Alhassanain (p) Network for Islamic Heritage and Thought

Remembering Karbala Once Again

Selected Marsias of Meer Anis and Mirza Dabeer

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My children, Mehdi and Abiha, inspired and motivated me to translate the marsias and continually oblige me by struggling to learn Urdu; It would be inexcusable to not mention my sisters, Sarah Naqvi and Soghra Raza, who have always encouraged my poetic blabber and listen patiently (or at least pretend to listen) to my ramblings; their respective husbands, Luthfe Naqvi and Sayyid Qayem Husain have also assisted in the circulation of this book; Finally, my many thanks to the readers of Meer Anis' and Mirza Dabeer's marsias in Hyderabad, India, whose beautiful recitation of the marsias fostered in me a love for the poetry, the reading of which I continue to enjoy to this day.

About the Translator

Syeda B. Naqvi was born in Hyderabad, India. She migrated to the United States in 1987 and has since lived in Maryiand. She is a mother of two children, Mehdi and Abiha. She is also an attorney practicing in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.

Introduction

Meer Anis or Mirza Dabeer need no introduction. The translation of their immortal marsias perhaps does. The Urdu speaking Shias who have had the pleasure of reading and hearing Meer Anis' and Mirza Dabeer's marsias can attest that nothing else can evoke with such clarity and such depth the memory, the emotion and the pathos of Karbala, as do these marsias. In Hyderabad, India where I grew up, Muharram and these marsias are synonymous. The recitation of the marsias there has reached an art form, passed on for generations, refined and evolving with every new reader.

The Shias owe much to Meer Anis and Mirza Dabeer who put into words for them, in a heart wrenching, exquisitely human form, the Divine glory of Prophet's Muhammad's household, the tragedy of Karbala, the clash between good and evil, and the ultimate triumph of good. A Majlis in the Urdu speaking Shia community without the marsias of Meer Anis or Mirza Dabeer is inconceivable.

Yet those of us who live in the West have been forced to accept the undeniable fact that our children will probably never experience the beauty of Meer Anis' or Mirza Dabeer's words. The thought is painful; the loss of significant proportions. Who, if not Meer Anis or Mirza Dabeer, can bring Karbala to life for our children.? Who will tell the tale as well as they did? A tale told in a manner so as to evoke within us grief, pain, and above all, love for the Ahlul Baith? I lamented at the thought that nobody can do all this as well as Meer Anis or Mirza Dabeer. I continue to believe that this will remain true forever.

The idea of translating Meer Anis' and Mirza Dabeer's marsias was born from this sense of loss; after all, if our children cannot understand the words of these memorable poets because they don't know Urdu, why not bring the words to them in the language that they do understand? This book is a humble attempt to accomplish this task

I must apologize to the reader, however, for the numerous deficiencies in my translation. while I have tried to adhere to Meer Anis' and Mirza Dabeer's words as much as possible, in my attempt to maintain a rhythm in the verses, I have often lapsed in this effort. I also apologize for the mistakes, the incongruities, or the gaps with which the reader may find my translation to be riddled. Despite all this though, it is my hope that the translation gives the reader a sense, albeit slight, of the beauty of Meer Anis' and Mirza Dabeer's memorable poetry

Marsiya n. 1: Husain Leaves Medina

The Journey of Imam Husain (‘a): Leaving Medina

("Ghar Sejab Behre Safar Sayyid a Aalam Nikle")

When the Noble Prince left His home

His eyes were teary and His heart did mourn

As friends and sons followed behind

He cried out "Destiny, here I come."

"I've heard the cries of Zahra all night

The forsaken wilderness is in my sight"

Then towards the Prophet's tomb He glanced

He bowed His head in a respectful stance

Then approaching the tomb, He knelt and bowed

"Do I have Your permission to leaves" He asked

"Today I depart from this home and this land

Your grandson leaves this country's sands"

"Though mankind sleeps with peace in its homes

This peace is denied to me alone

The cry of my family breaks my heart

Where must we go with babes in our arms?"

"Neither jungle nor city can shelter me now

To send me to my grave, they've taken a vow'

"The enemy swords await my neck

On my friends and family havoc will wreck

You had warned my Mother of these days my Lord

She had cried and Her heart had filled with dread"

"But pray do not forget this forlorn Grandson

Who'll be beheaded under the blazing sun"

"In this heat, even birds stay close to their nests

it's the month of fasting, but leave I must

For danger lurks wherever I stop

My children or family can find no rest"

"My Lord, I've tired of living thus

Come, take me, hide me in Your grave's dust"

Inconsolable He wept at His Grandfather's tomb

The tomb did tremble and darkness loomed

Then the voice of the Prophet filled the air

"My noble son, your foes are doomed"

"Forgetting how much I hold you close

They seek to kill you, your wretched foes"

"My patient, my noble, my pious Grandson

My virtuous, my truthful, my brave Grandson

Woe to the people who forsake You now

My honor, my pride, my dearest Grandson"

"I'll be Your company, forever and now

Abandoning my tomb with You I will go"

Heartened, the Grandson rose and bowed

And His noble sister cried out loud

"Let us go my Brother to our Mother's grave

To bid farewell and kiss the shroud"

"Why must I weep here in the palanquin?

With strangers around and in this din?"

So He led His family to Zahra's grave

And Zainab alighted at a somber pace

And they bowed and kissed their mother's tomb

And around Him He felt His Mother's embrace

And He heard His Mother weep at His plight

"O Mother," He cried, "Bid me farewell tonight"

"Not yet," She cried,,, I must see Abbas,,

"Then I will bid you farewell soon alas!

He's born of another, but my son no less"

Hearing this Husain called "Hither Abbas"

"Do not proceed we leave not yet

My mother summons you to her grave instead"

Hearing this Abbas slowed his horse's pace

And came and knelt at the foot of the grave

And Zahra cried "My beloved son"

"I leave Husain's safety up to you beware!"

"You are a friend to Husain in these lonely times

Farewell, protect him from his enemies' designs"

Marsiya n. 2: Hurr: The Warrior Friend

The Warrior Friend of Imam Husain (‘a) Respected Hurr

("Run mein jab Shah Id taraf se Hurr a Deendaar Aaya")

When Hurr left the camp of the Noble Prince

And came to battle His enemies thence

A murmur rippled through Yazid's camp

"Here comes a friend of Hyder's clan"

"A strange light lights up his path

As though angels in his company he hath"

Hearing this, the son of Saad cried

"Rain arrows and spears with a measured tide"

The army geared for a massive attack

And the lone soldier held his spear by his side

Seeing Hurr tremble with rage and might

The murderers scurried like rats in the night

Abbas applauded Hurr's battle skills

And Akbar admired, standing still

Qasim cried often "Bravo dear Hurr"

And the Noble Prince himself would smile

Listening to the applause from his Master's camp

Hurr would smile and bow at every chance

Alas as he bowed, the army slacked

And assailed the soldier from behind his back

And thousands surrounded the lonely Hurr

As he braced, the massive army attacked

Close by his heart he felt a spear

And he sensed that Death was very near

The arrows poured at his lurching chest

He doubled over seeking some rest

Watching Hurr's state, Alder cried

"May I go my Master to save our guest?"

"The devoted servant of Zahra and Ali

Now falls to the ground without a plea"

The Noble Prince seeing Hurr's plight

wept with sorrow at the sight

And replied to Akbar "Not you my son"

" I will be the one to go by his side"

"To whom can I express the sorrow I bear?

He is my guest and I must take his care"

Saying this Shabeer then mounted His horse

In a glimpse the battlefield He crossed

There Hurr fell on the scorching sand

And the Prince found him breathing his last

He held His guest and wept in pain

And watched Hurr rub his heels in the sand

He wiped Hurr's brow and held him close

And watched in misery as the blood flowed

And cried "Your wounds have broken my back"

"Yet another friend I've lost in my woes"

"You fell to the ground but didn't call for help

Come open your eyes my brother, my friend"

Hut opened his bruised and bloodied eyes

Saw the glorious face of the Prince in sight

Saw his head cradled in the Prince's lap

And smiled at his fortune and in delight

The Prince then asked "What do you sees"

Hurr replied "The heavens have opened to me'

“I see angels descend from the skies for me

Even in Death's face, a love I can see

Here comes Hyder Oh my good fortune!

I see Shabbar with him, boundless is my glee!"

"I see Muhammad’s Daughter bareheaded in grief

And Muhammad Himself comes to me receive"

Then Hurr's face contorted in pain

He looked at Husain and whispered His name

And the Prince cried "So you depart my friend"

Hurr's soul departed and his body went limp

Even in death his glance toward Husain

A smile on his lips, forgotten the pain.

Marsiya n. 3: Sacrifice of Aon and Muhammad

The Sacrifice of Zainab’s Sons Most Reverred Aon and Muhammad (‘a)

("Jab Zainab e Ghareeb ke run mein pisar lade" )

When in Karbala Zainab's children fought

The two alone with the massive army fought

With the courage and valor of Ali they fought

Oh like lions the grandsons of a Lion fought

Gallantry inherited from the Grand Amir

Such vigor can come only from Zainab and Ali

Zainab waited barefoot by the door

And Abbas reported their progress in the war

"Noble sister do not cry nor worry for them

Your sons have vanquished thousands more"

"Their strength reminds the world of Khyber today

Victorious they will return, the enemy they will slay"

With tears in her eyes Zainab replied

"May Allah bless them with success and might

The two are alone, fighting thousands today

Their fate rests with God, He will do what is right"

"Though helpless, I trust the Almighty God

He will grant me the wish I've always sought"

"Oh my brother, I do not fret for them today

They may die or get trampled by the army, yet I say

`If a thousand sons I had, let them all so get killed

To save the Son of Fatima, this price I will pay'

"In Husain's stead, let me bear all the pain

Even if nobody lives, yet live my Husain"

As Abbas and Zainab spoke thus, Husain cried

"Oh Abbas, the children are gone from my sight"

Abbas charged at the battlefield

On his way he heard Ali Akbar's cries

"We live to witness this day and to weep?

Let us get their bodies, on the sands they sleep"

Abbas charged, by his side his spear

And Husain grief stricken, bare headed was near

The army retreated seeing them approach

Dying on the sands lay the youth so dear

Though apart in battle, yet together in death

Still clutching their swords, wounded their chests

Seeing His sister's sons in this state

Crushed like flowers, trampled in haste

Their brow and long hair matted with dust

Lips blue with thirst, bruised the face

Their brows gashed and battered, their clothing torn

Ribs mashed and broken by the enemy swords

Husain cried, holding their bodies close

"Come open your eyes, watch my tears floes'

In Death' slumber, heavy lidded were their eyes

Abbas felt their pulse and wept in woe

"Raised in my lap, yet dying in my sight?"

Husain held the dear boys in His arms and cried

Alongside Abbas in sorrow wept

And cried "Oh here comes the shadow of Death"

And weeping in pain, Husain replied

"The two now depart to eternally rest"

"Within the camp, the hopeful mother waits

Now we take their bodies to her in this state"

But Zainab's heart knew that they lived no more

Quiet in grief, she sat down by the door

And Husain brought in her blood soaked sons

And said "Oh Zainab, my heart is torn"

"What has happened, what is lost, how can I say?

I hoped they would live, but they died on the way"

Hearing this Zainab rose, weeping in pain

And hugged their bruised bodies, uttering their names

She praised their valor and their sacrifice

And cried "Come wake up now, weeps my Husain"

" Wake up, walk bravely and show me your swords

The Imam needs you, so sleep no more."

Marsiya n. 4: A Baby is Slaughtered

The Slaughter of a Baby: Most Revered Ali Asghar (‘a)

("Banu ke sheerquar ko haftum se pyaas hai")

Banu's son has had no water for days

His pulse is weak and his mother prays

No hope in sight of getting water or milk

Helpless, she lingers by his cradle in a daze

"Pray tell me, what shall I do now Ya Husain?

The baby's eyes now roll back in pain"

"Oh Ya Ali, Ya Ali where can I go?

I cannot watch my baby suffer so

How do I find a way to make him lives

Ya Ali he needs water, that I cannot give"

" Last night I saw him open his eyes

But today he lays still, doesn't move, doesn't cry"

Then everyone said, "Lets call the Imam

For God's sake somebody, go get the Imam

The baby is dying, go tell the Imam

His face is blue, his body calm"

"Taking Alder's body to lay it to rest

The Imam is on his way, with grief beset"

His face stained with the blood of His 18 year old

The Imam entered, His head bowed

And everyone led Him to the baby's crib

And showed Him the baby's still fingers and toes

"He barely breathes Oh Noble Prince" they cried

"Sometimes you would think he had already died"

At the head of the crib, the Prince knelt down

in the baby's ear He whispered, head bowed

Hearing the Prince's voice, the baby smiled

Toward Husain he extended his arms and glowed

"It's a miracle my father," Sakina cried

"Oh mother, my brother has opened his eyes"

The baby in His arms, the Prince left the camp

And Death followed, eyeing them askance

To shelter her baby from the midday sun

The mother draped a sheet over the Imam's arms

Holding Asghar close, Husain walked, head bowed

in the arms of the heavens, a snow white cloud

As He neared the lowly enemy, Husain paused

Couldn't ask for water, couldn't utter the words

with embarrassment He paled and His body tensed

So He removed the sheet from the baby's face

Head bowed, he said, "I've brought my son to you

Seeking water Asghar now has come to you"

Then He kissed His baby's parched lips and looked

And whispered "My son I've said what I could

There is nothing else to say now Oh my son

maybe you can show them your dry, parched tongue"

And the baby obeyed, licked his lips dry

And Husain shuddered and looked up to the skies

And as Husain looked to the heavens so

The cursed Hurmula strung an arrow in his bow

And aimed the arrow at Asghar's throat

Pulling taut the bow, let the arrow go

As the tiny neck the arrow gashed

Asghar lurched and clung to his dad

A six month baby and an arrows force

Blood poured from the tiny, thirsty throat

Once more he lurched and then went still

His cap fell to the ground and he breathed his last

The tiny fists curled over his chest, body numb

A minute ago he was sucking his thumbs

And the desolate Father, watched His son

saw the devastation the enemy's arrow had done

And watched the baby in the throes of death

The tiny hands groping at the injured neck

The lifeless eyes rolling back in the head

Blood gushing forth from the battered neck

Gently pulling out the arrow from the neck

Husain lifted His son toward the heaven and said

"My God please accept my last sacrifice

For your cause, in your path, my son is now dead"

"Little in age but magnanimous in deeds

Thus are the children of Allah's creed"

Marsiya n. 5: An Eighteen Year Old Soldier

Husain’s Eighteen Year old Soldier: Most Revered Ali Akbar (‘a)

("Daulat koi dunya mein pisar se nahin behtar")

No greater wealth than your children in this world

No greater peace than their peace in this world

just as no better flavor than a freshly picked fruit

Or the fragrance of a rose with dew in its swirls

Soothing your troubled heart, they make you whole

They are your comfort, they calm your troubled soul

Ask a master of the loss of a household destroyed

Ask the members of the household who can only cry

Ask a parent of the ruin the death of a child brings

Ask Husain of Akbar's parting, the answer is in his sighs

May a parent never so suffer, nor a child thus part

In the tears of a mourning parent, is the blood of a bleeding

heart

When the dastardly arrows pierced Akbar's heart

His breathing became labored and almost stopped

He thought of Husain, as he fell from his horse

And he cried out "Oh Father from you now I part"

"Pray come to this wounded son, so alone, so bruised

Come help your Ali Akbar, whom you're about to lose"

Hearing His son's cries, Husain's heart sank

His legs gave way, He dropped often to the sands

With every breath He felt He could breathe no more

"Oh Asadullah" He cried, clutched His heart in pain

With shock His face ashen, desert dust in His hair

Trembling, He rose again; blinded, He stared

He shouted "Oh Ali Akbar, which way do I comes

Do I search in the sand dunes under the blazing sun?

My heart palpitates, do I seek the enemy's help?

I will come to you, I'll find you, to me you cannot come"

"Your loss has robbed your parents of every wish to live

Me you were supposed to bury, the job to me you give"

"Alter, call out my name, ask me once more to come

Call your desolate father, call me, my precious son

Call for your isolated, your heart broken father now

Call your anxious father so that I may come"

"whatever God wills must happen, let it be, let it be

So I must be beheaded, so what, let it be"

Stumbling and falling, Husain found His injured son

Lodged in Akbar's heart was an arrow, damage done

He felt as though the arrow had pierced His own heart

He clutched at His chest, Oh Akbar, so young

He heard Akbar's labored breath, his toil to hide the pain

The son dying before His eyes, the Father watched in vain

Lips dry, ashen faced, hair matted with dust

in his eyes a distant look, his body bruised and cut

Shoulders and neck wounded with arrows and swords

Blood smeared on his face, on his cheeks tears of hurt

His lips whispering, "My master hasn't come yet

My Father isn't here and I'm so close to my death"

"Oh listen my fluttering heart, beat till He gets here

Stay Oh parting life, the Lord of Gin and men is near

Linger Oh departing soul, the Imam must come

Await Him Oh Death, do you hear?"

"It is my wish to see Him once then I may die

In His laps, in His arms, once more I wish to lie"

"I am here Ali Akbar," said Husain, "I have come"

"Get up my beloved, my dearest, lovely son

You're waiting for me, your eyes searching the battlefield

Your forlorn father is here, your wait for me is done"

"Say something Akbar, open your eyes, look at me

I'll hold you so my miserable face you can see"

"You moan in pain, in your neck an arrow is stuck

Does it hurt to moves Should I let your rest on the dust?

My world has come crashing down on me today

I've raised you in my lap, do I watch you die thus?"

"Your liver comes gushing out of your wounded chest

Through the open wounds I see your broken ribs no less"

"Oh Ali Akbar, Ali Alter, say something, talk to me

Open your eyes Ali Akbar, so my face you can see

If you're leaving, say goodbye, do not so quietly go

You must die and I live, how can it be? "

"Even tired grooms do not sleep soundly as you do

I weep for you in pain, and yet you do not move"

In his unconscious state Akbar heard Husain's cries

The obedient son opened his arms and sighed

Husain held Akbar to His chest and wept in pain

Showed the thirsty son, His own tongue, parched and dry

And said "Oh dearest Akbar, not a drop I could find

I couldn't get any water, Oh dearest son of mine"

Tears flowed from Akbar's bloodied eyes

He looked at Husain heard his father's cries

And whispered "Mother Zahra has come for me"

He took his last breath, shuddered and sighed

Eyes open toward Husain, Ali Akbar passed away

Resting in his Father's arms, nothing more did he say

Historians say that the moment Akbar died

Zainab left the camp, "Oh my Ali Akbar" she cried

Her chador now forgotten, so intense was her grief

The ladies followed her, wailing, teary eyed

The desert air echoed with their grief stricken cries

"Oh Ali Akbar, Ali Akbar" in unison they cried

"Take me to Akbar, show me where he lies

Have mercy on me, guide me, hear my painful cries

My Brother sits alone with His wounded, youthful son

Behind a cloud hides my moon, show me" Zainab cried

"In grief I'm now blinded, where must I go?

I'm searching for my son, look at my tears flow"

Hearing Zainab's cries Husain ran to her side

Covering her with His cloak, her face He tried to hide

And said "My Zainab, why did you leave the camp?

Oh daughter of Ali, dead is my joy and pride"

"Bruised with spears, he lies on the desert floor

What do you wish to see Oh Sister? Akbar is no more"

Marsiya n. 6: Qasim: The Pride and Joy

Imam Hasans Pride and Joy: Most Revered Qasim (‘a)

(" Zaqmee jo run mein Qasim a gulpayrahun hua")

When in the battle of Karbala Qasim fell from his mount

Blood soaked his garments, that became his shroud

The heavens shook with the Prophet's mournful cries

And the army's gleeful cries could be heard loud

They shouted " We've trampled the garden of Husain

Come soldiers, douse the light of Hasan's lamp"

Upon hearing the shouts, to Abbas Husain turned

And said "For Qasim now we must mourn.?

The battle is over, Qasim's fate is sealed

Death's shadow now approaches the child of Hasan"

"Call for Ali Akbar now, let us pray, let us pray

Bare headed we will pray that death be stayed"

Toward Kaaba then the imam faced

To the heavens He looked, His hands raised

And cried out "Oh my wondrous, almighty God

From the hands of the enemy may Qasim be saved"

"You are the protector of all, Oh merciful God

Save the fatherless child from the evil swords"

And everyone prayed for Qasim, Hasan's son

in grief Zainab's hair was hastily undone

And Banu’s heart trembled and wept for Qasim

And his mother cried "Tell me, how is my son?"

with shock, Abid's feverish body turned cold

And Qasim's little brother paled as fear took hold

While adults and children in the camp prayed

The army surrounded Qasim, ready to slay

Their arrows and spears blocked his way, circled him

And thousands of swords flashed in the air

His face flushed, chest ridded with wounds

Blood dripped from his body, like sweat at high noon

He leaned over his horse, weak and giddy with thirst

Then a deadly arrow his chest pierced

The evil Sheesh stabbed a spear into his heart

As Qasim fell, at his back an arrow lurched

Tariq's spear assaulted, Qasim cried out in pain

"Oh Imam, I've fallen, Oh come now dear Husain"

With Zulfiqaar in hand, Husain charged at the field

Seeing Him, the evil army trembled and keeled

In terror the soldiers scattered, their horses neighed

The killers panicked and fled, took to their heels

As the army took flight, trampled and rushed

With the hooves of a thousand horses, Qasim's was crushed

When Husain reached Qasim, what a sight He saw

His lips parched with thirst, with pain his body raw

Grief stricken Husain wrapped Qasim in His arms

Qasim's soul departed, not a breath did he draw

Husain gathered Qasim's body, the limbs crushed, torn

Marked with hooves the body of the thirteen year old

Marsiya n. 7: The Brother and Standard Bearer

Imam Husain’s Beloved Brother and Standard Bearer of the Army: Most Revered Abbas ibn Ali (‘a)

("Jab Ibne Bu Turaab ba rue zameen gira" )

When to the ground the son of Abu Turaab fell

With arms severed, the brave warrior fell

And the banner he held fell with him to the ground

And Fatima cried out as he lay still

"Any moment now, behead him they will

A living symbol of Ali, surely they will kill"

The Prince heard the cry, to the battlefield He ran

In His haste, He stumbled falling often to the sands

His legs trembled, He grabbed His young son's arm

And cried "O Akbar, lead the way in this new land"

"Pray, move the crowding army from the river barks

Lead me to my brother, the delay I cannot stand"

"Oh Akbar, my life is ruined alas

My back is broken, this pain shall never pass

It's as though I've lost my Father once again

Oh the pain, like a knife, cuts right through my heart"

"Condolences to my Father, turn me toward Najaf

And let go my hands so I can mourn thus"

Akbar led Husain to His brother's side

And Husain saw that Abbas was ready to die

But hearing Husain's wails, Abbas opened his eyes

Akbar showed Husain the severed arms by his side

Seeing the severed arms, Husain fell to the ground

And hugged His brother, looking helplessly around

And Abbas stirred and opened his eyes

And cried, "Oh my Lord, have I lost my sight?

Why don't I see you, where are you Oh my Lord”

Husain said, "My brother in your stead I will die"

"Look at my plight, as you depart from me

This parting of brothers, how can it be? "

"Your beloved Sakina waits for you by the camps

And the thirsty children surround her, holding hands

And Sakina counsels them patience and says

"Look at Ali Asghar, toward the door his glance"

"For three days there's no water in the camps

My Ammu will come soon from the river banks"

But Abbas answered, "My Imam I depart

It is my will though that once I've passed

Please leave my body on the shores of Furat

Here will be my grave, that's a wish of my heart"

"Do not carry my body back to the camps

Hyder's son will stay forever on the banks."

"May I make another wish, Oh my beloved Lord?

I wish the ladies not leave their abode

And Sakina not see my injured body so

And a last dying wish grant to me my God"

"That your presence, Oh Imam illumine my grave

And your cloak be my shroud, it's a wish I crave"

So Husain draped Abbas in His cloak

"Are you happy my brother?" He asked tear soaked

" But the army will rob you of this cloak tonight

You won't have it for long, such is destiny's stroke"

"The enemy will loot everything tonight

Without chadors, our women will caulk in daylight"

Hearing this Abbas shuddered and opened his eyes

On the Imam's feet he rested his sight

In the throes of death, then he glanced at Husain

Dread at Husain’s words now in his dying eyes

Then Abbas went still as Husain watched

A brother lost his life as a brother watched

Marsiya n. 8: The Prophet’s Grandson

The Prophet’s Grandson: Most Revered Imam Husain (‘a)

("Jab qaatema ba qaer hue foj a Shah kaa" )

When the army of the Prince was no more

Thirsty, it had departed to Kausar's shores

His friends murdered, His family destroyed

The home of the Prophet was plundered to the core

No brother or friend or loved ones remained

Two sisters to mourn, and there was Husain

Earlier in the day, sons and friends were around

But by the afternoon, everyone was gone

The sun blazed, wind blew, the desert scorched

The tents flapped with a desolate sound

Husain was surrounded, alone in His pain

A commander but no army, all had been slain

"Why delay oh Death" in misery He asked

"Why must I live after Alder has passed?

Every moment feels like a lifetime to me

Only in Death will my pain pass"

"I should have died when Akbar was killed

I should've been beheaded, that is my will"

"Yet I remain, I live, after everyone has died

Alone I shed tears with no one by my side

Enduring the loss of my sons in this war

In my old age to bury them, to struggle and cry

"No son by me when I succumb to death

No support if I stumble, no place whereon to rest"

He glanced at Akbar's body on the desert sand

He clutched His chest and cried out in pain

"Oh Akbar you rest, your hair on the dust strewn

Come help me, I am falling, rise from Death's daze"

"In Death's slumber you forget your father my son

Say your Namaz (Salat) alongside under the blazing sun"

"From the banks of the Furat, Abbas come to me

My wounds burn with the heat, I'm thirsty, come see

Sprinkle on my body, water if you can find

I'm dying, say goodbye, come to me, come to me"

"In death you sleep soundly, what can Shabeer say?

May no one be as wretched as me I pray'

"Since you've left, every bone inside me hurts

My brow, neck, eyes, my joints, and head hurts

My heart, back, chest, every muscle is full of pain

Distraught I am my son, every vein within me hurts"

"I've battled a thousand soldiers, I'm soaked in blood

Young ones I've buried, with pain my heart floods"

Impatiently Saad's son addressed the army thus

"Come on brave soldiers, surround Husain we must"

They turned toward Husain, attacked and besieged

Thousands bearing arrows, armed with swords the rest

midst archers, stone throwers, Husain stood alone

Spears flashed in the sun, thousands against one

Surrounded by the massive army, all alone

Spears and swords charged, He stood all alone

Arrows inflicted fatal blows, Husain was all alone

Target of a thousand blows, Husain was all alone

in the gloom of Shaam's army, like the moon His Being

glowed

The world had turned against Him, toward Him its fury

flowed

Alas the wretched army knew not a Sayyid's worth

They pierced His noble body with arrows and spears

Aiming at Him their swords, they sought to massacre Him

They circled, surrounded Him, each seeking to kill him first

These were the Prophet's followers, they attacked His own

Grandson

Your Imam was unaided under the scorching sun

Husain fell from His horse, no friend to aid His descent

No one to pull the arrows from His riddled chest

His friends and loved ones dead, Husain now all alone

Weak with thirst and hunger, nowhere to go, no rest

Facing a treacherous army, drowning in their flood

in every face around Him, a hunger to spill His blood

It felt as though the heavens fell to the earth that day

Wounded the son of Fatima, on His horse swayed

The in um of the universe, the Prophet's dear Grandson

Precariously He swayed and fell to the earth that day

Oh the thousand bruises on His body as He fell!

Imagine the pain and hurt when to the sands He fell!

Fizza took the news to the ladies within

"The Imam is surrounded Oh what a sin"

Hearing this Abid stood up from his bed and fell

in panic the ladies ran out into the din

With Zainab's cries heaven and earth quaked

Stumbling she ran into the field, her eyes seeking Husain

" Where is my brother? " She cried, running every way

"All's wealth is lost, plundered here today

Show me the way to the river, take me to the battlefield

Show me where my Brother lies, wounded, show me pray'

"The heavens are no help, let me pass Oh blessed earth

I've come searching for Husain, wounded, alone, He hurts"

"I'm Syeda have mercy, help me find the way to Him

I'm Ali's daughter help me, save yourself from sin

May you live happily, find peace after death

Show me where the Sayyid lies, pray take me to Him"

"We've lost everyone, we're ruined in this new land

We're residents of Medina, against thousands today we

stand"

Then she heard Husain's groans, sensed her Brother near

And Zainab ran to where a the sound came clear

She watched in disbelief as Shimer beheaded Husain

She covered her face, fell to the earth, in shock and fear

With grief her heart shattered, she silently prayed

The severed head of her Brother, she saw on a spear raised.

Marsiya n. 9: A Visit to the Prisoners of War

Hind, Wife of the Cursed Yazid Visits the Prisoners of War

(" Qaid qaane mein talatum hai ke Hind aatee hai" )

The prisoners are informed that Hind is on her way

Beset with humiliation is Zainab's state

Agitated, distraught, embarrassed, distressed

Beside herself with grief, she cries out her prayers

"Unyielding the earth, distant the sky

Come pray Oh ladies that I rather die"

"What must I do now in this moment of sham

Save me from humiliation in Akbar's name

Make a circle around me, conceal me in your midst

Hide me in a corner, away from such disdain"

"I'm bare headed, no chador, hide me you must

Hind is coming, cover me with the prison's dust"

"At Hind's arrival, why mustn't I be dismayed?

I'm the daughter of Ali, now in prison I stay

The prison walls I wish would part, wrap me within

Or escape to Karbala, where my dear Brother lays"

"In the desert of Karbala, I will feel no disgrace

Un shrouded is my Brother, uncovered my face"

Then Fizza cried out "My Lady, I see her now'

"With glory and fanfare Hind comes, people bow

Her maids in chador, yet Hind's head is bare

Accompanied by guards, the trumpets play loud"

"Her pace is unhurried, she pauses often times

Frequently she stops to weep at the prison sights"

Hind cries "At the prisoners' sobs, I'm distraught"

"Their wails of `Yaa Husain' with pain are fraught

who killed their leader, why do these prisoners weep?

Was he a Sayyid? Tell me, keep from me not"

"My heart is burdened, I weep in pain

I see Fatima, bare headed in grief, complain"

"I am certain a terrible wrong has been done

The angels grieve, grieve the moon and the sun

I must go to Najaf, I find no peace these days

Only Ali can help me, he is the one"

"If all is well, my Maula sleeps in peace

if not, then restless in his grave, he weeps"

Just then Hind's entourage drew closer in

And saw a Noble Youth bound in chains, laying still

Gaunt and withered for lack of water or food

His face and body bruised with spears and whips

As He quivers with weakness starvation brings

A rattling is heard from His shackles and chains

The royal maidens turned to Hind and cried

"In this dark prison, He glows like a light

Engrossed in prayer, He's oblivious to us all

Why imprison Him.? He most certainly will die"

"Who bound Him in shackles, ropes and chains?

To Maula Ali He's related we're certain Oh Hind"

Hind approached the imam in great distress

moving the chains, her head on His feet she placed

"Who is it?" He called and Hind replied

"A servant of Shabeer, my salaam to you I say"

"Oh Prisoner its time to state Your last will

You're close to death, are You prepared still?"

"Your last will 1 will honor, do not fret Oh dying one

I'll walk with Your coffin, barefoot under the sun

Pray tell me about You, tell me Your name"

He replied "For forty more years live I must"

"You can call me a captive, a helpless soul

I'm a prisoner in shackles, I'm ill, such is my lore"

"What ails You?" She asked "Orphan hood" He replied

"The cures" Hind inquired "His mourning" He cried

"And Your homes" asked Hind, "Nowhere" said the imam

"Your caretaker?" She asked "Oblivion" He replied

Hind asked Him the reason for His mournful sighs

He showed her the bruises on His back in reply

"Why do they punish You so?" Hind cried

"Not a faulty deed have I done," He replied

Hind then asked, "Since when are You so chained"

"It was the 10th' of Muharram when they bound me" He

sighed

"For my shroud I own not a piece of cloth

My Father's body I've left on the sands, burning hot"

Hind then turned toward Zainab and cried

"Looks like Fatima in prison, Oh what a plight"

She then stared at Banu, and in amazement said

"It's a princess from Iran in prison, what a sight"

"I'm speechless at the sights I have seen today"

"Kulthum and Zainab in prison.? Oh what a day'

Zainab cried "Oh Hind, do not mention these names"

"Would such ladies be in prison? Imagine the shame"

"Of Fatima's daughters, do not so speak

"Hold your speech, seek pardon in Allah's name"

"with reverence of whom the Prophet did speak

Will the Muslims capture them, their chadors steal?"

"The Lady who was buried in the dark of the night

Bare headed her daughters would roam in daylight?

Of whom the Prophet spoke highly, with love

The Muslims will loot and with them they will fight?"

"Oh Hind, in public the kin of Muhammad parade

The heavens didn't fall and the earth didn't quakes"

Horrified, in distress, Hind fell on Zainab's feet

"Pray forgive me" She cried, "Do not sit still"

"Behead me for speaking with such disrespect"

"Curse me," Hind cried "Of me speak ill"

"When I mention Shabeer's name, you weep in pain

When I ask your names, you bow your heads in shame."

Marsiya n. 10: A Beloved Daughter

The Imam’s Beloved Daughter: Most Reveled Sakina (‘a)

(" Bevon kaa mulke Shaam mein jis dum guzar hua" )

When in Shaam the caravan of widows arrived

In embarrassment they bowed their heads and cried

Seeing the spectators lined up on the streets

Tears of humiliation filled their eyes

Having trailed through the roads, shops and streets

The Queens reached the court of the infamous Yazid

There Yazid conversed with Abid at length

Hearing Abid's responses, the attendees wept

Disgraced, Yazid brought the confrontation to a close

Enraged at Sajjad's character and strength

while all spectators went back to their homes

To prison the kin of the Prophet went on

In the dark prison, they sat heads bowed

Frightened of the darkness, Sakina looked around

So exhausted was Abid from His journeys on foot

He dropped to the floor without a sound

Many nights He had stayed up, many miles He had walked

He slept now, resting His ahead on the wall

"why is it so dark" Sakina wanted to know

"What place is this mother, where no air flows?

The darkness is smothering, I can't see a thing

Not the earth beneath or the sky above"

"We cannot stay here, no one will survive

Won't lamps be lit when evening arrives?"

"If it stays this dark, I will certainly not last

I'm convinced that this night will not pass

My Father would cradle me on his chest at night

Now sleep on the dirt? I cannot alas"

"If a lamp blew out, I'd wake with a start

Have I ever, Oh Mother, slept in the dark"

Her mother replied, wiping Sakina's tears

"Hush my little one, lest the guards hear

Morning will come soon, the dark will be gone

The moon will illumine this place my dear"

"The breeze will flow, the night will cool down

I'll hold you in my arms, rest Oh little one"

Thus the mother consoled, cajoled and calmed

The girl was restless, the night stretched on

Sakina sobbed and wept through the night

Weary she curled up in her mother's arms

Her frail body weak and drowsy, she slept

And Banu held Sakina in her arms and wept

Within moments Sakina was restless again

She dreamt of her Father, His presence she felt

Stretching wide her arms, she woke with a start

And peered in the darkness, her eyes seeking Him

She cried "Oh Mother, not a thing I can see

My Father was here, tell me where is Hue"

Everyone wept at Sakina's state

And so did the prison guard, hiding his face

And Yazid learned of Sakina's distress

That she's crying for her Father, for Him she prays

Inconsolable she weeps, nothing calms her down

She wants her Father, she wants Him now

"Then take His head" Yazid ordered his men

And Husain's severed head was carried thence

Its glory and radiance lighting the path

Fragrant and glorious Its noble presence

Sensing the approach, the prisoners hastily rose

impatiently Sakina waited by the door

Anxious to see Him, smiling through her tears

The air grew fragrant as His head drew near

With His halo the prison aura transformed

Gone with the gloom was Sakina's fear

In reception the prisoners lined up at the door

in respect and salutation Abid arose

To receive her Father, Sakina held out her dress

And hugged His head close to her chest

She kissed His forehead, His cheeks, His lips

The prisoners circled her in awe and respect

Where Zainab stood hair strewn, head bare

Husain's glance was affixed to her face

Holding her Father's severed head

Sakina sat on the floor and said

Words of love, of her loss, her pain

Then unconscious she was, close to death

Her face resting on her Father's face

She sighed, shuddered and took her last breath

Her silence at first gave no one alarm

For everyone thought she was feeling calm

But as the silence stretched, the mother said

"Wake up dear Sakina, pass the head to you Aunt"

Hearing no response, terror filled Banu’s heart

"She's fainted" said everyone, "Banu take heart"

Banu lifted Sakina into her arms

Saw the lifeless limbs, eyes shut, face calm

Neck limp, face drooping to her chest, not a sound

"what is this?" She cried, "What is this now?"

"What healer do I consult, where do I go?

The prison door is locked my dear, what do I do?"

She fanned Sakina's chest, lifting her shirt

"Pray my lady," she turned to Zainab and urged

She called out for Abid to come to her aid

"Come here my Son, Your sister won't stir"

"I'm trying to rouse her, I see no response

She's passed out I gather, but her breathing has stopped"

Feeling her pulse Abid moaned and tensed

And the mother cried "I have no more strength"

"Yet I'll face the truth, do not hide from me Son"

Abid replied "Dear mother, she is dead"

"Lay her down on the sand, let her rest

Her body is bruised, yet she's peaceful in death"

"In this dark prison my daughter is dead"

Banu cried "This death I will never forget"

And Fizza went to the prison door and asked

The guards for a lamp for the house of the dead

"No one keeps a body laying so in the dark

Yet our little girl lies in the prison night black"

With the light of dawn, the prison was lit

And Banu bent over Sakina and looked

Saw the bruised ears, dried blood on her neck

Her dress blood stained, tattered and burnt

Pale and gaunt, resting on the prison floor

Hair laden with dust, crying no more

"My dearest" She cried, "Wake up now

Its time for Namaz (Salat), your head you must bow

"You've never needed my help to wake up before

You'd wake on your own, what's happened now?"

"You know the guards' fury, do not so doze

This isn't home Sakina, they'll come to the door"

"The darkness troubled you, you couldn't rest

You'd pray for a breeze, you'd get upset

The breeze from heaven gill cool you tonight

in your new home Sakina my dear, sleep well"

"I hope you find comforts you couldn't find here

The grave is roomier than this prison my dear"

Marsiya n. 11: The Return to the Plains of Karbala

Most Reverred Zainab (‘a) Returns to Karbala Chehlum

[1]

("Chehlum jo Karbala mein bahattar ka ho chuka")

The Chehlum for seventy two martyrs was done

And the bodies and the heads had finally become one

And Husain's slain army was remembered by all

And the children of Muhammad lamented His son

For three days and nights in the desert they mourned

Embracing His tomb as though never to be torn

Hearts lit like candles, their love for Him bloomed

Their sons, like flowers, scattered around His tomb

Remembering those killed, they cried out in grief

And clutched at their hearts and in pain swooned

" Where are those who would protect us?" they cried

"Now we wander, heads bare in broad daylight"

The air fraught with sobs as the widows wept

And the Noble Sister's face on His tomb did rest

And cried "Oh my beloved brother dear Husain

For three days and nights I've been Your guest"

"Heartbroken and forlorn is this Prophet's grandchild

For my services You didn't accept, what a plight"

"The will of the imam, I will gladly accept

But the bruises on my arms I haven't shown You yet

I am alone today, no friend in sight

Without You I am nothing, how can You forget?"

"I've lost sons and brothers and You in this war

my back is bruised with the tip of the spear"

"I cared for the orphans, the fathers lay dead

Their frail ages and captivity, the pain and the dread

To divert them from their misery, I narrated your tale

I was their mother, their aunt, or their father instead"

"And I will live on to see them suffer and die

For it is not my destiny to see beloveds thrive"

" I had imagined pilgrims surrounding Your tomb

And the throng of the angels had lifted the gloom

And in Your memorial, we would all gather here

Yet I see not a soul, I am here alone"

" By your graveside I sit my Brother, and weep

And console my heart though my pain is deep"

Saying this, Zainab inconsolable, sobbed

And the tomb of the Prince shuddered and rocked

And Basheer approached the Prince's son and said

"Oh Imam shall we leaves Your aunt is distraught"

And Abid toward His Aunt did turn

And asked "Dear Aunt shall we return."

And Zainab replied, "As you wish dear Imam"

The preparations to leave for Medina began

The tents were untied and the camels lined up

And around the graves gathered Ali's clan

Bidding farewell to those who slept in their graves

The old and the young stood around in a daze

At the thought of leaving her Brother's tomb

Distraught, Zainab cried " How can I leave You along

In this forsaken desert away from us all

This empty, desolate city now Your home"

"where nothing grows and nothing lives

Such a place You've chosen to gather and rest"

"Oh Noble Lord of Karbala, farewell

Oh the sands that cradle His shroud, farewell

Dear grave of the noble, lofty Prince, farewell

My Brother Your sister departs now, farewell"

"This Prophet's grandchild is unfortunate indeed

For You're not pleased with her deeds"

"How do I face Medina having left You herd

What if the Prophet questions, how can I bear?

If I go to Najaf, the same question I will face

`Where is Husain?' That is all I will hear"

"You've asked me to leave, so how can I stay?

But where must I go, where must I stay?"

"won't You come, hold my hand as I alight?

Won't You shelter me from strangers' sights?

Won't Abbas or Alder come to bid me farewell?

Won't You bring Asghar for whom Banu cries?"

"You're our leader come lead us ahead

we're ready, yet You sleep, the grave Your bed"

"Although I weep and call out Your name

You do not answer Oh Prince, I'm amazed

if only You would embrace me now

I will leave for Medina, though never the same"

The Prince then answered "My dear Zainab farewell

Give my love to Soghra, my daughter who is ill"

Note

[1]The word "Chehlum" or “Arba’in” in Arabic,denotes the traditional memorial held on the 40th day after death.

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