

The Islamic College

**The Global *Azādārī* Effect:
A Comparative Analysis of the Cultural Effect of *Azādārī* and its
components, including Islamic Poetry and its Impact on Shi'ism
in Muslim and English Speaking Countries**

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MA Islamic Studies

September 2011

A dissertation submitted to Islamic College for Advanced Studies in collaboration with Middlesex University in accordance with the requirements of the degree of MA in Islamic Studies in the Faculty of School of Arts.

Acknowledgements

Regarding any light of knowledge that has been shed via this essay – all credit is due to He who has power over all things, and only the mistakes are my own. Special appreciation goes to a helpful and strong supporting cast and sources of inspiration, including my wife Fatemeh Osfoori-Fard and my parents Yahya Abdullah-Aziz and Aisha El-Mekki.

Abstract

The history of important events occurring after the time of the Prophet Muhammad, namely the heart-breaking events at Karbala and the ensuing traditions which followed are examined in an effort to determine the nature of this intricate aspect of Shi'a faith known as *Azādārī*. Many questions which arise include: how *Azādārī* and its components have impacted eastern culture and then later Western culture and how a culture so different, i.e. Western culture has embraced this. Quantitative research and questionnaires will help to identify the patterns which can help to offer deeper understanding of *Azādārī* in the west and its non-cognitive and emotive connection with Islam and Muslims.

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Introduction

The tragic martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, Husayn ibn Ali (peace be upon them), in Karbala, delineates a pivotal movement in Islamic history. This was especially important to Islamic civilization as it occurred only a few generations after the time of the holy Messenger, yet there was a presence of disregard and deviation from the pure Muhammadan Islam which needed to be defused and reckoned with. This manifested into an Armageddon of truth against those who were imposters of truth, misrepresenting Islam. Eventually this great war was lost and many lives were lost as well including many members of the family of the Prophet, the Ahl al-Bayt, and the Imam of the time, Imam Husayn (peace be upon him), who was horrifically martyred, with his body being trampled and his head placed upon a spear and taken to the palace of the tyrant ruler Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah. Islamic scholars still see this movement and revolution as a tremendous victory as the message that Imam Husayn stood for never ceased to be spread. Though his sick son (the fourth Imam), Ali ibn Husayn (peace be upon him) and the womenfolk and children were imprisoned, this message of truth and justice and the story of Karbala were constantly revisited by the narrators who were present and who shared this truth with others as they had been misinformed or uninformed about the tragedy. In fact it is mentioned that after the battle when the womenfolk were chained and being paraded through the streets of Kufa without their veils as to humiliate them even though they were innocent and were of the beloved family of the Prophet, some of the masses began to question who these individuals were. They responded that we are the Ahl al-Bayt. It was well known throughout the Muslim world that the status of the family of the Prophet was a very exalted in particular those who have been mentioned by the Prophet himself in traditions, and they were to be especially treated with a particular respect and honour due to the dignity and nobility of their ancestry and the piety they possessed. It very ironic that the people of Kufa were the ones who initially invited Imam Husayn to come and be their just leader, would be the same ones who would desert him and yet again they would be the same ones bewildered at the sight of the captures and overcome with sorrow. This sparked a very regretful mourning. Women scrambled to provide veils and food - for these were not just any captures, but the Ahl al-Bayt. The weeping and mourning and *Azā'* began for many at that time. The effect that it has had on all Muslims and the Muslim world as a whole is tremendous, particularly for those followers of the Ahl-al-Bayt. By the better part of the 19th century traditional mourning sessions were common in nearly every section of the world. With Islam being the fastest growing religion the global identity of Muslim culture began to become established. Muslims mourned during the months

of Muharram and Safar and it became a custom to recite poetry in memory of these events. there are traditions that mention that these gatherings of mourning were held in memory of the tragedy at Karbala, commemorating the fact that Imam Husayn sacrificed his life to uphold Islam and when the succeeding Imams would hear the mourning, crying and poetry being recited, they would encourage the people to continue to have such gatherings and they would enjoin this tradition, and even they themselves would cry and be overcome with grief. Eventually this culture grew and became the hallmark of those who called themselves the Shi'a. And within various Shi'a regions, *Azādārī* took on unique and more detailed styles based on the local culture. In so many words -it evolved taking on awe-inspiring form tailored to a specific cultures.

Statement of the Problem

Over the course of many long years the culture of *Azādārī* has grown stronger and stronger in the Muslim regions. A variety of styles of poetry have emerged, each unique in its own way. *Azādārī* was no longer a mere custom or tradition it had become a sort of rites of passage for Islam as a civilization. The various techniques and fashions in poetic address had outgrown the theme of custom or tradition as well and had metamorphosed into a finely honed art. As Islam grew across the globe and became more prominent in Western countries it was inevitable that some traditional aspects of Islam which had become amalgamated with eastern flavour would somehow transform into something with a slight Western twist. Islam is a very traditional religion and on one hand does not widely embrace change, as that is clear not just in the example of the holy Quran itself, but in dress and food and other customs. On the other hand each culture has its own unique tendencies which Islam does not debar, granted that it does not go against Islam or conflict with Islamic principles.

The dilemma lies in how a culture which in so many ways is extremely different from Islamic and eastern culture would make a tradition and art as complex and intricate as *Azādārī* of its own. In the west Islam is still in its infant stages in many ways and is still finding its own identity. During this process many Muslims feel inclined to connect Islam to the eastern

cultures as they have been fused together extensively. We find that many Muslims despite their background – i.e. even those converts or reverts born and raised in the west - find it easier and more comfortable to associate themselves with a culture that, is itself more familiar with Islam, i.e. eastern culture as opposed to trying to ‘reinvent the wheel’.

With all the importance in Shi’a traditions about *Azādārī* or shedding tears for Imam Husayn, it is clear that this is a very authentic and original aspect of faith which cannot be simply manufactured and must come genuinely from the heart and with sincerity. Therefore trying to force the elements of an eastern style of *Azādārī* into a Western construct proves somewhat problematic and often is the cause for disassociation with an aspect of Islam altogether.

Thus far no studies academic or otherwise can be found which have focused on analysing the particulars of Western culture and how *Azādārī* and all of its components can coalesce. This is somewhat astonishing since Shi’a Islam is on the rise, globally and in particular in the west and this is perhaps one of the single most important aspects of Shi’as Islam. Such a research will prove to be the first of its kind to investigate and study the trends of the Muslim Shi’a in the west and offer a unique perspective of their psyche. This dissertation would serve as a means to understanding the connection between the west and a very impassioned and perceptual aspect of Islam and what in traditions has been known as the foundation of Islam: the love of the Ahl al-Bayt.

Background of the Study

Azādārī and Islamic poetry, including *qasīdah*, *rawzah*, *marthiya* and *nawha* are rich in heritage and consequently have had colossal impact upon Muslims as a whole, but in particular those who are Shi’a or reside in predominately *Shi’a* regions.

The spread of Islam is undeniable throughout the world in particular in Western states. The same goes for *Shi’a* Islam. However, the rich heritage and culture of *Azādārī*, which can be seen as very successful and influential in Muslim, in particular, *Shi’a* regions, has had a dissimilar effect on English speaking cultures.

This ground-breaking analysis will explore why English speaking Muslims, have not experienced the same emotional bond and association to the culture *Azādārī* and Islamic

poetry and why it has not become an interwoven fabric of *Shi'a* Islam for English speakers. Especially considering the amazing emotional, spiritual and culturally intensive effect it has had for other Muslim languages, i.e. Arabic, Urdu, Persian and Turkish.

Likewise, the history of *Azādārī* and post-Islamic poetry has been reviewed and analysed a great deal. Countless articles can be found explaining the historic origin of this practice, as well as its legitimacy and variations in method of implementation. Unfortunately studies which focus on the rising prevalent tradition of *Azādārī* in regards to its transition into the Western hemisphere, in particular throughout English speaking countries, are non-existent. This may be due to the fact that Islam in the west is still premature in the West, and the same goes for the minority of *Shi'a* Muslims and the customs, rites and practices which are primarily particular to them. This analysis will be the first of its kind in this particular issue and the inconsequential amount of research on this relatively important topic warrants a comparative and in depth investigation and study.

Research Questions or Hypotheses

- When did *Azādārī* originate?
- How has this culture of mourning during Muharram been sustained for such a long period?
- What has caused this tradition of mourning to become a global tradition?
- Does the message of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) uphold any universal principles?
- Why is this tradition of mourning less present amongst non-*Shi'a* Muslims?
- Is there an active movement to defame the culture of *Azādārī* and if so why? And are there any examples to prove this?
- What are some Western perspectives, philosophies and notions regarding the psychology and methods of grieving and bereavement?

- What influence did Islam have on poetry?
- Did the Prophet and Saint Imams (peace be upon them) enjoin *Azādārī* and Islamic poetry?
- How did the culture of *Azādārī* affect Muslims, emotionally, spiritually, culturally and politically?
- Are there any differences in methods of grieving with respect to various cultures?
- Was the impact of this culture widespread, beyond Muslims?
- Is *Azādārī* practiced and or implemented in the same traditional fashions in the English language as in traditional “Islamic” languages?
- Are etymological differences between Muslim languages and the English language a cause for contrast in effectiveness?
- What effect if any does Western culture have in its amalgamation with such religious practices such as those practices in mourning during the month of Muharram?
- What role, if any, has environment and social atmosphere played in this comparative difference?
- Is there any evidence that the emotive connection between *Azādārī* and the revolutionary movement of Husayn ibn Ali (peace be upon him) has played a significant role in application and or expressive implementation?

Methods and Procedures

Quantitative research will be used as a method to gather information regarding the effected group, i.e. English speakers. An ample number of Questionnaires – approximately 100, will assist in identifying the validity of the stated problem. It will also help to ascertain the viewpoints based upon various demographics.

Members of various *Shi'a* communities from a range of English speaking communities, from the U.K. to the U.S., will be focused upon to complete the study. As much as possible, the goal is to contact a wide variety of communities in order to get a more realistic overview of the perception and opinion of these respective communities. Since I have been making

contacts with various communities I have visited over the past few years, contacting the communities themselves will be relatively easy. However, in an effort to keep the results as accurate as possible I will aim to target various age groups, gender and ethnicities within each of these communities. So while the communities will be outlined, the individuals selected will be at random although they will fall in some way within the various categories to ensure the most precise representation of the overall community at large.

Surveys will be completed on an individual basis to ensure integrity of information and data collected. Surveys will be submitted via, phone, email or in person. And in addition to basic demographical information, which will be necessary, inquiries relative to the issue at hand will be addressed to clarify the authenticity of the problem as well as possible solutions.

The collected data will be analysed in search of patterns and tendencies which pave the way for answers to some of the aforementioned questions. Of course, there are many variables to consider when deriving patterns and tendencies and the questionnaire will reflect this by delving into some detailed information in order to help gain better understanding.

Additionally, social media sources, such as Facebook, have been used in order to reach a wider audience by creating and utilizing groups, online polls and discussions.

The questionnaire consists of 29 questions and room for additional comments, and aims to generate specific categories which can be later cross-referenced in order to derive sub-categories and more specific data. Areas of focus include: family life, ethnic background, language, poetic inclination, emotive nature and religious confidence.

Limitations

Quite naturally, analogous to any census there will be margin for error. In this instance, that will most likely be due to the fact that the number English speaking *Shi'a* Muslims is quite high, and the poll can obviously only represent a portion of the total mass. Also in a survey of this nature integrity of the applicant is key and the hope is that anonymity will increase accuracy of results and encourage participants not to feel subjected to judgement or that they are being judged based on their religious dispositions and views.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that the success of the proposed solution(s) until implemented successfully on a large scale will remain somewhat hypothetical.

In retrospect, additional categories in the survey which were overlooked could have helped to pinpoint more specific demographics, i.e. if it was clear if the individual was a convert to Islam or born Muslim, or what the profession of the participant was. Should this study further develop, the limitations should be taken into consideration.

With regards to the survey, it came to light that a vast many Muslims living in the West are apprehensive about sharing information. Some questioned if this was a government affiliated project, others felt religion was a private matter, while others were generally unenthusiastic to spend any time completing any survey and seemed to view this as the typical 'telemarketer syndrome'. Of course, the latter is somewhat typical and expected, especially in what seems to be relatively socially cold Western societies. Thus the gathering of data required extensive reminding seeking leads.

Azā' (Mourning) and its Origin and a Brief Overview of Karbala

The idea of mourning itself is something that is obviously not particular to any tribe or faith and all humans have a capability and tendency to grieve and mourn in some fashion, especially as that relates to their dear deceased ones.

While there are some groups including the modern scholars of some non-Shi'a schools of thought who disallow even the shedding of tears for the deceased, amongst the vast majority of cultures this is quite the norm.

The methods of mourning in traditional Eastern and Middle Eastern culture as seen in early Turkish history and with that of the Arabs involved very intense grieving and for some this was manifested in forms of tapping and hitting one's self in addition to wailing and crying.

“*Azā'*” is rooted in the Arabic language meaning to mourn, lament and grieve while the “*dāri*” suffix is of Persian origin used to signify establishing, being in the state of, or upholding. The terms are commonly used together as a word (*Azādāri*) in the Persian language, but have since become somewhat common amongst Shi'a Muslims in general; many also refer to gatherings where mourning takes place as “*Majlis* (gathering) of *Azā'*”

These gatherings would grow to include Theatrical representations (in Iran this was known as *ta'zia*) along with many styles of poetry and speeches.

The eighth Imam of the followers of the Ahl al-Bayt (Household and Progeny of the holy Prophet) known as the Shi'a has mentioned the following tradition in regards to the custom of mourning during the Month of Muharram, which became significantly evident after the tragic incident which befell the third Imam, Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) and his family and dearest companions:

With the advent of the month of Muharram, my father Imam Kadhim (peace be upon him) would never be seen laughing; gloom and sadness would overcome him for (the first) ten days of the month; and when the tenth day of the month would dawn, it would be a day of tragedy, grief and weeping for him.

The Month of Muharram marks the tragic events which took place in Karbala, Iraq. The third Imam and leader of the Muslims was Husayn, the son of Alī the son of Abī Talib. However a common theme which is evident in the history of these Saint Imams is that they were often oppressed and kept under military or government surveillance and were not able to carry out their lives completely as they desired. Tyrants and false rulers would aim to thwart the efforts of the establishment of a totally Islamic society and government in accordance with the teachings of the Prophet of Islam. Some may ask what the motive is for the many wealthy rulers and Caliphs of the likes of the Abbasid and Umayyad dynasties to suppress and control the lives of the Imams. A primary motive is that should a just and righteous ruler who is most knowledgeable be in charge and have the authority over the Islamic *Ummah*, then that would mean the end of favouritism in government position and rank of “nobles”, and a disbursement of state treasury and the inevitable demise of dictator rulership and kingdoms which had been established on false pretence and without divine order – and ultimately it would mean the end of governance of incompetent and unworthy caliphs who had swindled their way to gain reigns of authority.

And such was the political climate during the era of the third Imam, as a tyrant ruler sought to eradicate the nobility of the family of the holy Prophet of Islam by referring to the Imam as a ‘rebel’ and by denying the masses to know much of the truth. Interesting enough, there are ample reference regarding the position and rank of the Imams amongst both Sunni & Shi’a traditions, however there appears to be constant effort by some anti-Shi’a groups to belittle the importance of the role of the Imams and their authority and similarly promote or condone the acts of the tyrant rulers of that era in the same way.

Ironically, Yazid the son of Mu’awiyah who promoted himself as the self-proclaimed “Commander of the Faithful”, and his deputies who claimed to be devout Muslim were busy in performing sinful acts openly such as drinking and gambling and these were certainly unacceptable for a person claiming to be the rightful ruler of the Muslim nation. Additionally he was engaging in embezzlement of funds and disrespecting the family of the holy Prophet which next to the Messenger of God, are considered to be the most pious, righteous, virtuous and complete individuals, amongst other despicable acts. In Islam exists the concept of ‘Enjoining good & forbidding vice’ as this is a way to defuse and prevent socially harmful epidemics and behaviours, and for Imam Husayn this was his motive to approach the tyrant to dethrone him. Moreover a massive group of the people and leaders under the rule of his deputy,

Ubaydullah the son of Zīyad had congregated secretly, and began to prepare for a revolt against the injustices of the government and therefore by recognizing the rightful heir to the throne of religious authority and rulership over the Muslim *Ummah*, over 18,000 letters were sent from Iraq inviting the Imam to come to them as their deserving leader and rightful leader of all Muslims. The Imam, along with his family and close companions began to head towards Iraq in order to stand up against the tyranny and oppression of Yazid and ibn Zīyad.

In due course the Imam, after having sent his cousin and representative forward to verify the request of the people, he would later be betrayed by these same people as they would also betray Muslim the son of Aqil, the cousin of the Imam, before him. This would lead to the capture of the Imam and his caravan. The Imam refused to pay homage to the oppressive government and kept his loyalty firm only to the God, the holy Quran, the Messenger of God, the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and the upright principles of the religion of Islam. Finally this would constitute an epic battle and Armageddon of truth against falsehood which would echo throughout the globe and penetrate the hearts of believers for centuries.

On the fact that the Imam, having received knowledge prior of what was to come, still took his family with him, Charles Dickens the renowned English novelist states: “If Husayn had fought to quench his worldly desires...then I do not understand why his sister, wife, and children accompanied him. It stands to reason therefore, that he sacrificed purely for Islam.”

For several days the Euphrates River and access to water would be denied for the camp of Husayn, which included womenfolk, small and infant children.

These events which would take place the first few days of the first month of the Islamic (lunar) calendar, during the month of Muharram and would snowball into the life-changing event which would take place on the tenth day of Muharram, the day of “*Ashūra*” (derived from the Arabic word “*ashara*” which means ten). Outnumbered by the thousands on the day of *Ashūra*, Imam Husayn and his companions fought gallantly, but one after another became martyrs.

In an effort to bring water back to the camp of Husayn, his brother Abbas, the flag bearer would try desperately to retrieve a small amount of water for his niece and the thirsty children

whose throats were parched on that scorching afternoon but would have his limbs cut off by the enemy viciously, in the process. When the infant son of Imam Husayn was brought forth before the enemy lines to request them to have mercy upon a mere 6 month old infant who is innocent and dying of thirst, his request was answered by a marksman sharply piercing the neck of the infant child who was being held up high in the hands of his father. In some traditions it mentions that the sadistic army of the tyrants used for this instance an arrow which is typically used to hunt or kill large game to puncture the fragile throat of this child. Young men, barely at the age of puberty begged to defend the honour of the Abā Abdullah (Imam al-Husayn) and the holy progeny of the Messenger of God, including an older son Ali Akbar who would also fight with valour but would have difficulty trying to withstand the heaviness of the armour, the blazing heat and the attack of multiple enemies. It is recorded that in his attempt he called out to his father saying that he could fight more if he could only have a few drops of water as the dehydration and lack of water over the past few days had taken a severe toll upon him and the companions of the Imam.

The details are many regarding each person who wanted to defend justice and the manner in which they would be slain, yet for the sake of brevity only a few instances have been mentioned. Each instance saddening and unfortunate as the next and perhaps none as detrimental as the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (The Chief of Martyrs) himself, who took to the battlefield and first reminded the treacherous enemies of the duty of each Muslim to follow the teachings of Islam and the Quran and what the Messenger of Islam had said regarding piety and righteousness. And as it was a custom to introduce one's self before battle, the Imam who needed no introduction would remind them of the position of the noble family of the Prophet. Nonetheless, for the promise of a position in government and wealth the army leaders continued the onslaught and would fill the body of the Imam with countless arrows, and if that were not enough, they would stab his body with spear and the most ruthless heathen would sit upon the chest of Imam Husayn and would perform the heinous and monstrous act of beheading the wounded Imam. Still not satisfied, vile enemies would trample the remains of the body and finally other loathsome and wicked enemies would steal the ring, turban, and clothing of the Imam. His head would be placed upon a spear as the tents were looted and the womenfolk were taken as prisoners and captures of war. The earrings of the young innocent daughter of the Imam are recorded to have been snatched away as were the women's veils and scarves snatched from them as they were all chained and paraded through towns as prize-captured rebels.

No accurate report can be found anywhere in history to speak ill of the grandson of the holy Prophet as he was renowned in his knowledge and piety and unparalleled in his kindness and virtue and was beloved to those who knew and even those who knew not of him. It is narrated that the Apostle of God, the Prophet Muhammad stated many traditions regarding Hassan and Husayn the second and third respective Imams as well as the grandsons of the holy Prophet. In one tradition it states that he said: O God, I love both of them. Therefore love them and love whoever loves them. He would also add: Whoever loves al-Hassan and al-Husayn is one whom I love. Whomever I love, God loves and whomever God loves, He will cause to enter Heaven. Whoever hates/despises them, I hate and God hates. Whomever God hates, He will cause to enter the Fire. Finally he said: These two sons of mine are my two plants of sweet basil (to sweeten) the world.

Once this beloved and dear Imam had been murdered on the desert sands of Karbala, the mourning of the tragedy began very early for the womenfolk. It is said that his daughter who was accustomed to sleeping on his chest wanted to find where her father had gone to...to find the body to lay her head upon his chest once again. The women wept intensely after having witnessed what appeared to be the desecration of humanity.

Chained and forced to walk they arrived at the city of Kufa of Iraq, ironically the city who had invited then betrayed the Imam initially. There the locals, confused, began to wonder who these bare-headed women were. When asked they replied that they were the Ahl al-Bayt (the household and progeny of their Noble Prophet). The masses realized then the head upon the spear was that also of the Ahl al-Bayt and none other than the Imam they had invited to be their leader, Imam Husayn. This caused in an eruption of emotion as many people, especially those who were witness and those who were active and involved in these events began to cry and according to many historians, they began to hit themselves in shame, grief, despair and heartache. They were mortified by this horrific tragedy and were overcome by tremendous discomfort woe and sorrow. In some way they played a direct role in this massacre and this responsibility would lie heavily upon their shoulders. People cried, and wept hitting their hands upon their head, hitting their thighs and apparently this calamity and suffering of the family of the Prophet plagued those who became aware and eventually spread like wildfire.

The specifics of when this form of mourning became prevalent, throughout the entire Shi'a community is difficult to pinpoint precisely, however what is known and can be found in

reliable and credible narrations are that following this incident sessions and gatherings were held regularly and the events were told by those who were witness and those who had come to be aware of what had transpired. The sister of Husayn, Zaynab is well known for her modesty and piety and gave one of the most eloquent speeches in face of the tyrant ruler himself. When they were brought to Damascus before Yazid and they were in the court of the tyrant the fire of justice had not subsided and she did not hesitate to speak out against this great injustice. This was the seeming manifestation of the prophetic tradition: The Holy Prophet stated: Surely, there exists in the hearts of the believer, with respect to the martyrdom of Husayn (peace be upon him), a heat that never subsides. And while Yazid took a stick and literally poked at the face of Imam Husayn ridiculing the revolt of the Imam, he alludes self-righteously to his outward victory and says: do you not see what God has done to Husayn. Zaynab proudly says in her speech: "...I saw nothing but beauty!" That is the beauty of the moral, ethical, noble, honourable and righteous defence of truth and justice even at the cost of one's own life. To stand in face of oppression, against all odds is the epitome of faith and in the Imam was this perfect exemplar.

Zaynab and Ali son of Husayn (also referred to as Imam Sajjad or Imam Zayn al-Abidin) who was sick and unable to fight in Karbala were two of the primary narrators of the events in question and many of the people were misinformed about what happened and the reasons why, and they would hold gatherings explaining the details and in these gathers people would weep.

Also, in early Arabic culture poetry was extremely important and would be recited at gatherings for entertainment. Similarly poets began to recite about the events of Ashura and thus Karbala and Imam Husayn were, in the poetic sense, immortalized through these verses and odes.

Globalization and Universality of Muharram, Ashura and Imam Husayn (peace be upon him)

Imam Ridha (peace be upon him) has said: He who sits in a gathering in which our affairs (and our path and aims) are discussed and revived; his heart shall not die on the day (Day of Judgment) when hearts shall die (of fear).

Some individuals sat in such gatherings motivated by spiritual reward, while many others did so recognizing this as a duty, seeking God's favour. The rewards mentioned by the Prophet himself who narrated of the incident to happen and of the Imams who came after Imam Husayn exhibit the great amount of emphasis and importance of reviving and remembering this event.

Furthermore, Imam Husayn's struggle became a global representation of fight against oppression and standing up against injustice and the embodiment of sacrifice. This made Imam Husayn's revolution a true victory.

The Scottish historian and essayist Thomas Carlyle, in regards to the victory of Imam Husayn has stated: "The best lesson which we get from the tragedy of Cerebella is that Husayn and his companions were rigid believers in God. They illustrated that the numerical superiority does not count when it comes to the truth and the falsehood. The victory of Husayn, despite his minority, marvels me!"

Those descendants of Imam Husayn are proud to be attributed to such great nobility while on the other hand the opposite is true for those who know their lineage and or relation to the enemy camp. Although the battle was technically lost, it would be accurate to announce that the war was won. The lessons and spirit of Muharram lives on globally and perhaps divine wisdom was such that fate should occur in this fashion. For Muslims, the pilgrimage to Hajj is considered an obligation for those who have financial means to do so; however the number of pilgrims which attend the annual Hajj pilgrimage vs. those who travel to Karbala to visit the Shrine of Imam Husayn (a recommended but not mandatory pilgrimage) is astonishing. The Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia records an approximate two million pilgrims per year. News agencies such as Press TV & BBC have estimated the pilgrims of the Shrine of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) to be between the numbers of ten to fourteen million, a stupendously mind-boggling difference. Many in nearby countries bike or walk to visit the shrine of the third Imam. While some flock there for receiving intercession as many miraculous and phenomenal experiences have been and are still taking place there, others go for the spiritual atmosphere. It is an evident testament to the accord and interrelationship of freedom and fight against injustice and oppression in its personification of Imam Husayn and Ashūra and the beliefs and ideology of the Shi'a everywhere.

The universality of social justice is something understood by any human being. Certain concepts and principles are an innate part of the human makeup and essence and thus as part of human nature can be easily understood even without a formal or structured system. Such are many elements of social justice. For example if someone were to take the property or life of another by force which they had no right to, any individual, monotheist, atheist, agnostic or otherwise understands that there is something wrong with that. This is what is referred to in Islam as the '*fitra*' or the essence or quintessential nature woven into the fabric of all human beings. Infringing upon the rights of others is something that the human quintessence and nature disapproves. Freedom from injustice and oppression is a major theme in Islam and Imam Husayn is in many ways the manifestation of this freedom, hence another title of the Imam: *Abā Ahrār* (The father of the free people). The famous Indian political and spiritual leader Mahatma Gandhi recognized this and was quoted to have said: "I learned from Hussein how to achieve victory while being oppressed."

The father of Imam Husayn, the successor of the holy Prophet and the first Imam, Imam Ali son of Abī Talib also known as the commander of the faithful, said to his son, the second Imam, Imam Hassan: "Oh my son, do not be the slave of other people, because Allah (God) has created you free" Servitude is an underpinning principle in Islam, and true servitude is a means for success granted that it is servitude towards God and what He has ordained and not to anyone else, hence freedom from shackles of enslavement towards material world or other persons or any form of injustice.

Today the remembrance continues and in every country gatherings are held and the struggle and lessons are remembered and people mourn. From Japan to Nigeria to Europe to the Americas and Australia, these gatherings continue in traditional mourning sessions which usually include elegies and poetry and hitting that hand upon the chest (known as *mātam*) while chanting and reciting lyrics of lamentation in.

Mourning in Traditions of non-Shi'a Muslims

The entire idea of lack of mourning by non-Shi'as and in particular the Sunni sects in regards to Karbala can be summed up in the words of a seasoned and knowledgeable scholar, the Syrian Grand Mufti, Sheikh Ahmad Hassoun as he expresses what appears to be a calculated and conspired effort to deny the truth about the events of Karbala:

"... Allow me to say this in honesty; tens of years when I was studying, I never heard from a single one of my teachers, that the day of Ashūra was a tragedy for the Islamic nation... why were they hiding this (truth) from us? May Allah forgive them! They said "Out of fear that you would be influenced and become Shi'a"... out of fear! Should we hide the truth from fear of (religious) inclinations?!

Do we conceal the truth so as not to allow one school of thought (*mazhab*) to be reinforced against another school of thought? O gentlemen, Spare us of this!

The period has passed when religion was used as a tool for personal political gains. And the time has passed when a man falsely names himself Amir al-Mu'minīn (The Commander of the Faithful) by means of oppression, [and uses this title] to spread corruption on the earth.

The Commander of the Faithful is none other than he who, firstly, applies the scale of truth and justice upon himself , and secondly, weighs his own deeds according to the Islamic Law (Shari's), and then thirdly places Islam as the standard and measure for his own and his family's deeds...and this is: Amir al-Mu'minīn (The Commander of the Faithful)!

And that person who became the commander/ ruler through forged allegiances and deception and bribery...such a person is no one's "Amir". He is merely the prince of his own basely desires and urges.

(this is) the truth, I am obliged to declare."

Similarly, when researching the books of Sunni traditions, almost no mention can be found of this major event in history. Is it possible that an event so capital as a revolution of this magnitude by the beloved grandson of the Prophet of Islam could be totally ignored or belittled to the extent that most of today's scholars, let alone laymen who are not Shi'a are unaware of the reality of what transpired, the historic account, socio-political implications or moral and religious significance?

In early Islam the mourning and weeping during the month of Muharram especially was something that even Sunni Muslims participated in. During the reign of the Safavid Empire, as early as the 12th century, there was no staunch disunity in regards to commemorating this tragedy. Currently in places where both Sunni & Shi'as reside alongside each other peacefully such as Iraq and in particular Karbala, many non-Shi'as engage in the practice of mourning and commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn.

Abdullah Yusuf Ali (d. 1953), a non-Shi'a Muslim, is perhaps the most well-known translator of the Quran to the English language and in 1931 he gave an address regarding the theme of Muharram, in which he aimed to unite the various Islamic schools of thought upon the principle of Islamic unity, and to even create an arena suitable for introduction of the universal principles and struggles of Imam Husayn to non-Muslims. Below are is a preface of the address along with a brief excerpt of the discourse, discussing the lessons of the tragedy of Karbala:

Preface

The following pages are based on a report of an Address which I delivered in London at an Ashūra *Majlis* on Thursday the 28th May, 1931 (Muharram 1350 A.H.), at the Waldorf Hotel. The report was subsequently corrected and slightly expanded. The *Majlis* was a notable gathering, which met at the invitation of Mr. A. S. M. Anik. Nawab Sir Umar Hayat Khan, Tiwana, presided and members of all schools of thought in Islam, as well as non-Muslims, joined reverently in doing honour to the memory of the great Martyr of Islam. By its inclusion in the Progressive Islam Pamphlets series, it is hoped to reach a larger public than were able to be present in person. Perhaps, also, it may help to strengthen the bonds of brotherly love which unite all who hold sacred the ideals of brotherhood preached by the Prophet in his last Sermon.

Lesson of the Tragedy

That briefly is the story. What is the lesson? There is of course the physical suffering in martyrdom, and all sorrow and suffering claim our sympathy, ---- the dearest, purest, most outflowing sympathy that we can give. But there is a greater suffering than physical suffering. That is when a valiant soul seems to stand against the world; when the noblest motives are reviled and mocked; when truth seems to suffer an eclipse. It may even seem that the martyr has but to say a word of compliance, do a little deed of non-resistance; and much sorrow and suffering would be saved; and the insidious whisper comes: "Truth after all can never die." That is perfectly true. Abstract truth can never die. It is independent of man's cognition. But the whole battle is for man's keeping hold of truth and righteousness. And that can only be done by the highest examples of man's conduct - spiritual striving and suffering enduring firmness of faith and purpose, patience and courage where ordinary mortals

would give in or be cowed down, the sacrifice of ordinary motives to supreme truth in scorn of consequence. The martyr bears witness, and the witness redeems what would otherwise be called failure. It so happened with Husayn. For all were touched by the story of his martyrdom, and it gave the deathblow to the politics of Damascus and all it stood for. And Muharram has still the power to unite the different schools of thought in Islam, and make a powerful appeal to non-Muslims also.

One of the reasons why this address holds incredible significance is that it shows a uniform love, affection and respect for the household of the Prophet and the struggle against injustice. Some scholars like to escape the despicable acts of Mu'awiyah and his son and their many breach of treaties and unislamic habits by saying that God will judge them or even saying that they were rightful caliphs and that Husayn was wrong to go against the one who sat in the chair of the ruler – albeit his leadership was invalid, and we cannot judge but rather God will judge the rulers actions. This idea goes against all that Islam propagates yet it has become a common theme. Countless scholars refuse to take a stance against Mu'awiyah. Of course, when it came to Yazīd, his actions were so perverse and vile that it is impossible to condone, yet still there are few scholars who seem to want to belittle the stand of Husayn by justifying Yazid's government in some fashion.

Concerning the rule of Yazid Ibn Taymiyya is quoted to have said in Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah: "Yazid had the sword and hence he had the power to deal with anyone that opposed him. He had the power to reward his subjects with the contents of the treasury, and could also withhold their rights. He had the power to punish criminals; it is in this context that we can understand that he was the *khalifah* (caliph) and king. Issues such as Yazīd's piety or lack of it, or his honesty or lack of it, is another matter. In all of his actions Yazid was not just; there is no dispute amongst the people of Islam on this matter".

Similarly, it is written in al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah (The Beginning and the End), a classic work by the renowned Sunni scholar and student of Ibn Taymiyya, Ibn Kathir.: "Traditions inform us that Yazīd loved worldly vices, would drink, listen to music, kept the company of boys with no facial hair [civil expression for paedophilia with boys, a form of homosexuality], played drums, kept dogs [civil expression for bestiality], not a day would go by when he was not in a drunken state".

Ibn Hajar al-Haytami mentions in his book refuting the views of the Shi'a (Sawaiqh al Muhriqa): "There is difference between Ahl al-Sunnah over whether Mu'awiyah's heir apparent Yazīd was a *kafir* (disbeliever). One group have deemed Yazīd to be a *kafir*, another has stated he was a Muslim but a *fasiq* (transgressor), a *fajir* (one that commits debauchery) and a drunkard. There is consensus over his *fisq* (transgression). One party of scholars have stated that you can curse him by name; this includes individuals such as Ibn Jauzi and Ahmad. One group made up of individuals such as Ibn Jauzi deem Yazīd a *kafir*, others say he was not a *kafir* but rather this is a matter that has caused a difference of opinion. The majority of Ahl al-Sunnah all agree that he was a *fasiq* (transgressor), a *fajir* (one that commits debauchery) and a drunkard. Waqidi had recorded a narration 'Verily we opposed Yazīd fearing Allah would rain stones down on us, Yazīd considered *nikah* (marriage) with mothers and sisters to be permissible and drank alcohol".

Moreover, In *Tat'hīr al-Janaan*, Ibn Hajr al-Makki had stated: " *Rasulullah* (The Messenger of Allah) (peace be upon him) witnessed a dream in which thirty individuals were jumping on his pulpit like monkeys. This pained *Rasulullah* so much that until his death no one ever witnessed him smiling. The thirty include the family of Marwan and Yazīd, Yazīd was the worst of them and the greatest *fasiq*, and there is a group amongst the [Sunni] imams that have issued fatwas deeming Yazīd to be a *fasiq* and a *kafir*. *Rasulullah* said that the *Dīn* (religion) would be destroyed at the hands of the youth from Quraysh. This refers to Banū Marwan, Yazīd bin Mu'awiyah and others. Yazīd ranks amongst the most debased oppressors and transgressors of all time". Ibn Hajr al-Makki like Abu Sulayman and Azam Tariq was a major adherent of Mu'awiyah, and in fact wrote a book in honour of Mu'awiyah. Yet even he deemed Yazīd to be a *fasiq*.

Also in *Bidaya* it states: "Ibn Asakir, writing on Yazīd, states then when Husayn's head was brought before Yazīd, he recited the couplets of Ibn Zubayrī, the *kafir* 'I wish my ancestors of Badr were here to see the severed head of the rebellious tribe [The Prophet (peace be upon him, tribe of Hashim)]." This explains a long line of evident hatred and enmity against the Ahl al-Bayt. This hatred seems to have not subsided and its implications are evident in the disposition of many non-Shi'as when it comes to mourning, commemorating or even remembering the tragic events of Ashūra.

Some questions require a much deeper analysis and perhaps a study of its own, such as: who stands to gain from destroying the memory of Husayn? Why are some scholars and entities insistent upon justifying the abhorrent acts of Yazid? Who benefits from the division of Sunni and Shi'as in this regard? Is there a conspiracy at hand?

Defamation of the culture of Azādārī

Reiterating the address of the translator and commentator of the Quran, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, a case study was done analyzing his commentary and explanatory notes between the original version and some of the 'revised' versions. Shockingly, an array of disparity is evident. Specifically, these include commentary of the merits of Imams Hassan and Husayn (peace be upon them) which were removed and deleted entirely in some of the newer editions.

In Chapter 37, Verse 107 of the holy Quran it states:

And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice.

In the footnotes Abdullah Yusuf Ali has made the following remarks:

The adjective qualifying "sacrifice" here, '*azīm*', (great, momentous) may be understood both in a literal and a figurative sense. In a literal sense it implies that a fine sheep or ram was substituted symbolically. The figurative sense is even more important. It was indeed a great and momentous occasion, when two men, with concerted will, "ranged themselves in the ranks" of those to whom self-sacrifice in the service of God was the supreme thing in life. This was a type of the service which Imam Husayn performed, many ages later, in 60 A.H., as I have explained in a separate pamphlet. But note that the ransom, i.e. the commutation of sacrifice, was made not by the men, but by God. God wants our will and devotion, not necessarily our lives in a physical sense. He will

find means, if we offer ourselves, to use us not for our destruction, but for our further advancement. In this sense, said Jesus, "he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. x 39).

In later revised editions, this mention of Imam Husayn, albeit as a parable and not even the intended direct interpretation of verse, has been wiped out completely. It is noteworthy to mention that the commentator also felt it was important to write and mention the separate pamphlet regarding the tragedy and sacrifice of Imam Husayn, and this mention has also been deleted.

In Chapter 3, Verse 140 it states:

If a wound hath touched you, be sure a similar wound hath touched the others. Such days (of varying fortunes) We give to men and men by turns: that Allah may know those that believe, and that He may take to Himself from your ranks Martyr-witnesses (to Truth). And Allah loveth not those that do wrong.

The commentator explains in his footnotes (#457):

These general considerations apply in particular to the disaster in *Uhud*. (1) In a fight for truth, if you are hurt, be sure the adversary has suffered hurt also, the more so as he has no faith to sustain him. (2) Success or failure in this world comes to all at varying times: we must not grumble, as we do not see the whole of Allah's Plan. (3) Men's true mettle is known in adversity as gold is assayed in fire: Cf. also [3:154](#), n. 467. (4) Martyrdom is in itself an honour and a privilege; how glorious is the fame of Hamzah the Martyr, and in later times of Hassan and Husayn? (5) If there is any dross in us, it will be purified by resistance and struggle. (6) When evil is given rope a little, it works out its own destruction: the orgies of cruelty indulged in by the Pagans after what they supposed to be their victory at Uhud filled up their cup of iniquity; it lost them the support and adherence of the best in their own ranks, and hastened the destruction of Paganism from Arabia, Cf. [3:127](#) and n. 448.

Interesting enough, the latter publications are essentially identical in regards to this verse and footnote with the exception that both revisions have omitted the following portion: "*and in later times of Hassan and Husayn?*"

And yet again in another instance regarding martyrdom a deletion is evident in revised texts.

Chapter 4, Verse 69

All who obey Allah and the messenger are in the company of those on whom is the Grace of Allah,- of the prophets (who teach), the sincere (lovers of Truth), the witnesses (who testify), and the Righteous (who do good): Ah! what a beautiful fellowship!

586. A passage of the deepest spiritual meaning. Even the humblest man who accepts Faith and does good becomes at once an accepted member of a great and beautiful spiritual Fellowship. It is a company which lives

perpetually in the sunshine of Allah's Grace. (This passage partly illustrates 1:5). It is a glorious hierarchy, of which four grades are specified: (1) The highest is that of the Prophets or Apostles, who get plenary inspiration from Allah, and who teach mankind by example and precept. That rank in Islam is held by Muhammad Mustafa. (2) The next are those whose badge is sincerity and truth; they love and support the truth with their person, their means, their influence, and all that is theirs. That rank was held by the special companions of Muhammad, among whom the type was that of Abu Bakr Siddiq. (3) The next are the noble army of Witnesses, who testify to the truth. The testimony may be by martyrdom, as in the case of Imams Hassan and Husayn. Or it may be by the tongue of the true preacher or the pen of the devoted scholar, or the life of the man devoted to service. (4) Lastly, there is the large company of righteous people, the ordinary folk who do their ordinary business, but always in a righteous way. They are the rank and file of the beautiful Fellowship, in which each has his place and yet all feel that they derive glory from the common association, (Cf. 29:9). (R).

In this instance, in later revisions another distortion is evident where “*as in the case of Imams Hassan and Husayn*” have been removed from the text.

Although Amana Publications, Amana Corporation, The Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance as well as the King Fahd Quran Printing Complex were contacted to inquire about the mysterious omissions, and the aim and methodology of the revisions and edits, no reply has yet been received in this regard.

What does come to light is that a evident animosity and hostility toward the Ahl al-Bayt by those who claim to be leaders or are in positions of leadership from a historic standpoint until today have caused for the masses and followers to feel antagonistic towards or to ignore or despise the commemoration of the tragic events and any traditions and rites associated with them.

Poetic Influence

Pre-Islamic poetry and Arabic and Persian literature and poetry has been studied at length, such as the seven famous odes of pre-Islamic Arabia or the likes of the writings of Sa'dī, odes of Hafiz or the famous *Shahnameh* (book of kings) of Firdausi. Sa'dī's poetry for instance is

not only renowned throughout the world, but a well-known part of one his poems can be found on the entrance of the United Nations building:

The sons of Adam are limbs of each other, Having been created of one essence.
When the calamity of time affects one limb The other limbs cannot remain at rest.
If thou hast no sympathy for the troubles of others
Thou art unworthy to be called by the name of a human.

In ancient Arabia where literacy was uncommon the earliest form of literature was in the poetry itself and while it was almost rare to find individuals who could to read and write, extensive memorization was very normal. With the advent of Islam the memorization of the melodic and eloquent verses of Quranic revelation came natural and as there were already a great number of persons who had memorized and were accustomed to recited the most eloquent of poems. The divine revelation of the Quran became the standard for Arabic grammar, eloquence and literature, and part of its miraculous nature is that the likes of it were never reproduced.

The focus of this study is not in the specifics of the origins of ancient poetry and its transition into the post-Islamic era, however the fact that such rich culture was prominent in such eras where Islamic civilization was dominant or when Persia was a grand empire or when the Ottoman rule was prevailing or during the revolutionary efforts of India to break from British rule, proves that these literatures are significant even from a global standpoint. It can even be argued that later European or Western literature was in fact influenced by this as well. Of course some orientalist argue that the European rise of scientific and social advancements caused for an impact upon Muslim culture as well. Considering the prevalence of Islam as a religion today and the immutable Quran, it is clear that if there was some non-Islamic influence it was minimal at best.

The event of Ashūra sparked a completely new era in poetry and many styles were formed. The religious authorities and Imams after Imam Husayn also highly encouraged gatherings of mourning and recitation of poetry. In a tradition from the sixth Imam, al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) he states:

There is none who recites poetry about Husayn (PEACE BE UPON THEM) and weeps and makes others weep by means of it, except that Allah makes Paradise incumbent upon him and forgives his sins.

Similarly, in another tradition from the same Imam it states: All praise is for Allah, who has placed amongst the people, those who arrive in our presence, eulogizing us and reciting elegies about us.

Schimmel writes in her analysis of Karbala and Imam Husayn in Persian and Indo-Muslim literature about the impact it had, as well as the emotional connection of a devout believer when considering the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet. She also mentions part of Qaani's eloquent elegy:

What is raining? Blood.
Who? The eyes.
How? Day and night.
Why? From grief.
Grief for whom?
Grief for the king of Karbala'

De'bil was a poet who was devoted to the Ahl al-Bayt, and a tradition from Imam al-Reza addresses this poet saying: I desire that you recite for me poetry, for surely, these days (of the month of Muharram) are the days of grief and sorrow, which have passed over us, Ahl al-Bayt.

In prevalent Urdu culture, *Souz* (elegies), *Salam* (Salutations) and *Marthiya* or *Marsiya* (Requiems) have a distinctive style. In the pre-Islamic era in the elegiac poetry also referred to as Marthiya was prevalent. This is a customary type of poetry in mainstream gatherings of Azā. Another form of poetic expression is more of mono-rhyme and tends to be longer which also dates to pre-Islamic era and is known as *qasīda*.

These forms of poetry in Muslim cultures are common especially as tributes to martyrs and to honour the deceased and are an emotive form of bereavement and grieving.

Lamentation (*nawh*) or *nawha* common in gatherings of mourning are recited as often people weep or in groups beat their chest. Attributed to Rubab, the wife of Husayn is a lamentation following the events of Karbala:

He who was a light, shining, is murdered;
Murdered in Karbala', and unburied.
Descendant of the Prophet, may God reward you well;
May you be spared judgment on the day when deeds are weighed:
For you were to me as a mountain, solid, in which I could take refuge;
And you treated us always with kindness, and according to religion.
O who shall speak now for the orphans, for the petitioners;
By whom shall all these wretched be protected, in whom shall they take refuge?
I swear by God, never will I wish to exchange marriage with you for another;
No, not until I am covered; covered in the grave.

The traditions are many where the Imams would weep themselves and mourn and speak of the rewards and blessings of those who recite poetry or those who weep when hearing the poetry.

Ja'far b. 'Affan (a poet) came to home of Imam al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) whereupon he sat next to the Imam, upon which the Imam said, Ja'far, I have been told that you recite poetry for Husayn, peace be upon him, and that you do it well.' 'Yes, and may God make me a sacrifice for you!' replied the poet. 'Recite, then', said al-Sadiq, and Ja'far recited these verses:

He who weeps for Husayn might well weep for Islam itself,
For the principles of Islam have been destroyed, and used unlawfully:
On the day when Husayn became the target of spears,
When swords drank from him, busy with their work.
And corpses, scattered, were abandoned in the desert.
Great birds hovering over by night and by day ...

And the Imam Sadiq wept and those around him with him, until his face and beard were covered with tears. Then he said, 'By God, Ja'far, the angels closest to God are witness here and they hear your words; they have wept as we have and more...

And likewise even non-Shi'as have been touched by this 'movement'.

The Imam Shafi'i recited the following controversial poetry refuting the term *rafidhi* which was a derogatory term meaning "defectors/deserters" to identify Shi'as:

They said, 'You are a *Rafidi*!', and I said, 'But no,
Nor is my religion nor are my beliefs of that kind ...
'But if love of the vicegerent of God be *Rafidism*,
Then I am the most *Rafidi* of the servants of God!'

Emotional, spiritual, cultural and political connection to Azādārī Revolution

In Shi'a areas that experienced uprising and revolution, a unique connection can be made to the culture of Azādārī and how it ignited or helped to sustain moral, spirituality and political fight. Two keen examples can be referred to, namely, the Islamic Revolution of Iran under the leadership of the Late Imam Ruhullah Khomeini, and the uprising of the Shi'as of Pakistan under the leadership of Sayyid Arif Husayn Al-Husayni.

In Pakistan, the slogan of Allamah Sayyid Arif Husayn was the slogan of "Ya Husayn" (O Husayn!), a slogan for freedom fighters and seekers of justice. He advocated unity between Sunni & Shi'as and also spoke openly against dictatorships and supporters oppressive regimes. He was quoted as saying, "My first one and a half years as leader were passed in assuring the nation that I am Shi'a and a believer in Azādārī".

He was also appointed by the Supreme Leader of Iran of the time as a vicegerent representative in Pakistan.

The Parliament President of the Islamic Republic Iran made a statement that the Islamic Revolution of Iran was rooted in the revolutionary movement of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him). And similar statements can be found from the Supreme Leader and other religious authorities and jurists which attribute the success of the Islamic Revolution in face of many superpowers, to the "*Husayni*" approach.

A personal account of the impact of Imam Husayn, Ashūra and Karbala may help to illustrate and put into perspective the climate of this revolution. Growing up as a young child in the

80's during the era of the Iran-Iraq war, living in Iran I can very vividly recall the atmosphere. This was shortly after the Shah of Iran had tucked his tail and fled the country after years of oppression, abuse of resources and acting as a puppet government. At night the city lights would be turned off so as not to illuminate targets, however the sky appeared to be radiant with light like fireworks, but this was no festive occasion. The missiles and fire of planes were very clear, yet there was no fear in the air and the people seemed brave and vibrant. Nonetheless, in addition to a brilliant feeling of camaraderie, a day did not pass by that you would not hear the chants of 'Ya Husayn'. Everywhere youth wore red headbands with this slogan written upon them. I witnessed by the hundreds people young and old walking in the street chanting slogans of Karbala and Imam Husayn. One of the most famous images of the war shows a group of Iranian soldiers with artillery in hand all wearing headbands with revolutionary slogans on them. Other well-known images are of individuals wearing the headbands. The cry of the people fuelled by the remembrance of Karbala was something unparalleled and the sheer thought for enemies that these brave soldiers had no fear of death and were very much prepared to sacrifice as did their great Leader Imam Husayn. If anything, this is notable evidence that the emotive connection between *Azādārī* and the revolutionary movement of Husayn ibn Ali (peace be upon him) has played a significant role in application and expressive implementation and manifested into a burning fire which arguably was the source that fuelled a revolution.

Martyrdom: Honourable or Objectionable

The idea of death for a believer is very tranquil and in a tradition it mentions that *Jibra'il* (Gabriel) was curious to the thoughts of a man who lived for over a thousand years, the Prophet Noah, on life in this world. His reply to the Angel was that this world was like a house, in which you enter through the front door and leave through the back. Similarly,

narrations mention that when the Prophet Jesus was asked about the world and its nature, he replied that this world is simply a bridge – a means to get to the eternal life.

Such traditions are part of a firm belief in the hereafter and Judgment Day and the requital and reward of deeds. For a believer Life does not end with death. And as Imam Reza has stated, when a believer dies, he awakens.

The Quran states: *And reckon not those who are killed in Allah's way as dead; nay they are alive (and) are provided sustenance from their Lord [3:169].*

The culture of martyrdom is viewed as a great honour and prestigious rank. And this did seem rather awkward for non-believers to comprehend especially those who saw death and a gloomy bitter end. So eagerness and enthusiasm to join a dark abyss seemed barbaric and abhorrent to those without faith.

Some media outlets, anti-Islamic writers or intellectuals would have us to believe that martyrdom is an abhorrent, distasteful and barbaric jihad-related theme of extremist Muslims. Usage of such word games should be carefully analysed. Is a war against injustice not holy or sanctified? Do not troops and soldiers of today's superpowers invade, occupy and ransack countries under the pretence of: freedom, justice, sacred war? In most cases it is a matter of an offensive attack and onslaught with aims of political gain, whereas in Islam war is a final means and primarily defensive and a method of stopping injustice and oppression. And should we call it Jihad, does it become automatically negative? If the term were used interchangeably for the holy wars occupiers of Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan would it be negative and derogatory?

The slogan of "Give me liberty or give me death!" is famously attributed to Patrick Henry. And we can find many cases throughout history where death even for those who disbelieve in the next life, is much more appealing than the idea of oppression, torture or a life of suffering.

This brings forth remnants of the struggles of the Scottish Knight, Sir William Wallace, where death was the cost of trying to attain freedom, but openly welcomed.

Today those who want freedom and justice, especially in Muslim countries have a genuine respect and admiration for the Islamic Revolution of Iran and its roots in the stand of Imam Husayn and this is manifest through the many instances of meetings amongst these leaders and their statements and support is furthermore proof of this.

Countries or Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, Tunisia, Arabia, Jordan and Syria amongst many others have witnessed the struggle for freedom and fight against injustice. And those who have given their lives in this process are not less than heroes for their countrymen.

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East vs. West: Grieving Bereavement and Mourning

In the East cultures tend to be more rigid and strict and not always ready to adopt new things. Western perspectives, philosophies and notions regarding the psychology and methods of grieving and mourning are not different. By gaining some insight as to these differences, this will help to better comprehend the results of the sampled data. This is especially important considering that although the survey participants were primarily in Western countries, many of them were of Eastern background.

Considering that Western societies promote secularism and with the separate of church and state religion can be viewed as a personal matter and not a part of the wider culture. As such, cross-culture counselling and psychotherapeutic analysis suggests that a legitimate frame of reference and background be in order to better understand the bereavement of Muslims. Many things must be taken into account and a sensitive approach is necessary in this context.

An individual's relationship with God, degree of religiosity, ethnic background as well as language and culture and even sect of religious belief are all matters which are substantial in comprehending the grieving and bereavement.

Of course, studies show that the same can be true for Christian and Jewish persons or non-Muslims who have a structured belief system which includes God and thus a viewpoint of afterlife and examples of mourning.

Grief is defined as the "...emotional and /or psychological reaction to any loss, not limited to death" (Hensley & Clayton, 2008, p. 650). The outward view of grief and/or bereavement is described by the word mourning and varies depending upon one's cultural preferences (Hensley & Clayton, 2008)

Critical theory of Western society suggests that the social parameters of grief expression constrict an individual's natural mourning and grieving process. This is not to say that grieving is socially unacceptable, however Western society is built upon capitalism, consumerism and individualist democracy by which the individual is more important than the society. Selfishness and 'looking out for number one' are themes which are not only not frowned upon but often encouraged and prided. As such the shame of grief or lack thereof tends to revolve around the individual benefit or value that it serves. Extensive mourning is not a part of common culture and noticeably, extensive grief is even sometimes looked upon as a possible psychological disorder or warranting psychotherapy and or counselling. Seemingly society would like one to 'move on'. Also it is noteworthy to mention that the nature of a business-society where work includes long hours and family time is something of the past and the vast majority of people are just a step above lower class and work to live and live to work. In such a society there is no room or time for grief and an individual should consider his own needs first and he who has left this world, then so be it, no matter how saddening or frustrating it may be. The idea is to 'get over it', or to supplement that attachment with something else. It is no surprise that the outlet of mourning in Western society results often in things like deep clinical depression, over-eating, crime or severe shopping (consumerism). In such a culture to see men cry is rare or considering socially unacceptable. A macho stigma does not allow for natural mourning and grief and thus this suppression is redirected in some other fashion.

So it is easy to understand that for Westerners or those who identify more so with Western culture, are shocked or uneasy when seeing intense grieving of Muslims during the month of Muharram -So much so that some find it barbarous and uncivilized. Of course the role of social outlook on lowly third world countries and their customs in face of the sophisticated, cultured, refined and educated Western and westernized societies, does not help. Muslims, especially a good number of those brought up in Western environments find themselves in tune with this perspective, wondering of these customs of mourning prevalent in Muslim societies.

Islamic Rulings and Laws Pertaining to the Customary Azā

In addition to weeping and crying as mentioned before it has become customary for poetry and or *nawhas* to be recited and for people to hit their hands upon their chest in a normal hitting gesture in a rhythmic fashion. Some may also tap their heads or thighs as well. The idea is to conduct the ritual mourning but not necessarily to harm one's self.

Some Muslims, in addition to the traditional mourning engage in was is known as *Zanjīr Zanī* or *Qam'e Zanī*, where sharp objects are used to penetrate the skin and to cause bleeding primarily upon the chest, back and or head. The concept of those who accept this fashion of mourning is that they are "bleeding for the Imam" or they are experiencing his pain.

Differences of opinion amongst followers as well as scholars have led to two camps in this regard. We will allude to the top religious jurist and authorities to note their opinions on this matter.

The general consensus of Shi'a scholars is that *Azādārī* itself is extremely important and keeps the message of Imam Husayn alive. In the will of Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, he states:

"The life of the nation lies in *Azādārī*. Hazrat Imam Husayn granted salvation to Islam, and protected its eminence from being trampled by kissing martyrdom. So holding *majalis-e-Azā* to commemorate Hazrat Imam Husayn (AS)'s martyrdom is a source of everlastingness and immortality of Islam. Those who oppose these

masalas, oppose Islam. They are totally unaware of Islam's reality. It is Azādāri of Syed al-Shuhada (Prince of Martyrs), which has given protection to Islam till today. *Sīna Zanī* (hitting that hand against the chest), nawha, lamentation and cries are the very secrets of our success.”...

"Those who object to Azādāri do not know that when one weeps for Imam Husayn (peace be upon him), he pledges to keep the mission alive. Our Youth have been told that you are a nation of weepers , those who tell them this are in fact very much frightened by our tears. The tears roll down our cheeks for the oppressed & suppressed, each droplet being a challenge to the tyrant. We must keep this up, for this is one of the signs of faith. Let no one in the name of modern thinking and intellectualism deceive you into believing that weeping and mourning over the tragedy of Karbala is useless. "- *Will of Ayatullah Khomeini (is)*

However in regards to the specifics of what is allowed according to Islamic law Ayatollah Khamenei (the current Supreme Leader's) ruling is as follows:

Is the *mātam*/latm (e.g. self-flagellation) with knives (*Zanjīr Zanī* with knives) allowed during mourning ceremonies for Imam Husayn (a.)?

2) Is the *mātam*/latm (e.g. self-flagellation) in form of hitting a sword on the head (e.g. *Tatbīr*) allowed during mourning ceremonies for Imam Husayn?

Answer: Bismihi Ta`ala (In the Name of The Most High)

1) If the use of such chains leads, in the eye of the public, to defaming our school of thought or inflicting a noticeable harmful effect on the body, it is not permissible.

2) 1) *Qama Zanī* (*Tatbīr*) is absolutely impermissible. In addition to the fact that hitting oneself / head with swords is not held in the common view as manifestations of mourning and grief and it has no precedent at the lifetime of the Imams (peace be upon them) and even after that and we have not received any tradition quoted from the Infallibles (peace be upon them) to support this act, be it privately or publicly, this practice would, at the present time, give others a bad image of our school of thought. Therefore, there is no way that it can be considered permissible.

Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Sistani has answered a similar question in this fashion:

Answer by Board of *Isti'fa*, Office of Grand Ayatollah Sistani: The main objective of mourning and lamentation during ‘Ashūra’ is to respect the signs and symbols of religion and remember the suffering of Imam

Husayn (peace be upon him), his companions, and his uprising to defend Islam and prevent the destruction of the religion by Banī Umayyad dynasty. These rites must be done in such a way that in addition to serving that purpose, it draws the attention of others to these lofty goals. Also its ritual aspect should be preserved. So those actions which are not understandable for the enemies of Islam and non-Shia Muslims and causes misunderstanding and contempt for the religion must be avoided.

And the current Supreme Leader, Sayyid Ali Khamenei has given several similar inquires the same general response as well:

Ayatollah Khamenei: Practical Laws of Islam >> Religious Events

Q1430: What is the view on beating the drum and cymbal, blowing the trumpet, and lashing oneself with chains with blades during the processions of the commemoration of the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (peace be upon them)?

A: If the use of such chains leads, in the eye of the public, to defaming our school of thought or inflicting a noticeable harmful effect on the body, it is not permissible. There is no harm in using the drum, cymbal, and trumpet in the traditional way.

Q1439: Is there any basis in religion for piercing one's body with weights dangling therefrom, all in the name of commemorating the martyrdom of the Imam Husayn (peace be upon them)?

A: These acts, which are, inevitably, bound to portray our school of thought in a negative shade, are impermissible.

Q1449: In commemorating the martyrdom of Imam Husayn (peace be upon them) on the tenth of Muharram, some people hit themselves with a machete, or walk bare-footed on fire. Such actions defame Shi'ism and put it in a bad light, if not undermine it. They cause bodily and spiritual harms on these doing it as well. What is your opinion in this matter?

A: Any practice that causes bodily harm, or leads to defaming the faith, is Haram. Accordingly, the believers have to steer clear of it. There is no doubt that many of these practices besmirch the image of Ahl al-Bayt's (peace be upon them) School of Thought which is the worst damage and loss.

Q1450: Is hitting oneself with swords Halal if it is done in secret? Or is your fatwa in this regard universal?

A: In addition to the fact that it is not held in the common view as manifestations of mourning and grief and it has no precedent at the lifetime of the Imams (peace be upon them) and even after that and we have not received any tradition quoted from the Infallibles (peace be upon them) about any support for this act, be it privately or

publicly, this practice would, at the present time, give others a bad image of our school of thought. Therefore, there is no way that it can be considered permissible.

Ironically, the most preposterous, derogatory and negative images of mourning during Muharram and Ashūra are the most promoted images by enemies of Islam. As of the time that this research has been conducted, keywords such as Ashūra, Karbala or Muharram spawn the most horrific and gory images and pictures. There is no mystery in how search engines work, with hundreds of thousands of available websites how it is determined which sites and images make the first page or few pages. And it is not secret that the common internet user does not search more than the first few pages. Speculations arise. Who is behind the promotion of such imageries and websites? Too often when researching the origins of an 'Islamic' website, it is found out that the site is in fact anti-Islamic and merely a means of distorting the image of Islam in the public eye. Should I be an individual who knows little of Islam, upon hearing the tragic story of Karbala, I may be inclined to research and want to perhaps increase my knowledge in this regard. But what becomes of my disposition when I stumble across numerous images of a small sect of individuals eager to portray Islam in a negative light? The survey research study also suggests that these negative depictions have greatly impacted even Muslims who otherwise very firmly support and accept the revolution of Imam Husayn, but find it extremely difficult to generate any connection to the ritual mourning ceremonies as they have been greatly distorted with the publicity of unacceptable and unbecoming forms of Azādārī.

Finally it is necessary to mention that any act of worship done in Islam, must be solely for the cause of attaining proximity to God. If an act is done for the pleasure of another or with the intention to boast or pose or to prove a 'holier than thou' depiction, then not only is such an act not considered worship, but it is considered a sinful and loathed act.

Conclusion

The survey data yielded incredibly interesting results although a good number were not included due to being incomplete. However, 90 completed surveys suggest very useful data in determining the source of the dilemma as well as a viable solution.

It's noteworthy to mention that nearly 50% of participants also included very comprehensive and in depth analysis in the comments section. This shows the interest level and concern associated with the matter. By analysing these comments it becomes evident that these concerns are deep frustrations for many and have been repeatedly thought about. These were also included in the spread sheet as they offer a much more detailed insight into the culture of Azādārī in the West.

The overwhelming majority of participants representing the Muslims in the West and their perspective on the culture of Azādārī suggest that there is a concrete emotional and spiritual connection involved with Muharram. However, many are disconnected from ritual customs of Azādārī and many others do not relate to the various forms of poetry.

A few important things must be considered, namely the places and establishments where a majlis may be held and the goals of that establishment be it a religious centre or a mosque. Seeing as how Islam is still somewhat new in the west, few centres or mosques which are predominately Shi'a can be found which have been established by the indigenous natives. The vast majority of Shi'a centres and mosques have been established the immigrant community. Quite naturally, such community based organizations will draw in similar individuals with some commonalities and language being the manifestation of culture often dictates that English is not the dominant language nor is western culture dominant in such institutions.

Interviews with a wide array of Shi'a converts or reverts suggests that one of the initial waves of Shi'a immigrants that found a home in the US or UK or elsewhere about thirty some-odd years ago resulted in the establishing of Shi'a centres where English was not only not the dominant language, but the centre, program and community entirely reflected a particular language and culture, i.e. Farsi, Urdu or Arabic speaking, primarily.

In many cases these establishments became a home away from home and served a social need to engage and socialize with people of similar culture, a place to meet, where individuals could find a spouse, where some educational program could take place. Preservation of culture was and still is of great importance for individuals coming from very rich heritage. As parents, these groups aim to educate their children with 'back home' values and language etc.

A great benefit of such cultures of the Middle East is that they have been amalgamated with Islam itself so much that certain religious practices are identical to cultural practices. Likewise, this has created a religious void as the fusion of culture and religion is often so intense that for the individual himself it is not clear where culture ends and where religion begins. This becomes problematic in areas where there is a significant difference in what Islam has ordained and what has become the cultural norm. And when these differences are not identified there can be many negative outcomes. For a new Shi'a Muslim who is on the outside looking in, with a new passion for his faith, it is very easy to see any flaws or discrepancies where cultural practice has hindered, abrogated or even replaced the true religious practice. The same is true for the vast number of second generation immigrants who have now grown up in Western society so much so that as the survey shows, not only do they identify mainly with the culture of the West but even their mother tongue or first language is in fact English.

Consequently this rise of Shi'a youth with a need for religious identity along with the growing number of indigenous Shi'a population sparked an era of English speaking programs and the inviting of English speaking scholars to these religious centres and mosque and this is evident more and more every year all throughout the globe. As such, as it is customary to invite guest speakers to give talks and commemorate the first ten days of Muharram, a new found appreciation for the revolution of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) is on the rise and now more than before Shi'a youth seem to have a firm understanding of the historic as well as moral and spiritual importance.

Many converts especially have grown tremendously frustrated with the politics, atmosphere and aims of such centres. However, as unity is a critical theme in Islam and the message of Imam Husayn (peace be upon him) was to bring humanity together upon truth and righteousness, patience is necessary to create more tolerable environments. Often individuals think that if the environment is not ideal, then if I leave then I will have achieved my goal, whereas in reality both ends suffer. A problem can be fixed by individuals who are aware that

it exists. Moreover, there is strength in numbers and more so than before, we find Shi'a centres full of unique diversity. While this is still shocking for some, usually the elders of a community, it is nonetheless an inevitable transition.

However, be that as it may, there are now entities, namely the convert communities as well as the second generation immigrant communities which for all intense purposes can be considered indigenous, which may appreciate but often do not fully comprehend or cannot relate to the ritual aspects of Azādārī, especially the poetry and the hitting on the chest.

Some simply have been heavily influenced by negative propaganda and are obviously not aware of the Islamic legal perspective or the apparent conspiracy and agenda against Islam and in particular the Ahl al-Bayt. The questionnaire suggests that many, especially converts are extremely disturbed by the groups that engage in unlawful methods of mourning including self-flagellation and cutting one's self (*qam'e Zanī/Zanjīr Zanī, Tatbīr*) – and rightfully so. However it seems that in haste to detest these acts, the acceptable and permissible Azā, i.e. simply taping that hand on the chest has been also overlooked. The negative association seems so great that it is the cause for complete disassociation for many. In other words: the baby gets thrown out with the bath water.

The reason and proper methodology of ritual mourning does require more discussion by scholars who visit local communities. Often the scholars assume that it is understood whereas in most cases a good portion of the masses are confused on this issue.

When it comes to the disconnect of poetry in particular, eventually at some point in time accounts, narratives, depictions in eloquent English which are acclimated with the Western cultures will arise and some are evident now. However, the realization is that this takes time. Languages such as Urdu, Farsi and Arabic are exceptionally rich in poetic culture. Globally, English poetry is not significant or well-known to the same extent. Poetry is also not an important part of Western culture. It is customary to hear any speech by an eloquent Persian speaker and he will utilize poetic verses to illustrate his topic and it is normal for Urdu speaking persons, to eat food with guest and sit and recite some poetry. The role of poetry in the common man's world in the West is totally absent and therefore there is not a passionate connection even with English poetry. However, the survey suggests that many English speakers, whom English is their mother tongue, prefer to and can find some connection to the

poetry if they can understand and comprehend it. It is rare to hear English poetry recited during a speech or a gathering of friends or at any social setting.

What is definite is that although, poetry of Ashūra and Karbala are exceptionally well tailored and precise and beyond eloquent in these rich Islamic languages, it should be considered that this is the result of a carefully honed skill. While Persian poetry for example is known throughout the world, there was a time when no verse of had been recited about Muharram. And what catapults the spiritual and emotive aspect of *nawha*, *marthiya* and *qasīda* is the genuine emotion associated with it. In English, too often Islamic poetry is forcefully translated from another distant language and thus has no English melodic nature or rhythm or sounds exactly like it is in the original language due to bad translation and more importantly lack of uniqueness in style.

In order for poetry to be successful in English, in particular in regards to poems of Karbala, it must come from the mind and experience of an English speaking individual who comprehends and has experienced Western society. Furthermore, such poetry cannot be forced into existence, but rather it must be the result of a heart that understand and has genuine and sincere connection to the topic it wants to illustrate. From the survey and Interviews it can be gathered that this is an area which needs significant improvement and is a reason for many not feeling inclined to shed a tear as they do not feel connected to unauthentic, unheartfelt and unoriginal works. Considering that nearly one third of the survey participants write poetry and in English and some in multiple languages, it would be the duty of such persons to create a connection with these events and to put them to paper.

Roughly 20% of participants felt uncomfortable explaining the views of Azādārī and much of that does have to do with minority of groups that relentlessly engage in defaming Islam via these performing these acts themselves or exploitation of those who do. This also has much to do with the “Muslim complex” as too often Muslims feel apologetic for simply being Muslims as they are so greatly surrounded by negative stereotypes and anti-Islamic propaganda. Or on the other hand Muslims can be found always eager to justify the acts of other Muslims or to advertise their social harmony so as not to cause any rift in the feeling others may have. If one stops to consider this, and compare it, then it becomes obvious that Muslims put themselves under a tremendous amount of social pressure. You can find Muslims apologizing for 9/11 as if they were directly involved yet you do not find Christians,

Jews, Atheists or any other sect so apprehensive to seek social validity when due to the incorrect actions of a few.

Religious confidence can only be achieved through education and understanding. Likewise, non-Shi'as or non-Muslims should not be so underestimated by Shi'as. Consider that a neighbour, co-worker or other associate has the capability to comprehend that which is explained to him or her. This results in confidence and acceptance of true Islam. The majority of people who were attracted to Islam from its inception until today have been in awe of the virtuous, moral and spiritual aspects of Islam and to understand and share them is duty for believers.