The Holy Drama

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Preface

From my childhood I remember the beginning of the month of Muharram, when my mother wore black to honour the martyrdom of Imām ʿḤuseyn. People in my city, Kerman, as in other cities, held mourning rites during the ten days from the first to the tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, to commemorate the death of Imām ʿḤuseyn. Their houses were thrown open to the public. The city was decorated with black cloths and banners. Many people dressed in black to show their commitment to Shiism and their fidelity to Imām ʿḤuseyn. Others would make vows to distribute sweets and sherbet among the poor or to the people on the streets, and believed that they received God’s grace for doing so. Sheep were sacrificed and the meat distributed among the needy, people cooked food and gave it to those who came to their door. Those who received the food treated it as a sanctified gift.

Finally, the tenth of Muharram dawns. People gather on the streets and in the bazaars through which the many processions to mourn the martyrdom of Imām ʿḤuseyn will pass. The sounds of drums, cymbal and clarinet announce that the first procession is coming. As a child, on hearing the music, I would hurry outside, curious to watch the procession. At the head of each procession are several men carrying banners. They are followed by the musicians, and then the procession itself. The taʿziya director walks along with the procession and reads elegies for the martyrs of Karbalā. He carries a copy (nuskha) of the script to read. He both directs the procession and stimulates the audience to lamentation and mourning. There is a harmony between the musicians, the procession, and the people who stand on both sides of the street or bazaar, crying and beating their chests and heads.

The procession carries various flags and banners in black or green, on which the names of Imām ʿḤuseyn and his family are sewn. There are some cross-shaped banners, called ‘alam. They are large and very heavy and are decorated with specific signs: green and coloured cloths, bronze pigeons and bronze hands. A young man rests the ‘alam in a holster on his belt, and
others help him. When he arrives at an open space in the middle of the bazaar, the tone of the music changes and he begins whirling slowly. The people step back to give him more space to whirl. It is very important that the ‘alam does not fall. That would be a bad omen.

Alongside each procession walks a youth carrying rose water, which he sprinkles on the spectators. Another youth carries water or sherbet and distributes it among the people. It may take hours for all the processions to pass through the bazaar. The procession group may eventually arrive at a large house, or an open space prepared as a theatre, where they perform the taʿziya, but in my childhood in Kerman and other large cities this was rare. At noon the members of the procession go to the houses to which they have been invited, taking blessings and honouring the landlord.

I also have a memory of a taʿziya play being performed in Mahan, a small district in Kerman province. Close to the tomb of the master of the Nematollahi order, Shāh Nematollāh Vali, a crowd gathers. They stand in a circle and from either side the antagonists and protagonists ride in on their horses, swords in hand. The protagonists recite the elegies of Imām Ḥuseyn, and the antagonists answer them. Then they fight, and those representing Imām Ḥuseyn and his companions are killed. At that moment, a man wearing a lion dress enters the arena, pouring dust and straw on his head. He is followed by several camels bearing litters, and young boys seated in each. As they enter, the people lament loudly, for they represent Imām Ḥuseyn’s family being carried into captivity.

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**Studies on Persian Passion Play**

Despite the fundamental importance of passion play (ta’ziya) in Iranian cultural patterns, studies on the topic have been limited. More research on the topic is necessary to fully explicate how deeply ta’ziya has influenced Iranians’ senses and thought.

Scholarly research on passion play commenced with the publishing of Peter J. Chelkowski’s 1971 article ‘Dramatic and Literary Aspects of Ta’ziya-khāni-Iranian Passion Play’. Notably, this piece offers a general and clear overview of various aspects of ta’ziya performance, such as its historical development, players, place of performance and its decorations, and its embedded narrative and mystical elements.\(^1\) Ṣādiq Humāyūni published another study on ta’ziya in 1975 entitled Ta’ziya va ta’ziya-khāni. Aside from addressing the historical roots of passion play, this book examines the text, instruments and characteristics of the players. Also of significance, it contains the following ta’ziyas, in addition to several medieval manuscripts of ta’ziya texts: ta’ziya of Qāsem, ta’ziya of ‘Abbās, ta’ziya of Imām Rezā and ta’ziya hazrat-e Ma’ṣūma.\(^2\) The first two illustrate the tragic events that happened in Karbalā.

Another scholar, Mahmoud Ayoub, explores how ta’ziya performance and the conceptualization of Ḥuseyn’s death have been derived from the traditions later attributable to the Prophet in his work *Redemptive Suffering in Islam* (1978). Such Prophetic traditions are used to show that the angels informed the Prophet about Ḥuseyn’s cruel death in order to promote a sense of legitimate leadership amongst the audience. Ayoub further elaborates the latent effects of ta’ziya on the Shiite Iranians. For instance, Shiites actively participate in ta’ziya to receive heavenly rewards. Their act guarantees their eternal life in Paradise. Ayoub also examines the growth and expansion of ta’ziya performance in various periods. He describes the places, instruments and their symbolic meanings, and the audience’s reactions. The importance of lamentation poetry (marātī) and its development in regards to the motives related to Ḥuseyn’s death is another subject that is dealt with in his book. Ayoub shows how the Shiite Muslims treat Ḥuseyn’s tomb as a sacred sanctuary (ḥaram).\(^3\)
In 1979, an invaluable collection of articles on the topic under the title of *Ta’ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran*, edited by Chelkowski, was published. As the outcome of a symposium organized by the Shiraz Festive of Arts in the summer of 1976, the book deals with yet another aspect of *ta’ziya*: its origin, method of performance and symbolic meaning of the instruments, cultural dimensions, and its roots among Iranians before Islam. The literary and musical progression of *ta’ziya*, as well as its philosophy, are studied. Several articles are dedicated to addressing the extent to which Western-style theatre is influenced by *ta’ziya*.

Moreover, Chelkowski published an article in 1984 titled ‘Islam in Modern Drama and Theater,’ in which he illustrates various theatrical plays in Iran such as *naqqāli, rūhowzi, kheyma šab-bāzi* and *rowza-khāni*. Chelkowski enriches this study with analysis of the development of written drama in Iran and the Middle East in conjunction with the social changes surrounding theatre. He goes on to explain various aspects of several rare *ta’ziyas*; namely, *Dhekr-e Muṣibat-e bar dār kardan-e Maṇṣūr-e Ḥallāj rahmatullāh aleyh* (a remembrance of the tragedy of Ḥallāj on the gallows ‘God blesses him’). In 1985, the journal *Drama Review* published yet another article on *ta’ziya* by Chelkowski entitled ‘Shia Muslim Processional Performances.’ In it, he sketches the development of *ta’ziya* performance from its Buyid dynastic beginnings (352/963), to the victory of the Islamic Revolution (1357/1979). Chelkowski also discusses various paraphernalia, such as *nakhl* or horses, prepared for performances, as well as places where *ta’ziya* has been performed, including open and enclosed areas, streets, and *tekkiya*. In 1986, Chelkowski published two articles in *al-Šerāt* magazine. In the first, entitled ‘Popular Shī’ī Mourning Ritual,’ he discusses ritual performance in the Middle East in Arab, Persian, Turkish and South Asian Muslim communities. In the second, ‘From Maqāṭīl Literature to Drama,’ Chelkowski illustrates how Husayn’s death is depicted in *ta’ziya* texts written by Arab composers. At the end of this article the author offers a translation from a *ta’ziya* entitled The Martyrdom of the Luminous Leader of the Bani Hāšem, Ḥaẓrat-e Abū ’l-Faḍl al-Abbās.

Michael M.J. Fischer’s *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution* (1980) sheds light on the political conflict over passion play performance between several Iranian intellectuals and modern Shiite *‘ulamā* such as Khomeini and Ahmad Kasravi. The author mentions that in the city of Yazd, several objects, such as a mirrored *nakhl*, are carried as symbols of Husayn’s martyrdom and the captivity of his family. In three small villages outside of the city, parades represent Ḥuseyn’s martyrdom. He further draws a compari-
son between the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers, and the Qur'anic story and ta'ziya texts, with the intention of showing that, for the Shiites, the concepts of sacrifice and suffering have a deep meaning. Fischer additionally discusses 'Āšūrā from historical and ethnographical perspectives in order to demonstrate how these events and their consequences have evolved into a remedy for social problems.9

A scholarly article written by Mary Hegland titled ‘Two Images of Ḫuseyn: Accommodation and Revolution in an Iranian Village’ (1983) is also worth mentioning. Poignantly, she stresses the influence of Ḫuseyn’s martyrdom on the formation and victory of the Islamic Revolution. She assesses that the Shiites of Iran believe in Ḫuseyn's intercession on the Day of Judgement. According to Hegland, Ḫuseyn’s death at Karbalā becomes a focal point during the Islamic Revolution and, moreover, Ḫuseyn became the archetype of protest against the tyrannical Umayyad caliph Yazid, which Iranians sought to emulate. Furthermore, the author describes how the passive concept of hope for intercession shifted to active protest against the Pahlavi regime. In other words, every one aspired to the ideal, inspired by Ḫuseyn, of bravely standing up to a totalitarian regime.10

Moreover, Šādiq Humāyūni published a scholarly work in 1989 titled Taʿziya dar Iran (Taʿziya in Iran). He discusses a wide range of topics including, but not limited to, the history of taʿziya and its roots, how taʿziya developed in Iran and how it declined. The writer asserts that aristocracy is the main reason for the destruction of taʿziya. He gives valuable information about different types of taʿziya, the composers, and how both Iranians and foreigners discussed taʿziya. Humāyūni writes about the instruments that are used in taʿziya, the copies, and the order of reciting taʿziya during performance, and the famous taʿziya reciters (taʿziya-khān) and the place of taʿziya performance. The book contains a large number of taʿziyas, such as taʿziya of Abbās, taʿziya of Imām Rezā, taʿziya of ‘Ali Akber, taʿziya of Qāniqā-e shāh-e farang (Qāniqā the king of a foreign country). The book is illustrated with a considerable number of photographs and manuscripts.11 Another commendable body of research has been produced by David Pinault. In his study The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community (1992), he hones in on a particular aspect of Shiism within the context of the taʿziya ritual in India.12 One of Pinault’s articles entitled ‘Zaynab bint ‘Ali and the place of the Women of the Households of the First Imāms in Shiite Devotional Literature,’ published in 1998, is another attempt to get a handle on the topic, in which he asserts Zeynab’s protest in the court of Yazid after the battle of Karbalā provided a model of activism for Iranian women during
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The Revolution. He goes on to explain how Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter and Ḥusayn’s mother, has become a role model for Iranian women.13

In 1993, Johan G.J. ter Haar published an invaluable article on passion play performance in Iran under the heading ‘Ta’ziyeh: Ritual Theater from Shi’ite Iran.’14 Lāla Taqiyān additionally provides the reader with general information about Iranian ta’ziya and theatre in her 1995 book Dar bāra-ye ta’ziya va te’ ātr dar Iran (About Ta’ziya and Theatre in Iran). In 1998, Šādiq Humāyūni published a brief survey on the historical origins and development of ta’ziya in Iran called Šīrāz khāstgāh-e ta’ziya (Shiraz, the Original Home of Ta’ziya).15

The Administrative and Social History of the Qajar Period [The Story of My Life] (1997) by Abdullāh Mostowfī is an autobiographical chronicle of ta’ziya performance during the Qājār period. Mostowfī conveys how Nāṣer al-Din Shah changed the commemoration of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom into a rationale based on pleasure and ostentatious luxury throughout the course of his reign. The author mentions that ta’ziya composers put in a great deal of effort, more to mobilize their audience than develop the plot. He describes the appearance of protagonists and antagonists, the role of Muʿīn al-Bukā’in (‘coordinator of weeping’), the stage, and the parade of more than 200 camels before Nāṣer al-Din Shah. Mostofi also provides an account of a ta’ziya that was performed in the house of Ezzat al-Dowlah, the sister of Nāṣer al-Din Shah.16 Significantly, it demonstrates that the religious aspects of ta’ziya performance were not of great importance to the Shah.

Kamran Scot Aghaie published a scholarly work in 2004 entitled Martyrs of Karbalā: Shi’i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran, in which he illustrates how what occurred in Karbalā has transformed from a historical event into a symbolic paradigm and has been used in various time periods in the form of ta’ziya ritual to legitimize the state. The Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) is an exception in this regard, as it tried to suppress ta’ziya performance in order to restrict its political influence. Importantly, Aghaie discusses how ta’ziya served the political purpose of the Qājārs, who ruled between 1796 and 1925, and the 1979 Islamic Republic of Iran. In particular, the Qājār elites participated in ta’ziya performance, which essentially represented their integration with the indigenous people. In other words, ta’ziya served as a social bond, one that connected them to society. Conversely, the Islamic Republic created a religious identity from the ta’ziya rituals to motivate the common people to overthrow the secular Pahlavi regime; later, the same rituals were used to mobilize youth to fight in the war against Iraq between 1980 and 1988.17
A collection of articles about passion plays was recently published in *The Drama Review Journal* (2005). As an introduction, Rebecca Ansary Petty offers a translation of a *ta'ziya* titled ‘The martyrdom of Hussein Ta'ziyeh dar Khour.’ The rest of the articles in this volume cover a wide range of topics: Sadiq Humayuni’s article ‘A View from the Inside, the Anatomy of the Persian Ta'ziyeh Plays’ deals with the poetry, music, place and performance of *ta'ziya*. Acting Styles and Actor Training in Ta'ziyeh’ by William O. Beeman and Mohammad B. Ghaftari examines the artistic skills required from *ta'ziya* players. For instance, a player is expected to know how to fight, run, and perform other athletic movements while singing. Additionally, they consider the influence of *ta'ziya* on modern media such as Hollywood films. Peter Chelkowski, in his article ‘From the Sun-Scorched Desert of Iran to the Beaches of Trinidad: Ta'ziyeh’s Journey from Asia to the Caribbean,’ studies how *ta'ziya* performance migrated from Iran to India. More specifically, he concentrates on explaining *nakhl*: meaning its production process, and the symbolic meanings of objects associated with it. Chelkowski shows various developments of *ta'ziya* from India to the Caribbean, where *ta'ziya* has become both a symbol of pan-Indian unity and the community of Indians.

Another informative contemporary text on *ta'ziya* is Negar Mottahedeh’s ‘Karbalā Drag Kings and Queens.’ Here, she observes the role of gender in *ta'ziya* performance, which, in turn, leads to an important discourse on national identity. Mottahedeh claims *ta'ziya* performance differs amongst Iranian Twelver Shiite in Iran and its neighbouring countries, and that through studying *ta'ziya*, one may understand the concept of Otherness in respect to Iranians.

Another collection of articles (2005) is *The Women of Karbalā: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam* edited by Kamran Scot Aghaie. The book is illustrated and divided into two parts. In the first part, the articles focus on Iran. The second part deals with the Arab world, South Asia, and the United States of America. In her article ‘Ta'ziyeh: A Twist of History in Everyday Life,’ Negar Mottahedeh argues how the gender dynamics of *ta'ziya* developed during the Qajar period. She holds that women were engaged in organizing the ritual. ‘The Gender Dynamics of Moharram Symbols and Rituals in the Latter Years of Qajar Rule’ by Kamran Scot Aghaie examines social, psychological and spiritual functions of Shiite symbols and rituals in Iranian women’s life in the Qajar period. He discusses how women played in *ta'ziya* rituals in both public and private rituals. Ingvild Flaskerud’s ‘Oh, My Heart Is Sad. It Is Mohar-
The Holy Drama: The Role of Aesthetics and Women's Mourning Ceremonies in Shiraz, examines the signs and symbols, places and the iconography of the images in modern Shiraz and the fact that women actively participate in *ta‘ziya* rituals to achieve salvation in the physical world and the other world. In her article ‘The Daughters of Karbalā: Images of Women in Popular Shi‘i Culture in Iran,’ Faegheh Shirazi explains the representation of female characters in religious eulogies and chants in modern Iran. She argues that the representations are used to support the Islamic Republic of Iran. 'Iconography of the Women of Karbalā: Tiles, Murals, Stamps, and Posters,' by Peter J. Chelkowski examines the images of female characters in Shiite religious drama. The writer illustrates how these female characters serve as a model for chastity, purity, and self-sacrifice through which the leaders of the Islamic Republic represented their ideals. In the second part of the book one reads the following articles: ‘Sakineh, The Narrator of Karbalā: An Ethnographic Description of a Women’s Majāles Rituals in Pakistan,’ by Shemeem Burney Abbas. She analyses how the narrative voice of Sakina presents gendered themes in mourning rituals in Pakistan. In his article ‘Sayyedeh Zaynab: The Conqueror of Damascus and Beyond,’ Syed Akbar Heyder studies how Zaynab is presented in modern Urdu poems and pious elegies. ‘Gender and Moharram Rituals in an Isma‘ili Sect of South Asian Muslims’ by Reyhana Ghadially examines how women in the Isma‘ili community of Bohra in India tend to be more active in private rituals than public ones. She finds that the women play a major part in universalistic Shiite Ideals. Mary Elaine Hegland’s ‘Women of Karbala Moving to America: Shi‘i Rituals in Iran, Pakistan, and California’ draws a comparison between two Shiite communities that have migrated to the United States. She illustrates the distinction between them and holds that South Asian women are more active in religious rituals than Iranian women. ‘Women’s Religious Rituals in Iraq’ by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea and Basima Q. Bezirgan illustrates that both men and women are active in public religious rituals. They show the supportive role of women in men’s rituals and men’s supportive role in women’s private rituals. The last article of this book is ‘From Mourning to Activism: Seyyedeh Zaynab, Lebanese Shi‘i Woman, and the Transformation of Ashura’ by Lara Z. Deeb. She focuses on Shiite Lebanese rituals and their recent changes under the influence of urbanization, modernization and political Shiite parties: Amal and Hezbollāh.

A valuable work on the subject is *Ta‘ziya-khāni ḥadīt-e mašā‘eb qudsi dar namāyeš-e ā‘ini* (Performing Ta‘ziya: Holy Tradition of Tragedy in Ritual
Play) by ‘Ali Bulūkbāši (2006). This study illustrates historical aspects of ta’ziya and its effective influence on Iranians as a holy religious ritual.34

In 2010, Ḩuseyn Ismā’ili published a collection of ta’ziya texts entitled Tešna dar miqāt, matn va matnšenāsi-ye ta’ziya. This collection, published in 1928 by the German diplomat Wilhelm Litten, is the first ta’ziya collection to be published in Persian in the nineteenth century, according to Ismā’ili. The book contains 15 gatherings or majles of ta’ziya and begins with mourning for the sacrifice of Ismael (ta’ziya-ye qurbani kardan-e Ismā’il) and ends with mourning for Amir Teymūr (ta’ziya Amir Teymūr). At the beginning of each majles, Ismā’ili has added an introduction (darāmad) that consists of an explanation about the gathering afterwards. Under the heading of the origin of majles (khāstgāh-e majles), he notes the Shiite sources from which the main theme of the majles is derived; then, in the copies of majles (nuskha-hā-ye majles), Ḩuseyn Ismā’ili refers to the collections in which the majles is mentioned. This work contains manuscripts of several majles-e ta’ziyas.35

In 2011, William O. Beeman published an invaluable book entitled Iranian Performance Tradition. In it, he explains Iranian behaviour and norms in order to offer a deeper understanding of Iranian culture to the reader. He observes theatre, both comedy and tragedy, and holds that they have their roots in Iranian tradition. Beeman illustrates the connection between performance activity and daily life in Iran. In other words, ceremonies reflect real life and the ideals of the Iranian community are illustrated. This book covers a wide range of subjects about Iranian life, behaviours, folk culture, religious rituals, Ruhowzi comedy and media and the Revolution (1979).36

Another scholarly work published in 2011 is Gender, Sainthood, & Everyday Practice in South Asian Shi’ism by Karen G. Ruffle. In her work, the writer observes how the battle of Karbalā is commemorated by the Indian Shi‘i community. She illustrates how deeply Indians are influenced by ta’ziya. For this study, she relies on hagiographical texts to show how Imām ʿHuṣeyn, his family and his companions are illustrated in these texts. On the importance of hagiography, Ruffle asserts that it ‘reflects local cultural values, variations in religious practice, political ideology, language and gender norms.’ In this study, the role of the saints (i.e. the twelve Shiite Imams) in the Indian Shiite community and the historical role of Iranian Shiites in developing and cultivating Shiite Islam are depicted.37

Citing another, yet older, source of literature on passion plays, ta’ziya processions are vividly portrayed in European travel accounts written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They provide valuable descrip-
tions of the objects used in ta’ziya performance, in addition to the scenes and players. A detailed description of the events at Karbalā is preserved in the works of the European traveller Pietro Della Valle. Significantly, he documents the 1618 Muḥarram ceremonies in Isfahan. Cornelis de Bruyn, a Dutchman, describes a ta’ziya scene in his work Travels into Muscovy and Part of the East-Indies. Likewise, William Franklin, in his Observations Made on a Tour from Bengal to Persia, reports on a ta’ziya procession, consequently revealing the rapid development of ta’ziya in the second half of the seventeenth century. Morier’s travel account titled Second Journey through Persia, Armenia, and Asia Minor between the Years 1810-1816, written in 1818, observes a form of ta’ziya performed before the king and his courtiers. The author illustrates how the objects used in the performance symbolically represented Ḥuseyn’s death at Karbalā. Morier also divulges in detail various other aspects of the performance, even decorating his work with several illustrations.

James Bassett is another traveller-observer of Muḥarram ta’zīyas. In his 1887 work Persia the Land of the Imams: A Narration of Travel and Residence 1871-1885, he explains the theatrical features of these ceremonies and the ostensibly pathetic stories that are read during the performance. According to Bassett, on the tenth day of the Muḥarram, members of the procession donned white clothing resembling shrouds, while walking with bare heads and feet. Later, they wounded their heads with sharp blades.

There is yet another vivid portrayal of ta’ziya performance in A Narrative Journey into Persia and Residence at Tehran by J.M. Tancoigne. He not only describes the procession of mourners, but also illustrates how the events of Karbalā and Ḥuseyn’s martyrdom are expressed in the nineteenth century.

Passion play processions and various forms of flagellation are also explained in travel accounts by Europeans. From a European perspective, these acts are important because they indicate that the mourning procession has theatrical features. Jean Chardin offers a vivid description of sina-zani (beating one’s breast) that he witnessed in 1667. The ta’ziya procession is also described by Pierre Ponafiedine in his travel account entitled Life in the Moslem East (1910). He describes the procession of the mourners. For instance, they not only inflicted wounds on their bodies, but also hung padlocks, daggers and horseshoes on their backs, arms and breasts. The mourners wounded their foreheads and shaved their heads, motivated by the belief that they would receive a reward. The author further mentions that throughout the first ten days of the month of Muḥarram, both non-
Qur’ānic and Qur’ānic stories were used to show the sufferings of Imām Ḥuseyn and his family.43

The Shia World (1910) by Muḥammad Ḥuseyn Khān Esfahāni provides a short but vivid description of a taʿziya procession in the city of Yazd. In this travel account, Esfahāni illustrates how the procession was characterized by several theatrical features symbolically depicting the events of Karbalā. Like Morier, he uses an illustration, though, in this case, to visually demonstrate what the procession leaders looked like.44

Translations in European languages

Moreover, several translations of passion play performance also exist. Thirty-seven majles of taʿziya have been translated into English by Lewis Pelly. It was during his journey to India and Iran that Pelly became intrigued by the taʿziya performance. He dedicated two volumes of his 1879 work The Miracle Play: Hasan and Husain to this invaluable task. The first volume starts with the taʿziya of ‘Joseph and his Brethren’ and then proceeds to sketch the events leading up to ‘the death of ‘Ali Akbar,’ who was Ḥuseyn’s son. The second volume begins with the death of Qāsim, the Bridegroom, and culminates in the scene of the Resurrection. Also of note, Pelly writes a short introduction at the beginning of each majles.45


In this book, I illustrate the major role of taʿziya performance among Shiites of Iran. It analyses the role of the Prophet’s granddaughter in modern twentieth-century Iran and, more specifically, how Iranian women perceived her as the archetype of resistance and protest against the tyrannical Pahlavi monarch during the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In this study, the religious prohibitions and restrictions infused in taʿziya performance are examined. It further shows how devotional themes such as predestination, salvation, intercession, free will and martyrdom are used in taʿziya texts.
Notes


5 P.J. Chelkowski, ‘Shia Muslim Performance,’ in The Drama Review, vol. 29, No. 3, Processional Performance (Autumn, 1985), pp. 18-30. Nakhl ‘is a big, tall bier (coffin) to which are attached daggers swords, luxurious fabrics, and mirrors. On the day of ‘Āshūrā, it is carried as if it was the coffin of Imām Ḥuseyn. Some times the nakhl is so colossal and heavy that it requires several hundred strong men to lift and carry it.’ See P.J. Chelkowski, ‘Art for Twenty-Four Hours,’ in Islamic Art in the 19th Century: Tradition, Innovation, and Eclecticism, eds. D. Behrens-Abouseif & S. Vernoit, Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2006, p. 410.


7 Ibid.


21 P.J. Chelkowski, ‘From the Sun-Scorched Desert of Iran to the Beaches of Trinidad: Ta‘zieh’s Journey from Asia to the Caribbean,’ in *The Drama Review*, vol. 49, no. 4 (T118), Winter 2005, pp. 156-170.

22 N. Mottahedeh, ‘Karbalā Drag Kings and Queens,’ in *The Drama Review*, vol. 49, no. 4 (T118), Winter 2005, pp. 73-85.


