

Tears of Martyrdom and Sacrifice a Study of the Indian Poet Mir Babar Ali Anees's Hussaini Elegy (Marsiya) of Karbala

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Abstract : *Mir Babar Ali Anees is a prominent Indian poet who dedicates his life to writing elegies (Marsiya) to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Hussain bin Ibi Talib (peace be upon them) and his companions. The paper is hitherto unprecedented attempt to introduce this preeminent poet to the Arabic-speaking people. It is divided into three sections and a conclusion. Section one explores the main characteristics of the Hussaini elegies/marsiyas. Section two is a general introduction to Anees's life and efforts in service of Imam Hussain's cause. Section three which critically analyses Anees's Marsiya of Karbala is followed by a conclusion that sheds light on Anees's place in the Indian poetry and his role in eternalizes the values of sacrifice and martyrdom.*

Key Words: *Imam Hussain, Anees, Elegy, sacrifice, martyrdom.*

I.Marsiya: The Poem of Lamentation and Commemoration:

The death of the third Imam, al-Husayn b. Ali (pbuh) (4–61/626–680) with his companions and members of his family, has traditionally been seen by Muslims of all sects and affiliations as perhaps the greatest single calamity that befell the community in its early history (Crow qtd in Çellenk, 2010, p.4). Because of this, the martyrdom of Husayn was of great religious significance and had a deep heart-searching after-effect upon the Shi'is, giving a new turn to the mode and nature of the Shi'i movement (Ja'fri in Ibid.). The martyrdom of Imam Husayn has also been regarded by the Shi'a community as a cosmic event around which the entire history of the world, prior as well as subsequent to it, revolves. (Ibid) Accordingly, the death of al-Husayn and his followers marked the "big bang" that created the rapidly expanding cosmos of Shi'ism and brought it into motion. For Shi'ites, Karbala represents the central point in their belief, the climax of a divine plane of salvation, the promises of which are offered to all who take the side of the martyred Imam. Since that time, the Shias keep on recounting and rehearsing the details of this tragedy. (Ibid)

The effects of al-Husayn's death were, consequently, deep and sorrowful and extended to several aspects of Muslim lives, among them, of

course, is literary production. The tragedy of Karbala, Al-Azhari (2008, p.17) opines, is not merely a "story of the injustice perpetrated against an individual namely Imam Husayn, but it has a much wider social, religious, moral, and political significance." In fact, it was a clash between truth and falsehood, and a war between justice and oppression, virtue and wickedness, good and evil (ibid). Al-Hussain, indeed, sacrifices everything for setting things right and establishing the truth: his life, family, relatives, wealth and friends. In this sense, Al-Hussain performs the highest form of 'Shahada' or martyrdom, which is to die for the cause of Islam, for the sake of Allah (qtd., p.18).

In his seminal study, *The Karbala*, Akramulla Syed (2005, p.2) delineates Imam Husayn's character. He sheds lights on him as a revolutionary figure, a righteous man, and a religious authority par excellence. As the representative of his grandfather Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), his main concern was to safeguard and protect Islam and guide his fellow Muslims. His was a tremendous undertaking which still reverberates throughout the

Muslim nation. He has been a propelling force and a seminal element in events throughout Islamic history, particularly in the sphere of Jihad.

As a result of the deep distress and shock felt by Muslims at what happened to Imam Husayn and his followers in the Battle of Karbala, a tradition of lamentation and weeping had become the center of Shi'ite religiosity and piety in the fourth/tenth century during the Buyids' reign (Çellenk, 2010, p.4). This process resulted in the emergence of new rituals and ceremonies purely peculiar to Shi'as like visiting shrines, public ceremonies, passion play, processions, a sort of music, poetry and literature that are all related to Husayn and Karbala. These practices were most evident in the month of Muharram. (Ibid)

During this month, as a Shi'a woman in Dhaka, India, explains, the Shi'as "for example, do not eat fish, get married or wear colourful clothes ... as we believe that these, representing joy, would be inappropriately enjoyed in the month of mourning (Annu Jalais, 2014, p.2) Around the Muslim world, Shi'as mark the day of Ashura by walking in long processions down streets, floating banners in the air, parading a white horse (representing Husain's horse and the empty mount on his back) and a highly decorated, albeit covered in black and/or green bier. They flagellate themselves with chains whilst calling out 'Ya Hasan', 'Ya Husain', 'Ya Ali' in self-mortification (Ibid.).

No doubt, the tragedy of Karbala exerts a great influence on poetry. Essentially this influence takes two forms. The first is the Marsiya which is said to provide the germ for early gatherings of partisans of the House of the Prophet. Moreover, they may be seen as the origin or earliest form of the ta'ziya as it is known today among Shi'is. The literary forms known as ta'ziya and Marsiya in Arabic are related, the ta'ziya being a kind of extended lamentation which is also intended to comfort the hearer in the face calamity, as the root meaning of the Arabic - 'comforting' - suggests. The 'ritual context' for lamentation on Husayn continues to be provided today not only by the developed ta'ziya, but also by

various other gatherings within the ten days of Muharram in which Marsiyas are recited. (Elegy on Husayn: Arabic and Persian, Al-Islam.org)

'Ta'ziya' is originally a "simple passion play about the events which occurred at Karabala and the other tragedies that befell the House of the Prophet." In this sense, it was an "exercise in mourning, a religious custom severely limited in scope." (Çellenk, p.2010, p.5) Ta'ziya has many functions: redemption, suffering, personal religious revivalism, public showing of a faith and etc. Philosophically, Husayn's quest was seen as a symbol of personal transformation, so joining and being part of ta'ziya enable the Shi'ite community to achieve their personal transformation. (Ibid., p.6) Traditionally, marsiyas (Elegies) are characteristic of the so-called Muhammadan poetry, especially in Persia and India. (T. Graham Bailey) The word 'Marsiya' is derived from the Arabic root 'رثى/rthā', meaning a great tragedy or lamentation of a beloved one (Marsiya, Wikipedia). As such, they are essentially religious in nature, and in the days before Muzaffar Hussain Zamir and Mir Mustahsan Khaliq, they were short devotional poems and little attention was paid to their literary qualities. Zamir changed that; then at the hand of Mir Babar Ali Anees (1800-1874) and Mirza Salamat Ali Dabeer (1805-1875), the Marsiya reached its peak and became practically a form of epic especially in Lucknow, India in the first half of the nineteenth century. Lucknow here is of special importance as it was one of the centers of Shia Muslim communities in South Asia, where it is regarded as an act of piety and religious duty to eulogize and bemoan the martyrs of Karbala. In this sense, Marsiya is a poem of mourning (Marsiya, Wikipedia). Marsiyas usually include historical narrative, moral and didactic teachings, description of natural scenery and delineation of human emotions. They suffer of course of their narrowness; each character is either friend or enemy, altogether good or entirely evil, and the only emotions are those which would be brought out by such a tragedy as that of Karbala (T. Graham Bailey).

In his seminal study, "the Art of Urdu Marsiya," C. M. Naim (1983, 101) states that "within the Urdu

literary milieu, the word Marsiya, unless preceded by some qualifying phrase, refers only to one thing: a poem describing some event related to the martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammed's grandson, Imam Husain at Karbala." Further, it always implies a very specific context: it is to be declaimed in a somewhat dramatic fashion at a majlis-a'aza, i.e., a gathering of devout people seeking to obtain religious virtue by listening to the story of Imam Husayn and his companions. Thus, it should be kept in mind that Marsiyas in Urdu has a particular public-religious context, and that it also has somewhat an edifying goal beside the usual literary purposes that any good poetry has(Ibid).

Since the time of Anees, marsiyas have usually been written in six line stanzas, the last two lines of each stanza making a particularly forceful or pathetic point. The last verse of each stanza is usually the cue for those listening to beat their breasts or slap their heads and call on the name of Husayn (ya Husayn, ya Husayn). In order to evoke the desired reaction in the audience, pathos is an essential ingredient of the Marsiya and its related genres: salams and nauhas. In general women do not appear in the main body of the congregation, but listen behind a curtain or a wall specially erected for the purpose. Since women can not openly participate in public (or even private) majlises where men are present, they often arrange majlises of their own, occasionally composing and singing nauhas in their own local dialect(Anis and the Marsiya, p.x)

Naim (1983, pp.101-2) further explains that mariyas in Urdu were first written in the sixteenth century in South India, in the Kingdoms of Golkonda and Bijapur which were Shi'ite in orientation and closer to the Iranian tradition than to Turk and Pathan kingdoms of North India. In the beginning, Marsiyas were written either in the two-line form, qasida, or in the four-line form, murabba'/rubai'i. These Marsiyas were usually sung, often set to some suitably mournful raga(indian classical music).In the murabba' form, the fourth line was often a refrain, repeated by the accompanists of the

Marsiya-reciter and perhaps also by the audience. The recitation took place both outdoors in processions and indoors. For that reason, early Marsiyas were shorter in length and simpler in structure than is the case now, and emphasized more the grief-inducing (weeping/mubki) elements of the narrative, such as the death of some hero and the consequent lament over his corpse.

In the nineteenth century, marsiya developed its own tradition in Lucknow and succeeded to establish what came to be regarded as the fundamental characteristics of a good Marsiya. These characteristics are essentially four: First, a marsiya was invariably in the form of a musaddas, the first four lines of each stanza having one rhyme scheme (AAAA), and the remaining two having another rhyme scheme of(BB). Second, certain medium length meters were preferred, especially those that could enhance the dramatic effect sought by the declamatory style of presentation. Third, each marsiya was usually devoted to just one hero or incident, and showed considerable narrative continuity. Secondary themes were allowed, but only when they complemented the main theme. Fourth, each Marsiya had all or some of the following constituent sub-sections in so far as they are allowed by the chosen theme. They are prologue which has for its subject the praise of Allah, the prophet, Imam Husyan or the poet himself; introduction of the main hero; description of the physical and spiritual qualities; the hero's arrival on the battlefield; the hero's declaration of his noble ancestry, personal virtues and superiority as a warrior; description of the actual battle and it often includes sub sections; the hero's death in the battle; the lamentation of the female relatives of the hero; the pious sentiment of the poet himself, often of a prayful nature expressed in just one or two stanzas(Naim, 1983, pp.102-3). "Marsiya Urdu Poetry" adds a fifth characteristic. It tells that although the language of marsiya draws heavily on Arabic and Persian vocabulary, the Urdu Marsiya is imbued with the color and flavor of the Indian subcontinent. The best of verses are exquisite

cameos composed of images of local flora and fauna, drawing on local custom and tradition(Iloveindia.com).

In Arabic, the marsiya was, like all pre-Islamic poetry highly conventionalized. The virtues of the deceased and the loss of the mourner are described, which then provides an opportunity to dwell on the pathos of this transitory life in the face of fate, always unalterable. Often the mourner curses the enemy and calls for vengeance. While the pre-Islamic elegy was conventionalized, it was also highly specific, or occasional: reflections on mortality only serve to frame a threnodic tribute to a specified personality (Elegy on Husayn: Arabic and Persian, Al-Islam.org) Not only would the listener be invited to dwell in the virtues of the deceased, but the pathos of the situation was also revealed, and it may be assumed that those present were then moved to weep. Some of the earliest examples we have of marsiya on Husayn are in fact simple poems of this type: lamentations by his wives and daughters. (Ibid)

Muhammad-Riza Fakhr Rohani(2007,p.3) defines marsiya as a literary technique which enables the poet to compose fine pieces of poetry. In elegy, the mind and soul of the poet get elevated, for he finds himself confronted with the mysterious phenomenon of death. Faced with the mysteries of life and the vicissitudes of times and fate, he tries to find a justification for that eternal silence through writing poetry.

In "Marsiya: A Form of Urdu Poetry", Kashif Alhuda has further illuminated the marsiya as a poetic genre. He defines it as a fully developed form of Urdu-Persian poetry that is normally recited on the death of a dear one, and says that it is wrong to think that it is just a lamentation for the dead in Karbala. Karbala, of course, has an important place in Islamic history and therefore in Muslim literature. Almost all Urdu poets use Karbala as a symbol of great tragedy or epic battle between good and evil(Al-Huda, "Marsiya."). In the same vein, "Marsiya: The Poetry of Martyrdom"(2015) points out that there are two types of marsiya: the 'pure' versus the 'non-pure' marsiya. He says that while the first type is solely written in remembrance of Imam Husayn and other martyrs of Karbala, the second type can be written to a family member or to any loved one as well(Lampsofdesert.com).

Although marsiyas poets were deeply interested in history and its interpretation(Syed Hasan Zia Rizvi, 2013), historical accuracy, as Naim in "Anis and the Maesiya"(1983, p.xiv) remarks was not given great priority by them. For example, the events that Anees chooses to describe or the fact that he throws into relief in his marsiyas are those calculated to arouse the emotion of his audience, who in turn would not expect or even desire an unbiased historical analysis of the battle of Karbala.

There are other characteristics of the marsiyas; namely, the lack of realism and the apparently blatant contradictions in the narrated details. For example, Anees sees no difficulty in describing the desert (stanzas15-17)where his heroes are stated to be suffering from thirst and heat as a green and verdant garden planted with luxuriant trees and flowers where nightingales sing, perched on the dew-filled roses(Naim, 1983, p.xiv). However, this can be regarded as a testimony to Anees's great poetic art. The fact that they are lacking in reality would be irrelevant, and it can always be argued that it is Husayn's miraculous presence which transforms the sands of Karbala into such a wonderful paradise(Ibid.).

The main purpose of the Marsiya, Naim(1983, p.xv) asserts, was to remind people (specifically Shi'a) of the sad events of Karbala and hence of their own desperate plight which can be directly ascribed to these events(For more information about the battle of Karbala, see Al-Azhari, 2008). Thus, an important aspect of Marsiya, according to him, is the unashamed pathos which is achieved in a number of ways. The final line of the stanza, to which the audience would react most strongly, often contains a direct and poignant summary of the rest of the verse. Every opportunity is taken to mention the pathetic state of the little children suffering from the heat or killed by the arrows of the heartless foe.(Ibid.) The women, like Zainab (stanzas 20, 31, 62, 2tc.) are made to speak in a simple, almost colloquial, form of Urdu which everyone in Lucknow who has heard a dying mother or a grief-stricken sister would instantly recognize. Husayn's

reasonable entreaties for peace are met with the guff insults of the unprincipled enemy, who are not merely content to kill the hero but must decapitate him and stick his head on a pole for his captive relations to see (stanzas 188-193)(Ibid.).

These features will be further elaborated and consolidated in the next section.

II. Mir Babar Ali Anees: Mir Babar Ali Anees was born in Faizabad to a distinguished and fairly prosperous family. (Wiki) Mir Babar Ali Anis was born in 1803 CE at Faizabad. A Musavi sayyed, descended from the 7th Imam, Musa al-Kadhim, he belonged to a family of poets. In his book (Famous Poets from the family of Mir Anis), Dr. Syed Zameer Akhter Naqvi listed 22 poets from Mir Anis' family and their poetry. Mir Anis was a fifth-generation poet, a fact he mentioned in the first stanza of his famous Marsiya "Namak-e-Khwaan-e-Takallum hai Fasaahat meri." He says:

My eloquence is the salt of the food of thought
The eloquents are mute when my style they hear
Fly colours when the colour of my ink I jot
The sound of the seas are my ideas clear
Hunting in this forest (for words) spent life I mine
Praising Hussain, fifth in progeny line His great
grandfather, Mir Ghulam Hussain Zahik was
famous in Delhi for his satirical and humorous
verse. Like many of the eighteenth century Urdu
poets, who depended for their livelihood on the
patronage of rich nobles, Mir Zahik migrated to
Faizabad which was rapidly taking the place of
Delhi as a great cultural center. Mir Zahik was
accompanied by his son, Mir Ghulam Hassan, the
author of the famous masnavi (poem written in
rhyming couplets) Sihr ul Bayan (The Magic of
Rhetoric). Mir Hasan also wrote a divan of Urdu
poetry which is still admired. When Asaf ud Daula
transferred his capital from Faizabad to Lucknow,
where the enormous Imambara (a building in which
Ta'zias, replicas of Imam Hussain's tomb, are kept,
was erected, Mir Hasan changed his residence and
lived in Lucknow for the rest of his life. He died in
1795. His son Mir Mustahsan Khaliq (Anees's
father) was highly regarded in his time as an Urdu
poet and received instruction from Mushafi, the
teacher/ustad of Na'ab Suleiman Shakoh. Although
he wrote ghazals and other forms of lyric poetry, he
was chiefly renowned for his Marsiyas which were
rapidly becoming an integral part of the Muharram

celebrations in Lucknow. Among his contemporaries are other famous Marsiya writers like Zamir, Miyan Dilgir and Mirza Fasih, whose works are still available but tend to be known only by a select band of Shia devotees. Mir Khaliq, however is said to have surpassed them all.

Mir Mustahsin Khaliq was (1774-1804) was one of the earliest elegiac poets in north India. He began writing poetry at an early age. His father, not having time to instruct him, committed him to the care of Mushafi. He made great progress and on the occasion of a gathering of poets in his native place in Faizabad, read one of his lyrics in such effect that Atish, who had come especially from Lucknow to grace the meeting, would not recite his own poem, saying there was no need for him when Khaliq was there. Anees, had two illustrious brothers, Mir Uns and Mir Munis, who had followed the family tradition of writing Marsiyas.

As is the case with famous Urdu writers, little is known about Anees's early life. He was no doubt given a traditional Shi'a education in Faizabad and Lucknow. However, research by Nayyar Masood reveals that, while in Faizabad, Anis studied with two religious scholars; one was a Shi'a mujtahid, Maulvi Mir Najaf Ali and the other was a Hanafi theologian, Maulvi Haider Ali Faizabadi. Masood also notes that Anis was well versed in Persian as well as in Arabic. Anis also had military training and gained a thorough knowledge of old and new weapons (Wikipedia.com).

It is clear from his poetry that he had a vast knowledge of Persian and Arabic as well as of the colloquial forms of his own mother tongue. One of his favorite devices is to use 'Hindi,' Arabic and Persian words which are near synonyms in the same line or verse. He was so clever in the employment of his knowledge of other languages to the extent that many believe he came to "symbolize the full spectrum of the cultural mosaic that Urdu has come to be" (Wikipedia.com)

In fact, such display of command over the language was greatly admired, and is a feature commonly found in the works of many Lucknow poets. In some cases, the correct interpretation of a verse depends upon knowing somewhat minor details of Arab history, especially those details to which mainly Shi'as give prominence (Ibid). Moreover,

Anees's master of simple, natural utterance and his superb command on the language enabled him to adequately express a large variety of moods, scenes, characters and situations. He is especially notable for presenting the same scene or situation, over and over again, in different words or phrases, without letting it appear monotonous (PoemHunter.com, 2012, p.2).

Anees was a Shi'a by religion and it is known that both his parents were religiously inclined. He seems to have been particularly attached to his mother, an educated lady, whose company may have inspired certain passages in his Marsiyas like the episode in which Zainab gently rebukes her two boys in language reminiscent of Lucknow women's speech. That Anees was an ardent believer is confirmed by the obvious sincerity of his verse and the great respect he shows to his religious heroes(Naim, 1983, p.v).

The majority of Shi'as, of course, firmly believes that Imam Ali was the rightful successor to Prophet Muhammed, and is thus regarded not as the fourth Caliph, but the first Imam. The death or rather the martyrdom of Imam Ali's second son, Husayn, in the battle of Karbala at the hands of Umayyid Yazid was great blow to the supporters of the cause of Imam Ali. Now many Shi'as look upon the battle of Karbala not as a political reversal but as a deeply felt tragedy in which wickedness triumphed over good(Naim, 1983, p.viii-ix)

The events leading up to AlTaf battle took place during the first ten days of Muharram or the first month of the Muslim year. The mourning for Husayn's death is thus carried out at this period of the year. During these days, each morning a meeting of mourning (majlis 'aza) is often attended by thousands of people who congregate to hear the events of Karbala related by a professional reciter (Zakir). Usually before the reciter's sermon, Marsiyas and other shorter compositions such as salams (poems resembling ghazals), nauhas (extremely pathetic poems) and ruba'is are also recited by well-known poets of the city(Naim, 1983, p.ix).

The celebration of the events of Karbala and the public mourning for the death of Husayn were well established in India long before the time of Anees. Muharram was given great prominence by the Shi'a kings of the Deccan (16th-17th centuries), who

themselves composed short Marsiyas for recitation in the majlises organized in Bijapur and Golkunda (Hyderabad). Most Dakani Marsiyas like those of Muhammed Quli and 'Ali Shah (rulers of Golkunda and Bijapur respectively) in form and rhyme resemble the ghazal. Some later Dakani compositions however are longer and are written in stanza form, with a poignant refrain at the end of each stanza(Naim, 1983, p.x)

The development of the Marsiya from a short lyrical poem expressing grief for the death of Husayn into a lengthy narrative poem written in musaddas form, in which the whole story of the battle, the events leading up to it, or one famous episode of it, are treated in great detail, seems to have taken place mainly in Faizabad and Lucknow during the last part of the 18th and the 1st part of the 19th century, when the opulent Shi'a rulers, whose ancestors had come from Iran, provided the stimulus and the money for Ta'aziya celebration on a grand scale. The famous celebrations which take place in Lucknow, Hyderabad (where the old standard and banners are still in existence) and to some extent in other Indian and Pakistani cities are unparalleled in any other part of the Islamic world. Even the well-known 'passion play' which is staged at Kazimain in Iraq during Muharram has no real connection with the Ta'ziya in the subcontinent. More noteworthy is the fact that the Urdu Marsiya as we know it from the works of Anees and his equally illustrious contemporary Dabeer has no counterpart in Arabic and Persian literature and is one of the few forms of poetry to which Urdu has an exclusive claim(Naim, 1983, p.x-xi).

As we have pointed out, marsiyas were mostly (though not exclusively) composed for recitation in the majlises organized for the mourning the death of Husayn. No less important than the art of marsiya composition was the art of the dramatic recitation of Marsiya before an audience. Often the great poets excelled in both. Many stories are told of Anees's power of recitation and during his performances he would frequently find himself in a state of ecstasy. It is said that on one occasion so many people came to hear him that the walls of the enclosure where the majlis was due had to be torn down to accommodate the large crowd. Anees is said to have had such a powerful voice that even those sitting farthest away from him could hear every word(Naim, 1983, p.xi).

There can be no doubt that Anees was one of the greatest Marsiya writers and until recently the Urdu Marsiya has been regarded as being almost synonymous with the poetry of Anees(Naim, 1983, p.xii). This results in making Muharram and Mir Anis practically synonymous in some parts of India. Undoubtedly, Urdu derives much of its strength from the Marsias of Mir Anis(Wikipedia.com)

III.Anees's Marsiyas of Martyrdom and Sacrifice:

“Oh, Lord, give me eloquence that would soften rocks into wax
Give my verses the force that crying has.”

In Marsiya of Karbala, Anees has succeeded in presenting a poem that manifests almost all the characteristic of the Marsiya mentioned above. The Marsiya is written in the form of musaddas and consists of 197 stanzas. Although its main theme is the martyrdom of Imam Husayn himself, several secondary themes are also introduced, making it more interesting(Naim, 1983,“The Art of Urdu Marsiya, pp.104-105).

At this point, before proceeding further, it would be useful to make note of two features that seem to be both common and crucial to all Marsiyas. First, what may be called the leitmotif of the Urdu Marsiya, a belief that life is followed by death followed by life again. In other words, Life (transitory)-Death (transitory)-Life (eternal). Second, the development of the themes, primary and secondary, is always in terms of binary oppositions. These binary distinctions arise out of a conviction that Islam itself is anchored in a dichotomy between Islam and non-Islam. They gain greater scope and effectiveness from another dichotomy that is crucial to the understanding of most Islamic literatures, that between the external or the obvious and the internal or the hidden, the two layers of meaning or significance that every word or act is believed to have (Naim, 1983,“The Art of Urdu Marsiya, pp.106-107). In the above-mentioned leitmotif, the cessation of life is only the external of death; its true meaning, the hidden, is the eternity of the hereafter. Thus, a true Muslim would look at the internal meaning of death and welcome it, whereas a non-Muslim would be afraid of death and cling to life here. In the Marsiya of Karbala, there is a group of people led by Imam who challenged the authority of Yazid, the temporal Caliph. Their action,

however, is a rebellion on the exterior alone; its internal meaning is the submission to a greater authority, the Command of Allah. The Imam and his companions are just, and thus must endure injustice at the hands of the soldiers of Yazid, the usurpers. As Muslims, they are aware of the end; as against their opponents who prefer the comforts of the hereafter. They are men of spirit and sacrifice. The Imam has submerged his will in the will of Allah, and his companions have done likewise through him. They have become part of the cosmos. When they pray, everything in nature prays; when they are wrathful, nature is wrathful too. They live in a cosmic time which is infinite; their enemies are fated to have only a transitory glory. Husayn is killed but his Islam is triumphant, Yazid wins the battle but has lost the war. In the eternity of the hereafter, the Imam is blessed, Yazid is cursed(Ibid. p.107).

Another noticeable feature is that the Marsiya consists of two types of material; the ‘mubki/weeping’ material, and the expressive of exaltatory ideas, celebrating the piety, bravery, resoluteness, and other virtues of the heroes of Karbala. Further, except for the natural, long outburst at the end, the ‘mubki’ stanzas have carefully been placed, usually in ones and twos, at various strategic points. They act as brief but sharp reminders of the main tragic theme as well as neat transition devices between major sections. There is no doubt that Mir Anees has put much careful thought in this organization of his verses and that it was primarily dictated by the demands of oral presentation(Naim, 1983,“The Art of Urdu Marsiya, pp.108).

Another feature that deserves to be noted is the depiction in Urdu Marsiyas of indigenous socio-cultural values and practices: the heroes and heroines are Arabs but behave like the gentle-folks of Lucknow. Their social mores, marriage customs, uniqueness of feminine speech-habits, family relationships, these all are Indian, specifically of Muslim upper classes of Lucknow. To a pedant that seems detracting if not ridiculous, but if we keep in view the fundamental goal of the Marsiya writer-make the piety-filled audience respond in an intense emotional manner-we shall have too little to object to. The Indianness in descriptions and details brings these events closer to the Indian audience, and makes it easier for it to identify with the martyrs. A

historically accurate Arab milieu would have created a wide gulf between the poem and its audience, thwarting the poets in their effort to present an ideal being who could yet be emulated(Naim, 1983,"The Art of Urdu Marsiya, pp.109).

Moreover, if one looks at a Marsiya in isolation, i.e., outside of its context of a majlis, one may get a feeling that it presents only a despairing vision. That it begins with life, but it ends with death. As already pointed out, that is not truly the case. In a majlis, a Marsiya is preceded and followed by reading of a fatiha, a verse that essentially confirms the immortality of the human soul. The tears of the audience are in themselves a witness to the fact that the sacrifices of the Imam and his companions has not been in vain that in their death lay their victory. Thus the events of Karbala become the story of what should be the ideal role of mankind in this world. No wonder then that we come out of majlis filled with admiration and exultation, not dejected and despairing(Naim, 1983,"The Art of Urdu Marsiya, pp.109-110).

The Marsiya poets are sometimes criticized for being repetitive. However, one should remember that Marsiyas are longish poems that are written about individual heroes and heroines and that they exist only for the purpose of being read in a majlis. Rituals, in order to maintain their efficacy allows little or no variation. The faithful come to a majlis with certain expectations, which have to be met. A radical departure from the traditional pattern may perhaps produce an interesting poem, but can not be expected to imbue it with that power of alleviation that a more traditional Marsiya would have for the piety-minded listeners(Naim, 1983,"The Art of Urdu Marsiya, pp.110).

The Marsiya of Karbala is an account of the battle of Karbala from the early morning, when the heroes wake up and prepare to war, to the late afternoon when Husayn and his companions are finally murdered. It culminates in Zainab's impassioned cry for the soul of her dead brother before she is taken captive by the enemy. The account proceeds episodically from start to finish, though the poem can not easily be divided according to the ideal scheme set out above (See section one). This is in fact the case with Marsiyas, whatever their subject, and it is often difficult to say exactly where the introduction (beginning of the morning and journey)

ends and where the description of the hero begins(Naim, 1983,"The Art of Urdu Marsiya, pp.104-105).

At the first signs of dawn after the sun completed its journey, the Imam who is called 'the King' awakens his companions and tells them "at last the time has come"(Stanza1). This line has two interpretations: either that the dawn has broken and the time for prayer has come or that the last day has dawned for the martyrs who will be all dead by the evening. Therefore, they gather for the Morning Prayer, each one is a paragon of spiritual virtues.

For the Imam and his companions, this day will be a day of "strife and slaughter." It is the day in which the blood of family of Muhammed will flow. In spite of this violent and bloody end, the face of al-Zahra, the Imam's mother, is radiant with joy for "the day of separation has passed and the day of reunion has come."(Stanza2-4) The members of the Prophet's family are those for whom the angels will grieve. They have spent their nights in anguish waiting for this day.

Anees describes the evening of this day as blessed because those who will die in it, the Imam and his supporters, will find place in heaven. Although they are dying of thirst in this day, they will be compensated in Heaven by enabling them to reach Al-Kawther spring with honor. The names of all those killed in this day will be inscribed in the roll of the faithful. Here, as throughout the Marsiya, we have an emphasis on the martyrs and their role in setting an example of sacrifice and goodness for people.

Having heard the Imam's call, the faithful rose from their beds. Each one of them was bedecked with very elegant clothes. They all fearlessly combed their beards and moustaches, and put their turbans. Their clothes were perfumed with musk, civet and attar of roses.

In spite of thirst, nothing on the Imam and his followers' lips except the praise of Allah. Therefore, they feel neither fear, panic, grief, nor sadness. They are generous, pious, steadfast,

accomplished, skillful, proud, brave, forbearing, and high-minded like "Solomon in battle, like lions in Sheba."(Stanza 6)

Anees goes on in his description of the splendidness of the Imam's followers in the following two stanzas. He praises their eloquence, fragrance, devotion and honesty. He compares them to the rubies and pearls. Their magnificence and greatness make the houris (gazelle-eyed women) "declared that they were angels, not men."(stanza8, L8)

Stanza nine is devoted to the delineation of Imam's family or "some of the daring children of Fatima." References are made to the "beautiful Qasim and the handsome Ali Akbar", the Imam's eldest son, who says the call for the prayer. There is also Aqil and Muslim, and the young striplings of Ja'far.

Because of their beauty, radiance, and glory, not only rose gardens, but nature itself with its valleys, mountains, trees and flowers were "put to shame." All the elements of nature, fauna and flora alike were celebrating the peerless presence of the Imam and his companions(stanza11).

On the Imam's side, there is a congregational prayer, on the enemy's side preparations for battle; as the Imam, the King of the celestial throne, ends the prayer some arrows fall near him, making him anxious about the children; he goes into the tents to bid farewell to the ladies. The King of the land and sea saw the state of his women. Their faces were pale, the hair on their heads was hanging loose. Zainab uttered a prayer: "Oh Lord Most Glorious (God), may the darling of Fatima be saved from this strife. May the crop of the renowned Lady Bano remain fresh and green." The children were also suffering as Baqir is lying in one place and Sakina has fainted in another. The moon-like babies have cried themselves to sleep after a long day of feverish heat, hunger and thirst. In spite of these continual ordeals, the Imam was determined to combat Yazid and his devil-like supporters(Stanzas24, 43).

Coming near the distressed Zainab, the Lord of court of Heaven said to her: "Do not be troubled,

for all your prayers are answered. The supporters of Yazid are unfaithful and arrogant. They are at fault. Therefore, the Imam shall go and show them the road of justice. As there is no time for lamentation and weeping, the Imam asks Zainab to bring him the relics of his ancestors-the robes of the Prophet, the sword of Ali, the turban, helmet, armor, shield and other necessary preparations, and gets ready (Stanza 46). The banner of the Imam is brought forth and the young sons of Zainab beg her to recommend their names to the Imam; she scolds them. The Imam praises the children of Zainab for their courage and determination, then at her recommendation sends for Abbas to give him the banner. Abbas takes the banner; Husyan's youngest daughter, Sukina, asks Abbas to bring her some water from the river; Husyan and Abbas leave the tents in order to bring water.

In contrast to the Imam, King of Faith, the leaders and soldiers of Yazid's army were wicked, ruthless, treacherous, deceitful and false. They were keen on using dirty means in their war against the carrier of truth. Besides outnumbering the Imam's army, the leader of Yazid's army tries to prevent Husayn and his men from reaching the water for the purpose of weakening them.

In stanzas 161-163, Anees describes the killers of Imam Husayn. One of them was gigantic and ugly, corrupt and dark-headed; brazen-bodied and black-hearted, with a waist of iron, his arrows were heralds of death; his quiver the abode of destruction. In his heart was evil, in his evil spirit was corruption. Accompanying him was another warrior of the same height and form. His eyes were dark-bleu; he had wrinkles on his black brows. He was wicked, evil-minded, tyrannous and full of depravity. They took their spears and girded up their loins for conflict. One boasted about the strike of his club the other about his fast sword; the other about his fast sword. In stanza 165, the soldiers were in anguish; the armies were in panic. They feared at every moment that Husain might advance and use his sword. They cried out that 'On one side are Marhab and 'Antar and on the other Ali. Who

will hold his head high today, i.e., who will win?
And whose head will be bowed?

After a heated exchange between the Imam and the commander of the enemy, Ibn Sa'd; the battle begins, and the Imam fights with the entire enemy; his sword is praised in detail. Unnerved by the ferocity of his attacks and the intensity of the heat, the Imam's enemies seek his refuge; the Imam, as befits him, sheaths his sword. Ibn Sa'd taunts his soldiers and two of the most fierce attack the Imam; at a command from Allah, Husayn unsheathes his sword again and kills them both.

The courageous men of Imam created havoc. They fought like hungry lions pouncing in anger on their preys. In the desert, in every direction, were piles of wounded and slaughtered men. The swords rained down from morning till midday. The earth shook and the skies continued to tremble. The angels shuddered as they folded their wings. No more were those shouts; no more was the flashing of those swords. The shields had their day; now it was the turn of the spears. At the time of early afternoon, the end of the army came about.

It is mid-afternoon and the Imam is all alone; he goes into the tents to take a final look at his infant son, Ali Asghar ; a deliberately shot arrow killed the infant in the Imam's lap; the Imam buries his son's tiny body. After his little son, Ali Asghar, was killed, Husayn came upon the army brandishing his sharp sword. His eyes were bloodshot with weeping, his face was red. He clothed his body with great pomp and ceremony in the holy cloak of the prophet. He took the shield of Hamza and the sword of Ali(Zulfuqar). On his body was the armor of the exalted Prophet of Allah.

The corpses of all of them were lying around, and in the midst of them was the Imam. The cloak of the Prophet was entirely soaked in blood. Hussain was dejected, grief-stricken, anxious and thirsty. The beatings of the drums of victory were like a spear in his heart. Whenever the enemies mentioned the name of any martyr, trembling he clasped his heart with both his hands. Now there was no freedom

from lamentation, no respite from mourning. The lamps which lit the house were extinguished. The sunlight beat down on the scattered limbs of all their bodies. There was not even a sheet on the corpse of Ali Akbar.

From the facing enemy, ten thousands arrows were aimed at his breast. Several hundred arrows struck his chest at one time. Spears transfixed his heart, arrows pierced his breast. Ten arrows hit him for every four that he pulled from his body. Arrowshafts were in the body of the Shadow of God, as spines in the body of a porcupine.

Husayn can not withstand the brutal attack of his enemies. As he declares earlier, "the time has come." Anees describes in detail the aftermath of Husayn's fall in stanza 183. The stanza is worth quoted in full:

Husain now falls from his horse-oh calamity! His holy foot has slipped out of the stirrup-oh calamity! His side has been torn open by a dagger-Oh calamity! He has dropped in a swoon, his turban has fallen from his head-Oh calamity! The Quran has fallen headlong on the ground from the bookstand of the bridle. The wall of Ka'ba has collapsed. The empyrean had fallen.

Husayn's mother laments in Paradise; her voice comes from the wilderness: 'The community has robbed me. Ah Muhammed! At this time who will discharge the duties of friendship? Alas! Alas such cruelty and the leader of both worlds. Lifting the curtain of the tent, the daughter of Ali and Husayn's sister comes bare-headed. Her legs were trembling; her back was bent; she was bathed in the blood of the heart. Beating her head, she was crying in all directions 'Oh Karbala, tell! Where is your guest? Alas! Now this thirst one can not lift his feet. Hold up my arm, and bring me to his corpse.'"(Stanzas 185-190)

Anees ends the Marsiya by addressing himself. He says, 'Stop speaking Anees! Your limbs are shaking with weakness'"(stanza 194, p.49). In spite of its length, ironically, he says "May these few verses

remain a monument in the world.” He wishes that he can recite his poetry in the assemblies of mourning for the rest of his life, thus, fulfilling the duty of the faithful and devout poet. A concluding stanza of pious sentiments and modest self-praise.

Conclusion:

Since the death of Imam al-Husain, or the Lord of the Martyrs, many poets try their hands at writing marsiyas in the dominant languages of the Muslim communities; namely; Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and Turkish. The marsiyas are multi-purposed. They serve to commemorate the sacrificial death of Imam Hussain who fought oppression and injustice and died for the sake of saving the Muslim community. They also help to bring Karbala with its meanings and symbols nearer to the local communities who live far away from the real Karbala where the Imam is buried.

In writing marsiyas, Anees follows a typical pattern. His marsiyas, especially the epic-like, Marsiya of Karbala are usually characterized by lengthy and colorful description of the main characters, their clothes, behaviors, manners, felling, etc.; abundant references to the flora and fauna of the poet's locales; sharp dichotomy, in terms of virtues and attributes, between the two warring parties; presenting the battle as well as life as a journey that extends from morning, symbols of life and beginning, to the evening, symbol of sunset and death of day; and finally, a great emphasis on the significance of the Imam's martyrdom as a means of enliven and invigorating the spiritual potentials of human communities.

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