The Twelver Shîᶜa as a Muslim Minority in India

Pulpit of tears

Toby M. Howarth

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The Twelver Shîᶜa as a Muslim Minority in India

The Twelver Shîᶜa as a Muslim Minority in India: Pulpit of Tears looks at the minority identity of India's Shîᶜî Muslims through the sermons preached at their mourning gatherings. Mourning commemorations are held by millions of Shîᶜî Muslims across the world to remember the death of Imâm Ḥusayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, at the Battle of Karbala.

This book uses these mourning sermons as a window into understanding the identity of India's Shîᶜas in a context of extraordinary cultural and religious plurality. This book includes:

- An examination of the community's history and devotional life
- Ten translated and complete sermons from a cross-section of the community, including men, women, lay preachers and formally trained scholars
- An investigation of the subjects contained within these sermons which range from women's rights to the significance of fire walking and stories of miraculous healing.

From an analysis of these issues, *The Twelver Shîᶜa as a Muslim Minority in India: Pulpit of Tears* offers a unique opportunity to hear and understand how one Muslim minority community understands its place and the multi-religious world of today. This book is essential reading for those with research interests in Islamic studies, Shîᶜîsm and Indian Islam.

Toby M. Howarth is currently working as an Anglican Parish Priest in a largely Muslim area of Birmingham. A graduate of Yale University, Birmingham University and the Free University of Amsterdam, he has studied and worked in Oxford, Uganda, Egypt, Jerusalem, India and the Netherlands. He speaks and writes widely in the field of Muslim–Christian relations.

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To the Shîᶜa of Hyderabad

Contents

Series editor's preface

The aim of this new series is to publish important monographs on all aspects of Shîᶜî and Iranian history.

Of special interest are works which remind us all of the transnational nature of both Persian society and culture and the Shîᶜî faith, Twelver Shîᶜîsm in particular.

Arguably Shîᶜî studies has only come into existence as a distinct field of scholarly endeavour since the events surrounding Iran's Islamic Revolution. Even now the field appears divided mainly between those who addressed the developments in Twelver doctrine and practice over the nearly seven centuries since the onset of the disappearance of the twelfth Imâm in 873–4, when the faith was a minority one within a Sunni dominated political structure and during which Arabic was the language of religious discourse, and those who are primarily interested in events and trends in 'modern' Shîᶜîsm, usually understood dating to the Safawid period (1501–1722), when Twelver Shîᶜîsm became Iran's established faith and Persian began to assume its role as an important, additional language of the faith.

Today the Shîᶜa presently comprise some 10 per cent of the world's 1 billion Muslims. And, while Twelver Shîᶜîsm has remained, except for a brief interlude in the eighteenth century, the established faith in Iran since the Safawid period, the Twelver Shîᶜa also form sizeable minorities in such other countries as Iraq, various Gulf countries, India and Pakistan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain, as well as Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and areas in eastern Africa.

These latter communities have received precious little scholarly attention to date. Hence, it is perhaps especially timely that the first monograph in this series address the faith and its distinctive beliefs and practices in one such community. Toby M. Howarth's study of Twelver Shîᶜî *majlis* preaching in Hyderabad, and his presentation of sermon texts, will certainly prove an invaluable resource for the study of the faith and the richness of its discourse, both past and present.

Andrew J. Newman
Series editor
Edinburgh, January 2005

Preface

The appalling terrorist attacks which tore apart the city of Karbala in the spring of 2004 drew world attention to the Shîᶜî Muslim commemorations that were taking place there at the time. Thousands of pilgrims had converged on the site in present-day Iraq at which their beloved Imâm Ḥusayn, grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, and members of his family had been killed at the Battle of Karbala in the Islamic month of Muḥarram AH 61 (October 680 CE). After decades in which these annual ceremonies had been banned in Iraq by the regime of Saddam Hussain, local Shîᶜas along with fellow pilgrims from Iran, Pakistan, India, Europe and beyond came to visit his tomb and to re-live the story of his martyrdom. Twenty-five years earlier, the commemoration of Muḥarram in Iran had been one of the events used by Âyatullâh Khomeini to spark the Islamic Revolution which toppled the Shah and rocked the world.

Although from a different geographical context, that of India, the focus of this study is on these same Shîᶜî commemorations. It was originally a PhD thesis, the research for which I undertook while I lived in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad between 1996 and 2000. Searching for clues as to how Muslims in a minority context understand their faith, I was introduced by friends to the extraordinarily intense manner in which Indian Shîᶜas commemorate Karbala. Various rituals are involved including large processions, self-flagellation and fire walking. The most important way in which the community remembers the death of Ḥusayn and its other martyrs, however, is through a gathering known as the *majlis* (pl. *majâlis*).[1] At a *majlis*, Shîᶜî men, women and children meet to hear again and re-live the narratives of their religious heroes and to weep for those who suffered and died in the events surrounding that battle. The extraordinary number of *majâlis* that are held in Hyderabad at different times of the year, the widespread availability of audio- and video-taped sermons, and the honour in which *majlis* preachers are held testify to the central place that these sermons have in building and nurturing the community's religious identity today.

As well as attending *majâlis* and making audio tapes of the sermons for myself, I copied tapes from friends within the Shîᶜî community and asked others to make recordings for me. I also bought audio tapes of sermons from local shops. Although some famous preachers have published collected texts of sermons in Urdu, there are no such printed texts available by contemporary preachers in

Hyderabad. Members of the Shîᶜî community were very helpful as I went about collecting and translating the sermons from Urdu into English. I always asked permission before taping a sermon and was never refused. Preachers would invariably reply that a *majlis* is a gathering open to anyone and that I was welcome to attend and to record whatever I liked.

While listening to about 200 sermons I selected about 80 for the purpose of making a more detailed study. This primary selection included sermons from as many different preachers as I could find, and a number of sermons from each of those who are widely recognized in the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community to be the more important preachers, either local preachers or those visiting from outside. The primary selection also included a few sermons by famous preachers of an earlier generation and some that were preached outside of Hyderabad. In order to understand these sermons within their context, I worked with various members of the Shîᶜî community including local *ᶜulamâ'* [sing. *ᶜâlim*, formally trained religious scholar with the title of *mawlânâ*]. Where the poor quality of the recording or excessive background noise made it difficult for me to understand part of a sermon, these scholars and others helped me to follow what was being said. They also helped me in tracking down some of the references and provided important background information.

For the original PhD thesis, I chose 20 sermons for inclusion. I was able to check most of these sermon texts with the preachers themselves, giving them a copy of the translation in advance and then meeting one or more times to go through the text and to interview the preacher more widely. If I was not able to interview the preacher himself or herself, as was the case with two women and those preachers who were not local to Hyderabad, I checked the translations with other members of the Shîᶜî community who had a good command of English. In this book, I have included only ten sermon texts, as it was considered that the inclusion of more would have made the volume too long for commercial publication. When these and other sermons are referred to, they are given an 'S' number which corresponds to a detailed list given after the glossary at the end of the book. For the sermons presented in Part II, this 'S' number is supplemented with paragraph numbers (e.g. 'S4.3' for Sermon 4, para 3).

The total number of *majlis* preachers whose sermons I listened to is 36. Of these preachers, 11 were formally trained religious scholars and 4 were women. All of the preachers' origins were in the Indian Subcontinent. Ten were visiting preachers who normally lived outside of Hyderabad. Of these, 5 lived in North India, 2 in Pakistan and the other 3 were living in Canada, Tanzania/London and Iraq. The rest were local Hyderabadis. Of those who were not formally trained *ᶜulamâ'*, 4 held university doctorates and at least 9 others held a college degree or diploma. At the time that I heard their sermons, the oldest preacher was 69 and the youngest was a teenager; 13 were below the age of 40. Three of the preachers were no longer living, but I had access to their sermons either from recordings or a printed text. These three preachers were Rashîd Ṭurâbî, who preached in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s (S153–5), Mawlânâ Sayyid ᶜAlî Naqî, who preached in Hyderabad in the 1950s (S152) and Ṭâhir Jarwalî, who preached in Hyderabad up to the 1980s (S156).

The main question that I ask is, 'What is happening in and around these sermons?' In seeking to answer this question, my starting point is the sermons themselves and the historical and contemporary context in which they were preached. My approach in this book is to analyse the preaching only after I have presented a number of sermon texts, and to look at the basic purpose of *majlis* preaching only after I have looked closely at its form and content. I show what the sermons speak about, how they do so and how they relate to their context. What are the roots of this preaching tradition, and how have mourning gatherings for Karbala developed over the course of Twelver Shîᶜî history? When and how did the modern, Indian form of the *majlis* sermon come into being? How has this form of preaching developed, especially in Hyderabad, up to the present time? Who were the people and what were the forces that shaped this development? What are the important features of the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community and the gatherings at which these sermons are preached? What is the place of the *majlis* and its preaching in the religious life of this community? How are Shîᶜî mourning practices perceived by the Sunnî Muslim community? Who are the *majlis* preachers? How do they come to be doing this work? How wide is the diversity among preachers, and how much freedom does an individual have in constructing and delivering a sermon? How are they rewarded?

In my analysis, my approach has been to use categories which are either drawn from the sermons themselves or used by the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community, or both. Observing the diversity of the preaching tradition taken as a whole, I ask whether different 'streams' or 'currents' can be distinguished within it and, if so, according to what factors? Noting the different kinds of material in the sermons, I ask how they are constructed. Which parts of the sermons are always present, and which are optional? What are the functions of these different parts? Do the sermons have a didactic or apologetic role and, if so, what are they teaching or defending? What sources are used in the sermons, and how? Can the sermons be said to have a ritual function and, if so, what is it? Looking theologically at the sermons, I ask what the important themes are that can be drawn out. How does mourning at a *majlis* relate to the Shîᶜa's minority position within the larger civil society? How do the themes of contemporary Hyderabadi *majlis* sermons compare with those of the classical Shîᶜî mourning and devotional tradition?

Having looked at the history of the sermons and their contemporary context, and having made a close analysis of the different parts of the sermons and their themes, I conclude my study by asking about the basic purpose of Hyderabadi *majlis* preaching. How does this preaching relate to the wider tradition of mourning for Ḥusayn in the Shîᶜî world, and can these sermons offer insights into how the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community understands its fundamental identity and purpose as a minority in modern, religiously plural India?

I was often asked by people in the Shîᶜî community as to who I was and what I was doing. As I was open about my background to those who asked at that time, it is important also to mention it here. I am British and, as well as my study of Islam, I have trained and worked as an ordained minister in the Church of England. This latter work, of course, included preaching sermons in the Christian

tradition. My Master's degree thesis focused on a collection of supplications by the fourth Shîᶜî Imâm ᶜAlî ibn Ḥusayn Zayn al-ᶜAbidîn (Howarth, 1994: 19–45). It was engagement with this text that inspired me to study further in the field of Shîᶜî Islam. My concern was to listen as closely as I could to a minority Muslim community and how it understands its identity in a religiously diverse society.

The main text of the book is divided into three parts. Part I gives the historical and contemporary context of the sermons. Part II presents ten full sermon texts translated from the original Urdu into English. Part III is an analysis of the sermons, drawing on the texts presented in Part II, and also more widely. Since many who read this book will be 'outsiders' to the world of the South Asian Shîᶜî mourning gathering or *majlis*, the first sermon presented in Part II includes not only the text but also a description of the entire gathering within which it was preached. Those readers who wish to get an introductory 'taste' of the phenomenon of which this book is a study may want to read this chapter first, starting on p. 61.

Acknowledgements

The research for this book has been essentially an exercise in listening. I am grateful to all those who have made that listening possible: the Hyderabadi Shîʿî community for its openness and hospitality, and many other people for their support.

Some people deserve special mention. I begin by thanking all the preachers and *majlis* hosts who graciously allowed me to attend their gatherings, record and translate their sermons, talk with them about their work and include their photographs. My gratitude goes also to the others in Hyderabad and Lucknow who shared their knowledge and experience with me in interviews. Among the preachers, I would like to acknowledge especially the help that I received from my copromotor, Dr Sadiq Naqvi of Osmania University, without whom this project would have been impossible. Dr Naqvi not only shared with me his wide knowledge of Hyderabadi Shîʿî Islam, but also accompanied me to Lucknow on a vitally important visit. I thank the community's religious leadership, especially Mawlanas Reza Aga, Mujahid Hussain and Sabir Hussain, for their valuable assistance. Many others in the Shîʿî community provided support and encouragement including Prof. Taqi Ali Mirza, Dr Asad Ali Khan and M.M. Hasan Sahib. I am indebted to Naimath Ullah Moosvi Sahib, Aga Muhammad Hussain Sahib and the Qur'ân Study Circles (both senior and junior) for allowing me to learn from them and share in their gatherings, and to Syed Mustafa Zaidi Sahib for help in understanding unclear recordings.

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Church in Rotterdam, as well as the faculty of Crowther Hall in Selly Oak, Birmingham were gracious and understanding in later stages of the project.

I would like to express my immense appreciation for the wisdom, faith and humanity of my promotor, Prof. Antonie Wessels, and to thank him for his exceptional supervision. I thank also the editor of this series, Dr Andrew J. Newman as well as Prof. Johan ter Haar, Dr Ida Glaser, Patrick Hobbs and Dr David Marshall for their valuable comments.

Lastly my family, both British and Dutch, have been always interested and encouraging. I mention especially my parents, and the help of my father-in-law, Dr Wulfert de Greef, in forwarding material to my supervisor. Franciska Safia and Lucy Teresa, both Hyderabadi *mulkis*, provided joy and perspective, as did Tamar Emanuelle when she arrived. Quite apart from reading the manuscript and giving advice and corrections, my wife, Henriette's companionship in the whole process has meant more to me than I can express.

Transliteration, translation and notes on the text

As the context of this study is an Urdu-speaking environment, I have used Urdu transliterations of words, even if those same words are Arabic or Persian in origin. Where I have used Arabic transliteration, it is because the Arabic spelling, grammatical construction or pronunciation is used in the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî context (e.g. *Naḥj al-Balâgha*), or because I wish to identify the formal Arabic name of a person. Place names have not been transliterated, nor have the names of contemporary people who have their own way of spelling their names in English. Apart from the frequently occurring plurals, *majâlis* [pl. of *majlis*] and *ᶜulamâ'* [pl. of *ᶜâlim*], other transliterated Urdu plurals are simply rendered with an English plural '–s'. The reason is partly that Urdu uses some Arabic 'broken' plurals which can be confusing for readers not familiar with the language. It is also because Urdu speakers (in Hyderabad at least) often use English plurals for Urdu words when they are speaking English, so that I am following local practice. The transliteration system is based on that of the US Library of Congress.

Some English words used in an Islamic context have specific meanings or associations that need to be clarified, especially those words that refer to the five 'pillars' of Islamic practice. Because of the specific Islamic meaning of these terms, I have translated them with a capital letter. Thus, the capitalized word 'Prayers' in this study refers to the prescribed ritual worship known in Urdu and Persian as *namâz*, and in Arabic as *ṣalât*. The Urdu word *riwâyat*, meaning narrative or tradition, is often used in sermons. The term refers to a body of handed down material about or attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, the Imâms and other important Shîᶜî personalities including, but wider than, formal *ḥadîs̲* traditions. I have translated it with the capitalized English word 'Tradition' to indicate that the English word is used in this technical sense. The capitalized word 'Sinless' translates the Urdu word *maᶜṣûm* which is used in the technical sense of meaning without sin or error. The capitalized 'Virtues' translates the Urdu *faẓâ'il*, referring to the qualities especially of ᶜAlî ibn-e Abî Ṭâlib, but also of other members of the family of the Prophet Muḥammad that are considered by the Shîᶜa to be in a different category from ordinary human virtues or merits. Likewise, the capitalized 'Sufferings' translates the Urdu *maṣâ'ib*, used of the sufferings of these personalities. The capitalized 'Knowledge' refers to the esoteric or mystical knowledge known as *ᶜirfân*.

I have used the English equivalents for the Arabic names of prophets who also appear in the Bible (e.g. Noah for Nûḥ). When I refer to 'the Prophet' without any other explanation, this means the Prophet Muḥammad. Similarly, when the names of the Shîᶜî 'Holy Family' are given without explanation, they refer to: Fâṭima (the daughter of the Prophet), ᶜAlî' (ibn-e Abî Ṭâlib, Fâṭima's husband, the cousin of the Prophet, the fourth caliph and first Shîᶜî Imâm), and their two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn (recognized by the Shîᶜa as the second and third Imâms, respectively). I have not generally used formal titles for personalities (except in sermon titles) or for the Qur'ân. This does not denote any lack of respect, but rather is in accord with academic convention.

Where I have quoted from the Qur'ân, I have used the English translations by S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali (1997). I have used this translation because it is the most widely used English translation (and commentary) in the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community, the one most recommended by the community's religious leadership and thus the natural choice for this study. In quoting from this translation, I have occasionally changed the original word order in order to make the meaning clearer. References to the Qur'ân are given with the name of the *sûra* as used within the Shîᶜî community followed by its number and the number of the *âyat*.

Majlis sermons make reference to a number of incidents and personalities that are so well known to a Shîᶜî congregation that they do not need to be explained in detail. For readers who are not familiar with this material, a glossary has been provided at the end of the study. An asterisk (*) following a word or phrase used in the book indicates that an explanation is given in this glossary. The glossary also gives brief explanations of Urdu, Persian and Arabic words. For readers who are unfamiliar with the early history of the Shîᶜa, a brief summary is given in An introduction to the Shîᶜa and the events surrounding the Battle of Karbala.

Dates are given, where appropriate, according to the Islamic (Hijri) followed by the Gregorian calendars. CE (Common Era) refers to the Gregorian calendar popularly known as Anno Domini (AD) as it counts from the supposed birth of Christ.

An introduction to the Shîᶜa and the events surrounding the Battle of Karbala

The origins of the Shîᶜa go back to the death of the Prophet Muḥammad himself when the question arose as to whom should now lead the Islamic community. The majority view was that the new leader should be chosen by a small group of the Prophet's companions. A minority held that the new leader should be the Prophet's cousin, ᶜAlî ibn Abî Ṭâlib, who had married the Prophet's daughter, Fâṭima. This group held that ᶜAlî was the closest in blood ties and by marriage to the Prophet, and that the Prophet had, during his lifetime, designated ᶜAlî as his successor. Despite this claim, ᶜAlî was blocked from the leadership and had to wait until three men, Abû Bakr, ᶜUmar and then ᶜUs̲mân, had become caliph before he was chosen for this role. The group that supported ᶜAlî became known as the *shîᶜat ᶜAlî* ['party of ᶜAlî] or, later, simply the *shîᶜa*.

During ᶜAlî's caliphate, the Muslim community was split by civil war. ᶜAlî, with an Iraqi army fought against Muᶜâwiya, the governor of Syria at Siffin on the Euphrates river in 36–7/657. Muᶜâwiya was the son of Abû Sufyân, a prominent enemy of the Prophet before he had embraced Islam at the conquest of Mecca in 8/630. Abû Sufyân and Muᶜâwiya were from the same ᶜAbd Shams clan as the third caliph, ᶜUs̲mân, and it was ᶜUs̲mân who had made his cousin Muᶜâwiya the Syrian governor. After the Battle of Siffin, ᶜAlî was murdered, leaving two sons by his wife Fâṭima, daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad. The eldest of these sons, Ḥasan, became caliph but was forced to abdicate by Muᶜâwiya who became caliph in his place.

In AH 60, after both Ḥasan and Muᶜâwiya had died, Muᶜâwiya's son, Yazîd, was proclaimed caliph, establishing the Umayyad family dynasty. Yazîd asked Ḥasan's brother, Ḥusayn, for a formal oath of allegiance. Ḥusayn, who was living in Madina, refused and withdrew to the sanctuary city of Mecca. When the news of his refusal spread, he was invited by supporters in the city of Kufa to lead them in a fight against Yazîd's government. Ḥusayn started out, but was intercepted by Yazîd's forces at a place on the Euphrates which became known later as Karbala. When Ḥusayn again refused to pledge allegiance to Yazîd, his company was cut off from the river, and on 10 Muḥarram 61/10 October 680 the two sides engaged in battle. Ḥusayn's party, numbering only about 70 combatants, was vastly outnumbered by the Syrian forces led by ᶜUmar ibn-e Saᶜd. One by one Ḥusayn's followers and male family members were slaughtered. Finally Ḥusayn himself was killed.

After the battle, the severed heads of the men and the captured women and children were taken in a caravan to Kufa. There, the governor, ᶜUbayd Allâh Ibn Ziyâd, is reported to have picked at the teeth of Ḥusayn's head with his staff. From Kufa, the captives and the heads were taken to Damascus, Yazîd's capital. After an audience with Yazîd, the captives were kept in prison in Damascus before being allowed to return to Madina from where they had originally set out.[1]

The Shîᶜa maintain that the Prophet had designated ᶜAlî as his successor by divine decree to be the community's *imâm* in this special sense. ᶜAlî is considered therefore to be the first Shîᶜî Imâm. ᶜAlî designated his eldest son, Ḥasan who, in turn, nominated his younger brother, Ḥusayn, and these two are recognized as the second and third Imâms, respectively. Only one of Ḥusayn's sons, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn, survived Karbala, because he had been too sick to fight. He is recognized by the Shîᶜa as their fourth. The largest group of the Shîᶜa in the world today recognize 12 Imâms, for which reason they are known as the 'Twelvers'. The last Imâm, Muḥammad al-Mahdî, is believed by this group to have disappeared in 260/874 into 'occultation'. As the 'Hidden Imâm', he is believed to be waiting until the last days when he will return. Other, smaller groups recognize 5 or 7 Imâms and are therefore known as 'fivers' and 'seveners'.

The largest population of Shîᶜas in the world today are to be found in Iran, where they make up the overwhelming majority of the population. Other significant numbers of Shîᶜas live in Pakistan, India, Iraq (where they make up about 60 per cent of the population), Central Asia, Turkey and the Lebanon. Smaller communities can be found in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Syria, as well as in other parts of the world such as East Africa, North America, Britain and Australia due to recent emigration.

Part I

Context

1 From Karbala to India

A history of Shîᶜî preaching

This chapter looks at the historical development of Shîᶜî preaching as it has evolved into the kind practised today in Hyderabad. The first section looks at the roots of Islamic preaching in general, and the following section looks at the roots of the Shîᶜî mourning gathering and its message. In the section on The development of mourning gatherings in Iran and South India from the sixteenth century, I show how mourning gatherings for Ḥusayn developed and spread from Arabia, flowering particularly in the medieval Shîᶜî kingdoms of Iran and South India. After the collapse of the South Indian Shîᶜî kingdoms, the centre of Indian Shîᶜî culture shifted to the northern province of Awadh, 400 km to the southeast of Delhi where a Shîᶜî noble had power. The section on Mourning gatherings in North India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries explores the emergence of the modern *majlis* sermon in Awadh from the eighteenth century. Finally, I return to South India, picking up the parallel history of the Shîᶜî community and its *majlis* in Hyderabad and tracing its development up to the end of the twentieth century. Earlier sections of this chapter draw for the most part on secondary written sources in English. From the discussion of the modern *majlis* sermon as it developed in Awadh in the section on The birth of the modern sermon, however, there is less secondary source material available, especially in English, and I rely more heavily towards the end of the chapter on primary oral and written Urdu sources. As far as I know, this present study is the first to systematically document the development of the Indian *majlis* sermon either in English or Urdu.

Roots of Islamic preaching

The sermons that are the focus of this study have roots that can be traced back to before the advent of Islam. Oratory was a highly developed and much valued skill in the Arabian tribal culture of the pre-Islamic period that is known among Muslims as the *Jâhiliyya* [‘Age of Ignorance’]. Among the nobles of a tribe’s leadership would be a *khaṭîb* [tribal spokesman] who, along with a poet, would function as the tribe’s ‘voice’. Johannes Pedersen writes that the *khaṭîb*’s role was to, ‘extol the glorious deeds and noble qualities of his tribe, to narrate them in perfect language and to be able likewise to expose the weaknesses of his opponents’ (‘Khaṭîb’, in *EI*^{2}).

The Prophet Muḥammad was himself an accomplished preacher, described on occasion by his biographer, Ibn Isḥâq, as a *khaṭîb* (Wüstenfeld, 1860: 823). Traditions recount that the Prophet, in the year AH 7 or 8 (629 or 630 CE) made a *minbar* [pulpit] out of two steps and a seat. Before this time he used to lean against a palm tree while preaching (Zwemmer, 1933: 219–20). In these early years, the word *majlis* [lit. 'sitting'] was sometimes used as a synonym for the word *minbar* (Margoliouth, 1918). The Prophet's discourses were different from those of the old tribal orators. They were religious in nature and directed towards the building up of the new, pan-tribal Muslim community. However, there was some continuity in the role of the *khaṭîb* as it was brought over into the new Muslim community. Evidence for this continuity can be seen in *al-ᶜasâ*, the staff, bow or spear which was associated with those early tribal orators and upon which preachers at the Friday congregational Prayers still lean today.[1] A Muslim preacher at the Friday Prayers continues to be known as a *khaṭîb*, and, although it is not the usual term, a Shîᶜî *majlis* preacher is sometimes also called a *khaṭîb*. Preachers are still valued for their eloquence and their ability to deliver an often complex and sustained discourse without any written notes.[2]

From the time of the Prophet Muḥammad preaching was an integral part of the Friday congregational Prayers, attendance at which was obligatory for all free adult male Muslims.[3] In the early years of Islam, this Friday preaching was the prerogative of the caliph or his representative.[4] It thus became an important platform for official public pronouncements. One of the features of the sermon was a blessing upon the caliph which the preacher included towards the end and which mentioned the ruler by name (Gaffney, 1994: 120–2). During the rule of the fourth caliph, Muḥammad's cousin and son-in-law ᶜAlî ibn Abî Ṭâlib (hereafter simply referred to as ᶜAlî), there was civil war in the Muslim community and ᶜAlî himself was murdered. After ᶜAlî's death, caliphs of the Umayyad dynasty used the Friday Prayers pulpit from which to curse ᶜAlî until this practice was stopped at the end of the first Islamic century (Margoliouth, 1918).

The Shîᶜa, however, considered that ᶜAlî and those specially nominated from among his direct descendants (known as the 'Imâms') were the sole legitimate successors of the Prophet. It was these men, in the eyes of ᶜAlî's supporters, who were the only ones qualified to lead and preach at the Friday Prayers. The majority of the Shîᶜa held that, in the absence of a visible Imâm, only the normal midday [*zuhr*] Prayers on a Friday should be held, and that these should be conducted without a sermon (Momen, 1985: 170). This began to change, however, from the fourteenth century when some Shîᶜî religious scholars began to argue that although there was no visible Imâm, his representative could legitimately hold the Friday congregational Prayers.[5] From the beginning of the sixteenth century in Iran, following a ruling from Shaykh ᶜAlî al-Karakî, these congregational Prayers were re-established (Arjomand, 1984: 134–8). However, they remained a point of contention among religious scholars even after this time. In India only from 1200/1786 were the Friday congregational Prayers and Friday sermons re-established among the Shîᶜa, a move that provoked much controversy.[6]

Sermons at the Friday congregational prayers were not the only kind of preaching practised in the early Islamic community. There were other occasions, often on a Thursday, at which sermons were preached, and these were known as *majâlis al-waᶜz* [preaching gatherings] (Margoliouth, 1918). There were also other preachers, different from the caliph or his representative, who preached in the mosques and were often officials there. Pedersen calls this these men 'free preachers', who were known in Arabic by the title of *wâᶜiẓ*, *mudhakkir* [reminder or mentioner], or *qâṣṣ* [narrator]. These preachers would sit in the mosque, and people would gather around them to listen, often giving money to them afterwards. They would also, at times, preach while standing or sitting on the *minbar*. The task of these 'free preachers' was to encourage warriors in their religious warfare [*jihâd*], admonish them from the law and relate narratives from the Qur'ân and the *ḥadîṯ** (Pedersen, 1953: 215–31; see also Pedersen, 1948). This tradition of 'free preaching' became an important activity in the early Islamic community and included exponents of the stature of Ḥasan al-Baṣrî (d. 110/728). The admonitions of these men to repent of their sins and yearn for God often led to emotional responses by their audiences, as a description of a sermon by the great preacher Jamâl al-Dîn ibn al-Jawzî (d. 597/1200) shows: 'The tears flowed, and when he left the *minbar*, the audience was shaken by commotion. "We had not imagined that an orator in this world might acquire such a mastery over the souls and play upon them as this man!" ' (quoted in Pedersen, 1948: 241).

The message of Shîᶜî mourning gatherings up to the sixteenth century

Although sermons at the Friday congregational Prayers were not generally preached among the Shîᶜa, other sermons were common among them from the earliest times, and it is these sermons that are the direct ancestors of the preaching that we are considering in this study. These latter sermons were more like those given by the 'free preachers' than the sermons preached at the Friday Prayers. They took place at mourning gatherings which commemorated the death of ᶜAlî's son, Imâm Ḥusayn, his family and followers at the Battle of Karbala in Muḥarram 61/680.

After the Battle of Karbala, the survivors from Ḥusayn's camp were led in a caravan from Karbala to Kufa, and from there to the caliph Yazîd's* court at Damascus. After some time the captives were escorted back to Madina from where they had originally set out, stopping on the way at Karbala where they were allowed to mourn their dead. Shîᶜî historians recount that all along the route that the caravan took, and especially once the prisoners had returned to Madina, gatherings were held to mourn those killed at Karbala. In these accounts of the journey, there is a persistent theme that people were drawn out of curiosity to see the 'spectacle' of the prisoners, but that these prisoners, especially Ḥusayn's sister, Zaynab*, and his son, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn* (the only male member of the family to have survived the battle), used every opportunity when a crowd formed to 'make speeches which would arouse great sorrow and cause much weeping'.[7]

Two of these gatherings that deserve special mention, because they are often referred to in contemporary Shîᶜî preaching, are a meeting organized and addressed by Zaynab for the women of Damascus and a meeting for the residents of Madina addressed by ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn. Another important leader of the mourning movement in Madina and preacher at these gatherings was Umm-e Banîn*, a widow of ᶜAlî ibn Abî Ṭâlib. The speeches that these leaders gave were designed to spread the news about what had happened at Karbala and to stir up sympathy and support for the followers of Ḥusayn. That these earliest mourning meetings and their sermons were perceived to be politically subversive is suggested by Traditions reporting that Zaynab was exiled from Madina by the Umayyad* authorities.[8]

Over the years and centuries that followed, remembrance gatherings for Karbala, known as *majâlis al-taᶜziya* [gatherings for consolation] or simply *majâlis* (sing. *majlis*), became a distinctive Shîᶜî practice.[9] A scholar who has done research into the early history of these gatherings, Yitzak Nakash, describes them as the 'oldest vehicle for creating and transmitting the memory of Karbala' (1993: 163). Mahmoud Ayoub claims that contemporary *majâlis* stand in direct continuity with the earliest funeral commemorations that took place at Karbala itself.[10]

In the period following the Battle of Karbala, during the Umayyad dynasty (41/661–132/750), and under the ᶜAbbâsids who displaced them (132/750–656/1258 in Baghdad), Shîᶜî *majâlis* were mostly banned. They continued to be held, but secretly, in the homes of the Imâms and their followers. However, at the beginning of the ᶜAbbâsid dynasty the Shîᶜa had a brief 'window' of freedom to practice their mourning openly. The Imâm of this period, Jaᶜfar Ṣâdiq* (*c*.80/699–148/765), used this freedom to establish formal structures of mourning and to encourage the development of specialized kinds of lamentation recitation and poetry (Nakash, 1993: 163). Traditions recount that it was also Jaᶜfar Ṣâdiq who first pulled a curtain across the hall in which a *majlis* was held as he invited women also to participate in the gatherings led by him and other men (Wafâ, 1978: 6).

In pre-Islamic Arabia, as we have noted, the function of tribal spokesman was shared by the prose orator and the poet. In the Shîᶜî *majlis* too, poet and prose speaker shared their tasks which was to proclaim and to enable people to re-live the memory of Karbala. In the chapter of his book that traces the history of the 'rites of remembrance for al-Ḥusayn', the Lebanese Shîᶜî historian Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdî Shams al-Dîn argues that by the time of the ᶜAbbâsids, the two main elements in the *majlis* had become the prose narration of the events of Karbala and lamentation poetry inspired by those events (1985: 168–70).

By the ninth century the position of a professional mourner had been established, a person whose job it was to chant elegies, recount the Sufferings of the Karbala martyrs and, in time, read one of the martyrdom narratives [*maqâtil*]. These professional leaders were called *qurrâ' al-Ḥusayn* [readers for Ḥusayn].[11] So important was the role of these leaders that it is reported that the Imâm would sit on the floor while the poet recited from the *minbar* (Wafâ, 1978: 4).

As the ᶜAbbâsid empire fell apart, it was replaced by local dynasties that were sometimes sympathetic to the Shîᶜî cause such as the Hamdânids of Syria and Mosul

(ruling from 293/905). Later, the Bûyid rulers of Iran and Iraq (334/945–447/1055) openly encouraged the Shîᶜî community, sponsoring processions (which provoked sectarian rioting) and *majâlis* on the day of ᶜÂshûrâ'* and the festival of Ghadir-e Khumm* (Mazzaoui, 1979: 231–2). Evidence for the spread of the Shîᶜî *majlis* by the end of the ninth century include buildings, known as *ḥusayniyyas*, that were constructed especially for Muḥarram commemorations in Baghdad, Aleppo and Cairo (Ayoub, 1978: 154). Ibn Bâbûya (also known as Shaykh al-Ṣadûq), an important scholar of the early Bûyid period, was a *majlis* preacher, and is credited as being the first person to, 'move the topic of Karbala from poetry to prose on the pulpit (without a gap)'.[12] The writings of his pupil, Shaykh al-Mufîd (*c*.336/948–413/1022), suggest that the remembrance rites for Ḥusayn began also to include the growth of exposition of the Sufferings of the other Imâms around this time.[13]

In his account of the Battle of Karbala, Shaykh al-Mufîd writes that Ḥusayn and the commander of the enemy forces, ᶜUmar ibn-e Saᶜd, met before the battle at night and talked together for a long time. After that meeting, ᶜUmar ibn-e Saᶜd sent a letter to the governor of Kufa, ᶜUbayd Allâh ibn-e Ziyâd in which he wrote that Ḥusayn had suggested that he go to 'one of the border outposts' of the rapidly expanding Muslim empire as a way of resolving the conflict (Al-Mufîd, 1981: 343). Other Traditions name that 'border outpost' as 'Hindustan' (India).[14] Even though Ḥusayn himself was not able to go to India, some of the Shîᶜa did emigrate there for various reasons, including those who came as refugees from the Umayyad and ᶜAbbâsid persecutions (Hollister, 1988: 101). These refugees brought with them rituals through which they kept alive the remembrance of Karbala and their Shîᶜî identity.

After the decline of the Ḥamdânids in Syria, the Bûyids in Baghdad and the Ismâᶜîlî* Fâṭimid dynasty in Egypt (358/969–567/1171), Shîᶜî power in the Muslim world waned considerably, and it is difficult to assess the exact strength of the Shîᶜa or their geographical spread (Momen, 1985: 83). There was a period at the end of the tenth century when Ismâᶜîlî Shîᶜî missionaries established a centre in Multan in what is today Pakistan, but that centre lasted for less than 20 years (Ahmed, 1987: 276). The commemoration of Muḥarram, however, was not limited to the Shîᶜa, and was widespread. By the thirteenth century, there are records of Muslim preachers giving a sermon known as a *taẕkîr* [lit. 'reminder' or 'recitation'] on the occasion of Muḥarram in mosques, public places and in military camps in North India. It is likely that these sermons used the example of the Karbala martyrs to encourage soldiers to be prepared to lay down their lives in the course of their duty, in the tradition of the 'free preachers' mentioned in the first section. The remembrance of Muḥarram was also spread in North India by Ṣûfî saints, especially of the Chishtî order, as well as by Ismâᶜîlî Shîᶜî preachers (Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 292–5).

The development of mourning gatherings in Iran and South India from the sixteenth century

A major turning point in the fortunes of the Shîᶜa within the larger Muslim community came at the beginning of the sixteenth century when in two parts of

the Muslim world important dynasties were established with a clear Shîᶜî identity. These were the Ṣafavids of Iran (907/1501–1145/1732) and the Shîᶜî sultânates of the Deccan in the south of India,[15] especially the Quṭb Shâhîs of Golconda and Hyderabad (*c*.924/1518–1099/1687). Under both of these dynasties, the *majlis* was officially patronized and developed in ways that have left their mark on Indian practice even today.

Both in Iran and South India, Shîᶜî dynasties had their antecedents in rulers who were sympathetic to the Shîᶜa, even if they were not overtly Shîᶜî themselves. The second wave of Mongol invaders who preceded the Ṣafavids in Iran, the Tîmûrids, were Sunnî. However, Tîmûr himself allowed Shîᶜî rulers to remain as vassals, and his son's wife built a large mosque at the shrine of the eighth Imâm, ᶜAlî Reẓâ*, in Mashhad (Momen, 1985: 98). Later, as the Ṣafavids gained power in Iran, they sometimes forcibly imposed the Shîᶜî faith on their subjects as a matter of state policy (Halm, 1991: 84, 98; Nakash, 1993: 168). They also encouraged the holding of *majâlis*, not least to promote opposition to the rival Sunnî Ottoman Turkish empire (Momen, 1985: 119).

As Shîᶜî Islam spread and flourished in Iran, the *ᶜulamâ'* [religious scholars] became increasingly powerful. They saw the need for a legal basis upon which they could act as representatives of the hidden Imâm. Three of the functions that became important for them as religious leaders of an overtly Shîᶜî state were the right to collect religious taxes, to hold (and preach at) the Friday congregational Prayers, and to declare a state of religious war [*jihâd*]. They also needed the flexibility to be able to give judgements in matters of law that were not explicitly stated in the Qur'ân or *ḥadîṯ*.

Earlier, the great Shîᶜî scholar ᶜAllâma al-Ḥillî (648/1250–726/1325) had set out the theory by which a scholar known as a *mujtahid* [lit. 'one who exerts'] could reach a legal judgement [*fatwâ*] based on rationalist principles in a process called *ijtihâd* [exertion] (Halm, 1991: 68–9). This process was thus known because it required a scholar to exert himself or struggle as he weighed up contradictory arguments in order to give a ruling on a matter that was not clear from the Qur'ân or *ḥadîṯ*. Only a properly trained *mujtahid* could give such rulings, and an ordinary Shîᶜa was required to submit to the *mujtahid*'s authority. Because of the central role of rationalist principles [*usûl*], this school of thought became known as the *Uṣûlî* school.

Although al-Ḥillî had set out the principles of *ijtihâd*, it was not until the seventeenth century in Iran that these principles were applied on a wide scale in the organization and administration of a state. The principle of *ijtihâd* gave the *ᶜulamâ'* of the *Uṣûlî* school wide ranging powers, and its implementation provoked a backlash from other, more conservative scholars. These latter legal theorists thought that judgements could be obtained only by means of the Qur'ân and *ḥadîṯ* [also known as *akhbâr*], and they thus became known as the *Akhbârî* school.[16]

One of the practical points of contention between these two Shîᶜî schools was the question of whether the Friday congregational Prayers could be held in the absence of the visible Imâm. Against the *Akhbârî* school, *Uṣûlî* scholars argued

that the holding of and attendance at Friday Prayers was necessary and obligatory, and that a *mujtahid* could represent the hidden Imâm in leading and preaching at them. Although it took almost 200 years before the controversy finally died away at the end of the eighteenth century, the *Uṣûlî* school prevailed, and Friday Prayers with their sermons became institutionalized both in Safavid-ruled areas and among the Shîᶜa of the shrine cities of Iraq (Momen, 1985: 117–18). In this way, the pulpit at the Friday congregational Prayers was recovered by the Shîᶜa as an important vehicle for the propagation and maintenance of their faith, and Shîᶜî preaching was given an important stimulus.

Another of the Shîᶜî institutions, which was encouraged by the new regime in Iran with its powerful religious scholars, was the *majlis*. Within a few years of the Safavids coming to power, a book describing the martyrs of Karbala became very popular in Iranian mourning rituals. This was the *Rawẕat al-Shuhadâ'* [The Garden of the Martyrs] written in Persian by Ḥusayn Vâᶜiẓ Kâshifî (d. 910/1504), a Sunnî specialist in *ḥadîṯ* and commentator on the Qur'ân (Momen, 1985: 100). This book, containing many quotations from Persian poetry, was to exert a great influence on the development of the *majlis* (Rizvi, 1991: 31). For two centuries it became the standard vehicle for conveying the memory of Karbala. Passages from it were recited, becoming known as *rawẕa khwânî* [recitation from the *Rawẕa*], and so common was the practice that the *majlis* reciter was simply called a *rawẕa khwân* [reciter of the *Rawẕa*] (Nakash, 1993: n. 32, p. 170). Mary Hegland, writing about women's *majâlis* in contemporary Peshawar in the North West Frontier of Pakistan, uses this term for *majlis* preachers, and the term is still in widespread use in Iran as well as in other parts of the Indian subcontinent (1995: 188).

In Iran, during the late Ṣafavid dynasty and under the Qâjâr dynasty that followed (formally from 1193/1779 to 1342/1924), the recital from the *Rawẕat al-Shuhadâ'* developed first into the dramatic form known as the *shabîh* [carnival play] and then later into the *taᶜziya* [theatrical melodrama],[17] both highly stylized enactments of the Karbala tragedy. The latter theatrical dramas were often held in specially constructed buildings known as *takiyyas* or *ḥusayniyyas*.[18] Sermons were preached in the context of these plays, as is evident from descriptions written by European eye-witnesses. A French traveller named A. de Gobineau, for example, who spent time in Persia in the 1850s, mentions sermons as a part of the 'warm-ups' to what he calls these 'Passion Plays' performed during Muḥarram (along with, 'procession, dances and singing').[19] He writes about bands of men who beat their breasts in mourning, and notes that they took up their positions, 'in front of the pulpits of the preachers', thereafter giving a description of a sermon: 'As soon as calm had returned (after the beating of breasts) a man in a green robe mounted the stage. There was nothing unusual about him; he looked like a grocer from the bazaar. This man preached a sermon on paradise, describing its size with powerful eloquence. In order to get there it was not sufficient to read the Koran, the book of the Prophet. "It is not enough to do everything that the Holy Book recommends; it is not enough to come every day to the theatre and weep as you do. Your good works must be done in the name of Husain and out of love for him.

It is Husain who is the gate of paradise; it is Husain who supports the world; it is Husain through whom salvation is won. Shout out, 'Hasan, Husain!' "

> The whole crowd shouts, "O Hasan, O Husain!"
> "Good, now once more."
> "O Hasan, O Husain!"
> "Pray God that he may always keep you in the love of Husain. Now, cry to God!"

The whole crowd in a single movement lift their arms high and give a long reverberating shout, "Ya Allah, O God!" '.[20]

There were many Shîᶜas in the army and nobility of the Bahmanî dynasty which ruled the Indian Deccan from 748/1347. These were mostly Persian immigrants who had come via the sea routes and the port cities of the west coast of India. They were an important component of the *Âfâqî* [foreign] faction which competed at the royal court with the rival *Dakẖnî* [southern or local] faction. These latter had come to the Deccan earlier starting from the first Turkish Muslim invasion from North India in 695/1296. The two factions were often bitter enemies and their rivalry eventually contributed to the splitting of the Bahmanî kingdom into five smaller sulṭânates at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Several of the Bahmanî rulers were sympathetic to the Shîᶜî faith of the *Âfâqîs*. These rulers participated in Muḥarram commemorations and built *ᶜâshûrkhânas**. Maḥmûd Gâwân, a minister who played a leading role in the kingdom, was in all probability a Shîᶜa (Hollister, 1988: 110), and brought several Shîᶜî scholars from Iran and Iraq to the Bahmanî capital, Bidar, where they recited at *majâlis* during the first ten days of Muḥarram (Wafâ, 1978: 9).

Although some of the Shîᶜa reached high positions in the Bahmanî kingdom, it was not until the beginning of the sixteenth century that two of the off-shoot kingdoms, in Bijapur and Golconda, officially adopted Shîᶜî Islam as the state religion (Khalidi, 1991: 6). The founder of the ᶜAdil Shâhî kingdom of Bijapur was the adopted son of Maḥmûd Gâwân. In 907/1502 he followed the Iranian Ṣafavid monarch in adding the distinctive Shîᶜî elements to the Call to Prayer [*aẕân*], and reciting the names of the Shîᶜî Imâms in the Friday congregational Prayers sermon. He thus formally declared Twelver Shîᶜî Islam the religion of the state, the first time this had ever been done in India.[21]

The second of the Shîᶜî kingdoms that emerged from the break-up of the Bahmanî state was ruled by the Quṭb Shâhî dynasty (*c.*924/1518–1099/1687) based in Golconda. Of all the five Deccani kingdoms it became the most important, and it was under this dynasty that the city of Hyderabad was founded in 999/1591.[22] Although the Quṭb Shâhî rulers established Shîᶜî Islam as the state religion, it is interesting to note that they did not discontinue the Friday congregational Prayers with their sermons, a practice of the previous Sunnî administration. Instead they simply replaced the names of the first three Sunnî recognized caliphs which had been mentioned in the Friday sermons with the names of the twelve Imâms (Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 263–4). This practice was in line with the

teaching of the Uṣûlî religious scholars from Iran who predominated at the royal court (Khalidi, 1991: 6; Rizvi, 1991: 23–4).

Under the patronage of the openly Shîᶜî administrations in Bidar and Golconda, Muḥarram commemorations became very important. By the time of the seventh Quṭb Shâhî ruler, Sulṭân ᶜAbdullah (1035–83/1626–72), elaborate rituals had been formalized which are described by the court historian Nizâm al-Dîn Aḥmad in a work entitled, *Ḥadîqat al-Salâṭîn* [The Walled Garden of the Kings].[23] This description mentions three kinds of mourners involved in leading the rituals: the *marṯiya khwân* [reciter of elegies], the *ẕâkir* [reciter, reminder or mentioner] and the *khaṭîb* [preacher]. All three of these roles came together later in *majlis* preaching as it is practised today.

The first kind of mourners, the 'reciters of eulogies for the Imâms' were those who, in Nizâm al-Dîn Aḥmad's description recited 'heart-rending *marṯiyas* [elegies]'. The *marṯiya* is a specialized lamentation elegy for the Karbala martyrs and later Imâms, and was previously written in Arabic and Persian. Under the patronage of the Deccani rulers, however, who themselves wrote as well as commissioned *marṯiyas*, these poems took on a particularly Indian form. They were written in the Indian languages of Old Deccani and then Urdu and included local elements such as descriptions of Deccani nature and culture.[24] These poems included praise of the Virtues [*faẕâ'il*] of the Imâms and other great Shîᶜî heroes as well as the narration of their Sufferings, and became the most important element in the Deccani *majlis* for almost 300 years, so that the literary history of the Deccani *majlis* is really the history of the *marṯiya* (Mosvi, 1989).

The second kind of mourners in Nizâm al-Dîn Aḥmad's description are called *ẕâkirs*. A *ẕâkir* referred in the Quṭb Shâhî period to the reciter of Kâshifî's *Rawẕat al-Shuhadâ*' mentioned earlier in connection with Safavid Iran. Nizâm al-Dîn writes that 'the assembled mourners burst into tears and loud shrieks of sorrowful ecstasy at the *ẕâkir*'s touching recitations' (Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 336).

Third, Nizâm al-Dîn mentions an 'eloquent preacher [*khaṭîb*]' who 'gives a lucid sermon in a loud voice to gain blessings from the souls of the Karbala martyrs and to invoke intercession for the Sulṭân's prosperity'. These preachers, probably from the *ᶜulamâ'*, are said to have preached about the events of Karbala and the Sufferings of Ḥusayn (Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 336–7). In the Deccan, recitation of the Karbala narrative from a memorized text, as well as its mention in the context of a sermon was a part of the Muḥarram ceremonies, but the highest place was given to the *marṯiya*.

Whereas in Iran under the Ṣafavids the Shîᶜî religion was, at times, forcibly imposed as the state religion, in the Indian Deccan the policy was different. Sadiq Naqvi and others have argued that the Quṭb Shâhîs tried to create a religious identity for the state by 'Indianizing' Shîᶜî rituals so that they became accessible to all religious communities. As a result Sunnîs and Hindus were able to participate in the mourning for Ḥusayn without abandoning their own particular faiths.[25] Examples of this accommodation to the Indian context include the chanting of *marṯiya* poetry to Indian *râgas* [tone patterns], the particular way in which *mehndî* [henna paste] is used in commemoration of the marriage that is believed

to have taken place between Ḥusayn's daughter and Ḥasan's* son at Karbala, and various methods of venerating objects used in the Muḥarram rituals.[26]

In 1099/1687 the Quṭb Shâhî dynasty was overthrown by the army of the staunchly Sunnî Mughal emperor Awrangzîb (1026/1617–1118/1707), who clamped down on Shîᶜî rituals and turned the royal *ᶜâshûrkhâna* in Hyderabad into a garage. Although the Âsaf Jâhî rulers (1132/1720–1367/1948) who followed the Quṭb Shâhîs were often favourable to the Shîᶜî cause, the invasion of the Deccan shifted the centre of Shîᶜî culture to North India and particularly to the Shîᶜî-ruled province of Awadh (1134/1722–1272/1856). For this reason we will first look at the development of the *majlis* and *majlis* preaching in North India from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, and then go back to look at the same period in the South.

Mourning gatherings in North India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

Whereas in South India Muḥarram ceremonies had been patronized by Shîᶜî Sulṭâns, in North India the situation under the Mughals was different. The Mughal rulers (932/1526–1274/1858) were Sunnî and they were wary of the Shîᶜî Ṣafavids to their west who had formed an alliance with the Deccani Shîᶜî kingdoms to their south. During the reign of Awrangzîb, the Indian Shîᶜa in the north were persecuted and often resorted to practising *taqiyya*, dissimulation of their religious identity that is allowable and even encouraged in Shîᶜî Islam under certain conditions.[27] Awrangzîb, however, was less harsh against the Shîᶜa who were Persian immigrants (known as *mughals*) because they were prized as soldiers and administrators (Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 37). In Awrangzîb's court, 28 per cent of 486 high office holders were Iranians (Cole, 1989: 81).

Many Shîᶜas lived in North India, and Muḥarram was commemorated there, but the Mughal state prevented the Shîᶜa from flourishing as a distinct community. As Juan Cole writes, 'In the Mughal period, and especially under Awrangzîb, Shîᶜas had no public rituals separate from Sunnîs which could serve as the matrix of community formation. Religious identity and social networks within a genuine religious community could only grow up around a set of uniting public rituals' (1989: 92).

Thus when a Shîᶜî noble of the Mughal court in Delhi was awarded jurisdiction of the area of Awadh in 1134/1722, and successive rulers from his family began to assert their independence as the Mughal empire declined, the resulting government became vitally important to Indian Shîᶜas. The rulers of Awadh were first known as *nawâbs* [lords or nobles] until they proclaimed themselves kings. It was here that specifically Shîᶜî rituals were again encouraged and sponsored by the state, often lavishly.[28] It is even related that King Ghaziuddin Haydar's favourite elephant had been trained to trumpet 'Wah Husseinaaah . . .' (Schimmel, 1979: 211). And it was here, after the downfall of the kingdom of Awadh in 1272/1856, that the *majlis* sermon developed into the form in which we know it today.

The most important religious scholar in the growth and establishment of Shîᶜî Islam in Awadh was Mawlânâ Sayyid Dildâr ᶜAlî Naṣîrabâdî (1166/1753–1235/1820), known as Ghufrân Maᶜâb ['he who has taken refuge in divine forgiveness']. Following a visit to the shrine cities of Iraq and Iran, Dildâr ᶜAlî returned to his native North India to become a champion of the Uṣûlî Shîᶜî school against which he had previously fought. The Friday congregational Prayers were part of the 'uniting public rituals' that the Shîᶜa needed if they were to flourish as a religious community in North India, a point that Dildâr ᶜAlî saw clearly in the late eighteenth century as he both argued for their establishment in Awadh and led them himself.

With the Friday congregational Prayers came their sermons, and a consequent recapturing by the North Indian Shîᶜa of the pulpit not simply as a platform from which to recount the narrative of Karbala in poetry or prose, but as a medium for argument and teaching. Dildâr ᶜAlî was a great preacher, and a collection of 50 of his sermons from around 1200/1786 was published under the title of *Fawâw'id-e Âsifiyya wa Mawâᶜiẓ-e Ḥusayniyya* [The Benefits of Sorrow and Exhortations of the *Ḥusayniyya* (building constructed for commemoration of Ḥusayn's martyrdom)].[29] Dildâr ᶜAlî himself is reported never to have preached at a *majlis*, although his sons did.[30] Especially well known as preachers were his youngest son, Sayyid Ḥusayn, and his grandson, ᶜAlî Muḥammad (d.1312/1894), who also wrote a book on preaching called *Ṭuhrat al-Wâᶜizîn* [The Purification of the Preachers] (Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 139).

At the same time as Dildâr ᶜAlî was establishing the Friday congregational Prayers, the holding of *majâlis* and other Shîᶜî practices were becoming increasingly popular in Awadh. Mrs Meer Hasan Ali, an English woman who married an Indian Shîᶜa and lived in Lucknow, the main city of Awadh, from 1231/1816–1243/1828, describes these practices in detail in her book, *Observations on the Mussulmans of India* (1917). She writes that nobles held *majâlis* in their specially constructed halls, known as *imâmbâṛas*,[31] twice a day during the first ten days of Muḥarram. She notes that these *majâlis* began with a reading by a religious scholar or *mawlvî* from a Persian Karbala narrative which she calls the 'Dhie Mudgelluss' [Ten *Majâlis*]. This was followed by a break during which *sherbat* [a sweet drink] and a *ḥuqqa* [water pipe for smoking] were passed around. After the break, several people recited *marṯiyas*. The *marṯiya* recitation was followed by *tawallâ* and *tabarrâ* [the ritual invocation of blessings on the Prophet and the Imâms and curses on their enemies], and the assembly finished with the performance of *mâtam* [ritual mourning] which, she notes, included breast beating as well as sometimes self-flagellation. The whole meeting seems to have been a combination of strict observance of decorum (e.g. during the break the junior nobility were not allowed to partake of the *ḥuqqa* pipe without the permission of their seniors), and displays of emotion ('…tears and groans being apparently sincere….') (Mrs Ali, 1917: 22–3).

Following her notes on the men's gatherings, Mrs Ali describes the performance of a woman's *majlis* (pp. 23–9). A woman's *majlis* was sometimes held in a special *imâmbâṛa* that had been constructed by a wealthy lady, or sometimes in

a public *imâmbâṛa* which was set aside only for the use of women on one of the mourning days (Hollister, 1988: 174). Much more frequently, however, women's *majâlis* were held in the private rooms of ladies of the nobility. Mrs Ali recounts how some educated women were hired to read the same Karbala narrative as the men and chant *marṯiyas*, being rewarded handsomely for their efforts. These women were mostly spinsters from poor *sayyid* families [i.e. descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad], unmarried because their parents could not afford an adequate dowry.

It is important to note that in Mrs Ali's descriptions the Karbala narratives or *kitâb khwânî* [book recitation] were read in the old court language of Persian while the *marṯiyas* were chanted in the native language of Urdu.[32] It was partly for this reason that *marṯiya* was so much more popular at that time than the narrative recitation. As she writes, '. . . the Musseah [*marṯiya*] narrative of the sufferings at Kraabaallah [Karbala] is a really pathetic and interesting composition; the work being conveyed in the language of the country, every word is understood, and very deeply felt' (Mrs Ali, 1917: 29).

Part of the evolution of the modern *majlis* sermon has been the movement in the mourning recitations from the prominence of poetry to the prominence of prose. The fact that poetry made the transition from Persian to Urdu long before prose recitation was one reason that it still claimed the most important position in the *majlis*. Mrs Ali was writing just before the height of the popularity of the *marṯiya*. The art of composing and reciting *marṯiyas* was brought from the Deccan to North India where it reached its peak under the two poets Mîr Anîs (d. 1291/1874) and Mîrza Dabîr (d. 1292/1875). The North Indian *marṯiya* was also popular because it drew on local imagery. As C.M. Naim observes (1983: 109), 'The heroes and heroines are Arabs but they behave like the gentle-folks of Lucknow. Their social mores, marriage customs, uniqueness of feminine speech-habits, family relationships, these are all Indian, specifically of the Muslim upper classes of Lucknow.'

An Urdu translation of the *Rawẕat al-Shuhadâ'*, known as the *Karbal Kaṯhâ* [The Story of Karbala], had already been made by one Faẕal ᶜAlî (known as Faẕlî) between 1145/1732 and 1162/1749. The author notes in his preface to that translation that he had written it because he had found that women could not understand the Persian idioms of the original text (Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 355). This translation naturally became very popular and was also used in Hyderabad (interview, SN) although it is interesting that Mrs Ali does not mention it in her descriptions.

Mrs Ali writes about the *kitâb khwânî* that she was familiar with (but could not understand because it was in Persian), 'It is, I am assured, a pathetic, fine composition, and a faithful narrative of each particular circumstance in the history of their leaders . . .'. It seems, however, that the ᶜ*ulamâ'*, including Dildâr ᶜAlî, did not think so highly of it. As a manuscript written in 1231/1816 about the latter half of the previous century observes, 'The major gatherings for Shîᶜas, the meetings held to commemorate the martyrdoms of the Imâms, were dominated by eulogizers, who specialised in chanting techniques, rather than by the scholars of Islam, who often frowned on the folk practices involved in such assemblies.'[33]

Other sources confirm that there was a difference of opinion about what made up a good *majlis* recitation, and that the *ᶜulamâ'* were keen to establish what they considered to be authentic readings: 'The main objection of the Sunnî *ᶜulamâ'* was that wrong traditions were being related from the *minbar*. For this reason, every day seventy *majâlis* were organised in which only the authentic traditions were narrated and a large number of people attended these.'[34]

Dildâr ᶜAlî was concerned that the recitations at these gatherings were often based on exaggerated or fabricated accounts of Karbala and the lives of the Imâms, and he encouraged his disciples to recite at *majâlis* using only authentic sources. One of these disciples, Mîr Akbar ᶜAlî Raẕvî, was told to use the teacher's own library in order to compose a series of *majlis* recitations 'in the Hindi language' which would be recited at Dildâr ᶜAlî's own *majâlis* and then published for others to use (Hidâ'î, 1988: 3–14). These recitations were duly brought out under the title *Ẕiyâ al-Abṣâr* [Light of Foresight], in the year after Dildâr ᶜAlî's death. Each of the 14 chapters is called a *taẕkira* [recitation], and covers such subjects as the life, character and miracles of Imâm Ḥusayn. The chapters also discuss the rewards for those who weep at Ḥusayn's sorrows and make a pilgrimage to the Shîᶜî holy shrines (Cole, 1989: 224–7).

Sayyid Zishân Hidâ'î, commenting on this book, writes that it throws light on the development of *majlis* preaching as it represents a transition from the recitation of narratives dominated by poetry to a purely prose style known as *ḥadîṣ khwânî*. In *ḥadîṣ khwânî*, each recitation is made up simply of a number of Traditions (translated from Muḥammad Bâqir Majlisî's *Biḥâr al-Anwâr* [Ocean of Lights], and other Arabic sources) strung together and followed by a short account of the Sufferings of the martyrs of Karbala. As well as Mîr Akbar ᶜAlî Raẕvî, other early pioneers of this form of *majlis* recitation-cum-preaching were Mawlânâ Sayyid ᶜAlî Ṣâḥib, who preached before the last king of Awadh, Wâjid ᶜAlî Shâh (1263/1847–1272/1856) (interview, SMN).

It should be noted that the mourning period of Muḥarram was being extended during this time from the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram to a period from 1 Muḥarram until the 40th day after ᶜÂshûrâ'* [the day known as *Arbaᶜîn* that falls on the 20th day of the following month of Safar]. The 40-day period began to be kept during the reign of Saᶜdat ᶜAlî Khân (1212/1798–1229/1814), and became official during the reign of Nassîr al-Dîn Ḥaydar (1242/1827–1253/1837) after he made a vow during an illness (interview, NM; see also Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 284). Eventually, the period was extended further up to the eighth day of the third Islamic month, Rabîᶜ al-Awwal.

The annexation of the kingdom of Awadh by the British in 1272/1856 encouraged forces which were to exert a great influence on the Shîᶜî *majlis* and particularly the development of the modern *majlis* sermon. The British action was one of the events that sparked off the so-called 'War of Independence' or 'Mutiny' (depending on who writes the history) of 1856–7, itself a part of the larger movement which was to lead to India's partition and independence 90 years later. Virtually nothing in India was untouched by the political and social changes of this time, and the Shîᶜî *majlis* was no exception.

One of the consequences of the fall of the Awadh royal court and, later, the whole system of landed nobility upon which it was based was the opening up of the *majlis* to the lower classes. In the days of the ruling *nawâbs* [nobles] and kings, although *majâlis* were held widely they were patronized mostly by the nobility. The *imâmbâṛa* in which a *majlis* was held could be visited by artisans or labourers in the evening, before a *majlis* started, but these people from the lower classes were made to leave before the *majlis* itself began (Mrs Ali, 1917: 27). Thus *majâlis* served to make statements about prestige, wealth, power and status. Muḥarram commemorations did, 'constitute an interface' between the wealthy and the poor, both of which groups honoured Ḥusayn, but they also served to demarcate the social lines between them (Cole, 1989: 103). With the abolition of the Shîᶜî royal court, the mourning ceremonies of Muḥarram began to be less dominated by the nobility and more widely attended.

We have already seen that *kitâb khwânî* had become more popular as it began to be recited in the common language of Urdu rather than the Persian of the elite. As it did so, it began to threaten the dominance of poetry recitation. The leading role of poetry at *majâlis* was further eroded as the poets' patronage base declined along with the position of the nobility themselves. At the same time, with the opening up of *majâlis* to the lower classes, the sheer number of gatherings taking place grew dramatically, especially during the early part of the twentieth century. The increase in the number of gatherings combined with a decline in the number of poets led to a scarcity of those who could recite at *majâlis*, a gap which began to be filled by preachers (interviews, NM and MA).

Although it may have taken a while to be felt, the ending of royal patronage for Shîᶜî rituals in Awadh was part of a larger process that lowered the status of the Shîᶜa in the wider society. The Shîᶜa were a community of perhaps only 3 per cent of the total population (Cole, 1989: 70), and their position changed from that of a ruling elite to a minority within the larger Muslim community which itself was to become marginalized as India became a secular democratic nation-state. The historian Mushirul Hasan and others have shown that the British, partly to counter the growing influence of the Indian National Congress, fostered a sense of being among the Muslims, 'a religio-political entity . . . unified, cohesive and segregated from the Hindus'. He argues that this policy was at least partly behind the formation of the Muslim League in 1906, and that it created space, as he writes, for 'reinforcing religious identities' (Hasan, 1997: 35).

Within this larger context of Muslim–Hindu polarization, the Shîᶜa also were faced with the need to foster and reinforce their own religious identity, especially as increasingly they could not rely on the external patronage of a Shîᶜî court or nobility. As Sunnîs in Awadh became more powerful with the fall of the Shîᶜî monarchy, the Shîᶜa felt the need to bolster their own identity as over against the Sunnî community (Freitag, 1984: 142). There was already a history of sectarian conflict in the commemoration of Muḥarram, as we have seen, at least from Bûyid times. Sunnî–Shîᶜî rivalry had also been a factor in the 'local'–'foreigner' competition at the Bahmanî court in the Deccan, and we have records of fighting during Muḥarram between and among Sunnîs, Shîᶜas and Hindus in nineteenth-century

Bombay (Masselos, 1982: 47–67). Sectarian conflict was also present in Awadh. Juan Cole argues that this conflict was partly a result of the attempt by *Uṣûlî* Shîᶜî religious scholars to distinguish what they understood as the proper practice of Shîᶜî Islam from more syncretistic practices that were closer to Sunnî Islam and Hinduism. By excluding Hindus and Sunnîs from Shîᶜî practices, these scholars were able to build up their own power base. As he comments, 'The divisive nature of some Shîᶜî practices, especially cursing the caliphs honoured by Sunnîs and forbidding Hindu celebrations during Muḥarram, encouraged the growth of an incipient communalism' (Cole, 1989: 93).

In 1338/1919–20 the *Madrasat al-Wâ'izîn* [College of Preachers], was founded in Lucknow in order to train preachers for the building up of Shîᶜî Islam (Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 157). The preachers trained at this college, which is still in existence today, include *majlis* preachers. The *majlis* had always been one of the most important rituals among the Shîᶜa for reinforcing their distinctive identity based on the collective memory of Karbala. Now this role began to be strengthened with community leaders using the platform of the *majlis* pulpit not simply to rehearse the narrative of Karbala, but to articulate a Shîᶜî identity in extended discourses.

The birth of the modern sermon

As we have seen from descriptions of commemorations in Qâjâr Iran and Quṭb Shâhî Hyderabad, the inclusion of an extempore sermon in the course of Muḥarram mourning ceremonies was not an entirely new phenomenon. In Bombay right up until the 1820s, Muḥarram commemorations were organized mainly by Konkani Sunnîs. By the 1860s, several of these Sunnî groups remembered the events of Karbala in their mosques with a series of five sermons [*waᶜẓ*] preached on consecutive nights. This practice was also followed by the local Bombay Shîᶜa (as opposed to Persian immigrants) who favoured the *majlis* with a discourse rather than the more traditional large public processions which often led to violent confrontation between rival groups of mourners (Masselos, 1982: 56–7). From the deep south of India in the 1870s we have another description, of a *majlis* in Madras, which includes an extempore sermon on the Sufferings of Ḥusayn's son, ᶜAlî Akbar* (Gover, 1872: 166).

What was a new feature of *majlis* preaching in Awadh, however, was that it not only remembered the Virtues [*faẓâ'il*] and Sufferings [*maṣâ'ib*] of the Karbala martyrs and other Shîᶜî heroes, but included other topics. The Virtues and Sufferings were still included, but the Sufferings were given a separate place at the end of the sermon and a discourse [*bayân* or *taqrîr*] was added to the beginning. The addition of this feature led to the development of a basic two-part structure in the body of the sermon: the first of which included a general discourse plus an exposition of the Virtues, and the second of which narrated the Sufferings. This is the basic pattern which has persisted until today (interview, SMN).

The structure and intention of the modern sermon in Awadh must also have been influenced by the *marṯiya* with which it was always linked in a *majlis*. There is a clear structure to the content of a traditional *marṯiya*, which may be more or

less strictly adhered to by the poet. In broad outline, a *marṣiya* would begin with a prologue, normally in praise and blessing of God, the Prophet or ᶜAlî, move on to an exposition of the Virtues of the hero of the poem (one of the main Shîᶜî characters), recount the hero's martyrdom and the lamentation for him by his female relatives, and finish with a supplication.[35] In a concluding couplet to one of Mîr Anîs' *mârṣiyas*, *Namak-e Kwân-e Takallum hay Fashaḥat Mêrî* [My Fair Speech is to Conversation as Salt is to Food], the poet describes his intention in writing the poem: 'May I depict grandeur, describe hardships, sing praises too. May the listener's hearts rejoice, grieve and also acclaim'.[36]

It is interesting to note how much of this framework was carried over to the modern *majlis* sermon, as we shall see in the examples of *majlis* sermons presented in Part II. Whatever the main subject matter of the sermons, they begin with blessings, include some exposition of the Virtues of one of the great Shîᶜî heroes, recount the Sufferings of at least one of the Karbala martyrs, include dialogues between the martyr and his women relatives, mention the martyrdom, and finish with a supplication.[37]

A prominent theme in these new Awadh discourses, preached at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries and designed as they were to reinforce a specifically Shîᶜî ideology, was what is known in Urdu as *munâẓara* [argument or polemic, understood generally in the Shîᶜî context as being against Sunnî Islam] (interview, SMN). *Munâẓara* itself had been a part of Shîᶜî discourse since the beginning, and it was now incorporated into the new *majlis* preaching. Two preachers who were active at the end of the nineteenth century and noted for their polemical sermons were Mawlânâ Muḥammad Ḥusayn and Mawlânâ Reẓa Ṣâḥib Fâẓil (interview, MA). Similarly, a *majlis* preacher who had converted from being a Sunnî and was known for his anti-Sunnî polemic at the turn of the century was Mawlânâ Maqbûl Aḥmad. He was a scholar who had translated the Qur'ân into Urdu. Maqbûl Aḥmad also visited Hyderabad, and some people claim that he was the first of the modern *majlis* preachers (interviews, MJR and ZH).

The man whose name is most often linked to the popularizing of the modern *majlis* sermon is Mawlânâ Sayyid Sibṭ-e Ḥasan Naqvî Jâ'isî (1296/1888–1354/1935). As the *majlis* became more open to all classes of people, he tailored his oratory to the new congregations. In contrast to the Persianized Urdu of the *ᶜulamâ'*, and the Karbala narratives that were still sometimes recited in Persian, Sibṭ-e Ḥasan spoke the kind of Urdu that ordinary people could understand and relate to. He was a powerful orator who could make a congregation feel passionately about his subject matter. People still remember that in one *majlis* the Mawlânâ was recounting the *maṣâ'ib* and spoke the words of Ḥusayn at Karbala, 'Who will help me?' So moved was one 8-year-old boy in the congregation that he stood up in the crowd and cried out, 'I will help you!' (interview, HKN). Other preachers who were contemporaries of Sibṭ-e Ḥasan were Mawlânâs Muḥammad Reẓa Shamspûrî and Hakîm Murtaẓâ Allâhabâdî.

J.N. Hollister, in his survey of Shîᶜî Islam in India written in the early 1940s, describes an entire Lucknow Muḥarram commemoration. The details were provided for him by a Shîᶜî friend, and are presumably contemporary to the writing of

the book. In this description he notes that when the replicas of the shrines of the Imâms [*taᶜziyas*][38] were installed in the special buildings or rooms which themselves became shrines during the Muḥarram period, there was also a pulpit [*minbar*] in the same place. Describing the *majâlis* themselves, he writes, 'In large gatherings, individuals especially trained are sometimes employed to relate that part of the history belonging to the day. An address may also be made. Then come the *marâthî*, or elegies, in which members of the congregation may join' (Hollister, 1988: 170).

It would seem from this account that in the 1940s *rawẕa* or *kitâb khwânî* was still narrated at *majâlis* and that, even with the growing popularity of preachers, sermons were still not such an important feature in *majâlis* as they became later on. It is also interesting to note that the 'address' which Hollister mentions did not replace the *kitâb khwânî* but was a separate addition. Hollister's observations are confirmed by people who remember attending *majâlis* in their childhood in Lucknow around that time (interview, DS).

Well-known preachers who are remembered in the mid-twentieth century are: Mawlânâ Kalb-e Ḥusayn, from the distinguished family of Dildâr ᶜAlî, who was president of the All India Shîᶜî Conference in 1943–4, and Mawlânâ Sayyid ᶜAlî Naqî, known as 'Naqqan Ṣâḥib' (*c*.1316/1898–1377/1958) who was lecturer at Lucknow University and then went on to become Chairman of the Dept of Shîᶜî Theology at Aligarh Muslim University. 'Naqqan Ṣâḥib' is said to have begun preaching when he was 13 years old, and one gentleman with whom I spoke could remember some of his sermons. He told me that the Mawlânâ would speak for ten days on one subject, for example *ẓulm* [wrongdoing, although in this context perhaps better rendered as 'exploitation']. In this series, the Mawlânâ argued that, 'Islam first preferred agriculture, then trade and then service industries because these types of societies tended to have an ascending degree of *ẓulm*.'[39] Other preachers included Mawlânâ Ibn-e Ḥasan Nohnêhrwî (1317/1899–1400/1980), the rivals Mawlânâ Ḥaydar Mahdî Zaydpûrî and Mawlânâ Muḥammad Mahdî Zaydpûrî, and Mawlânâ Moḥsin Nawâb, known as 'al-Millat' (interview, SMN). An interesting account was given to me of one Mawlânâ Sayyid Ahmad Dehlawî who is said to have recited very effectively in silence, using only hand movements (interview, HKN). Several of these *majlis* preachers from North India preached in Hyderabad from the mid-1950s such as 'Naqqan Ṣâḥib', Ibn-e Ḥasan Nohnêhrwî and Mawlânâ Awlâd Ḥusayn Lallan, a historian originally from Rampur.

A notable feature at contemporary *majâlis* is the number of preachers who are not formally trained and accredited religious scholars [*ᶜulamâ'*]. These preachers particularly, as well as preachers from the *ᶜulamâ'*, are generally referred to with the term *ẕâkir*, the word that was used for reciters of *rawẕa khwânî* in the medieval Deccan. However, all of the early *majlis* preachers whom we have noted above were from the *ᶜulamâ'*. It is therefore important to consider when and why 'lay' people began to climb the *minbar* to preach extempore discourses.

The first of these non-*ᶜulamâ'* preachers were very likely to have been women. Women were not generally given formal religious training, and could not become accredited scholars (Momen, 1985: 245, n. 5, p. 343). Yet they had been reciting

kitâb khwânî in women's *majâlis* from at least the early nineteenth century, as we have seen. Three well-known reciters of *kitâb khwânî* in the late 1930s in Lucknow were Mustafa Bêgum, Zakiya Bêgum and Taqiyya Bêgum (interview, AJB). Although these women would read or recite only from books, they could command audiences of up to 500 women who would be family and friends of the ladies who had hosted the *majlis*, and often included many Sunnîs. Elaborate food [a form of *tabarruk*, 'blessed offering'] would be served afterwards.[40]

By 1940 or 1941 Maḥmûda Bâqer, a *z̲âkira* [woman *majlis* preacher] from Fatepur (Lucknow), had begun to include extempore discourses in her sermons. She became a well-known preacher in Fatepur and Lucknow before she migrated to Karachi during the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 where she continued to preach until her death in about 1969. Maḥmûda Bâqer was not from the nobility, but she was a *sayyid*. Although she was without any formal religious education she had been educated at home in the Qur'ân, Traditions, Urdu and day-to-day *fiqh* [Islamic jurisprudence]. I have not been able to establish definitely whether she recited discourses on themes broader than the Sufferings of the Karbala martyrs, but it seems reasonable to suppose she did as the practice was well established among the *ᶜulamâ'* by that time. Another famous early *z̲âkira* was Bîbî Bêgum Nâder Jahaṇ who recited extempore *majâlis* from the early 1960s in Kanpur. Her father was an *ᶜâlim* named Anwâr Ḥusayn. Nâder Jahaṇ was also well known as a *nawḥa khwân* [reciter of the mourning chants known as *nawḥa*]. From the 1960s many more women preachers began to address *majâlis*, sometimes going on preaching tours with their husbands such as Tâj Sulṭâna, the wife of Mawlânâ Kalb-e Sâdiq.

Preaching at mourning gatherings in Âsaf Jâhî Hyderabad (1720–1948)

Having looked first at the development of the *majlis* in North India, because it was in Awadh that the modern *majlis* sermon was born and developed into its present form, we now shift our attention back to the Deccan in South India, picking up the history after the conquest of the Shîᶜî Quṭb Shâhî kingdom by the Mughal emperor Awrangzîb in 1099/1687. Even though it was North India that led the way, Hyderabad contributed significantly to the development of the *majlis* sermon. Also, the *majâlis* held in the Âsaf Jâhî period are the antecedents of the contemporary sermons that we will be looking at, making these earlier gatherings important for our study.

Although Awrangzîb made the Deccan a part of the Mughal empire, it was only 33 years later, in 1132/1720, that it again became an independent kingdom. During the period of the new Âsaf Jâhî rulers, known as 'Nizams', the fortunes of the Shîᶜa fluctuated according to the sympathies of the particular ruler. Under the first Nizâm both Hyderabad as a city and the Shîᶜî commemorations of Muḥarram suffered a setback. The city was deprived of its capital status as the Nizâm ruled from Awrangabad, and the commemoration of Muḥarram was deprived of its royal patronage. *ᶜÂshûrkhânas* were mostly closed, and the Shîᶜî

aẕân was banned. The second Nizâm, Mîr Niẓâm ᶜAlî Khân (1175/1762–1218/1803), however, reopened the royal *ᶜâshûrkhâna* and reinstated several of the old Muḥarram ceremonies. In his reign, a noble named Mehdî Iqbâl came from North India and encouraged the commemoration of Muḥarram in the city. He arrived in the Deccan from Murshidabad in Bengal after the Battle of Plassey in 1757 when the British ousted the Shîᶜî Nawab of Bengal, Sirâj al-Dawla. After settling in Hyderabad Mehdî Iqbâl built an *ᶜâshûrkhâna* in his house that still exists today, and several of his family members since that time have served the local Shîᶜî community as scholars and leaders (interview, MMA).

In a description of Muḥarram in Hyderabad from the mid-nineteenth century, the *majlis* consists predominantly of the recitation of *marṣiya* and *kitâb khwânî*. Khwâja Ghulâm Ḥusayn Khân, in his *Târîk-e Gulzâr-e Âsafiyya* [History of the Rose Garden of the Âsaf Jâhîs] (completed in 1266/1844), writes that from 1 to 10 Muḥarram, 'a few people hire the reciters to recount the Sufferings of Karbala, but others read these stories themselves'. But his descriptions focus more on festivities such as processions and poetry competitions than on these book recitations (quoted in Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 342).

In the periods of the third and fourth Âsaf Jâhî Nizâms, the fortunes of the Shîᶜa again declined until the time of the fifth Nizâm, Afẓal al-Dawla (1273/1857–1286/1869). The fourth Nizâm had made a Shîᶜa from North India, Sir Sâlâr Jung I, his Prime Minister in the last years of his reign. It was this man, who served for 30 years under three successive rulers and whose son and grandson served as Prime Ministers after him, who was most responsible for the revival of Shîᶜa fortunes in Hyderabad. He sought to modernize the state's bureaucracy by encouraging a new class of administrators to move to Hyderabad from North India. These were men trained in British India, and especially at the new Muhammedan Anglo Oriental College at Aligarh founded by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in 1292/1875. Several Shîᶜas were among them.[41] The policy of giving top administrative jobs to outsiders created tensions in Hyderabad between the *mulkis* ['locals' or 'residents'] and the non-*mulki* ['foreigner'] incomers. These incomers formed a new social group in the city which became politically dominant after Sâlâr Jung I's death in 1300/1883 (Leonard, 1978a: 128–30; see also Leonard, 1978b).

Sâlâr Jung I did not only bring Shîᶜî administrators to Hyderabad, but in 1276/1860 he also brought a Shîᶜî *ᶜâlim*, Âyatullâh Sayyid Niyâz Ḥasan Ḥusaynî, from Najaf (the Shîᶜî shrine city of ᶜAlî in Iraq) to the city. This *ᶜâlim* worked hard to increase the Shîᶜî community's profile in the city. He built the first new Shîᶜî mosque, the 'Masjid-e-Isnaashari', behind the Prime Minister's residence. He is also reported to have given the first Shîᶜî *aẕân* in Hyderabad after the fall of the Quṭb Shâhî dynasty, and the first open Shîᶜî recital of the martyrdom of ᶜAlî on 19 Ramaẓân 1276/11 April 1860.[42]

Before the year 1886, statistics for the Shîᶜa in Hyderabad's walled city are not available, but in that year they are listed as 6,217 (7.97 per cent of the Muslim population as a whole, which was at that time 78,000).[43] In this feudal system, society was ordered according to a strict hierarchy. Below the nobility, the higher classes of the Shîᶜa, like the larger Muslim community of which they were a part,

were generally divided between the *ahl-e sayf* [house of the sword], the category used to include the police and army, and the *ahl-e qalâm* [house of the pen] which included clerks and civil administrators. The lower classes comprised either labourers or dependants of the nobility (Khalidi, 1991: 10).

Âyatullâh Niyâz Ḥasan's sons continued their father's work after his death. His third son, Ḥujjat al-Islâm Sayyid Aḥmad Raẓâ, in his time, is reported to have been the, 'main spirit behind the *ᶜazâdârî* [mourning for Ḥusayn] in Hyderabad' (Wafâ, 1978: 99). This son and his younger brother began to establish the practice of making a *dawra* [round] of *majâlis* in each Shîᶜî locality during the first nine days of Muḥarram. After the morning [*fajr*] Prayers, dividing the Shîᶜî districts of the city between them, the two brothers would walk from house to house, finishing only at the evening [*maghrib*] Prayers (interview, ZH).

Although Âyatullâh Niyâz Ḥasan's third and fourth sons were important in re-establishing the practice of *ᶜazâdârî* in Hyderabad, it was his second son, Sayyid Abul Hasan (born *c*.1285/1868), known as 'Mîran Ṣâḥib', who of all the brothers contributed the most to the development of *majlis* preaching in Hyderabad. After completing his studies in Najaf, he returned to Hyderabad as a *mujtahid*. I have not been able to establish exactly when Mîran Ṣâḥib began to preach, but it was probably early in the twentieth century. The kind of *majlis* that he addressed was known as a *majlis-e mûᶜaẓa* [preaching *majlis*], and his sermons dwelt primarily on issues such as sin, punishment and hell. His *majâlis* were regularly attended by the seventh Nizâm, Mîr ᶜUs̱mân ᶜAlî Khân (1911–48). Mîran Ṣâḥib's son told me that on one occasion his father was dwelling at some length on the punishment that would be meted out by God to rich sinners in hell. The Nizâm, who was present, was reputed at that time to be the richest man in the world. He indicated to his Shîᶜî minister that he should request the Mawlânâ to hurry up and conclude the sermon. The Mawlânâ became angry and asked why people came to a *majlis* if they did not want to hear a message from God. Afterwards the Nizâm thanked the Mawlânâ for his sermon and asked for his prayers (interview, ZH).

Another of the important early *majlis* preaching families of Hyderabad is the family of Sayyid Ghulâm Ḥusayn, a *mujtahid* who lived in Najaf for 40 years before retiring to Hyderabad. He is noted for his part in the establishment of Twelver Shîᶜî Islam in East Africa (see Momen, 1985: 279). Sayyid Ghulâm Ḥusayn is also acknowledged by some as the first of the modern Shîᶜî *majlis* preachers.[44] His family had been connected with Hyderabad since the Quṭb Shâhî period. His son, Mawlânâ Sayyid Niṣâr Ḥusayn (1894–1952), known as 'Sayyid Âqâ', studied in Najaf before coming to Hyderabad also as a *mujtahid*. He travelled around South India as well as to East Africa like his father, engaged particularly in preaching. Sayyid Âqâ's son, Reza Aga, is currently the most prominent Shîᶜî *ᶜâlim* in Hyderabad (see Sermon 9 in Part II). A third line of *ᶜulamâ'* who preached at *majâlis* in Hyderabad were the family of Mawlânâ Muḥammad ᶜAlî who founded an important Shîᶜî mosque, the *Masjid-e Jaᶜfarî*.

The main developments in the commemoration of Muḥarram were taking place in the north of India, as we have already seen, and Hyderabad generally followed what was begun there. For example, around 1287/1870 the famous *marṣiya* poet,

Mîr Anîs, came to recite his poetry in Hyderabad. The result was that a number of Hyderabadi poets began writing in the same North Indian style. Although a particular form of Urdu, known as Dakhni, had been prevalent in the South from medieval times, by the nineteenth century, North Indian Urdu became the standard and swept the Dakhni form away (interview, SN). In the late nineteenth century, graduates of a Shîᶜî seminary in Lucknow that had been closed, spread to Hyderabad and other places, introducing teaching curricula as practised in North India (Cole, 1989: 289).

One particular and distinctive characteristic of the Muslim community in the Deccan which has largely escaped the influence of North India is the tradition of good relations between Sunnîs and Shîᶜas. Omar Khalidi ascribes this phenomenon in part to the influence of the Ṣûfî doctrine of *tafẕîliyya* [recognizing ᶜAlî's superiority among the first four caliphs] so that the praising of ᶜAlî was never seen as a purely a Shîᶜî prerogative. Actual incidents of Sunnî–Shîᶜî conflict have been extremely rare in the Deccan over the last 600 years (Khalidi, 1991: 8–9). Part of the reason for this must also be that Muḥarram in the Deccan, as we have seen under the Quṭb Shâhî rulers, was often encouraged by the state as a means of creating a common religious culture which could be participated in by Hindus and Sunnîs without them giving up their distinctive beliefs. The cursing by the Shîᶜa of the first three Sunnî caliphs [part of the practice known as *tabarrâ*], for example, was officially banned in Hyderabad in 1921. Several Hindu noble families in the Âsaf Jâhî era patronized Muḥarram rituals. Some did so simply because *ᶜazâdârî* was popular at the court. Other nobles did so in fulfilment of a vow, such as one Raja Rao Rambha who had promised to hold Muḥarram commemorations if he was granted a male child, an event which duly took place.[45]

An important role in the development of the Shîᶜî *majlis* sermon was played by Hyderabad's Osmania University (founded in 1918). This university, along with Aligarh Muslim University in North India (which in 1920 succeeded the Muhammedan Anglo Oriental College mentioned above), helped to create a class of educated Shîᶜas who were not content with the old kind of *majlis* that simply recited the Sufferings of the Karbala martyrs. With a university education came the desire by these Shîᶜas to know more about their faith at an intellectual level in the fast-changing world of pre-Independence India. The university created both a demand for preaching by those who had a broader education than the *ᶜulamâ'*, and helped to produce the preachers who met that demand. Two particular people, one man and one woman, stand out in this regard, both graduates of Osmania.

Among the men, the first well-known *majlis* preacher in the whole of India who was not from the *ᶜulamâ'* was Rashîd Ṭurâbî from Hyderabad. He was a graduate in philosophy and an orator of considerable skill. He used this skill not only from the *majlis* pulpit but also in the political arena in the turmoil of events leading up to India's Partition and the forced integration of Hyderabad State into the newly independent Indian Union. After Independence, he emigrated to Pakistan where he remained until his death in the 1950s. His sermons often consist of detailed expositions of specific themes, particularly from the Qur'ân

and the *Nahj al-Balâgha*. He preached on subjects such as *rizq* [daily sustenance] (S155) or *duᶜâ* [supplicatory prayer] (S153 and S154), and took several *majâlis* at a time to expound his subjects. In one famous series of 30 sermons he gave a detailed exposition of Sûra-e Yâsîn (36) from the Qur'ân, a *sûra* considered one of the most important in the Qur'ân, and one which is often recited at commemorations of a person's death. Other important early 'lay' *ẕâkirs* who preached in Hyderabad were Ṭâḥir Jarwalî, a graduate in law, Iqbâl ᶜAlî Zaydî, an arts graduate, and Mehdî Ḥusayn. In Lucknow, the pioneer among 'lay' *majlis* preachers was Firôz Ḥyder (interview, SH).

At about the same time as women in North India were beginning to preach extempore discourses, the same was happening in Hyderabad. One of the early pioneers who began to leave the old practice of *kitâb khwânî* was Laṭîf al-Nisâ'. She was an educated woman, with a Masters degree in Urdu, and taught at the prestigious 'Mahboobiya School'. By all accounts she was a strong and charismatic leader. She became the first president of the first religious association for Shîᶜî women in the whole of India, the *Markazî Anjuman Niswân Barkât-e ᶜAzâ* [The Central Women's Association for Blessed Mourning].[46] Laṭîf al-Nisâ' not only addressed *majâlis* in Hyderabad, inspiring a whole generation of women preachers after her, but also travelled to Calcutta and Bombay on preaching tours within India, as well as to Dar-es-Salaam in East Africa (interview, ZS). Contemporary women preachers in Hyderabad note two other important *ẕâkira* preachers of that formative period: Mehdî Bêgum, also a school teacher, and Mrs Wahâb Ṣâḥiba, although Latîf al-Nisâ was considered to be far ahead of them in her preaching.

The fortunes of the Shîᶜî community in Hyderabad increased steadily in the twentieth century. An important factor in this regard was that Zehra Bêgum, the mother of the seventh Nizâm, was herself a Shîᶜa. She encouraged in her son a deep inclination towards the Shîᶜî faith, and he constructed a large *ᶜâshûrkhâna* for the holding of *majâlis* in memory of her, as well as patronizing other *ᶜâshûrkhânas* and Muḥarram commemoration rituals (Moinuddin, 1977: 13). Following the Nizâm's example, other members of the nobility extensively patronized Muḥarram commemorations in the city. In the last 50 years of Âsaf Jâhî rule, 4 out of 10 *dîwâns* [Prime Ministers] appointed were Shîᶜas, and the Nizâm's political department [*Maḥkama-e Siyâsiyya*] was so heavily staffed by Shîᶜas that people jokingly called it the *Maḥkama-e Shîᶜîasiyya* (Khalidi, 1991: 8).

One of the few written sources for descriptions of the *majlis* at the end of the Âsaf Jâhî period is a personal remembrance entitled, *Ḥaydarâbâd kî ᶜAzâdârî Jaysâ ke Mayn nê Dêkẖâ* [Hyderabad's Mourning for Ḥusayn as I saw it], by Bâqar Raẕwî Amânat Khânî (included as ch. 14 of Wafâ, 1978). Although it contains hardly any dates, and although there is little mention of sermons or their content, this description does convey vividly the atmosphere of the Hyderabadi *majlis* at that time. From the context, the period covered must be from around the 1920s to the time of writing (1978) but concentrating on the last years of the Âsaf Jâhî rule. The description begins from 1 Muḥarram when *sâlâna* [annual] and *dawra kî majâlis* [neighbourhood 'rounds'] began to be held in different Shîᶜî localities. Bâqar Raẕwî mentions also several series of *majâlis* held during the

first ten days of Muḥarram [the period known as the *ᶜashra*, meaning lit. 'ten'] and later in the longer mourning period of 2 months and 8 days. The meetings, he writes, began from six o'clock in the morning and went on throughout the day, especially in the period leading up to *ᶜÂshûrâ'*.

Bâqar Raẕwî focuses his attention on *majâlis* which were held in the homes of the nobility and notes especially those which were attended by famous or important people. Thus he writes that when the Prime Minister, Sir Sâlâr Jung III, or the Nizâm himself were present at a *majlis*, a detachment of cavalry would be in attendance and a red carpet would be laid out in welcome. Other special guests mentioned include the acclaimed elegy reciter in the North Indian style known as *ṣôz khwânî*, Nâdir Ṣâḥib Râfî, the grandson of the famous *mârs̱iya* poet, Dabîr.

Attention is also given to the varieties of food and drink served at the gatherings and other such details. One famous annual *majlis*, for example, hosted by the private secretary to the Prime Minister, Sayyid Ḥâdîᶜ Alî, was known as the 'cold coffee *majlis*' because that was the form of *tabarruk* [blessed offering] that was traditionally served. Other forms of *tabarruk* mentioned are fruit, china bowls, money wrapped in handkerchiefs, Kashmiri tea and Ethiopian sweets. Further details mentioned include the firing of a cannon to announce the start of a large *majlis*, and various objects used in the commemorations, including life-sized statues of the fourteen 'Sinless Ones' (i.e. the 12 Imâms plus the Prophet Muḥammad and his daughter Fâṭima). Bâqar Raẕwî even recounts one occasion on which a certain poet, Hilmî Âfendî, died and fell from the *minbar* while in the middle of a recitation.

A few *z̲âkirs* are named in the course of these descriptions, such as Mawlânâ Ghulâm Ḥusayn (as mentioned on p. 22), who was known for his authentic narrations, and his son, Sayyid Âqâ. There is also mention of Mawlânâ Sayyid ᶜAlî Naqî from North India and Sayyid ᶜAbbâs Ḥusayn. These preachers had no amplification systems, but their voices were said to carry a long way even without such aids. As well as including names in the course of his descriptions, Bâqar Raẕwî provides a list of *majlis* preachers each of whom is given the title of *khaṭîb*. This list is made up of preachers active at the time of writing rather than the earlier period that is the focus of the description.[47]

Women's *majâlis* and their preachers are also mentioned. Bâqar Raẕwî writes that 50 or 60 years before (i.e. in the 1920s), there were very few ladies' gatherings in Hyderabad, but that when he was 5 or 6 years old he used to go to these gatherings with his mother sometimes. He mentions the pioneering *z̲âkira*, Laṭîf al-Nisâ', for her well-known discourses, and other contemporary women preachers.[48]

Preaching without political power: Hyderabad since India's independence

In 1947, India gained independence from British rule and was partitioned into India, West Pakistan and East Pakistan (later to become Bangladesh). Unwilling for the Nizâm's dominions to remain independent, the new Indian government invaded Hyderabad State in 1948 in what became politely known as the 'Police

Action', forcibly incorporating the territory into the Indian Union. Since that time, the Shîᶜî community has witnessed a period of rapid change. A number of developments, locally, nationally and internationally, have left their mark on the community's religious life including its commemoration of Muḥarram.

With the abolition of the Nizâm's rule, the old feudal system of *jâgîrdârî* [landed nobility] was abolished in 1949. A *jâgîrdâr* [feudal landlord] had supported not only his own family but many families living 'below' him in the hierarchical system. As we have seen in the earlier descriptions, *majâlis* too had been heavily dependent upon the patronage of the nobility who were, in turn, dependent upon the income from taxes generated by the villages under their jurisdiction. With the end of the *jâgîrdârî* system, much of that income dried up, and with it the support of many Shîᶜî families as well as the lavish spending on Muḥarram that had been a feature of Hyderabadi culture under the seventh Nizâm.

With an end to Muslim rule, memories of the terrible strife, local and national, that had been a consequence of Partition, and the establishment of Pakistan, an Islamic and enemy state, it was a difficult time for Muslims in India. Many of the old Hyderabadi nobility, in any case, had little formal education because under the feudal system they had not needed to work. With a general rise in the cost of living, and an emphasis on the local Telugu language and culture at the expense of Urdu, many Muslims saw better prospects in settling away from Hyderabad and left for Pakistan in the years following the 'Police Action'. Others, particularly educated young people, migrated to Britain where at that time immigration was relatively easy, although the process of settling there often proved very difficult (Naqvi, 1998: 15).

As well as outward migration, there has been migration of both Hindus and Muslims, including Shîᶜas, into Hyderabad since the 'Police Action'. Along with Sunnî Muslims, many Shîᶜas migrated from remote villages which had been part of the old Hyderabad State into Hyderabad district, where Muslims made up 15 per cent of the population. Others moved into Hyderabad's Old City itself where Muslims rose to almost 40 per cent of the population.[49] Other Shîᶜas came from further away, such as a community of mirror-makers who emigrated from Delhi.

With these significant population movements, it is not easy to come by accurate statistics for the Shîᶜî community in Hyderabad since Independence. By any counting, however, and even with the movement of Shîᶜas into the city, there was a huge drop in the number of Shîᶜas between the censuses of 1951 and 1961. This drop must have been largely due to the emigration to Pakistan and other countries. A survey of Hyderabad's Old City by a University of Hyderabad team led by Dr Ratna Naidu and published in 1990 lists the Shîᶜî population of the Old City as 68,704 in 1951 (21.5 per cent of the total population), and 9,078 in 1961 (5.5 per cent of the total), a drop of almost 60,000 people (Naidu, 1990: 24). According to her survey, the Shîᶜî population then rose in the following ten years to 12,541 (5.89 per cent of the total population). This 1971 figure, however, is contradicted by a monograph, published by the Census of India, 1971, which estimates the same Shîᶜî population as between 20,000 and 40,000 (the lower estimate being given by the Hyderabad Waqf board) (Moinuddin, 1977: 25, 47). Naidu's survey

also shows less than 400 Shîᶜas in the locality of Darushifa throughout the period from 1961 to 1981 (in map 4 of her study), whereas the Census of India monograph lists Darusḥifa as the main Shîᶜî locality, an assertion borne out by both local Shîᶜî and Sunnî opinion, and the presence in that area of the main Shîᶜî mosque. The possibility exists that, particularly at the time of the 1961 census, when Shîᶜî numbers were low due to emigration and the community was feeling insecure, a number of Shîᶜî respondents were practising *taqiyya** and passing as non-Shîᶜas, thus giving a lower population figure than was really the case.[50]

After the oil boom in the early 1970s, there was another exodus of Muslims from Hyderabad. These were mainly labourers and semi-skilled technicians who found lucrative employment in Arabian Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and the Arab Emirates.[51] An important difference between the emigration to Pakistan and the emigration to the Gulf was that for most people who went to the Gulf, there was no possibility of remaining there after their work was over. Although Indians were given work permits by Gulf states, citizenship, as in the case of Pakistan, was not granted. Muslims working in the Gulf therefore generally invested their savings in property or businesses in Hyderabad rather than in the countries in which they worked. This wave of emigration thus greatly benefited the Muslim community of Hyderabad including the Shîᶜa. The result was the emergence of a new class of wealthy people that was largely different from the old landed nobility (Naqvi, 1998: 15–16). Over the last 30 years there has also been considerable emigration of educated Hyderabadi Shîᶜas to North America, Australia and Britain. Expatriate communities of Hyderabadi Shîᶜas in these countries have also sent back money to family members who remained in Hyderabad.

In the years immediately following the Islamic Revolution in Iran of 1979, there was a surge of interest in Iran and Shîᶜî Islam in general throughout the world. The Iranian revolution also came with important developments in Shîᶜî religious and political thinking. Sermons at the Friday congregational Prayers in Iran, particularly at Tehran University, as well as preaching at Muḥarram commemorations were important in mobilizing support for the revolution and in consolidating support afterwards (Ram, 1994: 24–32). In some ways, these developments in Iran made very little impact on the community in Hyderabad. Hyderabadi Shîᶜas, while maintaining a high regard for the Iranian revolution and its leaders, nevertheless displayed a greater loyalty to their own, local traditions. *Majlis* preaching, for example, has been remarkably unaffected in its almost totally a-political orientation. The Iranian revolution, however, has had an important impact on the self-confidence of Hyderabadi Shîᶜas. I have heard from a number of people in the community as to how the events in Iran increased their self-confidence as Shîᶜî Muslims and encouraged them to take their religion more seriously.

The emergence of new wealth in the community, and the greater confidence inspired by the Iranian revolution has contributed to a dramatic growth in the performance of Muḥarram commemorations over the last 30 years. A survey on Muḥarram in Hyderabad conducted in 1972 by the Census of India collected

detailed information about the commemorations. The survey attempted to count at least the major *majâlis* and other meetings that were held during the mourning period by Shîᶜas, Sunnîs and Hindus (Moinuddin, 1977: 59–67). Among the Shîᶜa, the survey lists 105 *majâlis* during the Muḥarram period of which 79 were held in the first 10 days of Muḥarram. These latter included five *ᶜashra* series [*majâlis* held daily from 1 to 9 Muḥarram]. Two series of *majâlis* were also held in the month of Ṣafar (the Islamic month following Muḥarram) for 4 and 14 days, respectively.[52] Most of the gatherings were still sponsored by members of the old noble classes, although voluntary groups such as *mâtamî gurûhs* [men's mourning associations] were beginning to sponsor *majâlis* and lead the mourning at processions.[53] After a period of 25 years since that survey was conducted, it would have been very difficult to count the number of *majâlis* in a given year. David Pinault (1992: 86) quotes Mir Sabir Ali Zawar, the founder of one of the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî men's mourning associations, as saying, 'Today, everybody wants to have a *majlis* in their homes; there are more programs and more *majalis* than there ever used to be. *Majalis* used to be the exclusive province of a select few; now it seems that such a mark of eminence is within the reach of more people.'

The growth in the number of *majâlis* has led also to a growth in the number of preachers to recite at these gatherings. During the 1970s and 1980s, an important national gathering which encouraged particularly young Shîᶜas to begin preaching careers was organized every year in Agra, North India by the celebrated preacher, Sayyid Muẓaffar Ḥusayn Ṭâhir Jarwalî. This three-day function, which attracted many thousands of Shîᶜî mourners, consisted simply of one *majlis* after another with a 15-minute break between them apart from longer breaks for meals. The *majâlis* began after the morning [*fajr*] Prayers and lasted until midnight. Preachers from all over India were invited and would listen to one another's sermons, giving each other comments and encouragement as they ate their meals together. This convention was an important forum in which preachers from different places and contexts could learn from each other and share the new developments in *majlis* preaching. It was also a platform at which promising new *ẕâkirs* could make a name for themselves (interview, SN).

Even with increased wealth and confidence, the last 30 years has not been an easy time for Hyderabadi Shîᶜas. A problem for all residents of Hyderabad, and especially those living in the Old City has been recurring communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. Movements of people from and to the city, and a shift in the balance of power between Hindus and Muslims after Independence have contributed to violent clashes. After the violence in 1948 around the time of the 'Police Action', there was a period of relative calm until 1978 after which there was at least one communal riot every year until 1984, usually at the time of a major religious festival. Between 1978 and 1984 these riots left more than 400 people dead in Hyderabad. After 1984, there was again relative calm until 1990 which saw the run-up to the demolition of the Babri Masjid [mosque] by nationalist Hindus in Ayodhya in December 1992. This outbreak of violence lasted for 10 weeks and claimed more than 300 lives (Alam, 1992: 87–101; Kakar, 1995: 59–65).

Another issue of concern to the Muslim community in general is the decline of Urdu as a spoken language in Hyderabad. This decline began in the aftermath of the incorporation of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union when Urdu ceased to be the medium of instruction at Osmania University, and continued with the renaissance of Andhra Telugu culture and language. Although for the majority of Muslims in Hyderabad, it is still their mother tongue as a spoken language, very many young people cannot read or write Urdu. Urdu as a spoken language, especially in non-specialized fields, is very similar to Hindi, the main language of North India. For most school children in Hyderabad, Hindi is a compulsory language and thus many young Hyderabadis speak Urdu, but read and write it in the Devanagari (Hindi–Sanskrit) script. Especially in South India, English becomes more important the further a person goes in his or her secular education. English is also necessary for anyone engaged in business with multinational companies, especially in the burgeoning Information Technology industry of which Hyderabad (sometimes referred to as 'Cyberabad') is an important centre.

The impact of the decline in Urdu and rise in English has already begun to be felt in *majlis* preaching. This shift from Urdu to English has necessarily been felt more by expatriate Hyderabadi Shîᶜî communities in places such as North America, Britain and Australia. But even in Hyderabad itself, although the vast majority of sermons are still given in Urdu, preachers quite often mix English words with Urdu, and some have even begun to preach in English. Relatively recently it was considered unthinkable to recite a *majlis* in English. But now, even in Hyderabad's main Shîᶜî mosque, the Ibadatkhana Hussaini in Darushifa, at least one *majlis* sermon has been preached completely in English, and this will no doubt be repeated more often in the coming years.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the *majlis* sermon in its modern form is a recent development, probably not much more than a century old, even though it has grown out of much earlier antecedents. Although *majlis* preaching has developed separately from preaching at the Friday congregational Prayers, both forms have their roots in the pre-Islamic tradition of the tribal spokesman known as the *khaṭîb*. The mourning gatherings that became known as the *majlis al-taᶜziya* and speeches at these gatherings began in the immediate aftermath of the Battle of Karbala. As well as being conducted for mourning, they were also designed to spread the news about what had happened there, and as a means of keeping the memory of that battle alive. Just as the early *khaṭîb* worked alongside a poet, so preaching at *majâlis* has developed alongside a parallel poetic tradition. Over the following centuries the *majlis* remained a central institution among the Shîᶜa, vital for maintaining their corporate identity as a minority within the larger Muslim community. Thus wherever the Shîᶜa went as the Muslim empire expanded they took the *majlis* with them.

Although *majâlis* were held, albeit secretly, even when the Shîᶜa faced persecution, it was in the context of Shîᶜî-rule where the *majlis* was officially patronized

that it developed most. The three such periods which are most important for this study are the Safavid dynasty in Iran (907/1501–1145/1732), the Quṭb Shâhî dynasty of the South Indian Deccan (*c*.924/1518–1098/1687), and the period of Shîᶜî rule in the North Indian province (and later kingdom) of Awadh (1134/1722–1272/1856). In the context of these dynasties particular forms of narrative and poetry recitation were developed. The two most important of these forms for the Indian *majlis* tradition were the recitation of a text known as the *Rawẕat al-Shuhadâ'* [The Garden of the Martyrs] and the elegy known as the *marṯiya*. Sometimes, in addition, a *majlis* would include an extemporary sermon about some aspect of the Sufferings of the Karbala martyrs.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the modern *majlis* sermon developed in Awadh out of the three forms noted earlier. The narrative recitation of the text and the extempore discourse merged and took on aspects of the *marṯiya* which, as well as influencing the prose form, continued independently as a feature of the *majlis* in its own right. The new sermon included a discourse on topics other than the Sufferings of the Karbala martyrs and Imâms. The sermon developed out of the need to reinforce a specifically Shîᶜî identity in a time of rapid change and social upheaval. Initially the preachers were only men from the ranks of the professional *ᶜulamâ'*, but from the mid-twentieth century they were joined by 'lay' people, both women and men.

Although the *majlis* in Hyderabad initially followed the new developments in North India, it had its own distinctive character and its own famous preachers. The Hyderabadi *majlis* and other Muḥarram commemorations were lavishly patronized by the nobility under the Âsaf Jâhî Nizâms, especially in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1948, the State of Hyderabad was forcibly incorporated into the newly independent Indian Union, ending Muslim rule and resulting in a large exodus of, especially the more wealthy, Muslims. The Shîᶜî community has become more confident since the 1970s, however, with increasing wealth from job opportunities in the Arabian Gulf, and pride in the Islamic Revolution in Iran. One of the consequences has been a dramatic increase in the number of *majâlis* held each year in the city and preachers to speak at them.

In different cultures and periods of history, the *majlis* and its message have taken on aspects of the contexts in which they have been held. But always the essential nature of the gathering has been the same: a retelling of and mourning for Karbala in order to reinforce a distinct Shîᶜî identity.

2 The Shîᶜa of Hyderabad and their mourning gatherings

After the historical overview of Chapter 1, this chapter looks at the contemporary Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community, its mourning gatherings and the preachers who address them. The first section looks briefly at the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community, noting its significance within the city as a whole, some of the groupings within the community, and its religious observances. The section on The mourning gathering in the religious life of Hyderabadi Shîᶜas looks in depth at the wide range of *majâlis* performed in Hyderabad throughout the year and especially during the Muḥarram mourning season. This section also considers Sunnî perceptions of Shîᶜî mourning practices as articulated in sermons at the Friday congregational Prayers. The section on Varieties of mourning gathering focuses on the men and women who preach at these *majâlis* and how they are trained for this role. This section also looks at the preparation and delivery of *majlis* sermons and the question of financial recompense for preaching them.

Hyderabad's Shîᶜî community

Hyderabad's overall population was 5.53 million according to the 2001 census. Of this population, about a third, or 1.5 million, are Muslims. Apart from a Christian community of probably less than 5 per cent, and smaller communities of Sikhs, Buddhists and others, the rest of the population is overwhelmingly Hindu. Of Muslims, Shîᶜas make up probably 10 per cent, or 3 per cent of the city's total population: that is about 150,000 people.[1] Whatever the exact figures, the reality behind these statistics is that in today's Hyderabad, Shîᶜas as a community are a minority within a minority, and much less powerful than in the days of Muslim rule. Most Shîᶜas live in Hyderabad's Old City which is the poorest and the least developed part of the Hyderabad–Secunderabad conurbation (Naidu, 1990: 64). The Old City is also the area which has been most affected by the Hindu–Muslim violence that we noted at the end of Chapter 1. There are members of the community who are wealthy and educated, including a number who have moved out of the Old City to the New City and the suburbs, but the great majority of Shîᶜas are among the poorer classes of Hyderabad's population.

The Shîᶜî community is generally 'non-aligned' in terms of party politics, with no one party commanding community support as such. A few *z̲âkirs* have been

directly involved in politics, such as the prominent contemporary preacher, Baquer Aga, who has served as a Member of the State Legislative Assembly with the 'Majlis' ('MIM') party. There are also some politicians in the community from other parties including the Telugu Desham Party and the Hindu Nationalist 'BJP', which is otherwise generally not well-supported within the Muslim community.

Although Hyderabad's Shîᶜas are a small minority and relatively powerless in comparison with the larger Hindu and Sunnî communities, there are other factors which affect the way in which they are perceived and perceive themselves. Even as a minority, the Shîᶜî community is more visible than simple numbers would otherwise suggest. The phenomenon of a small community having a significance out of proportion to its size is not limited to Hyderabadi Shîᶜas. The same is true for Shîᶜas in other parts of India,[2] and applies to other religious communities in India such as Christians and Sikhs, although not always for the same reasons. There are four main factors in the Shîᶜa's significance as a religious community in contemporary Hyderabad: their historical legacy, the concentration of the Shîᶜî population in a small area of the city, the public visibility of many of their ceremonies and their relations with the outside world. All of these factors apply to the Muslim community as a whole but can be seen especially in regard to the Shîᶜa.

The position of Hyderabad's Shîᶜas today is very different from what it was 400 years ago when Shîᶜî kings ruled the area of South India known as the Deccan. Yet their heritage remains an important factor both in the way that others see them and in the way that they perceive themselves. Both Hyderabad's larger Muslim community and the Shîᶜî community within it used to have power. The city of Hyderabad was originally founded by a Shîᶜî king, Muḥarram Qulî Quṭb Shâh, in 999/1591. All of the original monuments, including the 'Charminar' [lit. 'four minarets'], the 54 m high edifice which is the city's emblem, and the original mosques including the main 'Mecca Masjid', have a distinctive architectural style which often incorporates clear Shîᶜî motifs.[3] Even though the Âsaf Jâhî Nizâms who followed the Quṭb Shâhî rulers were Sunnî, many of these later rulers were sympathetic to the Shîᶜa, who still made up a significant section of the nobility. These nobles patronized Muḥarram commemorations, and many of their families continue to do so today even though they may not wield the same political power as they once did. The historical heritage has also defined the common language of Hyderabad. Because the city has been ruled by Muslims for so long, the *lingua franca* of Hyderabad, especially in the Old City, is predominantly Urdu, although this language is often referred to as Hindi.

Hyderabad's history of Muslim rule, however, is a bitter–sweet heritage. I have been shown the vast but crumbling palaces of the old Nizâm's household by a Telugu man working among poor villagers in the outlying districts beyond the city. He remarked to me that those palaces were built at the expense of the development of the rural, Telugu villages which languished at the bottom of the feudal system. Akbar S. Ahmad, a Pakistani scholar, reflecting on this same heritage, writes that Hyderabad's Muslims, especially those of the old noble classes, suffer

from what he calls the 'Andalus syndrome'. Muslims in Hyderabad once enjoyed power in a vast and wealthy kingdom, as they did in Andalusia (now Spain) during the Ummayad rule there between the eighth and eleventh centuries. After they were deprived of that power, he writes, they became 'haunted' by, 'a forlorn nostalgia, a pain, an emotion sometimes too deep for words . . . a yearning for a past that is dead but will not be buried, a fear of an uncertain future which is still to be born' (Ahmad, 1985: 318).

The majority of Hyderabad's Muslims live in the 'Old City', the original walled city which is now only one part of the modern conurbation of Hyderabad–Secunderabad. Their concentration in a relatively small area, plus the Muslim architecture mentioned earlier in the section, gives the Old City a distinctively Muslim atmosphere, even if Muslims do not make up an actual majority of the population. This concentration is also important politically as it has partly enabled a distinctively Muslim political party, the MIM (*Majlis-e Ittiḥâd-e Muslimîn* or 'United Party of the Muslims') to consistently hold seats not only in the Andhra Pradesh State Legislative Assembly, but also in the national parliament, something that is rare for Muslim communities elsewhere in India.[4]

Just as Muslims as a whole are concentrated in Hyderabad's Old City, so within the Muslim community, the Shîᶜa are also concentrated in a relatively small area. By far the majority of Hyderabad's Shîᶜî community reside in a number of small, interconnected localities within the Old City south of the Musi River between the central landmark of Charminar and the main southbound railway line. The reason for this concentration is probably that during the Âsaf Jâhî dynasty several Shîᶜî nobles had their palaces and *ᶜâshûrkhânas* in these localities. Other Shîᶜas who were dependent upon the nobles' patronage tended to live in the same vicinity (Moinuddin, 1977: 29). Within these localities, Shîᶜas do not make up a majority of the population, unless possibly in the central quarter known as Darushifa.

As a result of this concentration Shîᶜas, like the Muslim community as a whole, tend to be associated with particular geographical areas. Within these areas, they are seen as the dominant community, even if they do not make up a numerical majority of the population. Because the area and the community tend to go together in people's minds, the community tends to assume more significance than if it was spread out evenly but thinly across the city.

Both Muslims as a whole and Shîᶜas in particular have highly visible public religious ceremonies which contribute to their significance in the culture of the city as a whole. At the last Friday Prayers in the month of Ramaẓân, for example, tens of thousands of men assemble in and around the central 'Mecca Masjid' for the special congregational Prayers. Even on an ordinary Friday, streets are regularly sealed off because so many men attend that they do not fit in the mosques and the overflow must be accommodated on mats spread on the roads outside. Again, during Ramaẓân, special foods such as 'haleem' [Urdu: *ḥalîm*, a preparation of cereals and meat] are widely available (and enjoyed not only by Hyderabad's Muslims), and the shops and stalls of the Old City and other Muslim neighbourhoods elsewhere in the city are brightly decorated and crowded late into

the night. Before the feast of *ᶜÎd al-Aẓḥâ*, known popularly in India as *Bakrîd* [a corruption of the Persian *baqr-e ᶜîd*, lit. 'cow festival'], flocks of goats can be seen on the streets waiting to be bought for the ritual sacrifice.[5]

As well as participating in the wider Muslim culture and festivals, the Shîᶜa have their own distinctive ceremonies, particularly in the month of Muḥarram. Throughout the main mourning period lasting from Muḥarram to the beginning of Rabiᶜ al-Awwal, it is common to hear *majâlis* being broadcast at high volume to the neighbourhood surrounding the place in which they are being held. Special days during the mourning season are marked by processions and other rituals such as fire walking. David Pinault (1992: ix) describes the scene on the day of ᶜÂshûrâ'* itself: 'A procession of thousands of mourners marches through the streets of Hyderabad's Old City neighbourhoods, in a parade of camels and horses, elephant-borne battle standards, bands of razor-wielding flagellants from the men's guilds. Crowds line the streets; beggars, fruit-sellers, and tradesmen with votive banners for sale work the throng....' Throughout the Muḥarram mourning period, Shîᶜas tend to wear black or sombre coloured clothing. Throughout the year, many wear a *kalâwa* or red thread tied around the wrist,[6] and often display distinctive signs or stickers on their doors or vehicles. The birthday of Imâm ᶜAlî is marked by a street festival. The overall impact of these practices by a minority group serves to reinforce the sense of their significance as a community.

Although they are only minority communities within Hyderabad and India, both Muslims in general and the Shîᶜa in particular are part of much larger, world-wide communities, another factor which increases their significance both in their own eyes and in the eyes of the rest of society. Many Muslim families have relatives working and living in the Arabian Gulf who regularly send money home to Hyderabad. Each year a large group travels to Saudi Arabia for the *Hajj* Pilgrimage, and smaller groups make a special Shîᶜî pilgrimage and visitation of shrines [*ziyârat*],[7] beginning at Mecca for the *ᶜUmrâ* ['lesser' pilgrimage] and then going on to Madina and the important Shîᶜî shrines of Syria, Iraq and Iran. In 2004, Indian pilgrims took part in Muḥarram commemorations in Karbala itself, an event that was allowed again after the downfall of the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussain.

More important for the Indian context are relations with Pakistan, the country which defines itself as a Muslim state and is commonly perceived within India as its greatest national enemy. After India was partitioned by the British and became an independent nation in 1947, a large number of Hyderabad's Muslims, including Shîᶜas, emigrated to Pakistan with the result that many families in Hyderabad have some family on the other side of the border. Still today marriages take place along kinship lines between Indian Hyderabadis and Pakistanis (there is an important city in the south of Pakistan which is also called Hyderabad), and Shîᶜî *majlis* preachers come and go between Hyderabad and the main Shîᶜî centres of Pakistan.

Important also is the relation between Hyderabad's Shîᶜas and Iran.[8] We have already noted the important historical links between Iran and the Deccan from the

medieval period. Before oil was discovered in Iran many Persians migrated to Hyderabad, which was sometimes called the 'golden bird' because of work opportunities to be found in the Âsaf Jâhî Nizâm's dominions. It is not uncommon to see portraits hanging in Shîᶜî homes of a Persian great-grandfather or another relative who had migrated to Hyderabad to seek his fortune. After the oil boom and the end of Muslim rule in Hyderabad, a number of Hyderabadi Muslim men, especially doctors and other professionals, went to Iran to work and some of them married Iranian women. Some of these families later returned to Hyderabad to form a significant Indo-Iranian community. The Iranian community in Hyderabad numbers several hundred, includes the owners of some prominent restaurants and bakeries, and is quite prosperous. It has its own mosque-cum-*ᶜâshûrkhâna* which invites visiting preachers from Iran each year during the Muḥarram season to address *majâlis* in the Farsi language. It also has its own *mâtamî gurûh* [men's mourning association] which can be seen participating in the main procession with its own style of *mâtam*, including self-flagellation, on the day of ᶜÂshûrâ'. In recognition of the significant Iranian and Indian Shîᶜî communities in Hyderabad, Bangalore, Madras and other areas of South India the Iranian government opened a consulate in Hyderabad in 1969. There is a regular flow of Hyderabadi scholars to Qum in Iran for training at that 'seminary city'. This flow increased following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 and the later closure by Saddam Hussain's government of Shîᶜî colleges in the shrine centres of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq.

Iran is the only country in the world with a Shîᶜî government, and thus has a unique role in the life of the Indian Shîᶜa. Iraq, however, and particularly the shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala are also important even though their importance was weakened by the anti-Shîᶜî policies of the Baᶜthist regime and the pitiful condition of the country following the Gulf War of 1991 and subsequent economic sanctions. It was noted in the previous chapter that *ᶜulamâ'* from Najaf played a significant part in the development of Indian Shîᶜî Islam. The influence of the Iraqi Shîᶜî leadership continued to be seen in the twentieth century as the majority of the Indian Shîᶜa gave their allegiance to the Iraqi based Âyatullâh al-Sayyid Abû al-Qâsim al-Khû'î (1899–1992) as *marjaᶜ al-taqlîd* [supreme legal authority accepted as a living referent for society] (al-Khû'î, 1988: 5). Many Indian Shîᶜas transferred their allegiance to al-Khû'î's disciple, Sayyid ᶜAlî al-Ḥusaynî al-Sîstânî after the former's death, in spite of the competing claims of the Iranian religious leadership following the revolution there. Al-Khû'î's leadership, in contrast to the post-revolutionary Iranian model, was marked by a politically 'rigorous quietism' (Sachedina, 1988: 13). David Pinault, writing before the death of al-Khû'î, confirms that, 'Ayatullah al-Khu'i is by far the most revered religious authority among Hyderabad's Shiites, many of whom consider him their *marja' al-taqlid,*' and writes about the visits of al-Khû'î's son and another agent of the Âyatullâh to Hyderabad in 1987 and 1988 (Pinault, 1992: 92–3).

Hyderabad's Shîᶜas also have strong links with immigrant communities from their city now based in the US, Canada, Britain and Australia. These were destinations for emigration that have become popular with the more educated and

wealthy of the community. Several cities, especially in the US, have large communities of Hyderabadi Shîᶜas with their own mosques, community centres and *ᶜâshûrkhânas*. There is a constant flow of family members travelling back and forth, and charities for the benefit of Shîᶜas in Hyderabad, such as the 'Imam-e-Zamana Mission' (named after the *Imâm-e Zamân* [Imâm of the (present) Age, i.e. the *Mahdî** or twelfth Shîᶜî Imâm]) raise considerable amounts of money each year from these expatriate communities. Each year, several of the better known *ẕâkirs* (*majlis* preachers, both men and women) make preaching trips to foreign countries. Some preachers from these countries also come and address Hyderabadi *majâlis*, such as Mawlana Zaki Baqri from Toronto, Canada, one of whose sermons (S9) is presented in Part II.

There are a number of groupings or streams within Shîᶜî Islam as a whole who are represented in Hyderabad. From among two of the Ismaili or 'Sevener' groups, some have broken away and become part of the Twelver community. In Hyderabad, Twelver Khôja Shîᶜas play a full part in the life of the wider Twelver community, sponsoring *majâlis* at their *ᶜâshûrkhâna* known as Baitul Kayyam [Arabic: *Bayt al-Qâ'im*, 'The House of the Steadfast' (an epithet for the *Mahdî**)]. They also have a mosque in Secunderabad called the Masjid-e-Ali [The Mosque of ᶜAlî]. A few extended families from Hyderabad's Bohra Shîᶜa also attend Twelver functions and invite Twelver *ẕâkirs* to preach at their own *majâlis*, including the death anniversaries of their members.

A very sensitive issue in the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community over the last few years has been the existence of a sub-sect among the Twelver Shîᶜa known as the *Akhbârîs* and led by Mawlana Riazuddin Hydar and his family. This group has defined itself in terms of the *Uṣûlî-Akhbârî* intellectual controversy between Shîᶜî scholars that was important in Iran and North India during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is unclear, however, whether doctrinal issues were the most important reasons for the formation of this sub-sect. Mawlana Riazuddin Hydar was a prominent scholar of the mainstream Shîᶜî community and a popular *ẕâkir* as is noted in, for example, the 1971 Government survey of Muḥarram in Hyderabad (Moinuddin, 1977: 49). He was also leader of the ritual Prayers at the main Shîᶜî mosque, the Ibadatkhana Hussaini in Darushifa. He left that position around 1987 to lead a group of followers who, although numerically small, have their own *ᶜâshûrkhâna* and still organize *majâlis* every year. This group also holds occasional public processions. In a community that is already a small minority, this *Akhbârî* sect provokes sometimes intense hostility from the mainstream Shîᶜa. Mawlana Riazuddin Hydar's son was murdered in 1996 (interview, RH).

The mourning gathering in the religious life of Hyderabadi Shîᶜas

Whereas this study focuses on one particular religious ritual practised by Hyderabadi Shîᶜas, the *majlis*, it is important to note the place of this ritual in the broader religious life of the community. As in many Islamic communities, religion touches on practically every area of life, and to adequately describe the huge

variety of religious practices and institutions in the community would be beyond the range of this study. But for the sake of clarity, I will discuss the *majlis* as it relates to three important areas of the community's religious life: the prescribed ritual Prayers, religious education and observances marking the specifically Shîᶜî religious calendar.

In the ritual Prayers, as with the other basic Islamic practices, the Shîᶜa worship in the same way as Sunnîs, although there are often variations in points of detail. For example, although all eight of the Shîᶜî mosques in Hyderabad conduct the five mandatory Prayers, these Prayers are held on three occasions during the day. The afternoon Prayers [*ᶜaṣr kî namâz*] follow on immediately from the midday Prayers [*ẓuhr kî namâz*], and likewise the night Prayers [*ᶜishâ' kî namâz*] follow on immediately from the evening Prayers [*maghrib kî namâz*]. Other differences in detail between Shîᶜî and Sunnî ritual in the performance of the Prayers include the *mohra-e namâz*, a small clay tablet from Karbala on which the Shîᶜa place their foreheads when they prostrate. Generally speaking, there is less emphasis on congregational Prayers among the Shîᶜa than among Sunnîs, with more people reciting the Prayers at home than in the mosques. However, the performance of the Prayers in the mosques does give a basic structure to the community's day, and *majâlis* are often held in local mosques directly after the Prayers, especially in the evening.

The Friday congregational Prayers are held at all of the eight Shîᶜî mosques except the Ibadatkhana Hussaini in Darushifa. This mosque was built too close geographically to an existing mosque to hold its own Friday Prayers according to Shîᶜî Islamic law, and is thus known only as an *ᶜibâdatkhâna* [lit. 'house of worship']. The sermons at these congregational Prayers differ according to the practice of the *ᶜâlim* who generally leads the Prayers. Some *ᶜulamâ'* simply recite an Arabic sermon [*khuṭba*, used here in the sense of a sermon itself rather than a memorized introduction], while others preach two sermons, one after the other, the first on an aspect of personal piety [*taqwa*], and the other on some aspect of contemporary concern to the community, including at times political topics. Far more people in the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community attend *majâlis* than the Friday congregational Prayers. Consequently, sermons preached at the Friday Prayers are marginal to the life of the community and have very little impact in comparison to *majlis* preaching. There is sometimes a *majlis* following the Friday congregational Prayers which includes its own discourse.

There are several institutions of religious learning in the community. Some have their own buildings, while at others students simply take classes from a local *ᶜâlim*. Students training to become an *ᶜâlim* themselves generally begin their religious education in Hyderabad before going on to further studies in Iran or Syria. Almost always, such students preach regularly at *majâlis*. Besides these religious schools and colleges, there are a few voluntary gatherings known as Qur'ân Study Circles that are held, normally every week on a Sunday, in different parts of the city. Most of those who attend these gatherings are educated people, and some of the gatherings are specifically for the youth. These meetings are organized and attended almost exclusively by lay-people, although someone

presides who is considered to have a good knowledge of the Qur'ân and Shîᶜî beliefs. The Qur'ân is read through systematically, a portion each week, with the members taking it in turns to introduce the passage while others have the opportunity to comment or to or ask questions.

There are several bookshops and libraries in the community selling and lending religious books, magazines and other devotional material. Individuals and organizations from the community also publish magazines and journals of a religious nature in both Urdu and English. These bookshops as well as one or two specialist outlets, such as 'Saaz Electricals', sell cassette tapes of professionally recorded *majlis* sermons, *marṣiya* and *nawḥa* recitations. These taped sermons are generally those by celebrated 'big name' male preachers, both local and visiting, and include 'classic' sermons by *ẕâkirs* who are no longer living, such as Rashîd Ṭurâbî. The large sales of taped sermons from these outlets testify to the educational role that *majâlis* play in the religious life of the community. Listening to the tape of a sermon is considered a good way of learning about one's faith. Because so many from the community participate in *majâlis* from such an early age, these gatherings are widely perceived to be the primary means by which a Shîᶜa learns the distinctives of his or her faith, and especially the central narratives.

There is a strong sense in the Shîᶜî community of an annual cycle of anniversaries which make up what could be termed a 'liturgical calendar'. These anniversaries fall into one of two categories. Either they are celebratory, in which case they are marked principally by meetings known as *jeshns* [festivals], or they are of a mourning, commemorative nature in which case they are marked principally by *majâlis. Majâlis* take place throughout the year, although the bulk are held in the Muḥarram mourning season. The special religious anniversaries follow the *Hijrî* calendar, and in order to follow the religious aniversaries, most Shîᶜî homes display somewhere one of the religious calendars sold at local bookshops which give the Gregorian and *Hijrî* date along with the events to be remembered. The most popular of these calendars, the *Ghadeer Shiya Calendar*, lists some *majâlis* and *jeshns* in the calendar itself, as well as carrying advertisements for others. These notices and advertisements show the date, time and place as well as the person sponsoring the gathering, the preacher and sometimes, in the case of a *majlis*, even the sermon topic to be addressed. Locally produced primers on Shîᶜî faith and practice, such as the anonymously authored and published *Know Your Islam*, also give lists of important dates (see also Momen, 1985: 239).

The dates in the Shîᶜî liturgical calendar are mostly made up of the birthdays and death anniversaries of the Imâms and other important Shîᶜî personalities. Other events are also remembered, including the Prophet Muḥammad's 'emigration' [*Hijrat**] from Mecca to Madina (in 622 CE, commemorated on 1 Rabîᶜ al-Awwal), ᶜAlî's part in the conquest of the Jewish stronghold of Khaybar in 7/628 (commemorated on 24 Rajab or 24 Shaᶜbân) and the desecration of the graves of the Prophet's daughter, Fâṭima, and several of the Imâms in Madina in the al-Baqîᶜ cemetery in Madina in 1926 (commemorated on 8 Shawwâl). There is some variation between Hyderabad and North India, and even within Hyderabad itself, concerning the dates on which certain anniversaries fall, but

mostly the dates follow a standard calendar. There are other rituals which commemorate special events such as processions or fire walking, and these are often connected to the performance of a *majlis*.

Within the larger public religious calendar, individuals and families have their own particular events which they commemorate. These events may be connected with a birth, marriage or a death, and/or may involve the fulfilment of a personal vow. As well as commemorating the public cycle of religious anniversaries, *majâlis* are also held in connection with these other, family commemorations.

Although there is no one liturgical formula which would apply to all *majâlis*, many *majâlis* contain the following elements: recitation of *marṯiya* [elegiac poetry], a sermon (which must include a narration of the Sufferings of one or more of the Karbala martyrs and/or other important Shîᶜî personalities, but may include other elements as well), *mâtam* [ritualized mourning including breast-beating and sometimes acts of self-wounding] to the accompaniment of *nawḥa* [rythmic elegy] chanting, a final ritualized *ziyârat* and the distribution of *tabarruk* [blessed offering, usually of food] to the congregation by the host.

Who attends a *majlis*, where and when it is held, and its particular features can vary a great deal. To give a flavour of this variety from my own experience, I have attended a *majlis* in Hyderabad where, apart from myself and one teenage boy, all of the mourners were children under the age of 11. At others, I have been the youngest present. Some *majâlis* have lasted considerably more than 2 hours and others barely 7 minutes. I have sat in *majlis* congregations numbering ten, and tens of thousands. Many gatherings have contained no sermon at all; the focus has been on poetry recitation. Other gatherings have functioned basically as the platform for a particular preacher's sermon. Still other *majâlis* have dispensed quickly with other rituals in order to focus on the performance of various forms of *mâtam. Majâlis* can be held in the context of a wedding, a funeral or a community meeting. They can be held in a tiny dwelling in a narrow Old City street or outside in a children's playground. Other locations in which I have attended *majâlis* have been a 400-year-old *ᶜâshûrkhâna*, a two-bedroom flat in a New City apartment block and a mansion in the exclusive suburb of Jubilee Hills where the sermon was relayed by radio microphone from the hall, in which the men were sitting, to the ladies gathered in a distant room.

Majâlis can be either gatherings for both men and women, led by men and in which men and women sit in separate rooms or are separated by a curtain or screen, or *zanânî* [women's] gatherings attended and led by women. Many women participate in the male-led *majâlis*, and can often be heard by the men weeping from behind the curtain. The world of women's *majâlis*, however, is very separate from the men's world.[9] A *zanânî majlis* is usually exclusively for women and addressed by a woman preacher [*ẕâkira*]. A few male family members or close friends, however, are sometimes in attendance in a separate room. Occasionally this congregation of men can be significantly larger.

Groups of women dressed in black *ḥijâb* [veil with full-length gown; the word also refers to a woman's modesty] can be seen moving from house to house throughout the mourning period as they attend *majâlis*. Shîᶜî women in

Hyderabad also have their own association, the *Markazî Anjuman Niswân Barkât-e ᶜAzâ* and their own *ᶜâshûrkhâna*, the Yadgar Hussaini [*Yâdgâr Ḥusaynî*, i.e 'Memorial for Ḥusayn']. The freedom that women have to organize and lead their own *majâlis*, to move around between different gatherings in the mourning season and particularly to be preachers is seen by Diane D'Souza as an important element in Shîᶜî women's empowerment and building of self-esteem.[10] The freedom of movement and interaction between men and women during Muḥarram, especially as they visit crowded shrines at the same time has led to some concern about community morals. A number of banners and posters in Urdu and English appeared during Muḥarram 1420/1999 at various locations in the Old City. These bore messages, for example, encouraging 'believing men and women' to 'lower their gaze', and proclaiming that, 'women and girls who do not Hijab (i.e. wear the *ḥijâb* veil and gown) have no standing before Allah'.

In male-led *majâlis* young children are free to come and go between the men's and women's areas, and a relatively high degree of fidgeting is tolerated. Sometimes a group of young boys, walking from *majlis* to *majlis* and often arriving just before the *tabarruk* food is distributed, oversteps the mark and is told to keep quiet or is even sent out of the gathering, but this is rare. If discipline is needed while a child is in the men's area, a sharp word may be spoken by someone in the congregation or, more rarely, by the preacher himself.

Varieties of mourning gathering

There are several formally recognized types of *majlis* held in Hyderabad. Various terms are used by members of the community, and it can be helpful to distinguish between different kinds of gatherings, although there is considerable overlap and blurring of distinctions between them. A further complication is that while different kinds of male-led and *zanânî majâlis* can be referred to by the same terms, there are differences between the same kind of *majlis* when it is hosted by men and when it is hosted by women. Broadly speaking, I can count six types of *majlis*: the *sâlâna* [annual] *majlis*, the *silsila* [series] of *majâlis*, the *dawra* [round] of *majâlis*, those *majâlis* that are connected with a person's death or marriage, regular daily or weekly *majâlis*, and finally those *majâlis* that do not fit into any other category! Not all of these types will be discussed in detail in this section, but I will give at least a brief definition of all of them here.

The *sâlâna majlis* is an annual gathering normally hosted by a particular person or family and often taking place in that person's home. A *sâlâna majlis* may be a mixed gathering; it is also a very common form of *zanânî majlis*. It is considered meritorious to hold a *majlis* in one's home, as a popular Tradition maintains that Fâṭima, the Prophet's daughter and mother of Ḥusayn, said that she would be present at each *majlis* held to mourn her son's death.[11] Thus the *dâᶜî* [host] of a *majlis* often prints flyers advertising his or her *majlis* which are then distributed at other gatherings and maybe posted on the wall of a public place such as the Ibadatkhana Hussaini. These *majâlis* almost always include a sermon, although the sermon can vary a great deal in length and content.

A prominent *ẕâkir* or *ẕâkira* or a particular *mâtamî gurûh* may be invited, or a special kind of food or gift may be distributed as *tabarruk* as an extra incentive for mourners to come to a particular *majlis*. Some of these annual gatherings began many years ago, patronized by a member of the Âsaf Jâhî nobility, and continue to be held by the noble's descendants. Most of the time, a *sâlâna majlis* will be addressed by the same *ẕâkir* or *ẕâkira* each year until it is 'inherited' by another preacher if the first dies or begins to travel outside of Hyderabad during the mourning period. There may even be competition between two *ẕâkirs* who both want the prestige of preaching at an important annual event.

A *silsila* [lit. 'succession'] is a series of *majâlis* held at the same hour and place and addressed by the same preacher for a number of consecutive days. A *silsila* provides a platform for a *ẕâkir* to address a particular topic or expound a particular text in greater detail than is afforded by a single *majlis*. The special kind of *silsila* [series] which is held during these first nine days is known as an *ᶜashra* [lit. 'ten'].[12] The series comprises nine daily *majâlis* held at the same time and place and featuring the same preacher. The sermons build on each other over the course of the series with the preacher expounding a particular *âyat* of the Qur'ân or a *ḥadîṯ*, and developing from it a certain theme or topic. Often these topics are explicitly stated and advertised. As the days go by, a greater proportion of the sermon is given over to the recitation of the *maṣâ'ib*, while less time is taken up with the other elements. The sustained preaching of an *ᶜashra* series is recognized as a task that not all *ẕâkirs* are able to accomplish.

ᶜAshra series may be large or small, and may be hosted by a family in their home or held at a larger public *ᶜâshûrkhâna*. During the course of an *ᶜashra* series, one particular *majlis* may be a special [*makhsûs*] gathering. If the household has a *ᶜalam* representing one of the Karbala martyrs which is particularly special to them, this *ᶜalam* may be carried around a fire-pit [*alâwa*] in the *ᶜâshûrkhâna* in a small procession after the sermon. More people may attend this one *majlis* in the series, which functions as a *sâlâna majlis* for the family. For well-known preachers or those visiting from outside Hyderabad, one or two *ᶜashra* series may form the core of their preaching over the first nine days, supplemented by many other *sâlâna* gatherings.

A *dawra* [lit. 'tour'] is a 'round' made up of a number of *majâlis* held in different homes in a particular locality daily during the first nine days of Muḥarram. In a *dawra*, a group of the Shîᶜî men and boys of a particular neighbourhood walk from house to house, sometimes beginning even before the early morning ritual Prayers [*fajr kî namâz*], and conducting *majlis* in each Shîᶜî home. These *majâlis* normally last about ten minutes and consist of the recitation of *marṯiya* and/or *nawḥa*, the latter chanted as an accompaniment to the performance of *mâtam*.

There may or may not be a sermon, depending on the availability of a *ẕâkir*, and different men and boys take it in turns to lead the mourning at each house. If there is a sermon, this will almost always be short and mostly composed of *maṣâ'ib* recitation, although it may cover other topics also. The preachers employ a variety of sermon types to keep the interest of the group which, although changing

to some extent, is comprised of a basic core congregation. Most of the sermons recite in some way the *maṣâ'ib* of the person or event commemorated on that particular day. However, some sermons also recount more contemporary narratives such as the healing of a disabled man that is the focus of Sermon 3 later in this chapter. Others begin with an *âyat* from the Qur'ân and give a very brief explanation of it. Still others take as their starting point a *ḥadîṯ* of the Prophet or one of the Imâms such as a quote from the *Naḥj al-Balâgha*, the collected works and sayings of ᶜAlî. Some sermons are used for moral instruction, or to give directions about how to behave in a *majlis* or during the mourning season.

The 'round' usually finishes mid-morning to allow people to go to work, college, school or to attend other *majâlis* outside the neighbourhood, but it may continue until the afternoon. Although some form of *tabarruk* is served at every home, each day one (or more) of the *majâlis* in the 'round' may be a special [*makhṣûṣ*] gathering after which more elaborate food is served.

Following the death of a member of the community, a number of *majâlis* known as *majâlis-e tarḥîm* [lit. 'gatherings for praying for God's mercy for a deceased person'] are held. These gatherings are normally conducted on the third day after the death (a gathering known as the *ziyârat majlis* [lit. 'gathering of visitation', i.e. of the deceased person]), on the 10th day, the 20th day, the 40th day (known as *chehlum*[13]), the one-year anniversary, and often thereafter each year so that they evolve into a *sâlâna majlis*. They almost always include a sermon. Traditionally the *ᶜâlim* who has recited the funeral prayers is also asked to address the gathering on the third day, although the later *majâlis* may feature a different preacher. These *majâlis*, while acknowledging the grief for a loved one who has died, make the powerful statement that all personal grief must be subordinated to grief for the martyrs of Karbala. Sermons at these gatherings traditionally mention the person who has died, although this is often done in passing, and sometimes not at all.

There is a Tradition relating that the fourth Imâm, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn*, having returned to his home city of Madina after the Battle of Karbala with the other captives, spent his time in prayer and mourning for his martyred family. One day he was invited to a wedding by one of his followers. He agreed to come only on condition that the wedding would be preceded by a *majlis*. This was duly done, and the practice has continued. There is a *jeshn* [celebration] in praise of the Prophet's family at the start of the whole marriage process, and a *majlis* which forms the first ceremony of the actual wedding. The *majlis* at a marriage, however, is generally held in private by the women of the family and takes place without a sermon.

Many Shîᶜî homes hold regular weekly *majâlis* throughout the year on a Thursday. These are normally family affairs as are similar daily gatherings held during the Muḥarram mourning period. These *majâlis* are usually organized by the women of the family in which case attendance is limited to members of the extended family. They rarely include a sermon. Other Thursday *majâlis* may be held at an *ᶜâshûrkhâna* or a mosque. Another kind of regular *majlis* is held after the Friday congregational Prayers at some of the Shîᶜî mosques and this may feature a sermon.

Occasionally gatherings are held which, while being basically a *majlis*, do not fit into any of the categories described. One example is a meeting that has taken place early in Muḥarram over the last few years between leaders of the Shîᶜî community and senior police officers. The gathering is a kind of public relations exercise organized by the Shîᶜî community. It is designed to give these officers who will have considerable extra work during the Muḥarram season, for example policing the main procession on the day of ᶜÂshûrâ', an understanding of what the rituals are all about. The banner hung at this gathering calls it *Meḥfil-e Z̲ikr-e Imâm Ḥusayn* [Gathering to Remember Imâm Ḥusayn], and it is addressed not only by a *z̲âkir* but also by one or two Hindu police officers. However, it begins with the recitation of *mars̲iya* and includes a discourse and recitation of the *maṣâ'ib*. The sermon is followed by *mâtam* to the accompaniment of *nawḥa*, and the whole event is concluded with a ritualized *ziyârat*. Thus, one could argue that what has taken place is basically a *majlis*.

A second example is a *majlis* that was held on 7 Ṣafar 1415/16 July 1994. There was a particular controversy at that time raised by the *Akhbârî* sect, mentioned earlier, which the mainstream community wanted to address. All of the community's *ᶜulamâ'* were called together for a public gathering at the Ibadatkhana Hussaini to which many ordinary Shîᶜas also came. The well-known preacher and community leader Baquer Aga preached a sermon dealing with the issue at hand and condemning the *Akhbârî* position. This was a genuine *majlis*, and was advertised as such, but it also served as a form of community meeting.

The annual cycle of mourning gatherings

The first and most intensive period of mourning, and the period in which more *majâlis* are held than at any other time in the year, comprises the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram [*ᶜAshra-e Muḥarram*] leading up to the climax of the day of ᶜÂshûrâ'. As the sighting of the new moon approaches indicating the start of the new month and with it the new Islamic year, the atmosphere in the Shîᶜî community undergoes a transformation. From 1 Muḥarram people begin to wear black or other sombre colours and generally give up luxury foods and cosmetics. As the tenth day approaches, they walk barefoot on the sometimes blisteringly hot streets. Homes are re-ordered as televisions are put away and a room or corner in most homes is set apart as an *ᶜâshûrkhâna*. Here *ᶜalam* standards are installed and decorated, and often white sheets are spread on the floor. Marriages and other celebrations are postponed and, instead, the gatherings that take place are *majâlis*.

The first nine days of Muḥarram make up the most intense period of mourning of the entire year. From 5 Muḥarram, many people take holiday from their work if they are able to do so in order to participate in more of the commemorations. Most *majâlis* include *mâtam* from 6 or 7 Muḥarram. By this time not a minute of the day or night goes by without one or more *majlis* being held somewhere in any given Shîᶜî locality. The streets are full of the sound of *mars̲iyas*, sermons and *nawḥa* chants broadcast from competing public address systems. The approximate proportion of *majâlis* held over the first nine days in comparison with the

rest of the mourning season can be seen from the number of *majâlis* that Sadiq Naqvi addresses. In a given season he preaches at around 50 *majâlis* over the first nine days of Muḥarram, followed by approximately 65 more during the remainder of the mourning period of 2 months and 8 days.[14]

During this period especially, the *mâtamî gurûh* associations play an important role in leading the *mâtam* at *majâlis* and in processions. Some of these associations are small; others have a membership of several thousand, from young boys right up to retired men. Although there is some friendly rivalry between these associations, they generally work closely together, and discipline among members is taken very seriously. These associations have a rigorous schedule which they follow: practising their special *nawḥa* chants and distinctive ways of performing *mâtam* as the Muḥarram season approaches, and then when it begins, moving from one *majlis* to another throughout the day and well into the night.

As well as the *dawra* 'rounds' which take place in particular neighbourhoods, there is a kind of larger 'round' of important *majâlis* that cover the Shîᶜî localities of the Old City as a whole during the first nine days. These *majâlis* are made up of the prominent *ᶜashra* series and *sâlâna majâlis*. One or more of these series form the core daily programme of *majlis* attendance for many men in the community, especially those who are attracted by sermons featuring a longer general discourse and not only a recitation of the *maṣâ'ib*.

In Muḥarram 1420/1999, this larger 'round' of longer *majâlis* began with a number of early morning series including Sadiq Naqvi's starting at 7 o'clock, and Baquer Aga's at 8 o'clock. At 11, Akhtar Zaidi, the most famous local preacher, addressed a popular series at Enayat Jung Palace in Mir Alam Mandi. After this, many mourners walked, rode scooters or hitched lifts with friends a little further south in the Old City to the palace of Hussaini Koti, a somewhat dilapidated hall nevertheless richly decorated with coloured glass lamps and mirrors from the era of the last Nizâm. Here, a visiting preacher from North India, Mawlana Sayyid Uruj al-Hassan Meesam, was preaching a series about Islam and other religions. The afternoon featured Shawkat Ali Mirza's series at half-past five. In the evening, there were two popular *ᶜashra* series, both addressed by preachers from Lucknow in North India. The first, at half past seven, was held at Enayat Jung Palace and addressed by Muhammad Ashfaq. The second, held next door at Baitul Qayyam, began at 10 o'clock and was addressed by Mawlana Ali Mutaqqi Zaidi.

As well as the larger *ᶜashra* series, other important *sâlâna majâlis* draw big crowds. These latter include gatherings such as the *mehndî kî majlis* [*majlis* of henna paste] held on 6 Muḥarram at the residence of M.M. Taqui Khan and addressed by Baquer Aga. This gathering commemorates the marriage that is traditionally believed to have taken place at Karbala between Ḥusayn's daughter and Ḥasan's son. In practice, the terms, *ᶜashra*, *sâlâna* and *dawra kî majlis* can overlap so that one particular *majlis* can fit into all three categories at the same time.

On each of the first ten days of Muḥarram (and beyond) a particular person or event in the Karbala narrative is especially remembered at *majâlis* and sometimes at other events as well. This calendar is a part of the larger 'liturgical calendar' mentioned earlier. Whatever the topic of the first part of a *majlis* sermon, it is likely that

the preacher will return to the character or event special to that day in the last part of the sermon known as the *maṣâ'ib*. Shorter *majâlis* that do not include a discourse are normally entirely dedicated to the day's special theme, which is also the focus of the *marṯiya* and *nawḥa* elegies. The tradition of persons or events remembered is not completely fixed, and sometimes a different topic is taken by a preacher for his or her *maṣâ'ib*.[15] Especially over the first five days there is some variation in terms of which topic is taken on which day. Nevertheless, the following calendar is generally acknowledged and followed in terms of the poetry and preaching:

1 Muḥarram	The demand by the officials of the Caliph Yazîd* for the oath of allegiance [*bayᶜat*] from Ḥusayn, or the departure of Ḥusayn's caravan from Madina to Mecca.
2 Muḥarram	The departure of Ḥusayn's caravan from Madina to Mecca, or from Mecca to Kufa.
3 Muḥarram	The caravan's arrival at Karbala.
4 Muḥarram	The commemoration of Ḥurr* (al-Ḥurr b. Yazîd al-Tamîmî), leader of the Kufan (Ummayad) cavalry who changed sides on the eve of the Battle of Karbala to become a martyr fighting for Ḥusayn.
5 Muḥarram	The martyrdom of the brothers ᶜAwn* and Muḥammad (b. ᶜAbd Allâh b. Jaᶜfar b. Abî Ṭâlib), young relatives of Ḥusayn who were killed together at Karbala.
6 Muḥarram	The martyrdom at Karbala of ᶜAlî Akbar*, the second son of Ḥusayn.[16]
7 Muḥarram	The martyrdom of Qâsim*, the son of the second Imâm, Ḥasan*, who was killed at Karbala. Widely commemorated on this day also is the marriage which is believed by many Shîᶜas to have taken place between Qâsim and Ḥusayn's daughter, Fâṭima Kubra, at Karbala just before the bridegroom's martyrdom. This commemoration is known as *mehndî* (from the custom of smearing *mehndî* [henna paste] on the bride and groom). This day is also remembered as the time when Ḥusayn's camp was cut of from the nearby Euphrates river and thus deprived of water.
8 Muḥarram	The martyrdom of ᶜAbbâs* (b. ᶜAlî b. Abî Ṭâlib), the standard bearer of Ḥusayn, who was killed attempting to fetch water for Ḥusayn's camp at Karbala.
9 Muḥarram	The martyrdom of the infant ᶜAlî Aṣghar*, the youngest son of Ḥusayn, killed by an arrow in his father's arms at Karbala.
10 Muḥarram	The martyrdom of Ḥusayn himself.

The climax of the ten days, and indeed the whole mourning season, is the day of ᶜÂshûrâ'*, the anniversary of the Battle of Karbala. On this day, local neighbourhood

majâlis are generally suspended in order to make room for the large gatherings which are attended by the community as a whole. Fasting is observed by many Shîᶜas as well as Sunnîs and even some Hindus. The main event of the day is the huge procession of the *Bîbî kâ ᶜAlam*, the most famous *ᶜalam* [replica battle standard] in Hyderabad. In the middle of the day, two of the largest *majâlis* in the whole year are held, the first at the Balsetty Kheit playground and the second at the Alawe Sartoq shrine (named after a piece of the fetters known as a *sartôq*, reputedly contained in the shrine's *ᶜalam* that were used to bind the fourth Imâm, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn, after his capture at the Battle of Karbala). The majority of the same congregation attends both gatherings, simply walking for a few minutes down the road between the two locations. On the evening of the tenth day, another large gathering takes place at Ali Nagar Colony, a quiet remembrance of the *Shâm-e Gharîban* [Evening of the Exiles], the survivors of Karbala in the aftermath of the battle.

The days of 11 and 12 Muḥarram generally continue as the days before ᶜÂshûrâ' until the *ziyârat* commemorations of the third day after Ḥusayn's death anniversary are completed. Over the little less than two months in which the mourning continues (i.e. the rest of the month of Muḥarram, the following month of Ṣafar, and the first eight days of Rabîᶜ al-Awwal), the *dawra* 'rounds' do not generally continue, but *sâlâna majâlis* are common, as are series. *Majâlis* continue to be held throughout the day, especially by women, but the concentration of gatherings tends to be in the evening and at night, particularly for people working outside of the home, school children and students. During these months many of the mosques and public *ᶜâshûrkhânas* of the community are so heavily booked with *majâlis* that it can be hard at short notice to find a suitable venue if a person wants to host a series.

During the days following ᶜÂshûrâ', a *silsila* comprises normally between 5 and 10 *majâlis*. A *silsila* of five is known as a *khamsa* [lit. 'five'] and a *silsila* of ten is termed an *ᶜashra* [lit. 'ten']. I have, however, attended series of 3, 4 and 12 *majâlis* during this time. In the slightly more settled atmosphere after ᶜÂshûrâ', these series are used by preachers to tackle subjects of a more intellectual nature or those which may be less directly related to the events of Karbala. Examples of such preaching in recent years have been series by the Canadian *ẕâkir*, Mawlana Zaki Baqri on 'Human Rights', or that of the eminent Hyderabadi scientist, Dr M.M. Taqui Khan, on 'Islam and Science'.

Several days in the mourning period following ᶜÂshûrâ' have special significance for *majlis* preaching either because, as in the days leading up to ᶜÂshûrâ', they are days on which certain events or personalities from the Karbala narrative are traditionally remembered, or for other reasons. A list of these days is as follows:

11 Muḥarram	The Sufferings of the Karbala captives and especially ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn*, the eldest son of Ḥusayn who survived Karbala to become the fourth Shîᶜî Imâm. These captives were taken in a caravan from Karbala to Kufa and Damascus before being

	sent by the Caliph Yazîd* back to their home in Madina.
12 Muḥarram	The *ziyârat* commemoration of the third day after the martyrdom of Ḥusayn.
19 Muḥarram	The martyrdom of Sakîna* (Arabic: 'Sukayna'), the young daughter of Ḥusayn who died in prison in Damascus from grief at her father's death, and the Sufferings she endured during and after Karbala (Sakîna is also remembered on 9 Ṣafar).
25 Muḥarram	The martyrdom of the fourth Imâm, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn, in AH 95.
1 Ṣafar	The arrival of the caravan of captives at the Caliph Yazîd's court in Damascus.
17 Ṣafar	The martyrdom of the eighth Imâm, ᶜAlî Reẕâ*, in AH 203.
20 Ṣafar	The commemoration of the 40th day after Karbala, known as *arbaᶜîn* [lit. '40']. This is the most important day of mourning besides ᶜÂshûrâ' itself.
28 Ṣafar	The death of the Prophet Muḥammad in AH 11, and the martyrdom of the second Imâm, Ḥasan, in AH 50.
5 Rabîᶜ al-Awwal	The arrival of the Karbala captives in Madina from Damascus.
8 Rabîᶜ al-Awwal	The martyrdom of the eleventh Imâm, Ḥasan ᶜAskarî, in AH 260. This is the last day of mourning. In the evening, in what is known as the *Chup Taᶜzîya* [Silent Procession], thousands of mourners carrying incense sticks walk to the Alawe Sartoq shrine at which there is a short *majlis* with a sermon. After this *majlis*, participants exchange their black shirts for colourful ones and their attitude of mourning for rejoicing.

After the Muḥarram mourning period is over, *majâlis* are not held with nearly the same intensity. They do continue, however, as they are connected with events such as marriages and deaths, on the anniversaries of the death of Imâms or other important personalities, as weekly commemorations and on other occasions. The two periods which are especially commemorated are the days surrounding the anniversary of the death of the Prophet's daughter, Fâṭima, and that of her husband, ᶜAlî. At each of these events the commemoration lasts for three days and, as well as single *majâlis*, series of three *majâlis* are also held. The three days of mourning for the martyrdom of ᶜAlî begin on the anniversary of his wounding, and culminate on the third day afterwards when he finally died (21 Ramaẕân). Many Shîᶜas in Hyderabad believe that the anniversary of ᶜAlî's martyrdom coincides with the commemoration of *Shab-e Qadr* [the Night of Power (or Decree)], rather than the night on which it is normally observed by Sunnîs (around 27th Ramaẕân). There is a tradition in Hyderabad of inviting a prominent *ẕâkir*

from outside the city to address a series of large meetings on the anniversary of Fâṭima's death. In recent years, this has often been a famous Pakistani *ẕâkir*. It is a testimony to the trust in which the community is held by the city and national authorities that these Pakistani preachers are able to get visas to visit India.

It should not be imagined that the Shîᶜî community is in a perpetual state of mourning, or that it does not know how to have a party! Birthdays of the Imâms are celebrated with almost the same passion with which the anniversaries of their deaths are mourned. The days surrounding the birthday of ᶜAlî in particular become a great festival in Shîᶜî neighbourhoods. Houses and shops are decorated with coloured fairy lights, stalls are set up selling food and trinkets, and a fair is held in the local playground. Music in praise of ᶜAlî is broadcast at great volume in the streets, and one prominent home even sports a life-sized model peacock which bows its head and opens its (real) tail-feathers to passers-by in honour of ᶜAlî.

Celebratory gatherings [*jeshns*] are held on this and other festive occasions, often throughout the night. They consist largely of two particular types of eulogistic poetry known as *qaṣîda* and *manqabat*, and are also frequently addressed by *ẕâkirs* who display their rhetorical skills with Arabic recitations and Urdu speeches honouring the person concerned. These speeches can be very similar to a *majlis* sermon, beginning with an Arabic *khuṭba* [memorized introductory piece] and going on to praise the Virtues of the member of the *Ahl-e Bayt* whose birthday or other anniversary is being commemorated. The *maṣâ'ib*, however, is left out. If the *ẕâkir* is a poet, which is often the case, he or she may recite some of his or her own poetry from the *minbar*. A calendar of some of the important anniversaries outside of the main mourning period is as follows:

9 Rabîᶜ al-Awwal	The celebration of the death of ᶜUmar ibn-e Saᶜd, Ḥusayn's enemy who led the Umayyad army against him at Karbala.
10 Rabîᶜ al-Awwal	The celebration of the marriage of the Prophet Muḥammad with his first wife, Khadîja*.
12 Rabîᶜ al-Awwal	The celebration of *Mîlâd al-Nabî* [the Prophet Muḥammad's birthday].
14 Rabîᶜ al-Awwal	The celebration of the death of the Caliph Yazîd* in 64/683.
8 Rabîᶜ al-Ṯânî	The birth of the eleventh Imâm, Ḥasan ᶜAskarî in 232/846.
14 Jumâdî al-Awwal	The death of the Prophet Muḥammad's daughter, Fâṭima, in 11/633.
15 Jumâdî al-Awwal	The birth of the fourth Imâm, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn, in 37/657.
20 Jumâdî al-Ṯânî	The birth of Fâṭima, in 615 CE.
26 Jumâdî al-Ṯânî	The martyrdom of the tenth Imâm, ᶜAlî Naqî, in 254/868.

1 Rajab	The birth of the fifth Imâm, Muḥammad Bâqir, in 57/677.
7 Rajab	The birth of ᶜAbbâs*, the standard-bearer of Ḥusayn, in 26/647.
10 Rajab	The birth of the ninth Imâm, Muḥammad Taqî, in 195/811.
13 Rajab	The birth of ᶜAlî in 599 CE.
15 Rajab	The martyrdom of the sixth Imâm, Jaᶜfar Ṣâdiq*, in 148/765.
24 Rajab	The part played by ᶜAlî in the capture of the Jewish stronghold of Khaybar* in 7/628.
25 Rajab	The martyrdom of the seventh Imâm, Mûsâᶜ Kâẓim*, in 183/799.
26 Rajab	The death of ᶜAlî's father, Abû Ṭâlib*, in 619 CE.
27 Rajab	The *Miᶜrâj** [the Ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad] in 621 CE.
1 Shaᶜbân	The birth of Zaynab*, the sister of Ḥusayn, in 6/627.
3 Shaᶜbân	The birth of Ḥusayn in 4/627.
15 Shaᶜbân	The birth of the twelfth Imâm, the *Mahdî**, in 255/869.
10 Ramaẓân	The death of Khadîja in 619 CE.
15 Ramaẓân	The birth of the second Imâm, Ḥasan*, in 3/625.
19 Ramaẓân	The fatal wounding of ᶜAlî in 40/661.
21 Ramaẓân	The martyrdom of ᶜAlî in 40/661.
1 Shawwâl	*ᶜÎd al-Fiṭr* [the feast ending the fasting month of Ramaẓân].
8 Shawwâl	The commemoration of the desecration of the Al-Baqîᶜ cemetery in Madina in 1343/1926.
10 Shawwâl	The beginning of the *Ghaybat* [Occultation] of the twelfth Imâm, the *Mahdî*, in 328/940.
11 Ẕi'lqaᶜda	The birth of the eighth Imâm, ᶜAlî Reẓâ*, in 148/765.
25 Ẕi'lqaᶜda	The births of the Prophets Abraham and Jesus.
29 Ẕi'lqaᶜda	The martyrdom of the ninth Imâm, Muḥammad Taqî, in 220/835.
7 Ẕi'l-Ḥijja	The martyrdom of the fifth Imâm, Muḥammad Bâqir, in 116/735.
10 Ẕi'l-Ḥijja	*ᶜÎd al-Aẓḥâ* [Feast of Sacrifice] known in India as *Bakrîd*.
15 Ẕi'l-Ḥijja	The birth of the tenth Imâm, ᶜAlî Naqî, in 212/828.
24 Ẕi'l-Ḥijja	*ᶜÎd-e Mubâhala**, the celebration of the confrontation of the Prophet Muḥammad and his family with the Christians of Najran in 10/632.

Sunnî perceptions of Shîᶜî mourning practices

An indication of how the Shîᶜî community's mourning practices are perceived by the majority Muslim community can be gained from looking at sermons preached at Sunnî mosques in Hyderabad during the Muḥarram mourning season. That there is a wide range of views is illustrated by two very different sermons which were preached on the same occasion: the Friday congregational Prayers closest to the day of ᶜÂshûrâ', 1420/1999 (23 April/6 Muḥarram). One sermon was preached at the main Sunnî mosque, the Jame Masjid in Darushifa which is situated next to the important Shîᶜî shrine of Alawa-e Sartoq. The preacher was Hyderabad's well-known Mawlana Muhammad Hamid al-Din Aqil Husami. He devoted a large part of his sermon to the topic of Karbala and included outspoken criticism of Shîᶜî practices, saying, for example, 'They (the Shîᶜa) make the month of Muḥarram a month of weeping and crying, and explain that they are doing it to exhibit in this way their love for Ḥusayn. But they don't care at all about acting on the words of Ḥusayn. They don't think about whether or not to do the ritual Prayers. They don't worry about giving Alms or not, going on the Hajj or not. They think that only by weeping and wailing they have a ticket to go straight to heaven. If Islam was so easy, then Ḥusayn himself would have understood that simply to weep for the martyrdom of ᶜAlî and the martyrdom of Ḥasan was enough for him, to hold *majlis* for Imâm Ḥasan and ᶜAlî and to weep for them, to beat their breasts and I don't know what!' (S157).

In contrast to Mawlana Aqil Husami, another Sunnî preacher who devoted most of his sermon to the topic of Karbala was very sympathetic to the Shîᶜî position. Mawlana S.M. Ibrahim Quadri Zarrinkullah is imâm of the Noor Khan Bazaar Masjid and the spiritual authority at a Ṣûfî shrine attached to the mosque.[17] At times, such was his attitude, I felt that I was almost sitting at a *majlis*: 'When Muḥarram comes, the matter of ᶜÂshûrâ' comes up, and when we mention the matter of ᶜÂshûrâ', we begin to grieve for the Prince of Martyrs, Ḥaẕrat Imâm Ḥusayn. The result of his sacrifice then is that Islam is still established today. Imâm Ḥusayn did not only sacrifice his life for Islam at that time, but to preserve it for all time, for his family members and for his dear children. For this he laid down his entire life and property. He did this completely in obedience to God's will. He was therefore given the status of the greatest of the martyrs' (S158).

Although Mawlana Quadri spoke so sympathetically about Ḥusayn's sacrifice, he also subtly relativized the Shîᶜî commemorations that were taking place all around the mosque, which is located in a Shîᶜî quarter. He talked at length about the importance of the day of ᶜÂshûrâ' apart from the events of Karbala. He explained, for example, how the world was created on the day of ᶜÂshûrâ', as was the Prophet Adam who also repented on that day. Jonah came out of the great fish on that day, he said, and it was an important fasting day for the Jews before and during the Prophet's Muḥammad's lifetime. ᶜÂshûrâ', he made clear, takes its place alongside the other special days and months of the Islamic year, and each of these has its special commemorations and observances. The particular observance

and 'gift' of ᶜÂshûrâ', he finished by saying, is that on the coming day of ᶜÂshûrâ' (four days hence), the congregation should come to the shrine bringing a bag of sugar. The preacher would put all the sugar together and say a prayer over it in the name of his grandfather. When the sugar was re-distributed to the people, it would serve as an antidote to snake and scorpion-bites for the whole of the coming year.

The preachers

The most striking feature about the preachers of *majlis* sermons is the variety of backgrounds from which they come. It is hard to think of another religious tradition in which such a range of people are given access to the community's pulpit. Sermons are regularly given by those in their eighties as well as children of 12 years of age or younger. Several preachers in the community have university doctorates while other adults do not even have a secondary education. Some are locals while others may have travelled half way around the world to preach in the city. The right of a woman to preach is never even questioned, and some women are held in such high regard by men that these men will make it a point to attend a *majlis* at which a particular *ẕâkira* will preach, even though they cannot be present in the main congregation. It is hard to come up with a precise figure for the number of *majlis* preachers in the community. There are about 25 well-known male orators and an equivalent number of women. However, especially among the women, as Diane D'Souza points out, many families have at least one member who can recite for a family *majlis* so that the total number is probably very high (1997: 16).

If the *majlis* preaching tradition as a whole is pictured as a river, then it is clear that there are different 'streams' or 'currents' within this river, but also 'banks' which keep the river within certain bounds. Just as in a real river, different streams within the *majlis* preaching tradition flow in and out of one another, and cannot be distinguished too rigidly from each other. Preachers have their own distinctive styles which are a product of many different factors including the person's individual character. Some preachers, for example, are simply gifted with innate rhetorical skill and a charismatic personality which contribute to their own personal preaching style. It would be wrong, therefore, to make distinctions that are too hard and fast, or to label a particular preacher as being limited to one stream or style of preaching. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between preachers and preaching styles due to factors such as education, gender and where a preacher is from. These differences can be seen in the sermons, and are recognized within the community itself.

The most important factor influencing the kind of sermons that a person preaches is the level and type of education that he or she has received. From my observations in simply attending many *majâlis*, and from conversations with members of the Shîᶜî community, I would say that most *majlis* preachers, both men and women, have only a basic secular education, and their religious education has come from the home, the *majlis* and the mosque. The bulk of small *majâlis* held in private homes or at local shrines are addressed by these preachers

with less formal education. The sermons of these less formally educated preachers are usually composed of *maṣâ'ib* with or without some *faẕâ'il* narrative. They may include some general discourse, but this is generally limited. Their preaching is characterized by series of narratives, often taken from a body of oral tradition, while Qur'ânic passages and formally quoted *ḥadîṯ* references are limited to a few important texts. Sermons in this 'stream' of *majlis* preaching are commonly also given by people with considerably more formal education, although the type and style of sermon remains the same. Examples of sermons from this 'stream' presented as texts in this study are S2, S3, S7 and S8.

Among those preachers who have received a higher education, there is a distinction between those who trained as religious scholars in a seminary, and those whose higher education was from a secular university. These two groups of preachers are distinguished clearly by their dress. While male *ẕâkirs* are commonly addressed as '*Mawlânâ*', or '*Qibla*',[18] titles of respect properly given to a religious scholar [*ᶜâlim*], preachers do not wear the *ᶜabâ* [loose fitting sleeveless cloak] and *ᶜammâma* [turban] of a qualified *ᶜâlim* unless they have had a formal religious education. Instead, male 'lay' preachers have their own uniform: a *sherwânî* [black, knee-length, button-up coat worn with loose white cotton trousers] and lambswool *tôpî* [hat].

Both within Hyderabad, and among visiting preachers, there is a limited number of 'lay' *ẕâkirs*, both men and women, with a higher education in the secular academic system. These preachers may hold a bachelor's, master's or even a doctoral degree. While these 'lay' *ẕâkirs* generally have a good knowledge of the Qur'ân, ᶜAlî's *Naḥj al-Balâgha* and other classical sources, their particular contribution to the *majlis* preaching tradition is their secular knowledge and their ability to relate that knowledge to their Shîᶜî faith. Sermons from this stream of preaching tend to be marked by an academic approach that is brought over from the preacher's university education or classroom teaching. Educated 'lay' preachers sometimes also mention the particular subject that is their speciality such as history, science, law, education or literature. It is this group of preachers who tend to deliver most of the sermon series and longer individual sermons that include a substantial general discourse. Examples of sermons within this 'stream' of preaching from the texts presented earlier in this study include S1, S4, S5 and S6.

Beyond these observations, it is hard to make a hard and fast distinction between the styles of preaching of the *ᶜulamâ'* and of 'lay' *ẕâkirs* with a university education. The 'lay'–*ᶜâlim* distinction in Indian *majlis* recitation was more clearly defined before the rise of university educated preachers in the middle of the twentieth century. We noted in Chapter 1 that the *ᶜulamâ'* in nineteenth-century Lucknow used to criticize what they saw as the exaggerated or even fabricated accounts which were recited by 'lay' people from popular written texts. This kind of *ᶜulamâ'*–'lay' distinction is much less evident today in *majlis* preaching. It is the case that members of the *ᶜulamâ'* generally quote more often from the Qur'ân and from Arabic Traditions in their sermons than 'lay' preachers (see, e.g. sermons S9 and S10). However, I have also heard educated 'lay' preachers holding forth on complex technical issues of religious science. One such sermon was by Dr Zakia

Sultana, a retired geography professor, looking at the question as to whether the Qur'ânic text has or has not been subject to corruption [*taḥrîf*] at the hands of Sunnis (S20).

There is occasional professional 'rivalry' between 'lay' preachers and religious scholars [*ᶜulamâ'*]. Some *ᶜulamâ'* have complained to me privately that 'lay' *ẕâkirs* do not have sufficient religious knowledge to preach. These religious scholars fear that without formal training, especially in the Traditions, a 'lay' *ẕâkir* may lead his or her congregation astray. On the other hand, some 'lay' preachers have told me, again privately, that the *ᶜulamâ'* are often out of touch with the 'real world' of the congregations. Yet both of these criticisms may be exaggerated. It cannot be said that the *ᶜulamâ'* only preach about narrowly religious topics while only 'lay' preachers take up broader subjects. Mawlana Zaki Baqri, for example, is a formally trained religious scholar, and preaches sermons that take up very relevant contemporary issues such as women's rights (see S10). Criticism directed against the use of exaggerated or inauthentic Traditions is also not limited to sermons by 'lay' preachers. Both 'lay' preachers and members of the *ᶜulamâ'* have told me that they considered exaggerated the claim by visiting Pakistani religious scholar, Talib Jawhari, for example, that both ᶜAlî's father, Abû Ṭâlib*, and his wife were Sinless [*maᶜṣûm*] (mentioned in S17). Some 'lay' preachers also take a lot of trouble to use only what they consider authentic Traditions. There is concern among *majlis* preachers about the authenticity of some Traditions used in sermons, just as there was in nineteenth-century Lucknow, but this concern cuts across the *ᶜulamâ'*–'lay' divide.

My limited observation suggests that women's *majâlis* have subtly different emphases than 'mixed' gatherings, and that women have their own styles of preaching. Many women's *majâlis* feature only *marṯiya*, and *nawḥa* without a sermon. If a sermon is preached, this is often composed only of *maṣâ'ib* recitation. The senior woman preacher Dr Zakia Sultana told me that women's *majâlis* are important opportunities for women to meet and to form friendships outside their family homes. After the ritual part of the gatherings, time is taken for conversation (interview, ZS). This social aspect of women's *majâlis* is occasionally criticized by male preachers, as Zaki Baqri comments (in S72), 'If women have a women's *majlis* in the home, they will spend the whole day; they will go for two hours before to chit chat, and stay afterwards for two hours, wasting the whole day. On the Last Day, we will be questioned as to how we have used our time.'

The importance of social interaction at women's *majâlis*, however, is emphasized both by women preachers from within the tradition, and by outside observers such as Diane D'Souza (1997) and Mary Hegland (1995). Although the bulk of material in *majlis* sermons is common to both male and female preachers, women's sermons often focus naturally on the world of women, family relationships and children. In comparison with sermons by men, they feature more narratives about the Shîᶜî heroes as children (e.g. S8.2–8 and 12–14). They also more frequently mention specific issues of family concern such as childlessness (S7.3), or fear of the 'evil eye' (S6, paras 12 and 16) and make the point that the intercession of the *Ahl-e Bayt* can help with these difficulties.

A third important factor influencing the kinds of sermons that are preached is the place from where the preacher comes. Although the vast majority of sermons in Hyderabad are preached by locals, a clear 'stream' within the preaching tradition is made up of visiting preachers. Almost all of these preachers are of Indian origin and preach in Urdu, their mother tongue. Most of them are from other parts of India, especially Lucknow and other cities in the north of the country. Of preachers who live in other countries, the most frequent visitors are from Pakistan. It is, of course, the better known and charismatic preachers from other places who are invited to Hyderabad to preach. These visitors thus often have a more flamboyant style than many local preachers, and this style contributes to the large crowds that they draw to their *majâlis*. Visiting preachers include *ᶜulamâ'* and 'lay' preachers, as well as both men and women, and their preaching styles are also influenced by their education and gender. However, their geographical origin also influences their manner of speaking and the topics that they cover.[19]

It is my observation that visiting preachers from Pakistan and North India are generally more polemical towards Sunnîs and Christians in their preaching than local Hyderabadis. This tendency reflects the context in those places of greater tensions between the different religious communities, and between local Muslims and the 'West'. Traditionally, Hyderabad has seen relatively good relations between Sunnîs and Shîᶜas, and between Muslims and Christians. Although both Sunnîs and Shîᶜas speak about each other from their respective pulpits, most of the time this is done subtly and without overt offence. Talib Jawhari, visiting from Pakistan, comments, 'Our problems are different and your problems are different. Our faith is one, our basis of faith is one, our Imâms are one, our Prophet is one, our Qur'ân is one. But look! Our way of life and position is completely different from yours. With us (i.e. in Pakistan) there are so many people who are insulting the prophethood, but I don't know if that is the case here' (S106).

The preacher does not say explicitly who he means by the 'people who are insulting the prophethood'. It may not be coincidental, however, that relations between Sunnîs and Shîᶜas in Pakistan at the time of that particular sermon (1997) were very strained, with open conflict and even shootings taking place. There were also allegations that certain Christians had blasphemed the Prophet Muḥammad. North India has also experienced comparatively bad relations between Sunnîs and Shîᶜas (although not nearly as difficult as in Pakistan) and more tension with the West, and this experience is also reflected in the sermons of preachers visiting from that part of India.

Sermon material which is polemical and overtly antagonistic to non-Shîᶜas is referred to within the community as *munâẓara* [argument or polemic] and is controversial in Hyderabad among Shîᶜas themselves. Preachers recognize this, and those who engage in *munâẓara* often preface their remarks with disclaimers. Thus the Pakistani preacher, Abdul Hakim, said from a Hyderabadi pulpit, 'my speech is without controversy', and yet went on to claim, '. . . and God says to Abdul Hakim, "Those people who are going to hell, they are the ones who are without ᶜAlî" ' (S110). Such talk would be highly unusual from a Hyderabadi *z̲âkir*, and Abdul Hakim was criticized at the time by some local Shîᶜas, including *z̲âkirs*.

These locals remarked that he was saying things in India, where the Shîᶜa are protected by the secular state, which he could never get away with saying at home in Pakistan. Despite these criticisms, Abdul Hakim's sermons drew large and enthusiastic crowds, and the tapes sold well in the weeks following his visit.

Financial recompense for preaching is a somewhat controversial point. It is known as *nazrâna* [gift or tribute] and can vary enormously. A preacher cannot demand payment, as his or her real payment is the reward [*ṯawâb*] given by the Imâms and Fâṭima for narrating their Sufferings. Yet a *ẕâkir*, especially one for whom preaching is his or her main occupation, can expect some financial recompence. Some preachers refuse to take anything except the *tabarruk* that everyone attending a *majlis* receives. Others may take travelling or other expenses, or a nominal fee of a few rupees. Mostly the *nazrâna* is slipped into the pocket of the preacher by the *dâᶜî* [host] in such a way that at the end of a day the preacher does not know how much came from which *majlis*. One *ẕâkir* with whom I spoke told me that he only takes *nazrâna* from one *dâᶜî*, and that is because the *dâᶜî* told him that he had been instructed to give a certain sum (a nominal few rupees) each year by Imâm Ḥusayn in a dream. A few years later, the *dâᶜî* forgot to give the *nazrâna* after the *majlis*, so the *ẕâkir* went to him and demanded it! All that being said, a common 'standard' rate for an ordinary house *majlis* in the late 1990s was 100 rupees (aprox. 2 dollars). Well-known visiting preachers at large *majâlis*, however, may exceptionally receive 100,000 rupees or even more for a single sermon, and a preaching tour, especially in the West, during the Muḥarram period can be financially very rewarding.

Becoming a preacher and community 'control' over the *majlis* pulpit

In likening the *majlis* preaching tradition in Hyderabad to a river, I mentioned that this 'river' has 'banks'. By this I mean that there are more or less defined boundaries governing who may preach and what a person may say from the pulpit. It is hard to generalize about the qualifications or training necessary to become a *majlis* preacher. The two main things necessary, however, are clearly that a preacher must have the required knowledge to convey, and that he or she must have the rhetorical skill to communicate it. The minimum knowledge necessary for a preacher is simply a good command of the Karbala narrative. As the most prolific contemporary *majlis* preacher in Hyderabad, Akhtar Zaidi, told me, 'If a person can recite the narrative of the Sufferings of the Karbala martyrs, then he (or she) is a *ẕâkir*' (interview, AZ). However, at least three other fields of knowledge are also very important: some knowledge of the Qur'ân, especially those passages that are common in Shîᶜî exegesis, some knowledge of the important Shîᶜî Traditions and their significance, and a good grasp of the narratives of early Shîᶜî history.

It is not enough simply to know certain information; a preacher must be able to communicate this knowledge in the correct way. A *ẕâkir* is expected to speak fluently and without notes, sometimes for a considerable length of time. He or she

will also be judged on the ability to move people to tears. An important element in this last qualification is the judgement and flexibility necessary to weigh up a congregation often very quickly and tailor a message for their particular needs. Vernon Schubel (1993: 12), writing from his context in Pakistan, notes that a *ẕâkir's* success is basically judged on his or her ability to elicit tears and to impart information.

Diane D'Souza relates a conversation with a woman who explains what it takes to be a *majlis* preacher:

> 'See, anyone can read the traditions', explained one young teacher. 'We've grown up with these stories our whole lives. We hear them every year. Even I can relate them.' She pauses to give me an earnest look. 'But a *ẕâkira* has something more. When she relates the *masaib* [the emotional latter part of the oration]... she should be crying.' She stops for a moment, thinking. 'Another thing. She must practise what she preaches. That is very important.'
> (1997: 12)

This young teacher's last point about the sanctity of the pulpit is often mentioned in connection with preachers. While all Muslims, of course, ought to fulfil their religious obligations, the standards for a *majlis* preacher are generally considered to be higher. One *ẕâkir* told me that he had served in the military and on a number of occasions had been heavily pressured to accept an alcoholic drink. He had refused not simply because he was a Muslim, but because he was known within his community as a *ẕâkir*.

There is no fixed path by which a person becomes a *majlis* preacher or trains for the role. Those who have been educated as an *ᶜâlim* are expected to be able to preach at *majâlis* also, and they often recite at smaller gatherings during their religious training even if preaching as such is not a part of their curriculum. This is the case, for example, with scholars-in-training at the main *Sulṭân al-Madâris* college in Lucknow (interview, MJR). The 12 students with whom I spoke at the *Madrasa-e Murtaẓâ*, the religious college run by Mawlana Reza Aga in Hyderabad, were given opportunities to preach at small *majâlis* and were also trained for that role. Reza Aga would give a lecture to them about a subject on which they might preach a sermon. They were then expected to write down what they had learned in the form of a sermon text. Once that text had been corrected by their teacher, they would memorize it and use it at a real *majlis* (interview, RA).

While some *ẕâkirs* begin their preaching careers from an early age, others are educated and begin their work in another field before starting to address *majâlis* later in life. One *ẕâkir*, Syed Ghulam Askari Abedi, told me that he began to recite in 1950 while working as a foreman on the huge Nagarjunasagar Dam project 150 km from Hyderabad. Many of the work-force for the dam were Shîᶜas, but there were no local *ᶜulamâ'* or *ẕâkirs* in that forest area. As Muḥarram came around, the foreman's friends and colleagues asked him to recite a *majlis* for them. He did so, and has been preaching ever since (interview, GAA).

Although the pulpit is open to such a wide variety of people that it may seem that almost anyone can be a *ẕâkir*,[20] the community itself, in an informal way, exercises a degree of control over both who preaches and what they say. This control is exercised subtly but powerfully so that even accredited religious scholars are not exempt. If allegations of immorality or impropriety are made against a preacher, as has very occasionally been the case, he or she will be unable to continue a preaching career within the mainstream community. Similarly, there have been incidents in which a preacher has gone against the tradition in some way and has been barred informally from the *majlis* pulpit within Hyderabad.

Even if a preacher does not cross the limits of 'orthodoxy' to such an extent that he or she is interrupted during a sermon or barred from the pulpit, smaller 'mistakes' may be pointed out after a sermon in which case the preacher may issue a public apology. Thus one preacher, for example, got somewhat carried away in his *maṣâ'ib* during a series of sermons and said that such was the distress of the fourth Imâm, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn, after Karbala, that his tears fell into the water that he was using for the ritual ablutions before he performed the Prayers. Whether the preacher was actually quoting from a Tradition, or whether he was simply saying something that he thought might have happened, it was pointed out to the *ẕâkir* afterwards that the admixture of tears makes water *nâjis* [ritually impure] and the ablutions are thus rendered invalid. Such an action could never even be contemplated in the life of a Sinless Imâm. The following evening, the preacher duly apologized at the start of his sermon. On another occasion I witnessed an old lady making clear her disapproval of a young preacher who had just recited the Sufferings of a particular personality because that narrative fitted in with the first part of his sermon, although the Sufferings of another personality would have fitted better with community tradition on that particular date.

The control that the community exercises over the *majlis* pulpit is not a simple matter, and it can also be abused. Unscrupulous leaders can manipulate it on the basis of rumour or for personal benefit. This control can even be used to prevent reform within the community by censoring preachers who are critical of certain aspects of community practice. Nevertheless, it is a genuine community response. Such incidents as I have mentioned are very rare, but they serve to underline the seriousness with which the community takes the task of *majlis* preaching.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented some of the contemporary context in which *majlis* sermons must be understood. The community out of which they come is a small minority within a minority in the modern, religiously diverse city of Hyderabad. Although representing only a small percentage of the city's population, Hyderabad's Shîᶜas have a significance that is out of proportion to their size. They also have a complex and highly structured pattern of religious observances that includes many of the wider observances of the Muslim majority community while including other rituals that are distinctive.

The most common of these distinctive rituals is the *majlis* which marks many of the important events in the community's life. Juan Cole noted, in relation to the Shîᶜa of North India living under Mughal rule, the importance of, 'uniting public rituals' that could provide a framework for 'religious identity and social networks within a genuine religious community' (1989: 92). If the relative importance of these 'uniting rituals' can be determined by their popularity and frequency, then the *majlis* comes out as the single most important ritual for the Hyderabadi Shîᶜa today. Within the *majlis* itself the time allotted to the sermon (when it is a part of the proceedings) and the honour given to the preacher are indications of the central importance of *majlis* preaching to the community.

As well as demonstrating the frequency and widespread performance of Hyderabad's *majâlis*, this chapter has also described their diversity and the diversity of preachers who address these gatherings. Because *majâlis* are held across a range of different occasions and are participated in by the whole range of the Shîᶜî community, there is a great variety in the way that they are performed. Further, almost all sections of the community have access to the *majlis* pulpit, each preacher bringing a different perspective and emphasis. Nevertheless, there is a significant degree of community control over who is allowed to preach and what they may say from the pulpit. Both the historical and contemporary context of *majlis* preaching are important to bear in mind while reading the sermon texts that follow.

Part II

Sermons

This part of the study presents ten sermons delivered by different preachers in Hyderabad between 1997 and 2000. After the first sermon, which is given within the description of a full *majlis*, each is presented with a heading, introduction and annotations. The heading gives the name of the preacher, followed by the subject and the liturgical remembrance of especially the last part of the sermon. The date and place are also given, along with details of the series of which the sermon is a part, if applicable. The information in the introductions is taken from personal observation supplemented by interviews with the preachers concerned. The sermon texts themselves are divided into numbered paragraphs (these divisions are my own). Annotations have been kept to a minimum. A number of references requiring explanation occur frequently enough that I have given separate treatment of these in the glossary at the end of the study. Words or phrases included in this glossary are marked in the text, as in previous chapters, with an asterisk '*'.

The basic criterion that I used in selecting the ten sermon texts was that they should together make up a representative sample of contemporary *majlis* preaching in Hyderabad. In order to preserve as much as possible of the preached character of the sermons, I have included full texts of ten sermons rather than a larger number in a condensed or summarized form. A wide variety of preachers is included, as well as contexts in which their sermons were given. These texts also display a range of preaching styles and sermon content.

In choosing to represent the diversity of *majlis* preaching in Hyderabad, I have included a few preachers who do not address many *majâlis* in a given year and have missed out others who preach at far more gatherings. All of the men and women whose sermons are included, however, are widely accepted in the community as legitimate preachers, and their sermons can therefore be considered representative of its preaching tradition. Although I have checked the representative nature of the sample with members of the Shîᶜî community, the responsibility for the selection as well as for the translations themselves rests with me.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the sermon texts presented here are originally oral and 'live' material preached in a very different language (Urdu). Even those that lasted almost two hours were preached entirely without notes. Especially towards the end of the sermons, the atmosphere was often highly emotional. These texts must therefore be read and judged in a different way than

if the preacher had been able to edit and 'polish' his or her material for the purpose of publication. Sometimes when I checked my translations with preachers, they suggested changes to my text even while acknowledging that it was true to what they had spoken. I have resisted such suggestions, and I am grateful that the preachers have respected my desire to keep as close as possible to the original sermon.

There is a rich body of Qur'ânic, *ḥadîṯ* and narrative material from which preachers draw in their sermons, and only very rarely are references given to sources. I have provided references to the Qur'ân, where it has been cited, in parentheses within the text itself. Other short references, notes and explanations are given likewise in parentheses. The endnotes provide longer references, explanations and background information. Many narratives are re-told from the early history of Islam, especially those that concern events surrounding the Battle of Karbala. These narratives are generally taken from an oral body of material including previously preached sermons. For this reason, written sources for narratives from the early history of Islam have not generally been given.[1]

3 The description of a complete mourning gathering (including the text of Sermon 1)

The setting

In a little ally behind the Noor Khan Bazaar crossroads a number of men, barefoot and wearing black shirts, are entering a house. It is 25 past 7 and a Shîᶜî mourning gathering known as a *majlis* (pl. *majâlis*) is about to begin. For many years, the family of Dr Asad Ali Khan has been hosting a daily series of *majâlis* from 1 to 9 Muḥarram leading up to 10 Muḥarram, the fateful day known as ᶜÂshûrâ'* on which, in the year 680 CE, Syed Ḥusayn was martyred at the Battle of Karbala. This is the penultimate gathering in the series.

As the mourners who will participate in the *majlis* arrive, a young man stands at the gate of the house to welcome them, the nephew and representative of the host. The host himself or herself is known as the *dâᶜî*, a word that means literally 'caller' and is also used of Muslim missionaries. The *dâᶜî* or the *dâᶜî's* representative stands at the gate or door of the place where the *majlis* is to be held and may literally 'call' in passers-by from the street. During these days, *majâlis* are being held day and night, often in neighbouring houses, and it is believed that the more people who attend a *majlis*, the greater the blessing for the host and his or her household.

The person who will address the gathering is Dr Sadiq Naqvi. He is known as an established *ẕâkir* [*majlis* preacher]. The word *ẕâkir* comes from the Arabic word *ẕikr* meaning 'remembrance', 'recitation' or 'narration'. A *ẕâkir* (or *ẕâkira* – the feminine form) in this context refers to one who recites the narration of Karbala and the early history of the Shîᶜa, recollecting the memory for and on behalf of his or her community. Sadiq Naqvi has been preaching at *majâlis*, including this series, since 1956. From the hoarseness of his voice it is clear that he has been particularly busy over the past 7 days, preaching at as many as 5 or 6 gatherings per day.

As well as being a well-known local *ẕâkir*, Sadiq Naqvi is an academic historian, and references to history are a notable feature of his preaching. Although retired as a Reader in History at Hyderabad's Osmania University, he continues to teach, write and supervise research students. He has written more than a dozen books in Urdu and English, mostly on Deccani medieval history, but including collections of Urdu poetry. He edits a journal of Islamic Studies, *The Noor* [The Light],

which comes out once or twice a year. Partly because of his academic career he also has something of a role in representing the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community to the wider world. It is thus appropriate to look at this gathering in full as an example of the way in which a *majlis* is performed.

The gateway leads through a passage into a small shady courtyard, at one side of which stands an *ᶜâshûrkhâna*. This word means, literally, 'house of *ᶜÂshûrâ*'*, and signifies a building, hall, room or even corner of a room constructed or set apart for the commemoration of Muḥarram and especially the holding of *majâlis*. This particular *ᶜâshûrkhâna* is a rectangular hall, roughly 10 m by 25 m, open to the courtyard on one side while along the far wall, representations of the battle standards [*ᶜalams*] used at Karbala have been set up and decorated. The floor of the hall is covered with white sheets. A small adjoining room serves as another *ᶜâshûrkhâna* where special *ᶜalams* are kept. At one end of the hall stands a *minbar* [Islamic pulpit]. In this case the *minbar* is a construction of four wooden steps covered with black cloth and topped with two small *ᶜalams*. While in larger *ᶜâshûrkhânas* the *minbar* is specially constructed (with more or less steps), in many houses a simple chair over which a cloth has been draped serves the purpose.

Mourners who have arrived early sit with the *z̲âkir* on a wooden bed in the courtyard drinking tea provided by the host while a microphone and amplifier are set up. The public address system will relay the *majlis* to women in another room inside the house as well as amplifying the sound for those in the hall.

The elegies

A group of five men and boys is ushered into the courtyard. They enter the *ᶜâshûrkhâna* and sit cross-legged in the middle of the hall on a special black and white sheet. These are professional chanters of the special *majlis* elegy, the *mars̲iya*. They form one of many groups who move from one *majlis* to another, performing day and night, during this period. The principal *mars̲iya khwân* [chanter] sits in the centre of the group facing the microphone with his hand-written book of *mars̲iyas* placed in front of him on a black cushion embroidered with the name 'Ḥusayn'. His helpers, known as *bâzûdârs* [lit. 'arms'] or *jawâbîs* [lit. 'answerers'], sit around him ready to join the chanting for the fourth and sixth lines of each stanza. In this case the group is a family and includes an old man and two young boys. They recite only extracts of *mars̲iyas*, both older 'classics' from the 'golden age' of *marsiyas* in the nineteenth century as well as more modern and even contemporary pieces. *Marsiyas* in Hyderabad are almost always written and recited in Urdu. The standard *marsiya* recitation may be preceded by the recitation of another type of elegy known as a *salâm* [salutation]. The chanting of this latter poetical lamentation is known as *sôz* [lit. 'passionate grief'] and is chanted by a soloist while his companions hum a continuous bass note. *Sôz* uses a classical Indian melodic pattern known as a *râga* [tone pattern].

The principal *marsiya khwân* leans into the microphone to breathe the single word, '*fâtiḥa!*' [Ar. 'opening']. He is calling for the congregation to join him in 'opening' the *majlis* by reciting a certain formula. This recitation consists of

a triple benediction of the Prophet Muḥammad and his family, the first *sûra* of the Qur'ân (Sûra-e Fâtiḥa, the 'Opener'), followed by a further three benedictions. A *fâtiḥa* is often recited in this way to gain merit for a deceased person, especially if the *majlis* is being held in the commemoration of that person's death. In this case the name of the person or persons is mentioned. Once the *marṯiya* recitation has begun, the members of the congregation begin to enter the hall and sit on the floor, facing the chanters. Some take out handkerchiefs and weep in response to the poetry. Today being 8 Muḥarram, the personality traditionally remembered in the *marṯiya* as well as in the latter part of the sermon is ᶜAbbâs, the standard bearer of Ḥusayn. ᶜAbbâs was killed while attempting to fetch water for the thirsty children of Ḥusayn's camp (especially Sakîna*, Ḥusayn's young daughter), as they had been cut off from the nearby Euphrates river for three days.

The following is an excerpt from a *marṯiya* (of 197 stanzas) written by the famous North Indian poet, Mîr Anîs (1217/1802–1291/1874) and translated by David Matthews (no publishing details known). It is entitled *Jab Qat' kî Musafat-e Shab Âftâb nê* [When the Sun Cut Short the Night's Long Trail].

> The little girl, Sakina came and said:
> 'Where is my uncle (ᶜAbbâs)? Tell me, why this throng?
> Let me place my blessings on his head.
> May he be saved by God from harm and wrong.
> He takes the standard; may his fame be mine;
> For he is Ali's glory, Ali's sign.'
> 'Come, my dear,' Abbas smiled through his tears.
> 'You are thirsty and I did not stop to think.'
> Sakina answered: 'No, allay thy fears.
> Thou hast the standard now, but we must drink.
> Go, fill my water-skin. No other boon
> I crave from thee. Bring water. Bring it soon!'
> The celestial Lord Abbas with firm intent
> Strode out; the soldiers said their last farewell.
> The King of Both Worlds [i.e. Ḥusayn] left the women's tent,
> But Zaynab's* piercing shrieks he could not quell.
> His heart was pained; tears washed his eyes anew,
> As when a sunflower's face is washed with dew.
> That Gabriel sought protection from his Lord
> The son of Sa'd there faced his final hour
> Midst shieldless corpses scattered by the sword.
> As lions spring to gain the river banks,
> Abbas swam through the waves of serried ranks…

Once the *marṯiya* chanting is finished, the chanters leave the *majlis* to recite elsewhere while the *ẕâkir*, who has been sitting next to the pulpit, climbs it and takes his seat on the last-but-one step. The top step is traditionally reserved for the last Imâm, the *Mahdî**, who will return one day from his occultation to rule

the world in righteousness. The microphone is moved and adjusted. At some point before the actual sermon begins, the *ẕâkir* or someone else may read out notices of forthcoming *majâlis*. Sadiq Naqvi is dressed in a *sherwânî* [a knee-length, buttoned-up, black coat] with white *payjâma* [loose, white cotton trousers] and a lambswool *tôpî* [hat]. Other people enter the hall from the courtyard to sit on the floor as the sermon begins. There are about 50 men and boys in the hall and another 15 women in a separate room.

The sermon

The *ẕâkir* begins his sermon by repeating the word, '*fâtiḥa*' and then recites the *khuṭba* (also known as the *salâm*, but to be distinguished from the elegy of the same name), a short piece of rhyming Arabic in praise of God, the Prophet and the Prophet's family. The Arabic word *khuṭba* simply means 'sermon' or 'address' and is a common term used for sermons preached at the Friday congregational Prayers. In Urdu, however, the term has acquired the additional meaning of 'introduction' or 'foreword', and it is in this sense that it is used here, as a prologue to the sermon proper. The *khuṭba* is memorized, normally from one of a number of standard written texts. Different preachers use different texts, and the *khuṭba* can sometimes be very long and elaborate. In this case, it is quite short, and the meaning is as follows:

> I seek refuge in God from the accursed satan.
> In the name of God the Benificent, the Merciful.
> Blessings and peace be unto God,
> And unto the Seal of the Prophets, Best of the Prophets and Apostles, the Best of Creation, Muḥammad, father of Qâsim,
> And the People of the House [*Ahl-e Bayt*], the Pure and Good, the Sinless Ones.

After reciting the whole *khuṭba*, the preacher repeats its first two lines as a preface to the formal recitation of the Arabic text upon which the first part of the sermon will be based. This text is usually an *âyat* from the Qur'ân itself, although it may also be from a work of one of the Shî'î Imâms, such as the collection of sermons, letters and sayings of 'Alî known as *Naḥj al-Balâgha* [The Peak of Elegance]. The transition to the body of the sermon itself is usually made with the call, '*ṣalawât!*' This word is the plural of the Arabic *ṣalât* [in other settings meaning the ritual Prayers, and here meaning 'benediction'] which in this context calls for the congregation to recite blessings on the Prophet and his family. In response to the call the congregation cries out the Arabic phrase, '*Allâhumma ṣalla 'alâ Muḥammad wa-Âla Muḥammad!*' [O God! Bless Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad!]. This call and response occurs frequently in *majâlis*, especially during sermons, mostly initiated by the preacher himself or herself to give a pause in the speech, but sometimes also by a member of the congregation. It can mark the end of a point that the preacher has made or, as in this sermon, the late entrance

of another prominent *ẕâkir* who takes his place on the floor in a position of honour close to the pulpit.

Especially in larger, public *majâlis*, another congregational call and response is common. This is *Naᶜra-e Ḥaydarî!* [lit. 'the 'Ḥyder (i.e. ᶜAlî) Cry!']. It is normally led by a member of the congregation who suddenly shouts out, '*Naᶜrê Ḥaydarî!*' or a variant to which everyone responds, '*Yâ ᶜAlî!*' [O ᶜAlî!]. Two particular men are well known in the community for their role as 'cry-leaders' [sing. *naᶜra zan*]. At most important public *majâlis*, one or both of these men station themselves directly in front of the pulpit and take it upon themselves to lead the congregation in these slogans, waving their arms and even sometimes standing while they do so.

The first portion of a *majlis* sermon is normally composed of a general discourse followed by or integrated with an exposition of the Virtues [*faẕâ'il*] of one of the *Ahl-e Bayt*. In this case, the general discourse (paras 1–3) consists of a brief discussion of a Qur'ânic text (Sûra-e Shûrâ 42.23). An illustration from the world of science (para 4) makes a bridge to the *faẕâ'il*, in this case an exposition of the Virtues of ᶜAlî (paras 4–6). A short section (para 7) recaps the argument of the sermon so far and makes a bridge to the recitation of the Sufferings [*maṣâ'ib*] (paras 8–13).

For each of the sermons in this series (S21–28), Sadiq Naqvi has taken as his opening text an *âyat* from the Qur'ân, Sûra-e Nisâ' (4.59), 'O ye who believe! Obey God and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority from among you.' After reciting the text and calling for *ṣalawât*, the preacher then switches into Urdu to give a translation of the *âyat*. It is then that he begins his sermon proper:

1 Yesterday we were considering the *âyat* in the Qur'ân in which the Prophet is commanded to say to the Muslims, 'I demand not of you any recompense for it (the toils of the apostleship) save the love of my relatives' (Sûra-e Shûrâ 42.23). This is an *âyat* that every child knows, but even if only this *âyat* is taken hold of, it will enable a person to reach God. The Prophet only asked for this one thing, and he asked for it as recompense for his work. The Prophet asked the Muslims to love his own family, but the Prophet did not ask anything for himself.

2 This is a very important point because in today's *majlis* we are concluding the series.[1] The Prophet himself all through his life gave such love to his family. It was for this reason that he asked the same as recompense from the Muslims. I am simply asking, 'Why was it that what was obviously the most important thing for the Prophet, because it was the one thing that he requested, was not the most important thing for the Muslims?' (You Muslims:) the Prophet demanded love from you. He did not request anything from you that you had made; only that which God had given you did he ask for. He demanded that you should give consideration to the obligations of his family.

3 Some people have disputed what the Prophet said and made it a complicated issue, but actually the only word from this *âyat* which you can misinterpret is the word *aqribâ* [relatives].[2] However, as we considered yesterday, this *âyat* clearly refers to the natural family of the Prophet. These words are not bound by time or place. What they mean is that the Prophet was saying, 'You should give

consideration to the obligations of my family when they preach from the *minbar* [pulpit].' This obligation is in the Qur'ân, the word of God. As no time and place are specifically mentioned in this command, we can say that it is universally relevant.

4 I am not a scientist, but I want to set before you an example from science. If a piece of cobalt, nickel or iron is placed in a magnetic field, then it starts to behave in the same way as the magnet. It does not become the magnet, it simply behaves in a similar way. If you put a piece of wood in front of the magnet, it will not respond. Only these three elements will respond, and they will attract things. When we turn from science to history we can consider the three principal followers of ᶜAlî: Salmân Fârisî*, Abû Ẕarr* and Miqdâd*. Of these, the closest to ᶜAlî was Salmân. He was able to do extraordinary things such as give commands to animals as well as human beings. The reason for his miraculous powers was that he was close to ᶜAlî. He had no power of his own. Among human beings, the highest place belongs to Salmân. He said, 'We are not the *Ahl-e Bayt*, but we are from the *Ahl-e Bayt*.'

5 Salmân received all his education from ᶜAlî. When he was sent by ᶜAlî to the Mada'in (the old Persian city of Ctesiphon on the Tigris, now in Iraq) he did not choose to go to a palace there, but to the mosque. When Salmân was about to die, he told his family and friends that they should wash his body and cover him with a shroud, but they should not pray the final prayers because ᶜAlî had told him that he himself would come and say those prayers. The people were amazed: how could ᶜAlî come so far in such a short time (i.e. from Madina in Arabia)? When they asked Salmân about this, he simply told them, 'My master has promised me.' And indeed, ᶜAlî came. How could ᶜAlî have reached Mada'in from Madina when the distance was so great? The reason was that ᶜAlî was Abû Ṭurâb which means that he was 'Lord of the Earth' [Ar. 'father of the dust/earth'].[3] Many *ẕâkirs* [*majlis* preachers] have said this; I am not saying anything new to you.

6 When ᶜAlî reached Salmân's corpse, it rose up to greet ᶜAlî out of respect. If ᶜAlî had even told it to come back to life it would have done so. But ᶜAlî did not do so. Instead, he said, 'Go back!' If ᶜAlî told a spirit to go it would go; if he told it to come back it would come back. The spirit is the command [*amr*], and ᶜAlî is the 'Master of the Command'[*Ṣâḥib-e Amr*]. But Salmân was only a servant of ᶜAlî. He was not a member of the *Ahl-e Bayt* itself. It was the power of the honour and respect that he felt for ᶜAlî that made him rise up and greet his master, even though he was dead. Like iron within the field of a magnet, he was affected. Once you are within that field, anything is possible, anything in the universe! That is the power of ᶜAlî. To the one who wanted knowledge or power, ᶜAlî gave it but only if that person gave him honour. With honour, ᶜAlî would recognize the person; if they did not give him honour, their request was useless.

7 Enough! This *majlis* is finished. This was a *ta'wîl* [interpretive] series of *majâlis*.[4] The concluding sentence is this: belief is love, and love for ᶜAlî. But ᶜAlî is not 1; ᶜAlî is 12.[5] The Prophet spoke about them as his family on the plain of the *Mubâhala*.* He spoke of them under the 'Cloak* of Purity'. He spoke of them from the *minbar* on the plain (i.e. at Ghadir-e Khumm*). This is his family. In the

obligations of his family no one was there who was not Sinless. They were all on this level. ᶜAlî never demanded anything; he always only gave. He never sought anything from God. God gave things to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham . . . There was only one thing that ᶜAlî ever asked from God, and that was someone to help his son on the field of Karbala. The name of that request was ᶜAbbâs . . .[6]

(The general discourse and the *faẕâ'il* have now finished, and the preacher has made his transition to the *maṣâ'ib*. There is a palpable change in the atmosphere of the *majlis*. Handkerchiefs are brought out of pockets and the congregation begins to moan and weep.)

8 Who was ᶜAbbâs? He was Ḥusayn's standard-bearer. While he was with the party at Karbala, no-one dared approach the tents of Ḥusayn's family. ᶜUmar ibn-e Saᶜd* wrote to Yazîd* that there was a 'lion' protecting the tents of Ḥusayn's camp. This was ᶜAbbâs. Such was the bravery of ᶜAbbâs that no soldier dared approach him. Ḥusayn used to call him 'Shield of the People of the Pen'. When Zaynab saw ᶜAbbâs, she said to him, 'I want you to show me your hands and arms.' 'Why?' ᶜAbbâs asked. Zaynab replied, 'I have seen your lord Ḥusayn kissing them. He explained to me that these arms would be cut off. I think now the time has come about which your lord spoke.'

9 ᶜAbbâs did not fight in the Battle of Karbala itself. Ḥusayn had not given him permission. The only fighting that he did was against the soldiers guarding the way to the Euphrates river. He was a well-trained soldier who could have fought any of the champions of Yazîd's army as Ḥusayn himself did.

10 When ᶜAbbâs said goodbye to Sakîna, she said to him, 'Why are you taking a sword when all you are going to do is to fill a water-skin from the river?' So he took the sword from his belt and threw it on the ground, taking only a javelin with him. The Traditions say that ᶜAbbâs had not eaten or drunk for three days, and that he had been burying the corpses of the children. There were 8,000 enemy soldiers, and he fought a path through them to the river.[7]

11 ᶜAbbâs put the skin in the water and paced to and fro on the river bank. People today ask, 'Why did he walk back and forth on the river bank?' They don't understand today about water-skins: these need to be soaked for some time before they can carry any water. But such was the terror that he had inspired in the enemy soldiers that nobody came near him even while he soaked a water-skin that had been dry for three days. Even when he started on the return journey to the camp, no one dared to actually approach him with a sword. All they could do was to shoot arrows and throw stones from a distance.

12 After wounding him with arrows and stones, the soldiers came to him in a group in order to fight him. Someone from behind cut off his arm at the shoulder. So with his other arm, he took the javelin, jumped from his horse and started fighting. Another soldier, again from behind, cut off his other arm. While he had his arms, no one dared to approach him, but now he was alone, his horse had been taken and he was without his arms. Another archer shot an arrow at the water-skin and the precious water poured out. Now the enemy soldiers came and taunted him saying, 'ᶜAbbâs! Where are those great arms of yours?'

13 When ᶜAbbâs was on the point of death he cried out (to Ḥusayn), 'My Lord! Receive the last greetings from ᶜAbbâs!' When Ḥusayn heard these words, he cried out, 'ᶜAbbâs! Your death has broken my waist [*kamr*]…'

The flagellation

As the preacher's voice fades away into the weeping of the congregation, he looks towards a group of about twenty men and boys who have entered quietly towards the end of the sermon and says the words, '*Mâtam-e Ḥusayn!*' [mourning for Ḥusayn]. Especially during the last few days before 10 Muḥarram, an association of men and boys known as a *mâtamî gurûh* is often invited by a *majlis* host to perform *mâtam* to the rhythm of a special chant known as *nawḥa*. A *nawḥa* is an elegy that mourns the martyrs of Karbala in a more vigorous and rhythmical style than the *marisya* that preceded the sermon (see Pinault, 1997: 246–9). This particular *mâtamî gurûh* now moves to the front to take up its position, chanting, 'ᶜAbbâs! ᶜAbbâs!' The men and boys form squares of eight, facing inwards. A young man takes the microphone and begins to chant one of the special *nawḥa* elegies that are a trademark of each group. As he does so, the members of the group fling their arms in the air and begin to beat their breasts with a heavy rhythmical thud.

The following is an excerpt from the *nawḥa* chant, *Yâ ᶜAlî Duhâ'î hay* [O ᶜAlî! This is the Cry for Help/Cry against Injustice] by Janab Ali Rafi, translated from the original Urdu by David Pinault (1997: 248):

> This sound of mourning [*mâtam*] is a message of wakefulness;
> For this reason flows the lifeblood in our veins.
> Our life consists of lamentation for the king (i.e. Ḥusayn)…
> In this sorrow there will arise a people who will beat their breasts.

In the first few days of Muḥarram if an organized group is not present (it is not always directed by a *gurûh*), or otherwise if *mâtam* is not being performed, the sermon generally finishes with a series of short supplications normally spoken in Urdu. In earlier *majâlis* of the series, Sadiq Naqvi has prayed that God would take away the worries of those who are upset, heal those who are sick, give work for the unemployed, an increase of love for the *Ahl-e Bayt* in the hearts of the believers, and that if anyone had a request in his heart, God would fulfil it. After each short petition, the congregation, standing with hands palm-up in the traditional attitude of supplication, murmurs, '*Allâh amîn*!' ['Amen, O God!']. As the *mâtam* proceeds, the preacher moves into the courtyard to be greeted by members of the congregation. Some take his hands into their own. If he is a prominent man or a religious scholar, they may bow and kiss his hand or otherwise ask for a blessing from him.

After the *mâtam* is finished, or directly after the supplications if there is no *mâtam*, the last ritual of the *majlis* is performed: the *ziyârat* [visitation of the graves of the Imâms]. This liturgy is also recited after the ritual Prayers. Everybody stands, mostly with the left hand behind the back and the right hand

held pointing to the front, facing the direction of *al-Baqîᶜ* cemetery in Madina where the Prophet's daughter Fâṭima, and several of the Imâms are buried. The direction is slightly to the right of the *Qibla* [the direction of the *Kaᶜba* in Mecca which must be faced during the ritual Prayers]. One man, usually an elder, recites a piece of Arabic which, like the *khuṭba*, can vary within a basic format. I quote here from the locally published translation of a common *ziyârat*.[8]

> Peace be upon thee, O Aabaa Abdilla (pet name for Imam Husain).
> Peace be upon thee, O son of the Holy Prophet, (the Holy Prophet always called his grandson Imam Husain his son).
> Peace be upon thee, O son of Hazrat Ali, the Commander of the faithful.
> Peace be upon thee, O son of Janab-e-Fatima Zahra,* Chief of the women of the world.
> Peace be upon thee and the mercy of God and His bounties.
> (facing a little further to the right than above)[9]
> Peace be upon thee, O one who lies far away from his domain.
> Peace be upon thee, O Ruler, O Ali son of Moosur, Reza* and the mercy of God and His bounties.
> (facing straight towards *Qibla*)[10]
> Peace be upon thee, O king of the times.
> Peace be upon thee, O merciful leader.
> Peace be upon thee, O companion of the Quran.
> Peace be upon thee and the mercy of God and His bounties.

After the *ziyârat*, several members of the congregation walk along the row of *ᶜalams* [battle standard representations] touching each in turn to bring a blessing on themselves. On the way out, the same young man who welcomed the guests stands at the door, this time handing out pieces of freshly baked flat bread. This is a form of *tabarruk* [blessed gift] which is always given out freely at a *majlis*.[11] Sometimes the *tabarruk* is given before the *majlis* begins although normally, as here, it is distributed afterwards as the guests leave. Depending on the resources of the host and the occasion of the *majlis*, *tabarruk* may consist of anything from a glass of iced *sherbat* drink to a full meal of chicken curry with rice, desert and tea. I have also, at times, been offered an empty tumbler, or a small glass dish filled with snacks to take home with me. Where *tabarruk* is offered at the end of a *majlis*, a number of children may arrive towards the end of the sermon in anticipation. Nobody seems to mind, however. On the contrary, as we have noted, the greater the number of people who attend a *majlis*, the greater the blessing for the host. The whole event has taken a little over an hour.

4 Sermons by male 'lay' preachers

Sermon 2: 'a son dies in his father's arms'

Preached by Mirza Muhammad Ashfaq on 6 Muḥarram 1420/23 April 1999, at the residence of Ali Aqa Sahib, Hussaini Koti and commemorating the martyrdom of Haẕrat ᶜAlî Akbar.

Introduction

Mirza Muhammad Ashfaq is professor of Persian at the Shîᶜa College of Lucknow (affiliated to Lucknow University) in North India. Although from Lucknow, he is well known in Hyderabad as he has been coming every year as a visiting preacher during the first part of the Muḥarram season since 1973. He comes from a distinguished Lucknawi Shîᶜî family, began preaching in 1957 and was in his fifties when this sermon was preached.

In each Shîᶜî neighbourhood of Hyderabad the first nine days of Muḥarram are marked by 'rounds' of mourning gatherings known as *dawrê kî majâlis*. Each day one (or more) of the *majâlis* in the 'round' is a special [*makhsûs*] gathering after which special food is served. The following sermon was preached at one such gathering and began at about ten o'clock in the morning. The sermon itself was quite short as this meeting, plus the eating of a full meal of chicken curry, rice, vegetables and dessert had to be squeezed in between other *majâlis*. About 300 men, plus many women and children, were in attendance so that the cost to the host must have been considerable. The gathering was held in the courtyard of a private residence which could not accommodate all of the congregation. Many people, therefore, participated standing outside and listening to the sermon broadcast from loudspeakers. A *mâtamî gurûh* [men's mourning association] had been invited to lead the performance of *mâtam* and moved into position as soon as the sermon was over.

The sermon began with two sentences of a memorized Arabic *khuṭba* introduction but, unlike Muhammad Ashfaq's longer sermons which include a general discourse, the *khuṭba* was not followed by an *âyat* from the Qur'ân. Before this *majlis*, the congregation had attended a number of other gatherings, so that the mourning of those others continued and reached a climax at this *majlis*. People entered the

courtyard already in a state of grief, and the moment the *marṯiya* recitation started they began again to weep. By the time the preacher took his place sitting on the *minbar*-chair, the atmosphere was intense. Many of the congregation, including the preacher, were sobbing and wailing loudly. Some were rocking back and forth as they sat cross-legged with their faces buried in handkerchiefs. Others struck their foreheads with their hands or even beat their heads against a wall or pillar.

The sermon text

1 (Arabic:) Peace be upon the Servant of God (Muḥammad)! Peace be upon the Son of the Prophet of God! (Ḥusayn, often referred to as the Prophet's son)

2 (Urdu:) Peace be upon those believers who mourn the helplessness of Ḥusayn! Peace be upon those who mourn his aloneness! For whose *mâtam* [ritual mourning] has this congregation assembled? Whose Sufferings are we remembering today? May God prosper your homes! May God keep safe your young people! At Karbala the earnings [*kamâ'î*] of Layla* were destroyed (i.e. ᶜAlî Akbar, whose mother was Layla). Today is 6 Muḥarram. O youth of the community [*qawm*], perform *mâtam* for ᶜAlî Akbar! Salute ᶜAlî Akbar! Ḥusayn has lost his son in the prime of the boy's youth![1]

3 The boy's mother was waiting at the entrance of the camp, looking keenly at her husband. Layla knew that if anything untoward were to happen to her son, it would be reflected in his father's face. Suddenly Ḥusayn's face changed and she cried out, 'Is it well with my son?' Ḥusayn replied, 'Layla, ᶜAlî Akbar is alive, but a famous warrior has come to confront my son. I am worried because my son is so weak. He has not drunk any water for three days, and his adversary has eaten and drunk well. I have heard my grandfather saying that a mother's prayer [*duᶜâ*] for her son is always accepted [*mustajâb*]. Go now back into the tent and pray for your son!' Can you imagine the scene? The 'Imâm of the Time' [*Imâm-e Waqt*][2] is asking his wife to pray for their son! Layla went back into the tent and said to the other women there, 'Umm-e Kulṯûm* and you others, come! I am going to pray for ᶜAlî Akbar'. She began to pray, raising her hands and supplicating, 'O You who made Jacob and Joseph meet again![3] Arrange a meeting for my husband and his son!'

4 The prayer of this mother was accepted, and history relates that ᶜAlî Akbar did return from the battle once to stand by the side of his father. He asked his father in a soft voice, 'Father, did you see how I fought?' His father replied, 'Yes my dear child, you kept fighting valiantly as band after band of the oppressive soldiers came at you. But this is not surprising; you are the grandson of the "Lion of God" [*Asad Allâh*, a title for ᶜAlî]!' ᶜAlî Akbar replied immediately, 'That is what I was saying, father, but the fight would have been more memorable had I been able to take even a sip of water to quench my extreme thirst!' Indeed, we cannot even begin to describe the thirst of ᶜAlî Akbar! But Ḥusayn said to him, 'The Holy Prophet will surely quench your thirst at the Fountain of *Kawṯar*.'[4]

5 (The preacher looks at his watch.) This *majlis* is already finished. Now, ᶜAlî Akbar went back to the battlefield and, O mourners, do not expect him to return

this time! This will be the last time that he goes forth! A cry will come, 'O father!' So Ḥusayn was waiting again and looking towards the battlefield. Suddenly his face changed so much that Layla was forced to cry out, 'What's the matter? What has happened to my son?' Ḥusayn replied, 'O Layla! Your Lord has accepted our sacrifice. Your son is calling me for the last time.' It seems that Ḥusayn was waiting for this call, so when he heard the cry, 'O father! My last salutations to you!' he rushed into the battlefield crying, 'Where is my beloved? Where is ᶜAlî Akbar? Where is the one who is a very part of me?'[5] Ḥusayn went on crying, 'O ᶜAlî! O ᶜAlî!' He was searching for him just as Jacob searched for his son, Joseph.

6 Ḥusayn went on and on. When he finally found his son, the boy was unconscious and soaked in blood. Ḥusayn shook his shoulder crying, 'O son of ᶜAlî! O son of ᶜAlî! O son of ᶜAlî!' But there was no response. So Ḥusayn put his cheek onto his son's and said, 'Get up, my son! Look, your father has come to you!' ᶜAlî Akbar opened his eyes and looked at his father, and his father could see that his son was trying desperately to hide one particular wound. When Ḥusayn looked, the sight was terrible to behold: the broken point of a spear had pierced the boy's heart. Ḥusayn turned his son over onto his back and, rolling up his sleeves and kneeling on the ground, he wrenched out the spear with the cry of '*Yâ ᶜAlî!*' A fountain of blood spurted out, and the martyrdom of ᶜAlî Akbar… (the preacher cannot be heard over the sound of weeping for some time)…O mourners! The earnings of Layla have been looted!

Sermon 3: 'a miraculous healing'

Preached by Syed Ziya Abbas Naqvi on 8 Muḥarram 1420/25 April 1999 at the residence of Abu Talib Sahib, Darushifa and commemorating the martyrdom of Haẕrat ᶜAbbâs*.

Introduction

The *majlis* of which this sermon is a part lasted 12 minutes, and the sermon itself 7 minutes. As with the previous text, this sermon was preached as part of a *dawra* [round] of gatherings. This particular *dawra* comprised 53 homes in Darushifa, Balsetty Kheit and Noor Khan Bazaar. It began between 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning, included the dawn Prayers [*fajr kî namâz*] and continued until 2 o'clock in the afternoon when the final home hosted the mourners for lunch. About 70 people began the *dawra*, a congregation which swelled to more than 200 by the time this *majlis* took place at a quarter past seven. Three *ẕâkirs*, one of whom was in his early teens, attended all 53 *majâlis* in the round and took it in turns to preach very short sermons.

Ziya Abbas Naqvi calls himself a 'self-made' *ẕâkir*. He does not come from a family of scholars or *ẕâkirs*, and is the only one from his immediate family who preaches. He has been involved in the performance of *majâlis* in a formal way since 1978 when he helped to found a *mâtamî gurûh* [men's mourning association], the *Anjumân-e ᶜAwn awr Muḥammad* [The Association for ᶜAwn* and Muḥammad].

In 1981, he began to preach, simply out of his own 'passion' [*shawq*], as he puts it. Rather than older or established preachers, it was his friends in the association who encouraged him in his preaching, and he now has an affiliation with the *gurûh* as 'their' *z̲âkir*.

Although he has had no formal religious education, Ziya Abbas Naqvi spent several years, while he was unemployed, in private study. Since getting married, having children and finding employment (since 1995) as a clerk at the local Municipal Corporation of Hyderabad, he has had less time for his studies. The preacher told me that he does not prepare in advance what he is going to say at a particular *majlis*. He simply climbs the pulpit, looks at the congregation and decides on the basis of how the *majlis* is going what kind of sermon to preach. The incident related in this sermon was borrowed from another sermon that Ziya Abbas Naqvi had heard previously.

The sermon text

1 Today is 8 Muḥarram. In every *ᶜâshûrkhâna* this is a special day for *mâtam* and the *mâtam* today is done with a passion for ᶜAbbâs. Therefore the ones who do *mâtam* today do it with a feeling of great fervour. My arms are with me (the preacher here shows his arms). I am going to do *mâtam* with these arms for the one who lost his arms (i.e. ᶜAbbâs). My arms are still with me, so I have to do *mâtam* with great fervour. Listen to me! Today you usually hear about certain people (i.e. those who lived in the time of Ḥusayn or the Imâms) but this day you will hear the account of a man who was a great believer [*mu'min*] and whose body was scarred by the force of so much *mâtam*. He was a witness to ᶜAbbâs. He was always in the front of the mourners with great zeal for the mourning during these days of Muḥarram.

2 However, one year he lost his feet and became disabled. It was Muḥarram, he was sleeping and the time came for a *majlis* to begin at his neighbour's house. He felt terrible that he was not in a position to be able to do *mâtam*. He said, 'I cannot go because I do not have any feet.' Then 8 Muḥarram came. He was very much upset that he could not walk to a *majlis*, so he told his sons, 'Carry me in and put me down near the pulpit so that I can participate in the *mâtam* for ᶜAbbâs.' So his sons took him and placed him there, and even though he could not stand, they supported him while he sat through the *majlis*. When the *z̲âkir* had finished narrating the *maṣâ'ib* of ᶜAbbâs, the *mâtamdârs* [those performing *mâtam*] stood up and began to perform the *mâtam* for ᶜAbbâs. This man also got up and also performed the *mâtam*. Afterwards, someone asked him, 'How were you able to get up and do this?'

3 The man replied, 'If you can listen, then listen! When everyone got up and was mourning, suddenly a thought came into my heart and I said, "O ᶜAbbâs! If I were able to do so, I would be standing with these people performing *mâtam*. I would be doing this for you. But alas! I don't have my feet, and that is why I am only sitting." After saying this, I looked and saw a horseman coming towards me, and he said to me, "Get up, my dear lion,[6] get up!" I replied, "I do not have any

feet, how can I get up?" But the man said to me, "I am ordering you to get up, so get up!" So I said to him, "With your words, I feel that there is an energy coming into my feet, but I still do not have the confidence to stand. You have given me some favour [*karam*] by talking to me. Can you give me just a little more and reach out your arm and help me up?" The man replied, "O my lion! This is not possible for me!" I asked him, "Why is it not possible?" He replied, "These arms were once pillows for Sakîna*, but cruel people have cut them off." '

4 This is actually the *maṣâ'ib* of ᶜAbbâs, who helped a believer to get up onto his own feet. Did you think that this was an ordinary sentence? This was ᶜAbbâs who lost his arms and of whom Fâṭima* said that this was the greatest suffering [*azîm musîbat*]. Fâṭima said, 'Whenever you recite the *masâ'ib* of ᶜAbbâs, you must also recite this, the greatest suffering. This martyr who came from above with arms. Alas! My son, ᶜAbbâs, has no arms on his body!' When he had no arms, someone attacked him and he fell to the ground. He cried out, 'Master, receive my last greetings!' When Ḥusayn heard these words, he mustered all his strength and went to mourn for him: 'ᶜAbbâs! ᶜAbbâs! You have died, and my waist is broken . . .'

Sermon 4: 'Hindus commemorate the death of Ḥusayn'

Preached by Syed Naqi Mehdi on 9 Muḥarram 1420/26 April 1999 at the residence of Dr Sudarshan Das, Dabeerpura and commemorating the martyrdom of ᶜAlî Aṣghar*.

Introduction

The following sermon was preached in the context of a mourning gathering organized by a Hindu primarily for a non-Shîᶜa congregation. As a result, the language used is mostly English. The gathering is an annual one, organized by Dr E. Sudarshan Das, a local community leader and political activist in the Dabeerpura area (see Pinault, 1992: 161). Sudarshan Das is a devotee of Fâṭima*, the daughter of the Prophet and mother of Ḥusayn, and each year he invites several non-Shîᶜî politicians and other community leaders to attend his *majlis*, addressed by a Shîᶜî *zâkir*, in order that they may gain a better understanding of the meaning of Muḥarram and the Battle of Karbala. For many years the *majlis* was conducted in Urdu, but it proved hard for Telugu and English-speaking Hindus to understand the sermons.

A group of about 20 Shîᶜî men and boys made up a core of the congregation, clearly aware that they were 'performing' a religious ritual in the presence of outsiders, but nevertheless participating as they would in any other *majlis*: calling out blessings on the Prophet and his family, weeping and performing *mâtam*. Another group of Shîᶜî young men from a *gurûh* did not sit in the main gathering, but waited in the margins for the sermon to finish and for their role in the performance of *mâtam* to begin. Among the others in the congregation were: one Member of

(the national) Parliament, two current Members of the (state of Andhra Pradesh) Legislative Assembly (MLAs) and a two other ex-MLAs. All of these politicians were Hindus. Present also were some prominent Sunnî Muslim leaders, including two Sunnî members of the Andhra Pradesh State Waqf Board who were standing a little distance away.[7] The retinue of these visitors included various attendants and bodyguards, some armed with machine guns, who were also part of the gathering.

Syed Naqi Mehdi is a Shîʿî community leader known for his work with the Shîʿî charitable organization, the 'Imam-e-Zamana Mission'. He is a businessman and also heavily involved in an honorary capacity with various non-governmental organizations. He has been reciting at *majâlis* since 1986, and speaks at around 150 gatherings during the mourning season. Of these 150 sermons, 3 or 4 sermons are given in English. In the following text, I have transcribed the English parts of the sermon as they were spoken by the preacher.

The sermon text

1 (Urdu:) 'Court of Ḥusayn!' [*Aîwân-e Ḥusayn!*][8] You know that during these days many people in this area are going about mourning, wearing black clothes and walking barefoot. What is their purpose in doing this? In this particular gathering, for the benefit of those friends who do not know, I generally speak mostly in English in this sermon, but for those who do not understand much English, I will be summarizing it from time to time in Urdu.

2 (English:) The incident of Karbala took place nearly 1,400 years ago, 10 October 680 is the corresponding date of 10 Muḥarram 61 *Hijrî*. Karbala is a place in the south of Iraq. Karbala was originally known as Ninawa. After the 10 Muḥarram incident, it became Karbala which is distortion of *karb ô balâ*'. *Karb* is *dard* (Urdu) – pain, and *balâ*' is the *taklîf* [Urdu, 'hardship'] that took place. So *karb ô balâ*' is that. Some people are coming…

(At this point another politician comes in, accompanied by his armed bodyguard and other attendants, and the sermon is interrupted by the call from a member of the congregation for blessings [*ṣalawât*] on the Prophet and his family.)

3 (English:) So Ninawa after the 10 Muḥarram 61 *Hijrî* became *Karbalâ*'. Karbala, though it was one day incident, has a background which dates back to the early days of Prophet Muḥammad, in fact, even earlier than that. Karbala is the symbolism, is the real call of the forces of righteous against the forces of evil.

4 (Urdu:) Those who were not of the truth, who were not on the true path explained to the people of Karbala, 'To give your life for the truth in reality is foolish. We are not going to do this.'

5 (English:) You know, they were afraid to give their life for a cause. Karbala was a cause of saving the religion, not a fight for the state. Karbala was not a fight for the land. And to prove this, the moment Ḥusayn arrived in Ninawa, he bought the whole of the area which he had under his eyes and his sights, and he knew that he is going to live in this place, he is going to fight in this place, he is going to get martyred in this place. He bought the whole land (repeated in Urdu). Then he made it as a *waqf* property [religious endowment]. *Waqf* in the name of Allah.

Islam is categorical about it: that you cannot pray in anybody's house or anybody's land; you cannot live on anybody's property or anybody's land, you cannot use anybody's property or land without the permission of the person whose land or property it is.

6 (Urdu:) On land which is not your own and on which you do not have permission, your ritual Prayers are false [*bâtil*], food is illegal [*ḥarâm*]. Whose land was this? Whose property was it? We cannot do anything until we have the permission of the owner.[9]

7 (English:) So the best thing that he did was to buy the land and *waqf* it in the name of Allah. That became Allah's property. So the people who are now saying that Ḥusayn's war was for the land or for a war for the caliphate, is defied by this very action of Ḥusayn. He has shown that, 'I am fighting, I am living, I am going to get martyred on the land of Allah, not on anybody else's land. Not on the land ruled by the *khalîfa* of Syria or Iraq, not on the land governed by the governor of Iraq, but on the land which is that of Allah.' That is his *jihâd* [religious war/struggle]. He has invited his enemy to come and fight with him on Allah's land. He did not go on enemy's land to fight him there. (This paragraph is summarized in Urdu.)

8 (English:) Look at the two sides: 72 on one side, and an estimated between 1.5 *lakhs* and three *lakhs* on the other side (i.e. between 150,000 and 300,000). The 72 included one who was 82 years old who could not hold his sword so it was tied to his hand. He could not sit properly on his animal; his back was tied with a wood piece.[10] And a 6 month-old baby (ᶜAlî Aṣghar*). Yes, you raise your eyebrows. Six month-old baby. These both were included in the 72 which fought with Ḥusayn in Karbala saving Islam and the righteousness.

9 (In Urdu, the last paragraph summarized, plus:) All of these soldiers were saying, 'We are going to take revenge on Ḥusayn for what ᶜAlî has done.'

10 (English:) ᶜAlî had fought many a battle for Islam and won them all. In these battles, many of his opponents were killed. The descendants of these opponents wanted to take revenge on Ḥusayn. This is history.

11 (Urdu:) This is history. I am not indulging in polemic [*munâzara*].

12 (English:) And what a battle it was! In a matter of a few hours, 36 were martyred. Then came the turn of the family of ᶜAlî. Ḥusayn called his 18-year-old son, ᶜAlî Akbar*. A father is getting his 18-year-old son ready to go and face the enemy, and this son of Ḥusayn resembled the Prophet in every way. So whenever Ḥusayn wanted to see his grandfather's face, or to hear his grandfather's voice or to smell his grandfather's fragrance, he would call ᶜAlî Akbar and ask him to come and sit in front of him. He used to talk with him, he used to see his face for hours and hours and hours. That beloved son is being sent out. ᶜAlî Akbar faced the enemy, and his end came with a broken lance in his liver. He fell down from his horse, called his father, and it is one of those very rare moments in human life, when a father is sitting with a dying son. And that dying son, with bleeding wounds on his body is making his last wishes to his father. (Repeated in Urdu.)

13 (English:) Ḥusayn took out the lance from his son's chest; he showed every sort of bravery, but then Ḥusayn lost his sights (i.e. became broken in his spirit). When Ḥusayn got up, he was not a straight-standing man, but his body

was bent. In a matter of those few minutes, his hair and beard has gone white. One after the other, he sees the young people of ᶜAlî's house went and got killed. One, Qâsim*, was still alive when he fell from his horse and his body was trampled by the enemy horses.[11]

14 (English:) ᶜAbbâs*, Ḥusayn's brave brother. ᶜAlî had wished for ᶜAbbâs's birth. After the death of Fâṭima, ᶜAlî said to his brother, ᶜAqîl, 'I would like to marry a very brave woman who would produce a son for me who would represent me in my chivalry and everything else in Karbala.' So the chivalrous ᶜAbbâs, the wish of ᶜAlî, came with Ḥusayn to Karbala in a very tempered manner. At every stage whenever ᶜAbbâs wanted to take out his sword to strike the enemy, Ḥusayn would calm him down, and he obeyed Ḥusayn's every wish. (Repeated in Urdu, plus:) If ᶜAbbâs had been allowed to fight, the outcome of the battle would have been different. Otherwise the whole history would have been re-written, and totally changed.

15 (English:) ᶜAbbâs was attacked from behind. Nobody had the courage to come in front of ᶜAbbâs. First his right shoulder was cut off. Then his left shoulder was cut off. And when the water carrier that ᶜAbbâs had with him was pierced with an arrow, ᶜAbbâs lost interest in life. Ḥusayn went to ᶜAbbâs's body, then this brother of Ḥusayn made his last wish which was, 'My *mawlâ* [master], leave me here! I do not want to show my face to Sakîna* who will ask, "Where is the water?" I had promised this girl water, who was thirsty for the last three days.' There was no food in Karbala, no water in Karbala for three days. From the young and the old, there was one solitary voice that was coming from the camps of Ḥusayn. There was no crying there. There was one voice, and that was '*al-ᶜatash!*' (Arabic) That is simply *piyâs!* (Urdu), 'Thirst!' I stop here, and I just want to tell one thing in Urdu.

16 (Urdu:) During the procession on 10 Muḥarram, our small children who are living with their mothers and fathers, leave the home for a short time with their mothers and fathers and come to the procession.[12] They come only to explain to the world the meaning of thirst. When they say, '*al-ᶜatash! al-ᶜatash!*' our hearts weep. Think! At Karbala the children were looking for the battle standard [*ᶜalam*] and crying out, '*al-ᶜatash!*' How could ᶜAbbâs listen to those cries? So ᶜAbbâs made his promise and left.

17 (English:) ᶜAbbâs told Ḥusayn not to take him back to the camp, so Ḥusayn left him there, but took the *ᶜalam*, the flag which ᶜAbbâs had and the (water) carrier which ᶜAbbâs had carried, back to the camp. From that moment, none of the children asked for water because they had lost hope. At last, Ḥusayn was alone. I am coming to an end. He came to the field, faced the enemy, and he made two wishes. His one wish was, 'Even now, if you want to absolve yourself, let me go from here and I will go to Hindustan.' That is why, Sir, I am asking you a question now. That is why in India, from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, from Gujurat to the borders of Bangladesh and beyond, to the borders of Burma, irrespective of caste, irrespective of religion, irrespective of language, we call (on) Ḥusayn. This *majlis* is evidence of the fact; this is being organized by Sudarshan Das. In Jubilee Hills, three days ago, I was invited to recite a *majlis*.[13] I went there; there were no Muslims, just five of us were there who were Muslims. They were all our Hindu

brethren. Let me tell you very boldly here, what they were reciting there in Telugu, in the *nawḥâ* [elegies] around the *alâwa* [fire-pit], what they were reciting there in Telugu, we dare not repeat that in Urdu over here! If we dared, there would be a riot.[14] So Ḥusayn is no one's particular clan, no one's particular tribe, religion or caste. Those who like to see evil abandoned and the righteous established will definitely attract towards Ḥusayn. You just have to listen to Ḥusayn. You just have to read about Ḥusayn, and you yourself will get attracted, provided you have that wish to be on the side of the righteous. Ḥusayn gave a clarion call in Karbala, asking all his friends who were available. There was a friend, a 6-month-old son.

18 (Urdu:) I am now going to give the remembrance [*zikr*] of ᶜAlî Aṣghar. I am not going to recite the martyrdom of Ḥusayn.

19 (English:) This 6-month-old son started crying, and books have it that he fell down from the cradle. His mother picked him up. This little ᶜAlî[15] was handed over to Ḥusayn. Ḥusayn covered him with his apparel, brought him to the enemy camp, just opposite their forces. ᶜAlî Aṣghar's face was revealed. Most of the soldiers were on the point of revolt. Shimr*, the leader of Yazîd's army, said, 'If this happens, then we lose the war.' He asked Hurmala, of whom it is said that his arrow was so strong that it could go through at least seven very thick iron plates, to finish off Ḥusayn's *kalâm* [talk], to finish off Ḥusayn's questions. He aimed his arrow at the throat of ᶜAlî Aṣghar. The arrow was let go. It pierced the throat of ᶜAlî Aṣghar, injuring the arm of Imâm Ḥusayn. Ḥusayn picked up the blood. He wanted to throw it on the ground, but there was a sound from the ground saying, 'We will not accept it!' He wanted to throw it to the sky. The sky said, 'I too will not accept it.' So Ḥusayn kept the blood with him.[16] I am coming to an end now. This is not the end of the story of ᶜAlî Aṣghar. ᶜAlî Aṣghar was the only person who was buried in Karbala. But after the darkness fell on Karbala, the enemies were looking for the body of ᶜAlî Aṣghar because they wanted to cut off his head from his body and put it on a lance. They searched his body all over the place, and when they found the grave, he took out the body of this small baby, cut off its head and put it on a lance.

20 (Urdu:) Enough! The *maṣâ'ib* for them is finished. (The above account is repeated with the following additions: the baby was smiling as the arrow entered its throat, Ḥusayn wiped his son's blood on his face, and the decapitation of the baby is called his 'second martyrdom'.[17])

Sermon 5: 'religion and politics'

The last in an *ᶜashra* series of 10 sermons on the topic, *Khilqat-e Insân* [The Creation/Nature of Humankind] preached by Syed Husn al-Hasan Nayar Razvi Quararvi on 12 Muḥarram 1419/9 May 1998 at Baitul Kayyam, Mir Alam Mandi and commemorating the martyrdom of Bîbî ('Lady') Sakîna*.

Introduction

The Twelver Khôja Shîᶜa community in Hyderabad regularly sponsors mourning gatherings at their *ᶜâshûrkhâna* known as the Baitul Kayyam. For the last few

years this community has invited a visiting preacher to address their regular *ᶜashra* series in the beginning of Muḥarram. This *ᶜashra* series comprised the usual nine *majâlis* during the first nine days of Muḥarram, but it also included two additional gatherings on 11th and 12th days. In 1998, this *ẕâkir* was Syed Husn al-Hasan Nayar Razvi Quararvi from Allahabad in North India. He was in his forties at the time of this sermon, held a Master's degree and taught English at a college of higher education.

The topic of this series was advertised as *Khilqat-e Insân* which can be translated as either 'The Nature of Humankind' or 'The Creation of Humankind'. This topic was followed as a broad line throughout the series although with many diversions. From his discussion of creation and humankind the preacher moved to the topic of faith and science and, finally, to the last sermon and the topic of religion and politics. As often happens in a series of *majâlis*, the congregation grew as days went on, in this case from a few hundred to at least a thousand people for this last gathering.

The sermon text

(The preacher was late in arriving, and another *ẕâkir* who was in the congregation had been asked to preach in his place. This other *ẕâkir* began by reciting the *Ḥadîṯ-e Kisâ*' [Tradition of the 'Cloak*'], but before he was able to begin his actual discourse Husn al-Hasan arrived and took over on the *minbar* directly without reciting a *khuṭba* or a text…)

1 I am sorry to have been delayed. There was once a *ẕâkir* who went on preaching so long that two friends in the congregation picked up a wooden stick. The *ẕâkir* cried out, 'Don't hit me!' But they replied, 'This stick isn't for you, it's for the host [*dâᶜî*]!' (Laughter from the congregation.)

2 During the period of time between Adam and Jesus, there were various religions and the founders of these religions taught that there is a great difference between religion and the world [*dîn ô dunyâ*]. The idea is still current today that religious people and politicians are different. It is held that politicians are inherently corrupt and dishonest, and that a political promise is an empty promise. The real meaning of politics is that political leaders should help all the people and should take responsibility for the running of the country. But today politicians are simply concerned to look after their own interests. In contrast the Imâms said, 'There is no one who knows more about politics than us.' They had the correct understanding and were the ones who really looked after the poor and needy.

3 Today's children are very forward; they know so much about everything. If a person who had died 200 years ago were to come back from the dead today he would be so worried about the knowledge that these children have. If leaders are good and honest and just and have a spirit of service, then there will be peace and the people will be happy. Their first quality must be a right knowledge and understanding. But if they are not like that, then there will be trouble for the people. There was previously no difference between the thinking of the politicians and the

religious leaders. Both of these groups said that the responsibility of the government should be to care for the interests of the public: their food, shelter and other needs.

4 It is common teaching in the various books of Hinduism and other religions, and also in Islam, that the responsibility of the government is to maintain peace and to provide for the people. The first responsibility of an Islamic government is to give peace to the people. 'When ye are greeted with a greeting, then greet ye with one better (than it), or return it; Verily, God, of all things, taketh account' (Sûra-e Nisâ' 4.86).

People do not know the meaning of the greeting *al-salâm ᶜalaykum*! [peace be upon you!]. It ought to be the case that if you meet a murderer and greet him with these words and he greets you in return,[18] then he should no longer be able to hurt you because of the meaning of his reply. But today in India people simply say the words and don't know the meaning of what they are saying. In the ritual Prayers, every time a person performs a *rakᶜat* [lit. 'bowing'] of the ritual Prayers,[19] he says the *fâṭiha* twice. In each of these recitations, he prays, 'Thee (alone) we worship and of Thee (only) we seek help' (Sûra-e Fâtiḥa 1.5).

These words make up a contract [*aḥd*] between the worshipper and God. But since most people don't know Arabic, they don't know what they are saying.

5 A common accusation against Islam is that it was spread by the sword. This is actually the fault of Muslim leaders. If the leadership was good, then the accusation would not be levelled, but the leadership has been bad and without knowledge, so that is what people think. With good leadership, the Islamic world would have peace, but they are only saying 'peace' with words, while at the same time making all sorts of arms and bombs and fighting with one another. Both the government and religions have a responsibility to create peace. Both have this responsibility within society, and religions have the additional responsibility of creating peace in the heart. The problem is one of hypocrisy: these leaders are Muslims only 'outwardly'.

6 'And those who believe and their hearts are set at rest by God's remembrance; Certainly! By God's remembrance are the hearts set at rest' (Sûra-e Raᶜd 13.28).

There is a *ḥadîṯ qudsî* [sacred *ḥadîṯ*][20] which relates the five things that God likes, and the first of these is a hunger for knowledge. Most of those who are rich do not have this 'hunger for God' in their hearts. If you look at all the great scientists and leaders, it is a fact that they have been poor. They have had a desire for knowledge because they have not had their fill of riches. Another Tradition relates, 'There are two things to avoid: rich people and following a horse! The first will lead you astray and the second will result in getting kicked in the teeth! So leave them! You might get some financial gain, but you will also get a lot of suffering with it!'

7 At Ghadir-e Khumm*, ᶜAlî was made the leader in both spheres of life: he was a 'doctor' [*ḥakîm*] of both religion and the world. Therefore these two spheres should not be divided between separate leadership. At Ghadir-e Khumm, this *âyat* was revealed on the same occasion as the designation of ᶜAlî as Imâm. 'This day have I perfected for you your religion, and have completed My favour on you, and chosen for you Islam (to be) the Religion' (Sûra-e Mâ'ida 5.3).

8 'He it is Who raised among the 'Ummies' an Apostle from among themselves, reciting unto them His signs, and purifying them, and teaching them the Book and wisdom although they were of before in manifest straying' (Sûra-e Jumuᶜa 62.2).[21]

This *âyat* refers to both *the 'book and the wisdom'* [*al-kitâb wa al-ikma*]. The book is the Qur'ân and stands for the religion while wisdom stands for scientific knowledge. Both of these were combined in the Prophet. How then can you say that the Prophet was illiterate? If someone is a leader of the ritual Prayers, he should be better in every way than the people who are performing the Prayers behind him. Thus even if one person was able to read and write in the congregation that was Praying behind the Prophet, that person should have been leading the Prayers. ᶜAlî was clearly able to read and write, and he learned everything from the Prophet, so how could the Prophet be ignorant? In one of his sermons in the *Naḥj al-Balâghâ*, Alî says, 'All truth will return to God.' That is why he did not protest when he was passed over in favour of others for the caliphate.

9 When someone is getting all the attention, another person will use the expression, 'Why am I always performing the Prayers behind him?' Some people have asked me why I am always discussing the English in my *majâlis*. But we know that when Imâm *Mahdî** comes, he will perform the Prayers in the mosque at Mecca, and Jesus will perform the Prayers behind him. If this is the case the English should be praying behind me! Please forgive me! There is a proverb in English which goes (spoken in English:) 'The king can do no wrong.' In the English tradition the king is the supreme authority in making laws for his country. But with us it is not like that. There is only One who can make the laws for us and that is God. It is the government's task to recognize God's rules and to safeguard them as they were given by the Prophet and safeguarded by the Imâms. This is the reason why the parliament and other law-making bodies are not the supreme authority. Only God is the supreme authority. So if the English proverb is, 'The king can do no wrong', our proverb comes from the Qur'ân: 'Say (O Prophet Muhammad): "Verily my prayer and my sacrifice, my life and my death, are (all, only) for God, the Lord of the Worlds" ' (Sûra-e Anᶜâm 6.162).

10 (The preacher gives a translation of this *âyat* into Urdu in which he uses the Persian word *Khudâ* for God.) I am glad that S–A–from B–is not here. I am saying *Khudâ* and not *Allâh*, and he is a dangerous fellow! (Laughter from the congregation.)[22]

11 ᶜAlî used to live on a very simple diet of only dry bread [*rôtî*]. When he was caliph, some visitors came from a foreign place who didn't know what Alî looked like. He was working in the fields. When the time came to break for lunch, ᶜAlî invited the visitors to share his meal with him, but they were unable to eat the dry bread that he offered. So he told them to go into Madina and to ask for food at the home of a man named Ḥasan. Ḥasan (i.e. ᶜAlî's eldest son) gave the visitors a good lunch but asked who had sent them to him. They described the man who had sent them as a poor man [*faqîr*] who was working in the fields. Ḥasan informed them that the man was no *faqîr* but rather the Caliph ᶜAlî. We can learn two lessons from this tradition: first, that even when he was the ruler of the Muslim empire, ᶜAlî had a very simple life-style. Second, Ḥasan did not have such

a simple life-style and yet he was equally pious. One's piety does not depend on one's outward circumstances or life-style.

12 Today's leaders are different. The President of India, for example, has a very easy life. Nowadays, people would like to be president because the job comes with so many perks such as a nice house with many facilities. The President's house has 70 rooms, it never has power failures, it has its own water supply and there are many servants. So the President has no feeling for what the ordinary and poor people of his country go through. Yet when the President of Iran, Muḥammad ᶜAlî Raja'î,[23] was sworn in, Âyatullâh Khomeini, gave a speech in which he said that the job of President of Iran was not an easy one but rather the opposite, with many difficulties and hardships. He asked a number of questions to ᶜAlî Raja'î about how he would live in such a way as to be aware of how the people in his country, even the poor, were living.

13 During the time before Christianity in Europe, the people there worshipped the sun, the moon, the stars and water, among other things. At that time there was no real thinking about politics and leadership. They did not have a conception of the meaning of governance. They had been under the control of the Romans and the Greeks. But the Romans didn't change the people's thinking, they just ruled their bodies. So the entire culture of Europe was actually the culture of Greece. Initially in Europe, the Church and the state ruled as one. But that didn't work. Then Henry IV wanted to change the rules of the Church, but they didn't allow him, so he was excommunicated. The Pope wanted to punish him by making him walk around the streets for three days wearing a hair shirt. After that Henry said, 'Enough! The Church should be separate and the state separate.'[24]

14 Now the English have tried to spread their thinking into Islam too. As a result, many Muslims believe that it is dangerous to mix the two (i.e. religion and the state) together, but this idea came originally from Henry IV and his hair shirt! The idea of separating religion and politics has been taken on by Muslims and it is very dangerous for our religion. It has been spread in order to keep Islam weak. If the government is combined with religion, it will have a lot of power; if it is separated from religion then it is weaker. Hence they try to keep it apart. The English author D.B. Macdonald has written a book called (spoken in English:) *Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Act*. He writes that if in Islam all the different parts of the law would be brought together, and religion and politics were united, then there would be nothing that could stand up to Islam.[25] Islam has been sleeping for so long that it is very weak. But little by little it is waking up and growing stronger.

15 Islam has rules for even small things such as not sleeping on the left side. You have to enter the mosque with your right foot first and leave with your left foot first. Conversely, when you enter the toilet it should be with the left foot first and you should leave with the right foot first. If Islam has rules for such small things, how much more important are the rules for government!

16 In the human body, there is an electrical current which is 'AC' ('alternating current'). When a person sneezes, that current fails and the person becomes dead for a split second. This is why a Muslim says, '*al-ḥamdu li'llâh!*' [Praise God!]

after he sneezes, because he has received new life from God. But the Europeans say (spoken in English:) 'Excuse me!'[26]

17 At the beginning of the age of Islam, the Arabs were very ignorant and they didn't give importance to knowledge. But ᶜAlî said to his disciples, Abû Ẓarr* and Salmân Fârisî*, 'If I wanted to, I could give electricity to all the schools [*madrasas*].' There was no electricity at that time, but he would have invented it. However, such was the level of the people's minds around him that they were only asking. 'How many hairs do I have on my head?'[27] At that time ᶜAlî knew how to make electricity out of water as we do today (spoken in English:) 'hydro-electric power'. He also told people not to cut down green trees. Today the scientists are telling us that even green trees are alive and have feeling. Similarly, in Islam, it is not allowed even to cut hair during the *Ḥajj* [Pilgrimage].[28] This is because even hair is alive and has feelings. There are scientists who had previously rejected God and the Qur'ân, but when they saw that the Quran foretold so many scientific discoveries that modern science now knows, they accepted Islam.

18 Christianity separates governance from religion. In doing this it is deceiving people and perpetrating a fraud. Except for Imâm Alî and Imâm Ḥasan, and until the *Mahdî* comes, the Imâms did not have the power to govern. But all the Imâms had the desire to govern. Therefore proper rules and laws exist for governance, but they have never been implemented because the religious authorities have not had power. For example, if a *Mawlvî* [religious scholar] knows that a man in his mosque is a thief, what can he do? (All he can do is to) go to the mosque council and get the man thrown out. The *Mawlvî* cannot implement Muslim law [*sharîᶜa*]. Among Muslims a *Mawlvî* can say that, according to the law, a thief's hand should be cut off. But who is going to do the cutting? It is the same with invigilators of school and college examinations in the North (of India). If a student has a pistol on his desk, the teacher can only keep quiet while the students cheat.[29]

19 In the West there are three parts of government (spoken in English:) 'the parliament, the judiciary and the administration.' Yet, in Islam, these three are combined in one person. When the *Mahdî* comes, all the world which is full now of injustice will be full of justice. He will have complete power throughout the world. At the moment, America is the world's *dâdâ* [tough guy].[30] The power of America is a headstrong [*sârkash*] devil [*ṭâghût*]. When the *Mahdî* comes, God will give him complete power. There will only be one government in the world, and that will be his. The *Mahdî's* power will be like that of America in its scope, but he will have both spiritual power as well as temporal power. An example of this will be that the tiger and the goat will be able to drink together from the same water without any problems. At that time, there will be no one to whom we will be able to give Alms [*zakât* and *khums* (religious tax of 20 per cent paid by Shîᶜas to the representative of their Imâm)] as there will be no more poverty. The earth will produce food from the fields and treasures from the mines. People now think that Islam is a religion that is only concerned with the mosque or the *darga* [shrine built over the grave of a Sûfî 'saint'] or other Sûfî practices. But at that time it will be shown that Islam is a religion of governance and a perfect system for the whole of life.

20 When he comes, the *Mahdî* will need doctors and engineers and people to pilot the aircraft and drive the trains. He will be needing people for these jobs who acknowledge him now. So this is a message to the youth. You need to work hard and study hard and try your best so that when the *Mahdî* comes, he can select you and give you these positions that he needs to fill. The *Mahdî*, when he went into occultation, was unmarried. When he comes, it will be to the earth and not to heaven. He is not, therefore, going to marry a *ḥûrî* [heavenly companions of the blessed, see Sûra-e Dukhân 44.54]. He is going to marry the daughter of one of his followers. Oh that there would be a virtuous woman when he comes who could become his wife! Wouldn't it be great, you men, if the *Mahdî* were to become your son-in-law? You must bring up your daughters in the best possible way for that eventuality. Similarly, you brothers of girls, and you girls. It is your task to bring yourselves up to be a potential wife for the *Mahdî*. In the Qur'ân God says, 'He it is Who sent His Apostle with guidance and the religion of truth, that He may make it prevail over all other religions, though the polytheists may detest it' (Sûra-e Baraâ'a 9.33, see also Sûra-e Ṣaf 61.9).

This subject is called the *Raj^{c}a* [Return][31] and is an article of Shî^{c}î faith although not of Sunnî faith. At that time, all the previous Imâms and prophets will also come. But even though all these others will return, power will be solely in the hands of the *Mahdî*.

(Transition to *maṣâ'ib*)

21 Some people say that Ḥusayn's martyrdom actually happened not at Karbala but at the Saqîfa [portico] of the Banû Sâ^{c}ida.[32] This was actually where the truth was defeated. After that time, step by step, the powerful people became more and more oppressive and wicked. By the time of Yazîd*, wickedness had reached its limit. At that time, Yazîd was the representative of falsehood. So even Ḥusayn's son, ^{c}Alî Zayn al-^{c}Âbidîn*, who was so sick that he couldn't even stand up, was beaten as he lay on the ground by Shimr*.

22 It was not enough simply to kill the people; the enemies rode their horses over the dead bodies. They set fire to the tents of Ḥusayn's family. They ripped the earrings out of the ears of even the little girls. They put ropes around the women's necks and arms as if they were animals. They put the women and the children on the camels without any saddles. ^{c}Alî Zayn al-^{c}Âbidîn was forced to walk without any shoes. And when the children fell from the camels, because they did not have saddles, they were simply left to die in the desert. Before the Battle of Karbala, there were 65 children in the company. But now only one or two remained. Umm-e Kulṯûm*, on seeing Madina, cried, 'O Madina! When we left you we had our little ones with us; now when we return we have nothing. You will not recognize us!'

23 When they arrived in Damascus, they were taken to the palace of Yazîd. He was drunk, and the others around him were proud of what they had done. He was even boasting that he would go to Mecca and drink wine on the roof of the Ka^{c}ba*. Imâm Ḥusayn's head, lying in a basin, was like the Ka^{c}ba: desecrated by Yazîd. The women, including Sakîna* were tied together with ropes. Yazîd asked her, 'Why are you hopping up and down?' She replied, 'When my mother and my

aunts are made to stand up, it pulls on the rope around my neck.' Yazîd asked Sakîna, 'Do you love your father very much? Do you want to meet him again?' Then he showed her Ḥusayn's head in the basin. It was many days since she had seen her father and she wanted so much to meet him. She had been whipped on her back. Yazîd said to her, 'You wanted to see your father? I want to test your love for him. Normally you would not be able to see your father. But I am testing you.' Sakîna replied, 'What kind of test is this? You should know that such is my love for my father that I would take the head of Ḥusayn and embrace it.' Sakîna wiped her hand on her blood-stained shirt and, lifting her hands in supplication said, 'Come, my father! Do not shame me before Yazîd.' Then the head of Ḥusayn rose up into the air and flew into her lap. She had been deprived of her father for so long, but now she leaned her face on his face and poured out her heart to him: 'O Father! They ripped the earrings out of my ears! My cheeks have been bruised. My back has been flogged. Aunt Zaynab* is here, and Umm-e Kulṯûm is here and my brother Sajjâd [lit. 'the Prostrator', that is, the fourth Imâm] is also here. We have all been humiliated and insulted here in the court of Yazîd. But we are enduring all of this for the sake of the community [*ummat*] of my grandfather!'

5 Sermons by women

Sermon 6: 'supplication and fire-walking'

Preached by Anees Fatima Begum on 11 Ṣafar 1420/27 May 1999 at Yadgar Hussaini, Purani Haveli and commemorating the martyrdom of Ḥaẕrat ᶜAbbâs*.

Introduction

This sermon is carefully constructed for a particular occasion: an annual *majlis* held at Hyderabad's all-women's *ᶜâshûrkhâna*, Yadgar Hussaini, during which a replica battle-standard from Karbala [*ᶜalam*] 'passes through fire'. During the morning of the day on which the *majlis* was held, women came to the *ᶜâshûrkhâna* with bundles of wood, and a fire was lit that burned all day as more and more logs were added. The *majlis* began in the evening, with about 500 women and many children in attendance. After the sermon had been preached, there was a performance of *mâtam* accompanied by *nawḥâ*. Towards the end of this performance the live coals of the fire were spread out over an area approximately 7 m in length and 3 m in width. Ten minutes later the *nawḥâ* gave way to chants of, '*Yâ Ḥusayn! Yâ Ḥusayn! Yâ Ḥusayn!*' as the special *ᶜalam* representing ᶜAbbâs was ceremonially taken from its stand and carried towards the fire. The standard-bearer proceeded to carry the *ᶜalam* through the fire with a number of women following her. All were walking barefoot. Other women also walked across the live coals, some going back and forth several times. The *majlis* and fire walking were begun more than seventy years ago by a woman named Abîda Bêgum (Mrs Raẕâ Raẕvî), and have been continued by her family ever since. It is possibly the only example of fire walking practised by Shîᶜî women in Hyderabad.[1]

The *ᶜalam* of ᶜAbbâs has great significance as ᶜAbbâs was the *ᶜalamdâr* [standard-bearer] for Ḥusayn at the battle of Karbala. When he was killed in his attempt to fetch water for the children of Ḥusayn's camp, it was the *ᶜalam* and empty water-skin, pierced by an arrow, that told of his death when they were brought back to the thirsty children. These two objects have thus become symbols of ᶜAbbâs and his supreme sacrifice.

Anees Fatima Begum has been preaching at *majâlis* since 1976, when she was 13 years old. She comes from a family in which there were many *ᶜulamâ'*, including her grandfather, Mawlânâ Amad Raẕâ, notable as the *ᶜâlim* who started the *dawra*

of *majâlis* in the Darushifa area. It was this family tradition, along with encouragement from her parents, that led her to begin preaching, and the first *majâlis* she addressed were gatherings at home. Although she studied at well-known colleges in Hyderabad, she has not received any formal religious education. She is a school teacher by profession. Anees Fatima's husband, Baquer Mohsin, is a prominent Hyderabadi poet and journalist; at least one of his *marṣiya* compositions features in the following sermon text. A feature of Anees Fatima's preaching is the fine literary style of her language and her use of poetry.

The sermon text

1 'Call ye unto Me, and I will answer you!' (Sûra-e Mu'min 40.60).[2]

2 God, in the Qur'ân says, 'Ask, and I will give to you,' God is explaining the importance of prayer [*duᶜâ*]. What is prayer? It is when a subject seeks something from God, whether favours [*naᶜimat*] in this world or happiness in the next. It is obligatory for a subject to pray. If a subject does not pray he will, in the eyes of God, be considered arrogant. God does not approve of the arrogance of his subjects. The destiny of one whom God does not like is hell. O friends! God Almighty, the Merciful and Compassionate [*Ramḥân ô Raḥîm*] expects a person to seek His grace with all humility, raising his hands and crying out with the utmost extremity. And God, in His generosity, gives this person what he seeks. All of you believing women [*mu'minât*] know that prayer is the weapon of a believer.

3 Prayer [*duᶜâ*] is the soul of worship. We find a number of sayings of the Sinless Ones in connection with prayer. (The eighth) Imâm (ᶜAlî) Raẓâ has said, 'Arm yourself with the weapon of the prophets and apostles [*anbiyâ ô mursalîn*]!' When people asked him what was the weapon of the prophets and apostles he answered, 'The weapon of the prophets is prayer, and the quality of the weapon comes from its sharpness [*âb*].' Just think of it! The importance of prayer is indicated here. The question therefore arose: 'What could be the "sharpness" of prayer?' The Imâm replied, 'The "sharpness" of prayer is intercession [*wasîla*].' Without intercession, no prayer can be effective. Then the question arises: 'Whose intercession is needed?' The intercession of a person who is closest to God. Now, people may think, 'Who are the creatures who are the closest to God?' Then the secret was revealed to the mind of humankind that God Almighty wants His subjects to pray through His 'Beloved' [*Ḥabîb*, a term for the Prophet Muḥammad]. But did the Prophet only convey the order of God? Did he not practise what he preached?

4 At this point we find the Prophet of God saying, 'God has sent me as your guide [*ḥâdî*]. I have done my duty as your guide in every possible way. How is it possible that in the matter of prayer I could not guide you? Come and recall the time when Islam was in danger and in such moments of crisis! What did I ask you to do? Do you not remember?'

> When there were obstacles in the taking of the fort of Khaybar*
> Gabriel brought the order of God to the Prophet,
> Turn your face towards Madina and cry out, 'O ᶜAlî! O ᶜAlî! O ᶜAlî!'
> The 'ᶜAlî Cry' [*Naᶜrê ᶜAlî*]! That wonderful phenomenon![3]

5 So Muḥammad sought ᶜAlî's aid in his difficulty, because he wanted to teach how to pray. He wanted to teach the way that God's help should be sought.

The chief of all prayers was this prayer
That brought solace to the heart of the Prophet
There was an eagerness in the heart of the Prophet
Which grew and became the '*ᶜ*Alî! Cry'.

6 The Prophet, by seeking ᶜAlî's aid in his own difficulty made it clear that 'You should seek the help of that person in your time of difficulty who is my inner self [*bâṭin*]. Seek his help who is the outward manifestation [*ẓâhir*] of God, who removes all the difficulties of humanity, who solves all problems in this world and the next.'[4]

Before your prayer and after your prayer
Seek the blessings of God on Muḥammad and his progeny
Akhtar![5] When you pray to ᶜAlî, the elevated,
Recite the '*ᶜ*Alî Cry' after each prayer.

7 O Friends! It is now clear that the chief weapon of the prophets is prayer, and the power of this weapon lies in the intercession which goes with the prayer. This intercession is from ᶜAlî who is the 'Master of Creation' and the 'Soul of the Last of the Prophets'. Without the help of ᶜAlî no prayer can be accepted, whether it is a prayer of the *jinn* or of human beings, whether of angels, *hourîs*, common people or the prayers of the enlightened and elevated ones [*awliyâ ô awṣiyâ*]. Even the prayers of the prophets will not be granted without the intercession of ᶜAlî. No such prayer will be accepted at the court of God.

8 If man wants to get close to his Creator, then his only intercession is the personality of the 'Representation of God' [*Maẓhar-e Ḥaqq*, that is ᶜAlî]. If there comes a time when ᶜAlî himself seeks something from God, imagine what the greatness of that prayer will be!

It is ᶜAlî who keeps the order of the universe in place,
And from whom all seek help from the first [*Âdam*] to the last [*khâtam*].
Although this one is supposed to be a subject of God,
He is himself all powerful.
No-one saw him extending his hand in prayer,
Whose personality results in all the intentions of God being accomplished.
The prophets pray through his intercession.
If such a person prays, what a prayer it will be!
What will be the destiny of ᶜAbbâs
As the result of such a prayer?[6]

9 So ᶜAbbâs is the name of ᶜAlî's prayer. He who gave to others sought the help of ᶜAbbâs. The Creator granted him his prayer. The sea of His mercy became effervescent [*jôsh*]. In Sûra-e Yusuf in the Qur'ân (Sûra 12), the beauty of Joseph

and the prayer of Jacob are mentioned. Jacob prayed through the intercession of ᶜAlî, and God granted the prayer of His prophet, giving him a handsome son. This son was one whose name has become a byword for beauty. Then when ᶜAlî himself prayed for a son, God honoured this prayer and gave to ᶜAlî this son who was like ᶜAlî in every way. Even the beauty of Joseph was dimmed by the beauty of this son. ᶜAbbâs is the picture of ᶜAlî:

He whom we know as Ḥusayn is Abû Ṭurâb [lit. 'Father of the Dust', a title for ᶜAlî]
What about the beauty of Joseph? It is something discarded by ᶜAlî.[7]

10 Friends! When the 'Moon of Loyalty' (i.e. ᶜAbbâs) rose in the sky of courage, this child who was the beloved of (his mother) Umm al-Banîn*, who was of the line of Abraham and the heir of Ishmael, appeared in the family of ᶜAlî.

When this child (i.e. ᶜAbbâs) opened his eyes and saw the light of the imâmat,
He saw those who were brought up in the *Âyat-e Taṭhîr** [Âyat of Purity].
He saw those who gave their lives in the way of the love of God.
He saw the fearless warriors and matchless knights.
He was brought up and received his purity from the lap of Umm-e Kulṯûm*.
He received the love of Shabbîr (i.e. Ḥusayn) and the affection of Zaynab*.

11 How is it possible to describe the greatness of ᶜAbbâs? The Virtues of ᶜAbbâs are limitless, while our thinking is limited. The personality of God can be seen at the highest peak of greatness. Our thought cannot reach those heights. The greatness of ᶜAbbâs has thousands of facets. We cannot even encompass one of those facets.

ᶜAbbâs is the heir of the bravery of ᶜAlî.
ᶜAbbâs is the manifestation of loyalty and love.
ᶜAbbâs is the very picture of ᶜAlî.
The bravery of ᶜAbbâs is the bravery of ᶜAlî.
The way that ᶜAbbâs fights is the way that ᶜAlî fought.
Two lions were created from the strength of God.
One was the 'Lion of God' (i.e. ᶜAlî);
The other was the son of the 'Lion of God' (i.e. ᶜAbbâs).
One lion was given the task of protecting the Prophet.
The other lion was given the task of protecting the Imâm (i.e. Ḥusayn).
One lion was given in appreciation the power of divinity [*khudâ'î*].
The other lion who was thirsty was allowed the bank of the river [*tarâ'î*, that is, the Euphrates].

12 O Friends! ᶜAbbâs was 11 years old at the Battle of Siffin*. ᶜAbbâs came to know that Ḥusayn had gone to the battlefield, and he became restless. He went to ᶜAlî and told him, 'Give me permission to go to the battlefield.' ᶜAlî knew

how restless ᶜAbbâs was, but he did not grant him permission. This was a way of training the child. ᶜAlî was training his son to keep his courage in check. But the father could not bear to see his son's restlessness any further, so he removed his armour and made ᶜAbbâs wear it. It fitted the body of ᶜAbbâs perfectly. Then the thought occurred to him that his son might become the victim of the evil eye [*naẓar-e bad*]. He put a veil over his face and only then granted him permission to fight. In no time ᶜAbbâs reached the battlefield with only one thought: that the body of Ḥusayn should not have received any wounds. In the presence of the slave, the master should not get wounded.

13 When ᶜAbbâs reached the battlefield, the commander of the enemy forces ordered a very famous champion to go and fight this horseman. This champion first sent one of his sons. ᶜAbbâs killed him. Then he sent two more of his sons. ᶜAbbâs put them to death. In this way seven of this champion's sons were killed by ᶜAbbâs. At last the champion himself, in a state of fury, came to fight ᶜAbbâs, and ᶜAbbâs severed his head from his body in a single stroke of his sword. Then the enemy soldiers shouted, '"ᶜAlî himself has come to fight wearing a veil!' ᶜAlî came to the battlefield and removed the veil from the face of ᶜAbbâs. He said, 'This is the "Moon of the Banî Ḥâshim"!' This was the occasion when ᶜAlî conferred the title of 'Moon of the Banî Ḥâshim' on ᶜAbbâs.

Shabbîr was so proud of his brother,
As proud as God is of His Uniqueness.

14 ᶜAbbâs is the 'Gate of the Needs' [*Bâb-e Ḥawâ'ij*]. ᶜAbbâs is the 'Gate of Desires' [*Bâb-e Murâd*]. When we are surrounded by difficulties and pray to ᶜAbbâs, he gives us more than what we have asked for. And why not? ᶜAbbâs is the beloved son of a generous man like ᶜAlî. Even today, the door of the abode of ᶜAbbâs is open. No seeker can come back from here without his prayers being granted. He is the heir of the 'Remover of Difficulties'. He is ᶜAlî's very double. The only condition is that you should seek from the bottom of your heart and completely give yourself with all the powers of your soul. You should have the love of the progeny of the Last Prophet in your heart, the Knowledge [*ᶜirfân*] of the very purpose of creation. You should have the Knowledge and belief in the greatness of ᶜAbbâs. If you extend your hands to ᶜAbbâs, fulfilling all of these conditions, then your heart's wish will be fulfilled.

15 Let me mention one particular prayer to you that you can use if you are facing a difficulty or any worry, or if you are surrounded by fear and trouble. Offer two *rakᶜats* [lit. 'bowings'] of the ritual Prayers in the name of ᶜAbbâs, and after that read the following prayer:

Yâ Kâshaf al-Karbî ᶜanna wajh'ul-Ḥusayn ᶜalayhi'l-salâm
Ikshaf karbî baḥaqqi akhîk al-Ḥusayn 'alayhi'l-salâm.
[This prayer is recited in Arabic and is not translated into Urdu. It's meaning, however, is as follows: O 'Remover of Troubles' on the strength of the countenance of Ḥusayn, peace be upon him! Remove my troubles by the right of Ḥusayn's brother (i.e. ᶜAbbâs), peace be upon him!]

If you do that, God willing, ᶜAbbâs will grant your prayer.

16 Dear friends! This ᶜAbbâs, the fulfilment of ᶜAlî's prayer, was on one occasion pacing up and down in the courtyard of his house. On seeing his son, ᶜAlî's face lit up with a divine smile and his heart was filled with joy and pleasure. He told Umm-e Banîn*, 'Tell me! When does a man get such joy?' Umm-e Banîn said, 'Sir, you know better!' ᶜAlî said to her, 'Umm-e Banîn, real joy comes to a man when his son is going about right there before his eyes. Look! This, my son, who is the very embodiment of piety, abstinence, knowledge and loyalty, is right here before my eyes and this is the real reason for my joy.' When Umm-e Banîn saw ᶜAbbâs, she spoke up in a wave of pleasure. She said,

My brave and courageous son!
He who resembles the Lion of God!
May God save you from the evil eye!

17 When we examine the history of the life of ᶜAbbâs, we get a picture of ᶜAbbâs which blinds our eyes with his greatness. Our minds and our hearts are filled with light. In our hearts the light of ᶜAbbâs is beauty. Our hearts are inundated with the light of ᶜAbbâs's beauty. Spontaneously the praises of ᶜAbbâs flow from us like a waterfall. In the praise of ᶜAbbâs every word that comes from our hearts is filled with fragrance. ᶜAbbâs is not a name but a universe of fragrance.

Whenever the name of ᶜAbbâs is on our lips,
Then our lips exude the fragrance of loyalty for a long time!

18 Just think about it! If such a thing can happen to an ordinary person, that such a fragrance remains on his lips for such a long time, then what is the greatness of the fragrance that falls from the tongue of ᶜAbbâs himself, this man who was suckled with the tongue of Ḥusayn? Two qualities of ᶜAbbâs which are very prominent and which are always mentioned are his loyalty and his bravery. If these qualities are added to ᶜAlî's wish and the love of Ḥusayn, it can be said that ᶜAbbâs is without parallel in his love for Ḥusayn, and that ᶜAbbâs is without parallel in his obedience to God. ᶜAbbâs is without parallel in courage and bravery. ᶜAbbâs is the last word in courage. He is the last word in loyalty. He was the standard-bearer, and therefore the right [*ḥaqq*] was with him. Righteousness was on his side. ᶜAbbâs is the last word in loyalty and obedience to Ḥusayn. ᶜAbbâs is the last word in his service to Zaynab. He is the last word in his affection for Sakîna*.

On the lips of Ḥusayn is the praise of Sakîna,
And on the lips of Sakîna is the name of ᶜAbbâs.
ᶜAlî's dear son is the very centre of Fâṭima's* wish,
And Sakîna herself is the light of ᶜAbbâs.

(Transition to *maṣâ'ib*)

19 Dear friends! We are assembled to speak about the greatness of ᶜAbbâs. The mother who was so proud of her son told ᶜAbbâs at the time of his departure from Madina, 'My son, let us go to the Prophet's tomb!' Umm-e Banîn led the

way with ᶜAbbâs following her, his head bowed. They entered the tomb of the Prophet, and Umm-e Banîn said, 'Please place your right hand on the grave of Muḥammad.' ᶜAbbâs did so. Then she told him, 'Put your other hand on my head!' Then she said, 'Turn your face towards Najaf (i.e. the grave of ᶜAlî)!' Then she said, '*ᶜ*Abbâs, promise me that as long as these two hands are there, you must see that no harm comes to Fâṭima's son (i.e. Ḥusayn). ᶜAbbâs, you know that you are the protector of the modesty [*ḥijâb*] of the daughters of Fâṭima.' ᶜAbbâs made this promise: 'As long as these hands are intact, no harm will come to Fâṭima's son, and the honour of ᶜAlî's daughters will not be violated.'

20 O mourners! When ᶜAbbâs reached the battlefield, there was determination in his eyes. On 5 Muḥarram, Ḥusayn entered the tent and told Zaynab, 'See that ᶜAbbâs does not allow his anger to go beyond its limits, because ᶜAbbâs is now very angry.' Zaynab ordered Fiżża (the old maid servant of Fâṭima) to fetch ᶜAbbâs. ᶜAbbâs came and asked her, 'O Princess! What is the matter?' She replied, 'Listen to what Zaynab is saying to you! ᶜAbbâs, remove the tents from the bank of the Euphrates!' ᶜAbbâs bowed his head and said, 'Your wish is my command.'

21 On the night before ᶜÂshûrâ', ᶜAbbâs was going round the camp. Zuhayr ibn-e Khaym (one of the companions of Ḥusayn) came to him and said, '*ᶜ*Abbâs, when you were born ᶜAlî made a prostration to God. ᶜAbbâs, maybe that prostration was done for this night.' The signs of glory [*jalâl*] appeared on the face of ᶜAbbâs. He said, 'Zuhayr, you are urging me to show my courage. If you asked me, you would know how much ᶜAbbâs is controlling that courage.'

22 Then the day of ᶜÂshûrâ' came, and ᶜAbbâs did not get a chance to show his prowess. He was not granted permission to fight. Whenever ᶜAbbâs went to seek permission, Ḥusayn used to say, 'No, ᶜAbbâs! No!' A time came when ᶜAbbâs became very restless. All his life he had obeyed Ḥusayn without question. But when he saw Ḥusayn's relatives being martyred he could not control himself, and once again he asked, 'Master, just tell me, why are you preventing me from going to fight?' Ḥusayn was once again filled with eagerness. He embraced ᶜAbbâs and looked at him for a long time and then said, 'If my objective was war and fighting, then one single ᶜAbbâs would have been enough for this entire enemy army!' At that moment, Zaynab called Ḥusayn to her tent and told him, 'Brother, permit ᶜAbbâs to fight!' Both brothers entered the tent, and Sakîna looked at ᶜAbbâs. She said, 'Uncle, thirst is killing me.' She gave the empty water-skin to ᶜAbbâs.

23 Sakîna provided ᶜAbbâs with his task. He took the skin and showed it to Ḥusayn. He said, 'I am not going to fight. I am only going to get water for Sakîna.' Then Ḥusayn permitted him to do the job of a water-carrier. He only said, 'You go and take permission from Zaynab.'

Ḥusayn came and sat near to Zaynab with a bowed head.
His legs shook with sorrow.
She remembered what her father had told her.
She looked at her shoulders and then looked at ᶜAbbâs.
ᶜAbbâs, you may go! Now no-one can prevent Zaynab from being tied with ropes!

24 ᶜAbbâs left the tent carrying the water-skin on his shoulder and with the standard in his hand. Histories tell us that Ḥusayn helped every martyr to mount his horse except for ᶜAbbâs. ᶜAbbâs was going ahead with Ḥusayn following him. Then Ḥusayn said, 'Why don't you mount your horse?' ᶜAbbâs replied, 'How can I mount a horse in your presence?' Only when Ḥusayn was out of sight would ᶜAbbâs go ahead and mount his horse. He reached the river and filled the water-skin. It was his desire to bring the water-skin for Sakîna, but this wish was never fulfilled. God Almighty said, 'I will make you the "Gate of Needs". Through your intercession prayers will be granted.'

25 When ᶜAbbâs was returning with the water, there was a shout from the enemy troops, 'Not a drop of water should reach the tents of Ḥusayn!' How can I relate how ᶜAbbâs was attacked? At the first attempt his right arm was severed from his shoulder. ᶜAbbâs took the standard in his left hand. Then that arm too was cut off. Then ᶜAbbâs took the water-skin and the standard in his teeth and went ahead through the rain of arrows. One of the arrows pierced the water-skin and all the water escaped. ᶜAbbâs felt as if blood was flowing down his neck. All the hopes of the children were spilt on the sands of Karbala. Someone hit him with a mace. He fell down. I do not know where Fâṭima is in this *majlis*. It was the wish of Fâṭima that whenever the Sufferings of ᶜAbbâs would be mentioned, this particular suffering (i.e. the cutting off of his arms) should be mentioned without fail. For this reason we refer to ᶜAbbâs as the 'Greatest Martyr' [*Afẓal-e Shuhadâ'*].

26 Because he had no arms, ᶜAbbâs fell down from his horse. Without his arms, he fell on his face and cried out, 'Master, receive my last greetings!' Ḥusayn put his hands on his sides and said, 'My waist is broken! Now Ḥusayn is without help!' Then he went towards the Euphrates. Ḥamîd ibn-e Muslim relates, 'At one point Ḥusayn fell down, lifted some things from the earth and placed them on his breast.' These were the arms of the brave ᶜAbbâs who was the strength of his arms. 'My brother! You are leaving me without your arms! After you, Ḥusayn cannot live for long!' The moment came when he reached the body of ᶜAbbâs and put the head of ᶜAbbâs on his lap. ᶜAbbâs removed his head from the lap. Ḥusayn asked him, 'Why are you doing this?' ᶜAbbâs replied, 'Master, my head is on your lap; but when you die, on whose lap will be your head?' The air was filled with Fâṭima's voice: '"ᶜAbbâs, I know how loyal you are. When Ḥusayn dies, his head will be on my lap.' Ḥusayn removed an arrow from ᶜAbbâs's eye, and ᶜAbbâs saw Ḥusayn for the last time. Ḥusayn told ᶜAbbâs, 'Please, do not deny me one last favour! As you are going from this world, fulfil my last desire! All your life you have called me, "master" [*âghâ*]; just once, call me "brother"!' When ᶜAbbâs used the word, 'brother',

> That was the moment that ᶜAbbâs died.[8]

27 When the standard was brought back to the tent, and ᶜAbbâs did not come, Ḥusayn looked at Zaynab's face and said, 'My ᶜAbbâs is no longer there, Zaynab . . .'.

Sermon 7: 'Imâm Ḥusayn as a child'

Preached by Asgari Hussain Begum on 15 Ṣafar 1420/31 May 1999 at the residence of Abbasi Begum, Noor Khan Bazaar and commemorating the martyrdom of Ḥaẕrat ᶜAlî Akbar*.

Introduction

A popular preacher over many years, Asgari Hussain Begum comes from an important family of Hyderabadi religious scholars and *majlis* preachers. Her cousin is Mawlana Reza Aga, an example of whose preaching features as Sermon 9 later in the book. This sermon was preached at a *sâlâna majlis* organized by Abbasi Begum, the mother of Dr Asad Ali Khan. This *majlis* has been held annually since about 1960. The sermon is translated from a cassette tape. During the *maṣâ'ib* part, it was sometimes very difficult to hear the preacher's voice clearly over the noise of the congregation's weeping. For this reason, although I have translated the main line of the *maṣâ'ib*, a few inaudible details from this part of the sermon have been left out (marked as . . . in the text).

The sermon text

1 'I am from Ḥusayn, and Ḥusayn is from me' (a Tradition of the Prophet).

2 (The discourse begins with a recitation of the above Tradition in Arabic followed by its translation into Urdu with the addition of:)

> Whoever is a friend of Ḥusayn is my friend also, and whoever is my friend is a friend of God and will be happy and blessed [*khûshâ baḥâl*].

Ḥusayn has a very high position with God. The will of Ḥusayn and the will of God are one and the same. What God wants is what Ḥusayn also wants, and what Ḥusayn wills, God will bring to pass. Ḥusayn has such a high position with God that whatever he asks from God is given to him. If Ḥusayn wills it, even what has been written about a person's life or destiny [*taqdîr*] can be changed. Ḥusayn can turn around a person's fate [*qismat*]. This means that Ḥusayn has complete power over God's will. Whatever Ḥusayn wants, God also wants.

3 There was an incident during Ḥusayn's childhood that illustrates this point. The Prophet was sitting in the mosque at Madina one day when one of his companions came to him and said, 'O Prophet of God! You are the "Mercy of the Worlds," and you have a very high position with God. I have come to you with great hope wanting you to pray for me.' The Prophet replied, 'My son, what is your need?' The man said, 'I have been married for a long time, but we have no children. Please pray for me that God will grant us children.' The Prophet prayed for this man, and at that moment (the angel) Gabriel came down. Gabriel said to the Prophet, 'It is written in the "Preserved Tablet" [*Lawhe Mahfûz*],[9] that this man is destined to be without children. Therefore, O Prophet, do not pray for him!'

So the Prophet said to the man, 'To have children is not your fate. What you need is patient endurance [*ṣabr*] to bear your grief.' After saying this, the Prophet got up and went out.

4 Meanwhile a small prince (i.e. Ḥusayn as a child) came into the mosque. He looked into the face of the companion and, seeing his grief, he asked the man what was the matter. The man replied, 'God has destined that I should have no children, so I came to ask your grandfather to pray for me. But your grandfather told me that it is not written that I should have children.' At this point Ḥusayn turned, went to his grandfather and said to him, 'Why is this so?' The Prophet said, 'O Ḥusayn! Gabriel came to me and told me that it is written in the Preserved Tablet that this man should not have children.' Ḥusayn said, 'O Grandfather! I will give this man a child.' Then the Prophet again said to Ḥusayn, 'O my dear son Ḥusayn! God has not written this.' Ḥusayn said to him, 'I will give him two children.' Again, the Prophet said, 'Ḥusayn, it is not destined for this man.' Ḥusayn then said 'O Grandfather! I will give him three children.' The conversation went on in this way until Ḥusayn said that he would give the man seven children. When Ḥusayn had said that he would give the man seven children, Gabriel again appeared and said to the Prophet, 'O Prophet of God! God orders you to stop this! Even if Ḥusayn were to continue like this until the Day of Resurrection, I would have to keep on giving children!' This is the greatness [*ᶜaẓmat*] of Ḥusayn.

5 God has made Ḥusayn the master of His will. Ḥusayn is the grandson of the Prophet and the son of ᶜAlî and Fâṭima. He is the master of his own destiny. Nothing is beyond his power. If anyone comes to his door, Ḥusayn will give that person at least something so that he does not go away empty handed. Whatever the question, he need not be helpless. If a helpless person comes to the door of Ḥusayn, Ḥusayn will give him so much that he need not go to the door of anyone else. Ḥusayn is so generous that even if the person is penniless, he will become rich. People will say, 'This man had nothing and now he is so rich. How can this be?' The man's reply will be, 'This is the propitiatory charity [*ṣadqa*][10] of my master Ḥusayn, the son of ᶜAlî.'

6 O mourners! The time has come for the sacrifice of our lives for Ḥusayn. What terrible treatment Ḥusayn and the progeny of the Prophet received from the people of this world! The period of the ᶜAbbâsid* Caliph Mutawakkil[11] was the hardest time for the progeny of the Prophet. In this period, the greatest number of Shîᶜas were killed. Mutawakkil was so hostile to ᶜAlî's progeny that he would imprison them and execute them. He would even kill them by building them into a wall while they were still alive. There was one young 'prince', a descendant of Ḥasan. He was a very handsome prince, the only son of his mother. He was dragged from his home and brought to the court of the caliph. The caliph immediately ordered that he should be built into a wall while he was still alive.

7 A mason was brought and ordered to carry out the task. He duly began to build the wall around the prince, but he kept looking at the prince as he was doing his work. He was so overcome by the prince's beauty that he could not bring himself to kill him. So while he was building the wall higher and higher, he secretly said to the boy, 'I will build the wall around you, but I will leave enough holes in

it for you to be able to breathe. Then, in the darkness of the night, I will come and rescue you.' The mason was as good as his word. That night he returned to the wall and released the prince. He was so terrified that, having taken the prince out, he said to him, 'Do not make your escape known to anyone. When you go from here, you must not even return to your own family; otherwise it will be very dangerous for me.' The prince agreed but then took a knife and cut off some of the locks of his hair. Then he said to the mason, 'I will not go back home, as you say, but you must promise me something. You must go to the house of my mother, and take these locks of my hair to her. Give them to her and tell her not to weep for me. But say to her that I may never be able to meet her again until we see each other at the great Plain of the Gathering [*Maydân-e Ḥashr*] (on the Last Day).'

8 The mason went to the town of which the prince had told him, and reached the house at the given address. As he approached the house, he heard a lady crying and wailing inside. He knocked at the door and, when the lady came, he gave her the locks of hair belonging to her son. He said to her, 'These locks of hair are from the head of your son. Your prince has requested me to tell you not to weep, because he is safe.' But the young man was the only son of his mother, and even when she heard that he had not been killed, she could not stop crying. Even though the boy was alive, she felt his absence and wept such bitter tears. If she felt so bad about a son who was alive, what about the mother at Karbala (i.e. Layla*) whose son (ᶜAlî Akbar*) really was killed, right before her own eyes! (The preacher has now made the transition to the *maṣâ'ib*.)

9 ᶜAlî Akbar came to his mother in her tent. He said, 'Mother, give me permission to go to the battlefield!' . . . The last persons he took leave of were his mother, then his aunt (Zaynab*) and then his brother, Sayyid-e Sajjâd (i.e. the fourth Imâm, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn*). He told his brother, 'When you go back to Madina, convey my greetings to those in the city. When you feel thirst, remember my thirst; when you are helpless, remember my helplessness. When you meet my sister, Fâṭima Sughra*, convey my love to her. Before we left Madina, in order to comfort her because she could not come with us, I had made her a promise. I told her that, if death did not prevent me, I would come back to her and take her everywhere with me . . .'

10 The last meeting took place between the father and the son. ᶜAlî Akbar sought permission from his father to go to the battlefield. Ḥusayn knew that the time had come, so he put the armour on his son and a turban on his head. He told the boy, 'Whenever I used to want to look at the Prophet, I would only have to look at you. Now that you are leaving, go slowly so that I can see you as long as I can.' As ᶜAlî Akbar began to ride away to the battlefield, Ḥusayn followed him and kept crying to him, '*Mahlan! Mahlan!*' ['Slowly! Slowly!'] . . .

11 . . . ᶜAlî Akbar came back from the battlefield one last time and told his father, 'Father, I am dying of thirst! Can you give me even one drop of water?' Ḥusayn told him, 'There is no water anywhere!' Then Ḥusayn put his tongue into the mouth of his son. ᶜAlî Akbar stood back, startled. He said, 'O Father! Your tongue is even more dry than mine!' Then Ḥusayn told him, 'Go! Your thirst will be quenched at the fountain of *Kawṯar* by your grandfather (ᶜAlî)!' . . .

12 Finally, ᶜAlî Akbar was so badly wounded that he fell down from his horse. He shouted for his father, and Ḥusayn went running to help him. When he reached the place, Ḥusayn called his son's name, but there was no reply. He pulled a javelin from his son's chest. He shook the boy's body, but there was no response. Finally, he even lay down by the side of the boy's body. Even then there was no reply. Then he knew that his son's last moments had come. He picked up the boy and carried him back to the tents. He kept looking to the face of his son, because there was still some life left in the boy. But at last he saw that even that spark of life had gone. He lifted his eyes and cried out, 'Verily we are God's and verily unto Him we shall return' (Sûra-e Baqara 2.156).

13 Ḥusayn put the body of his son on the ground and called for the children to come and carry their brother back to the camp . . .

Sermon 8: 'the remembrance of Imâm Ḥasan'

Preached by Nafees Unisa Begum on 29 Ṣafar 1420/13 June 1999 at Ashurkhana Ata-e-Zehra, Noor Khan Bazaar, and commemorating the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imâm Ḥasan.

Introduction

After taking her Master's degree in geography from Hyderabad's Osmania University, Nafees Unisa Begum became a teacher of geography and English, and retired one year previous to this *majlis* from her job as head teacher of the local Gusha Mahel School. Alongside her professional career, she has been preaching since 1970, encouraged by her family. This sermon was preached at an annual gathering hosted by a relative of the preacher, Sayyida Nafees Begum. The venue was a newly constructed *ᶜâshûrkhâna* in the residence of the organizer and between 100 and 150 ladies were present. As with the previous sermon, it was difficult at times during the *maṣâ'ib* to hear exactly what the preacher was saying over the sound of the congregation's weeping, and a few details from the end of the sermon have been left out and their place indicated by '. . .' in the text. The sermon begins with the Qur'ân referring to the confrontation between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Christians of Najran in AH 10. Discussion did not bring agreement between the two sides, and the Prophet then challenged the Christians to a *mubâhala* [the mutual invocation of a curse]. The Christian leader and the Prophet would bring their families with them and invoke a curse on the side of those who did not speak the truth. The Christians backed out of the confrontation and agreed, instead, to pay tribute to the Muslims (see Ibn Isḥâq, 1955: 270ff.).

The sermon text

1 'And unto him who disputeth with thee therein after the knowledge has come unto thee, say! (O Our Apostle Muhammad!) (Unto them) "Come ye, let us summon our sons, and (ye summon) your sons, and (we summon) our women and (ye)

your women, and (we summon) our selves and (ye) your selves and then let us lay the curse of God on the liars!" ' (Sûra-e Âl ᶜImrân 3.61).

2 God gave an order to the Prophet to bring a curse, and told him to bring his women and his children and his own self [*nafs*]. The curse was done in order to see if it were possible that they (i.e. the Christians of Najran) would go on the right path. God told the Prophet the arrangements that he should make: he should walk in a line with ᶜAlî, taking Fâṭima and the two children (i.e. Ḥasan and Ḥusayn) with them. The question arises as to why he was ordered to take the children with him, as it could have been harmful for them. But when the scholars from Najran saw the faces of the two children, they saw such a light coming from them that it would make the mountains move. They realized that if a curse would have been laid on these children, that curse would have brought Christianity to an end until the Day of Judgement. The position of the Prophet was so high, and God had put these two children on the same level as that of the greatest of the prophets. The scholars of Najran could see the splendour of the prophets in the faces of the boys. For this reason they said, 'We cannot go through with the *mubâhala*, because if we do actually curse them, until the Day of Resurrection, our religion will be finished.' This was the reason that God commanded that the children be a part of the *mubâhala*, so that their position and their importance would be recognized. Even though they were only children, those on earth would recognize their real status. Even though they were children, these two boys were equal to adults.

3 The Prophet had explained Islam to the Christians, and they were not able to understand it. But when he brought the *Ahl-e Bayt** with him, including the small children, and they saw the shining light on their faces, then the Christians said, 'If he curses these children, then all of our children will die and our race will be wiped out.' This means that without the *Ahl-e Bayt*, Islam cannot be understood. It was only when the Prophet came with the *Ahl-e Bayt* that the Christians said, 'We do not want to do the *mubâhala*.'

4 There was an occasion when a certain companion of the Prophet was doing his ritual ablutions [*wuẓû*] in the mosque of the Prophet. Ḥasan and Ḥusayn [lit. '*Ḥasanayn*'] saw that he was doing the ablutions in the wrong way. Ḥasan said to Ḥusayn, 'That man is doing the ablutions in the wrong way. You wash in the same way as him, and I will come to you and point out what you are doing wrong so that he can see and be corrected. In this way his fault will be rectified (without him losing face).' Look! This is the family of the prophethood. At what a high level their manners and behaviour were in dealing with their elders! When Ḥasan interrupted ᶜAbû Bakr* who was preaching from the pulpit he said to him, 'It is not your right to be preaching from here; it is only my father's right!' When the companion saw the boys doing their ablutions, he said to the Prophet Muḥammad, 'Look at the method of washing that those boys are using. Is it correct or not?' The Prophet replied, 'Yes, everything that those two boys do they learn in our house and it is correct.' In this way the Prophet explained the importance of the two children. When the Prophet was prostrating (during the ritual Prayers), the children climbed on his back. Various histories tell how the Prophet explained the importance of these two boys saying, 'The days are coming when the reins of Islam will be in their hands.'

5 On one occasion, the festival of *ʿÎd* was approaching.[12] Ḥasan and Ḥusayn said to their mother, 'We don't have new clothes* to wear for *ʿÎd*.' Their mother (i.e. Fâṭima) said to them, 'Don't be contrary [*ẕid*]! I will bring new clothes for you from the tailor.' She was grinding corn to make flour, and as she was doing so she said to God, 'What am I to say to these children? What are You going to do to remedy this situation?' God said to her, 'Put your hand on the door. "Riẕwân of the Garden" (the angel who guards paradise) will bring clothes for you.' When the clothes came they were white. The children said, 'These clothes are white, and all the other children have colourful clothes.' Fâṭima said, 'I will dye them and make them colourful.' She put the clothes in a tub. When she brought them out of the tub, they were dyed in two colours. One set of clothes was green and the other was red. She gave the green clothes to Ḥasan and the red clothes to Ḥusayn. She said to Ḥasan, 'You will drink poison. Your liver will be broken to pieces by the poison and it will come out of your mouth.' To Ḥusayn she said, 'You yourself will be dyed in blood and cut into pieces for the sake of Islam.'

6 When all the other children were climbing on their camels, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn did not have camels to climb on. At that time, the Prophet bent over and said to them, 'Climb on my back!' They climbed onto the Prophet's back but said to him, 'We don't have reins in our hands.' The Prophet said to them, 'Take my hair and that can be the reins for you.' They went riding along, but then they said, 'O grandfather! Our camel isn't making any noise.' So the Prophet made the sound of a camel for them. He would cater to their every whim [*nâz*]. The Prophet said, 'If I do not carry them, then the prophethood is not guided by the reins of the imâmat. If the imâmat steers in one direction, then the prophethood will be steered in that direction.' One of the companions said to the boys, 'What a good mount you have!' The Prophet replied, 'Don't say, "What a good mount!" Say rather, 'What good riders!"' He would do anything for them.

7 When the Prophet closed his eyes in death, what was the behaviour of those who were around at that time? The boys saw their mother outside the house. They said to each other, 'She is weeping for her father.' When Fâṭima saw the faces of her children, she saw that their faces were downcast. She said to them, 'Why is it that your faces are so downcast?' They said, 'Now that our grandfather has left the world, these people living in Madina have turned their backs on us. They do not look at us very lovingly as they used to look at us when the Prophet was present with us. Now everyone in Madina looks badly at us.' You can imagine what passed through the heart of Fâṭima after she had heard these words from her children. This was the same princess whose father was the Holy Prophet of Islam. He had bequeathed her in his will the garden of Fidak, but it had been taken away by the Muslims of that age.[13] You can imagine what she must have felt in her heart.

8 Fâṭima took along her two children to the court of the caliph (i.e. Abû Bakr) and pleaded with him for this property which had been willed to her by her father, the Prophet. When the caliph asked, 'Do you have any witness that the Holy Prophet had left the garden of Fidak to you from his property?' she said, 'Yes! These two children are my witnesses.' The caliph replied brutally saying, 'We do not accept the witness of two children.' You can imagine what she felt as she

recollected that these were the same children who had been taken as witnesses for God on the occasion of the *Mubâhala* (see paras 1–3). Many times the Prophet had declared, 'These children are not like ordinary children. They are equivalent to the adults of the time.' Now, when Fâṭima was leaving her household at the time of her death, you can imagine what she was feeling: these were the same children for whom the Prophet cared very much. These were the same children whom she nourished and brought up by grinding flour for them at the grinding mill.

9 Today is the *majlis* of Imâm Ḥasan. It is not so common for us to remember the Sufferings of Ḥasan. There was once a poet who used to write so many *marṯiyas* that he began to lose his sight because of the strain. When he found out that he was losing his sight from continuous writing, he prayed to God asking, 'O my Lord! I am losing my sight. Restore my sight!' When he slept, he saw in his dream Fâṭima to whom he pleaded, 'O Bîbî [Lady]! I have been writing *marṯiyas* for your household but I am losing my sight. Bless me so that I might get back my normal vision!' She replied, 'O poet! Why have you not written a *marṯiya* for my son Ḥasan? He faced so many difficulties before he passed from this world. Nobody writes *marṯiya*s describing the tragic events in his life! Why don't you write a *marṯiya* for him and then, God willing, your sight will be restored to you!' After the poet had written a *marṯiya* for Ḥasan, describing the tragic events and other details of his life, he was blessed with the restoration of sight to his eyes.

10 After ᶜAlî had died, Muᶜâwiya* became the worst enemy of the *Ahl-e Bayt* and desired that Ḥasan be put away. He wanted Ḥasan to be removed from his office so that he, Muᶜâwiya, could become caliph. He tried many times to do this, and he could be charged with many attempts to murder Ḥasan. Many times Ḥasan was given poison but escaped with his life. On one occasion, for example, Muᶜâwiya devised a very cunning plan to get rid of Ḥasan. A man said that he was prepared to fake blindness. This man was given a begging bowl beneath which was attached an iron spike coated with a very terrible poison. When Ḥasan was sitting, this man stumbled over him, injuring him with this poisonous bowl. However, sitting with Ḥasan at that time was his faithful servant and brother, ᶜAbbâs. ᶜAbbâs ran after the man and cut him with his sword, sending him to hell right there and then. Muᶜâwiya devised many plans like this to murder Ḥasan.

11 At last, after all of these plans had failed, Muᶜâwiya said to Ḥasan, 'O Ḥasan! Either fight me, or get out of here and go into exile!' Ḥasan decided to fight Muᶜâwiya. Muᶜâwiya was aware that when the Prophet's grandson would fight, nobody could beat him because he was the grandson of the Prophet. So Muᶜâwiya spread false rumours in the city that Ḥasan was entering into a treaty [*sulḥ*] with him. This was obviously a false statement that had come from Muᶜâwiya himself. While Ḥasan was praying in his camp, some of his companions came rushing to him, acting on impulse and without thinking. Therefore, Ḥasan showed that to get to the bottom of an affair, you have to make an inquiry and get the facts of the matter.

12 I would like now to narrate an event that took place when Ḥasan was a child, sitting near his father, ᶜAlî. One of Muâwiya's agents came to him to ask some questions of him. ᶜAlî, who was sitting there, said, 'You have not come to hear me! You have come to ask some questions and you have been sent by Muᶜâwiya!' He pointed

to Ḥasan and said, 'This is my son. Ask any question you want from him, and he will answer you!' When the man came to Ḥasan, Ḥasan said to him,

> You have come to ask me some questions. I know what your questions are. You have come to ask about the distance between truth [*ḥaqq*] and falsehood [*bâṭil*]. The distance between them is only the width of four fingers. The ear which listens to falsehood cannot justify it with the truth. It is the eyes that see the truth. So what you have heard you have to analyse and test against what actually happened by asking those who actually saw what happened. You cannot judge whether something is true or not simply from hearing about it. You have also come to ask about how far the earth is from the sky. Two things reach very quickly from the earth to the sky. One is the curse of the oppressed [*maẓlûm*], and the other is a person's sight. Both of these reach swiftly from the earth to the sky.

13 Imâm Ḥasan has mentioned very clearly here, and it is something that we as people of understanding should carefully note, that the prayers of the oppressed reach the Almighty very swiftly. So we must always take care to bear this in mind. Ḥasan went on to say,

> The third question that you wanted to ask me is: 'What is the rainbow?' The rainbow is a sign of God. It appears indicating that rain will come. If it appears while it is raining, it indicates that the rain is about to end. The fourth question that you have come to ask is . . .

14 O believing women! This question has a very detailed reply. But listen to it anyway, and within a short time I will end with the *maṣâ'ib*.

> The fourth question you want to ask is: 'Name the ten things that are the most powerful, and those which are more powerful than them.' The answer is: the most powerful thing that we can observe is stone which is very hard. But iron can break stone, so iron is more powerful than stone. But fire can melt iron, so fire is more powerful than iron. And water is more powerful than fire because water can extinguish fire. Clouds are more powerful than water because clouds can carry water high into the heavens. Air is more powerful than clouds because it is air that makes the clouds fly in the sky. The angel of wind is more powerful than the wind because it is the angel who commands the wind to move. The angel of death is more powerful than the angel of wind because he can take the spirit [*rûḥ*] from the angel of wind bringing death to that angel. Death itself is more powerful than the angel of death, and truly, Almighty God is more powerful even than death.

(Transition to *maṣâ'ib*)

15 So you can imagine the knowledge that Ḥasan, the 'Master of the Age', possessed. This Muʿâwiya was trying to overrule him. He was trying to overthrow

him and was very greedily trying to capture his office. He wanted to become the caliph of the Muslims. He repeatedly tried to poison the Imâm, but when he did not succeed, he poisoned the ears of the Imâm's companions through false propaganda. Once, when the Imâm was praying, these companions came and asked him why he had agreed to make peace [*ṣulh*] with Muᶜâwiya. They insulted him, and one of them even struck the Imâm with his sword. That is why we find Ḥusayn saying, 'The companions whom I have with me were not available to my grandfather or my father or my brother.'

16 So we can see that this is how Ḥasan had to face the anger of his own companions even before peace had been negotiated with Muᶜâwiya. Therefore, only when the Imâm was certain that he could not rely on his own companions in the fight against Muᶜâwiya, he accepted the offer although he knew that Muᶜâwiya would not fulfil the conditions that he had laid down.[14] There is a Tradition from the Prophet in which he asked his companions, 'What is the strongest link (in the chain) of belief [*imân*]?' Some said the ritual Prayers, others suggested Fasting, yet others said Almsgiving. But the Prophet said, 'No! I will tell you what is the strongest link of belief. If you make religious war [*jihâd*] with someone, then do it only for God; and if you make peace with someone, then do it only for God.' This is why Ḥasan made peace in accordance with the will of God.

17 But when we see that, after the peace had been made, ᶜAlî was cursed from 80,000 pulpits, you can imagine the condition of the son listening to this calumny against his father, and yet enduring patiently. Although it was very difficult to be patient at a time like this, I would like to say, 'O Imâm (Ḥasan)! There was another son who saw his father wounded with 80,000 blows of the sword and fall on the field of Karbala, left even without the ritual bath for his body, and without a shroud.' It was ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn* who said, 'I could not even recognize my father such was his state.'

18 Even after all of this, Muᶜâwiya was not satisfied. He had Ḥasan poisoned by one of the Imâm's wives because in doing this he opened up the way for Yazîd to become caliph after him. You can see the extent to which the love of this world makes a person act! The Imâm got up in the night to drink a glass of water which was poisoned. As a result his liver was broken, and the Imâm vomited the pieces out of his mouth. Zaynab* and Ḥusayn were called and the brothers embraced each other. But what was the condition when Ḥusayn himself was martyred? There was no loving face around him. It was only Zaynab who tried to reach the place where her brother was dying, but Ḥusayn told her to go back to the camp.

19 Thus Ḥasan was martyred, and before his death he stipulated that he should be buried beside the Prophet. Marwan, who was the governor of Madina, himself joined the procession behind Ḥasan's bier with tears in his eyes. When people asked him, 'While Ḥasan was alive, you gave him so much trouble; and now you are in tears. What is this?' He replied, 'Yes, I used to trouble him and he used to bear it patiently.'

20 But Ḥasan's wish was not fulfilled, and the Muslims did not allow him to be buried beside the Prophet, and for that reason he was buried in the Baqîᶜ cemetery. And even after that, today, we find that his grave is not there because it has been obliterated by the oppressors [*ẓâlimîn*]. We are not allowed even to go near the site of the grave although we so desire to do so. We can only call out from afar: 'O Master! Accept our visitation [*ziyârat*]!'[15]

6 Sermons by religious scholars

Sermon 9: 'a necklace of pearls of the praises of Imâm ᶜAlî'

The last in a series of three sermons preached by Syed Reza Aga on 21 Ramaẓan 1419/9 January 1999 at the preacher's residence, Noor Khan Bazaar and commemorating the anniversary of the martyrdom of Imâm ᶜAlî.

Introduction

Mawlana Reza Aga is the most prominent Shîᶜî religious scholar in Hyderabad, as the title, 'King of the Scholars' [*Sulṭân ul-ᶜUlamâ'*], bestowed on him by his teacher, Âyatullâh ᶜAbdullâh Shîrâzî, suggests. He comes from a well-known family of religious scholars and preachers. This family traces its ancestry back to Shiraz in Iran and includes leaders in the Shîᶜî community throughout South India. Reza Aga's grandfather, Sayyid Ghulâm Ḥusayn, was mentioned in Chapter 1 of this study. Reza Aga himself was born in Hyderabad in 1936 and studied at a *madrasa* in Lucknow for three years before travelling to Najaf. In recognition of his father's services to the Nizâm, Hyderabad's ruler, the Nizâm personally financed the young Reza Aga's journey and studies. In Najaf, Reza Aga stayed for 13 years, learning from such eminent scholars as Âyatullâh al-Khû'î, Âyatullâh Shîrâzî and Âyatullâh Khomaynî. He attained the rank of *mujtahid* before returning to Hyderabad in the late 1960s. He began to preach at *majâlis* as a young boy, reciting short, memorized *maṣâ'ib* orations written for him by his father, although he dates his career as an established *ẕâkir* from 1955. As part of his work as a religious and community leader, Reza Aga now runs a small *madrasa* training religious scholars and *ẕâkirs* from his residence, as well as a primary school. Shortly before this sermon was preached, Reza Aga was named by the supreme Iranian spiritual leader Âyatullâh Khâmana'î as the official representative of South Indian Shîᶜas to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The *majlis* presented here is the final one in a series of three held in commemoration of the martyrdom of ᶜAlî. This annual series of *majâlis* held at his home attracts large numbers of people who cannot hear him during the mourning season itself as he is normally travelling outside of the country. The size of

the congregation grew each night, so that by the last *majlis*, presented here, the hall in the house itself was very crowded, and many people were sitting outside on mats spread on the road. There were several hundred people in attendance. The *majlis* was broadcast from loudspeakers outside the house to the surrounding neighbourhood. A particular feature at this *majlis* was the presence of a crew from a local Hyderabadi cable TV channel. The manner in which some people in the gathering were dressed indicated that they knew in advance that the event was to be televised.

Several community leaders, other scholars and *zâkirs* were present throughout the series. After the sermon, a model of ᶜAlî's bier was carried into and around the hall while the congregation struggled to touch it in order to obtain a blessing. After the bier had been carried out again, the 'men's association' [*mâtamî gurûh*] supervising the performance of *mâtam* took over the proceedings and led the congregation in the chanting of *nawḥa* elegies accompanied by *mâtam*. This *mâtam* included not only beating of the chest but also the use of knives and razor-blades by a few individuals.

The sermon text

1 'Or do they envy the people for what God hath given them of His grace? But indeed We have given to Abraham's children the Book and the Wisdom and We gave them a Great Kingdom' (Sûra-e Nisâ' 4.54).

2 Thank you all for coming. As I speak to you, between us is the love of the 'Master of Creation' (i.e. ᶜAlî). What would be the point of me speaking to the walls? It is you who have come to listen, and we must pray that God will continue to keep in our hearts the love of ᶜAlî. It is a little cramped in here at the moment but, God willing, when the *ᶜâshûrkhâna*[1] is completed, we will have more room for the commemoration of the 'Sufferings' [*maṣâ'ib*].

(At this point a delegation from the Iranian Consulate, including the Consul General himself, enters. The preacher greets them, explaining in Farsi that most of the people who have come to the *majlis* do not understand the Farsi language, and for that reason he will be speaking in Urdu.)

3 All things on earth have limits, a language and a place, but the attributes of God are without limit, language, or place. What God gives is also without limits, His being [*zât*] having no limits. If we were to understand the beginning of God, we would have to go on a *Miᶜrâj**. Before anything else, God created the 'Light of Muḥammad' [*Nûr Muḥammadî*], as the Prophet said, 'Before anything else, God created my light.' Other Traditions of the Prophet relate that the first thing created was reason [*ᶜaql*]. Thus, the light was a perfect light and the light of knowledge. This light of knowledge was not single; all of the 'Fourteen' (Sinless Ones) were included in it. The Prophet also said, 'I and ᶜAlî are from the same light'. The (original) light was split into two parts.

4 There is an *âyat* in the Qur'ân which says, 'O (Our) Apostle (Muḥammad)! Strive hard against the infidels and the hypocrites, and be severe unto them' (Sûra-e Baraâ'a 9.73, cf. Sûra-e Taḥrîm 66.9).

We must take the help of this *âyat* in understanding the Light of Muḥammad. Up to the 11th year of the *Hijrat* (i.e. the year of the Prophet's death), the Prophet had not 'striven hard' [lit. 'practised *jihâd*', see above-quoted *âyat*] against the hypocrites, but only against the unbelievers. It is known that there were people with the Prophet who were hypocrites, but the Prophet was not struggling against them. After the death of the Prophet, it was ᶜAlî who had to struggle against the hypocrites. We can see therefore that the reference in this *âyat* to the Prophet, and thus to the Light of Muḥammad itself, includes all of the 14 Sinless Ones. The Light of Muḥammad was split into two pieces, but it was the same light. When ᶜAlî slept in the bed of the Prophet on the night of the *Hijrat**, the people thought that it was Muḥammad who was sleeping there. When ᶜAlî led the Prayers, they had the same 'fragrance' [*khushbû*] as when the Prophet led them.

5 God sent his light which was split into two pieces. Many of the *âyats* in the Qur'ân refer both to Muḥammad and to ᶜAlî, but the real meaning of them was not understood at the time. My speech is about light. My speech is not for those who do not acknowledge the Light of Muḥammad. My speech is for those who both acknowledge the Light of the Prophet and who call the Prophet *ummî* (see S5.8) God gave the *âyat* (quoted at the start of the sermon) about the Prophet, and God also gave the *âyat* that says that God had made the Prophet *ummî* (i.e. Sûra-e Aᶜrâf 7.157). How could God give both the first *âyat* and the second, if the second means that he is an ignorant 'hick' [*gauṇwâr*, lit. 'villager'], unable to read or write. This *âyat* says that the people were jealous of the Prophet. How could they be jealous of one who could not read or write and who did not have any knowledge? God gave so much grace to the Prophet that it was overflowing. To say that God had not given the Prophet the ability to read and write is to say that God is a miser.

6 Such was the grace God gave Muḥammad that from the very drops of sweat on his forehead were created Adam, Noah, Moses and all the prophets. Adam is the father of all, but if he was created from a drop of sweat that fell from Muḥammad's forehead, how can he be called Muḥammad's brother? The Qur'ân says of Abraham, 'And verily of his (i.e. the Prophet Muḥammad's) persuasion was Abraham' (Sûra-e Ṣâfât 37.83).

Sûra-e Nisâ' (4.125) says, 'And who is better in religion than he who resigned himself entirely unto God? And is righteous and followeth the creed of Abraham, the Upright One, and God took Abraham for a Friend.'

Abraham was the ancestor of the Prophet Muḥammad, but Abraham himself wanted to be included in the followers of Muḥammad. How can he then be called the Prophet's brother?

7 How can someone with crew-cut hair, a long beard and trousers above his ankles claim that the Prophet is his brother?[2] God says of ᶜAlî:

> He was born in My house, and My attributes are explained by means of his nature. When a person looks at ᶜAlî, they are able to understand My nature, My greatness and My exalted stature. When a person looks at ᶜAlî's deeds, they will understand My divinity and the worship due to Me. When a person sees ᶜAlî's generosity, they will understand My providence and generosity.

> When they see ᶜAlî as the giver of daily sustenance [*rizq*], they see My sustenance. When they see the creativity of ᶜAlî, they understand My creation. When they see ᶜAlî's lordship, they understand that I am the Lord of lords. You cannot even understand the work of ᶜAlî's slaves; how can you then possibly understand the work of ᶜAlî himself?

How can people say to me that I am one of the exaggerators [*ghulât*]?[3] I am not exaggerating. ᶜAllâma Majlisî[4] said that the exaggerator is one who goes beyond the limits. But there are no limits to the Virtues [*faẕâ'il*] of ᶜAlî, so how can exaggeration be possible?

8 What can I say about the generosity of ᶜAlî? On one occasion, a person on the road asked him for a *rôtî* [round, flat bread]. ᶜAlî's slave, Khambar, was leading a camel by a rope tied through its nose, and behind it were many other camels. ᶜAlî told his slave to give all of the camels to the poor man. Khambar gave the camels and quickly stepped aside. The reason was that such was his master's generosity that he was afraid that he himself would be given away by ᶜAlî! The poor man said to ᶜAlî, 'But I only asked for a *rôtî*!' ᶜAlî replied, 'Your capacity is only a *rôtî*, but my capacity is beyond even these camels.'

9 The nature of ᶜAlî was such that he could see as well in the day as in the night; thus he would never get lost. On the night of the *Hijrat**, ᶜAlî was under the blanket in the bed of the Prophet, and the unbelievers (of Mecca who came to kill Muḥammad) could not tell the difference between ᶜAlî and the Prophet: such was his character. ᶜAlî was a moon which shone even in the light of day. As the Qur'ân says (Sûra-e Shams 91.2), 'By the moon when she followeth after it (i.e. the sun).'

We cannot see God, but we can see the god of the Nuṣayrîs,[5] and the god of the Nuṣayrîs is so great that when we see the greatness [*ᶜaẓmat*] of the Nuṣayrî's god, we recognize the greatness of God. On the night of the *Hijrat*, when ᶜAlî was sleeping in the bed of the Prophet, God summoned the angels and ordered them to protect ᶜAlî, telling them that this was their worship. Gabriel was at the head of ᶜAlî, while Michael was at his feet. The two angels were talking to one another. Gabriel boasted to Michael, 'I am at ᶜAlî's head!' Michael retorted, 'I am at ᶜAlî's feet so that I can see his face; to see the face of ᶜAlî is my worship. The feet of ᶜAlî which I am guarding are the feet which stood on the shoulders of the prophethood (see Kaᶜba*), and God says that when ᶜAlî goes along, God is happy.'[6]

10 On a certain occasion a person asked ᶜAlî, 'How can I find you in the midst of a battle, in order to get your orders?' ᶜAlî replied, 'When I am fighting in a battle, I stand in a particular place; from there I may go to the right, to the left or forward, but I always return to that point. Thus you will always know where to find me.' ᶜAlî was such a swordsman that in a battle the last blow that he gave was called the '*Ḥaydarî* cut.'[7] There was no blow like it. Who can compare with ᶜAlî's character? There is no comparison possible with ᶜAlî's blow, with his character or with his horsemanship. When a person wants to say something very important, he will swear by something which is very great. In this way, God takes an oath by the sun, 'by the moon' (see previous para) or by the setting of the stars (see Sûra-e Naḥjm 53.1). The movement of the star* referred to here is its descent to the door of ᶜAlî's house.

11 Before the Battle of the Wadî-e Yâbis, ᶜAlî said to the other fighters with him, 'I will go in front on my horse, and you follow behind on yours.' ᶜAlî went so fast that God named a *sûra* of the Qur'ân after his riding, Sûra-e Adîyât (100.1–3): 'By the snorting chargers [*adîyât*]! And those that dash off (their hoofs) striking fire, and those that scour to the attack at morn!' Such is the greatness of ᶜAlî that when even a horse is near him, God will swear by it!

12 (Note: at this point a man from the congregation stands up, waves his arms and cries out the following:) 'So brilliant is this discourse, that after it the cries of *Naᶜrê Ḥaydarî* are silent and worthless! So brilliant is ᶜAlî that his charity [*ṣadqa*] gives light both in this world and the next! O God! Send your light on this gathering such that all those gathered here remain always happy and good! O God! By the "Moon of the Banî Hâshim" (i.e. ᶜAbbâs*), increase the age and qualities of Reza Aga! Through ᶜAlî Akbar*, make all the youth gathered here happy and good! Through Ḥusayn, bless Baquer Aga, Husain Aga (brothers of Reza Aga) and Hyder Aga (Reza Aga's son), Mohsin Aga (Baqer Aga's son) and the government of Iran! *Naᶜrê Ḥaydarî! Yâ ᶜAlî!*'

13 The horse that ᶜAlî was riding was not a heavenly horse. It was an ordinary earthly horse. Yet because it was ridden by ᶜAlî, God was prepared to take it as an object of His oath. This is the case for everything that was with ᶜAlî. Because of ᶜAlî, these things became close to God. There is a Tradition (of the Prophet) that says,

> The remembrance of ᶜAlî is worship. The reason for this is that the remembrance of ᶜAlî is the remembrance of me, and the remembrance of me is the remembrance of God, and the remembrance of God is worship.

In some places, the remembrance of ᶜAlî is not possible.[8] In these places, all that can be done is to hold the love of ᶜAlî. But the love of ᶜAlî is also worship. There is another Tradition of the Prophet which says, 'To see the face of ᶜAlî is to worship.' In relation to this last Tradition, the question arose during ᶜAlî's life as to how it would be relevant once ᶜAlî's face could no longer be seen when he had died. When asked about this, ᶜAlî replied that everyone would see his face at the time of their death and after their death.

14 There was one occasion when ᶜAlî was with his friends (Salmân Fârisî*, Abû Ẕarr* and Miqdâd*). At this time, ᶜAlî said to Salmân,

> My nature [*zât*] is so high that it cannot be reached; even my name is so high that no other name can reach it. When my name was written on the earth, the earth was established. When my name was written on the sky, it was raised up. When my name was written on the sun, the moon and the stars, they began to shine. When my name was written on the dew, it formed into a drop and fell. When my name was written on the light, it became brilliant. When my name was written on the darkness, it became black. When my name was written on the lightning, it struck. When my name was written on the clouds, they gave forth their rain. If it is impossible to understand even my name,

how can anyone understand my very nature! There are some circumstances in which we (i.e. the *Ahl-e Bayt**) are seen to be like God; there are other circumstances in which God seems to be like us. We are what we are; and God is what God is. This is not a difficult thing to understand. For example, when an iron rod is put into the fire, while in the fire it looks like the fire itself, but when it is brought out, the rod is the rod, and the fire is the fire.

15 God placed before ᶜAlî a light. When people who love ᶜAlî by means of that love see his light, they see the original principle [*ᶜasl*] of light. This is a matter which the Nuṣayrîs (see para 9) are not able to understand. They are able to get close to understanding, but they do not arrive at a right understanding about ᶜAlî. The Nuṣayrîs, when they see the nature of ᶜAlî, love the attributes of God. They understand the principle of ᶜAlî, but they do not understand the principle behind that principle, and so they deny the real principle of God. They confess ᶜAlî as God not from enmity, but out of love for him. Even today when people mention the name of the Nuṣayrîs, they do so with a smile because they realize that what the Nuṣayrîs do, they do out of love. They are not on the right path; they have left it, but they have done so as a token of love. They are on the wrong path, but our smile is a token of (our recognition of) their love for ᶜAlî.

16 Love [*muḥabbat*] is love, affection [*piyâr*] is affection, Knowledge [*ᶜirfân*] is Knowledge. Worship has its own pleasure: love for the *Ahl-e Bayt*. Prostration goes with a feeling of love towards the *Ahl-e Bayt*. When a prostration is done with this feeling of love, what an exemplary prostration it is! It encompasses the giving of Alms and the 'Ring'.[9] For us Shîᶜa, this kind of prostration is exemplary, and we understand the meaning of it, but some others neither understand it nor do they see it as exemplary. It is actually a completely clear matter, as God loved this action (i.e. ᶜAlî's giving of the ring) so much that He even sent down an *âyat* of the Qur'ân as a token of His commendation of the act: 'Verily, verily, your guardian [*mawlâ*] is (none else but) God and His Apostle (Muhammad) and those who believe, those who establish prayer and pay the poor-rate, while they be (even) bowing down (in prayer)' (Sûra-e Mâ'ida 5.55).

Even so, some people do not understand this action. But they would not understand the action even if the *âyat* had been sent down 70 times!

17 When the *Âyat-e Taṭhîr** [Âyat of Purity, that is Sûra-e Aḥzâb 33.33 quoted later] was sent down, it was not sent down in a house. If it had been sent down in the Prophet's house, where the Prophet's wives were staying, then it would have included them also. It included only those who were under the sheet [*châdar*].[10] It did not refer to those who were allowed to enter the house, but only those who were allowed to enter the sheet. Other people could not join; neither could any of those (under the sheet) leave that group. 'Verily, verily God intendeth but to keep off from you (every kind of) uncleanness O ye People of the House [*Ahl-e Bayt*], and purify you (with) a thorough purification' (Sûra-e Aḥzâb 33.33).

I will speak a little more about the Virtues of ᶜAlî before moving on to the account of the Sufferings [*maṣâ'ib*]. O God, double the happiness of the people here who love ᶜAlî!

18 God told Gabriel to stop anyone else from going under the sheet. Gabriel is one who is very strong in his mind, and who never forgets anything. He never suffers from any mental defects. He never babbles words out of sickness, as he never gets sick. He always carries out those things that he intends to do. He always reaches the place where he is intending to go, and gives to those to whom he intends to give. He does not eat. Abraham once told Hagar and Sarah to make food, and Abraham offered it to Gabriel. But Gabriel refused and went away (see Sûra-e Hûd 11.69–70). But once, Gabriel came to the house of Fâṭima three days in a row. This one who had refused the food of Abraham, saying that he did not need food, so badly wanted *rôtî* [bread] made by the hand of Fâṭima that he said to her, 'I am a poor indigent, please give me a *rôtî*!'

19 When Gabriel brought the Prophet to the 'Furthest Lote Tree' [*Sidrat al-Muntahâ*] at the *Miᶜrâj** [Ascension of the Prophet], Gabriel was told to wait while the Prophet went in (to the presence of God). The Prophet was sweating out of apprehension at meeting with God, but God showed him that all around were pictures of ᶜAlî. After that, the Prophet was happy and relieved and stopped sweating. But if Gabriel had gone in with the Prophet, he would have entered as Gabriel but would have come out as a Nuṣayrî. It was this that kept God from allowing Gabriel to enter with the Prophet. Once the Prophet was asked to recount the Virtues of ᶜAlî. He replied that if he were to do that, people would take the dust that had been under ᶜAlî's feet and use it as salve for their eyes. The Prophet would not mention ᶜAlî's Virtues in order to save the community from straying from the right path. ᶜAlî's friends would not talk about his Virtues for fear of his enemies, and ᶜAlî's enemies would not speak about his Virtues because of their own enmity.[11] Even God would keep ᶜAlî's Virtues hidden in order to keep Gabriel from becoming a Nuṣayrî! If ᶜAlî's Virtues are so well hidden, and yet the Nuṣayrîs revere him as God, what would happen if these Virtues were not hidden? If the Virtues of ᶜAlî have no limits, what is the limit of the jealousy of those who do not acknowledge ᶜAlî?[12]

20 Whatever Gabriel saw of the Prophet, he remembered. He forgot nothing that the Prophet had done, neither his words nor his actions. Gabriel said to God, 'You have heard all the voices of everyone in the whole world. Why do you only choose the accent of ᶜAlî with which to speak?' The reason is that those whom you like you tend to copy. Thus a (younger) *ẕâkir* will copy the accent of an older *ẕâkir* whom he likes. For example, a younger *ẕâkir* might like ᶜAllâma Rashîd Turâbî, Ibn-e Ḥasan Nohnêhrwî, Abrâr Ḥusayn Parwî, Ṣibt-e Ḥasan or my own father, Sayyid Âqâ, and copy his style.[13] A Tradition of ᶜAlî relates that he said, 'I was a thousand years before Adam; I was with Adam and I am after Adam. My Virtues overflow like water from a spring; no one's mind can grasp my Virtues.'

21 O God! May the Shîᶜa live for ever! May the Shîᶜî country of Iran remain for ever! May no one cause the Shîᶜa any harm until the 'Imâm of the Age' [*Imâm-e Zamân*, that is, the *Mahdî**] comes to save them! Through the hearing of the Virtues of ᶜAlî, make happy the faces of those who love him! Through the happiness of these faces, establish the purity of their ancestors! If any do not smile when they hear the Virtues of ᶜAlî, expose the shame of their ancestors!

For those whose ancestors' goodness has been established, tonight is the night of martyrdom!

(Transition to *maṣâ'ib*)

22 In the house of the *Ahl-e Bayt*, this night of the year is remembered as a very tragic night. According to our *ᶜûlamâ'*, two nights in the history of Islam are very tragic nights. The first is the Night of ᶜÂshûrâ' [*Shab-e ᶜÂshûr*], and the second is the Night of Martyrdom [*Shab-e Shahâdat*], that is the martyrdom of ᶜAlî. There is one thing which is common to these two nights. In both of these nights one person was tragically affected, and that was Zaynab*. When Zaynab was born in Madina, the Prophet was not in the city at the time. However, Zaynab's parents (i.e. ᶜAlî and Fâṭima) did not name her until (her grandfather) the Prophet arrived. When he came, he went to Fâṭima's house and enquired about the newborn baby. Taking the child into his arms, he asked whether the child had been given a name. ᶜAlî replied that she had not been named, but that they had been waiting for the Prophet's arrival for him to give her a name. The Prophet then declared, 'I name this child Zaynab.' The word *zaynab* is the Arabic compound [*murrakkab*] form joining the two words, *zayn* [Ar. 'adornment', 'beauty'] and *ab* [Ar. 'father']. It means the '*zayn* of the *ab*', that is the 'pride', 'glory' or 'ornament' of the father. And, by God! Zaynab throughout her life proved to be the adornment of her father.

23 By the age of 5 or 6, Zaynab had faced many tragic events in her life. The first came when her mother, Fâṭima, passed away. You simply cannot imagine a normal child of this age being given her last will and testament [*waṣiyyat*] by her mother. This child of 6 years was sitting beside her mother when her mother was about to leave for her heavenly dwelling. At that time, her mother was instructing her about the Sufferings [*maṣâ'ib*] that she would undergo at Karbala. This child was behaving far beyond her age as she sat keenly listening to what her mother was saying. 'Yes, Mother,' she said, 'I promise to show patient endurance [*ṣabr*] at that time.' She was even showing this patience at the time when this tragic event was being foretold to her by her mother. But at a certain moment she asked her mother, 'Will this event really happen?' She was referring to something particular that happened to Zaynab at Karbala. Her mother replied, 'Yes, and you will have to be very patient even at that time.' So Zaynab promised her mother that she would be patient. But then she asked her mother, 'Will you promise that when that time comes, and I call on you for help, you will come?' Fâṭima replied, 'Yes, whenever a terrible event happens to you, and you call upon me, I will come to you.'

24 On this night (i.e. when ᶜAlî was dying from his wound sustained two days earlier), it is said that the spirit of the Holy Prophet was very uncomfortable, and that even Fâṭima came out of her grave. ᶜAlî was deeply distressed and ill at ease. Sometimes he would talk to Umm-e Kulṯûm*, and sometimes to Zaynab. He would tell Zaynab to direct him to lie on the bed, or at other times to make him sit. It was clear that he was very ill at ease. The reason was the poisoned sword-wound from his murderer, Ibn-e Muljam. After some time, when he looked towards the sky with a deep, contemplative thought, he addressed Zaynab saying, 'Zaynab! Will

you do one thing for me if I request it?' 'Of course, my father!' she replied. 'Just say the word, and I will oblige you.' He told her, 'Today it is my wish that a cloth be spread and food laid on it so that all my children can sit and eat together. Can you make this arrangement for me, Zaynab?' 'Certainly, Father,' she replied, 'I will arrange it now.' So the cloth was laid, food placed on it, and ᶜAlî's children sat around to eat. It is narrated in reliable Traditions that ᶜAlî had 36 children, of whom 18 were daughters and 18 were sons.

25 ᶜAlî instructed the people around him to sit him up with some support so that he could look at the children as they ate. As he sat watching, his children would take a morsel and lift it to their mouths. But when they saw his wounded head, they could not bring themselves to actually eat. This continued for some time until ᶜAlî called Ḥasan, his first-born son, to come to him. Then, one by one, he called all of the rest of his children to come to him, and to put their hands into the hand of Ḥasan, saying that they were all now under the guidance and support of Ḥasan. This happened to all the children. They all came one by one, put their hands into Ḥasan's hands while ᶜAlî said, 'This is my child, O Ḥasan! You must look after him and care for him!' Ḥasan promised faithfully that he would do this.

26 But at a certain point, ᶜAlî heard a wailing voice from the back of the room. He asked, 'Who is it who is crying?' The reply came, 'It is Umm-e Banîn* who is crying.' He called Umm-e Banîn and asked her, 'Why are you crying?' She was the wife of ᶜAlî. She said, 'You have placed all the children's hands into the hand of Ḥasan. But are you not happy with my son, ᶜAbbâs, whose hands you have not placed into Ḥasan's?' ᶜAlî replied, 'That is not the case!' He called ᶜAbbâs to come to him. ᶜAbbâs was very young, and he was crying. He said, 'O my father! O my master! You have given everyone's hands into my master Ḥasan's hand; why haven't you placed my hands in his?' ᶜAlî began to weep and said, 'No! That is not the case!' He told ᶜAbbâs to come closer. When the child ᶜAbbâs was standing very close to him, ᶜAlî called Ḥusayn and placed Ḥusayn's hands into those of ᶜAbbâs, saying, 'O ᶜAbbâs! I give Ḥusayn into your protection. You have to take care of him!' This was the tragic scene which could be observed on this night.

(There is a break here in the tape. It resumes as follows:)

27 When I went as a student to Kufa, I happened to see the annual ceremonial procession in which the *tâbût* [representation of the bier, that is of ᶜAlî] is carried from Kufa to Najaf.[14] Many *ᶜulamâ'* try to take blessings from the *tâbût* as it passes, and it seems as if the funeral of ᶜAlî himself is being re-enacted.[15] A day came when the funeral of ᶜAlî was arranged. But before ᶜAlî passed away, he called Zaynab and said, 'My little daughter, I have to tell you something very important.' She said, 'Yes, my father, what is it?' He replied, 'I am very proud of you, my daughter. You are my pride [*zînat*]. The patience [*ṣabr*] of your mother is proud of you. My own patience is proud of you.'[16] It is important to note here that ᶜAlî said something very great. ᶜAlî said, 'My patience, Zaynab, I am designating as yours.'[17] But, my child, whatever you come across in your life, never curse [*bad duᶜâ*] anyone or anything. You will be driven out from Madina, but you must never curse. You will reach Karbala, but you must never curse. You will be paraded in

the streets of Damascus, but you must never curse.' He continued, 'Whatever tragedy you face in your life, you must never curse, O my daughter!' Then he kissed the arms of Zaynab and said, 'These are the arms which will be tied with ropes at Karbala.' Then, astonishingly, she said, 'O father! I have a brother, ᶜAbbâs. Who would dare even to touch me, when my brother, ᶜAbbâs is with me?' But alas! ᶜAlî recited the Profession of faith [*Kalima*]: 'I bear witness that there is no god but God; and I bear witness that Muḥammad is the Prophet of God.' At that moment, his eyes closed forever, and Ḥusayn and Ḥasan and all ᶜAlî's children were surrounded by an uncompromising grief which remained with them throughout their lives…

Sermon 10: 'women's rights'

The fifth in a series of seven sermons on the topic of 'human rights' preached by Zaki Baqri on 16 Muḥarram 1418/24 May 1997 at Enayat Jung Palace, Mir Alam Mandi and commemorating the Sufferings of the women of Karbala.

Introduction

Mawlana Zaki Baqri is a regular visitor to Hyderabad in the period directly after the day of ᶜÂshûrâ'. He comes from the same family line as Asgari Hussain Begum and Reza Aga (see Sermons 7 and 9, respectively), but was brought up in the town of Alipur, near Bangalore in the state of Karnataka (South India). He began his religious education in Hyderabad under Reza Aga, and then in Bangalore under another *mawlânâ*, Rawshan Ali, before travelling to Qum (Iran) where he studied for four years. He has been living in Canada since 1979. Besides visiting India each year, he also travels to other countries for preaching, as well as for business purposes.

Both in 1997 and 1998, Zaki Baqri spoke on the subject of human rights. The two series were connected, and some of the material used in 1997 was developed and used again the following year. The series began with a discussion of 'rights' in general, and in particular the question of who had the right to guide the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet. He compared the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (which was at that time coming up to its 50th anniversary) with ᶜAlî's teaching on human rights in the *Naḥj al-Balâgha*. He argued that the same rights were articulated then, 1,400 years ago, as were written in the UN Declaration 50 years ago. He then moved to a discussion of rights and responsibilities, including the 'rights of God' from a treatise by the fourth Imâm, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜAbidîn*, the *Risâlat al-Ḥuqûq* [Treatise on Rights]. The final three sermons of the series were devoted to issues of family relationships. They included this sermon and the last, which dealt with rights and responsibilities of parents to their children and vice versa.

Zaki Baqri is a popular speaker, particularly among young, educated Shîᶜas. He uses examples from sports, computers and the Internet, and speaks often about the West, particularly the US and Canada. He also uses a lot of English in his

sermons. After the last of his series, young people were invited to stay behind for a question and answer session. Zaki Baqri remained on the pulpit and answered a selection of questions that had been handed in previously on slips of paper. There were approximately one thousand people in the congregation of this *majlis*.

The sermon text

1 'Say thou (O Our Apostle Muhammad!) "Of your associates is there any one who can guide unto truth?" Say thou! "It is God alone who guideth unto truth; Is then He Who guideth unto truth more worthy to be followed or he who himself goeth not aright unless he is guided? What then hath befallen you? How (ill) ye judge?" ' (Sûra-e Yûnus 10.35).[18]

2 In yesterday's majlis, we mentioned the UN Declaration on Human Rights and the Muslim laws concerning human rights. This is a very important issue, but this Declaration is not actually followed. It represents only empty laws. The religion of the *Ahl-e Bayt** is a very practical one: the Imâms did not simply speak; they also acted and taught through their actions, for instance about relations between slaves and their masters. In the world there is only one person who is really showing the real meaning of human rights: Mother Teresa. She is like the example of the fourth Imâm, ᶜAlî Zayn al-Âbidîn. When this man's son, the fifth Imâm Muḥammad Bâqîr, was washing his father's body after his death, he not only saw the mark on his forehead of many prostrations, but also the marks on his back, the scars from having gone each night to distribute bread to the poor. In my last *majlis*, I gave a summary of the characteristics of the fourth Imâm, especially how he used to go to the poor areas of the city to give food. But we are different; we expect the poor to come to our homes to collect the alms.

3 In 1944, there was a conference on human rights that took up the special topic of women's rights.[19] This has remained an important subject up until today. In fact, it is the most important aspect of human rights, and this will be the subject of today's *majlis*. It is a strength of Islamic law [*sharîᶜa*], and we are proud of it, that our law covers every area of human life.

4 Before the coming of Islam, there were three famous civilizations: those of India, Persia and China. In none of these cultures had women any rights. In China, if a man saw a woman on the road, he could simply buy her. In India, if a woman's husband died, she did not have the right to live; she had to die.[20] Even today in India, if a man's wife dies, he can marry another woman; if a wife's husband dies, she cannot marry again. In fact in most societies, it is considered a bad thing even today for a woman to remarry, even if her first husband has died. In India, if there is a party at a wedding or other happy event and a widow comes, it is considered a bad thing. In Iran, before Islam, there was no difference between a mother and sister and wife, in terms of who a man could use. A woman's use was only for sex, whether she was a wife or a mother or whatever.

5 In Arabia, before Islam, a man could simply throw a sheet over a woman and she would become his wife; he could have as many wives as he wanted, whether it was 10 or 15 or 20. There was no limit. When Islam came, a man was

allowed 2 or 3 or 4, but no more than that, and if he could not do justice to them, then he could have only one. It is very difficult to do justice to more than one so (spoken in English:) 'better to stick with one'. After the *Hijrat* [emigration from Mecca to Madina], the Prophet lived only 8 or 9 years, and within that time there were 86 major or minor battles. In these battles, most of the men were killed. As a result, permission was given for men to marry up to four women. In no other religion is permission given for such a situation; other religions do not have the ability to cope with such a situation. There is a proverb which says, 'An open door is easy to close; but a closed door is difficult to open.'

6 Psychologists will tell you that if you are going to prohibit something, it is important to give something better in exchange. For example, if you tell a child to stop watching the TV, you should suggest another occupation which will be better and will keep the child busy. Similarly, when the Prophet Lot was talking to the people of his day and telling them to stop practising homosexuality, he said to them, 'Marry my daughters! That would be better for you.'[21] He gave an alternative. If one is going to close a door to a bad thing, it is important to first open a door for a good thing and then close the other door.

7 When a country makes laws, it makes them in the interests of its own culture and people. Thus American laws will favour American people and will be interesting or attractive to Americans. It is the same with Indian laws for Indians and Pakistani laws for Pakistanis. But God's laws are for the whole world and do not show partiality to any one group or nation or culture. I am concerned about young people. They should not simply sit back with their eyes closed, but they should be forward thinking and actually do something. My words at this *majlis* are not partial but universal; they are words of understanding [*ʿaqlî*] and thought [*fikrî*]. As the proverb goes (spoken in English:) 'Don't just sit there with your eyes closed, try and do something!' My words are for young people, they are the only ones who are going to be able to change the world.

8 In Europe and America 150 years ago, women did not have the right to vote. They only received it later. In the congregation here this evening is a 'friend' who has come here for research, and anyone can check with him afterwards about the reference for this.[22] But in Islam, women and men are equal. Women are allowed to have a profession and can own property. The Qur'ân says: '. . . for men shall have of what they earn; and for women shall have of what they earn . . .' (Sûra-e Nisâ' 4.32). So if a woman earns property, it is hers and her husband does not have the right to snatch it from her.

9 In Islam, a woman also has the right to her life. In America, only in the 1950s was slavery abolished. There is a movie, a documentary that details how slaves were brought from Africa to America to be sold.[23] In other countries also they had trains with separate compartments for Blacks and Indians and Whites. In Islam, there was no such discrimination. There was an African, Ḥaẓrat Bilâl, and a Persian, Salmân Fârisî, who were together; one was Black and the other White. In the time of slavery, Africans were treated like animals and would weep. In those days, they were brought to America in chains. Nowadays instead they are lining up at the American or British Embassies! America and Britain have reached such

a high standard of development that although previously they brought slaves into their countries with chains, now they do not need to as everyone wants to go themselves!

10 In Sûra-e Raḥmân we find the words, 'Read thou! (O Our Apostle Muhammad!) In the name of thy Lord who created (everything in the Universe) He created man from a clot!' (also known as Sûra-e ᶜAlaq 96.1–2).

The Qur'ân does not say '*khalaq al-rijâl*' [created man] but '*khalaq al-insân*' [created humankind]. He did not just create man. He created man and woman equally at the same time. Some people think that God took some of the earth from the image [*mujassama*] of the man that had been created and made Eve out of it. But this is not correct. He created them both from earth. In the Bible, it says that it was because of Eve that Adam sinned. But in the Qur'ân, they were both tempted by Satan and sinned together. They both went astray together.[24] In our culture, if a man has problems it is common to blame the wife. But this is not right thinking.

11 In the Qur'ân it says, 'O ye people! Verily We have created you of a male and a female, and made you in nations and tribes, that ye may recognise each other. Verily the most honoured of you with God is the one of you who guardeth (himself) the most (against evil), verily God is All-Knowing, the All-Aware' (Sûra-e Ḥujurât 49.13).

The meaning is that although different people are Black and White or male and female, the only thing that makes one person superior to another is that person's level of piety [*taqwâ*]. The UN law on Human Rights says that all people have the same rights. That is what I am also saying. But in 1986, Âyatullâh Khâmana'î (of Iran) said at the UN that even though under the law there are the same rights for everyone, actually in the UN itself, there are two levels of membership: the ordinary members and the members who have the power of veto. Basically the difference is between the rich and the poor. In Islam, the first law is that all are equal.

12 The Qur'ân gives examples of two women, the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot, who did wrong: 'God setteth forth the similitude unto those who disbelieve the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot; they both were under two of Our righteous servants, but they two were unfaithful (unto their husbands) and they (their husbands) availed them naught against God, and it was said (unto them): "Enter ye both the fire (along) with those who enter (it)!" ' (Sûra-e Taḥrîm 66.10).

These are two examples of women who were unrighteous, but who had righteous husbands. There are other examples, such as ᶜÂsiya, the wife of Pharaoh, who were believers and yet married to unbelievers. What a wonderful book the Qur'ân is! Some think that a bad environment will only produce bad people. But ᶜÂsiya was a good woman who was brought up in a bad situation.

13 Man is *insân* and woman is *insân*. In the beginning they were created equal, but they have different qualities [*ḥâlat*]. Thus men are physically strong; but this is after the creation. According to Islam, they have equal rights, but in practice today in Islamic countries the condition of women is not good. You know, for example, about Saudi Arabia. With us it is the case that women are simply divorced and treated without regard for the proper Islamic law.

14 There is a Tradition about Saᶜad ibn-e Maᶜâẕ, a companion of the Prophet. At his funeral, his mother said over his corpse, 'Congratulations on attaining heaven!' But the Prophet, who was also at the burial said, 'No, he will receive punishment.' The other companions were amazed because this man had such a reputation for piety and had fought with the Prophet at Badr* and Uḥud*. The Prophet had even said that there would be 17,000 angels over his bier at his funeral. Yet although on the surface he was a good man and pious, underneath, meaning at home with his wife and children, he was not a good man. Therefore, he would receive punishment. With us it is also the case that an outwardly pious man can be bad at home.

15 The bravest man is one who can admit his own wrongdoings. Actually, 99 per cent of marriages today are against the proper laws of Islam. According to Islamic law marriage ought to be a simple affair, but today we are making it very difficult and complicated. A Tradition about a marriage in the time of the Prophet relates that one day a woman came to the Prophet and asked him to marry her. He told her that he himself would not marry her but he asked his companions, and one of them said that he would be prepared to do so. But when the Prophet asked this companion about the *mehr* [bridal gift],[25] the man said that he didn't have any money to give. The Prophet then asked the companion if he had any skills, and the man replied that he could recite the Qur'ân. So the Prophet asked the woman if she would agree to be taught to recite the Qur'ân as her *mehr*. She agreed, and the marriage went ahead. But now, people are asking one or two hundred thousand rupees (2–4,000 dollars). It is this huge *mehr* that causes such problems for marriages later on. The girl says, 'My grandmother had such a huge *mehr*, so I need also to have so much.' This has become the tradition [*sunnat*] of our families!

16 In Islam, the marriage ceremony [*ṣîgha-e nikâḥ*] is actually a simple thing. The boy and the girl can simply say it together either in Arabic or translated into the vernacular, give the *mehr*, and they are legally married. There is no (spoken in English:) 'priesthood' in Islam. I might get criticism from the local (i.e. Hyderabadi) *mawlânâs* [religious scholars] who would say, 'Why are you saying this in public here? You are not from Hyderabad, but this is our living. If you say that the boy and girl can simply say the marriage contract together, where would we get our daily sustenance [*rizq*] from?'[26] But I would say this in Alipur and Canada also!

17 According to Islamic law derived from tradition [*sunnat*], the first thing that should be done after the marriage is that when the girl goes to the boy's house, he should wash her feet with water. How many of you did that? If you did not do it at that time, you should go home and do it now! And the water that has been used to wash her feet should be sprinkled around the house as a blessing. This is a woman's right.

18 In the West, the big question is (spoken in English and Urdu:) 'Who is the boss?' [*Baṛâ kaun hai?*] There is even a TV programme in America with that name. Who is the boss in the home? In Islam, it is very clear. There is only one answer and that is, 'the man'. Even if five people are in a car, there can be only one driver.

19 On one occasion, Jesus was with his disciples. He told them, 'I want to complete my wish [*khoâhish*] for you.' They said, 'Yes – what is it?' He told them, 'My wish is to wash your feet.' They regarded him as the Prophet of God and saw him as having a much higher status than them. Yet he did this (see John 13.1–14). Even today, the Pope washes the feet of some people. Jesus had a much higher position than them, but he made himself lower by being ready to wash their feet. If you wash your wife's feet, you will be leaving behind your pride but you will gain a high position both with God and in the home. This is Islam. In Islam, a woman is not a slave, she is a person. She is an equal partner. In Islam, when a woman prays the *namâz* she should be one foot behind the man. But the reason is that *jihâd* [religious war] is not obligatory for her. So the man should die first; and if he will die first, then he should pray first.

20 When Zachariah came to visit Mary (Sûra-e Âl ᶜImrân 3:37), he saw that she was provided with food. When he asked her from where it came, she replied that it was provided by God. Zachariah was surprised that God was giving food to her in a way that He had not even provided for a prophet such as himself. This is how God views the status of women. In the same way Fâṭima's slave, Fiẓẓa, also prayed to God, and He gave her food. So on human terms there may be a great difference, but with God, both women had a very high position.

21 My sisters, you must understand your status and your position. Even today in India, families still keep the women outside during the time of their monthly period. But in Islam this is not the case. At the time of the ritual Prayers, she should do the ritual purification [*wuẓû*], go to the place of prayer, take her rosary beads [*tasbîḥ*] and perform *ẕikr* [ritualized 'remembrance' of God]. She is not impure. No one can take away her right to pray. This is the first time that you are hearing this. That is why you are breathing in a dry way.[27] My young people, my elders, my brothers, please try to understand! The person who does understand can do only one thing, and that is to love Islam.

(Transition to *maṣâ'ib*)

22 At Karbala, Ḥusayn gave the rights to the woman. History tells us that when Ḥusayn came out of his tent, the women and children were looking at him. Fiẓẓa said to Ḥusayn, 'I am a part of this family and I also have the right to do something.' She proposed that the women stand facing each other, and Ḥusayn walk down the line between them saying his goodbyes. He then said to her, 'Fiẓẓa, I pay my respects to you!'

23 On the night of 10 Muḥarram [*Shâm-e Gharîbaṇ*, the 'Evening of the Exiles'] all the men had been killed: ᶜAbbâs*, ᶜAlî Akbar*, ᶜAlî Aṣghâr*, Ḥusayn. The only one left was ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn and he was desperately ill. Zaynab* was now playing the role of ᶜAbbâs. On that day, the women's tents had been burned and they had been publically humiliated. Zaynab was guarding this group that had been looted, with everything taken from them and no man to guard them. There are two ways (under Islamic law) to slaughter [*ẕibaḥ*] an animal: you can either cut it with a knife or, if it is a fish, take it out of the water. On the day of ᶜÂshûrâ', both Ḥusayn and Zaynab were 'slaughtered'. Ḥusayn's head was cut off, and Zaynab's veil was ripped off: she also became a martyr.

24 This is the last sentence of my *maṣâ'ib*. When the caravan reached Kufa, a woman came and stood by Sakîna* and asked her, 'Who are you?' Sakîna replied, 'I am an orphan.' The woman replied, 'I heard the Prophet say that God will listen to the prayers of an orphan, so please pray for me.' Sakîna looked back to Zaynab, and Zaynab told her, 'We have come only to pray for those people who are in my grandfather's community [*ummat*]. You pray for us!' The woman prayed, 'May God not make my children orphans like yours!' Sakîna then lifted her hands and prayed, 'O God, do not make anyone's children orphans like me!' The woman's second request was that God should take her to Madina. Sakîna asked her, 'What do you want to do in Madina?' The woman replied, 'What are you saying? In Madina, I will see my lord Ḥusayn!' Sakîna then said to her, 'Umm-e Habîba, this is your Zaynab! I am Sakîna, and that is your lord, Ḥusayn' (pointing to the severed head of Ḥusayn which was being carried on a lance). This is the history of Karbala. When they entered Damascus, they were made to stand in the Gate of Safa for 72 hours. That was in the market where they made mirror work and where Sakîna had come before like a princess with her mother.

25 O sisters! When you mourn for Karbala, you say, '*Hâ'î Piyâs! Hâ'î, Karbalâ'!*' ['Alas, thirst! Alas, Karbala!']. The reason is that all were thirsty, all the tents were burned and Ḥusayn and the others were killed. But when the fourth Imâm was asked, 'What was your worst suffering?' He replied, 'Damascus!' When someone asked him, 'Why?' he replied, 'In the palace of Yazîd* in Damascus all the women were trying to hide one another. Zaynab entered. They were twelve women and a young girl. Sakîna, with her hands on her neck, was crying, "*Hâ'î Karbalâ'!*" Yazîd asked her, "Who are you?" She replied, "I am an orphan. My father, Ḥusayn . . .' Yazîd interrupted her saying, "You are Sakîna. I hear that your father loved you very much." She replied, "Yes, and he said that he did not like the home where 'Sajjâd' ('The Prostrator' that is, the fourth Imâm who is speaking) and Sakîna were not present. I would not sleep unless I slept on my father's chest." Then Yazîd said to Sakîna, "Good! So you love your father so much! Look at your father and we'll see just how much you really love him!" Yazîd gave the order for the basin in which Ḥusayn's head was kept to be uncovered. Sakîna cried out, "*Bâbâ!* [Father!]" and the head of Ḥusayn rose up and flew through the air to land in the lap of Sakîna. "*Bâbâ!* . . ." '

Part III

Analysis

In the ten sermons presented in Part II, I have allowed the texts to speak for themselves. The commentary that I gave was intended simply to clarify what was spoken by the preachers. These texts, however, raise a number of questions. How do they stand, for example, in relation to each other? How do they function rhetorically and in terms of the faith that they proclaim? I now make an analysis of *majlis* preaching, considering these ten texts as well as a larger group of sermons and preachers.

7 What the sermons do and how they do it

This chapter asks how the different parts of the sermons function, and how the congregation responds. It is clear from the sermon texts that there is a structure to the sermons, that they are made up of different parts, and that these parts function in different ways. In one part a preacher may be arguing a doctrinal point, whereas in another part she may be trying to make her congregation weep. Taking the three main parts of the sermons in turn, and the different elements within these three parts, I look at how the sermons function in relation to their congregations. I start with the general discourse which often begins a sermon, looking especially at its teaching or argumentative function. As well as the preacher's own community, other communities are often addressed apologetically in the general discourse. I discuss material concerning these other groups, beginning with the majority Sunnî community since this is the group most commonly addressed. The section on Uniting the community in praise of its heroes takes up the part of the sermons which is known as the *faẓâ'il*, an exposition of the Virtues of the great Shî'î personalities. I look at the characteristics of this exposition and how it functions ritually and devotionally within the sermon as a whole. In a similar way, the section on Binding the community in a narrative of Suffering takes up the *maṣâ'ib* [narration of the Sufferings of these personalities, especially the martyrs of Karbala], looking at how this part is designed to make people weep.

Some of the features of the sermons are discussed in more than one section or subsection of this chapter. Congregational responses and narratives, for example, play an important role in both the *faẓâ'il* and the *maṣâ'ib* but they function in different ways, and for this reason I discuss them separately in both the sections on Praise of its heroes and Narrative of Suffering. Similarly, the Qur'ân and Traditions are used in different ways in different parts of the sermons, and I explore their use within the discussion of the relevant part of the sermon. I discuss the way that these sources are used apologetically in the general discourse under the first section, and the way that they are used to expound the Virtues of the *Ahl-e Bayt* in the section on Praise of its heroes.

Defending the faith in a pluralist world

The general discourse is optional and the part of a *majlis* sermon in which a preacher has the most latitude in what he or she wants to say. Many sermons,

especially those preached at a neighbourhood 'round' [*dawra*] of *majâlis*, include very little besides the required *maṣâ'ib*. But although the general discourse is optional, in many sermons it is the longest part, and it can even overshadow the *maṣâ'ib*. When a general discourse is present in a sermon, it is placed at the beginning, almost always following immediately from the recitation of a text. This text is usually from the Qur'ân, but can also be from a Tradition of the Prophet or one of the Imâms. The general discourse is almost always connected to the text, with the preacher often reciting the text and then expounding it (e.g. S8.1–3), or otherwise refering to it in the discourse (e.g. S9.1 and 5). When sermons are given titles by the preacher, these titles usually refer to the subject of the general discourse. These titles are more common in series of sermons, but they may also be given for individual sermons, or an individual sermon in a series may have its own separate title (e.g. S5 and S10). The title may then be advertised beforehand, or announced in the sermon text itself. However, it is related to the text, and whether or not it has a title, the general discourse usually functions by presenting an argument or teaching about a given topic before the sermon moves into the *faẓâ'il* and the *maṣâ'ib*.

There are two main ways in which the general discourse functions in the sermons as a whole. The first way is as an apology in the neutral, technical sense of that term, explaining and defending the mainstream Shîᶜî position as against the position of another community such as Sunnîs, Christians, *Akhbârîs* or Hindus. The second way that the discourse functions is as moral teaching or as an argument for community reform. As the apologetic function is by far the most common, I will discuss this first.

The beginning of a sermon by Shaukat Ali Mirza (S11), gives an insight into how the general discourse functions apologetically. He begins his sermon, 'Continuing the discussion on this *âyat*, today is the fourth day. Yesterday's *majlis* culminated in a point of discussion that if any tragedy has taken place in this world, our immediate aim is to seek answers to three questions: "Who was killed?", "Who killed him?" and "Why was he killed?" It is my request to all Muslims that they should look at the tragedy of Karbala from the same angle.'

The methodology of the general discourse here is set out clearly and self-consciously. The 'discussion' [*bayân*] is based on an *âyat* from the Qur'ân, it continues that which has been going on in the last three sermons of the series, and presumes that most of the congregation will have been present at these previous occasions. Furthermore, this discussion is constructed around a framework of three questions which are being dealt with in turn. One of the characteristics of the general discourse is its appeal to reason and logic. This is not 'insider' discourse, but rather argument designed to appeal beyond the borders of the Shîᶜî community.

The reason that the preacher appeals to reason and logic is that he has more than one audience in mind in this discussion. He is preaching not only to the Shîᶜî congregation sitting at his feet, but also to 'all Muslims'. In this case, Shaukat Ali Mirza confirmed to me after the sermon that he was aware of the Sunnî Muslims who would be hearing his sermon from within their homes as it was broadcast to

the surrounding neighbourhood. He therefore appealed to reason and logic as a common 'language' shared by all of his listeners. A feature of the general discourse as it operates apologetically is the use of 'us and them' or 'I/we and you' language, so that the presence of an 'other' is acknowledged. Sometimes this other is addressed explicitly, as here, or as when Abdul Hakim says, 'My speech is . . . for all the Muslims' (S111). But more often, the other is addressed indirectly. Thus Baquer Aga tells his congregation, 'To those who say to me . . . I reply . . .' (S12). At other times the approach is even more indirect, simply talking about another community or addressing the perceived arguments or concerns of that community (e.g. S5.9, where the 'other' is 'the English').

Yet, however much an 'other' is present in the discourse, the argument is aimed primarily at the Shîᶜî congregation. The function of the general discourse is basically that of distinguishing what is considered right from what is considered wrong, and proving to the Shîᶜî congregation, as well as any others who may be directly or indirectly present, that the Shîᶜa are right. This 'other' may be one of a number of constituencies and, although it is only a 'secondary' audience, a useful way of analysing the general discourse as it functions apologetically is in terms of which 'other' the preacher has in mind.

Apologetic in relation to Sunnî Islam

By far the most common 'other' either addressed or taken up in the general discourse is the Sunnî community which forms the majority of Muslims both within Hyderabad and world-wide. The general discourse then serves to argue that the Shîᶜa, even though they are a minority, have the original, pure and true Islam which was discarded by the majority of Muslims after the Prophet's death. The key to this argument is the person of ᶜAlî, as Baquer Aga puts it, 'The community of the Muslims [*millat-e Islâmiyya*] in general is not on the right way and they are therefore not able to take the *ḥaqq* [truth or right]. First of all, one needs to choose the right path, the path of perfection. That is, the greatness and perfection of ᶜAlî need to be recognized and acknowledged' (S12).

Preachers consistently argue that the Qur'ân and the Tradition of the Prophet made it clear that ᶜAlî was to be the successor to the Prophet following Muḥammad's death. However, the Muslim community passed over ᶜAlî and therefore left the path of truth. This fundamental error is then argued to have affected the right understanding of the main sources of Islamic faith and practice: the Qur'ân, the Prophet Muḥammad and early Muslim history.

A number of 'stock' Traditions and Qur'ânic texts are cited in order to prove that the original purpose of God and the Prophet was that ᶜAlî should directly succeed Muḥammad following the Prophet's death. Three of these Traditions are especially popular and are each connected with a Qur'ânic text. The most popular is the so-called *Hadîṣ-e Kisâ'* [Tradition of the 'Cloak'*] which relates an incident in which the Prophet gathered his immediate family under a cloak, after which *majlis* preaching's most frequently quoted of all Qur'ânic texts, Sûra-e Aḥzâb 33.33, is reported to have been sent down upon him: 'Verily, verily God

intendeth but to keep off from you (every kind of) uncleanness, O ye the People of the House and purify you (with) a thorough purification.'

A similar gathering of the Prophet's immediate family is the focus of the second very popular Tradition. This gathering is connected with the confrontation between the Prophet and the Christians of Najran, and is known as the *Mubâhala**. It is referred to in Sûra-e Âl Imrân (3.61):

> And unto him who disputeth with thee therein after the knowledge has come unto thee, say! (O Our Apostle Muhammad!) (Unto them) 'Come ye, let us summon our sons, and (ye summon) your sons, and (we summon) our women and (ye) your women, and (we summon) our selves and (ye) your selves and then let us lay the curse of God on the liars!

The third oft-referred to incident is the Tradition of Ghadir-e Khumm*, an oasis at which the Prophet is reported to have formally nominated ᶜAlî as his successor. This last Tradition is connected with Sûra-e Mâ'ida (5.67):

> Deliver thou what hath been sent down unto thee from thy Lord; and if thou doest it not, then (it will be as if) thou hast not delivered His message (at all); and surely will God protect thee from (the mischief) of men; Verily, God guideth not an infidel people.

As well as the Qur'ânic texts associated with these three Traditions, there are a number of other frequently cited passages. These include Sûra-e Nisâ' (4.59). ('O ye who believe! Obey God and obey the Apostle and those vested with authority from among you.') This *âyat* is interpreted as making it necessary for believers to recognize the Imâms as the third category mentioned to whom obedience is due. As Sadiq Naqvi comments on this text, 'If you want to bring together in one sentence the whole meaning of Islam, you could do so in this one sentence. God has given a way to follow, and this way is the way of obedience to these three' (S21).

Another popular text is Sûra-e Shûrâ (42.23), where the Prophet is quoted as saying, 'I demand not of you any recompense for it (the toils of the apostleship) save the love of my relatives.' This 'demand' is interpreted as being the love of the *Ahl-e Bayt*. Another text, popular because it mentions the important word *imâm*, is Sûra-e Baqara (2.124): 'And remember when his Lord tried Abraham with certain words then he fulfilled them. He said, "Verily I make thee Imam for mankind;" (Abraham) said "And of my offspring?" He said: "My covenant reacheth not the unjust." ' This text is interpreted to exclude all Muslim rulers apart from ᶜAlî and his family from the true imâmat which has been ordained by God. Underlying the use of these and other sources is a persistent attitude of 'us and them' in which the *ḥaqq* [the divine 'truth' or 'right'] is shown to be with 'us' and not with 'them'.

The rejection of ᶜAlî and his family as the rightful successors to the Prophet affects a right understanding of the Qur'ân. It is claimed, for example, that the majority Muslim community thinks that the Qur'ân is 'enough for us', quoting a Tradition in which the second caliph, ᶜUmar, is reported to have said these words

(see 'Pen and Paper*'). For 'us' (Shîᶜas), however, it is different, as Shabbir Hassan, a visiting preacher from Najaf in Iraq begins his sermon, 'The Qur'ân begins with the letter *bê* and ends with the letter *sîn*; the whole of the Qur'ân lies within this word. These make up the word *bas* [enough] but we cannot say that the Qur'ân is enough! Some say that only the Qur'ân is necessary. It can never be in itself sufficient for us' (S120).

The point is then made that ᶜAlî is the 'Speaking Book' whose life and actions are necessary in order to understand the inner aspects of the Qur'ân. As M.M. Taqui Khan puts it, 'The Qur'ân is there as the book of God, but ᶜAlî was the first to show how to attain that Knowledge and to reach God' (S13).

Again, it is claimed that the Muslim majority community believes that the Prophet Muḥammad was a person 'like them', whereas for 'us' (Shîᶜa) he was perfect and could never sin. The basis of the issue is the Qur'ânic text addressed to Muḥammad, 'Say thou: "I am only a man like you, it is revealed unto me that your God is but One God . . . " ' (Sûra-e Kahf 18.110), but this text is rarely mentioned. The only sermon in which I have heard this *âyat* explicitly mentioned was in a tape by Rashîd Ṭurâbî (S154) which had no place or date specified but was probably recorded in the 1950s. In that sermon, the preacher commented on the *âyat* as follows: 'It is one thing for the Prophet to say that he is "like" someone else, but quite another for that other person to say the same to him! The real difference is that the Prophet had a revelation from God.'

Normally, however, it is argued that to liken the Prophet to an ordinary person is to lower his status. As Abdul Hakim, visiting from Pakistan, argues, 'The Sunnîs say, "The Prophet is like us!" and "he is our brother." But if they say, "the Prophet is like us," they imply that as we are sinners, so it is possible that the Prophet is also not perfect. But just as the Qur'ân is perfect, so the Prophet is also perfect and without any crookedness' (S110, cf. S9.7).

Instead, the Prophet and the *Ahl-e Bayt* are put into a different category of creation than that of ordinary mortals. ᶜAlî and the Prophet, argues Reza Aga, 'were created from one light, and that light was split into two equal pieces . . .' (S107). Precisely who the opponents of this argument are is seldom mentioned, nor is it mentioned that the vast majority of non-Shîᶜî Muslims would also say that the Prophet did not sin. That is not the point. The point that the preachers are making is that the Shîᶜa have the correct understanding of Islam. The Prophet Muḥammad is fundamental to Islam, and thus it needs to be shown that the Shîᶜî understanding of the Prophet is superior to that of their intellectual opponents.

A 'correct' understanding of the Prophet Muḥammad is also the issue behind the many discussions of the term *ummî* as applied to him. The Arabic word *ummî* is used of the Prophet in the Qur'ân (Sûra-e Aᶜrâf 7.157–8, Sûra-e Âl ᶜImrân 3.20 and Sûra-e Jumuᶜa 62.2), and has been variously translated as 'unlettered' (A. Yusuf Ali) or 'who can neither read nor write' (M. Pickthall). *Majlis* preachers, however, consistently argue that the Prophet could indeed read and write because to say that the Prophet was illiterate would be to denigrate him. The concerns of those who argue for the Prophet's illiteracy in order to strengthen the case for the miraculous nature of the Qur'ân are not at issue in this discussion. Rather the concern is that,

at least in modern India, illiteracy is considered a serious weakness in a person. It is associated, for example by Reza Aga, with 'ignorant villagers', and this meaning for the term *ummî* could therefore never be applied to the Prophet of God (S9.5). Thus *ummî* must mean something other than that the Prophet could not read and write. As with apologetic discussions about the Qur'ân or the creation of the Prophet, the person of ᶜAlî is often brought into the argument. Husn al-Hasan asks, 'ᶜAlî was clearly able to read and write, and he learned everything from the Prophet, so how could the Prophet be ignorant?' (S5.8).[1]

Not only can the Qur'ân and the Prophet Muḥammad be correctly understood only by means of ᶜAlî, but ᶜAlî is also the key to a correct understanding of early Muslim history. In a typical passage, Akhtar Zaidi says at an ᶜÂshûrâ' *majlis* about the time immediately following ᶜAlî's death,

> . . . the period of 'kingship' [*mulûkiyat*] began, and the time of the caliphate [*khilâfat*] ended. In this period, the rulers were doing evil things and setting themselves up as kings. People could not have confidence in their rulers, and this led to difficulties for those living in their kingdom. The rulers were only concerned about themselves. They were ruled by the spirit of the age, denying God and denying the Prophet. They were absolute, despotic rulers, taking even God's rule upon themselves. They were perverting the Traditions and denying the Qur'ân. The ordinary people recognized that their rulers were only wearing the mask of Islam on their faces.
>
> (S102)

In the often complex events of the period following the death of the Prophet, who was right and who was wrong? As Sadiq Naqvi argues in a discussion of the Battle of Siffin* where ᶜAlî fought against a rival claimant to the caliphate, Muᶜâwiya*,

> Take the Battle of Siffin. History writes that on one side is ᶜAlî with his Muslim army, and another army of Muslims is against him. The historian is forced to say this because he can see the action but he cannot see the intention [*niyyat*] of the action. He can see that on both sides there were people who prayed the ritual Prayers, who Fasted and who performed the Pilgrimage. There were reciters of the Qur'ân and even those who had memorized the Qur'ân.
>
> (S24)

Sadiq Naqvi then goes on to conclude, 'But what was lacking from that one army (i.e. that of Muᶜâwiya)? I tell you it was the love of ᶜAlî.' It is ᶜAlî and what he is said to represent that is seen as determining the rightness or wrongness of a person in those crucial early years as the Muslim empire grew and developed.

When actual Sunnî personalities are referred to in a general discourse oriented around debate with the majority Muslim community, these are almost always the Umayyad* and ᶜAbbâsid* rulers under whom the Shîᶜî Imâms suffered and died,

or one of the first three caliphs. But although this discourse is couched mostly in terms of the past, the real function is to make a distinction in the present, and to argue that even though they are in the minority, the Shîᶜa are still on the side of the truth. Occasionally a preacher argues explicitly that the hostile attitude of these two dynasties against the Imâms has been brought over into the modern era, especially in the case of the Saudi Arabian government with its Wahhâbî understanding of Islam (see S8.20).

Apologetic in relation to the West and Christianity

Although the Sunnî Muslim community is the most common 'other' spoken to or referred to in the general discourse, it is not the only 'other' to be addressed. Many preachers speak about the West, and its influence, as an 'other'. The West is identified often with Britain, with America, with science and technology, and with both secularism and Christianity. As with discourse concerning Sunnîs, there is a variety in approach between different preachers. The preachers who talk the most about the West are those who are living there. The sermons of these preachers are often very popular, especially with young people and students. In recent years, India has opened its markets to the West, with a consequent dramatic increase in the availability of Western products. Cable TV with many American channels is very popular with the wealthier sections of society. Hyderabad in particular has sought to present itself to the rest of the world as 'Cyberabad', an Information Technology centre boasting the offices and training centres of multinational companies such as Microsoft. It was the ambition of many young, educated Shîᶜas with whom I talked, to emigrate to America or elsewhere in the West, and several whom I know have done so. The issue of the West, therefore, is important to the community and is reflected in *majlis* sermons.

Syed Muhammad Naqvi, a visiting preacher who has homes both in Tanzania and London, sees the influence of the West essentially as a threat, saying, 'The West . . . is trying to attack our culture in order to destroy us.' The way that it does so, he argues, is through television and a secularizing process that diminishes the value of religion and particularly affects young people:

> At a certain point the child will leave the mother, and be far from the father. He will be in the world and in the society [*samaj*] and he will forget all these religious things. If you ask him about the cricket, he will talk to you about cricket. 'How many runs?' He will explain to you. 'Which particular bat is used by a particular player?' He will tell you. He will be able to talk to you about insurance. He won't be able to tell you the name of the mother of the sixth Imâm . . .
>
> (S121)

The discourse of Zaki Baqri, living in Canada, reflects more of the complexity of the relationship between the Shîᶜî community and the West. On the one hand, he identifies the West with America and its foreign policy saying, 'Look at America!

All over the world it is saying, "Peace!" but doing wickedness.' On the other hand, he admits that there are good things in the West, and that the West is very attractive, 'Just go anywhere in Bombay, Madras, Delhi and look at the lines simply to get a form for a visa to go to America. When they've got the visa it is as though they've got a visa to go to heaven' (S77).

Some preachers focus on the West in terms of its perceived superiority in areas such as science and technology, human rights and political power (e.g. S5). They are ready to credit the West with what it has achieved, and they show sadness that the Muslim world in general seems to be lagging behind the West at the present in these areas. But these preachers look back to the past and forward to the future in order to demonstrate the superiority of Shîᶜî Islam. For example, the local preacher M.M. Taqui Khan asserts that the Qur'ân predicted the problem of global warming in Sûra-e Wâqiᶜa 56 (S87), and Zaki Baqri makes a similar point when he says that 'the human rights declaration of the United Nations . . . had been articulated by Islam 1400 years ago' (S71). In terms of political power, Husn al-Hasan takes his hope from the future return of the last Imâm, the *Mahdî**: 'At the moment, America is the world's "tough guy." The power of America is a headstrong devil. When the *Mahdî* comes, God will give him complete power. There will only be one government in the world, and that will be his' (S5.19).

Whatever the reality of the religious situation in Europe and America, the West is often linked in the sermons with Christianity. Although there are many local, indigenous churches in Hyderabad, their colonial heritage and continuing links with the West have led to Christianity almost always being perceived as a Western religion in the sermons. Several of the churches in Hyderabad were built in the colonial period including one, located on the main shopping street of the New City, dedicated to St George, the patron saint of England. Other churches are subsidized financially by the world-wide denominations of which they are a part or by other Western Christian organizations and individuals. In the period of my research in Hyderabad, there were also regular 'revival' and 'healing' meetings sponsored by Pentecostal and Evangelical groups from the US. The widespread publicity for these meetings left an almost permanent legacy of posters around the city featuring pictures of the American speakers who addressed them. An example of the assumed relation between the West and Christianity can be seen in Husn al-Hasan's sermon (S5.9) where he says, 'Some people have asked me why I am always discussing the English in my *majâlis*. But we know that when Imâm *Mahdî* comes, he will perform the ritual Prayers in the mosque at Mecca, and Jesus will Pray behind him.'

With no further explanation given, 'the English' (meaning, in the context of his sermon, the West more generally) is simply linked to the person of Jesus, as if Jesus were English. To perform the ritual Prayers behind someone is to acknowledge that person's superior standing before God. Jesus, representing Christianity and 'the English', is thus shown in this sermon to be acknowledging the superior status of the last Imâm (and, by implication, the Imâm's religion and his community).

In this context, both Jesus and Mary become important not only for who they are in Islam but in terms of what they represent as prominent figures of the

supposed religion of the West. Although in some sermons, Jesus or Mary are discussed simply in terms of their position within Islam (e.g. S10.20), it is also common to hear these personalities discussed in terms of the supposedly Western religion that they represent. I have heard several preachers arguing that Mary or Jesus are subordinate to Muḥammad and his family. In the cases of both Jesus and his mother the problem, as articulated by the preachers themselves, is how to deal with passages from the Qur'ân that give these two persons a very high place. Uruj al-Hasan Meesam explains that the reason it is written in the Qur'ân that the Prophet Jesus did great miracles of healing and raised the dead, while the same is not written about the Prophet Muḥammad, is that in the time of Jesus it was the science of medicine that was at a high level, and therefore Jesus was given miracles of healing. But in the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, the great achievements were in the field of literature, and that is why Muḥammad was given the miracle of the Qur'ân. The Qur'ân is the greatest miracle ever, and has not been matched by any 'Christians, Jews, Communists, atheists or anyone until today' (S127). Even in terms of other miracles, says Talib Jawhari, 'the Prophet Muḥammad was given all authority by God, but the Prophet Jesus had to have permission from God for these miracles that he did' (S106).

Apologetic in relation to the Akhbârî *Shîᶜî sub-sect*

A very sensitive point in Hyderabadi *majlis* preaching concerns a sub-sect of the community who broke away in the 1980s and call themselves *Akhbârîs* (see Chapter 2). The way that this sub-sect is spoken about shows clearly how the general discourse functions in distinguishing 'us' from 'them', in this case the mainstream Twelver Shîᶜî community and the *Akhbârîs*. Although this group is mentioned far less often in sermons than are Sunnîs or the West, it is mentioned more frequently than Hindus. The reason is that, as a minority already, the mainstream Twelver Shîᶜa see unity within their community as vital for their survival and thus perceive the *Akhbârîs* as a threat. Zaki Baqri makes this clear when he says that the *Akhbârîs* are 'splitting the community . . . and turning people against each other even in well-known families' (S72).

Sometimes an olive-branch is held out to the *Akhbârîs*. In one sermon, Talib Jawhari told a narrative about Moses, knowing that the leader of the *Akhbârî* community was sitting before him in the congregation,

> When on a certain occasion Moses was praying for rain, the rain did not come and the clouds went away. Moses was upset with God and asked, 'Why did this happen?' God replied that there was one 'tell-tale' in the congregation and that was the reason that his prayers had not been accepted. When Moses then asked who it was, nobody would admit to being the tell-tale. When Moses then said to God, 'You are the All-Powerful! You tell me who is the tell-tale!' God replied, 'If I were to tell you, then you would call me a tell-tale!' When the person who was the tell-tale saw that God was so merciful that He would not expose him before all the rest of the people, he repented

> in his heart and asked for forgiveness. At this point, God forgave his sin and the rains came. In this hall, the Azakhana Zehra, there are no tell-tales, and all are pure and good people. But if there is one person here who is not, and in his heart he asks forgiveness from God, then God will forgive him and all of the prayers of this gathering will be acceptable to God.
>
> (S105)

Very rarely the preaching can be vitriolic as, for example, in one *majlis* where the same *Akhbârî* leader was likened to Satan and publicly cursed (S57).

Apologetic in relation to Hinduism

Although Hindus make up the vast majority of the population of India, and also a majority of the population of Hyderabad, they are rarely mentioned in *majlis* preaching. The reason for this is the sensitive and complex relationship between Shîᶜas and Hindus in Hyderabad. The Shîᶜa seem to feel that they are caught between the Sunnî Muslim majority and the wider Hindu majority with loyalties and conflicts in both directions. In an overwhelmingly Hindu nation they are Muslims who, together with their Sunnî brothers and sisters, proclaim an uncompromising monotheistic creed and feel the heat of a rising Hindu nationalism. At the same time, however, Shîᶜas often feel closer to Hindus than they do to Sunnîs because of the antagonism between the Islamic sects and because of the devotion that many Hindus show towards Ḥusayn and Fâṭima. It is clear that the Shîᶜa do not perceive Hinduism as nearly as much of a threat in religious terms as Sunnî Islam, secularism or even Christianity. It is interesting, therefore, to note how these ambiguities are expressed from the *majlis* pulpit, even if this is not done so regularly.

Shîᶜas are Muslims, and as such they are affected by Hindu–Muslim tensions just as Sunnîs are. As we noted in Chapter 1, however, there is a heritage in Hyderabad of Muḥarram commemorations being patronized by the state in an attempt to bring all of the different religious communities together. Hindus can often be seen participating in some of the rituals and processions which take place during Muḥarram, a point that Muhammad Ashfaq acknowledges: ‘In that time (i.e. the period of the Umayyad* dynasty), ᶜAlî ibn-e Ḥusayn (the fourth Imâm) was not recognized by the Arabs. But now, 1400 years later in India, all the Hindus know who Imâm Ḥusayn is and who the rest of the *Ahl-e Bayt* are, and even mourn for him during Muḥarram’ (S39).

Thus, in terms of their relationship to what is considered vital to Shîᶜî belief and practice, that is love and devotion to the *Ahl-e Bayt*, Hindus are considered to have a good attitude. Further, this attitude is seen to confirm the truth of the Shîᶜî position: even non-Muslims can see the Virtues of Ḥusayn and are prepared to mourn his Sufferings.

Some Hindus even go so far as to sponsor mourning rituals for Ḥusayn themselves. An example of this is the *majlis*, sponsored and attended by Hindus, at which Sermon 4 was preached. In this sermon, Sayed Naqi Mehdi also mentions

a Hindu commemoration of Muḥarram that he had witnessed three days earlier. He relates that these 'Hindu brethren' were commemorating Muḥarram in their own language, with their own rituals, and that they were being outspokenly critical of Yazîd, the Umayyad caliph under whose rule Ḥusayn was killed.

Yet Hindu belief is still perceived to be fundamentally at odds with Islamic monotheism. Even if they share a kind of brotherhood in their common devotion to Ḥusayn, Hindus are still 'other' and wrong. Occasionally 'idolatry' is explicitly condemned, as an example from a sermon by Reza Aga shows:

> When ᶜAlî was born in the Kaᶜba he came out of it through a crack which miraculously opened in the wall. He could not come out of it by the door, as this was the way by which ordinary worshippers of the idols had gone in and out. He was so special that God had to make a new way, that is by opening a new door in the wall. ᶜAlî was not an ordinary worshipper of idols, but an idol breaker.
>
> (S108)

Interestingly, the preacher's focus here is not primarily Hinduism. His main point is to attack the first three Sunnî-recognized caliphs who were 'idol worshippers' before they became Muslims, and to compare them unfavourably with ᶜAlî who the Shîᶜa believe was raised as a Muslim rather than ever having to 'convert'. However, in the Indian context of widespread veneration of idols, and the much-publicized history of iconoclastic Muslim invaders, such a condemnation of idolatry makes the assumption that the worship of idols in contemporary Hinduism is basically the same as the idolatry of pre-Islamic Arabia.

It is very rare, however, to hear mention of idols. More often, when a *majlis* preacher does speak about Hinduism, the reference and critique are done more carefully. M.M. Taqui Khan, for example, speaks of the religion of 'our brothers' in which, 'the world is simply *mâyâ* [illusion]'. At the same time, making use of the freedom of expression allowed in India, he argues that Hinduism is essentially flawed. He says that Hindus believe a person to be, 'imprisoned in the body . . . entrapped in this "net" of our physical existence and . . . trying to escape from it'. In contrast, he argues, 'God says that people should consider the things of this world' (S13). The preacher's apologetic is clear, but aware that his sermon is being broadcast at great volume onto a busy road just outside, it is kept short and indirect.

In a similar way, Zakia Sultana argues against Hindu polytheism, but makes it clear that her intention is primarily to strengthen the faith of her co-religionists rather than to attack anyone else:

> . . . it is important that we talk about the differences between our doctrines and those of others. We are not speaking against another religion, and we are not disputing. What we are doing is to enable our young people to discern the fundamental truths. If these fundamental truths contradict another religion, then this is not our responsibility. When we say, 'I bear witness that there is no god but God', it is possible that people from another religion will think

> that we are speaking against them because in their religion they acknowledge more than one god. But we are not speaking against them; we are only talking about our own religion.
>
> (S20)

Yet, however indirectly she speaks about 'another religion' (i.e. Hinduism), her words clearly make a distinction between 'us' and 'our religion' and 'them' and 'theirs' in order to establish which is right and which is wrong.

The general discourse as moral or reformist teaching

As well as functioning as an apology for the Shîᶜî faith over and against that of other communities, the general discourse can also be used by a preacher to teach about or argue for higher moral standards or community reform. It is common to hear preachers including material concerning piety [*taqwa*] or general moral teaching in their sermons. This kind of teaching or argument may be quite general as, for example, when Nafees Unisa speaks about death and two ways of living: the way that recognizes God, and the way that recognizes only material things:

> If a person is only thinking about the things of this world, he will not be considering the next world. If the word death is mentioned, he will get worried and begin to tremble. He does not like death. He simply wants to go on living and go on living because he thinks that death is simply annihilation. He is never ready for the coming of death. This is one kind of purpose which people make for their lives.
>
> (S92)

It is rare to hear concrete ethical instruction given from the *majlis* pulpit. Preachers may include general remarks about divine judgement, as when Sayed Muhammad Naqi quotes a Tradition in which God Himself says, 'O my servant, son of Adam! If you have the passion for sin, the amount of fire that your body will be exposed to in hell will correspond to the amount of sin that you have committed' (S121).

Similarly, Anees Fatima tells her congregation bluntly, 'The destiny of one whom God does not like is hell.' But the mention of specific sins is not so common. Abu Talib is an exception when he specifically mentions the evils of alcohol, slander and gambling (S18). Speaking soon after the celebration of the birthday of ᶜAlî he goes on to say, 'God has purified the *Ahl-e Bayt* from all impurity. If a person, on the occasion of the birthday, wants to do something from his own will or wants to become close to the *Ahl-e Bayt* by means of immoral things, he will not become close but rather will become distant from them' (S18).

Occasionally preachers use the general discourse to speak about manners, such as when Husn al-Hasan likens men who urinate standing up to donkeys (S60), or when preachers give instructions to their congregations about how to conduct themselves at *majâlis*.

Another use of the general discourse that is also rare is to argue for reform within the religious life of the community. By 'reform', I mean here an attempt to bring the practices and beliefs of the community into line with what is perceived (by these reformers) as a more 'orthodox' and 'Qur'ânic' interpretation of Islam. There are a few men and women who may even be recognized as a kind of 'reformist school' within the Hyderabadi preaching tradition. Mujahid Hussain, for example, speaks pointedly in a number of his sermons about the need for reform among his own people. In the following quotation, the 'majority' that he speaks about does not refer to Sunnîs:

> When a people takes a wrong path the majority of them are simply silent. This majority does not take the initiative in doing wrong; they are just negligent and do not care if their leaders are attached to God or not. They do not know if their leaders are holding tightly to the 'rope of God' or not (see Sûra-e Âl ᶜImrân 3.103). They are so negligent in their reason, understanding and thinking that they are just led blindly to the edge of hell. They are only concerned about where their next meal is coming from, yet the ones whom they have made their leaders do not give them anything. People are oppressed, but they don't do anything about it; they are wronged but they don't try to change their situation. In spite of the fact that their leaders are not giving them anything, they still love to give their leaders high positions and much respect. They are so attached to their leaders that they lose any attachment that they had to God Himself.
>
> (S14)

Sometimes this kind of reformist preaching can generate a kind of discussion between different preachers in which a point raised by one preacher in a sermon is addressed by another in a different sermon. One preacher, for example, spoke negatively about the practice of wearing a red thread around the wrist, and this subject was then taken up by another preacher in a later sermon: 'The way that love for the *Ahl-e Bayt* is expressed may be cultural and may therefore differ from one place to another. Take, for example, the red wrist band: this is a sign of my affection for the *Ahl-e Bayt*. It shows my affiliation, therefore it cannot be forbidden. In fact, for me, it is obligatory' (S86).

There is some difference between those general discourses that address the preacher's own community for the purposes of raising moral standards or stimulating reform and those that address another, different community in apologetic argument. Nevertheless, the basic character and function of this part of the sermon is broadly similar. The preacher uses argument and teaching, backed up by appropriate quotations from the Qur'ân or Tradition, and occasionally narratives, in order to convince and persuade the congregation of the truth of his or her position.

In the general discourse the sermon may be said to be functioning in an argumentative or teaching mode. The appeal is primarily to the mind. This mode of operation is recognized by the community itself, as an aphorism that I have heard often, especially during the main mourning season of Muḥarram,

illustrates: 'Muḥarram is a complete university course.' When asked what is meant by this comment, Hyderabadi Shîᶜas have explained to me that the hundreds of *majâlis* that most Shîᶜas attend each year make up an educational programme that includes not only teaching about their faith, but also teaching about the world in which they live. As one young Shîᶜa said to me about a particular sermon, 'It was a "brain-wash" ' (using the English expression). When I questioned him further, he explained that by this comment he meant not that he had been 'brain-washed' into believing something that was not true, but rather that his mind had been stretched and given a purifying 'work-out' by the intellectual arguments offered by the preacher. This intellectual purpose is also mentioned in the sermons themselves. As Mehdi Abedi, for example, comments, '. . . *majlis* preaching [*ẕâkirî*], is an activity which is concerned with recognising the truth and speaking correctly about it' (S16).

Uniting the community in praise of its heroes

After the general discourse, or sometimes interspersed within it, comes the part of the sermon known as the *faẓâ'il*. This is an exposition of the Virtues [*faẓâ'il*] of the great Shîᶜî personalities, especially ᶜAlî. The word *faẓâ'il* is used in a technical sense in *majlis* preaching (in a similar way to the word *maṣâ'ib*), and is impossible to translate simply into English. It means literally 'excellencies', and calls to mind the divine character, acts and utterances of these men and women from the family of the Prophet.

At times, the *faẓâ'il* is a clearly defined element within the first part of the sermon. In this case it is normally made up of a series of short units strung together like beads on a necklace (e.g. S6.8–18). When composed in this way, the *faẓâ'il* may be made up of narratives, mini-expositions of Qur'ânic passages or Traditions, or other elements. Whatever form they take, each 'bead' in the 'necklace' serves to highlight a particular facet of the greatness of the personality whose Virtues are being expounded. Such a 'necklace' can make up a substantial proportion of the first part of a sermon (e.g. S9 and S8) and normally makes a bridge between the general discourse and the *maṣâ'ib*. Not all sermons, however, have a *faẓâ'il* of this kind, and some sermons include hardly any *faẓâ'il* at all (e.g. S10). In some cases, the *faẓâ'il* is woven into the non-*maṣâ'ib* part of the sermon rather than comprising a distinct part of it. Husn al-Hasan, for example, uses two narratives that function as a part of the argument of his general discourse while at the same time expounding ᶜAlî's virtues (S5.11 and 17).

The language of praise

The clearest indication that the Virtues are being expounded in a sermon is, not surprisingly, the explicit mention of the word *faẓâ'il* by the preacher. Such a mention also often indicates 'whose' Virtues are being expounded, as Shabbir Hassan exclaims, 'What Virtues can I acclaim for the Lady Fâṭima? Such are her Virtues

that I cannot tell them! No other women can compare with her! No insults can be brought against her!' (S120).

Or as Anees Fatima cries out, 'How is it possible to describe the greatness of ᶜAbbâs? The Virtues of ᶜAbbâs are limitless while our thinking is limited!' (S6.11).

Even when the word *faẕâ'il* is not mentioned, not only the content but also the style of preaching indicates what is happening. The language becomes full of superlatives and expressions of praise, often rendered in a rhetorical or poetical manner. A good example of this style is Abdul Hakim's praise of Fâṭima:

> The Qur'ân is the House of Fâṭima. The people of the Qur'ân are the House of Fâṭima. The believers [*mu'minîn*] are the House of Fâṭima. The Commander of the Believers [*Amîr al-Mu'minîn*] is the House of Fâṭima. *Tâ Hâ* is the House of Fâṭima. *Yâ Sîn* is the House of Fâṭima. *Taṭhir* is the House of Fâṭima. *Tanwîr* is the House of Fâṭima. *Kawsar* is the House of Fâṭima. *Sâqî-e Kawar* is the House of Fâṭima. Heaven is the House of Fâṭima. *Qasîm al-Nâr* is the House of Fâṭima. The Masters of the Youths of Paradise are the House of Fâṭima . . . My elders and young people, my friends, this is Fâṭima: the centre of all things!
>
> (S111)

The Arabic words included in this quotation emphasize the 'insider' nature of the discourse. Their meanings, according to Shîᶜî tradition, are as follows: *mu'minîn* are the Shîᶜa; *Amîr al-Mu'minîn* is a title for ᶜAlî. *Tâ Hâ* is the title of the 20th *sûra* of the Qur'ân and (on the authority of the sixth Imâm) is said to refer to the Prophet Muḥammad. *Yâ Sîn* is the title of the 36th *sûra* of the Qur'ân and (on the authority of the first Imâm) is also said to refer to the Prophet. *Taṭhir* [purity] refers to the so-called 'Ayat of Purity' (Sûra-e Aḥzâb 33.33) which, in turn, is said to refer to the Prophet, ᶜAlî, Fâṭima, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. *Tanwîr* [enlightenment] refers to the radiant light of the *Ahl-e Bayt*. *Kawsar* is the pool or river in paradise which symbolizes eternal life and relief from hardships. *Sâqî-e Kawsar* is ᶜAlî, the 'cupbearer' of the pool who distributes its water to his followers at the Judgement Day. *Qasîm al-Nâr* [Distributer of the Fire] refers also to ᶜAlî, this time in his role as the one who sends his enemies to hell. The Masters* of the Youths of Paradise are (according to a Tradition of the Prophet Muḥammad) Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.

At times preachers quote directly from Urdu poetry. Most quotations are taken from *marsiya* or *nawḥa* elegies, or poetry, known as *manqabat*, written in praise of the Prophet and his family. *Marsiya* and *nawḥa* are the forms of poetry that frame the sermons in a *majlis*. Their forms have influenced the development of the *majlis* sermons, and their inclusion in the sermons themselves is therefore quite natural. Every year in Hyderabad a series of *majâlis* is even held in which poets replace the preachers on the *minbar*. One evening *majlis*, for example, featured the well-known local poet, Hasan Abedi, who works at the Hyderabad mint (S151). He recited an entire *marsiya* of his own composition, and its format paralleled the format of a sermon, with general topics giving way to *faẕâ'il* and then

to *maṣâ'ib*. Within Anees Fatima's sermon, quotations from *marṣiya* elegies make up a large proportion of her *faẓâ'il*, first in praise of ᶜAlî (S6.4–9) and then in praise of ᶜAlî's son, ᶜAbbâs (S6.9–18).

As well as language and style, there are other elements which are commonly used in the *faẓâ'il* such as congregational responses, the use of narrative and a particular method of using the Qur'ân and Tradition. The way that these elements are used gives an insight into how the *faẓâ'il* functions within the sermon as a whole.

Responding in praise

When the *faẓâ'il* is made up of 'beads' in a 'necklace', each separate unit is often completed in such a way as to elicit a response from the congregation. This response is usually a standard cry of acclamation and praise. Congregational responses include a hand stretched out towards the preacher with the cry of *Wah! Wah!* [Well done! Bravo!], or the exclamation, *Subḥan Allâh!* [Glory to God!]. There may also be a cry of blessing on the Prophet and his family or the '*Naᶜrê Ḥaydarî*' [lit. 'Ḥyder (i.e. ᶜAlî) Cry']. In Reza Aga's sermon, a member of the congregation even goes so far as to make a mini speech in praise of the sermon and the preacher, ending with a call for the congregation to respond as a whole (S9.12). The sequencing of short sections from the pulpit followed by responses from the congregation creates, in the hands of an expert preacher, an exciting and emotional rhythm in the performance of a sermon.

At times, the congregation may be sluggish in its responses, and the preacher has to encourage them to respond louder. Such was the case with Husn al-Hasan when he said, 'Give me a *ṣalawât*!' to which there was such a dull reply that he called for another one, saying, 'You can do better than that…!' (S62). Other preachers have the opposite problem. At several points in a series of sermons preached by the visiting Pakistani *ẕâkir*, Abdul Hakim, the congregational responses got so out of hand that the organizer of the *majlis* tried to intervene to calm the proceedings down. The preacher then rebuked him, on one occasion saying, 'Brother, this is intoxication with the love of ᶜAlî! It doesn't matter! I myself am intoxicated!' (S111), and on the following evening, 'Don't be confused! This is the drunkenness of the love of ᶜAlî! This is not sweat, this is blood! But its appearance has been changed to look like water! Don't think that I am sweating because of the hot weather! I sweat like this even when it is cold! It is the strength of my preaching that causes me to sweat like this!' (S112).

The use of 'triggers' by preachers and 'stock' responses from the congregation suggest that the *faẓâ'il* is functioning in a different way from the general discourse. While the general discourse operates as a sustained argument appealing to the minds of the congregation, the *faẓâ'il* operates as short units which appeal to the heart or the emotions. In the general discourse, a congregation may nod their heads or murmur approvingly at a particular point that the preacher has made, but in a comparatively restrained manner. By the time the *faẓâ'il* has been reached, both preacher and congregation have warmed up, and the sermon takes

on characteristics of a ritual performance. The highlighting of the Virtues of the great Shîᶜî heroes of faith serves to bind the community together as those who recognize these heroes and are devoted to them in love and loyalty.

Stories of glory

One of the most important elements within the *faẓâ'il* is narrative material taken from a body of traditional sources. A narrative in the *faẓâ'il* is usually an incident recounted from the early history of Islam and featuring the personality whose Virtues the incident serves to highlight. A loose distinction is sometimes implied linguistically in the sermons between a narrative (normally referred to as a *riwâyat*, and in this study rendered with the capitalized 'Tradition'), which the preacher recounts in Urdu in his or her own words, and a formal *ḥadîṯ* of the Prophet or one of the Imâms which is quoted first in Arabic. This distinction is, however, fairly fluid even when it is adhered to. Although, according to Shîᶜî belief, the formal body of *ḥadîṯ* material also includes the sayings and actions of the Imâms, a *ḥadîṯ* of the Prophet himself is generally quoted in Arabic more often than a saying of one of the Imâms. Sometimes preachers even quote the very words of God as a kind of *ḥadîṯ qudsî* [sacred *ḥadîṯ*]. Thus Reza Aga proclaims (without the use of any Arabic), 'God says of ᶜAlî: "He was born in My house, and My attributes are explained by means of his nature. When a person looks at ᶜAlî, they are able to understand My nature, My greatness and My exalted stature . . ." ' (S9.7).

Tradition narratives may have been gathered orally by the preacher from other sermons. Other sources are the many written collections of Traditions such as Mawlana al-Sayyid Najm al-Ḥasan's famous *Chawda Sitârê* [Fourteen Stars]. Very occasionally preachers give a reference to a source that they are using, especially if they want to make a particular point about it, for example, that the source is itself Sunnî and cannot therefore be accused of anti-Sunnî bias. Sometimes a preacher simply says about a Tradition, for example, 'This is written in the history books' (S17). Normally, however, there is no mention of sources at all, and preachers are not able to give the sources for Traditions that they have quoted without further research. An exception to this is the preacher Abu Talib, who keeps a record of all the Traditions that he cites with their references written in a book so that he can always give a book and page number for a Tradition if asked to do so (interview, AT).

A good example of the use of narrative in the *faẓâ'il* is Reza Aga's sermon preached on the anniversary of ᶜAlî's death (S9), in which the Virtues expounded are naturally those of ᶜAlî. The congregation is told about ᶜAlî's generosity as illustrated by a narrative in which he gives a whole caravan of camels away to a beggar who has only asked for a loaf of bread (S9.8). This is followed by a narrative about the occasion on which ᶜAlî slept in Muḥammad's bed in order to deceive the Prophet's enemies while he escaped from Mecca (S9.9). Both narratives include a lightness of touch as ᶜAlî's servant hides in case he is also given away, and then two angels are portrayed as boasting to each other about their

respective stations in guarding ᶜAlî from harm while he sleeps. After these two narratives comes a third, illustrating ᶜAlî's prowess in battle.

Anees Fatima, in her *faẕâ'il* expounding the Virtues of ᶜAbbâs, narrates an incident in which ᶜAbbâs fought so valiantly and with such skill at the Battle of Siffin* that the enemy soldiers thought that it was ᶜAlî himself who was fighting (S6.12–13). This narrative gives an insight into another important feature of the *faẕâ'il*. The *faẕâ'il* is considered essentially to be an exposition of the Virtues of ᶜAlî. Other personalities may have their Virtues, but these are capped and included in the Virtues of ᶜAlî himself. Mujahid Hussain relates narratives expounding the Virtues of three of the other Imâms. But he ends his *faẕâ'il* with the Virtues of ᶜAlî himself, and even while recounting the other narratives, he says, '"ᶜAlî's children did the same work as ᶜAlî himself had done' (S14). Similarly, Asgari Hussain expounds the Virtues of Ḥusayn, but her last words of that exposition define Ḥusayn as 'the son of ᶜAlî' (S7.5).

In the *faẕâ'il*, narratives sometimes stand alone as 'beads' in a larger 'necklace', but they are often connected with texts from the Qur'ân in a kind of mini-exegesis. Since ᶜAlî is never mentioned explicitly in the Qur'ânic text as we have it today, a major feature of Shîᶜî exegesis of the Qur'ân involves showing where and how the Qur'ân speaks implicitly about him. In the *faẕâ'il*, this interpretation [*ta'wîl*, see S1.7] involves the linking of these otherwise 'hidden' texts with short narratives about ᶜAlî. The narratives are presented as the 'occasions of revelation' [*asbâb al-nuzûl*] of the texts, arguing that in many places the Qur'ân does speak about the Virtues of ᶜAlî by providing a commentary on actions that are not explicitly mentioned. Taqui Khan explains the belief behind this kind of interpretation:

> Today I will be bold enough to declare that if one looks into the whole of the Qur'ân from the *âlif, lâm, mîm* until its end, you will find there nothing but the praise [*madḥ*] of ᶜAlî. In fact, the sum total of the Qur'ân is a description of the Virtues [*faẕâ'il*] of ᶜAlî. The Qur'ân is an ode [*qaṣîda*] to the Virtues of ᶜAlî, and we are those who can attest to this claim.
>
> (S13)

Examples of this kind of exegesis can be seen clearly in Reza Aga's *faẕâ'il*. He begins with a very short, one-sentence exposition, '"ᶜAlî was a moon which shone even in the light of day. As the Qur'ân says (Sûra-e Shams 91.2), "By the moon when she followeth after it (i.e. the sun)" ' (S19.9). He then goes on to mention or refer to 5 or 6 more passages from the Qur'ân which, he claims, speak about ᶜAlî, and one which speaks about Fâṭima (S9.11–19). What is interesting in these expositions is the amount that the preacher assumes and does not make explicit. He speaks explicitly to 'us Shîᶜa' (S9.6), assuming that the congregation has heard what he is saying many times before. He therefore refers to a narrative or a mini-exposition for a certain effect, rather than needing to explain it as something new.

The preacher's use of narrative here functions in a radically different way from the argument of a general discourse. In the general discourse the reasoning is designed to convince the unconvinced. It has in mind an 'other' who has a different

understanding from the Shîᶜî view. In the *faẓâ'il*, the use of narrative is not designed to make sense to an outsider. In S9.6 Reza Aga makes a link between an incident involving the 'giving of Alms and the Ring*' and 'an *âyat* of the Qur'ân' without any explanation. An outsider would have no idea what he is talking about. The insider knows, of course, that he is referring to the Tradition in which ᶜAlî gives his ring to a beggar during the performance of the ritual Prayers, after which Sûra-e Mâ'ida (5.55) is believed to have been revealed. The exposition is clearly spoken for 'us Shîᶜa', as those 'who understand the meaning of it'. No explanation is necessary as everyone in the room has heard 'the Tradition of ᶜAlî and the Ring' countless times in the course of *majlis* sermons and knows it as well as the preacher does. The narrative is functioning as 'insider talk', binding the congregation together as those who share a common story.

As an exposition of Virtues, the *faẓâ'il* does have a moral function, inculcating values such as generosity and piety. But this function is subordinate to that of binding the community together. The Virtues of the *Ahl-e Bayt* are expounded primarily to glorify the *Ahl-e Bayt* themselves and only secondarily to inspire virtue in their followers. That is why we hear so much of ᶜAlî's skill and bravery in battle, for example, or his extraordinarily simple life style. These characteristics of ᶜAlî are not designed to stimulate ordinary Hyderabadi Shîᶜas to act in the same way, any more than descriptions of ᶜAlî's miracles are designed to inspire others to attempt the same. The point is precisely that the Virtues of the *Ahl-e Bayt* are unique. They can inspire, but they cannot, by definition, be replicated.

Zakia Sultana, for example, says, 'When we hear mention of the purity of the *Ahl-e Bayt*, our hearts also want to be pure. We want to put all sin far from our hearts. When we hear about the purity of these people, then like these pure people, we also want our souls to become pure. And we do become pure!' (S20).

In this passage, however, she is careful to distinguish any moral traits that an ordinary Shîᶜa might gain by hearing about the *Ahl-e Bayt* from the Virtues of the *Ahl-e Bayt* themselves. She uses the word *ṭâher* [pure] in a technical sense for the purity of the *Ahl-e Bayt*, taken from the so-called '*Âyat* of Purity' in the Qur'ân (Sûra-e Aḥzâb 33.33) which she quotes. The word that she uses for 'us' Shîᶜas, however, is the more ordinary word, *pâk* [pure]. She then goes on to ask: 'Who are these people who are pure?' The emphasis in this passage of her sermon is on the unique purity of the *Ahl-e Bayt* which she compares to a locked room. To 'touch the garments' of these people can cause an ordinary believer to become more pure, but it can never make anyone pure in the same way as the *Ahl-e Bayt*. Similarly, Akhtar Zaidi uses the piety of ᶜAlî to inspire piety in his congregation, but the main point of this part of his sermon is to show that ᶜAlî is the 'Leader of Piety' and that true piety is a matter of being completely loyal and obedient to him (S15).

The *faẓâ'il*, placed as it mostly is between the general discourse and the *maṣâ'ib*, often functions as a bridge between these two other parts of the sermon. In his *faẓâ'il*, Sadiq Naqvi relates a narrative in which ᶜAlî miraculously travels a huge distance in order to preside at the funeral of his closest disciple, Salmân Farisî. ᶜAlî is then greeted by the disciple's corpse which rises up out of respect to its master (S1.5–6). The general discourse in the first part of Naqvi's sermon

has argued that love for the Prophet and his family is the badge of true belief. The *faẓâ'il* then gives an example of how this love works as demonstrated by the love that Salmân had for ᶜAlî. Once ᶜAlî has been mentioned, the preacher then speaks about ᶜAlî's prayer for another son to help Ḥusayn at Karbala. This prayer then brings him smoothly to the subject of ᶜAbbâs and thus into ᶜAbbâs' *maṣâ'ib* (S1.6–8). In a similar way, Anees Fatima builds a *faẓâ'il* bridge in praising ᶜAbbâs as Ḥusayn's loyal helper to take her from a discourse about mediation in prayer to the narrative of ᶜAbbâs' own helpless suffering at Karbala (S8).

The *faẓâ'il* and *maṣâ'ib* belong together in *majlis* preaching. As a preparation for the *maṣâ'ib*, the *faẓâ'il* paints a picture of the great Shîᶜî personalities in such a way as to make their Sufferings, told in the *maṣâ'ib*, that much more tragic. Emotionally, the *faẓâ'il* gives the congregation a 'high', making the listener glory in the greatness of these heroes of faith. The subsequent 'low' when these heroes are unrecognized, persecuted and martyred, becomes thus all the more poignant. As the *faẓâ'il* and the *maṣâ'ib* function together, it is not surprising that they exhibit similar features to each other and function in a similar way.

Binding the community in a narrative of Suffering

The essential core of any *majlis* sermon is the *maṣâ'ib* or narration of the Sufferings of the Karbala martyrs and other important Shîᶜî personalities. If there is time for only one part of the sermon, this will always be the *maṣâ'ib*, and when a sermon begins with a general discourse and *faẓâ'il*, the climax is always the *maṣâ'ib* that follows. The *maṣâ'ib* forms a distinct part of the sermon, and the transition from what precedes it is always deliberate on the part of the preacher and recognizable on the part of the congregation. As a complement to the *faẓâ'il*, the *maṣâ'ib* uses similar elements to create an atmosphere not now of praise but of mourning and tears. These elements include 'triggers' designed to elicit ritual expressions of mourning, special mourning narratives and techniques by which a congregation is taken back in time into the events of the past.

Triggering the tears

In the sermon texts presented in Part II, I have noted in parentheses where the sermons make the 'transition to *maṣâ'ib*'. The 'clue' that I have used in noting these transitions has been aural – the sound of weeping and wailing that is clear even on taped sermons. This change in atmosphere is triggered by expectations and certain signals that the preacher gives. A congregation generally knows roughly how long a sermon will go on for, given the kind of *majlis* of which it is a part. A congregation also knows from experience roughly what proportion of the sermon will be given over to the *maṣâ'ib*. Thus, at a certain point in the sermon, people begin to be on the lookout for 'triggers' which will indicate to them when the *maṣâ'ib* has begun. Some of these triggers are obvious and some are more subtle.

Occasionally a preacher will simply announce the transition to the *maṣâ'ib* with words such as, 'At this point I will stop the discourse and begin the *maṣâ'ib*'

(S109). He or she may also simply say, for example, 'I am now going to recite the *maṣâ'ib* of Habîb ibn-e Muâhir…' (S91). Such an explicit transition, however, is comparatively rare. The most common signal is simply a mention of the word 'Karbala' (e.g. S5.21 and S10.22). Even if that particular word is not mentioned, another key word or phrase may be used which is clearly linked with Karbala. This could be the number '72', the number of followers of Ḥusayn who were reportedly killed in the battle, a word such as 'blood' or 'death', or a phrase such as 'lay down my life', spoken by Ḥusayn. If the particular date on which the sermon is being preached is dedicated to a certain event or personality, the mention of this person's name or a reference to the event may also provide the signal that the preacher is making his or her transition to the *maṣâ'ib* (e.g. Ḥusayn's son ᶜAlî Akbar, in S7.9, or the martyrdom of ᶜAlî in S9.22). At the transition to the *maṣâ'ib* a preacher may also take off his hat, or undo the top button of his coat, or pull out a handkerchief from his pocket, all of which signal that he is beginning to grieve. Often it is a combination of verbal and visible signals that makes clear to a congregation that their response is now properly one of mourning.

Such is the power of these trigger words and phrases that whenever they are heard in a sermon, or in one of the elegies recited at a *majlis*, or even outside of a *majlis*, they may evoke a response of tears. Sometimes there is a kind of anticipation of the *maṣâ'ib* that takes place before the actual *maṣâ'ib* has started, provoked by the mention of an incident or personality. In one of Talib Jawhari's sermons in which he had been preaching for a long time but was still busy expounding the *faẕâ'il* of Fâṭima, people began to cry before he was ready to start his *maṣâ'ib* and he remarked,… 'This is not the *maṣâ'ib*! Bîbî Fâṭima is the only one for whom her Virtues and her Sufferings are the same. Her Virtues are her Sufferings and her Sufferings are her Virtues. So this is the "Virtues of her Sufferings"!' (S105).

During a series of conversations with a prominent *ᶜâlim*, who was also a *ẕâkir*, every time I mentioned the word Karbala, or the name of one of the Karbala martyrs, the *ᶜâlim*'s eyes would fill with tears and he would have to pause to collect himself (interview, ZH).

Narrating the Suffering

Even more prominently than in the *faẕâ'il*, the central feature of *maṣâ'ib* is narrative. *Maṣâ'ib* narratives relate the various trials and Sufferings of a particular individual or individuals, most often leading up to that person's death. Several important Shiᶜî personalities have their own *maṣâ'ib* narratives, known simply as 'the *maṣâ'ib* of "X" or "Y" '. These personalities include Ḥusayn and those of his family killed at Karbala, ᶜAlî, Fâṭima, some of the women who were present at Karbala, and all of the other Imâms except the twelfth. While there may be some differences in how these narratives are related in terms of detail or sometimes in terms of which incidents are included and which are left out, the basic narratives are common or 'stock' Traditions and are used by all *majlis* preachers.

Muhammad Ashfaq's sermon (S2) is composed entirely of *maṣâ'ib*, and the way he begins illustrates two important points about the way that these narratives

work. The first is that although the *maṣâ'ib* of ᶜAlî Akbar features as the main narrative in this sermon, it is never allowed to eclipse the Sufferings of Ḥusayn himself. The preacher's first words in Urdu are about the 'helplessness of Ḥusayn' and 'his aloneness' (S2.1). Ḥusayn functions here much as ᶜAlî does in the *faẓâ'il*, taking up and including the Sufferings of all the other personalities in his own. Mehdi Abedi makes this point clear as he sums up his whole preaching task in the words, 'I am only a simple man to tell you about ᶜAlî's greatness and to mourn the death of Ḥusayn' (S103). If this point is not made at the beginning of the *maṣâ'ib*, it is often made at the end. Thus, when Mawlana Nabi Hassan relates the *maṣâ'ib* of the seventh Imâm, he immediately qualifies it with a further reference to Ḥusayn: 'Thousands of people without coverings on their heads or feet, crying "*Wâ' Imâm! Wâ' Imâm!*" brought the (seventh) Imâm and washed the body, put it in a shroud and buried it. "O Martyr of Karbala! For three days, you had no one to wash your body or put it in a shroud or bury it!" ' (S118).

Or, as Sadiq Naqvi says at the end of a *maṣâ'ib* narrating the deaths of ᶜAlî Akbar and ᶜAbbâs, 'What martyrs these were, but who could compare with the martyrdom of Ḥusayn himself!' (S30).

The second point that is clear from Muhammad Ashfaq's sermon commemorating ᶜAlî Akbar is that his congregation knows the narrative as well as he does. The preacher asks the rhetorical question, 'Whose Sufferings are we remembering today?' (S2.1) knowing that everyone in his congregation can give him the correct answer. Relating another *maṣâ'ib*, Taqui Khan, unable to continue preaching for a moment because of his own tears, says simply, 'You know the rest of the narrative . . .' (S13). He then leaves the narrative unfinished and moves on.

Maṣâ'ib narratives are even better known than their *faẓâ'il* counterparts, as the material is more limited and they are used more frequently. The fact that members of a *majlis* congregation have heard all of the *maṣâ'ib* narratives since they were children gives preachers a certain flexibility in the use of these narratives within their sermons, as well as imposing a certain control. A preacher does not need to recite every part of a particular *maṣâ'ib* narrative. To do so would take too much time, and often one part fits better into a particular sermon than another. Although ᶜAlî Akbar's *maṣâ'ib*, for example, is related by Muhammad Ashfaq (S2), Syed Naqi Mehdi (S4) and Asgari Hussain (S7), each preacher relates it slightly differently, emphasizing some elements and leaving others out. All three preachers preserve the essential narrative line and the main theme of the love between father and son. Other common details include the lance or spear which killed him, but Ashfaq does not mention Ḥusayn carrying his son back to the camp as the others do. In the case of the *maṣâ'ib* of ᶜAbbâs, the cutting off of ᶜAbbâs' arms is always mentioned, as is his relationship with the young daughter of Ḥusayn, Sakîna. In the *maṣâ'ib* of Sakîna herself, the incident in which she is confronted with the severed head of her father is a core element.

Another aspect of uniformity in *maṣâ'ib* narrative recitation concerns certain elements of dialogue spoken or quoted by a character or characters. A narrative may include a quotation from the Qur'ân, such as is the case with the *maṣâ*'ib of ᶜAlî Akbar. In this narrative, Ḥusayn is often quoted as reciting Sûra-e Baqara

(2.156), 'Verily we are God's and verily unto Him we shall return!' He may say these words before ᶜAlî Akbar's death (in the case of Mujahid Hussain's account, S14) or after the boy's death (in the case of Asgari Hussain's account, S7), but they are recited in Arabic with exactly the same wording each time, as befits a recitation of the Qur'ân. Other, non-Qur'ânic dialogue also retains a level of uniformity, although not to the same degree. Thus Ḥusayn's words to ᶜAlî Akbar about being given water to drink from the 'fountain of *Kawṯar* by your grandfather' are related with only slight differences (see S2.4 and S7.11). When Muhammad Ashfaq was reciting these words, a couple of men sitting near to me completed the quotation themselves, before the preacher himself did so.

The kind of familiarity that I witnessed in that situation brings with it a sense of ownership, a sense which was particularly visible in that *majlis*. The recitation bound the congregation together as those who had a common knowledge and indeed a common history. These were the people who understood the meaning of 'the earnings of Layla', a phrase which made no sense to an outsider who did not know that Layla was ᶜAlî Akbar's mother and that it was thus the fruit of the mother's work in bringing up her son that was 'destroyed' on the field of Karbala. Although the preacher was a famous university professor, and Hyderabadi Muslim culture can be very aware of a person's status, he sat on the floor simply weeping with the rest of the congregation until the time came for him to preach. Indeed, until he took his seat on the black-draped *minbar* chair, anyone who did not know him would not have known that he was the speaker. After he had finished preaching Muhammad Ashfaq simply merged back into the congregation as they rose as one to begin the performance of *mâtam*. The overall effect was that the sermon came across as simply the articulation of a narrative that belonged to the congregation as a whole.

There is concern within certain sections of the community about the historical reliability of some of the *maṣâ'ib* narratives, as it is believed that some preachers exaggerate or even fabricate certain details of the narratives in order to encourage more fervent mourning by the congregation. One example of a *maṣâ'ib* Tradition that is controversial in this way is the narrative about Qâsim*, the young son of the second Imâm, Ḥasan, who died at Karbala. It is widely believed that Qâsim was married to his cousin, Ḥusayn's daughter, just before going to the battlefield to be martyred, and that he was wearing his bride-groom's clothes when he was killed. As a sermon preached at the largest *majlis* in the community commemorating this event relates, 'O mourners! You have come to this tragic wedding ceremony without any invitation card. You have come like this because this is the marriage of an orphan. The beloved of a widow of Karbala is going to be married' (S58).

Another sermon, also commemorating Qâsim's martyrdom, does not mention this marriage at all. The way that the narrative is related makes it clear that the preacher does not believe in the authenticity of the 'marriage' Tradition. Nevertheless the point is sensitive, and is made subtly by reference to the boy's clothes and the mention of a Traditionist [*râvî*], 'Qâsim was only wearing a turban and a shirt and ordinary sandals; he was not dressed for war. The *râvî* writes that the tie of his left sandal was open' (S89).

Taking the congregation 'back in time'

A common feature of the *maṣâ'ib* in *majlis* preaching is the use of techniques by which a congregation is 'taken back in time' to the events of the narratives being related. Occasionally a preacher does this explicitly, such as when Talib Jawhari cries out to his congregation, 'If you know the love between a mother and son, then come with me! It is the night before the 28 Rajab! (i.e. of the year 61/680)' (S17). Sometimes a preacher also speaks 'to' one of the characters, as Nafees Unisa does when she calls out, 'I would like to say, "O Imâm (Ḥasan)! There was another son who saw his father wounded with 80,000 blows of the sword and fall on the field of Karbala . . ." ' (S8.17).

Apart from this direct bridging of past and present worlds, preachers have a number of indirect techniques that they use for the same purpose. One of these techniques involves the use of the present tense, and is accentuated by a peculiarity of Urdu grammar. Although *maṣâ'ib* narratives are almost always related in the past tense, preachers use a lot of direct quotations which are, of course, spoken in the present tense. Urdu tends not to use indirect speech but rather has a marked preference for direct speech so that where an English preacher might say, 'Ḥusayn asked who would help him,' an Urdu preacher instead always quotes Ḥusayn directly saying, 'Who will help me?' This use of dialogue has the effect of bringing the members of the congregation into the narrative as if they were contemporary witnesses to the events. Sometimes the use of the present tense in direct quotations 'spills over' into the narrative itself so that the preacher begins to relate the events in the present tense, as Taqui Khan, through his tears, relates in his *maṣâ'ib*, 'Yazîd asks her . . .' and 'Sakîna replies . . .' (S13).

A more subtle technique involves narrating the *maṣâ'ib* through one or more of the characters in the narrative. Zaki Baqri, for example, relates the *maṣâ'ib* of Sakîna in the words of the fourth Imâm, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn (S10.25). The *ẕâkir* then goes on to relate Sakîna's *maṣâ'ib*. But as he does so it is as if the congregation has been transported back in time from a *majlis* in twentieth-century Hyderabad addressed by Zaki Baqri, to one of the first *majâlis* in Madina at which the *ẕâkir* is the fourth Imâm himself.

Some preachers link their congregation's own time-world with that of the *maṣâ'ib* narrative by making a deliberate connection between past events in the *maṣâ'ib* and ritual events in the present. Such a connection fuses past and present through the ritual act in which the congregation is engaged. Perhaps the clearest example of a sustained linking of this kind that I have heard occurred in one of Akhtar Zaidi's sermons (S15). This sermon commemorated the 40th day after the death of Ḥusayn. Traditionally the *maṣâ'ib* portion on this day recounts the Sufferings of the survivors of Karbala as they made the long and arduous journey back to Madina, from where they had started out. In this sermon, the narrative was skilfully told in such a way as to directly connect the *majlis* in which Akhtar Zaidi was preaching to the earliest rites of remembrance for the martyrs of Karbala, and especially the rites connected with the 40th day remembrance known as *arbaᶜîn*.

He mentioned certain ritual objects which were familiar to his listeners such as the cloth upon which the mourners sat and the clothes which the mourners wore. He related that Ḥusayn's sister, Umm-e Kulṯûm, was reciting *marṯiya* and *nawḥa*, the two forms of elegy that his congregation were familiar with in contemporary *majâlis*, and that would sandwich the very sermon that he was preaching. Lastly the preacher brought in the *ziyârat* or ritual visitation of the Shîᶜî shrines of Arabia, Iraq and Iran that would end Akhtar Zaidi's *majlis* as it ends almost every *majlis*. He described how Zaynab visited her grandfather's and her mother's graves, greeting the graves with the beginning of the same greeting as is used in the *ziyârat* ritual. Whatever the historical facts of the development of the *majlis* as a mourning ritual, the implication of Akhtar Zaidi's *maṣâ'ib* was that what his congregation was doing was the same as that which was done in the immediate aftermath of Karbala. His congregation's actions were shown thus to continue an unbroken tradition that reached back to the origins of their identity as a community.

The point that Akhtar Zaidi illustrates is made explicit by Talib Jawhari in a *maṣâ'ib* in which he narrates a conversation between the Prophet and his daughter, Fâṭima. When Muḥammad tells Fâṭima that her son will be killed, she asks, ' "Who will weep for him?" Fâṭima prayed that there would be a community who would weep for him. So (the preacher explains) you people are the answer to Fâṭima's prayer that there would be a community who would weep for her son' (S105).

Vernon Schubel's book, *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam*, is a study of Shîᶜî rituals in southern Pakistan. Schubel observes a similar fusing of past and present in these rituals and analyses them drawing on the work of sociologist Victor Turner. He argues that the process that takes place in a *majlis* and other Shîᶜî rituals is one in which community identity is formed and strengthened. Schubel calls the ritual world of the *majlis* a 'liminal reality' in which the events of Karbala and the here and now are brought together. Individual participants are also bound together by their common participation in the rituals so that when they 're-aggregate' with normal society they do so with a new identity (Schubel, 1993: 47, 95). A similar analysis could be made of the *majlis* as a ritual in India too.

Women as role models

A noticeable feature of *maṣâ'ib* narratives is the important part that women almost always play in them. Women are prominent in these narratives not simply because of their role in the events described, but because of their important role in mediating the action of the narrative to the listeners, and providing a model for the congregation in their mourning. Mahmoud Ayoub (1978: 179) mentions the technique of using one of the women of the Holy Family as a speaker to recount the tale of the suffering of the Imâm and his family to another dead family member. He mentions this technique only in the context of Arabic poetry, but it has probably influenced the Urdu Shîᶜî tradition via the Persian.

This mediating role can be seen in the way that Muhammad Ashfaq shows the congregation the Sufferings of ᶜAlî Akbar through the character of Ḥusayn's wife,

Layla (S2.3). The congregation are not shown ᶜAlî Akbar directly. Instead they participate in the narrative through the experience of the boy's mother who can only see and hear what is happening from her husband. By recounting the narrative in this way, Ashfaq articulates the relationship between the congregation and the events of the *maṣâ'ib*. The 'primary' sufferers portrayed in the narrative's own terms are ᶜAlî Akbar and his father: the son as he is martyred, and the father who holds the boy in his arms as he dies. But Layla also suffers in a secondary sense as one who does not actually witness the martyrdom with her own eyes, but must hear about the events indirectly and see them reflected in Ḥusayn's face. As such, she becomes a model for the congregation because she has the same relation to the events of the narrative as they do. An interesting feature of this particular narrative is that ᶜAlî Akbar is named in terms of a woman, 'the earnings of Layla', a reversal of the usual Arabic practice of naming a woman in terms of her father or son.

In the ritual time-frame in which a congregation is taken back to the events of Karbala through the *maṣâ'ib*, it is the women who provide the models for the community in the crucially important roles of mourning the dead and keeping alive the memory of Karbala. Zaynab is the great role model as the woman who became the leader of the community after Karbala. Technically it was ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn who was the Imâm, but more often in *majlis* preaching it is Zaynab who is portrayed as making the decisions and articulating the grief.

In his narration of the *maṣâ'ib* of ᶜAlî, Reza Aga uses the character of Zaynab to convey a 'very great' message to contemporary mourners in Hyderabad: that they must never curse their enemies (S9.27). The preacher is here condemning the ancient Shîᶜî practice, known as *tabarrâ* whereby the Shîᶜa ritually curse the first three caliphs.[2] This is, of course, highly inflammatory to Sunnîs, and was officially banned in Hyderabad in 1921 as we noted in Chapter 1. I have heard occasional rumours that some in the Shîᶜî community still practise *tabarrâ* in secret, and it is possible that Reza Aga was countering this publically in his sermon, not least for the benefit of any Sunnîs who might have been watching his *majlis* on television. But here the most prominent Shîᶜî scholar of Hyderabad is showing a distinctive feature of Hyderabadi preaching in making a subtle but forceful plea for good relations between his congregation and their Sunnî neighbours. He does so by describing a woman from the *maṣâ'ib*, Zaynab, and bringing her into the present as a role model for their own attitude.

The person of Fâṭima is also key in this regard. She often becomes a kind of supra-temporal figure, having died before her husband and the rest of her family, but coming back again and again to the land of the living in order to mourn when one of her children or later descendants is martyred. The classic time when she returns is at Ḥusayn's martyrdom, as Anis Fatima narrates her as saying, 'When Ḥusayn dies, his head will be on my lap!' (S6.26).

As well as 'returning' from the land of the dead within *maṣâ'ib* narratives, Fâṭima is also often spoken of as being present at every *majlis* held to honour her children and thus provides a personal bridge at every contemporary gathering to the world of the past. As Akhtar Zaidi announces, 'O you who weep! Be at rest! Even the daughter of the Prophet has come!' (S15). Or as Anees Fatima again

comments, 'I do not know where Fâṭima is in this *majlis*…' (S6.25) meaning that she is present but invisible.

In both the *faẕâ'il* and the *maṣâ'ib*, the sermon is clearly operating in a different way than in the general discourse. While the general discourse appeals to the mind, functioning in what I have called an argumentative or teaching mode, the *faẕâ'il* and *maṣâ'ib* appeal to the heart functioning in what may be called a ritual mode. As defined in folklore theory, ritual is, 'the performance of a more or less invariant sequence of formal acts and utterances…' (Rappaport, 1992: 'Ritual'). In the *faẕâ'il* and the *maṣâ'ib* the Virtues and Sufferings of the *Ahl-e Bayt* are said to be 'recited' rather than 'preached'. The *ẕâkir* or 'reciter' repeats narratives and Traditions that are already known by the congregation in a kind of performance in which the responses of acclamation and weeping are as important as anything that is being communicated from the pulpit.

8 Indian Shîʿî preaching as the expression of a minority Islamic religious identity

Having looked in Chapter 7 at how the sermons function, I now consider *majlis* preaching from the perspective of the faith that it proclaims. I begin by exploring the theology of the sermons before concluding the study by examining the purpose of the *majlis*, its sermon and the Shîʿî community itself as a minority in the religiously plural context of India.

The theology of the sermons

Whether it functions as argument or as ritual, *majlis* preaching is a presentation of the Shîʿî faith. This is not to say that sermon texts may be read as theological textbooks. Even when they are preached by members of the *ʿulamâ'*, *majlis* sermons do far more than simply conveying a set of doctrines. Nevertheless, they do serve to articulate for their congregations the community's beliefs and how members of a congregation are expected to act in the light of these beliefs. It is in this sense that a 'theology of the sermons' may legitimately be drawn out of them.

The theology of *majlis* preaching has three main emphases: it is person-centred, it is a theology of mediation and it is a theology of suffering. As articulated in *majlis* preaching, the Shîʿî community and within it the individual believer does have a direct relationship with God in terms of worship, obedience and prayer, but far more important than this direct relationship is an indirect relationship, mediated by the persons of the *Ahl-e Bayt*. These persons are believed to be especially loved by God as His perfectly pure and obedient servants, and Shîʿî faith is expressed as love and loyalty to them. The experience of both the *Ahl-e Bayt* and their true followers, the Shîʿa, has always been one of suffering, and therefore love and loyalty are properly demonstrated through mourning. Tears are shed for the Sufferings of the *Ahl-e Bayt*, but the community also perceives itself as a suffering community, its own sufferings arising out of and participating in the Sufferings of the *Ahl-e Bayt* themselves. These three theological themes are rooted in the larger Shîʿî mourning tradition, a point which I argue for in the last part of this section by drawing on some early devotional sources.

A personal theology

The theology of *majlis* sermons is fundamentally person-centred. The traditional observances and doctrines of Islam are recognized and acknowledged, but they only find their true meaning and place within Islam if they are believed and practised with heart-felt love for the family of the Prophet, the *Ahl-e Bayt*. The theology of *majlis* preaching is heavily influenced by the narrative character of the sermons. Narrative is used partly, as Akhtar Zaidi notes, because it is more appealing to congregations than dry theory (interview, AZ). But it is also an appropriate medium for communicating a person-centred faith. Although preachers can and sometimes do explain in theory what it means to be a believer, they would rather show what it means by recounting a narrative.

Sadiq Naqvi sums up this personal theology in a narrative about the commander of the Umayyad cavalry, Ḥurr, who switched sides on the eve of the Battle of Karbala to die as a martyr fighting for Ḥusayn.

> It only takes one second for a person to make a decision which will put him on the true or false path. How many times had Ḥurr prostrated at the Prayers that morning? What kind of example would Ḥurr have been if he had not made that decision that morning? Ḥurr made the journey from hell to heaven in a decision lasting one second. He said to his son, 'Tie my hands behind my back!' He wanted to go to Ḥusayn in this way, on foot behind the saddle of a horse. He only had one thing to ask of Ḥusayn and that was for forgiveness. What answer did he want Ḥusayn to give? 'Your sins are forgiven!' And Ḥusayn's answer was, 'I forgive you, and my God forgives you!' Such is the power of Ḥusayn that when he forgives someone, God also forgives that person.
>
> (S30)

It is a right attitude of the heart to the persons of the *Ahl-e Bayt* that determines an individual's eternal destiny, and this attitude is conveyed with a vivid narrative-portrait. The well-known character, Ḥurr, approaches his master in penitence and faith, ready to die for the truth that Ḥusayn represents. Even when the preacher, in another sermon of the series, provides Qur'ânic backing for this message that belief is more than outward actions, he does so with a passage linked to another narrative (S21). Some desert Arabs, he relates, approached the Prophet and told him that they were *mu'mins* [those who believe]. The Prophet then received a revelation from God instructing him to rebuke these Arabs by telling them that they were not 'believers' but rather *muslims* [those who submit] for, as the text says, '*faith has not yet entered your hearts*' (Sûra-e Ḥujurât 49.14). It is on the basis of this theological principle that *majlis* preachers follow the more general Shîᶜî practice of referring to Shîᶜas as 'believers' rather than 'Muslims' (e.g. S6.2 and S3.1).

Such is the importance of a right attitude of heart to the *Ahl-e Bayt* that it is said to be more important than memorizing the Qur'ân or even performing the core Islamic practices such as the ritual Prayers and Fasting. To obey ᶜAlî is to obey God, because ᶜAlî was perfectly obedient to the Prophet of God. In the early

years after the Prophet's death, it was love for ᶜAlî or a lack thereof that divided the community and led to the crucial event of Karbala. An inner attitude of love is often held up as the core element that distinguishes the true believer from the false who only obeys in outward ways (e.g. S5.5). The outward practices of Islam are also believed to be obligatory, but they must be done with a right intention of love. Husn al-Hasan recounts a narrative which puts the relation between love for the *Ahl-e Bayt* and the practice of the 'pillars' of Islam in their right relationship: 'There was an incident when the Prophet Muhammad was performing the Prayers and the young Ḥusayn came and sat on his back as he prostrated. The Prophet kept performing the Prayers showing that you should do God's will and keep love for the *Ahl-e Bayt* at the same time' (S60).

The Qur'ân is given its due status as the revealed book of God, and it is also frequently quoted. But the holy book is always held together with the holy persons who brought the revelation and preserve it on behalf of God. Sometimes this relationship is formally justified by reference to the so-called *ḥadîṯ* of the 'Two Weighty Things*', but more often it is simply assumed in the way that the Qur'ân is used and interpreted by means of incidents narrated about the *Ahl-e Bayt*.

It is because their theology is so person-centred that Hyderabadi Shîᶜas can welcome others from very different traditions, including even Hindus, to their devotional rituals. As Syed Naqi Mehdi says, 'Ḥusayn is no one particular clan's, no one particular's tribe, religion or caste. Those who like to see evil abandoned and the righteous established will definitely attract towards Ḥusayn' (S4.17). I have often been told by Hyderabadi Shîᶜas that anyone who has respect or love for the *Ahl-e Bayt* in their heart is welcome to attend a *majlis*. An 'outsider' can participate in a *majlis* without necessarily 'signing up' as a member of the community, something that is very different from participation in an activity such as the ritual Prayers. Some Sunnî Muslims would feel out of place in a Shîᶜî *majlis* precisely because they would object strongly to the importance given to the *Ahl-e Bayt* and the mediatorial role ascribed to them. Nevertheless, there is a long tradition in Hyderabad, typified by the seventh Nizâm, of being a Sunnî and at the same time demonstrating love and respect for the *Ahl-e Bayt* by participating in Shîᶜî mourning practices.

Vernon Schubel uses the Shîᶜî emphasis on personal loyalty to the *Ahl-e Bayt* to formulate what he sees as the central distinction between Shîᶜî and Sunnî Islam. As he puts it (1993: ix),

> …Sunnis see in the Qur'ân God's authentic voice because of the miraculous qualities of the book itself. Shi'ites, however, accept the Qur'ân as God's Word because their beloved Prophet said it was. The charisma of the Book, thus, is grounded in the charisma of Muhammad, and in the infallible spiritual guides, the Imams, who descended from him: Ali, Husayn and others.

Whatever the evidence for this statement in the Pakistani context, however, it is difficult to sustain such a conclusion either in theory or from sermons preached

in India. The revelation of the Qur'ân must always be linked to the Prophet who brought it. The authority of the Qur'ân, at least in the time of the Prophet, must have been derived from the authority of Muḥammad himself, just as the Prophet's authority was based on the revelation that he claimed was sent down upon him. It is not simply a matter of one or the other being the case. At least from sermons that I have listened to in India, Shîᶜî *majlis* preachers refer to the miraculous character of the Qur'ân just as Sunnîs do. A Sunnî preacher could easily have preached as, for example, the North Indian Shîᶜa Uruj al-Hasan does about the miraculous nature of the Qur'ân, quoting Sûra-e Baqara (2.23), a classic *âyat* used to defend this doctrine, 'If you are in any doubt that this book comes from God, and if you are in any doubt that Muḥammad is his prophet, then God says, "Bring a book like this one!"' (S127). Similarly, Zakia Sultana speaks very forcefully about the miraculous nature of the Qur'ân when she says that God would not allow the words of the Qur'ân written on paper or leaves to be eaten by animals, but rather that God supernaturally preserved them (S20).

There is always a danger when the theology of one group is defined in contrast to the theology of another that one or other position is stretched to make the contrast fit. Schubel writes (1993: 75, with his own italics), '. . . the Shiᶜa understand Islam to be not only an allegiance to a set of ideas or laws (whose primary source is the Qur'ân) but also *a personal allegiance to the bearer of the message – the Prophet Muhammad*'.

It seems to me, however, especially on the Indian Subcontinent, that attention can be drawn to the Shîᶜî emphasis on a person-centred faith without implying that Islam for Sunnîs is only book-centred. Such a definition as Schubel's may be an accurate portrayal of the Shîᶜî position, but it does implicit injustice to the long and rich tradition among Sunnîs on the Indian Subcontinent of veneration of the Prophet (as well as his family), not least because of the immense influence in the region of Ṣûfî thinking and devotional practices.

A theology of mediation

If the theology of the sermons is fundamentally person-centred, it is also fundamentally a theology of mediation. When a believer comes to the *Ahl-e Bayt* as an obedient follower, he or she is in a position to enjoy the mediation of the *Ahl-e Bayt* with God. An obedient follower is promised that his or her prayers will be answered, difficulties removed, sins forgiven, and that he or she will be admitted to heaven after death. The mediation of the *Ahl-e Bayt* is basic to a believer's whole life. Islam is understood as a relationship in which a believer demonstrates his or her faith in God by means of unquestioning love and loyalty to the *Ahl-e Bayt*. In return for this love, the believer is 'carried' by the *Ahl-e Bayt* through life and death.

Nabi Hassan, in a sermon in which he expounds the opening *sûra* of the Qur'ân, makes this point in his discussion of the phrase '*Guide us on the right path* . . .' (Sûra-e Fâtiḥa 1.6). He uses the illustration of a visitor to Hyderabad

arriving at the central bus depot and wanting to visit Hyderabad's most famous monument, the Charminar:

> What does this mean, '*Guide us on the right path?*' I will give an example: You are standing at the Afzalgang bus depot. A traveller comes and asks the way to Charminar. He says to you, 'Which direction should I go to get to Charminar?' You say to him, 'From Nayapul you go straight, and you will see the Madina Building. If you go straight from there, you will come to the Charminar.' This is showing the way to Charminar. This is the first meaning of the word 'guidance'. The second meaning of the word is that you take the person by the hand and bring him to the place. In our example, this means that a bus arrives and the person says, 'How do I get to Charminar?' You have a scooter with you. You say to the person, 'Get on the back of my scooter and I will take you to Charminar.' You take him there and drop him off at Charminar . . . This is the difference between the Prophet and ᶜAlî. The Prophet is the one who explains the way to heaven. But ᶜAlî is the one who takes us by the hand and leads us there.
>
> (S118)

The *Ahl-e Bayt* function both in mediating God to the world, and in mediating the world to God. It is the Imâms who are the helpers sent by God to aid His prophets as they bring God's law and God's justice forward in society. It is ᶜAlî's life which fleshes out the teachings of the Qur'ân and the example of the Prophet. God's love for ᶜAlî, for example, is so great that at the time of the *Miᶜrâj** He is even said to have spoken to the Prophet with ᶜAlî's voice (S9.20 and S17). The *Ahl-e Bayt* also take the requests of their followers to God and intercede for them to Him. As Hadi Ali Mirza says, commenting and expanding on the *ḥadîṯ* of 'Ghadir-e Khumm*',

> The Prophet took ᶜAlî's hand and held it up and made ᶜAlî's intercession. He prayed, 'O God, make of his friends Your friends! Reject those who reject ᶜAlî! Those who are ᶜAlî's enemies, may they be also Your enemies! Those who give help to ᶜAlî, may You also help!' Thus from that time on, any prayers that are offered apart from ᶜAlî are not acceptable to God. Unless one is a friend of ᶜAlî, it is not possible to be a friend of God, to receive help from God or to reach God, unless a person has love of ᶜAlî in his heart.
>
> (S117)

Even a believer's supplication should only be one that has been written by one of the *Ahl-e Bayt*, as Rashîd Ṭurâbî explains, 'Just because a person is fluent in Arabic does not mean that he can write a supplication [*duᶜâ*]. You need to go to someone who is between humanity and God who can teach you how and when to pray' (S153).

Particularly common are narratives relating the help given by members of the *Ahl-e Bayt* to their followers in order to aid these people in the performance of Shîᶜî rituals. Ziya Abbas Naqvi's sermon (S3) relates how ᶜAbbâs helped

a disabled man to perform *mâtam* [ritual mourning]. Another such incident is summarized by David Pinault from a sermon by the local Hyderabadi *ẕâkir* Hyder Zaydi in which Fâṭima, Zaynab, Umm-e Kulṯûm and Sakîna come to a Shîᶜî woman's home to help her to hold a *majlis* after her daughter has died (Pinault, 1992: 118–9).

After interceding for their followers in this life, the *Ahl-e Bayt* will exercise their right of mediation on the Day of Judgement. This mediation is sometimes spoken of corporately, as Mehdi Abedi says, 'Who will come to our rescue after death? ᶜAlî and Fâṭima will save us from the rigours of dying and the questioning and what happens after death. Ḥasan and Ḥusayn will take us to the sacred fountain of paradise' (S103).

More often, the intercession that the *Ahl-e Bayt* make for their followers on the Last Day is spoken of individually, as Reza Mehdi says, 'ᶜAlî is the one who will write a letter for a person to take to heaven. If the person has that letter, he will be accepted, if he does not have it, he will not be accepted. Without the love of ᶜAlî, a person will not be able to smell the perfume of heaven' (S150).

At times, this intercession at the Judgement Day can become controversial. Abdul Hakim, for example, tells a narrative about the *Miᶜrâj** in which he relates a conversation between the Prophets Muḥammad and Abraham. When Abraham asked Muḥammad about a light which was next to him, Muḥammad told Abraham that this light was his 'brother, ᶜAlî'. When Abraham then went on to ask about certain people whom he could see 'around that light', '…the Prophet replied, "These are the party [*shîᶜa*] of my brother ᶜAlî." Then Abraham asked him, "What is the credit of this party of ᶜAlî?" The Prophet replied, "All of them are going to heaven!" ' (S110). Such talk is perceived by some other preachers as encouraging immoral behaviour by Shîᶜas who think that whatever they do they are going to heaven.

It is against this kind of thinking that Abu Talib says, 'The definition of the love of ᶜAlî is piety. Without piety there is no possibility of loving ᶜAlî. Whoever would have love for ᶜAlî must have piety' (S17.11). Similarly, Mujahid Hussain seeks in his sermons to correct what he sees as the wrong interpretation of some passages from the Qur'ân and Traditions which play down moral action in favour of love for the *Ahl-e Bayt* and their mediation. He quotes the popular Sûra-e Shûrâ (42.23) which speaks about the 'love of (the Prophet's) relatives', and which ends with the words, '…and whosoever earneth good, We increase for him good therein, verily God is Oft-Forgiving, the Most Grateful (One).' The preacher's commentary on this passage is as follows:

> God says at the end of this *âyat*, 'God often forgives your sins, and is the Most Grateful.' He will completely wipe away the bad things from us and increase more and more the good things in us. This is the meaning of a Tradition in which the Prophet says, 'Your sins are eaten by the love of ᶜAlî.' This Tradition must be read together with the above *âyat*; it is those 'servants who believe and do good deeds' who are the ones whom God will forgive.
>
> (S91)

Although the mediation of the *Ahl-e Bayt* is spoken of most often in terms of ᶜAlî and Fâṭima, it is granted to all of the *Ahl-e Bayt* in the sense that all of the *Ahl-e Bayt* participate in the nature of these two and the Prophet. This 'secondary' mediation can sometimes be seen to form a kind of chain linking God with the ordinary Shîᶜî believer. 'When we reach God,' says Talib Jawhari, 'it is through the medium of Muḥammad, and when we reach Muḥammad, it is through the medium of ᶜAlî' (S17). Or as Anees Fatima says, 'ᶜAbbâs is the name of ᶜAlî's prayer. (This ᶜAlî) who gave to others sought the help of ᶜAbbâs' (S6.9). Thus ᶜAbbâs also becomes someone to whom a Shîᶜa can turn in a time of trouble: 'Let me mention one particular prayer to you that you can use if you are facing a difficulty or any worry, or if you are surrounded by fear and trouble. Offer two *rakᶜats* [lit. 'bowings'] of the ritual Prayers in the name of ᶜAbbâs . . .' (S6.15).

There are two sets of reasons given for why God has granted the *Ahl-e Bayt* the power of mediation. One set of reasons focusses simply on God's decision and action. God created the *Ahl-e Bayt*, explains Zaki Baqri, '. . . to allow communication between Himself and humanity. This medium had to be like a human being, otherwise people would not have accepted it' (S70). God and His Prophet so loved the *Ahl-e Bayt* that He gave them the power to mediate for their followers both in this life and the next. As Abdul Hakim says, 'When people objected and asked why the Prophet would pray through the mediation of ᶜAlî, he replied that when he looked at where God was, he saw that the only one who was near God was ᶜAlî. This was the reason that he prayed using ᶜAlî's name' (S110).

Sometimes no reason is given at all except that God has ordained the matter, as Husn al-Hasan states, referring to the incident in the Qur'ân (Sûra-e Aᶜrâf 7.11) in which Satan refused to bow down before the humans whom God had created in defiance of God's order: 'Satan refused. He said, "Why should I bow down to someone who is between God and me?" But God simply said, "An order is an order – do it!" It is the same with mediation; God has simply ordered it!' (S60).

Theoretical reasons given for God's decision to grant mediation to the *Ahl-e Bayt* are less common than narratives which show simply that God loves them so much that He does what they ask. The child Ḥusayn could give a childless man as many sons as he chose, relates Asgari Hussain (S7.3–4), even though the Prophet Muḥammad could only tell that man that his unhappy state was predestined and could not be changed. Fâṭima's power of intercession for the faithful on the Day of Judgement was given to her, says Talib Jawhari, as her *mehr* [bride-price] on the occasion of her marriage because she was so loved by God and His Prophet (S17).

Another set of reasons that God has granted the *Ahl-e Bayt* this power of mediation has to do with their experience of suffering. The *Ahl-e Bayt* are those who have proved themselves in the fire of suffering. They are the oppressed ones who were frustrated in life and prevented from fulfilling their desires. God grants them therefore the right to grant desires in the hereafter. Anees Fâṭima, for example, implies that the very frustration that ᶜAbbâs experienced in not being able to bring the water-skin for Sakîna caused God to make him an intercessory 'Gate of

Needs' (S6.24). It is the badges of suffering of the *Ahl-e Bayt* that will be shown at the Last Day when their intercession is invoked, as Shabbir Hassan says,

> On the Plain of Ḥashr (the great gathering-place where everyone will be brought before the Day of Resurrection), first Fâṭima will come bringing with her all the people who had asked for any intercession [*shafâᶜt*]. Her intercession is the basis for all other kinds of intercession. She will come bringing the teeth of her father (that were knocked out at the Battle of Uhud*), the turban of ᶜAlî (that was cut when his assassin struck him on the head with the poisoned sword), the armour of Ḥasan (that was pierced by the poisoned knife which killed him), and Ḥusayn's shirt that he was wearing at Karbala.
>
> (S120)

It is common in sermons to hear the intercession or mediation of the *Ahl-e Bayt* spoken about as a 'reward' [*ṯawâb*] for believers who take part in remembrance rituals. Muhammad Ashfaq, for example, says, '... it is worth sitting through endless *majâlis* because you know that you will get the reward' (S39). David Pinault confirms that the Hyderabadi Shîᶜas with whom he talked understood their ritual mourning as giving them access to the intercession of the *Ahl-e Bayt*. They told him that, 'The Shiite who remembers Karbala every year in Muharram and weeps for the martyrs will be rewarded by the intercession of the Ma'sumin [Pure Ones] on his or her behalf in paradise' (Pinault, 1992: 40).

A theology of tears

The third important theme characterizing the theology of the sermons is that of suffering. The *majlis* pulpit is a pulpit of tears. Whether the theme of suffering is spoken about in the general discourse of a sermon or simply described in a *maṣâ'ib* narrative, it is taken up by every preacher in every sermon. The fact that every sermon narrates the Sufferings of the *Ahl-e Bayt* makes clear that these are central to the Shîᶜî world-view. More specifically, the Battle of Karbala is understood in the sermons to be the most important event in the history of the world. The world and the position of the Shîᶜa in the world can only be rightly understood in the light of Karbala. Its shadow falls both on those who lived before the event and on those who came afterwards.

Alamdar Hussain Mehdawi devotes a considerable part of one of the sermons in his *ᶜashra* series to recounting narratives of the prophets who came before Ḥusayn (S143). Each of these prophets at a certain point came to Karbala and felt an awful foreboding of what would happen at that place. Noah's ark ran into a terrible storm over the spot, and other prophets experienced earthquakes or were simply overwhelmed with grief. When they asked God why these things were happening to them, the reply came that this was the place at which the beloved of God, Ḥusayn, was to be martyred. Abdul Hakim sees in a similar way the passage in the Qur'ân in which Abraham's son is said to have been '... ransomed ... with

a great sacrifice' (Sûra-e Ṣâfât 37.107). In his discussion of this text, the preacher quotes God as saying explicitly that the 'great sacrifice' provided by God in the place of Abraham's son, 'is not a ram; it is Ḥusayn. My purpose is Ḥusayn!' (S114; see Pinault, 1992: 32–4).

For Hyderabad's Shîᶜa who live after Karbala, its memory makes all religious reflection into a theology of tears. The powerlessness of Ḥusayn at Karbala is a paradigm of the experience of the rest of his family as well as for the community that grew up as their followers even up to the present time. The Sufferings of Karbala encompass and eclipse all others, relativizing all 'ordinary' personal suffering by individual believers. The community's response to the Sufferings of Karbala becomes the crucial mark of their identity.

The essential feature of Ḥusayn's suffering and that of the other Imâms is powerlessness. Ḥusayn and his family were powerless as they fought the Umayyad forces against overwhelming odds. Muhammad Ashfaq begins his sermon with the words, 'Peace be upon those believers who mourn the helplessness of Ḥusayn! Peace be upon those who mourn his aloneness!' (S3.2). The events of Karbala are understood to have been set in motion right from the death of the Prophet when Ḥusayn's father, ᶜAlî, was denied the caliphate that he considered had been ordained for him by God and the Prophet (S5.21). The second Imâm, Ḥasan, because of the strength of his rival, Muᶜâwiya, and the weakness of his own companions, was forced to abdicate the caliphate. Instead of ruling in the place of his father, he had to endure patiently while his father was publicly cursed (S8.16). After Karbala, all the rest of the Imâms were denied their right as the Prophet's successors and all but the last of them is believed to have been poisoned at the behest of the reigning Umayyad or ᶜAbbâsid monarch. Husn al-Hasan sums up their experience when he says, 'Except for Imâm ᶜAlî and Imâm Ḥasan, and until the *Mahdî* comes, the Imâms did not have the power to govern. But all the Imâms had the desire to govern' (S5.18).

Whatever the reality of the Shîᶜa community's significance and influence in Hyderabad today, the perception of their experience as related from the *majlis* pulpit is that it is essentially a continuation of the experience of the Imâms. The Shîᶜa feel themselves to be powerless as a minority within a minority community. Even when the Shîᶜa of South India held power under the Quṭb Shâhî dynasty from the beginning of the sixteenth century, this privileged position only lasted until the Kingdom of Golconda was crushed by the forces of the anti-Shîᶜî Mughal Emperor Awrangzîb in 1687. Sadiq Naqvi relates his community's history from the time of the Umayyad caliph Muᶜâwiya to the present, ending with the words,

> Explain to me about when Awrangzîb attacked the Deccani sultanates, when he ordered the Shîᶜî shrines to be destroyed! I can show you the *firmân* [official order]! For what crime were these shrines destroyed? But the modern period of history is not very different in this respect. Who are the enemies? In this time, the same things are being repeated as in the earlier period.[1]
>
> (S26)

There are important qualifications to this experience of powerlessness and the suffering that goes with it. For a start, being a minority within the larger Muslim community does not necessarily mean that the Shîᶜa are wrong. There is a common perception among the Shîᶜa that truth follows consensus [*ijmâᶜ*] in Sunnî Islam. *Majlis* preachers are therefore quick to point out that people who practice falsehood and wrong are often in the majority and often have power. The powerlessness of the Imâms came about because of their stand for the truth, and it is not the way of God and of truth to force people into submission. As Muhammad Ashfaq says, 'Most people do not recognize the status of the *Ahl-e Bayt*. But most people do not perform the Prayers or go on the Pilgrimage either!' (S39).

Further, it is often paradoxically stated that the path of powerlessness and suffering was the choice of the *Ahl-e Bayt*. Ḥusayn knew what would happen to him and his family in advance and, even if he had simply allowed ᶜAbbâs to fight, the Imâm Ḥusayn could have overcome militarily at Karbala (S4.14 and S6.22). Taqui Khan talks about this issue as follows: 'People ask, "Why didn't Ḥusayn use a miracle at Karbala to create a flood in order to defeat the enemy? He could have destroyed the whole earth!" But Noah didn't curse his people for the same reason. The capacity was there but the miracle must point towards the truth' (S87).

Rather, the Imâms were prepared to leave the outcome of their struggle in the hands of God, assured that in time He would set the world to rights at the return of the *Mahdî* (S5.19), and save the Shîᶜa from their oppressors (S9.21). David Pinault confirms, in his conversations with Hyderabadi Shîᶜas, the importance of the 'willed nature of Ḥusayn's sacrifice' that 'made his death meritorious and salvific for others' (1992: 55).

Ḥusayn's Sufferings are consistently spoken of as overshadowing and taking up all other suffering in them. Akhtar Zaidi, for example, says simply, 'Whatever other people might say that their grief is more important than any other, we say that we do not recognize any grief greater than that of Karbala' (S102). This subordination of personal grief to grief for the Sufferings of Ḥusayn has been a consistent feature of Muḥarram remembrance in India since at least the early nineteenth century. J.N. Hollister (1988: 175) comments on it in his own time (the middle of the twentieth century), quoting Mrs Meer Hassan Ali's observations from the century before:

> . . . the bereavement of a beloved object even is almost overlooked in the dutiful remembrance of Hasan and Hosein at this period; and I have had opportunities of observing this triumph of religious feeling in women, who are remarkable for their affectionate attachment to their children, husband and parents; – they tell me, 'We must not indulge selfish sorrow of our own, whilst the Prophet's family alone have a right to our tears.'

It is at a funeral *majlis* that this doctrine acquires most poignance. In one such gathering, Abu Talib quotes Sûra-e Raᶜd (13.28) in which it is said that believers' hearts are set at rest by means of the remembrance [*ẕikr*] of God. Commenting

on this passage to those who have come to mourn their own dead, as well as Karbala's, the preacher says,

> It is by means of the remembrance of God that people's hearts are set at rest. If this remembrance of Ḥusayn is not part of the remembrance of God, then how can we bear the weight of our broken hearts? This remembrance of Ḥusayn is the same as the remembrance of God, and this remembrance of Ḥusayn will bear the weight of our broken hearts.
>
> (S18)

The roots of the sermons' theology

We have noted that these sermons are 'live' material, preached without notes in often highly emotional contexts. Given their particular focus, it is important to ask whether the theological themes that we have drawn out of them are broadly in line with the classical tradition of Shîᶜî devotional and mourning literature. We will therefore look at some examples from this wider tradition. The supplications attributed to the fourth Shîᶜî Imâm, ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn, known as *Al-Ṣaḥîfat Al-Kâmilat al-Sajjâdiyya* ['*The Perfect Book of the Prostrator*'] are a very early source for tracing a Shîᶜî understanding of God and the world.[2] Although attributed to an Imâm and addressed to God, the supplications are designed for use by ordinary Shîᶜî believers and as such convey an understanding of what it means to be a Shîᶜî believer. Within this understanding of Shîᶜî identity, the same three theological themes that we noted in the sermons are clearly present: personal devotion to the Prophet and his family, mediation and suffering.

One of the most striking features of these often very beautiful supplications are the constant references to the Prophet Muḥammad and his family. As in the sermons, blessings upon Muḥammad and the *Ahl-e Bayt* are a constant refrain. After the first supplication, 'In praise of God', the second is introduced with the words, 'After this praise of God he (i.e. the fourth Imâm) would supplicate by calling down blessings upon God's messenger (God bless him and his Household).'

Thereafter, the formula most commonly used within the supplications is an invocation of God, followed by a blessing on Muḥammad and his family, followed in turn by a specific request. The effect of this constant mentioning of Muḥammad and his family is that their remembrance becomes the avenue through which God Himself is understood and approached. The supplications are steeped in Qur'ânic language and references. They are also shaped by the experience and personality of the Prophet and his family, through whom that revelation came and was made secure. The way to the mercy of God is through God's chosen and beloved persons, and their remembrance becomes the defining feature of the pray-er's identity. The blessing and remembrance of the Prophet and the *Ahl-e Bayt* also function as a mediation by means of which the supplications will be heard and answered. Thus the 'Supplication in Seeking Needs from God',

includes the prayer,

> Bless Muḥammad and his Household with a permanent, ever-growing blessing whose perpetuity has no cutting off and whose term knows no limit, and make that a help to me and a cause for the granting of my request!
>
> (13.24)

The mediation of the *Ahl-e Bayt* is directly linked to the sufferings and tribulations of the Prophet and his family, and Supplication 2 shows how that link works. It is a kind of poem recounting the Prophet's humility and exaltation. The supplication begins with the praise of God and a description of the exalted status of Muḥammad. He is: '. . . entrusted by Thee with Thy revelation, distinguished by Thee among Thy creatures, devoted to Thee among Thy servants, the imam of mercy, the leader of good, the key to blessing . . .' (2.3).

The supplication then goes on to describe the humility of the Prophet, his sufferings and the tribulations that he willingly endured for the sake of God (2.4–22): '. . . who wearied his soul for Thy affairs, exposed his body to detested things for Thy sake . . . migrated to the land of exile and the place of remoteness from the home of his saddlebags . . .'

Finally it ends with a prayer for the Prophet's even greater exaltation:

> O God, so raise him, because of his labours for Thy sake, to the highest degree of Thy Garden, that none may equal him in station, none may match him in level, and no angel brought nigh or prophet sent out may parallel him in Thy sight. And inform him concerning his Household the pure and his community the faithful of an excellent intercession, greater than what Thou hast promised him!
>
> (2.23–25)

Intercession is understood here as the reward of suffering freely chosen by God's appointed servants.

Karbala and the sufferings of Ḥusayn are never explicitly mentioned in the supplications. The traditional reason given is simply that the fourth Imâm was strictly constrained in what he was allowed to say and to teach by the political authorities of his time. Yet there is a profound understanding of suffering that pervades the supplications. This understanding is partly about the suffering that is part and parcel of what it means to be human. There are, for example, supplications for use 'When Sick' (15), 'In Worrying Tasks' (7), 'In Acts of Wrongdoing' (14), 'In Hardship' (22), 'For Help in Repaying Debt' (30) and 'When Death was mentioned' (40). Other supplications, for example, 'For Parents' (24) speak about the 'hardship and toil' that is simply part of bringing up children. But the supplications also include an understanding, as shown in the interpretation of the Prophet's life given in Supplication 2, of the special vocation to suffering known by the Prophet and his family.

The three theological themes of personal devotion to the Prophet and his family, mediation and suffering are also important threads that run through the many

quotations in Mahmoud Ayoub's study of Shiᶜi Traditions and devotional literature, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*. Ayoub quotes excerpt after excerpt from classic *ḥadīṯ* collections including *al-Kâfî* [The Sufficient] of Muḥammad Yaᶜqûb b. Isâq al-Kulaynî al-Râzî (d. 328/939), and *Biḥâr al-Anwâr* [Ocean of Lights] of Muḥammad Bâqir al-Majlisî (d. 1111/1699), historical narratives such as that of Muḥammad b. Jarîr b. Yazîd al-Ṭâbarî (d. 310/923), and what he calls 'hagiographical' material such as the *Manâqib Âl Abî Ṭâlib* [Eulogy of the Family of Abî Ṭâlib] of Ibn Shahrâshûb (d. 588/1192). Along with quotations from many other sources, these show how central the personalities of the *Ahl-e Bayt* are to Shiᶜi identity and piety, and how the mediation of these personalities is to a great extent linked to their life of suffering.

It is clear from these quotations that especially the *faẓâ'il* and *maṣâ'ib* material in contemporary Hyderabadi *majlis* sermons can be traced directly back to these classical sources. A typical Tradition is taken from the *Kitâb al-Amâlî* [The Book of Expectations] of Shaykh al-Ṣadûq Ibn Bâbûya al-Qummî (d. 381/991) and is from an actual *majlis* dated 367/978. This Tradition quotes the Prophet Muḥammad as expounding the Virtues of Ḥusayn and prophesying his Sufferings:

> As for Ḥusayn, he is flesh of my flesh and blood of my blood; he is my son, my child . . . He is the *Imâm* of the Muslims, the master of the faithful and the representative (*khalîfah*) of the Lord of the worlds. He is helper of them that call for help, the cave [refuge] for those who seek refuge, and the Proof of God for all His creatures. He is the master of the youths of paradise and the gate to the salvation of the community (*ummah*) . . . I shall announce to him his martyrdom in the land of sorrow (*karb*) and calamity (*balâ*') and of death and annihilation. A small number of the faithful will come to his aid; these are the masters of the martyrs of my community on the Day of Resurrection. I can see him shot with an arrow and falling dead off his horse. Then will he be slain like a lamb.
>
> (Ayoub, 1978: 41)

The movement that we can see in this early Tradition from glorying in the Virtues of the *Ahl-e Bayt* to mourning their Sufferings is the same movement that is evident in many of the contemporary sermons that we have looked at in this study.

One particular element of many of the Traditions quoted by Ayoub is noticeably different from the sermons. This is the cursing of the enemies of the *Ahl-e Bayt* known as *tabarrâ*. Ayoub includes a chapter, for example, on *ziyârat* [visitation] literature, liturgies used in the ritual visitation of the shrines of the Imâms. In almost all of the liturgies that he quotes, there is both a confession of love and loyalty for the Imâms, expressed in blessings on them, and a corresponding confession of hatred for their enemies, expressed as curses. In the *ziyârat* liturgies used after contemporary Hyderabadi *majlis* sermons, however, this latter element is almost completely absent, as is the explicit cursing of the enemies of the *Ahl-e Bayt* from the sermons themselves. Indeed, as we have seen in the preaching of Reza Aga, cursing is explicitly condemned (S9.27).

It may be claimed that a particular excerpt from a particular contemporary Hyderabadi sermon is an aberration from the main stream of Shîᶜî devotional literature, but this cannot be said for the preaching tradition as a whole. As measured against the supplications of the fourth Imâm, and Ayoub's survey of sources from the fourth to the ninth centuries AH, the sermons may be said to be broadly in line with the main themes of the classical Shîᶜî devotional tradition. As Ayoub sums up the message of the Traditions that he quotes (1978: 198),

> The *imâms*, as we have seen throughout this study, were from the beginning destined by God to drain the cup of suffering and martyrdom and to play a decisive role in human salvation and judgement. To a large extent, the intercessory prerogative of the imâms is dependent upon their patient endurance of privation, rejection and persecution.

The purpose of the *majlis*, its sermon and the Shîᶜî community

In the course of this study, we have looked at and 'listened to' Hyderabad's rich *majlis* preaching tradition, from its historical roots to its contemporary theological distinctives. Now, at the conclusion to the study, we are in a position to ask about the fundamental purpose of Hyderabadi Shîᶜî *majlis* preaching. To do so is to go to the heart of the community's understanding of itself. One of the things that emerges most powerfully from the historical survey in Chapter 1 is that the *majlis* sermon is basically about community identity. Through poetry and prose orations, the Karbala narrative was handed down among the Shîᶜa from generation to generation, and the participation of the *majlis* congregations became, as Yiztak Nakash notes, 'vital for reinforcing their distinct Shîᶜî identity and collective memory' (1993: 163). This issue of identity was particularly acute for the Shîᶜa because of their minority status under the first two dynasties of the Islamic empire.

Crossing over from the Arabic and Persian Muslim heartlands to the Indian Subcontinent, this issue of identity became both sharper and more complex. Although from time to time they were in positions of power, the Indian Shîᶜa have always been a minority within a minority, and this has been more powerfully felt in the South than in the North. Akbar Ahmad comments (1985: 317), 'It is almost a thousand miles from Delhi to Hyderabad. Here the ruling Muslims had to make serious efforts to live with the majority Hindus or face extinction. There was no going back. Their boats were burnt when they crossed into the South.'

In Hyderabad, apart from relatively recent communal violence between Hindus and Muslims (especially after 1947), there has been a long and rich tradition of communal harmony in which Muḥarram mourning commemorations have played a significant part. As one Sunnî researcher has written, 'Moharrum in Hyderabad originated as a socio-political *mela* [festival] in which people belonging to different castes and creeds have participated' (Moinuddin, 1977: 36). Nevertheless, in this religously, socially and politically plural context, the Shîᶜa have had to struggle to preserve their own distinct identity as a faith community.

The Shîᶜa of Hyderabad have a rich historical heritage, and a challenging future. They have to find their way as a Muslim and yet minority community in the context of a secular democratic state that is overwhelmingly Hindu. In contemporary Hyderabad, as we saw in Chapter 2, the *majlis* is the single most important corporate ritual that the Shîᶜî community has for finding and articulating this way to their future. We noted in that chapter that the *majlis* pulpit is open to all sections of the community, and that the community at the same time exercises control over what is preached. This combination of openness and control means that the *majlis* sermon can be said to speak not only for one or other particular group but for the community as a whole. Every year thousands of people from all walks of life attend scores of sermons in which they are called on to think hard, to cry out in praise and to weep at the heart-rending narratives that are told over and over again. *Majlis* preaching is able, therefore, to offer a unique window into the community's understanding of its own identity and purpose.

The Shîᶜî identity was forged out of a response to the experience of ᶜAlî and the Imâms who came after him. Within that response, mourning for the events of Karbala and Ḥusayn, the 'Prince of Martyrs', assumes the primary place. The purpose of *majlis* preaching is linked to the purpose of the *majlis* of which it is a part, and that is to mourn for Karbala. There is, however, a tension among the Shîᶜa between two different ways in which the experience of Ḥusayn and the other Imâms are taken for inspiration. It is important therefore to see Hyderabadi Shîᶜî self-understanding in the light of this tension.

Preaching as a response to Karbala

Historically, there have been two basic responses to Karbala and the experiences of the Imâms among the Shîᶜa. Some Shîᶜas have understood the mourning for Ḥusayn as an inspiration to follow the third Imâm in his 'uprising' against oppression and wrong. This understanding may be termed the revolutionary or political stance. The Kufan 'Penitents' [*Tawwâbûn*], for example, who took up arms against the Umayyad government in 65/684 to atone for the city's guilt at deserting Ḥusayn in his hour of need, spent a day and a night in mourning at Karbala which then inspired them to engage a much larger Umayyad army. In the ensuing battle, the Penitents were wiped out.[3]

More recently, Twelver Shîᶜî religious leaders such as Rûḥallâh Mûsavi Khomaynî (d. 1989), ᶜAli Khâmene'î (b. 1940) and ᶜAlî Akbar Hâshemî Rafsanjânî in Iran, Sayyid Mûsâ al-Ṣadr (disappeared 1978) in the Lebanon, and Muqtadda al-Ṣadr in Iraq have taken the remembrance of Ḥusayn's action at Karbala and the sufferings of the other Imâms as an inspiration for the political struggles in which they were involved. As Ḥujjat al-Islam Rafsanjânî said at a Friday Prayers sermon in Iran in 1983, '(Imâm Ḥusayn) wanted to let the whole world understand that … under conditions of oppressive government – when the Qur'ân is abandoned, when the people who wield power are alien to God and to religion – … every man … has a duty to rise up in revolt'.[4]

In a similar vein, Âyatullâh Khomaynî wrote in his last will and testament, 'We take pride that the infallible Imams were imprisoned, lived in exile, and finally became martyrs while enhancing Islam, implementing the Holy Qur'ân – the establishment of Just and Righteous Rule being one of its dimensions – and toppling the tyrannical governments and the oppressors of their time.'[5]

In different parts of the Shîᶜî world, remembrance gatherings for Ḥusayn take different forms and are known by different names. Under the influence of the above mentioned Shîᶜî religious leaders these gatherings, especially in Iran and the Lebanon, have been used at times as a medium for stimulating revolutionary activity. Around the time of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, for example, recitations at the commemorative gatherings known there as the the *taᶜzîya majlis* sometimes became a platform for anti-government sentiment, with the names of certain personalities in the narratives becoming code-words for the Shah and his government (Momen, 1985: 240). In the Lebanon, remembrance gatherings known as the *taᶜzîya* or *dhikrâ* are held, as well as commemorative processions. It was in the context of one such procession on the day of ᶜÂshûrâ' in 1983 that Shîᶜî mourners clashed with Israeli soldiers at Nabatiyya. After this clash, the representative of the missing Sayyid Mûsâ al-Ṣadr, Sheikh Muḥammad Mahdî Shams al-Dîn issued a *fatwâ* [legal decision] declaring resistance to all foreign powers within the law (Halm, 1991: 132). Sheikh Shams al-Dîn was involved in training Shîᶜî preachers in Iraq (where the commemorative gathering for Karbala is known as the *qirâya*). He encouraged his students there to use the medium of the *qirâya* pulpit in a revolutionary way. He also called for a general conference for 'the leading men in the field of preaching from the pulpit of al-Ḥusayn in every country' presumably to further stimulate its revolutionary use.[6]

Although the revolutionary stance has deep roots, it has not been the majority stance of the Shîᶜa historically. The most prevalent response to Karbala has been to mourn and keep the memory of Karbala alive while remaining politically quietist. To 'rise up' in this view would be to risk annihilation which would then deprive Islam of its witness to the Shîᶜî vision. This latter stance was inspired by ᶜAlî and the Imâms who came after Ḥusayn. ᶜAlî refused to fight against the first three caliphs for what the Shîᶜa understand as his God-given right to lead the Muslim community. The Imâms who came after Ḥusayn lived under Umayyad and ᶜAbbâsid rule and also refused to fight or to work politically for temporal power in the Muslim state. The eagerly awaited last Imâm, the *Mahdî*, it came to be believed by the majority of the community, would be the only one to actually take the power that was his by right. This politically quietist stance has been represented more recently among Twelver Shîᶜas worldwide by the leadership, based in Iraq, of Âyatullâh al-Khû'î (1899–1992) and his disciple, Âyatullâh al-Sîstânî. At the time of writing, al-Sîstânî was recognized by the large majority of Hyderabad's Shîᶜî community as their spiritual leader.

Even in Iran and the Lebanon, remembrance gatherings for Ḥusayn have only at certain times been used to inspire political activity. Mahmoud Ayoub, recalling the *taᶜzîya majlis* commemorations which took place in Iran before the Islamic

revolution there, writes (1978: 155–6),

> The *majlis* begins with a short reading from the Qur'ân, then the reader chants or reads a long passage or poem describing some of the episodes of that particular day of the journey, and tries to emphasize some hardship encountered on the way by the *Imâm* or someone of his family. Finally, the reader himself, or another orator, gives a long sermon on the sufferings of earlier prophets or the persecutions suffered by members of the Holy Family before and after Ḥusayn.

Ayoub also includes in his book a summarized translation of a series of Lebanese *dhikrâ* sermons given by Sayyid Naṣrallâh, a famous Iraqi *nâ'iḥ* (translated by Ayoub as 'lamentation reader'). The sermons are not dated, but were presumably recited shortly before the book's publication in 1978. They contain no incitement to revolutionary activity but are a recitation of *maṣâ'ib* narratives designed to stimulate mourning (Ayoub, 1978: 251–3).

The revolutionary stance is also not the majority position of the Shîᶜa in Hyderabad today. Rather, the Hyderabadi *majlis* and its preaching are a part of the politically quietist tradition. Even if a particular *majlis* preacher has a different understanding of the significance of Karbala and leans more towards the thinking of Iranian leaders such as Âyatullâh Khomaynî, he or she still operates within the mainstream *majlis* format and tradition. Evidence that Hyderabadi preaching takes this 'quietist' stance is the largely a-political orientation of the sermons. The famous preacher Ṭâḥir Jarwalî, speaking in 1986, said, 'From the pulpit, I will never talk about politics. One can talk about mountains, rivers or flowers, but never politics' (S153). Contemporary *majlis* preachers say the same.

This attitude is quite different from Sunnî preaching at the Friday congregational Prayers in Hyderabad, Egypt and Jordan, as well as Shîᶜî preaching at the Friday Prayers in Iran, or in the Lebanon.[7] As Ḥujjat al-Islam Rafsanjânî described the purpose of the Friday Prayers sermon in Iran in 1984, 'The people must learn their obligations in the congregational prayer through a discussion of the current political, social and judicial affairs. This is in effect what lies at the bottom of the congregational prayer . . .' (quoted in Ram, 1994: 25). The political content of Egyptian sermons at the Friday congregational Prayers is discussed in detail in Patrick Gaffney's study on Muslim preaching in Egypt, *The Prophet's Pulpit*. He presents the translation of a sermon by one 'Shaykh Umar' (from 1979), for example, which covers issues such as the repression of their peoples by the governments of Syria, South Yemen and Iraq, the oil policies of Aramco and Saudi Arabia, Jewish settlements in Palestine, as well as the policies of the (named and criticized) president and prime minister of Egypt (Gaffney, 1988: 294–316).

In contrast, David Pinault writes that he never sensed, 'any reference to current political issues, whether local or international' in the *majâlis* that he attended. When he asked a young Shîᶜî doctor about the matter, he received the following reply: 'Zakirs avoid politics in their Muharram sermons so as not to risk their

popularity. Politics and current local events are not what people come to hear about or want to learn about when they attend a *majlis*' (1992: 117).

I would not go as far as Pinault in saying that I never sensed any reference to political issues, or that the kind of response to Karbala advocated by post-revolutionary Iran was entirely absent. In my experience, it is not altogether surprising to hear at least the mention, almost always in the general discourse, of current political events such as a recent coup in Pakistan (in the year 1999, S18). Internal community politics, such as the position of the *Akhbârî* community, are not infrequently mentioned as discussed earlier, as are international concerns such as the position of women in Saudi Arabia (S10.13) or the desecration of Shîᶜî holy sites there (S20). At least one *majlis* sermon by one of the most popular Hyderabadi *ẕâkirs* has included a passionate criticism of American policy and Israeli actions in Israel/Palestine (S57).

There are a very few *majlis* preachers in Hyderabad who advocate a revolutionary response to Karbala. One of these preachers is Mehdi Abedi, whose long association with Indian and Soviet socialism has clearly influenced the way he speaks about Karbala (interview, MA). He understands Karbala as a challenge to any unjust social or political order, and an inspiration for revolution [*inqilâb*] and uprising [*baghâwat*]. This understanding carries with it implications for the *majlis* preacher, as he says, 'Karbala was an event that came about through revolutionary fervour. Its historical background is political, social, economic, literary and cultural as well as religious, and it is the responsibility of the *ẕâkir* to look at all of these aspects' (S16).

Mujahid Hussain is another preacher who speaks of the 'uprising' of Karbala and draws inspiration from Ḥusayn's action in standing for the truth against wrongdoing, although he is influenced by the Iranian revolution rather than by socialism, of which he is very critical. He quotes Ḥusayn's famous words, 'If there is anyone to help me, give me help! If there is anyone to answer my cry, then come to me!' and comments,

> This cry of Ḥusayn did not stop at Karbala. The evil that took place at Karbala was only an example of all the evil that continues to take place up to today. This is that the wrongdoers try to seize for themselves the wealth and honour and everything from those who are weak. And those who stand against wrongdoing try to safeguard the truth. In every age the safeguarding of truth is necessary. For this reason the love of the *Ahl-e Bayt* is also necessary in every age, as is obedience to them.
>
> (S91)

Despite occasional references to politics, very few preachers speak about Karbala in terms of an 'uprising', and although all *majlis* preachers would agree that Karbala was a battle against injustice, the proper response advocated by the vast majority of them is in line with the politically quietist stance. It is a response articulated in terms of mourning. As Zakia Sultana addresses her congregation, she says, 'O mourners! We are here to grieve and we have gathered to shed tears' (S20).

And, as Baquer Aga proclaims, 'The meaning of life is an open book of love. The perfection of the return to God is love, and the perfection of love is the shedding of tears for the Sufferings of Ḥusayn' (S12). In another sermon, Baquer Aga goes as far as to set ritual mourning [*mâtam*] for Ḥusayn over and against other, less 'quietist' responses to the Imâm's sufferings. Appealing to the authority of Ḥusayn's sister, Zaynab, he says, 'Zaynab told the people who had the emotion of wanting to take revenge for the killing of Ḥusayn, "Weep! Bring out the emotions of revenge in your tears!" If people think that we are weak because instead of taking revenge we weep, then no! Do *mâtam*! *Mâtam* was there and *mâtam* will go on!' (S57).

Preaching and Shîᶜî identity

Hyderabadi *majlis* preaching articulates a response to Karbala that is overwhelmingly apolitical and directed towards mourning. Yet mourning in itself is not the fundamental purpose of the *majlis* or its preaching but rather a means to a deeper end. David Pinault (1992: 116) writes that, according to the preachers he spoke to, the 'primary purpose' of the *majlis*' is to: '…render the events of Karbala imaginatively present to the congregation, and that the preacher's responsibility in his sermon is to evoke the sufferings of the Karbala martyrs so powerfully as to make the congregation weep. In this way both *zakir* and congregation acquire religious merit.'

To write about the 'primary purpose' of the *majlis*, however, is to beg the question as to whether there is a purpose to the *majlis* and its sermon behind that of making a congregation weep. Pinault mentions here the acquisition of religious merit or reward [*ṣawâb*]. There is no doubt that this is an important factor in the holding of *majâlis* and the preaching of *majlis* sermons. Nevertheless, simply to speak of the purpose of *majlis* preaching in terms of mourning in itself, or even in terms of the acquisition of religious merit, does not do justice to the evidence of the sermons themselves.

To speak about the purpose of *majlis* preaching only in terms of its encouragement of mourning is to ignore the important roles of the general discourse and the *faẓâ'il* in the sermons. The general discourse, as we have seen in Chapter 7, has an argumentative or teaching function, appeals primarily to the head rather than to the heart, and in itself is not designed to make the congregation weep. It is designed rather to inform and strengthen the faith of congregation members who are interacting on a daily basis with other people who do not share their beliefs. As Zakia Sultana states the intention of her general discourse: 'We are talking about these matters because our young people have a lot of interaction with their friends. These people need to know what are the basic differences between them and their friends' (S20). In contemporary Hyderabad, those 'friends' will include other young people from a wide variety of religious and secular backgrounds. The *faẓâ'il* also plays an important role in the overall purpose of the sermons, and not just as a prelude to the *maṣâ'ib*. The Virtues are expounded in order to inspire the community to love and follow their leaders as the *Shîᶜat-e ᶜAlî* [Party of ᶜAlî].

Ṭâhir Jarwali, went so far as to distinguish himself from a Sunnî (or Shîᶜî) *khaṭîb* preacher at the Friday congregational Prayers with the words, 'We (i.e. *majlis* preachers) are not *khaṭîbs*! What is our work? To expound the *faẓâ'il*, the knowledge, the prestige and worth of Ali!' (S153).

The sermons themselves also speak about the purpose of mourning in terms that go beyond the acquisition of religious merit. The community's task of publicly mourning for Karbala is seen as complementing the intellectual task of presenting a Shîᶜî apologetic. The truth of the Shîᶜî position is thus demonstrated in argument, and the importance of its claims is demonstrated by the fervour with which the Shîᶜa mourn. Akhtar Zaidi, for example, quotes Zaynab as teaching that mourning for her brother, Ḥusayn, and the *majlis* should be established in order that 'Islam will be kept alive…' (S15). This comment makes a link between mourning for Karbala and the preservation of 'Islam'. It is clear from the context that the preacher does not mean that mourning for Ḥusayn would have kept alive the outward form of Umayyad and ᶜAbbâsid Islam that continued anyway after Karbala. Instead, what is meant is the essential, Shîᶜî vision of Islam that Ḥusayn gave his life for and that would be preserved by mourning for him. From the sermons that I have listened to, it would be more accurate to say that the primary purpose of *majlis* preaching is to establish and reinforce the community's identity as guardians of and witnesses to this essential, Shîᶜî vision of Islam.

The purpose of *majlis* preaching is inextricably tied to the purpose of the Shîᶜî community itself, which is to bear witness to the Shîᶜî vision of Islam until the return of the *Mahdî*. Bearing witness in this sense includes practising the faith uprightly as handed down by Shîᶜî tradition, and defending the faith in conversation with others who hold a different view. More importantly, it also means demonstrating to the world, and especially to other Muslims, the crucial importance of the tragedy of Karbala through tears and the performance of *mâtam* [ritual mourning]. This ritual mourning, including the shedding of one's own blood by certain individuals and groups, becomes the defining mark of the community's identity. Shabbir Hassan makes it clear that the *majlis* plays a fundamental role as the primary institution in which this mourning is given expression and fostered:

> Look! My elders, my friends, my young people, my dear ones! Keep this *majlis* safe! Keep the *majlis* of Ḥusayn safe! This weeping is for Ḥusayn. Keep this mourning [*mâtam*] safe! This is your identity. This is your individuality. This is your characteristic. Knowledge is established from this mourning. This world is a big religious jungle; without this mourning you will not know where you are. Without this weeping, you will not be recognized. Weeping is your way of life. Weeping is the identification of the believers. Weeping is the sign of the culture of your soul. Keep it safe!
>
> (S120)

These words about the importance of *mâtam* resonate in the lives of many of Hyderabad's Shîᶜî community. Some from the community, especially young men, are members of voluntary mourning associations [*mâtamî gurûhs*]. David Pinault

quotes a member of one of these associations as saying, 'We do *matam* not just to commemorate Hazrat Imam Husain but as a way of saying we are Shiites . . .' (1992: 103). Pinault thus acknowledges that the performance of *mâtam* has to do with community identity, but he does not develop this question of identity in relation to the sermons. In their formal ritual performance of *mâtam*, mourning associations play a key role within the community in organizing and encouraging mourning activities. As they participate especially in the large processions that take place during the mourning season, they also become the public face of the community to the wider society. On more than one occasion, when a man from Hyderabad has told me that he is a Shîᶜa, he has taken off his shirt to show me the scars from years of *mâtam* performance. Similarly, when Sunnîs in Hyderabad's Old City learned that I was doing research into the Shîᶜî community, they would sometimes beat their breasts and cry '*Yâ Ḥusayn!* [O Ḥusayn!]' to confirm to me that they knew the community that I was talking about. Pinault points out that the performance of *mâtam* is a distinctively Shîᶜî practice, not shared by members of other religious communities even if they commemorate Muḥarram in other ways. It is also a practice which is directed against the mourner him or herself, rather than against another community.

Even if members of the community are not personally a member of a mourning association, they also participate in *mâtam*. In a narrow sense *mâtam* designates the formal ritual acts of breast-beating and self-flagellation that are generally directed by the associations. In a wider sense, however, it includes all displays of mourning. Old women and men may be seen after a *majlis* symbolically tapping their breasts with their hands in time to the *nawḥa* chanting. Some mourners weep, wear black clothing or go about barefoot. Syed Naqi Mehdi, in his sermon preached for Hindu and Sunnî 'outsiders' to the community, takes as his starting point the public display of mourning by the Shîᶜî community as a whole: 'You know that during these days many people in this area are going about mourning, wearing black clothes and walking barefoot. What is their purpose in doing this?' (S4.1).

He then goes on to narrate the tragedy of Karbala. His narration of the events and his explanation of their significance cannot be separated from the public witness of the community as a whole. Neither can the purpose of *majlis* preaching more generally be separated from the purpose of the community in which it is practised. The community sees itself as a witness to the original and pure vision of Islam that was brought by the Prophet Muḥammad. As the Shîᶜa understand it, the primary witness to that original vision was the Prophet's closest companion and designated successor, ᶜAlî. ᶜAlî's son, Ḥusayn, was himself a witness to that vision by giving his life in order to preserve the vision from corruption. As mourners for Ḥusayn's martyrdom, the Shîᶜî community sees itself as standing in that tradition of witnesses. *Majlis* preaching educates the community about Karbala and its implications, and stimulates the community to mourn for its martyrs. In its education and in its encouragement of mourning, the sermons thus serve the community's larger purpose.

While this fundamental purpose remains the same, the form and even content of the *majlis* sermon will have to adapt to the rapidly changing context of

contemporary Hyderabad. We have noted that Urdu is a language in decline in Hyderabad, and that *majlis* preachers are beginning to preach, albeit only very occasionally, in English. This trend is almost certain to accelerate, especially given the rapid growth of expatriate Hyderabadi communities in English-speaking countries where generations are growing up with a diminishing command of Urdu. The issue of the development of the *majlis* sermon is also related to other pressures on community traditions. The shedding of one's own blood in the practice of *mâtam*, for example, has been criticized by religious authorities in Iran who advocate that mourners give to a blood-bank instead (Ende, 1978: 19–36). Such criticism was highly controversial in Hyderabad, and the *majlis* pulpit became the primary platform from which the public debate about this issue was carried on. The number of people participating in 'blood *mâtam*' seems to have grown in recent years rather than diminished. This increase is partly the result of the proliferation of outsiders with video cameras and the ready availability of first-aid. However, the risks associated with HIV and other infections may also come to be seen as important in the ongoing debate about this issue, and the issue will no doubt continue to be discussed from the *majlis* pulpit.

In looking to the future, it is important to remember that the *majlis* sermon in Hyderabad as it is now preached, is a comparatively recent phenomenon, and that it has developed in very significant ways since the late nineteenth century. *Majlis* recitation has already adapted to the change from Persian to Urdu, and from the highly stylized Urdu of the nobility to the language of the people. As it adapts to further changes in language, and as it continues to serve as a platform for wider debate within the Shîᶜî community, it is certain to undergo further changes itself. As India continues to open up more to the West, young people are becoming increasingly secularized. The secularizing process raises issues for young people, and they need intellectual and ritual resources with which to deal with these issues. The massive increase in the amount of television that is watched, especially by young people, and easy access to the Internet is likely also to have an impact on the expectations of *majlis* congregations. The attention-span of a teenager today is shorter than it was 20 years ago. It is now possible to watch and listen to *majlis* sermons on the Web at the click of a mouse button.[8] Such developments in the media may come to affect attendance at traditional gatherings. These kinds of predictions may seem far-fetched when one is sitting in a traditional *majlis* surrounded by literally thousands of mourners, old and young alike, but there is no reason to assume that the Shîᶜî community is immune from influences that have deeply affected traditional preaching in other communities. How the *majlis* pulpit responds to these and other challenges will depend primarily on the willingness of young people to question traditional ways, and the willingness of the community to listen to them.

Majlis sermons play an integral role in the wider context of ritual remembrances that make up the Shîᶜî 'liturgical year'. The cycle of anniversaries, and the events which are held to mark them provide a parallel world of meaning and coherence to the Shîᶜî community living as a minority within a minority in the complex and rapidly changing world which is India today. The *Ghadeer Shiya*

Calendar hanging on the wall of many Shîᶜî homes in Hyderabad, expresses these parallel worlds in the dates and events which are listed next to each other. Alongside the Gregorian calendar with its Western-imported names of days and weekends ordering work, study and leisure; alongside the Hindu calendar of festivals expressing the radically different world-view of the majority of the population; alongside festivals such as Republic Day which attempt to bind more than a billion diverse people into a single Indian nation; alongside the Muslim year, commemorating for example, the death of a local saint as well as the larger *ᶜîd* festivals, are listed the anniversaries of the Shîᶜî liturgical year. Sometimes the Shîᶜî anniversaries overlap with other events, but more often they are distinct. By far the most common event used to mark the Shîᶜî anniversaries is the *majlis* and its sermon.

A young Shîᶜî clerk returns home from a day at Hyderabad's Municipal Corporation offices. He pauses by a shop selling televisions outside of which a crowd has gathered to watch a cricket match broadcast live from Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. Bright splashes on the pavement from the previous day remind him of the Hindu festival of *hôlî* celebrated by 'playing' with coloured paints. But as he walks past the Ibadatkhana Hussaini in Darushifa, he hears over the loudspeakers that a *majlis* has begun and slips off his sandals to take his place on the floor before the *minbar*. He nods in affirmation as the *ẕâkir* teaches about the imâmat, and in response to a narrative relating a miracle of ᶜAlî he cries blessings on the Prophet and his family. This young clerk, having attended government schools, may not have learned to read and write his mother tongue, Urdu; he may be an avid cricket fan and he may even have 'played *hôlî*' with his Hindu colleagues the day before. But he is a Shîᶜa, and as the *ẕâkir* begins to recite the Sufferings, his heart weeps out of love for the Imâm.

Appendix I

List of sermons and preachers

This list details the sermons either presented or referred to in the text. The sermon number is followed by the name of the preacher (including where the preacher is normally resident, if outside of Hyderabad), and the date and location of the *majlis* at which the sermon was preached.

Sermons included as full texts

S1 Dr Sadiq Naqvi (text with description of the complete *majlis*); 8.1.1420/25.4.1999; residence of Dr Asad Ali Khan, Noor Khan Bazar.

S2 Prof. Mirza Muhammad Ashfaq (Lucknow); 6.1.1420/23.4.1999; residence of Ali Aqa Sahib, Husaini Koti.

S3 Ziya Abbas Naqvi Sahib; 8.1.1420/25.4.1999; residence of Abu Talib Sahib, Darushifa.

S4 Syed Naqi Mehdi Sahib; 9.1.1420/26.4.1999; residence of Dr Sudharshan Das, Dabeerpura.

S5 Syed Husn al-Hasan Nayar Rizwi Qararwi (Allahabad); 12.1.1419/9.5.1998; Baitul Qayyam, Mir Alam Mandi.

S6 Anees Fatima Begum; 11.2.1420/27.5.1999; Yadgar-e-Hussaini, Darushifa.

S7 Asgari Hussain Begum; 15.2.1420/31.5.1999; residence of Dr Asad Ali Khan, Noor Khan Bazar.

S8 Nafees Unisa Begum; 28.2.1420/13.6.1999; Ashurkhana Ata-e-Zehra, Noor Khan Bazaar.

S9 Mawlana Reza Aga; 21.9.1419/9.1.1999; the preacher's residence, Noor Khan Bazar.

S10 Mawlana Zaki Baqri; 16.1.1418/23.5.1997; Enayat Jung Palace, Mir Alam Mandi.

Other sermons referred to

S11 Dr Shaukat Ali Mirza; 4.1.1420/21.4.1999; residence of Sarfaraz Ali Engineer Sahib, Darushifa.

S12 Baquer Aga Sahib; 10.1.1418/17.5.1997; Alawe Sartoq, Darushifa.

S13 Dr M.M. Taqui Khan; 2.2.1420/18.5.1999; Enayat Jung Palace, Mir Alam Mandi.

S14 Mawlana Mujahid Hussain; 10.2.1420/26.5.1999; Ibadatkhana Hussaini, Darushifa.

S15 Akhtar Zaidi Sahib; 20.2.1418/27.6.1997; Ibadatkhana Hussaini, Darushifa.

S16 Mehdi Abedi Sahib; 5.3.1418/10.7.1997; Mehdi Iqbal Ashurkhana, Irani Gully.

S17 Mawlana Talib Jawhari (Pakistan); 14.5.1418/16.9.1997; Azakhana Zehra, Darushifa.

S18 Abu Talib Sahib; 23.7.1420/2.11.1999; Ibadatkhana Hussaini, Darushifa.

S19 Mir Hussain Ali Razvi Sahib; 25.7.1420/4.11.1999; Ibadatkhana Hussaini, Darushifa.

S20 Dr Zakia Sultana; 8.10.1420/15.1.2000; the preacher's residence, Darushifa.

S21–8 Dr Sadiq Naqvi; sermons 1–7 and 9 in series 1–9.1.1420/18–26.4.1999; residence of Dr Asad Ali Khan.

S29 —— 3.1.1420/20.4.1999; Barga-e-Shabbir, Mir Alam Mandi.

S30 —— 8.1.1420/25.4.1999; preacher's residence, Darushifa.

S31–8 Dr Shaukat Ali Mirza; sermons 1–3 and 5–9 in series 1–9.1.1420/18–26.4.1999; residence of Sarfaraz Ali Engineer Sahib, Darushifa.

S39–47 Prof. Mirza Muhammad Ashfaq (Lucknow); series 1–9.1.1420/18–26.4.1999; Enayat Jung Palace.

S48–56 Baquer Aga Sahib; series 1–9.1.1420/18–26.4.1999; the preacher's residence, Noor Khan Bazaar.

S57 —— 7.2.1415/16.7.1994; Ibadatkhana Hussaini, Darushifa.

S58 —— 6.1.1420/23.4.1999; residence of Dr M.M. Taqui Khan, Yaqutpura.

S59–68 Syed Husn al-Hasan Nayar Rizwi Qararwi (Allahabad); sermons 1–10 in series 1–9 and 11.1.1419/28.4–6.5 and 8.5.1998; Baitul Qayyam, Mir Alam Mandi.

S69–74 Mawlana Zaki Baqri; sermons 1–4 and 6–7 in series 12–18.1.1418/20–26.5.1997; Enayat Jung Palace, Mir Alam Mandi.

S75–81 —— series 12–18.1.1419/9–15.5.1998; Enayat Jung Palace, Mir Alam Mandi.

S82–8 Dr M.M. Taqui Khan; sermons 2–8 in series 2–8.2.1420/18–24.5.1999; Baitul Qayyam, Mir Alam Mandi.

S89–91 Mawlana Mujahid Husayn; sermons 1, 3, 4 in series 9–12.2.1420/25–28.5.1999; Ibadatkhana Hussaini, Darushifa.

S92 Nafees Unisa Begum; 15.1.1420/2.5.1999; residence of Dr Asad Ali Khan.

S93–101 Akhtar Zaidi Sahib; series 1–9.1.1420/18–26.4.1999; Enayat Jung Palace, Mir Alam Mandi.

S102 —— 10.1.1419/7.5.1998; Balsetty Kheit.

S103 Mehdi Abedi Sahib; 21.9.1417/31.1.1997; Mehdi Iqbal Ashurkhana.
S104 —— 5.3.1420/19.6.1999; Mehdi Iqbal Ashurkhana.
S105–6 Mawlana Talib Jawhari; sermons 1–2 in series 13–15.5.1418/ 15–17.9.1997; Azakhana Zehra, Darushifa.
S107–8 Mawlana Reza Aga; sermons 1–2 in series 19–21.9.1419/ 7–9.1.1999; preacher's residence, Noor Khan Bazaar.
S109 —— 8.8.1419/28.11.1998; Zaidi Mazil, Darushifa.
S110–16 Abdul Hakim Sahib; series 11–17.5.1419/2–8.9.1998; Azakhana Zehra, Darushifa.
S117 Hadi Ali Mirza Sahib; 8.1.1420/25.4.1999; Banjara Hills.
S118 Mawlana Nabi Hassan; 25.7.1420/4.11.1999; Ibadatkhana Hussaini, Darushifa.
S119 —— 27.8.1420/6.12.1999; Ibadatkhana Hussaini, Darushifa.
S120 Ayatullah Shabbir Hassan Najafi (Najaf, Iraq); 12.5.1417/25.9.1996; Azakhana Zehra.
S121 Mawlana Sayed Muhammad Naqvi (Tanzania); 21.2.1420/6.6.1999; Ibadatkhana Hussaini.
S122–30 Mawlana Sayyid Uruj al-Hassan Meesam (Allahabad, North India); series 1–9.1.1420/18–26.4.1999; Hussaini Koti.
S131–9 Mawlana Ali Mutaqqi Zaidi; series 1–9.1.1420/18–26.4.1999; Baitul Qayyam, Mir Alam Mandi.
S140–8 Mawlana Alamdar Hussain Mehdawi; series 1–9.1.1420/ 18–26.4.1999; Darushifa.
S149 Aijaz Faruq Sahib; 10.1.1420/27.4.1999; televised *majlis* broadcast on Doordarshan.
S150 Reza Mehdi Sahib; 8.1.1420/25.4.1999; residence of Lt. Gen. Akhtar Hussain Zaidi, Banjara Hills.
S151 Hasan Abedi Sahib; 23.2.1420/8.6.1999; Barga-e-Shabbir, Mir Alam Mandi.
S152 Mawlânâ Sayyid ᶜAlî; written summary of a series 29.12.1370–4.1.1371/1–5.10.1951; no place mentioned; see Bibliography (Urdu sources).
S153–4 ᶜAllâma Rashîd Ṭurâbî; sermons 1–2 in a series entitled *Duᶜâ awr Iṭṭmînân-e Naᶜimât* [Supplication and the Satisfaction of Grace]; no place or date mentioned.
S155 —— sermon entitled *Rizq* [Daily Sustenance]; no place or date mentioned.
S156 Ṭaḥir Jarwalî Ṣâḥib, 1.1407/1986; Kamal Yar Jung Palace, Mir Alam Mandi.
S157 Mawlana Hamid ud-Din Aquil Husami; 6.1.1420/23.4.1999; Jame Masjid, Darushifa.
S158 Mawlana S.M. Ibrahim Quadri Zarrinkullah; 6.1.1420/23.4.1999; Jame Masjid, Noor Khan Bazaar.

Appendix II

Interviews

AF	Anees Fatima Begum, at her residence in Darushifa, Hyderabad, with her husband, 13.2.2000.
AJB	Azam Jahan Begum (b. 1920s), daughter of the late Sayyid Wâjid Ḥusayn and wife of Mirza Saeed Iftikhar Husain, at her residence in Lucknow, 16.9.1999.
AT	Abu Talib Sahib, at his residence in Darushifa, Hyderabad, 14.3.1900.
AZ	Akhtar Zaidi Sahib, at his residence in Noor Khan Bazaar, Hyderabad, 27.1.2000.
DS	Mr D. Shah, at the Birla Auditorium, Hyderabad, 23.1.1999.
GAA	Syed Ghulam Askari Abedi Sahib, at the Madrassa Murtuza, Noor Khan Bazaar, Hyderabad, 29.2.2000.
HAR	Mir Hussain Ali Razvi Sahib, at his residence in Darushifa, Hyderabad, 17.3.2000.
HKN	Habib Kazim Naqwi Sahib, at his residence in Lucknow, 13.9.1999.
MA	Dr Mirza Muhammad Ashfaq, Prof. of Persian at the Shîᶜa College, Lucknow, at his residence in Lucknow, 14.9.1999.
MH	Mawlana Mujahid Hussain, at his residence in Noor Khan Bazaar, Hyderabad, 2.3.2000.
MJR	Mawlana Muhammad Jafar Rizvi, Principal of the Sultan al-Madaris seminary, Lucknow, at Sultan al-Madaris, 15.9.1999.
MMA	Muhammad Mehdi Abedi Sahib, at his residence in Himayatnagar, Hyderabad, 30.6.1999, and at the residence of Abbas Mehdi Sahib, A.C. Guards, Hyderabad, 15.3.2000.
NM	Prof. Nayyar Masaud, Prof. of Persian at Lucknow University, at his residence in Lucknow, 14.9.1999.
RA	Mawlana Reza Aga, at his residence in Noor Khan Bazaar, Hyderabad, 17.2.2000.
RH	Mawlana Riazuddin Hydar, at the Barga-e-Akhbariya, Purani Haveli, Hyderabad, 29.1.2000.
SAM	Shaukat Ali Mirza Sahib, at APTECH, Darushifa, Hyderabad, 8.1.2000.
SH	Syed Husayn Sahib, at his residence in Lucknow, 13.9.1999.
SMA	Syed Mohsin Aga Sahib, at his residence in Noor Khan Bazaar, Hyderabad, 17.3.2000.

SMN Mawlana Sibt-e-Muhammad Naqavi (b. 1925), librarian of Umdat al-Ulama library, in the compound of Barga-e-Ghufran Maab, Lucknow, and editor of *Hamârê Tawhîd* (Hindi fortnightly) and *Tawhîd Mail* (Urdu weekly), at Barga-e-Ghufran Maab, Lucknow, 15.9.1999.

SN Dr Sadiq Naqvi, a number of interviews and conversations held at his residence in Darushifa, Hyderabad between 1997 and 2000.

SNM Syed Naqi Mehdi Sahib, at his residence in Banjara Hills, Hyderabad, 27.2.2000.

TK Prof. M.M. Taqui Khan, at his residence in Yaqutpura, Hyderabad, 15.3.2000.

ZAN Syed Zia Abbas Naqvi Sahib, at his residence in Balsetty Kheit, Hyderabad, 29.2.2000.

ZH Mawlana Ziaul Hasan, a series of interviews conducted at his residence in Mata ki Kirkhi, Hyderabad, February–March 2000.

ZS Dr Zakia Sultana, at her residence in Purani Haveli, Hyderabad, 31.1.2000.

Glossary

ᶜabâ The loose fitting sleeveless cloak worn by an ᶜ*âlim*.

ᶜAbbâs ibn-e ᶜAlî ibn-e Abî Ṭâlib The standard bearer of Ḥusayn. He was, technically speaking, the half-brother of Ḥusayn as they were sons of ᶜAlî by different wives (his mother was Umm-e Banîn*), although ᶜAbbâs is never referred to as such because of a Tradition in which Ḥusayn called him 'my brother'. After Ḥusayn's camp at Karbala was cut off from the nearby river Euphrates by the enemy soldiers, ᶜAbbâs promised to fetch water for the children, especially Sakîna* whose name is often linked with his. In the attempt his arms were cut off, the water-skins were pierced with arrows and finally he was martyred. He is often likened to a lion, as this is the meaning of his name, or referred to as the 'Moon of the Banî Hâshim' (his tribal house).

ᶜAbbâsids The second major dynasty in Islam which flourished between 132/750–656/1258. The ᶜAbbâsids initially sought to legitimize their rule in terms of their loyalty to the family of the Prophet, but then turned against the Shîᶜa who had supported them.

Abû Bakr (*c*.573–13/634) The first caliph and the father of ᶜÂ'isha, third wife of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Abû Sufyân A prominent enemy of the Prophet Muḥammad before he embraced Islam at the conquest of Mecca in 8/630, the father of Muᶜâwiya* and the grandfather of Yazîd*.

Abû Ṭâlib The Prophet's uncle and ᶜAlî's father who took the young Muḥammad into his home after his mother died.

Abû Ẕarr al-Ghiffarî A companion of the Prophet Muḥammad and a leading supporter of ᶜAlî. Critical of the lavish lifestyle of the third caliph, ᶜUs̱mân*, he was exiled and subsequently died in 32/651.

Ahl-e Bayt Lit. 'the People of the House (of the Prophet Muḥammad)' that is the Prophet himself, his daughter Fâṭima, his son-in-law ᶜAlî, their two sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and the other nine Imâms after them. This term is sometimes used more loosely to include other family members, especially those killed at Karbala.

Akhbârî A school of thought within the Twelver Shîᶜa, particularly active in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and opposed to the *Uṣûlî* Shîᶜa.

The controversy between these two schools of thought centred on the use of reason in jurisprudence. There is also a sub-sect within the contemporary Hyderabadi Shîᶜî community which defines itself according to the same controversy.

ᶜalam A representation of one of the battle standards used at Karbala.

ᶜAlî Akbar The second son of Ḥusayn killed at Karbala. He is popularly remembered for his extraordinary likeness to the Prophet Muḥammad. Some sources say that he is the first son of Ḥusayn, and that ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn* was his younger brother.

ᶜAlî Aṣghar The infant son of Ḥusayn, killed by an arrow in his father's arms at Karbala.

ᶜAlî Reẕâ The eighth Shîᶜî Imâm (148/765–203/818). He was nominated by the ᶜAbbâsid caliph al-Maᶜmûn as his successor and is popularly known as *Gharîb al-Ghurabâ'* [Exile of the Exiles] because he died and was buried so far away from the Arabic heartlands and the rest of his family.

ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn The eldest son of Ḥusayn who survived Karbala to become the fourth Shîᶜî Imâm. He survived because he had been too sick to fight and because his aunt Zaynab*, Ḥusayn's sister, had protected him from the enemy soldiers. He is remembered especially for his piety and his supplications, the latter collected under the title of *al-Ṣaḥîfat al-Kâmilat al-Sajjâdiyya* [The Perfect (or Complete) book of *al-Sajjâd*]. The title, *al-Sajjâd*, means 'the one who constantly prostrates himself in Prayer,' and is often used of the Imâm in *majlis** sermons, as is *Sayyid-e Sajjâd* [Master of Prostrations]. Some sources say that he was younger to ᶜAlî Akbar*.

ᶜâlim (**pl.** ***ᶜulamâ'***) A formally trained Muslim religious scholar known as *mawlânâ*.

ᶜammâma The turban worn by an *ᶜâlim*.

arbaᶜîn The commemoration of the fortieth day after ᶜÂshûrâ'.

ᶜashra-e Muḥarram The first ten days of the Muḥarram mourning period leading up to the day of ᶜÂshûrâ'*; and a series of *majâlis** held on each of the first nine days. An *ᶜashra* is also the term for a series of ten *majâlis* held later during the mourning period.

ᶜÂshûrâ' The tenth day of the Islamic month of Muḥarram. ᶜÂshûrâ' was commemorated from the time of the Prophet as a day of fasting linked to the Jewish Day of Atonement. It is still a voluntary fast-day among Sunnîs. The day has particular significance for the Shîᶜa as it was on ᶜÂshûrâ' that Ḥusayn was killed at Karbala.

ᶜashûrkhâna Lit. 'house of ᶜÂshûrâ'*, the South Indian term for a building, hall, room or even corner constructed or set apart for the commemoration of Muḥarram and especially the holding of *majâlis**.

'Ask me' Tradition A remark made in more than one sermon by ᶜAlî in which he challenges his congregation: 'Ask me before you miss me because, by Allah who has my life in my hands, if you ask me anything between now and the Day of Judgement or about the group who would guide a hundred people and also misguide a hundred people I would tell you . . .' (Razi, 1981: 181, 311–12).

The words that begin this Tradition in Arabic, *Salûnî! Salûnî!* [Ask me! Ask me!] are well known and are often used to refer to it in sermons without any further explanation.

ᶜAwn and Muḥammad ibn-e ᶜAbdallâh ibn-e Jaᶜfar ibn-e Abî Ṭâlib Two brothers, almost always remembered together, who were young nephews of Ḥusayn killed at Karbala. Their mother was Zaynab*, Ḥusayn's sister.

âyat Lit. 'sign', a 'verse' from the Qur'ân.

Âyat-e Taṭhîr *Âyat* of Purity; see Tradition of the 'Cloak*' below.

ᶜazâdârî Lit. 'mourning', in the context of this study, a general term for Shîᶜî mourning rituals for Ḥusayn and the other martyrs of Karbala.

aẕân The call to Prayer in which there are differences between the Sunnî and the Shîᶜî versions.

Badr, the Battle of (2/624) The first major fight between the Muslims, led by the Prophet Muḥammad, and their Meccan opponents. It was a dramatic victory for the Muslims who fought with fewer numbers. Prominent among the Meccans was Abû Sufyân* who lost his eldest son, Hanẓala, in the fight. For an account of ᶜAlî's participation in the Battle of Badr, see al-Mufîd (1981: 44–51).

bayân Discourse, used of all or the first part of a *majlis** sermon.

bayᶜat Oath of allegiance. In the context of this study this term almost always refers to the demand for allegiance by Yazîd* or one of the other caliphs from Ḥusayn or another of the Imâms.

caliph A leader of the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad.

'Cloak', Tradition of [*Ḥadîṯ-e Kisâ'*] The most frequently cited Tradition in *majlis** preaching which reports the 'occasion of revelation' of the also much-quoted '*Âyat* of Purity' [*Âyat-e Taṭhîr*] (Sûra-e Aḥzâb 33.33). One account of this Tradition is as follows: 'It is reported that the Prophet's wife, Umm Salama, said, "The Holy Prophet was in my house when Faṭima brought a cup of *harrira* (a sweet liquid) to him. At that time he was sitting on the porch where he used to sleep. He had a *khaybari* (*sic*) mantle under his feet. I was offering prayers in my apartment." The Prophet asked Fatima to call her husband and sons. Soon Ali, Hasan and Ḥusain came in and all shared the *harrira*. Gabriel appeared and revealed this holy verse to the Prophet: "Allah only desires to keep away the uncleanness from you, Oh People of the House! And to purify you with a (thorough) purifying." Umm Salma says that she moved forward and desired to enter the mantle saying: "O Prophet of Allah, may I also join the group?" The Holy Prophet replied: "No, remain in your own place, you are in virtue" ' (cited in Shirazi, 1996: 292–3).

'Clothes' from Paradise A Tradition in which it is reported that when Ḥasan and Ḥusayn were children their mother, Fâṭima, could not afford to buy them the traditional new clothes for the festival of *ᶜÎd* but promised the boys that they would get new clothes anyway. After she had prayed, an angel brought them clothes from heaven.

dâᶜî Lit. 'caller', in the Hyderabadi Shîᶜî context, the host of a *majlis**.

dawra A 'round' of *majâlis** held on one day in a particular locality in which a group of mourners walks from house to house conducting a *majlis** in each Shîᶜî home.

fâtiḥa Lit. 'opener', a word used to refer to the opening chapter of the Qur'ân, the Sûra-e Fâtiḥa and, more widely, a recitation of this and certain other texts, sometimes on behalf of the dead.

fatwa A formal, legal judgement given, in the case of the Shîᶜa, by a qualified religious scholar known as a *mujtahid*.

Fâṭima The Prophet's daughter by Khadîja*, and the wife of ᶜAlî. She is often given the title *Bîbî* [lady] and referred to as '*Zehra*' [the Radiant One].

Fâṭima Sughra The daughter of Ḥusayn by Umm-e Isḥâq who, according to some Traditions, was too sick to accompany her father to Karbala.

faẕâ'il Lit. 'excellencies' or 'merits' and translated in this study with the capitalized word 'Virtues' to show that it refers to the Virtues of ᶜAlî or another member of the *Ahl-e Bayt*. In the context of a *majlis** sermon, the part of the sermon which expounds these Virtues.

Ghadir-e Khumm The name of an oasis at which the Prophet is reported to have stopped on the way back from his final Pilgrimage to Mecca. He is further reported to have raised ᶜAlî's hands, declaring, 'To whomsoever I am the master [*mawlâ*], this ᶜAlî is his master.' The Shîᶜa interpret these words to mean that Muḥammad at that time formally nominated ᶜAlî as his successor. The commemoration of this event takes place traditionally on eighteenth Ẕi'l Ḥijja, the month of Pilgrimage.

ḥadîṯ A formally preserved record of the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muḥammad and (according to Shîᶜa) the Imâms.

Ḥasan (3/624 or 5–*c*.49/669) The eldest son of ᶜAlî by Fâṭima and elder brother of Ḥusayn. He is regarded by the Shîᶜa as the second Imâm, after ᶜAlî. After being forced to abdicate the caliphate in favour of Muᶜâwiya*, Shîᶜî Traditions assert that Ḥasan was poisoned on Muᶜâwiya's orders.

ḥaẕrat A term of respect used of important religious figures.

ḥijâb A veil with full length gown worn by some Muslim women. The word also refers to a woman's modesty.

Hijrat The migration of the Prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to Madina in 622 CE which became the first year of the Islamic era. Muḥammad's life was in danger from his Meccan enemies so he escaped by night with Abû Bakr*. ᶜAlî was asked by the Prophet to sleep in his bed that night in order to fool the Meccans into thinking that Muḥammad was still in the city. For accounts of this occasion see Ibn Isḥâq (1955: 118–22) and al-Mufîd (1981: 31–2).

Ḥurr ibn-e Yazîd Tamîmî Leader of the Kufan (Ummayad*) cavalry who changed sides on the eve of the Battle of Karbala to become a martyr fighting for Ḥusayn.

Ibn-e Ziyâd, ᶜUbayd Allâh The governor of Kufa under the caliph Yazîd* at the time of the Battle of Karbala.

Imâm Used (capitalized) in this study to refer to one of those considered by the Shîᶜa to be divinely appointed leaders of the Muslim community.

Ismâᶜîlîs A branch of Shîᶜî Islam that takes its name from Ismâᶜîl, the eldest son of the sixth Imâm, Jaᶜfar Ṣâdiq*, also called Seveners because they acknowledge seven principal Imâms after the Prophet Muḥammad.

Jaᶜfar Ṣâdiq (*c*.80/669–148/765) The sixth Shîᶜî Imâm*. He is recognized for his great learning as well as piety and did much to establish Shîᶜî law and religious practice.

jeshn A celebration, normally of the birthday of one of the *Ahl-e Bayt**.

Kaᶜba The cube-shaped shrine in Mecca towards which Muslims must face when they perform the Prayers. It is popularly known as 'God's House'. References to the Kaᶜba in *majlis** sermons focus on ᶜAlî's relationship with the shrine. Shîᶜî Tradition asserts that ᶜAlî was born in the Kaᶜba itself (see al-Mufîd, 1981: 1), that before his birth, the wall of the building opened in a crack to let his mother in, and that three days later, after his birth, it opened again to let him out. After the conquest of Mecca in 8/630 when the Kaᶜba was 'cleansed' from the idols that had been set up inside it, the Prophet is reported to have asked ᶜAlî to climb on his shoulders in order to pull down some idols that were out of his reach.

Khadîja bint-e Khuwaylid (*c*.554–619 CE) The wealthy widow who became the first wife of the Prophet Muḥammad and mother of their daughter Fâṭima.

Khaybar, the Battle of (7/628) The battle that took place between the Muslim community and the Jewish inhabitants of a wealthy oasis town whom the Prophet Muḥammad suspected of being against him. It is reported that the Muslim army could not capture the fort of Khaybar until the Prophet made ᶜAlî the standard bearer (see Ibn Isḥâq, 1955: 154; Shirazi, 1996: 141).

khaṭîb An Islamic preacher.

khuṭba In general Islamic terms, a sermon. In the context of *majlis** preaching the term refers to the opening part of the sermon which is a short piece of rhyming prose recited in Arabic (also known as the *salâm**).

kitâb khwânî Recitation from a book. In the context of this study, the recitation of a prose narrative of the Battle of Karbala.

Layla Daughter of Abû Murra ibn-e ᶜUrwa ibn-e Masᶜûd al-Thaqafî, wife of Ḥusayn and mother of ᶜAlî Akbar*.

Mahdî The twelfth Shîᶜî Imâm*, believed to have been born in 255/869 as the last Imâm and thus 'Imâm of the (present) Age' [*Imâm-e Zamân*]. From 260/901 he is believed to have disappeared into 'lesser occultation' meaning that he appeared to 'mediators' [*sufarâ'*] who passed messages to and fro between him and his followers. From the year 329/941 he is believed to have passed into the 'greater occultation', remaining on the earth but hidden from sight, until he reappears as a prelude to the Day of Judgement.

***majlis* (pl. *majâlis*)** Lit. a 'sitting', a term used in the context of this study for a gathering for the purpose of mourning the martyrs of Karbala and other

important Shîᶜî personalities, also known as *majlis-e taᶜziya* [mourning gathering].

marṯiya An elegy used in mourning for the martyrs of Karbala; the reciter of such an elegy is known as a *marṯiya khwân*.

maṣâ'ib The Sufferings, especially of Ḥusayn and the *Ahl-e Bayt**. The term is also used for the last part of a *majlis** sermon in which the Sufferings are narrated to the accompaniment of mourning.

'Masters of the Youths of Paradise' A term that refers to Ḥasan and Ḥusayn on the authority of a Tradition in which it is reported that the Prophet said, 'Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are the masters of the youths of paradise'.

maᶜṣûm Sinless, a technical term used of the Imâms* and prophets who were preserved from sin and error.

mâtam Ritualized mourning involving breast-beating and sometimes self-flagellation.

mâtamî gurûh A voluntary association that organizes and leads the performance of *mâtam**.

mawlânâ Title of respect given to an *ᶜâlim**.

mehr That which is given (usually money) by the bridegroom to the bride as a necessary part of the marriage contract under Islamic law.

minbar An Islamic pulpit.

Miqdâd ibn-e Aswad A companion of the Prophet Muḥammad and a leading supporter of ᶜAlî.

Miᶜrâj The Ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad through the seven heavens to God's presence, after the *Isrâ'* [Night Journey] from Mecca to Jerusalem.

Muᶜâwiya ibn-e Abî Sufyân (d. 60/680) A relative of the third caliph, ᶜUṯmân*, who appointed him governor of Syria. He fought against ᶜAlî, and after ᶜAlî's death forced ᶜAlî's son Ḥasan* to abdicate so that he, Muᶜâwiya, could become caliph. He was the founder of the Umayyad* dynasty.

Mubâhala The confrontation of the Prophet Muḥammad and his family with the Christians of Najran in AH 10. After some discussion, the Prophet challenged the Christians to a *mubâhala* [the mutual invocation of a curse] in which both sides would bring their families and invoke a curse on the side of those who were wrong. The Christians declined to take part, and instead agreed to pay tribute in exchange for protection. This incident is especially remembered by the Shîᶜa as they hold that the Prophet only brought his immediate family, that is Fâṭima, ᶜAlî, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and that it was the sight, especially of the two boys, that convinced the Christians not to take part. The incident is referred to in the Qur'ân, Sûra-e Âl ᶜImrân 3.61.

Mûsâ Kâẓim (*c.*128/745–183/799) The seventh Twelver Shîᶜî Imâm*.

Naḥj al-Balâgha Lit. 'Peak of Eloquence', the collection of sermons, letters and sayings of ᶜAlî compiled by Sharîf al-Raḍî in the fourth/tenth century.

namâz The prescribed ritual daily Prayers known in Arabic as *ṣalât*.

nawḥa An elegy commemorating one of the martyrs of Karbala, frequently chanted at a *majlis** to the accompaniment of *mâtam**.

'Noah's Ark', the Tradition of The Prophet is reported to have said, 'My family among you are like Noah's Ark. He who sails on it will be safe, but who holds back from it will perish' (Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Ṣasâ'iq*: 150, 184, cited in Momen, 1985: 17).

payjâma Loose, white cotton trousers worn with a *sherwânî**.

'Pen and Paper', the Tradition of It is reported that the Prophet, on his death bed, ordered that a pen and paper be brought to him. The Shîᶜa maintain that the Prophet was wanting to write down the name of ᶜAlî as his successor, but ᶜUmar* is reported to have said, 'The illness has overwhelmed the Prophet. We have the Book of God and that is enough for us' (cited in Momen, 1985: 16).

Qâsim ibn-e Ḥasan ibn-e Abî Ṭâlib Ḥusayn's nephew killed at Karbala. He is widely believed among the Shîᶜa to have been married to Ḥusayn's daughter, Fâṭima Kubra*, at Karbala just before his own martyrdom.

rawẕa khwânî Recitation of Kâshifî's *Rawẕat al-Shuhadâ'* [The Garden of the Martyrs].

'Ring', the Tradition of It is reported that on one occasion when ᶜAlî was performing the ritual Prayers in the mosque, a beggar began to ask for alms. ᶜAlî pointed to his finger, and the beggar removed his ring. Some Traditions report that when the Prophet saw this or heard of it, a passage of the Qur'ân was sent down upon him: either a passage from Sûra-e Ṭâhâ (20.25–36) followed by Sûra-e Aᶜrâf (7.142), showing that ᶜAlî was to the Prophet Muḥammad as Aaron was to Moses, or Sûra-e Mâ'ida (5.55) 'Verily your guardian [*walî*] is God and His Apostle and those who believe, those who establish prayer and pay the poor-rate, while they be bowing down (in prayer)' (al-Bukhârî, *Ṣaḥîḥ* 62.9, 64.78, referred to in Shirazi, 1996: 84)

Sakîna (Arabic: 'Sukayna') The young daughter of Ḥusayn who survived the Battle of Karbala only to die in prison in Damascus from grief at her father's death. Her mother was Umm-e Rabâb*.

salâm Salutation or benedictions, used especially in the context of a *majlis** to refer to the opening part of the sermon known also as the *khuṭba**.

sâlâna majlis A *majlis** held annually, hosted by the same *dâᶜî**, at the same place and on the same date and often addressed by the same *ẕâkir**.

***ṣalawât* (sing. *ṣalât*)** Lit. 'benedictions', in the context of a *majlis**, a call for the congregation to join in reciting blessings on the Prophet and his family. The term is also the Arabic for the obligatory ritual Prayers known in Urdu and Persian as *namâz*.

Salmân Fârisî An early Persian convert to Islam and companion of the Prophet. He is remembered by the Shîᶜa as ᶜAlî's leading supporter.

sayyid A descendant of the Prophet Muḥammad.

sherwânî The knee-length, buttoned-up coat which has become the uniform of a *ẕâkir** who is not an *ᶜâlim**, although it is also worn more widely.

Shimr (Arabic: Shamir) ibn-e Dhî al-Jawshan A fierce opponent of Ḥusayn who commanded the foot soldiers of the Umayyad* army at Karbala and who is reported to have cut off Ḥusayn's head.

Siffin, the Battle of (37/657) The battle fought between ᶜAlî (when he was caliph) and Muᶜâwiya* which ended in arbitration after which ᶜAlî was murdered by a member of a group of disaffected followers.

silsila When used of *majâlis**, a series held at the same time and place and addressed by the same preacher for a number of consecutive days.

'Star', the Tradition of A reference to the star which, according to Shîᶜî Tradition, came down upon the house of ᶜAlî and Fâṭima*, and that of no one else, in response to an order of the Prophet.

sûra One of the 114 sections of the Qur'ân.

taqiyya Dissimulation of a person's religious identity that is allowable and even encouraged in Shîᶜî Islam under certain conditions.

tôpî A hat, specifically in the context of this study made of lambswool and part of the uniform of a *ẕâkir** who is not an *ᶜâlim**.

Trench, Battle of (5/627) The third major confrontation between the Muslims under the command of the Prophet and the Meccan forces in which the Muslims successfully stopped the Meccans from entering Madina by digging a trench [Arabic: *khandaq*].

'Two Weighty Things', the Tradition of The Prophet is reported to have said, 'I have left among you two weighty matters which if you cling to them you shall not be led into error after me. One of them is greater than the other: the Book of God which is a rope stretched from heaven to earth and my progeny, the people of my house. These two shall not be parted until they return to the pool (of paradise) (Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, IV.371, see Momen, 1985: 16).

Uḥud, the Battle of (3/625) The second major battle fought between the Muslims and the Meccans. The Meccans were led by Abû Sufyân*. Although more than 70 Muslims were killed and the Prophet wounded, the Muslims were not driven out of Madina.

ᶜUmar ibn-e Khaṭṭâb (591–23/644) The second caliph* after Abû Bakr*.

ᶜUmar ibn-e Saᶜd The son of a companion of the Prophet who led the army against Ḥusayn at Karbala.

Umayyad The first Islamic ruling dynasty (41/661–132/750), founded by the caliph Muᶜâwiya* in Damascus.

Umm-e Banîn Wife of Alî and the daughter of Ḥizâm ibn-e Khâlid ibn-e Dârim. According to Al-Mufîd (1981: 268), she lost her four sons at Karbala. She became an important leader of the Shîᶜa when the survivors returned to Madina.

Umm-e Kulṯûm The younger daughter of ᶜAlî and Fâṭima*.

Umm-e Rabâb Daughter of Imru' al-Qays ibn-e ᶜAdî, wife of Ḥusayn and mother of ᶜAlî Aṣghar* and Sakîna*.

ᶜUṯmân ibn-e ᶜAffân The third caliph after ᶜUmar* ibn-e al-Khaṭṭâb, assasinated in 35/656.

Uṣûlî A school of thought among the Twelver Shîᶜa which emerged as the victor in a controversy with the *Akhbârî** school on the use of reason in jurisprudence.

Yazîd ibn-e Muᶜâwiya ibn-e Abî Sufyân The Umayyad* caliph who succeeded his father, Muᶜâwiya* and who is reported to have ordered the killing of Ḥusayn.

ẕâkir Lit. 'one who recites or remembers', a *majlis** preacher, used especially although not exclusively of a preacher who is not an *ᶜâlim**. The feminine form is *ẕâkira*.

zanânî majlis A woman's *majlis** attended by women only and, if there is a sermon, addressed by a *ẕâkira**.

Zaynab The elder daughter of ᶜAlî and Fâṭima* and thus sister of Ḥusayn. She is highly honoured as an important leader among the Shîᶜa and one of the first *majlis** preachers following the Battle of Karbala.

ẕikr Remembrance, a term used sometimes for a *majlis** sermon.

ziyârat The visitation of the graves of the Imâms*, either as a pilgrimage to the sites themselves, or in a ritualized form, notably at the conclusion of a *majlis**. A *ziyârat majlis* is one that is held on the third day after a person's death.

Ẕu'l-Fiqâr Lit. 'Possessor of Notches', the name of a famous sword captured at the Battle of Badr*, owned by the Prophet Muḥammad, and then passed on to ᶜAlî. There is a Tradition from the Battle of Uḥud* when a heavenly voice is reported to have called out, 'There is no sword except *Ẕu'l-Fiqâr*; there is no young man except ᶜAlî!' (A number of Traditions relating this are cited in al-Mufîd, 1991: 58).

Notes

Preface

1 The word *majlis* is taken from the Arabic root *j-l-s* meaning 'to sit down'. It is widely used in the Muslim world with meanings ranging from a gathering, to a court or tribunal, to a political party, to a national parliament. In this thesis, the term refers specifically to the *majlis-e taᶜziya* [mourning gathering] of the Shiᶜa.

An introduction to the Shiᶜa and the events surrounding the Battle of Karbala

1 This account of the events of Karbala is summarized from that of al-Ṭabarî (d. 310/923), whose main source is *Kitâb Maqtal al-Ḥusayn* [The Book of the Murder of Ḥusayn] by the Kufan Abû Mikhnaf (d. 157/774). Other sources are discussed by the translator, I.K.A. Howard, in his foreword (al-Ṭabarî, 1990, vol. xix: ix–xvi).

1 From Karbala to India: a history of Shiᶜî preaching

1 Pedersen (*EI*^{2}). In his article, 'Khutba' in *EI*^{2}, A.J. Wensinck quotes C.H. Becker in writing that this staff was the symbol of the old Arabian judge. The *minbar* itself seems originally to have been associated with the ruler or judge's seat (Zwemmer, 1933: 222). *Al-ᶜasâ* is the term used by Islamic preachers in India today although Pedersen uses the term *al-makhâṣir*. The fact that this staff continues to be understood as a military symbol is evident from Shiᶜî preachers in Iran who, after the Iranian revolution, replaced their staff with a Kalashnikov rifle (Ram, 1994: 30).

2 For a discussion of the differences between the Islamic and Christian traditions of rhetoric, see Smyth (1992: 242–55).

3 Fathi (1995). According to tradition, the Friday congregational Prayers must be preceded by two sermons. The preacher must deliver both of them standing, and sit down between them. At other special prayer gatherings held at the two great annual festivals, *ᶜÎd al-Fiṭr* and *ᶜÎd al-Aẕḥâ*, an address follows the Prayers. An address is also given at the special Prayers held at the time of an eclipse or of drought (Margoliouth, 1918).

4 It was later, during the ᶜAbbâsid era (132/750–656/1258 in Baghdad), that specialized preachers were appointed (Pedersen, *EI*^{2}).

5 See the ruling by Muḥammad ibn Makkî al-ᶜÂmilî, known as Shahîd al-Awwal [the First Martyr] (d. 786/1384) (Arjomand, 1984: 71). See also Madelung (1982: 163–73).

6 Cole (1983: 35, 1989: 127ff.). Mawlânâ Sayyid Akhtar Raẕvî Gôpalpûrî is explicit in writing that the Friday congregational Prayers held in Faizabad on 27 Rajab 1,200 (26.5.1786) were the first such Shiᶜî Prayers to be held in (North) India (in Kalb-e Ṣâdiq, 1998: 15).

7 Shams al-Dîn (1985: 140) and Rizvi (1986, vol. 2: 285). Al-Tabarî (1990) recounts speeches of Zaynab at Karbala (p. 164), Kufa (pp. 165–7) and Damascus (p. 171). Popular collections of the speeches of Zaynab and ᶜAlî Zayn al-ᶜÂbidîn, such as Ibn-e Ḥasan Najafî's Urdu translation (1985), are available in Shîᶜî religious bookshops in Hyderabad. For a discussion of the role of Zaynab as it relates to contemporary women's *majâlis* and preaching, see D. D'Souza (1997, 1998).
8 Shams al-Dîn (1985: 145) suggests that she was exiled to Egypt, while other sources say that she went to Syria.
9 The word *taᶜziya* has a variety of different meanings across the Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages. It comes from the Arabic, meaning 'consolation', and further developments in its meaning will be noted in the course of the study.
10 Ayoub (1978: 152). J.R.I. Cole writes that the *majlis* itself, as a 'stylised mourning session' developed only during the Ṣafavid period in Iran, although he admits that, 'gatherings to mourn the martyred Ḥusayn had far more ancient antecedents' (1989: 105).
11 Muḥammad ᶜAlî Hibat al-Dîn al-Ḥusaynî al-Sharastânî, *Nahẕat al-Ḥusayn*, 5th ed. Publications of al-Râbiṭah al-Nashr al-Islâmî, Karbala: al-Taẕâmmun Press (1969: 159), quoted in Ayoub (1978: 152). Ayoub gives the name of a professional mourner as a *nâ'ih*. Shams al-Dîn also mentions these reciters, especially one by the name of Abû Hârûn in the time of the sixth Imâm, Jaᶜfar Ṣâdiq, and says that these professionals later included 'wailers' who could be both men and women (1985: 168–9).
12 According to ᶜAllâma Sayyid Mujtabâ Ḥusayn Kâmûnpûrî, former prof. at Aligarh Muslim Univ., quoted in Wafâ (1978: 6).
13 See, for example, al-Mufîd (1981). Although focussing on the life of ᶜAlî, this book also contains chapters on the lives of all the subsequent Imâms.
14 This Tradition has, naturally, become very important for the Indian Shîᶜa, and is referred to in Indian *majlis* preaching (see S4.16).
15 The word Deccan comes from the Urdu word *dakẖan*, simply meaning 'south', and refers to the mid-south of India reaching as far as the modern states of Tamil Nadu in the southeast and Kerala in the southwest.
16 The *Akhbârî* position had existed from the time of the Bûyids, but it came into prominence in the seventeenth century in reaction to the increasing dominance of the *mujtahids* (Litvak, 1998: 14).
17 Both of these definitions follow Nakash (1993: 169–74).
18 Chelkowski (1979, 1985: 18–30, 1986: 209–26, 1995). See also Momen (1985: 143). In the Persian language, the word *taᶜziya* now refers to the Karbala 'passion play'.
19 For a complete translation in English of one of these plays, see Pelly (1879).
20 Canetti (1978: 149–52). Another account, written in the 1920s by Prof. L Bogdanov, also mentions sermons in the context of these plays (1923: 123).
21 Hollister (1988: 113). The Shîᶜî *aẕân* contains the words not found in the Sunnî form, 'I bear testimony that ᶜAlî is the friend [*walî*] of God,' and, 'Come to the good deed!'
22 For a historical introduction to the Shîᶜa of the Deccan and bibliography of relevant literature, see Khalidi (1987, 1991); Ghauri (1975: 151–61) and Rizvi (1991).
23 The section describing Muḥarram is translated by Rizvi (1986, vol. 2: 335–40). There is also a summary in Naqvi (1999: 58ff.).
24 Sulṭân Muḥammad Qulî Quṭb Shâh (972/1565–1020/1611) in particular stands out as a great patron of the arts. Although what is now known as Urdu/Hindi began to be spoken much earlier, from about 596/1200 (see Russell, 1986: 4) it was this ruler particularly who encouraged the language of Old Dakhni which became an early form of modern Urdu, now the language in which almost all *majlis* sermons in Hyderabad are preached. K.C. Kanda regards Muḥammad Qulî as the 'architect of the Urdu language' (1995: 18), presenting and translating into English a selection of his poetry which is sprinkled with references to the love of ᶜAlî and his progeny. For an Urdu history of the *marṯiya* in the Deccan, including many examples, see Rasheed Mosvi (1989).

25 See Naqvi (1993: 199ff., 1999: 66–94), where he quotes T. Donappa's *Jana Pada Kala Sampada* (1975: 129–66). This Telugu book documents some of the Hindu and Tribal forms of Muḥarram mourning [*ᶜazâdârî*] which were established under the Quṭb Shâhîs and still continue today in many parts of rural Andhra Pradesh.
26 Diane D'Souza (1998a: 76–9) and Pinault (2001: 17–18) both discuss the influence of Hindu practices in the veneration of *ᶜalam* standards.
27 For further discussions of *taqiyya*, see Enayat (1982: 175–81) and Kohlberg (1991). For a discussion of *taqiyya* in a series of *majlis* sermons, see Howarth (1998: 15–31).
28 William Knighton, an English officer posted at the courts of Ghâzî al-Dîn Ḥaydar and Naṣîr al-Dîn Ḥaydar, estimated that the reigning 'Nawab' spent 'upwards of 300,000 pounds (sterling)' on Muḥarram commemorations (quoted in Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 317).
29 The content of these sermons is discussed in Rizvi (1986, vol. 2: 131) and Cole (1989: 131–3).
30 Interview, SMN. The title of his collection of sermons may, however, indicate that he did preach at *majâlis*.
31 This term, the equivalent of the South Indian *ᶜâshûrkhâna*, is still used in North India.
32 Rizvi (1986, vol. 2: 320) suggests that the 'Dhie Mudgelluss' to which Mrs Ali refers is the Urdu translation of the *Rawẕat al-Shuhadâ*' known as the *Dah Majlis*, translated in 1791–2 by Sayyid ᶜAlî Wâsitî Bilgrâmî (see Rizvi, 1986, vol. 2: 355). In her earlier description, however, she states explicitly that the reading was in Persian. The work she is referring to is probably therefore one of the abridged Persian versions of the *Rawẕa* that Rizvi mentions in the same volume on p. 354.
33 'Âᶜina-e-Ḥaqq-nama.' *Rijâl Shîᶜah*, Persian MS 1, fol. 79a, Nâṣiriyya Library, Lucknow, by an anonymous disciple of Dildâr ᶜAlî, quoted in Cole (1989: 56).
34 Interview, NM, quoting Khân, Lucknow (1823).
35 The more detailed structure is given in A.D'Souza (1993: 31–47) and Naim (1983: 103).
36 Quoted in Naim (1983: 108) with the author's translation.
37 I have not been able to establish firmly that the very early modern sermons followed this pattern, although it is reasonable to suppose that they did because the structure was laid down so clearly in the *marṯiya*. The contemporary structure of the *majlis* sermon is set out on p. 123 of this book.
38 From the Arabic, meaning 'condolence', the word *taᶜziya* came in Persian to mean 'Karbala passion-play'. In Urdu it refers either to a model of one of the shrines of the Shîᶜî Imâms or a commemorative procession in honour of the Karbala martyrs.
39 Interview, HKN. For a part-translation and discussion of one of ᶜAlî Naqî's *majlis* sermons see Howarth (1998).
40 Diane D'Souza suggests that, 'It was perhaps sometime in the late nineteenth century that a few women began to take up the job of orating the tragic Karbala story at mourning gatherings' (1997: 8). I have not found evidence for women's extempore preaching this early, although the transition between *kitâb khwânî* and extempore preaching may well have been gradual as the written account was memorized by reciters who then adapted and expanded on it from the *minbar*.
41 Bawa (1986: 111–17). Bawa writes that Sâlâr Jung I asked Sir Syed Amhed Khan for names of suitable men, and that he made clear that 'he was not going to enquire to what caste or religion they belong' (p. 114). The immigrants that he names in this regard include Sunnîs and Hindus as well as Shîᶜas.
42 Ẕiyâ al-Ḥasan Ḥusaynî (1980: 93). Until that time, the Shîᶜa had been using a small, older mosque, known as the *Chhoṭî Masjid* [Small Mosque], but they had no Shîᶜî scholar to lead them. According to Omar Khalidi, the Shîᶜî *aẕân* was only reinstated after the annexation of Hyderabad State into the Indian Union (1991: 9–10).
43 Moinuddin (1977: 26–7). Karen Leonard (1978a: 140) writes that the first state census was taken in 1881 in which the population of Hyderabad's walled city was listed as

123,657, of which 63 per cent were Muslims. The suburban population was estimated at between 100,000 and 130,000 around that time.

44 According to Sayyid Ghulâm Ḥusayn's grandson, Reza Aga, this is written in the book, *Tazkirat al-Ẕâkirîn*, by Âqa Ashᶜar Laknawî (interview, RA). This book is out of print and very rare, and I have not been able to locate a copy of it. I have been told, however, that it is essentially a history of the family of Sayyid Ghulâm Ḥusayn.

45 Khalidi (1991: 57). The participation in not only Shîᶜî but also Sunnî Muslim religious ceremonies by Hindus in the Âsaf Jâhî bureaucracy is also documented by Karen Leonard (1978a: 81–2).

46 A history and description of this fascinating organization and its headquarters, Hyderabad's all-women Shîᶜî shrine, has been written by Diane D'Souza (2004). It is not clear when Laṭîf al-Nisâ' began to preach at *majâlis*. Diane D'Souza notes that this may have been before or after the founding of the Association in 1946. Even if it was before, it is likely that Maḥmûda Bâqer from Fatepur, as noted earlier, began extempore preaching before this was done in Hyderabad.

47 This list includes: Sayyid Sharâfat Ḥusayn, Mirzâ Ashfâq, Sayyid Muẓaffar Ḥusayn Ṭâhir Jarwalî, Mirzâ Muḥammad Aṭhar, Muḥammad ᶜAlam, Shabîh al-Ḥasan and Dr Badr al-Ḥasan (Wafâ, 1978: 113).

48 These are: Laṭîf al-Nisâ's daughter, Maryam Bêgum, and the popular Mahdî Bêgum, Sayyida Ṣâḥiba and Ṣughra Bêgum (Wafâ, 1978: 113).

49 Ahmad (1985: 325). The AP Directorate of Census Operations gives numbers for Muslim 'in-migrants' only as a whole community: 92,913 from 1951–81 (Naidu, 1990: 28).

50 The difficulty of getting reliable population statistics for Indian Shîᶜas because of the practice of *taqiyya* has been noted by census officials, and is taken up in a study by Jatindra Mohan Datta (1956: 233–5). Dr Naidu herself acknowledges the problem (1990: n. 4, p. 26).

51 According to the AP Directorate of Census Operations, 12,511 people, 9.3 per cent of Muslims in Hyderabad's Old City in 1971, had emigrated to foreign countries by 1981 (Naidu, 1990: 28).

52 Ibid.: 76. Hyderabadi local preachers mentioned in the survey (with their names spelled as in the survey) are Reza Aga, Riazuddin Hydar, Akhtar Zaidi, Iqbal Ali Zaydi, Taqi Hasan Wafa, Ziya Aqa, Baqer Aga, Asghar Husayn and Sadiq Ḥusayn Najafi. A list is also given of visiting preachers from North India who include Ibne-e-Hasan Nawnehrwi, Zishan Haydar, Shabi ul Hasan, Taher Jarwali, Mirza Muḥammad Athar, Ruhi, Mirza Muhammad Aalam, Ghulam Askari, Sharafat Husayn and Mirza Muhammad Ashfaq (pp. 49–50).

53 Some of these organizations are described in Moinuddin (1977: 50–5), and Wafâ (1978: ch. 19). A detailed study of these groups can be found in Pinault (1992).

2 The Shîᶜa of Hyderabad and their mourning gatherings

1 There is considerable divergence in population statistics for Hyderabad's Shîᶜas. The official statistics from the Andhra Pradesh Office of the Directorate of Census Operations give the number in 1981 as 8,641, 3.59 per cent of the total population of Hyderabad's Old City. David Pinault, writing in the early 1990s, estimated the population as 80,000 (1992: ix). Sadiq Naqvi, a Shîᶜî historian from Osmania University living in Darushifa, estimated the Shîᶜî population in 1999 at around 150,000 (interview, SN). Other Shîᶜas with whom I have spoken put the figure as high as 200,000.

2 Juan Cole writes about the Shîᶜas of Awadh, North India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, 'Shîᶜas always remained a small minority in Awadh, but their influence with the Nawabi (ruler's) court gave them an importance out of proportion to their numbers, so that they profoundly influenced Awadh culture' (1989: 70).

George Koovackal and Paul Jackson, commenting on the position of Indian Shîᶜas, also write, 'Their influence is certainly greater than their numbers – collectively probably less than ten per cent of the Muslims of India – would seem to indicate' (Jackson, 1988: 127).

3 The Charminar is built in the shape of a *taᶜziya* [the Urdu term for a representation of a tomb of one of the Imâms], a distinctively Shîᶜî design (Ahmad, 1985: 320). Shîᶜî designs, such as representations of *ᶜalams* [battle standards] from Karbala, are clearly visible in the plaster-work of the Charminar, and between the minarets are written the words of a Tradition of the Prophet, 'I am the city of knowledge and ᶜAlî is the gate of that city.'

4 Alam (1991: 17–37). Mushirul Hasan comments, however, that the few Indian Muslim parties which have managed to pick up parliamentary seats did so, 'not through a consolidation of 'Muslim votes' but through a coalition with local or regional forces' (1997: 295).

5 In the term, *Bakrîd*, the Arabic/Persian word for cow [*baqr*] has become confused with the Urdu word for she-goat [*bakrî*]. While the prescribed sacrifice may be a cow or even a camel, in India it is usually a goat or sheep. In the Hindu context of India where cows are considered holy, their slaughter, although it does take place, is a sensitive religious and political issue.

6 Some Shîᶜas interpret the thread to represent special clothes believed to have been brought by the angel Gabriel to the two grandchildren of the Prophet Muḥammad, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, at the time of *ᶜÎd* (Moinuddin, 1977: 15–16). Others see it as a symbol of the protection of the shrine at which it was tied. The custom of tying a red thread around the wrist is also practised by other religious groups including some Hindus, but for different reasons.

7 A detailed discussion of the history and meaning of the *ziyârat* can be found in Ayoub (1978: 180–96).

8 For a brief history of the relations between Hyderabad and Iran, see Naqavi (1994). This book was written for the occasion of the visit of Iranian President Rafsanjânî to Hyderabad in October 1994.

9 Diane D'Souza has written several articles on Shîᶜî women's devotional practices in Hyderabad as part of her work for a PhD in this fascinating and hardly touched area of academic research (see Bibliography).

10 D. D'Souza (1997: 18). Mary Hegland (1995), however, commenting from the probably more conservative context of Peshawar in northern Pakistan, saw the women's *majâlis* that she attended as a 'mixed blessing'. On the one hand, Hegland (1995) writes that they gave women the opportunity for 'expression, social interaction, performance, prestige, leadership, mobility, meaningful religious involvement, and emotional comfort . . .' (pp. 191–2), but on the other hand, in her view, ritual participation 'meant added exposure to sermons and symbolism stressing women's spiritual, moral, physical, political and economic inferiority and dependence' (p. 183).

11 Fâṭima's presence at every *majlis* held in honour of her son is often mentioned in *majlis* preaching, on the basis of a Tradition related from the sixth Imâm, Jaᶜfar Ṣâdiq. I have not, however, been able to find a reliable source for this Tradition.

12 The term *ᶜashra* is somewhat confusing in that it denotes the number ten when in fact there are only normally nine *majâlis* held because of the different programme that takes place on the day of ᶜÂshûrâ itself. Later in the mourning period, however, the term *ᶜashra* is used for a series of ten *majâlis*.

13 The word *chehlum* simply means '40' in Persian. The Arabic term, *arbaᶜîn*, which also means '40' is reserved for the 40th day commemoration of Ḥusayn himself and is not used for the commemoration of an ordinary Shîᶜî believer's death.

14 These numbers are fairly typical for a popular *ẕâkir* and for the (relatively few) *ẕâkira* women preachers with whom I have spoken (even allowing for some exaggeration). Diane D'Souza notes that a popular *ẕâkira* might speak at, 'four, five or even six *majâlis* each day during the main two month mourning period' (1997: 11).

15 Peter Chelkowski (1995) gives a calendar for commemorations at Iranian *taᶜziya* performances which begins with the Martyrdom of Muslim ibn ᶜAqîl on 1 Muḥarram, and includes the Martyrdom of Ḥurr on the 6th, the Martyrdom of Qâsim the Bridegroom on the 7th, the Martyrdom of ᶜAlî Akbar on the 8th, the Martyrdom of ᶜAbbâs on the 9th, and commemorates the Sufferings of the women captives in the days following the 10th. A Turkish ordering from the *Maktel-i Hüseyin* of Kastamonulu Şadi (dated 1361 CE), can be found in And (1979: 251–2).
16 In referring to ᶜAlî Akbar as the second son of Ḥusyan, I am following al-Mufîd (1981: 379). According to some other sources, he was Ḥusayn's eldest son (see Halm, 1991: 15).
17 For a fuller translation of this sermon see Howarth (2000: 23–30). The relation between Shîᶜî and Ṣûfî thought is discussed in Rizvi (1988: 97–108) and Sanyal (1996: 211–16).
18 The Arabic word *qibla* in Islam properly denotes the direction a worshipper must face when performing the ritual Prayers. It is used, however, for respected preachers in the secondary sense of those who themselves may be taken as a reference point because of their teaching and example.
19 The local origin of Islamic preachers and its effect on their relationship with their congregations is discussed in terms of Iran and Jordan in Antoun (1989b: 98–9).
20 On more than one occasion even I, a Christian, have been semi-jokingly told that I should begin a *majlis* preaching career.

Part II Sermons

1 A discussion of early Shîᶜî traditional sources can be found in Jarrar (2000: 98–129).

3 The description of a complete mourning gathering (including the text of Sermon 1)

1 That is the preacher is concluding the argument of the series. The following day's *majlis* (S28) will be shorter and will consist of only a recitation of the Sufferings of Ḥusayn.
2 The Arabic word translated here (following S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali) as 'relatives' is *al-qurubâ*. Sadiq Naqvi translates this word into the related Urdu word, *aqribâ* with the dictionary meaning of 'most near relatives'.
3 This patronymic title was given to ᶜAlî by the Prophet who entered a mosque one day and found ᶜAlî sleeping on the earth floor. He is reported to have said, 'Get up, Abû Ṭurâb!'
4 The word *ta'wîl* refers to an interpretation of the Qur'ân that is hidden or allegorical, specifically the Shîᶜî interpretation that finds references to the *Ahl-e Bayt* in passages that may not outwardly mention them.
5 That is ᶜAlî incorporates in himself his descendants, the other 11 Shîᶜî Imâms.
6 This particular transition from *faẓâ'il* to *maṣâ'ib* is a common one (see, for example S6.8–9).
7 The precise numbers of those at Karbala (on both sides, but especially of Ḥusayn's enemies) varies according to the different accounts, and is a sensitive point in *majlis* preaching. Al-Mufîd, for example, mentions a force of about 1,000 cavalry under the command of Ḥurr* and another 4,000 cavalry under the command of ᶜUmar ibn-e Saᶜd* of which 500 under ᶜAmr ibn-e Ḥajjâj were deputed to prevent Ḥusayn's party from gaining access to the river (1981: 335, 341, 343, respectively).
8 *Know Your Islam* (Hyderabad: n.p., n.d.) pp. 200–1. The transliterations and parenthetical explanations are as given in the published translation.
9 That is in the direction of Mashhad, the shrine of the eighth Imâm in north-eastern Iran. This Imâm, ᶜAlî Reẓâ, who was nominated by the ᶜAbbâsid* Caliph al-Maᶜmûn as his successor (thus 'Ruler'), is known as *Gharîb al-Ghurabâ*' [Exile of the Exiles] because

he died and was buried so far away from the Arabic heartlands and the rest of his family.

10 In honour of the last Imâm, the *Mahdî**.

11 This practice is reminiscent of the distribution of blessed bread handed out to all who have attended an Orthodox (Christian) liturgy.

4 Sermons by male 'lay' preachers

1 Al-Mufîd writes that ᶜAlî Akbar was 19 years old when he died at Karbala (1981: 358).

2 According to Shîᶜî belief, there is and must always be an Imâm in existence in this world, known as *Imâm-e Waqt* [Imâm of the Time] or *Imâm-e Zamân* [Imâm of the Age]. The fifth Imâm is reported to have said, 'By God! God has not left the earth, since the death of Adam, without there being on it an Imâm guiding (the people) to God . . .' (Momen, 1985: 147–8).

3 The Qur'ân, following the Bible, relates that these two prophets, father and son, had been separated for many years after Joseph had been taken to Egypt (see Sûra-e Yûsuf 12.100).

4 *Kawsar* [the Abundant] is believed to be a river, fountain or spring in paradise and is referred to in the Qur'ân, Sûra-e Kawsar (108.1).

5 The expression used means lit. 'a piece of my liver.'

6 The word that the horseman uses gives a hint as to his identity, as 'lion' is the meaning of the name 'ᶜAbbâs'. Everyone in the congregation knows that the horseman is ᶜAbbâs.

7 The AP Waqf Board is the powerful committee that oversees the extensive Muslim religious endowments (*waqf* properties) in the state and manages the revenue from them.

8 Although this sermon was preceded by an Arabic *khuṭba*, no text was recited.

9 The preacher confirmed to me after the sermon some of the background to these remarks: the majority of legal cases in Hyderabad's civil courts (and not only in Hyderabad) are about ownership of land. Many of these cases involve the encroachment by people on land belonging to others (including land that has been designated as a *waqf* property). The 'land business' is one in which some people have made a lot of money, sometimes by underhand means, and it is this money which has enabled some leaders to establish a political career (see Kakar, 1995: 76–7). At the time that this sermon was preached, there were cases in the courts involving the jurisdiction of certain *waqf* properties by the AP Waqf Board.

10 This reference is to Ḥabîb ibn-e Muẓâhir, a leading Kufan Shîᶜa and a companion of the Prophet and of ᶜAlî.

11 The original words were: 'He died while he was still alive,' but their meaning is as I have rendered them in the text.

12 This is a reference to the main Shîᶜî procession which takes place on 10 Muḥarram (and in which the host of this *majlis*, Sudarshan Das, rides a camel). The main *Bîbî kâ ᶜAlam* [Standard of the Lady (i.e. Fâṭima)] battle standard is paraded through the streets on an elephant with hundreds participating, and many thousands, most of them non-Shîᶜas, watching. For several years a group of about 40 small children, all under the age of 6 or 7, have approached the *Bîbî kâ ᶜAlam* standard at a certain point in the procession carrying small, earthenware pots and crying in Arabic, '*al-ᶜatash! al-ᶜatash!*' ['Thirst! Thirst!']. This is a particularly moving scene as it symbolizes the children of Ḥusayn's camp who had been deprived of water for three days. The preacher is concerned that some observers may have witnessed this event or heard about it, but not understood its significance.

13 Jubilee Hills is a wealthy suburb of Hyderabad. The preacher, however, is not referring to the wealthy newcomers but to the original inhabitants, Hindu villagers, who since Quṭb Shâhî times have commemorated Muḥarram in gatherings in their own, Telugu, language.

14 That is between Shîᶜas and Sunnîs. The preacher explained to me afterwards that these people were being very outspoken in their condemnation of the enemies of Ḥusayn and the *Ahl-e Bayt**.
15 The boy's name was ᶜAlî Aṣghar [lit. 'ᶜAlî the younger/smaller']. By only using his first name in this way, the preacher is emphasizing the boy's relation with his grand-father, ᶜAlî ibn-e Abî Ṭâlib.
16 Normally *ẕâkirs* say at this point that Ḥusayn wiped ᶜAlî Aṣghar's blood on his face. Syed Ali Naqi does not mention this detail here, probably out of deference to his Hindu guests, but does so in the Urdu version that follows. This narrative echoes the Qur'ânic text in which the earth, the heavens and the mountains are offered the 'trust' [*amânat*] of creation but refuse it (Sûra-e Aḥzâb 33.72).
17 To call the digging up and beheading of ᶜAlî Aṣghar a 'second martyrdom' is an image taken from a *salâm* elegy written by the contemporary Hyderabadi poet Abul Hasan.
18 The reply is, *wa ᶜalaykum al-salâm!* [and peace be upon you!]
19 Each of the five daily ritual Prayers in Islam is made up of a number of 'units' [*rakᶜats* – lit. 'bowings'].
20 This is the technical term for a *ḥadîṯ* that relates the actual words of God although without the same authority as an *âyat* of the Qur'ân.
21 The meaning of the word *ummî* as used here is controversial. The standard Sunnî interpretation, that is also followed by some Shîᶜas is that the Prophet was illiterate, that is he could not read or write. This *ẕâkir*, like the majority of *majlis* preachers, considers that interpretation demeaning to the Prophet, claiming that the Prophet was able to read and write.
22 The person named by the preacher is a local Shîᶜa who has been known to interrupt *majâlis* and even come to blows with the *ẕâkir* if he disagrees with him. One of his concerns is that Muslims should not use the Persian word *Khudâ* in place of the Arabic word *Allâh* because, he argues, the Arabic word is a 'proper name' which is untranslatable.
23 That is the second president, after Abû'l Ḥasan Banî Ṣadr was deposed in June 1981.
24 For an account of the complex issues involved in the power struggle between Henry IV (1050–1106) Holy Roman Emperor and king of Germany, and Pope Gregory VII, see Latourette (1953: 472–3).
25 D.B. Macdonald (1903). I have been unable to find the reference in this book which is incorrectly referred to by the preacher.
26 It is traditional in (Western) Christian cultures for another person to say to the one who has sneezed, 'God bless you!' or simply, 'Bless you!' This expression has been credited to Pope Gregory I (540–604), although Aristotle mentions a similar custom among the Greeks (*Brewer*, 1989: 1033). The 'electrical current' explanation for the Muslim expression was being used in Sunnî sermons in Hyderabad at about the same time.
27 This is a reference to the 'Ask me* Tradition' in which ᶜAlî challenged people to ask him anything and he would give the answer. A further Tradition relates that a certain man responded to ᶜAlî's challenge by asking ᶜAlî to tell him how many hairs he had on his head. ᶜAlî replied that he knew the answer, but that the man didn't know and wouldn't be able to count and check, so there was no point in telling him!
28 According to Muslim law, the hair and nails should not be cut while a person is in the state of *iḥrâm*, that is, consecrated for the performance of either the *Ḥajj* or *ᶜUmra* pilgrimages.
29 The preacher (a college lecturer) has spoken in previous sermons of this series about the problem of cheating at school and college exams in North India.
30 *Dâdâ* is the Urdu word for 'paternal grandfather'. In slang, it refers to men from the criminal underworld, particularly the 'toughs' who work for corrupt politicians and who come to prominence during elections and communal rioting. For an interview with a self-confessed *dâdâ*, see Kakar (1995: 88–92).

31 That is, return of the *Mahdî* who will come back from his occultation shortly before the final Day of Judgement, leading his company of the chosen ones to fight against the forces of evil in an apocalyptic battle in which the enemies of the Imâm will be defeated (see Momen, 1985: 166).
32 This was the portico of the Khazraj tribe of Madina where, following the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, the decision was taken to make Abû Bakr* the leader of the Muslim community.

5 Sermons by women

1 The carrying of *ᶜalams* through fire by men is more common. There are several occasions when this is traditionally practised, particularly in the town of Vizianagaram, 550 km outside of Hyderabad, where 110 *ᶜalams* are taken through the fire. A significant aspect of fire walking in the context of Muḥarram commemorations in Andhra Pradesh is the participation of Hindus in the ceremonies. In Vizianagaram, 109 of the *ᶜalams* are carried by Hindus (interview, SN).
2 The word translated by the English 'call' in this *âyat* comes from the same root as the word 'supplication' [*duᶜâ*], the subject of the first part of this sermon. In this sermon I translate the word *duᶜâ* and its cognates with the English word 'prayer' and its cognates, as the Urdu (and Arabic) word conveys the same sense as the normal usage of the English word. The obligatory ritual performance of *namâz/ṣalât* is always translated in this study with the capitalized 'Prayers'.
3 This extract, and the following extracts until para 7, are from a poem by Ali Akhtar. The form is a *manqabat*, written in praise of ᶜAlî or another of the Imâms. The 'ᶜAlî Cry' [*Naᶜrê ᶜAlî*] is commonly used as a congregational response in *majlis* preaching.
4 'Remover of Difficulties' [*Mushkilkushâ'ê*] is a common title for ᶜAlî.
5 In the last couplet of an Urdu poem the poet traditionally includes his own name, in this case 'Akhtar'.
6 This is part of a *marṯiya* by the poet Javid Maqsood.
7 This quotation and the next two are from a *marṯiya* by the preacher's husband, Baquer Mohsin.
8 A line from a famous *marṯiya* of the poet Mîr Anîs.
9 This is a tablet in heaven on which it is believed the original text of the Qur'ân is written (see Sûra-e Burûj 85.22), along with what is fated to happen to people.
10 The meaning of the word *ṣadqa* is best illustrated by two cognates of this noun: the intransitive verb *ṣadqê jânâ* means 'to become a sacrifice for (someone's) welfare', and the adverbial form *ṣadqêvârî* indicates 'sacrificed for averting ill-luck (from someone) ('*ṣadqa*' in Qureshi, 1994).
11 Caliph from 232/847 until he was murdered in 247/861.
12 That is, one of the two great festivals of Islam on which it is traditional, among other things, to buy and wear new clothes.
13 It is reported that Abû Bakr, when he became caliph after the death of the Prophet, took the garden of Fidak, a valuable plantation of date-palms, asserting that it was to become the property of the state. Shîᶜas claim that it had been specifically left to Fâṭima by her father. For the debate on this issue and relevant Traditions (from the view point of the Shîᶜa), see Shirazi (1996: 279–89 and 251ff.).
14 Traditions relate that Ḥasan agreed to abdicate the caliphate in favour of Muᶜâwiya only on certain conditions. These included a promise that Muᶜâwiya would not speak badly of ᶜAlî, that he would not persecute ᶜAlî's or Ḥasan's followers, and that he would not appoint his own successor to the caliphate.
15 In 1926, the graves of Fâṭima and the Imâms buried in the Baqîᶜ cemetery in Madina were desecrated by the Wahhâbî Ikhwân brotherhood. The present Saudi government does not allow pilgrims to enter the cemetery in order to pray at the sites of the graves.

6 Sermons by religious scholars

1 A purpose-built hall for holding *majâlis* was under construction in the preacher's residence at the time.
2 A mocking reference to the appearance of some strict Sunnîs who seek to follow as closely as possible Traditions which relate the manner in which the Prophet dressed.
3 The word *ghulât* has the technical sense of referring to those who exaggerate the status of ᶜAlî, even to the extent of claiming that he is divine (see Halm, 1991: 156–61; Pinault, 1992: 40–6). This subject will be touched on again in this sermon in relation to the Nuṣayrî sect (see paras 9 and 14, later in text).
4 Muḥammad Bâqir Majlisî (1038/1627–1111/1700) was a scholar who played an important role at the end of the Ṣafavid dynasty in Iran. He is known particularly for his work known as the 'Oceans of Lights' [*Biḥâr al-Anwâr*], the most comprehensive collection of Shîᶜî Traditions (comprising 110 volumes). Majlisî himself is labelled 'extremist' by the contemporary scholar of Shîᶜî Islam, Mahmoud Ayoub (1988: 182).
5 The Nuṣayrîs, also called ᶜAlawîs (i.e. those who follow ᶜAlî) are a sect, communities of which live in Syria, Turkey and Lebanon. They are known among Twelver Shîᶜa as those who regard ᶜAlî as divine.
6 This is a reference to a popular Tradition concerning the night of the *Hijrat*. It is reported that God sent two angels, Gabriel and Michael, to protect ᶜAlî. As the Tradition is related by Shirazi (1996: 133): 'God said to the two angels, "I have created brotherhood between my vicegerent Ali and my Prophet Muhammad. Ali has offered to sacrifice his life for the sake of the Prophet's life. By sleeping in the Prophet's bed, he is protecting the Prophet's life. Now both of you are ordered to go to the earth and save him from the enemy's evil designs." Accordingly, both of them came to the earth. Gabriel sat at Ali's head and Michael at his feet. Gabriel said, "Congratulations, O son of Abu Talib in whom Allah Almighty takes pride in the presence of His angels!" After this, the following verse was revealed to the Prophet: "And there is the type of man who gives his life to earn the pleasure of God; and Allah is full of kindness to (His) servants" ' (Sûra-e Baqara 2.207).
7 The name Ḥaydar, meaning 'lion', is another name for ᶜAlî.
8 That is, public Shîᶜî practices are discouraged or banned.
9 This is a reference to a Tradition that relates how when ᶜAlî was performing the ritual Prayers in the mosque one day, a beggar began to ask for alms. ᶜAlî pointed to his finger, and the beggar removed his ring. Traditions report that when the Prophet saw this or heard of it, a passage of the Qur'ân was sent down upon him: either a passage from Sûra-e Ṭâhâ (20.25–36) followed by Sûrat al-Aᶜrâf 7.142, showing that ᶜAlî was to the Prophet Muḥammad as Aaron was to Moses, or Sûra-e Mâ'ida 5.55, as related here (Shirazi, 1996: 84).
10 Traditions which give the background to the revelation of this *âyat* say that its words apply to a group of people gathered with the Prophet's family under a sheet. There is a history of disagreement as to whether the part of the *âyat* quoted includes in its address the Prophet's wives or only the Prophet's daughter, Fâṭima, her husband ᶜAlî and their two sons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn.
11 This last sentence is a well-known saying, attributed originally to al-Zamakhsharî, the famous commentator of the Qur'ân.
12 This is a reference to the *âyat* (Sûra-e Nisâ' 4.54) quoted at the start of the sermon.
13 These are the names of famous preachers of an earlier generation, mentioned in Chapter 1. This *majlis* is taking place in the very house in which Rashîd Ṭurâbî, used to live.
14 A *tâbût* would be brought out in a mini-procession at the end of the present *majlis*, and from the pulpit, the preacher could see it being prepared in a room adjoining the main hall.
15 The shrine cities of Najaf and Karbala in Iraq were, at that time, full of religious colleges so that the processions would be joined by many scholars from these colleges.

During these processions a person is believed to receive a special blessing if he is able to touch the *tâbût*. When the *tâbût* was brought out after the present *majlis*, there was considerable scuffling and pushing as everyone tried to touch it.

16 ᶜAlî is particularly noted by the Shîᶜa for his patient endurance [*ṣabr*] while waiting to be made caliph.

17 The word *naṣṣ* used here carries important overtones in Shîᶜî discourse. It is the word that is used of the designation of an Imâm by God and the Imâm's predecessor.

18 The Arabic word translated here 'truth' [*ḥaqq*] is the same word for a 'right'.

19 This may be a reference to the 'Dunbarton Oaks Conversations' that took place in 1944 and included a discussion of human rights.

20 The preacher is referring to the practice of *satî* whereby a widow would throw herself onto her husband's funeral pyre.

21 The reference is to Sûra-e Hûd 11.78, although it is not given as a direct quotation in the Arabic.

22 This is a reference to the author of this study who was present at the *majlis*.

23 The preacher refers to this same film the following year, giving its title, *A History of Slavery*.

24 This observation has been developed by Riffat Hassan (1987).

25 *Mehr* is that which is given (usually money) by the bridegroom to the bride as a necessary part of the marriage contract under Islamic law.

26 A fee is normally paid to a *mawlânâ* for the part that he plays in the marriage ceremony.

27 This point proved controversial and was discussed in the community after the sermon.

7 What the sermons do and how they do it

1 Although I have never heard an explanation for the word *ummî* in a sermon, I have been told by *majlis* preachers in Hyderabad that the word means that the Prophet came from Mecca, which is the *umm-e madâ'in* [mother of cities]. Many Western scholars also argue, although for different reasons, that the word *ummî* does not indicate illiteracy. Montgomery Watt writes that this word means that Muḥammad came from a people 'without written scriptures'. He argues that it is, 'virtually certain that *ummî* means "non-Jewish" or "Gentile", and that it is derived from the Hebrew phrase *ummôt ha-ôlâm*, "the peoples of the world" '. He thus concludes that 'on the whole it seems likely that (Muḥammad) could read and write as much as an average merchant of Mecca' (Watt, 1970: 33–7).

2 Halm calls the cursing of ᶜAlî's opponents a 'fundamental characteristic of Shiite tradition' (1991: 12). He also relates how Shîᶜî Islam was set up as the 'ruling faith' in Ṣafavid Iran. During the first Friday Prayers in the capital, Tabriz, the sermon included a ritual cursing of the first three caliphs along with an order that those of the (predominantly Sunnî) population who did not participate would be killed (1991: 84).

8 Indian Shîᶜî preaching as the expression of a minority Islamic religious identity

1 David Pinault comments on the difficulty of making the paradigm of Karbala fit with the periods in the Shîᶜa's history in which they did wield power. He writes that these periods 'have not carried significance in the face of the overriding paradigm of persecution, exclusion, and suffering' (1992: 56). Wayne Husted notes that South Asian Shîᶜas in particular perceive themselves as a 'beleagured religious minority . . . (with an) ethos akin to that of the Shîᶜite Muslim community throughout much of their history' (1993: 267).

2 William Chittick, introducing his translation of the *Ṣaḥîfa*, discusses the question of the collection's authorship. He believes that the core 54 supplications go back to the

fourth Imâm himself (ᶜAlî ibn al-Ḥusayn, 1988: xx). In the following extracts from the *Ṣaḥîfa*, I quote from Chittick's translation and use his system of supplication and verse numbering.

3 The Shîᶜî historian S.H.M. Jafri gives a detailed account of the *Tawwâbûn* as well as a translation of one of the speeches of their leaders (1979: 225–6).

4 From a sermon published in the Iranian newspaper *Ittilaᶜat*, 8.10.1983, and quoted in Ram (1994: 86).

5 Khomeini, *Imam*, p. 9. For another sermon taking this perspective, see Khâmene'î (1996: 17–37). For a discussion of the use of Ḥusayn's martyrdom in Iranian speeches made during the Iran–Iraq war, see Gieling (1998: 117–27). The debate arising from this stance in terms of political doctrine is discussed in T.M. Aziz (1996: 273–93).

6 Shams al-Dîn (1985: 210). He writes of a conference for the 'leading men' because he is under the impression that women do not participate in mourning meetings along with men, and do not preach (p. 208). He is apparently unaware of the history of the role of women at *majâlis* in the Indian Subcontinent. David Pinault writes about the invitation of various prominent Hyderabadi Shîᶜas, including several *majlis* preachers, by the Iranian government to witness the commemorations of a death anniversary of Âyatullâh Khomaynî in 1989. He also mentions a pamphlet which was distributed during Muḥarram 1989 from the Iranian Consulate in Hyderabad praising Muḥarram rituals as, 'a manifestation of resistance to the Satanic forces of oppression and injustice'. But he comments that this kind of pamphleteering did not mean that Iran was 'attempting to exert any overt political influence over Indian Shiites' (1992: 94–5).

7 See, for example, Haggay Ram's and Saskia Gieling's studies on Iran (1994 and 1998, respectively) and Richard Antoun's on Jordan (1989a,b). A TV documentary, *Out of the Shadows* (broadcast on 11 April 2004 on British ITV 1), featuring former hostage John McCarthy, showed heavily political excerpts from Lebanese Shîᶜî preaching at Friday Prayers. Expatriate Lebanese Shîᶜî preaching from the US on political themes is discussed in Walbridge (1993).

8 For news of *majâlis* taking place around the world, and for links to sites from which sermon recordings can be downloaded, see web-pages such as www.karbala.com and www.shianews.com.

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