, 1988), 167–79. For the primary documentation pertaining to these conflicts and the governmental interference in them, see Sayyid Ashraf Ḥusain, *Taḥaffuẓ-e Shīʿat* (Lucknow: Tanẓīm-e Millat-e Lucknow, n.d.).

27. See Ashraf Ḥusain, *Taḥaffuẓ-e Shīʿat*, 97.

28. See Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 249–79. This is one of the best studies of the Shii-Sunni communal tensions in North India during the late-nineteenth century and the first few decades of the twentieth century. Far from discussing these communal tensions as rooted in age-old differences of religious interpretation between the Shii and the Sunni communities, Freitag takes into account the role of colonialism in crystallizing communal identities and the shifts in ruling networks during this period.

29. Born in the Yazd province of Iran in 1899, Ayatullah Pooya migrated to India in 1925 and became a prominent Shii scholar and authority soon after. He then migrated to Pakistan upon the creation of that state. Rashid Turabi and Syed Muhammad Murtuza were among his disciples and the latter translated and edited some of Pooya's writings. See Syed Muhammad Murtuza and Husain P. Taylor, eds., *Essence of the Holy Quran: The Eternal Light*, by Ayatullah Haji Mirza Mahdi Pooya (New Jersey: Imam Sahebuz Zaman Association, 1990).

30. Syed Muhammad Murtuza, conversation with author, Los Angeles, August 1, 1996.

31. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History*, 1:377.

32. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History*, 2:70.

33. Athar Abbas Rizvi, *Socio-Intellectual History*, 2:71.

34. Barbara Daly Metcalf, "The Reformist ʿUlama: Muslim Religious Leadership in India, 1860–1900" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1974), 75. A revised version of Metcalf's dissertation has been published: Barbara Daly Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband, 1860–1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).

35. Metcalf, "Reformist ʿUlama," 4.

36. Maḥmūd Aḥmad ʿAbbāsī, *Ḵhilafat-e Muʿāwiya o Yazīd* (Karachi: Maḥmūd ʿAbbāsī, 1964). Although historians/polemicists hardly rushed to Yazid's defense throughout the course of Islamic history, there is evidence, especially from Syria (the power base of Yazid as well as his Umayyad clan) that historians like Ali b. Asakir did attempt to redeem Yazid. See James Lindsay, "Caliphal and Moral Exemplar? ʿAlī ibn ʿAsākir's Portrait of Yazīd b. Muʿāwiya," in *Der Islam* (1997): 250–78.

37. ʿAbbāsī, *Ḵhilafat-e Muʿāwiya o Yazīd*, 115.

38. Syed Muhammad Murtuza, conversation with author, Los Angeles, August 1, 1996.

39. See ʿAbdul Ḥalīm Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture,* trans. and ed. E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1976), 149.

40. Syed Taqi Hasan Wafa, conversation with author, Hyderabad, India, July 18, 1997.

41. Awadh Punch, February 20, 1908.

42. See Pinault, *Shiites* (pp. 63–76), for a good discussion of the manner in which Muharram was represented during the British rule in India.

43. Nasir-e Khusraw, *Divān-e ashʿār-e Ḥakīm Abū Muʿīn Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Ḵhusraw Qubādīyānī,* ed. Mahdi Suhail and Nasr Allah Taqavi (Isfahan: Intishārāt-e Kitāb Furūshī-e Taʾyid, 1339 [1960]), 5.

44. Sayyad Ḥasan, ed., *Mumtāzul Majālis* (Lucknow: Iḥbāb, 1962), 150.

45. Abu Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī,* trans. I. K. A. Howard (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990): 19:97.

46. Al-Ṭabarī, *History,* 19:115.

47. Ḥusain Naqvī, *Dāstān-e Karbalā* (Hyderabad: Turābiya, n.d.), 34.

48. *Shāfaʿ-e Ḥashr,* or the Intercessor of the Resurrection Day, is one of the epithets of the Prophet Muhammad.

49. Shabbīr, as we have mentioned previously, is another name for the Imam Husain.

50. Mir Anis, *Anīs ke Marsiye,* ed. Ṣāleḥa ʿĀbid Ḥusain (New Delhi: Taraqqī Urdu Board, 1977), 172.

51. Ḥusain Naqvī, *Dāstān-e Karbalā,* 35.

52. Ḥusain Naqvī, *Dāstān-e Karbalā,* 39.

53. Mir Anis, *Anīs ke Marsiye,* 2:298.

54. Sound cassette. Transcribed in Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī,* 1:120.

55. Sound cassette. Transcribed in Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī,* 1:119.

56. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī.*

57. Sayyid Ibn-e Ḥasan Jārchavī, *Chaudah Majālis* (Lucknow: Sarfarāz Qaumi, 1965), 57.

58. Majlis Broadcast in India on ETV Urdu, February 15, 2005.

59. Majlis Broadcast in India on ETV Urdu, February 14, 2005.

60. See Diane D'Souza, "In the Presence of the Martyrs: The ʿAlam in Popular Shiʿi Piety," *The Muslim World* 88, no. 1 (January 1998): 67–80. For a traditional South Asian Shiʿa view of alams, see Ahmed Ali, *Husain: The Saviour of Islam* (Baldwin, NY: Anjumane Aza Khana-e Zahra, n.d.), 232–35.

61. Turāb ʿAlī Rizvī, ed., *Fuġhān-e ʿAzādārāñ,* 22.

62. Turāb ʿAlī Rizvī, ed., *Fuġhān-e ʿAzādārāñ,* 19.

63. Turābī, *Majālis,* audiotape of Rashid Turabi's majlis (n.p., n.d.).

64. Moezzi, *The Divine Guide,* 66.

65. Sayyid Al-e Aḥmad, "Salām-e Āḵhir," in *Soz-e Karbalā,* ed. Sayyid Ḥasan ʿAbbas Zaidī (Karachi: Ahmad Book Depot, 1983), 350.

66. Mīr Anīs, *Marsiya dar Ḥāl-e Ṡāni-e Zahra Ḥaẓrat Zainab Kubrā* (Hyderabad: Aijaz Printing Press, n.d.), 3.

67. Sayyid Anīs Jahān Ḥaidarī, *Guldastah-e Murād* (Bombay: Ḥaidarī Kutub Ḵhāna, n.d.), 131.

68. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī,* 2:244.

69. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī,* 2:243.

70. Quoted in Abdulaziz Abdulhussein Sachedina, *The Just Ruler in Shiʿite Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 114.

71. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī,* 2:223.

72. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī*, 1:159.
73. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī*, 3:66.
74. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī*, 3:66.
75. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī*, 3:68.
76. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī*, 3:67.
77. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī*, 3:67.
78. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī*, 3:68.
79. Fadwa El Guindi, *Veil: Modesty, Privacy and Resistance* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 126. In fact many artists who depicted the events of Karbala showed the male members of the Prophet's family veiled. As one artist told me, this is because we can never really fully understand the lofty status of these people. Even if they appear to us unveiled at one level, their overall majesty remains veiled.
80. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī*, 3:69.
81. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī*, 2:249.
82. Turābī, *Majālis-e Turābī*, 3:102.
83. Sayyid ʿAlī Naqi Naqvī, *Mujāhida-e Karbalā* (Lucknow: Sarfaraz Qaumi Press, n.d.), 332–41.
84. ʿAlī Naqi Naqvī, *Mujāhida-e Karbalā*, 341–42.

CHAPTER 4

1. Muʿinuddīn Ḥasan Chishtī, *Dīvān-e Ḵhwājah-e Ḵhwājagān Ġharīb Navāz Muʿinuddin Ajmerī Chishtī*, trans. ʿAbdul Qādir Chishtī (Dhanbad: ʿAbdul Qādir Chishtī, 1984), 196.
2. Muʿinuddīn Ḥasan Chishtī, *Dīvān-e Ḵhwājah-e Ḵhwājagān*, 197.
3. Meraj Ahmed, conversation with author, New Delhi, India, June 3, 2004.
4. Sayyid Muḥammad Akbar Ḥussaini, ed., *Jawāmeʿ al-Kalām: Malfūẓāt-e Khwāja Bande Nawāz Gesūdarāz*. (Delhi: Adabī Dunyā, 2000), 531.
5. Ḥafiẓ Shirāzī, *Divān-e Ḥafiẓ*, ed. and trans. ʿIbādullāh Akhtar (Lahore: Al-Kitāb, 1979), 543.
6. Ġhulām Rasūl Mahr, *Navā-e Sarosh* (Lahore: Shaiykh Ghulam and Sons, n.d.), 207.
7. Wheeler Thackson, *A Millennium of Classical Persian Poetry: A Guide to the Reading and Understanding of Persian Poetry from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century* (Bethesda, MD: Iranbooks, 1994), 42.
8. Mahr, *Navā-e Sarosh*, 446.
9. Inayat Pasha, interview by author, Jhangir Piran shrine, near Hyderabad, August 7, 1998.
10. Inayat Pasha, interview by author, Jhangir Piran shrine, near Hyderabad, August 7, 1998.
11. Inayat Pasha, interview by author, Jhangir Piran shrine, near Hyderabad, August 7, 1998.
12. Sura 7:156 ("My mercy encompasses all things.")
13. Sura 50:16.
14. Quoted in William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Love: The Spiritual Teachings of Rumi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 39.
15. Regula Qureshi, *Sufi Music of India and Pakistan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 116.
16. Qureshi, *Sufi Music*, 21.
17. The dilemmas and political controversies after the Prophet became a prelude

to the crystallization of Sufism, as they were a prelude to the development of Shiism; however, these two readings of Islam have not been identical. For example, most Chishtis, when pressed, identify themselves as Sunnis, in spite of their view that Ali was the best of the Prophet's companions. According to these Sufis, love and reverence for the Prophet's family is not an exclusively Shii attitude. That the Prophet loved his daughter Fatima, relied heavily upon his son-in-law Ali, and adored his grandsons Hasan and Husain, is understandably axiomatic for Muslims in general. The issue that creates a schism within the community is the succession to the Prophet. For the Shias, a grave injustice was done to the Prophet's family with the "usurpation" of the caliphate from Ali. Although many Chishtis might hold Ali and his descendants in the highest respect, and even agree that Ali suffered injustices, they are not willing to raise this issue to the same doctrinal importance as the Shias do.

18. See Etan Kohlberg, "Shahīd," in *Encylopaedia of Islam,* vol. 9 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 206.

19. Quoted in Chittick, *Sufi Path,* 183.

20. Maḥmūd Shabistarī, *Gulshan-e Rāz* (Islamabad: Iran Pakistan Issues of Persian Studies, 1978), 79.

21. Annemarie Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade: The Imagery of Persian Poetry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 116.

22. Mahr, *Navā-e Sarosh,* 211.

23. See Sura 33:72.

24. *Sāqīya* (O *Sāqī*) is the vocative form of *Saqī.*

25. Just as the trope of wine is loaded with ambiguity in Perso-Indic poetry, the (genre of) *saqīnama,* usually in praise of the saqi, at times leaves the identity of the saqi ambiguous too. There are also many saqinamas that explicitly identify the saqi with the Prophet Muhammad, a member of his family, or other spiritually revered personality. Even the genre of marsiya contains plenty of saqinamas within it. According to one source, Mir Anis introduced this subgenre within the larger genre of Urdu marsiya. (Mir Anis, *Anis, Dabistān-e Anīs Rawalpindi kā Yādgār Majla* [Rawalpindi: Dabistan-e Anis Rawalpindi, 1974], 231.)

26. Thackston, *A Millennium of Classical Persian Poetry,* 43.

27. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, "Early Indo-Muslim Mystics and Their Attitude Towards the State," *Islamic Culture: The Hyderabad Quarterly Review* 23 (1949): 13–21. Nizami discusses in this article and at other places the manner in which political power was kept at arm's length by most Sufis.

28. Muzaffar Alam, *The Language of Political Islam in India c. 1200–1800* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004), 82.

29. See Richard Eaton, *Sufis of Bijapur, 1300–1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

30. Sadiq Naqvi, *Muslim Religious Institutions and their Role Under the Qutb Shahs* (Hyderabad: Bab-ul-ilm Society, 1993), 118–19.

31. The audience's nod of approval can either come through the cheers of *vāh* (Bravo! Great!), *bahot ḳhūb* (very good), *kyā kehne* (What can be said!), *subḥan Allāh* (Glory be to God!) or through monetary gifts (*naẓrāna*) to the qawwal.

32. Regula Qureshi, "Recorded Sound and Religious Music: The Case of Qawwali," in *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia,* eds. Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 147.

33. Qureshi, "Recorded Sound and Religious Music," in *Media and the Transformation of Religion,* eds. Babb and Wadley, 147–48.

34. See John Hawley, "Authorship and Authority in Bhakti Poetry of North India," *Journal of Asian Studies*, 47 (1988): 269–90.

35. Thomas de Bruijin quoted in Ali Asani, "At the Crossroads of India and Iranian Civilizations: Sindhi Literary Culture," in Sheldon Pollock, ed., *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 621.

36. Muslim societies have historically been ambivalent as far as audition of spiritual music (*samāʿ*) is concerned. Of course it is important to keep in mind that the issue here is *spiritual* music, not other forms of music. The contemplative treatises of tenth-century Iraq, the *Rasāʾil Iḫwan al-Ṣafā*, or the *Treatises of the Brotherhood of Purity*, consider music a means to enhance spirituality. The great philosophers Abu Nasr Muhammad b. Tarkhān al-Farabi (d. 950 C.E.) and Ibn Sina acknowledged the entertainment value of music as a means to alieviate life's hardships and boredom. Ibn Sina also underscored the principle of pleasure in which music is anchored; he was a physician and utilized music as a therapeutic device. Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, a bridge-builder of sorts who tried to reconcile Sufism with Islamic "orthodoxy," provides a passionate defense of music in his *Alchemy of Happiness*.

The cumulative weight of these testimonies favors the view that music has not usually been seen as completely forbidden, and is even encouraged when deemed conducive to the community's spiritual enhancement. Although some Muslims are keen on proscriptions against all forms of music, the attack of most is not on music *per se* but on its inappropriate use. The thrust of their attack is framed more in terms of its implications for piety and spirituality than its ontological status. While sympathetic to its spiritual impulses, they caution that this can lapse into the vice of licentiousness. Thus, the discourses on music are usually subordinated to spiritual concerns and these are the concerns that primarily condition the qawwali context, at least in its traditional form.

37. Carl W. Ernst and Bruce Lawrence, *Sufi Martyrs of Love: The Chishti Order in South Asia and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 137.

38. Quoted in Athar Abbas Rizvī, *A History of Sufism in India* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1986), 1:167.

39. Ḥasan Sijzī, *Dīvān-e Ḥasan Sijzī Dihlavī* (Hyderabad: Ibrahim, 1933), 390.

40. Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, *Tārīkh-e Mashāikh-e Chishti*, 383. (Delhi: Idara-e Adabiyat-e Dilli, 1980)

41. Quoted in Annemarie Schimmel, *Islam in the Indian Subcontinent* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 28.

42. Another version of this couplet's birth is that when Nizamuddin Awliya acknowledged the diversity of communal beliefs with the first hemistich, it was Khusraw, and not Hasan, who improvised the second hemistich. I mention this other version for it helps us remember that hagiographies, like histories, are emplotted in more than one way.

43. Mahr, *Navā-e Sarosh*, 262.

44. Ḥāmid Ḥusain, *Urdu Shāʿirī*, 100.

45. Schimmel, *A Two-Colored Brocade*, 56.

46. Quoted in Mir Valiuddin, *Love of God: A Sufi Approach* (Surrey, England: Sufi, 1972), 32.

47. Hadi Hasan, *A Golden Treasury of Persian Poetry* (New Delhi: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, 1972), 217.

48. Annemarie Schimmel, "Karbala and Husain in Literature," in *Al-Ṣerat: Pa-*

pers from the Imām Ḥusain Conference—London, July 1984 (London: Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1986), 31–32.

49. Quoted in *Al-Ṣerat*, 31.

50. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, 70.

51. Sura 4:171.

52. Sura 3:49. It must be kept in mind that Jesus, although a privileged messenger of God, is not a divine being in Islam. Nor does Islam accommodate any version of the Christian "trinity." The Quran neither gives credibility to Jesus' crucifixion nor to his resurrection as interpreted by the majority of Christians (4:157). There are, however, Muslim traditions that state that Jesus' return before the end of time is assured, since he will combat and destroy the Anti-Christ (*al-Dajjāl*) who will have sown the seeds of spiritual destruction.

53. See The Quran, 5:110. Schimmel has again elucidated this connection between Christianity and wine drinking by pointing out the fact that many times in Persian mystical poetry, the cupbearer was Christian. For like the Magians, the Christians were also permitted to drink (*A Two-Colored Brocade*, 79.)

54. Sura 7:143.

55. Annemarie Schimmel, "The Marsiyeh in Sindhi Poetry," in Chelkowski, *Taziyeh*, 221.

56. S. H. Nasr, *Sufi Essays* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 76.

57. Jalil Sehvani, ed., *Al-Shehbāz: Savāniḥ Ḥayāt Ḥaẓrat Qalandar Laʿl Shahbāz* (Sehvan Sharif, Sindh: Idara-e Shahbaz, 2001), 79–80.

58. Muʿīnuddin Ḥasan Chishtī, *Dīvān-e Ḳhwājah-e Ḳhwājagān*, 197.

59. Wāṣif ʿAlī Wāṣif, *Guftagū* (Lahore: Kashif Ali, 1996), 101.

60. Quoted in S. H. Nasr, ed., *Islamic Spirituality*, vol. 2 (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 2:129.

61. Amir Khusraw, *Seventh Centenary Celebration*, February 11–13, 1972 (Hyderabad: Abul Kalam Azad Oriental Research Institute, 1976), 96–98.

62. A discussion of the bride's jewelry is available from the works of fine scholars like Regula Qureshi. See Qureshi, *Sufi Music*.

63. Akmal Ḥaidarābādī, *Qawwālī: Amīr Khusro se Shakīla Bāno Tak* (New Delhi: Idāra-e Shamaʿ, 1982), 100.

64. Ḥaidarābādī, *Qawwālī*, 100.

65. Gerry Farrel, *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 207.

66. Quoted in Dimitri Ehrlich, *Inside the Music: Conversation with Contemporary Musicians about Spirituality, Creativity, and Consciousness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1997), 120–21.

67. Manẓar Siddiqi, *Sīmāb Akbarābādī* (Lahore: Feroz Sons, 1968), 36.

68. Aziz Ahmad Khan Warasi, *Qawwalis*, Hyderabad, private recordings.

69. Ġhulām Farīd and Maqbūl Aḥmad Ṣabrī, *Qawwālī*, vol. 8 (Karachi: Maria Gold Production), audiocassette.

70. Ṣabrī, *Qawwālī*.

71. Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, *Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan et son ensemble en concert a Paris, 1985*, vol. 2 (Paris: Ocora, 1987), compact disc.

72. Sura 96:19. Quoted in Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 153.

73. Sura 55:26.

74. See William Chittick, "Rūmi's View of the Imām Ḥusain." In *Al-Ṣerat*, 4. *Pa-*

pers from the Imām Ḥusain Conference—London, July 1984, (London: Muhammadi Trust of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, 1986): 4.

75. Valerie J. Hoffman-Ladd, "Devotion to the Prophet and His Family in Egyptian Sufism," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (1992): 615–37, citing 625.

CHAPTER 5

1. Reynold Nicholson, (trans.), *A Rumi Anthology* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2000), 111.
2. Yūsuf Chishtī, *Asrār-e Ḳhūdī maʿ Sharḥ* (New Delhi: Eteqad, 1998), 412–415.
3. Sayyid Afẓal Ḥusain Naqvī, *Midḥat-e āl-e Muḥammad aur Iqbāl* (Karachi: Anjuman-e Safina-e Adab, 1977).
4. Afzal Husain Naqvi, *Midḥat-e āl-e Muḥammad aur Iqbāl,* 55.
5. Afzal Husain Naqvi, *Midḥat-e āl-e Muḥammad aur Iqbāl,* 59.
6. Afzal Husain Naqvi, *Midḥat-e āl-e Muḥammad aur Iqbāl,* 60.
7. Afzal Husain Naqvi, *Midḥat-e āl-e Muḥammad aur Iqbāl,* 60.
8. Chittick, "Rūmi's View of the Imam Ḥusain," in *al-Ṣerāt,* 4.
9. Chittick, "Rūmi's View of the Imam Ḥusain," 4.
10. Chittick, "Rūmi's View of the Imam Ḥusain," 4.
11. Shimr was the person who actually killed Husain in Karbala.
12. Chittick, "Rūmi's View of the Imam Ḥusain," 5.
13. Farīduddīn ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībatnāmah* (Tehran: Kitābfurushī Zavvār, 1958), 37.
14. ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībatnāmah,* 37.
15. ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībatnāmah,* 37.
16. Muḥammad Anqirawī, *Sharḥ-e Kabīr-e bar Maṡnavī-e Mawlavī* (Tabriz: Kitābfurushī-e Ḥikmat, 1970), 96.
17. Anqirawī, *Sharḥ-e Kabīr-e bar Maṡnavī-e Mawlavī,* 1.
18. Chittick, "Rūmi's View of the Imam Ḥusain," 9.
19. Chittick, "Rūmi's View of the Imam Ḥusain," 11.
20. Hadi Hasan, *A Golden Treasury of Persian Poetry,* 163.
21. Chittick, "Rūmi's View of the Imam Ḥusain," 10.
22. Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Divān-e Kāmil-e Jāmī* (Tehran: Chāpḵhāna-e Pīrūz, 1962), 78.
23. Jāmī, *Divān-e Kāmil-e Jāmī,* 78.
24. Muḥammad Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl* (Urdu) (Aligarh: Educational Book House, 1992), 347.
25. Ẓahīr Aḥmad, *Iqbāl aur Ḳhūdī* (n.p.: Etemad, 1971), 33.
26. Ẓahīr Aḥmad, *Iqbāl aur Ḳhūdī,* 39.
27. Afẓal Ḥusain Naqvī, *Midḥat-e āl-e Muḥammad aur Iqbāl* 60.
28. *Abjad* is the sequence of Arabic letters in which each letter has a numerical value. It has been used throughout centuries for chronograms and other mystical as well as playful expressions wherein the artists have desired to link numbers to concepts.
29. Ẓahīr Aḥmad, *Iqbāl aur Ḳhūdī,* 67.
30. Afẓal Ḥusain Naqvī, *Midḥat-e āl-e Muḥammad aur Iqbāl,* 61.
31. Afẓal Ḥusain Naqvī, *Midḥat-e āl-e Muḥammad aur Iqbāl,* 64.
32. Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl,* 202.
33. Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl,* 159.
34. Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl,* 680.

35. Sayyid Aḥsan ʿImrānī, *Iqbāl dar Madḥ-e Muḥammad va āl-e Muḥammad* (Lahore, Ḥaqq Brothers), 193.

36. ʿImrānī, *Iqbal dar Madḥ-e Muḥammad*, 193.

37. Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl,* 402.

38. Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl,* 400.

39. Muḥammad Rame, *Iqbāl aur Soshalizm* (Lahore: Albayan, 1970), 103.

40. It was under Iqbal's pervasive inspiration that other Progressive Marxist poets of the subcontinent, like Shabbir Hassan Khan "Josh" Malihabadi, struck the reformist chord.

41. Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl,* 148.

42. Muhammad Iqbāl, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore: SH. Muhammad Ashraf, 1988).

43. Minault, *Khilafat Movement,* 154–155.

44. Muḥammad ʿAlī Jauhar, *Suḳhan-e Jauhar,* ed. Aḳhtar Bastavī (Lucknow: Uttar Pradesh Urdu Academy, 1983), 31.

45. Jauhar, *Suḳhan-e Jauhar*, 79.

46. Jauhar, *Suḳhan-e Jauhar*, 10.

47. Jauhar, *Suḳhan-e Jauhar*, 30.

48. Quoted in Abulkālam Āzād, *Shahādat-e Ḥusain* (New Delhi: Eteqad, 1987), 60.

49. Quoted in S. H. Nasr, ed., *Islamic Spirituality,* 129.

50. Abulkālam Āzād, *Shahādat-e Ḥusain,* 88–89.

51. Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl,* 486.

52. Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl,* 61.

53. Afẓal Ḥusain Naqvī, *Midḥat-e āl-e Muḥammad aur Iqbāl,* 63.

54. Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty: Individual and Community in South Asian Islam since 1850* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 176, 179.

55. I am using the term "interpellation" in the way in which the French cultural critic, Louis Althusser used it: Processes whereby an ideology designates and defines its subjects without giving the subjects themselves much agency in the constitution of their identity. See Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays,* trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971).

56. For an excellent analysis of how Sunni religious authorities of the 1950s were bent upon defining Islam by excluding the Ahmadis, see Seyyed Vali Reza Nasr, *The Vanguard of the Islamic Revolution: The Jamaʿat-i Islami of Pakistan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 132–141.

57. Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *The ʿUlama in Contemporary Pakistan: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 127.

58. See Rory McCarthy, "Religion and Violence on Pakistan's streets," *Guardian Unlimited* (Friday, April 6, 2001), http://www.guardian.co.uk/elsewhere/journalist/story/0,7792,469439,00.html. Accessed May 8, 2001.

59. See Rana Jawad, "632 Fell Prey to Sectarian Killings in Punjab in Nine Years," *News International Pakistan* (January 19, 1999), http://www.best.com/karachi/news/sectarian2.html. Accessed May 25, 2001.

60. In my conversations with Syed Muhammad Murtuza and many other Shias who are well versed in English, I repeatedly heard references to this work of history in order to legitimize the Shii cause. Interestingly enough, W. Madelung's *Succession to Muḥammad* has a similar appeal among many Shias today.

61. Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* ed. David Womersley (London: Penguin Press 1994), 218.

62. Gibbon, *Decline and Fall,* 224.

63. A Pakistani contemporary of Turabi told me that excerpts from Gibbon's Islamic history were readily available in Karachi, where Turabi was based.

64. Turābī (Karachi, 1971), cassette recording.

65. See S. M. A. Zaidi, *Iqbāl aur Ḥubb-e Ahl-e Bait* (Lahore: Shaykh Ghulam Ali and Sons, 1965).

66. Rashid Turābī (Karachi, 1971), cassette recording. Although this couplet is repeatedly invoked in Iqbal's name, it most likely does not come from him. See ʿImrānī, *Iqbāl dar Madḥ-e Muḥammad,* 36–37.

67. Rashid Turābī (Karachi, 1971), cassette recording.

68. Ali S. Jafri, interview, January 1999.

69. ʿAlī Sharīʿatī, "A Manifestation of Self-reconstruction and Reformation," http://www.shariati.com/iqbal.html. Accessed January 6, 2005.

70. "Struggle to Rescue Islam from Zealots," *Irish Times* (November 22, 1997), http://www.seraj.org/Irishr.htm. Accessed January 6, 2005.

71. Iqbāl, *Kulliyāt-e Iqbāl,* 378.

CHAPTER 6

1. Raj Bahadur Gour, interview with author, Hyderabad, India, January 5, 1999.

2. Tigris here is a metaphor for river.

3. Mahr, *Navā-e Sarosh,* 95.

4. *Times of India* (Bombay), April 6, 1968.

5. *Times of India* (Bombay), April 6, 1968.

6. *Times of India* (Bombay), April 10, 1968.

7. Maḳhdūm Muḥiuddin, *Bisāṭ-e Raqs* (Hyderabad: Urdu Academy Andhra Pradesh, 1986), 195–196.

8. See Syed Saeed Rizvi, *The Life of Muhammad: The Prophet, Peace be Upon Him* (Stanmore: The World Federation of Khoja Shia Ithna-Asheri Muslim Communities, 1999), 127–130.

9. The actions of the United States in Vietnam as well as America's support for Zionism was a constant theme in critiques of US imperialism.

10. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed on July 19, 1953, in the United States, for allegedly spying for the Soviet Union. The unjust aspects of their trial in a paranoid United States outraged human rights advocates around the world. The Rosenbergs instantly became the symbols of martyrs at the hands of capitalism and imperialism. The finest of Urdu poets, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, himself in a Pakistani prison at the time, also wrote a passionate poem in their honor. See Faiẓ Aḥmad Faiẓ, *Nusḳhhahā-e Vafā* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1992), 266–68.

11. See Carlo Coppola, "Urdu Poetry, 1935–1970: The Progressive Episode" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1975).

12. For an excellent discussion of this period, see Ayesha Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty,* 43–101.

13. Holroyd, a British official involved in the Indian educational establishment, had encouraged the composition of poetry based on themes that were not traditional in Mughal India. See Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness,* 34–39.

14. Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥali, *Muqaddamah-e Sheʿr o Shāʿirī* (Allahabad: Rāʾi Sāḥab Lāla Rām Dayāl Agarval, 1964), 338.

15. Aḳhtar Ḥusain Rāʾipūrī, *Adab aur Inqilāb* (Karachi: Nafīs Academy, 1989), 15.

16. Rāʾipūrī, *Adab aur Inqilāb,* 21.

17. Rā'ipūrī, *Adab aur Inqilāb,* 24.

18. Rā'ipūrī, *Adab aur Inqilāb,* 26.

19. Rā'ipūrī, *Adab aur Inqilāb,* 38.

20. Sayyid Abul Ḳhayr Kashfī, *Urdū Shā'irī kā Siyāsī aur Tārīḳhī pas Manẓar, 1707 se 1857 Tak* (Karachi: Adabī, 1975), 103.

21. Mirza Dabir likewise tinged the poetic landscape of Karbala with faint touches of his contemporary Lucknow. He also appraised Karbala's didactic value by reminding his ruler-patron about the necessity of keeping on guard against oppression.

22. Inṭizar Ḥusain, "Anīs ke Marsiye meñ Shahr" in *Anīs Shināsī,* ed., Gopichañd Narañg (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1981), 159.

23. Nadir Shah (d. 1747 C.E.), from eastern Iran, wreaked havoc on the Indian subcontinent by killing hundreds of inhabitants of this region and looting large amounts of wealth. The Mughal rule, based as it was in Delhi, was unable to stave off his attacks, thereby displaying its weak infrastructure that consequently lead to more attacks on its territory.

24. Sayyid ʿAbdullāh, *Mubāḥis: Ḍākṭar Sayyid ʿAbdullāh ke Taḥqīqī aur Tanqīdī Maẓāmīn* (Lahore, Majlis Taraqqī-e Urdu Adab, 1965), 254. Also see Āmir ʿArifī, *Shahr Āshūb: Ek Tajziya* (Delhi: Delhi University, 1994), 158–59. Both these works discuss this genre and provide numerous examples of it.

25. ʿIsmat Malīḥābādī, ed., *Josh kī Inqilābī Naẓmeñ* (Lucknow: ʿIsmat Malīḥābādī, 1982), 16.

26. Although Josh Malihabadi was born into a predominantly Sunni family, he grew up inclined to Shiism under the influence of his Shii paternal grandmother. Josh's family is a good example of a non-Shii family that strictly observed the "Days of mourning." Josh, however, like many poets before and after him, scoffed at any label of narrow sectarian identity.

27. ʿIsmat Malīḥābādī, *Josh kī Inqilābī Naẓmeñ,* 175.

28. ʿIsmat Malīḥābādī, *Josh kī Inqilābi Naẓmeñ,* 174.

29. Ḥusain and Uz zamān, *Intiḳhāb-e Josh,* 78–84.

30. Josh Malīḥābādī, *Josh Malīḥābādī ke Marsiye,* ed., Zamir Akhtar Naqvi (Karachi: Idarah-yi Faiz-e Adab, 1980), 121.

31. Josh Malīḥābādī, *Josh Malīḥābādī ke Marsiye,* 21.

32. Josh Malīḥābādī, *Josh Malīḥābādī ke Marsiye,* 23.

33. Josh Malīḥabādī, *Samūm o Ṣabā,* (Delhi: Munshi Gulab Singh, 1950), 267.

34. Mushirul Hasan, *From Pluralism to Separatism: Qasbas in Colonial Awadh* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 37.

35. Gopīchañd Nārañg, *Sānaḥa'e Karbalā Baṭaur Shi'rī Isteʿāra,* 121.

36. Anjum Vazīrābādī, *Ḥusain Dūsroñ kī Naẓar meñ* (Lahore: Maktaba-e Aḥbāb, n.d.), 43.

37. Quoted in Vinay Lal, *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 62.

38. See Sheila McDonough, *Gandhi's Response to Islam* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1994), 46.

39. Mouna Mounayer, dir., *The Living Martyr: Hizbollah Unveiled.* 2001, Films for the Humanities and the Sciences.

40. Vazīrābādī, *Ḥusain Dūsroñ kī Naẓar meñ,* 50.

41. ʿAlī Sardār Jaʿfri, "Taḥrīk-e Jamāliyat aur Siyāsat," in *Taraqqī Pasañd Adab, Pachās Sāla Safar,* ed. Qamar Rais and Sayyid Ashur Kazmi (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1994), 46.

42. See Gene Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India: A Study of Controversy* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), 99–101; also see Norman G. Barrier, *Banned: Controversial Literature and Political Control in British India, 1907–1947* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1974).

43. Of course there was no nation-state of India in the 1920s and this very notion of national/*qawmī* was obscure and subject to multiple readings.

44. Charu Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public Sphere in Colonial India* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 286.

45. Madan Gopal, *Munshi Premchand: A Literary Biography* (New York: Asia, 1964), 236.

46. Munshi Premchand, *Karbalā* (Hindi) (Delhi: Saraswati, 1985), 8.

47. See Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001). Even a hundred years prior to this period, Urdu and Hindi did not exist in independent, mutually-exclusive terms. But as the fervor of religious exclusivism increased with each passing year, religious communities constituted themselves, among other things, on the basis of particular linguistic identities. With time, the division between Urdu and Hindi became more polarized, as the Urdu "community" borrowed its learned vocabulary more from Persian and Arabic, and the Hindi "community" from Sanskrit.

48. The Hindi *Karbala* was first published in the Devanagari script in November 1924 by Ganga Pustak Mala of Lucknow.

49. Munshi Premchand, *Karbalā,* 5.

50. Munshi Premchand, *Karbalā,* 5.

51. Munshi Premchand, *Karbalā,* 38–39.

52. Munshi Premchand, *Karbalā,* 264–65.

53. Munshi Premchand, *Karbalā,* 102.

54. Ṣāleḥa A. Ḥusain, *Ḳhavātīn-e Karbalā Kalām-e Anīs ke Āīne Meñ* (New Delhi: Maktaba Jāmiʿa, 1973).

55. As far as this narrative's historicity is concerned, Premchand is little concerned with the truth behind the Hindu presence at Karbala. He claims that he has been exposed to this story by reading *Āīna,* a journal that was published in Allahabad. See *Premchand: A Miscellany, Selections from the Monthly Zamāna (Kanpur) 1903–1942,* (Patna: Ḳhuda Baḳhsh Oriental Public Library, 1995), 211. For a fascinating, although poorly-documented, account of the Husaini-Dutt Brahmans, see Abu Talib, "Dut Brahman Imām Husain se Rabṭ o Ẓabṭ" in *Reg-e Surḳh,* 63–71.

56. Munshi Premchand, *Karbalā,* 249.

57. Munshi Premchand, *Karbalā,* 252–53.

58. Imtiyāz ʿAlī ʿArshī, *Dīvān-e Ġhālib Urdū: Nusḳhah-e ʿArshī* (Lahore: Majlis Taraqqī-e Adab, 1992), part 1, 251.

59. Khwāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī, "Urdū Hindī aur Risāla-e Zamāna," in *Yādgār-e Jashn-e Ṣad Sāla Munshī Dayā Narāʾin Nigam,* ed. Sri Narain Nigam (Lucknow: Sri Narain Nigam, 1981), 19.

60. Khwāja Ḥasan Niẓāmī, "Urdū Hindī aur Risāla-e Zamāna," 20.

61. Premchand's letter from Hindi-Urdu has been translated in Gopal, *Munshi Premchand,* 235–37. For the original letter, see Munshi Premchand, *Chiṭṭhi Patr [Correspondence]* (Allahabad: Hamsa Prakasana, 1978–1985), 1:146–48.

62. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), 187–206.

63. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 113.

64. See Premchand, *Premchand: A Miscellany,* 212.

65. Although he makes this clear in his Hindi version, he suggests that the play could be staged with some modifications. What exactly these modifications are, we are never told. However, by the time his Urdu version is ready to go to press, he insists that the play is "only to be read." The Urdu play would give Muslims a wider access and it is possible that Premchand did not want controversy over the staging of the play to hurt his agenda of bringing religious communities together. As Premchand himself points out, there are two types of dramas: one written for the stage, one written only to be read.

66. Peter Chelkowski, *Taziyeh,* 4–5.

67. Sudipta Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India," in *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society,* ed. Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), 31.

68. Kaviraj, "The Imaginary Institution of India," in *Subaltern Studies VII,* 32.

69. See Coppola, "Urdu Poetry," throughout.

70. Ali Sardar Jafri, Interview with author, Mumbai, India, January 15, 1999.

71. Nathanvīlāl Waḥshī, *Fikr-e Rasā,* ed. Jābir Ḥusain, (Patna: Bihar Foundation, 1996), 16.

72. Waḥshī, *Fikr-e Rasā,* 22.

73. Waḥshī, *Fikr-e Rasā,* 26.

74. Waḥshī, *Fikr-e Rasā,* 26.

75. The Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, her husband Ali, and the two grandsons of the Prophet, Hasan and Husain, are considered "People of the Cloak," or *ahl-e kisa*, see chapter 3.

76. Waḥshī, *Fikr-e Rasā,* 26.

77. Waḥshī, *Fikr-e Rasā,* 27.

78. Waḥshī, *Fikr-e Rasā,* 28.

79. Waḥshī, *Fikr-e Rasā,* 30.

80. K. L. Narang Saqi, ed., *Kulliyāt-e Saḥar.*

81. K. L. Narang Saqi, ed., *Kulliyāt-e Saḥar* 395.

82. Ja'far Ḥusain Ḳhān, ed., *Risā'ī Adab meñ Hindū' oñ kā Ḥiṣṣa* (Lucknow: Sol Agent Urdu Publishers, 1983), 202.

83. Nazrul Islam's Bengali poetry had been translated into Urdu by none other than Akhtar Husain Raipuri, under the title "*Payām-e Shabāb*" or the "Message of Youth." See Raj Bahaduṛ Gouṛ, *Adabī Jā'ize* (Delhi: Dunyā), 91. In a conversation with the author, Ali Sardar Jafri also credits Nazrul Islam with having a strong influence of Urdu Progressive Literature.

84. Muḥammad Waṣī Ḳhān, *Ḥusain Ḥusain*. Vol. 2, 134

85. Mizanur Rahman, *Nazrul Islam* (Dacca: n.p., 1966), 152.

86. For Sajjad Zahir's own account of this movement, see Sajjād Ẓahīr, *Raushnā'ī* (New Delhi: Sīma, 1985).

87. Coppola, "Urdu Poetry," 39–55.

88. Coppola, "Urdu Poetry," 64.

89. Coppola, "Urdu Poetry," 17–36.

90. Jawaharlal Nehru, "*Taraqqī Pasañd Muṣṣanafīn"* in *Nayā Adab aur Kalīm*, ed. Josh Malihabadi, vol. 4, January-February 1941, 65.

91. Nehru, "Taraqqī Pasañd Muṣṣanafīn," 65.

92. Ali Sardar Jafri, interview with author, Mumbai, India, 16 January, 1999.

93. Ẓahīr, "Ghalib and Progressive Urdu Literature," in *International Ghalib Seminar* (New Delhi: All India Ghalib Centenary Committee, 1969–1970), 110–120.

94. See Ralph Russell, "Ghalib: A Self-Portrait," in *Ghalib: The Poet and His Age.*

ed. Ralph Russell (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1972), 9–35. Russell in this "portrait" quotes the words that Ghalib, the poet laureate of the last Mughal court, wrote to the British monarch, Queen Victoria: "And so your poet and panegyrist seeks a title bestowed by the imperial tongue, and a robe of honour conferred by the imperial command, and a crust of bread from the imperial table." 20.

95. See Alṭāf Ḥusain Ḥali, *Yādgār-e Ġhālib* (New Delhi: Ghalib Institute, 1986 [1897]).

96. Muḥsin Kiyānī, *Divān-e Ġhālib Dihlavī*, (Farsi) (Tehran: Rawzanh, 1997), 67.

97. Kiyānī, *Divān-e Ġhālib Dihalvī*, 120.

98. Kiyānī, *Divān-e Ġhālib Dihalvī*, 67.

99. The Ravi and the Ganga are two sacred rivers of the subcontinent, the former in today's Pakistan and the latter in India.

100. Shimr is the one who murdered Husain.

101. Hurmula murdered Husain's six-month-old son, Ali Asghar.

102. This is a reference to Farhad, the legendary lover of Indo-Persian literature, who was willing to carve a river through mountains in order to win over his beloved Shirin. Thus the "mountain hewer" image signifies any determined lover.

103. *Jām-e Jam*, or the goblet of Jamshid (the legendary Persian king), signifies wisdom and gnosis, for it is within it that the real events of the world are reflected. In order to see through this goblet, one has to receive spiritual training and guidance. *Āsūdagān-e Jām-e Jam*, signifies those who are spiritually handicapped and thus cannot see through this goblet.

104. Ali Sardar Jafri, *Mushāʿira 86: Bayād-e Faiẓ* (Recorded in Dubai 1986), videocassette.

105. Ali Sardar Jafri, *Lakhnau kī Pañch Rāteñ* (Delhi: Mir, 1964), 22.

106. Ali Sardar Jafri, *Mushāʿira 86*.

107. Ali Sardar Jafri, interview with author, Boston, May 2, 1999.

108. Coppola, "Urdu Poetry," 64.

109. See Gouṛ, *Adabī Jāʾize*, 60.

110. Faiz, *Nuskhaha-e Vafā*, 698.

111. Ḥabīb Jālib, *Kulliyāt-e Ḥabīb Jālib* (Lahore: Māwara Publishers, 1993), 216.

112. Shahab Ahmed, "The Politics of Solidarity: Palestine in Modern Urdu Poetry," in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 18, 1998, 29–64.

113. Faiẓ, *Nuskhḥahā-e Vafā*, 567–568.

114. Quoted in Gopichand Narang, *Sānaḥaʾe Karbalā Baṭaur Shiʿrī Istiʿāra*, 68.

115. Aḥmad Farāz, *Nābīnā Shahr meñ Āʾīna* (Karachi: Aẓīm Publishers, 1983), 41.

116. Faiz Ahmad Faiz and Gopichand Narang have both commented on Arif's fondness for the symbol of Karbala. See Iftiḳhār ʿArif, *Mehr-e do Nīm* (Karachi: Danyal, 1983), 5–10 and 23.

117. See Iftiḳhār ʿArif, *Mehr-e do Nīm*, 67.

118. Parvīn Shākir, *Ṣadbarg*, in *Māh-e Tamām* (Delhi: Educational Publishing House, 1995), 131–132.

119. Narañg, *Sānaḥaʾe Karbalā*, 85.

120. Naẓmī, *Reg-e Surḳh*, 201

121. Vahid Akhtar has also drawn similarities between the Islamic revolution of Iran and the uprising of the Imam Husain at Karbala. See Sayyid Vahid Akhtar, "Karbala, an Enduring Paradigm of Islamic Revivalism," *Al-Tawhid* 13 (1996): 113–125.

122. Akhtar, "Karbala," 158–159.

123. Vahid Akhtar, *Karbalā tā Karbalā* (Aligarh: Sayyid Vahid Akhtar, 1991), 168.

124. Akhtar, *Karbalā tā Karbalā*, 175.

125. Ismat Chughtai, *Ek Qaṭrah-e Ḳhūn* (Bombay: Fan aur Fankar, 1976), Foreword.

126. See James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990). Although Manto and Chughtai both identified with the Progressive agenda to a great extent, it must be pointed out that their relationship with some of their other Progressive comrades was tense at times: While the general tenor within the Progressive Movement was to privilege the issues of class and economics, war and imperialism, Chughtai and Manto unabashedly laced their themes with issues dealing with sexuality and this made many of their colleagues uncomfortable.

127. Sadat Hasan Manto, *Yazīd* (Lahore: Maktaba-e Sher-o Adab, 1975), 5–21.

128. Sadat Hasan Manto, *Yazīd*, 7.

129. Sadat Hasan Manto, *Yazīd*, 8.

130. Sadat Hasan Manto, *Yazīd*, 13.

131. Sadat Hasan Manto, *Yazīd*, 15.

132. Sadat Hasan Manto, *Yazīd*, 19.

133. Sadat Hasan Manto, *Yazīd*, 20–21.

134. Gayatri Spivak, interview by Stu Dawrs, *South Asia News*, Center for South Asian Studies, University of Hawaii Newsletter, Spring 2003, 1.

135. Khwaja Shamsuddin Muḥammad-i-Hafiz-i-Shirazi, *The Divan*, Edited and Translated by H. Wilberforce Clarke, Volume 1 (New York: Samuel Weiser Inc., 1970), 4.

136. Shakīl Anjum Dehlavī, ed., *Behtā lahū jalte jism: gujrāt ke haulnāk fasādāt ke pas manẓar men manẓūm majmū'a* [Flowing blood, burning bodies: a versified anthology in the aftermath of Gujarat's frightening riots] (New Delhi: Shakīl Anjum Dehlavī, 2002), 73–74.

137. See Syed Akbar Hyder, "Urdu's Progressive Wit: Sulaiman Khatib, Sarvar Danda, and the Subaltern Satirists Who Spoke Up," in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, no. 20, 2005, 99–126.

138. Ali Sardar Jafri, interview with author, Boston, May 2, 1999.

139. Faiz, *Nusḳhḥahāi Vafā*, 265.

140. Muhiuddin, *Bisāṭ-e Raqṣ*, 196.

CONCLUSION

1. The first poetic epigraph for this chapter is from Mahdī Naẓmi, *Reg-e Surḳh*, 96. The second is from Saeed Shahidi Saeed, *Ḳhāk-e Shafā* (Karachi: Ghulam Abbas, 1982), 16.

2. Frances Pritchett, *Nets of Awareness*, 199.

3. Mahr, *Navā-e Sarosh*, 996. This couplet also exists in a different version but since it is not the subject of my analysis here, I am only giving the version that Saeed Shahidi gave me.

4. Mahr, *Navā-e Sarosh*, 996.

5. Qais is the legendary Romeo-like character of Arabic literature whose love for Laila renders him insane (*majnūn*). Among the many images of Qais that have been conjured up by writers and artists is the one in which the world has enchained him so as to keep him away from Laila.

6. Saeed Shahidi Saeed, interview by author, Hyderabad, India, January 1, 1999. I also interviewed a member of this mushaira audience, who was a professor of Urdu at Osmania University, Hyderabad: Akbar Beg, interview by author, Hyderabad, India, January 2, 1999.

7. Saeed, interview by author, Hyderabad, India, January 2, 1999.

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Tu ba tariki Ali ra didai
zin sabab ghair-e bar u bogzi dai
man Ali ra roz-e raushan dida am
zin sabab ghayr-e bar u nagzida am

You have seen Ali in darkness
For this reason you privilege others over him
I have seen Ali in the light of day
For this reason I do not privilege anyone over him

Rumi