The Holy Drama

Mahani, Mahnia A. Nematollahi

Published by Leiden University Press

Mahani, Mahnia A. Nematollahi.
The Holy Drama: Persian Passion Play in Modern Iran.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/102627.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/102627
Zeynab in the Passion Play

Zeynab is the third child of ‘Ali Ibn Abi Ṭālib and Fāṭima, the Prophet’s daughter. Zeynab was born in Medina. Sources on her childhood are meagre. She married her cousin, ‘Abd al-Allāh Ibn al-Ja‘far Ṭayyār. Although he was a wealthy man, it is said that he led a modest life, devoting most of his wealth to charity. They had four sons –‘Ali, ‘Awn, Muḥammad, ‘Abbās and one daughter, ‘Umm al-Kultūm.1

Zeynab played an important role in the battle of Karbalā. After the day of ‘Ašūrā, the household of Imām Ḥuseyn, along with his two sisters Zeynab and ‘Umm al-Kultūm, were taken to Damascus to the court of Yazid. A few days later, he released them and they returned to Medina. It is said that Zeynab did not survive for long after returning from Damascus. She died in 682/1283. There are several different suggestions about the day of her death: on the 11th or 21st of Jamādi ‘ut-tani, the 24th of Safar, or the 16th of Dhu’l-Hijjah.2

Veiling and its Supporters in the Ta‘ziya Texts

The term hejāb derives from the Arabic root h-j-b. The Persian equivalent is parda: a general term for an object that conceals or covers something or someone. The term parda has different meanings in the Persian language such as, ‘curtain,’ ‘musical mode,’ ‘respect’ and ‘secret(ly).’3 The veil has various functions: sometimes it indicates the marital status of a woman. In Mesopotamian society, the veil was a sign of a woman’s chastity, in contrast to the prostitutes who appeared in public uncovered.4 After the revelation of Islam in 610, the significance of the veil in Arab society changed. It became an indicator of a woman’s belief in the sacred law (šari‘a) of Islam, as distinct from the dress of pagan Arabs. In that period, wearing a veil showed one’s belief in the Islam, but it was not a device for limiting women and secluding them in the court, in a harem or in the house.
The veil plays an important role in the Persian passion play. When, after the massacre in Karbalā, the family of Ḥuseyn were arrested and taken to the court of Yazid, Zeynab protests twice: first, in Kūfa against the people of Kūfa, and a second time, at the court of Yazid. At the court, she protests and saves the life of her nephew Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin. Zeynab appears both with and without a veil. When her veil is forcefully removed, her character does not change. Zeynab, wearing a veil, supports Imām Ḥuseyn and follows him to Karbalā. She shows the ultimate sacrifice when she sends her sons to the battlefield. Her veil does not prevent her from taking part in the battle. The veil was not a means to seclude her as a woman. Later, Zeynab appears without a veil, protesting against injustice, embodied in the Umayyad caliph. Without any covering, she criticizes the people of Kūfa and Yazid. She reminds Yazid of the punishment that he will suffer in the Hereafter. Appearing without a veil or headscarf (sar berahna) in the bazaar of Damascus and at Yazid’s court was very hard for Zeynab because, as one of the descendants of the Prophet, she would normally have been veiled in the company of men who were not among her intimates. After the battle, when the prisoners are being taken to the court of Yazid in Damascus, Zeynab says,

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{be sūy-e kūfa bā meḥnat ravam bi čādur-u ma’jār} \\
&\text{če sāzam čāra natvānam khudāhāfez khudāhāfez (26).}
\end{align*}
\]

I am going to Kūfa, with no veil or headscarf, 
There’s no remedy for me; may God be with you, God be with you (26).

She says that as soon as she arrives there, she will tell the truth to the people and dishonour Yazid. In the court of Yazid, Zeynab tells him,

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{biparda miyān-e khalqam ammā} \\
&\text{rūḥ al-qudus ast parda dār-am (125).}
\end{align*}
\]

I am unveiled among the people, and yet 
The Holy Spirit, like a lady’s maid, is proffering a veil (125).

From the above examples we see that Zeynab feels that it is her social and religious duty to protest against the tyrant Yazid. When a woman unveils herself, she is protesting against a situation.

The female audience in the ta’ziya performance wears the veil and supports veiling. When a woman spectator sees Zeynab’s veil being forcefully
removed by the enemy, she is expected to curse the Umayyad caliph and his commanders such as Šemr and Ibn al-Sa’d for their malicious behaviour. For the audience, the veil increases the aura of chastity around Zeynab and, by association, around other women. So the veil is accepted as a sign of moral behaviour in public and unveiling is an evident sign of protest against injustice. When Zeynab says that the Holy Spirit is my *parda-dār*, she is expressing that her chastity is protected by it.

**Zeynab as a Role Model for Iranian Women**

Zeynab, presented as a chaste and brave woman who fights against injustice at the side of her brother, has become a role model for Iranian women. Before the Islamic Revolution (1978-79), she was presented as an afflicted, oppressed woman who, in spite of restrictions, protested against the ruling Umayyad caliph. During the Islamic revolution, Zeynab found a role, for the revolutionary women of Iran, as a symbol of the resistance against Muhammad Rezā Shah (1941-1979), who was ‘compared to the tyrant Yazid responsible for Ḥuseyn’s death.’ During the Islamic Revolution, women took Zeynab as their role model when they protested against the Pahlavi king. The difference here is the role of the veil: Rezā Shah had politicized the veil (*čādur, rūsari*) in 1936 by officially banning it in public. The veil became part of women’s protest. They would conceal themselves in the veil as a sign of freedom of beliefs and ideas.

After the Islamic Revolution and during the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-88), Iranian women strictly followed Zeynab as a model. They supported the soldiers both behind the battlefield and at the front line. For Iranians, the war against Iraq was a ‘holy defence’ (*defā’-e muqaddas*). The state tried to shape perceptions of the war using the tragic paradigm of Karbalā. Women going to the front went as if they were Zeynab, going to assist Imām Ḥuseyn at Karbalā. State propaganda claimed that it was the ancestors of the Iraqi soldiers who had killed the Shiite Imām; now Iranians had to sacrifice themselves and their families to avenge the act.

After the Iran-Iraq war, Zeynab’s status as a model Shiite woman was used to reinforce the wearing of *hejāb* as a sign of chastity. An Islamic state organization called ‘the sisters of Zeynab’ (*khāharān-e Zeynab*) act in public to remind women to cover their body and head in public or in the company of those who are not their close relatives. Women who do not cover themselves completely are seen as protesting against the Islamic Revolution.
Zeynab’s Sermons

After the battle of Karbalā, during the imprisonment period Zeynab preached two sermons, one in Küfa and one in Damascus. After the battle, the army of Ibn al-Ziyād set fire to the tents, arrested the women and children and took them to Küfa.9 Here, Zeynab preached a sermon, which is seen by the Shiites as a new chapter in the history of Shiite belief. After praising God and introducing herself and her family, she blames the people of Küfa and calls them ‘deceitful and renegade.’ She warns them of God’s punishment in the Hereafter.

She preached her second sermon in Damascus before the Umayyad caliph Yazid. He is noted as an unbeliever and an enemy of Islam, the Prophet and his family. Yazid says to Zeynab that the battle of Karbalā is revenge taken on the Prophet’s descendants, because the Prophet and his companions killed Yazid’s polytheist ancestors. Zeynab criticizes Yazid, listing the sins that he has committed. Citing a Shiite tradition, she says, ‘Denying the signs of Allah and ridiculing him and his Prophet is a sin.’ Then she says: ‘You [Yazid] have reached the point that you want to take revenge for your ancestors on the children of the Prophet. So you are still at the same stage that they [the ancestors] were; meaning that Yazid is still a pagan. She emphasizes that whatever Yazid does to the family of the Prophet, whether it is killing them, or arresting them and marching them through the blistering desert from one town to another, cannot disgrace them. She says to Yazid that his wrong ideas have made him proud of himself, but God says, ‘We only give them [unbelievers] time to let them increase their sins. For them there will be a humiliating torment’ (Q.3/178). She reminds Yazid that his ancestors were pagan, that he is an unbeliever, that his ancestors were among the last group to embrace Islam. Then she talks about herself and her well-known family. Her connection with the Prophet gives her a position superior to Yazid’s. The cruel behaviour of Yazid and his men cannot diminish the honour of Zeynab and other members of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family. She is particularly critical of Yazid’s mistreatment of the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn.10

Zeynab’s sermon shows her character. She is a very strong and brave woman. She speaks in Yazid’s court and criticizes him, while the severed head of her brother is before her. Her deep grief at the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn and her children does not prevent her from protesting against Yazid and demanding justice.
Zeynab, Justice and Destiny

In the ta’ziya texts, Zeynab is the archetype of devotional beliefs and moral attitudes. She turns her face to God to ask for justice. She does not ask people for help. When she talks with people, she reveals how her enemies have oppressed her. Even when Zeynab talks with God, her tone is that of a person who complains about injustice. For instance, in the period of imprisonment a diplomat comes from Europe (farang) to the court of Yazid. Yazid respects him, but he does not respect Imām Ḥuseyn’s family. Zeynab complains to God,

*bār-elāhā sina-ye Zeynab az in ġam riš šud ey khudā bengar farangi qurbaš az mā biš šud* (122).

O God! My heart is wounded by this grief
O God, a man from Europe is more honourable than we are (122).

Zeynab’s tone changes when she seeks justice from God. She is forced to go to a public place such as a bazaar without her veil. She says, ‘O! May the hand of God make haste and destroy Damascus, like Khaybar because Zeynab has lost her veil’ (127). Here she draws a comparison between Khaybar, a fortification belonging to Jewish opponents of Muḥammad, and the city of Damascus where the court of Yazid is. The Jews of Khaybar were defeated by her father, Imām ʿAli. Through this comparison, Zeynab highlights the distinction between the family of the Prophet and the Umayyad caliph, between faith and infidelity. Several times, Zeynab prays to God asking him to take revenge. In such cases, she explains the situation like a person who wants to motivate someone else and asks him to help her. For instance, after the day of ʿĀšūrā, Imām Ḥuseyn’s family gathers around Zeynab. She prays and they say ‘amen’ twice. She swears to God, invoking his mercy, kindness and blessings to the previous Prophets (Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus). Then she invokes God in the name of the Prophet Muḥammad and, finally, in the name of the family of the Prophet who have been killed, asking God to take revenge on their enemies (155). The ta’ziya text reports that Zeynab’s supplication causes Yazid to have a dream in which the Prophet orders that Yazid should be thrown into hell (157). Because of the dream, Yazid is frightened and regrets his behaviour towards Imām Ḥuseyn and his household. He humbly apologizes to the Imām Ḥuseyn’s family, and specifically to Zeynab and Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin, for his cruel
behaviour. The event shows the spiritual power and the honour of Zeynab in the eyes of God.

When Zeynab faces the tyranny of her enemies, she also asks for justice from the spheres. Zeynab refers to the sphere as an oppressor, and she protests against her destiny. She talks to the sphere in a loud voice as if it hears her. She seeks revenge for the martyrs. The sphere is responsible for the death of her brother and her two sons. She refers to herself several times as afflicted and oppressed (setamkeš-e zār), and as sorrowful and wounded (ḥazin-e fegār). She says that the sphere oppressed her by separating her from Ḫuseyn. Zeynab says,

falak ze jowr-u jafāḥā-ye tu hezārān dād
ze sina barkešam az kina-at du ṣad faryād
če kina-hā ke nadārī be in setamkeš-e zār
če zulmhā ke nakardi be in ḥazin-e fegār
ze hejɾ-e rūy-e Ḫuseyn šahid-e bi yāvar
ravān nemūda-i az dida-am tu lakht-e jegar
ze dāḡ-e Akbar-u ʿAbbās-u Qāsem-u Aṣḡar
be rūz-u šab zanam az ġuṣṣa dast-e ġam bar sar […] (199).

O Sphere! A thousand times I protest your tyrannies and oppressions,
Two hundred times I shout from my heart because of your rancour.
What tyrannies have you not imposed on this oppressed, afflicted one!
What oppressions have you not inflicted on this wounded sorrowing one!
Because of separation Ḫuseyn, the martyred, the friendless
You have caused bloody tears to flow from my eyes.
From the fateful marking of Akbar, ʿAbbās, Qāsem and Asḡar
Day and night, for grief, I lay the hand of sorrow on my head […] (199).

The oppression of the sphere is not limited to the martyrdom of Imām Ḫuseyn and his companions. The sphere is blamed for having stolen the leadership of the Muslim community from Imām Ḫuseyn’s family.

The first four hemistiches rhyme on dād and faryād (to shout or to appeal for justice, to cry out), and on zār and fegār (afflicted and wounded). These words imply dissatisfaction and rebelliousness. In the second four hemistiches, the rhyme words strengthen the empathy of the audience: Ḫuseyn dies without a supporter (biyāvar), her tears contain part of her liver (lakht-e jegar), and she beats the hand of sorrow on her head (dast-e ġam bar sar, a mourning practice). The emotive rhyme words arouse the
audience to seek revenge on the enemies of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family, and to show their feelings in the ta’ziya.

Although Zeynab addresses the sphere in a harsh tone, as if she is talking to her enemy, she submits to the power of destiny, because she believes in predestination (qadar). Qadar is a Qur’anic term meaning ‘eternal decision or decree.’ Zeynab employs this word to show her submission to God and his decision. She accepts her fate and tries to remain patient, while her restless heart is filled with sorrow and grief. The following hemistiche shows Zeynab’s submission to predestination. After ‘Āšūrā, the Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter Sakina mourns for her father and complains about their situation. Zeynab says,

če kunam ‘amma kār-e taqdir ast (200).
What can I do, this is predestined (200).

**Zeynab Inspired**

Inspiration (elhâm) is one of the essential traits of the Prophet and his family. Being the friends of God, they were fully aware of their fate. A friend of God receives inspiration from divine grace. For instance, when Imām Ḥuseyn was on the way from Mecca to Kūfa, many people asked him not to go further, but he responded that,

The decision is God’s, and God will do what he wishes. ‘Every day our lord exercises power in [every] matter. If fate sends down what we like, we praise God for his blessings […] However, although fate may frustrate their hopes, those whose intention is the truth and whose hearts are pious are not aggressors.’

This answer shows that he had utter trust (tawakkul) in God. Zeynab does the same. There is a parallel between them: both are aware of their fates and the fates of the other members of the family. Zeynab speaks in a way that shows she is divinely inspired. For instance, when she talks to Sakina, she mentions the place of her death. Zeynab says,

*be khudā ke khūn šud az ġam del-e biqarār-e Zeynab
be Karbalā mabādā bēsavād mazār-e Zeynab (200).*
I swear to God that Zeynab’s restless heart is bloody for grief,
That Zeynab’s resting place may not be at Karbalā (200).

The narrator employs the term ‘may not be’ (mabādā) to emphasize that the event will happen in near future.

**Zeynab’s Spiritual Power**

One example of Zeynab’s spiritual power, in the Majāles-e ta’ziya, comes after the events at Karbalā, when Šemr goes to Medina to once more arrest Imām Ḥuseyn’s family. Zeynab says to her fellow women,

\[ \text{čādur-e 'eṣmat kunid 'āl-e payāmbar be sar} \\
\text{dušman-e jān-e šumā dast be khanjar resid} \\
\text{jumla ravid in zamān bar sar-e qabr-e rasūl} \\
\text{āh-o fağān barkešid Šemr-e setamgar resid (204).} \]

Put on the veil of protection, O family of the Prophet,
Your mortal enemy is arriving, dagger in hand.
All of you, go to the tomb of the Prophet,
Wail and mourn, the oppressor Šemr is coming (204).

In these couplets, Zeynab offers two means of escaping from Šemr, their enemy. Firstly, they are told to wear the veil of chastity. The veil acts like a protective boundary between a woman and those not immediately related to her. The word translated here as protection, ‘eṣmat, also means chastity. It also has a connotation of the spiritual power exercised by Muḥammad, Fāṭima and the twelve Imāms. Secondly, the women are told to take refuge in mourning and lamenting at the tomb of the Prophet. The supposition is that they will be assisted by the Prophet’s spirit. The idea that the deceased saints such as the Prophet, Imām ‘Ali and Fāṭima can assist the faithful is very common in the ta’ziya texts.¹⁴

Zeynab’s curse is also effective. It is linked to the idea that the sigh uttered by an innocent person has an effect. After the battle of Karbalā, Šemr tears Fāṭima’s earring from her ear. With her ear bleeding, Fāṭima cries and complains of Šemr’s cruelty to her aunt Zeynab. Zeynab says to Šemr: ‘Curse on you unfaithful Šemr that you make the daughter of the king of the Faith cry’ (53). Zeynab warns him that God will help her and that she is not alone. She
swears to God that her sigh (āh) will have a profound effect (be khudu āh-e man khatā nakunad) (54). Then, speaking to the earth, Zeynab says,

\[
ey zamin kun madad be Zeynab-e zār \\
tā kamar gir in sāg-e gaddār \\
tā bedānad ke mā Sağir-u kabir \\
bahr-e 'ummat šudim zār-u 'asir (53-54).
\]

O earth! Assist Zeynab,
Take this deceitful dog up to his waist
That he may know that all of us, young and old,
Are afflicted and bound for the sake of the nation (53-54).

Zeynab’s prayer causes a miracle: at that moment Šemr is rooted to the spot. He asks Sakina for help, and Sakina intercedes on behalf of Šemr. Zeynab asks God to accept Šemr’s repentance, and then the earth releases him. The miracle is a warning to the audience, to respect Imām Ḥuseyn and his family, for disrespect has consequences.

Other miracles also show Zeynab’s spiritual power. After the battle, Ibn al-Sa’d orders his army to trample on the bodies of the martyrs. Fezza (Zeynab’s servant) hears this order and asks Zeynab to find a solution. She adds that last night she heard a lion moaning the whole night. Zeynab tells her, ‘go to the lion and say, the family of ‘Ali have been arrested, come and guard the bodies of the martyrs’ (55). The lion obeys Zeynab and comes, and Ibn al-Sa’d’s army run away. According to Shiite tradition, when the Imām Ḥuseyn was killed, the whole universe lamented. Here the lion, the royal animal, represents the animal kingdom. In another episode, a lion moans for the martyrdom of Imām Ḥuseyn, and the audience is expected to accompany the lion. If the lion (the animal kingdom) respects Zeynab and obeys her, then the Shiites must do the same.

**Zeynab the Leader**

The role of Zeynab as a leader is signified both in history and in the ta’ziya texts. As a leader, she teaches her family and, indirectly, the audience that they have to sacrifice themselves for the sake of justice. She is a model for her fellow women and subsequent generations of Shiite women. She is an archetype of sacrificial behaviour. For instance, she offers her children to
Imām Huseyn and asks him to permit them to fight against Yazid’s army (10-12). In all situations, she is the first person who takes decisions for her small community, motivates her fellow women and teaches them to protest against their enemy. For instance, after ʿĀšūrā, she makes the people of Medina aware of the events at Karbalā and the harsh behaviour of Yazid and his commanders against them. She also implies that what happened to ʿHuseyn and his household might happen to the rest of society in the future. She uses mourning and lamentation as a womanly weapon to motivate the people of Medina. They gather around the family of Imām ʿHuseyn, asking about the events on the day of ʿĀšūrā. Zeynab behaves like a man fighting against his enemy. She mourns and laments, and in doing so protests against the Umayyad caliph. For instance, after the battle of Karbalā she asks the mother of Qāsem to arrange a mourning assembly for the martyrs. First, Zeynab asks her fellow women to make a circle of mourning (mātam) around her. She says,

\textit{zanid ḥalqa-ye mātam be dowram ey yārān
kunid nawha-u zārī ayā havā-dārān} (202).

O! My friends make a circle of mourning around me, 
O! Partisans lament and wail (202).

Next, Zeynab gives them pieces from the clothes of the martyrs. She gives the bloody flag of ʿAbbās to ʿUmm al-Kūtūm her sister, the clothes of ʿAli Asgār to Sakina, the dress of Qāsem that is drenched in his blood to his mother, and the dress of ʿAli Akbar to her sister, Fāṭima. Then she says, ‘My part is putting the robe of Imām ʿHuseyn on my head while I am wailing and mourning’ (202).¹⁵

\textit{Mātam} is an Arabic term, referring to mourning and lamenting for a dead person. In Shiite terminology, the term \textit{mātam} refers mainly to mourning and wailing for the martyrs of Karbalā. The mourners perform \textit{mātam} in the form of repetitive chest beating (\textit{sina-zani}). The sound of chest beating harmonizes with the chanting of elegies (\textit{nawha}).¹⁶ In \textit{nawha}, ‘vocal recitation and public performance’¹⁷ is an important factor. The expression, ‘circle of mourning’ (\textit{halqa-ye mātam}) means that she asks them to mourn for the martyrs with her. In the \textit{taʿziya} performance the audience stands in a circular form around the \textit{taʿziya} players. Therefore the mourning circle is ready. The spectators are friends who gather around the \textit{ahl al-bayt}, the holy family, and ease their sorrows by mourning with them. Zeynab addresses the audience as ‘My friends and Partisans’ (yārān and havā-dārān). The
reference to the spectators motivates them. They lament bitterly, as Zeynab asks them to. They wish that they could take part in the battle of Karbalā and assist Imām Ḥuseyn and his family. Their chest-beating, and the lamentation of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family, harmonizes with the sound of the *nawha* chant. This motivates the spectators to participate in the *ta’ziya* performance. For the spectators, distinctions of time and place vanish and the past and present mingle.

Another example of a direct address to the audience is in the passage just mentioned, in which Zeynab says,

-naṣib-e man bowad ey khāharān be šivan-o šin
be farq-e khud fekanam jāma-ye Imām Ḥuseyn (202).

O my sisters! My part in lamentation is,
To put Imām Ḥuseyn’s robe over my head (202).

The expression ‘O my sisters!’ (*ey khāharān*) is a reference to the audience. In Persian literature, the term *khāhar* has a profound meaning because the *khāhar* is the closest relative who sympathizes with her sister under all conditions. Here, Zeynab calls the audience ‘sister.’ On the one hand, she is going to share her grief with the females who are present, as if they were her sisters. She reminds them that Zeynab is their oppressed sister who was alone and helpless before her enemies. Her helplessness invokes the image of the Shiite community as helpless, but surviving despite the limitations opposed on Shiites throughout history. On the other hand, Zeynab asks them to lament and to mourn for their brother (Ḥuseyn) and the other martyrs. Here the spectators beat their chests and lament bitterly.

The *ta’ziya* texts show that the seed that Zeynab has cultivated grows. The mourning of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family attracts the people of Medina. They ask Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin to explain ‘how the Imām of salvation (Imām Ḥuseyn) was martyred’  The *ta’ziya* spectators symbolically become the people of Medina, gathering to hear about the martyrdom. Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin recounts how Imām Ḥuseyn’s loved ones were killed before his eyes. For instance, he says how cruelly his half brother ‘Abbas, his son ‘Ali Akbar, and his nephew Qāsem were killed. The audience is taught, or reminded of, the hardships that Imām Ḥuseyn suffered before his death. They compare these with their own hardships and find them tolerable.

The awareness of the people of Medina of Yazid’s cruel behaviour then causes uproar in Medina. People sympathize with the family of Imām
The Holy Drama

Huseyn and regret not being present at Karbalâ. Zeynab’s mourning is a protest against the authority of the Umayyad caliph, a cry against oppression and for justice.

Zeynab as Saviour of the Shiite Tradition and the Line of Imâms

In the ta’ziya texts, Zeynab has a symbolic role as the holder of the Shiite Trusts (amânât, the things entrusted for safekeeping). On the Day of Judgement, these Trusts will exempt Shiites from punishment. According to an episode in the ta’ziya on ‘the death of her holiness Zeynab’ (majles-e ta’ziya rehlat-e hażrat-e Zeynab), on her deathbed she passes on several Trusts (amânât) to her sister Umm al-Kulţûm. Zeynab tells her sister to preserve the Trusts, saying that on the Day of Judgement, her mother (Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet) will intercede on behalf of the Shiites because they have preserved the remembrance of the Trusts (210).

Amâna (Persian amânat) is a Qur’ânic term derived from the Arabic root a-m-n. The most famous Qur’ânic verse that refers to the amâna is, ‘we offered the Trust to the heaven and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear it and were afraid of it: but man undertook to bear it […]’ (Q. 33/72). The Trust here is ‘free will and moral responsibility,’20 which man alone was willing to bear. The Shiite Trust that Zeynab transmits is responsibility for the preservation of the Faith and community, embodied in certain relics. The fragment refers to the importance of preserving the relics because the salvation of the Shiites depends on them. The amâna are two teeth of the Prophet that were broken in the battle against pagans for the sake of the expansion of Islam; the turban of Imâm ‘Ali who was murdered by Ibn al-Muljam in 661/1262 because he wished to preserve Shiite Islam; the torn liver of Imâm Ḥasan, poisoned by the order of Mu‘âwiya, the Umayyad caliph; and lastly, the shirt of Imâm Ḥuseyn, martyred on the plain of Karbalâ by the Umayyad army. For a Shiite, the objects depict the sequence of conflicts between the family of the Prophet and false claimants to the caliphate. The question is, how can a Shiite today preserve these relics that no longer exist? The answer is that commemorating and mourning for the owners of the objects will prevent them being forgotten. The remembrance of a thing is preserving its essence. In the ta’ziya ‘on the death of Zeynab,’ there is a reference to the intercession of Fâṭima, the Prophet’s daughter, on the Day of Judgement,21 for those who have preserved the rel-
ics. It is suggested that one who mourns and wails for the owners of the objects preserves their memory, so his salvation is assured.

Zeynab is the preserver of the line of Shiite Imāms in another way, because she prevented Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin from being killed. After the battle of Karbalā, the severed heads of the dead were taken to Yazid’s court, where Yazid desecrated them. According to the taʿziya texts, Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin criticized Yazid’s behaviour. He says to Yazid: ‘O! Oppressor! You struck the one whom the Prophet had kissed’ (127). Yazid orders his executioner to kill him. Zeynab protects Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin and threatens Yazid,

If you kill him I will untie my hair [indicating the innocent victim], wail in God’s court of law and ask him for justice [...] I will go to Najaf without veil or footwear and lament so bitterly that the earth and heavens roar (129).

Then she calls on her father Imām ʿAli for help. Miraculously, Imām ʿAli appears to Šemr and orders him,

\textit{makuš makuš ke del-e ʿahl-e bayt khūn gardad} \\
\textit{makuš makuš ke samāvāt sarnegūn gardad} (129).

Do not kill him, do not kill him, lest the hearts of the Prophet’s family turn to blood [...] Do not kill him, do not kill him, lest the heavens be turned upside down (129).

When this vision appears to Šemr, he is frightened and does not dare to murder Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin. The lesson for the audience is that the family of the Prophet is ‘spiritually present and actively involved in human affairs long after her [their] deaths’. Zeynab’s words not only preserved Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin, they preserved ‘the line of the Imāms in human [Shiite] History’.

\textit{Zeynab the Generous}

The taʿziya teaches the virtues and norms of society. As the archetype of Shiite virtues, Zeynab is described as a generous person. For instance, when
Yazid releases Zeynab and the household of Imām Ḥuseyn, they return to Medina, assisted in their journey by a man named Baṣir. When they are near Medina, Baṣir wants to separate from them. Zeynab thanks him and gives him her ankle-ring as a gift. She apologizes to Baṣir and says that nothing else is left to give, because their properties were plundered by Šemr’s army. Sakina imitates Zeynab’s action and gives her necklace to Baṣir, and Imām Zeyn al-‘Ābedin gives him his turban (184). The expectation is that the spectators will likewise be generous.

**Zeynab and the Protagonists**

Zeynab and Imām Ḥuseyn

The close relationship between Zeynab and her brother Imām Ḥuseyn is emphasized in the *ta’ziya* texts. She is his supporter and assistant. At Karbalā, as Imām Ḥuseyn is going to the battlefield, he asks Zeynab to bring his horse (9). She also hands him a weapon, saying ‘take the weapon of war from your sister’ (*selāh-e razm rā bestān ze khāhar*) (10). When all the men have been killed, she holds the flag of war as a man would (172). Imām Ḥuseyn is the last person to go to the battlefield; no man is left alive to help him, so Zeynab tells him that the women sheltered in his own tent will assist him (172).

There is another episode, in which Zeynab finds her brother alone and helpless on the battlefield. She sends her two sons, Muḥammad and ‘Awn, to help him. According to the *ta’ziya* texts, they were then aged seven and eight. Zeynab offers her sons as a sacrifice (*qurbān*) to her brother. She ties them with a rope, like sheep being offered for sacrifice (12), and both are killed in battle. Zeynab sacrifices her children to save her brother’s life; the question is, why does she do so? There is no doubt that her love for her brother is not the main reason. In fact, she sacrifices them to ensure the survival of Shiite Islam. The implication is that Shiites should sacrifice themselves and their children so that Islam can survive.

In the *ta’ziya* on Amir Muṣayeb (*majles-e ta’ziya Amir Muṣayeb*) there is an episode in which Zeynab and Imām Ḥuseyn talk about the coming events of Karbalā, and through their conversation reveal their spiritual relationship and their foreknowledge. The events of Karbalā are vividly depicted. Imām Ḥuseyn says,
resida vaqt ey khāhar ke mā az ham judā gardim
biyā tā dar zamān-e ḥāl az qesmat rezā gardim (61).

My sister, the time of our separation has come
You know that in this world we must acquiesce to our fate (61).

The term qesmat is derived from the Arabic root q-s-m, meaning ‘to share.’ In Persian literature, it appears with the meaning of ‘accepting the effect of predestination’ (qadar). Acquiescence (rezā) is a crucial concept in Islamic culture. It refers to man’s submission to God’s will (az qesmat rezā gaštan) (8). The fate of each man is written on the Well-Preserved Tablet (lawḥ-e mahfūz). Thus, man cannot change his fate, but he can accept it happily. When Imām Ḥuseyn says to Zeynab that they must acquiesce to their fate, he prepares the audience to hear unpleasant news. In this episode, Imām Ḥuseyn and Zeynab divide the coming events of Karbalā between them, each taking a number of parts. Zeynab tells Imām Ḥuseyn that she will take grief. He answers that he will take the parts of the plain of Karbalā and the shameless siege, as well as offering his head and his chest to the daggers of the enemy. He says that he also takes the martyrs of the plain of Karbalā as his part. ‘Abbās, whose hands are cut off, the body of Qāsem that is torn into one hundred pieces, ‘Ali Akbar, whose face is as beautiful as the moon, and ‘Ali Asḡar, the infant whose life is sacrificed. He takes two further parts: those of the pilgrim (zā’er) and of the preacher (Dhāker and rawza-khān) (61-62), who will retell the events of Karbalā and recite the suffering of Imām Ḥuseyn and elegies to him.

The roles that Zeynab takes are affliction, mourning (mātam), and the events that happen after the day of ‘Āšūrā. Therefore, her share is to preserve the indigent orphans from the attack of Šāmiyān’s army, to support Robāb, Šahrbānū and Umm al-Laylā, and the bride who does not have jahāz or dowry (61-62). The last refers to Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter Fāṭima, who has married Qāsem in Karbalā but does not consummate the marriage because he is killed in the battle.

In the role of Imām Ḥuseyn, the wounds of daggers refer to his badly injured body, before his final death. The reference to his head and chest summons up an image of his martyrdom. His head is mentioned because he is beheaded, his chest because his body is trampled by his enemies. The body of ‘Abbās that is ‘without hands’ refers to the death of ‘Abbās, Imām Ḥuseyn’s half-brother. According to Shiite sources, the blockade prevented water from being obtained for ten days. Then, ‘Abbās galloped to
the Euphrates for some water, but the enemy cut off his hands and he was killed. The tearing of the body of Qāsem reminds the audience that he was newly married, and his body was torn to pieces. The sacrificed life of ‘Ali Asgār reminds the audience of Imām Ḥuseyn holding him, and demanding a sip of water for him. Harmala shoots an arrow and murders the infant. The last parts taken by Imām Ḥuseyn are the pilgrims (za’er) and the preachers (dhāker and rawza-khān). The former refers to Shi‘ite Muslims who visit the shrine of Imām Ḥuseyn. The reference in the ta‘ziya increases the desire to visit Imām Ḥuseyn’s shrine. The latter (Dhāker and rawza-khān, see above) refers to those whose profession is to recite the elegies of Imām Ḥuseyn and narrate the events of Karbalā. The reference to them tells the audience that the family of the Prophet respected this occupation, and that its practitioners will be rewarded in the Hereafter (61-62).

The parts that Zeynab takes are the events after the day of ‘Āšūrā, beginning with mourning and lamentation. Zeynab is described as a mournful woman who takes responsibility for keeping the tragedy of Karbalā alive. In imitation of her, Shi‘ite women have to mourn and lament for the martyrs of Karbalā. Second, Šāmiyān’s attack on the destitute children, the occasion when Ibn al-Ziyād’s army attacked the tents of Imām Ḥuseyn’s family, set them on fire, seized the women and children and marched them through the desert to the palace of Yazid in Damascus. Third, Robāb, Šahrbānū and ‘Umm al-Laylā are the wives of Imām Ḥuseyn whom Zeynab agreed to support after his death. The name of Šahrbānū, between the names of Imām Ḥuseyn’s other two wives, gives an Iranian flavour to the ta‘ziya. Šahrbānū reminds the audience of the Iranian presence at Karbalā, which underlines the duty of Iranian women to take part in the ta‘ziya and mourn the martyrs. Fourth, the image of the bride who does not have jahāz, referring to the marriage of Fāṭima and Qāsem (the son of Imām Ḥasan) at Karbalā. Qāsem was martyred while Fāṭima was captured and taken to Damascus. According to the ta‘ziya texts, their marriage will be consummated in the heaven.

Through the conversation of Imām Ḥuseyn and Zeynab, the audience remembers the entire tragedy of Karbalā and is moved to sympathy and to active participation in the ta‘ziya.
Zeynab and Sakina

Zeynab as Mother

In the ta'ziya texts, Zeynab acts as a mother for Imām Ḥuseyn's children. The most vivid picture is of the relationship between Zeynab and Sakina. The word Sakina derives from the Arabic root s-k-n. There are many derivations from this root in the Qurān. It means, ‘To go down, rest, be quiescent, inhabit’. Sakina is the daughter of Imām Ḥuseyn. She was present at the battle of Karbalā, with the rest of Imām Ḥuseyn's family. Many ta'ziya texts refer to the relationship between Sakina and her aunt Zeynab. Zeynab always supports Sakina, like a mother who supports her daughter. When Sakina cries for the death of her father, Zeynab tries to calm her, like a mother who cannot bear to hear her daughter crying. When Zeynab talks with Sakina, she uses the expressions that a mother uses to comfort a sorrowful daughter. For instance, Zeynab says ‘I sacrifice myself for you’ (be qurbān-e tu) or ‘I sacrifice myself for your well-being’ (fadā-y-e ḥālat). After the events at Karbalā, Sakina wails and laments for her father's death. Zeynab says,

\[
\text{mazan bar sina-u sar ey Sakina} \\
\text{be qurbān-e tu ey mehnat qarina} \\
\text{čeğīna bengaram geryān-u zārat} \\
\text{bemiram tā nabinam aškbārat}\ (199).
\]

O Sakina! Do not beat your chest and head
I sacrifice myself for you, for whom grief is a companion
How can I see you, afflicted and shedding tears?
I wish I could die and not see your tears (199).

Several times, Zeynab says, 'I sacrifice myself for the sake of your head' (fadā-ye sarat gardam).

\[
\text{makan tu gerya be qurbāni-ye sarat gardam} \\
fadā-y-e ān del-e andūh parvarat gardam\ (200).
\]

Do not cry, I sacrifice myself for your head,
I sacrifice myself for your sorrowful heart (200).
The expression (*fadā-*ye sar gaštan*) to make oneself a sacrifice for someone’s ‘head,’ has a profound meaning in Persian literature. The head (*sar*) is much more than the seat of reason it represents the person’s life.

Zeynab speaks as a mother talks to her very young daughter.

*agar mādar nadāri mādarat man*
*agar yāvar nadāri yāvarat man* (122).

As you have no mother, I will be your mother
As you have no helper, I will be your helper (122).

The term child (*tefl*) has positive connotations. It is used to show kindness and compassion towards someone who is not necessarily a child. Zeynab calls Sakina, ‘my child of Ḥuseyn, who has no friend’ (*tefl-e biyār-e Ḥuseynam*) (199). This expression increases the empathy of the audience for Sakina, and reinforces their hatred for Šemr, who killed Imām Ḥuseyn.

Zeynab takes risks to rescue Sakina. In the *ta’ziya* on ‘the death of her holiness Zeynab’ (*ta’ziya vafāt-e haẓrat-e Zeynab*), Šemr goes to Medina to once again arrest Imām Ḥuseyn’s family. He severely beats Sakina. When Zeynab sees his cruel behaviour, she curses him and says, ‘O unfaithful ugly oppressor,’ terms that show that Šemr’s behaviour results from his lack of faith. In this episode, Zeynab says,

*čūb bar peykaraš mazan ze jafā*
*zan be farq-e man ey la’in-e daḡā* (206).

Do no beat her with a stick, for cruelty’s sake,
Instead, strike my head, you deceitful, cursed one (206).

Zeynab again behaves sacrificially when Šemr is about to seize Sakina. Seeing Sakina in danger, she asks Šemr to arrest her instead. She says,

*az yatimi čunin ě mikhāhi*
*tu marā jāy-e ū bebar mal’ūn* (205).

What do you want with such an orphan?
Seize me, instead of her, you accursed man! (205).
Both these examples present ideals for the audience to follow. The audience is deliberately involved. When Šemr goes to arrest Sakina, Sakina turns to the audience and seeks refuge. Her behaviour moves the audience to sympathy. Several key terms such as, O Muslims! (ey musalmānān), O Friends! (ey yārān), O my dears! (ey ‘azizān) connect the player to the audience, and motivate the audience to participate. This comes at the climax of the *ta’ziya*. The direct link with the player reinforces the emotions of the audience, and they wail and lament bitterly because they cannot help Sakina.

Sakina then rushes to her aunt asking for help. She says,

\[
\text{‘amma jān ‘amma jān be dādam res juz tu ey ‘amma jān nadāram kas} \ (206). \\
\text{Dear aunt, dear aunt, respond to my appeal} \\
\text{I have no one but you, dear aunt} \ (206).
\]

In Persian literature, *dād* means justice, but also a lament or appeal for justice. The compound verb, *be-dād residan* means to respond, to release someone from oppression or hardships. Sakina asks Zeynab for justice, giving Zeynab the role of a judge, Šemr that of the oppressor, and Sakina is the oppressed one. The audience wants to know whether Zeynab rescues herself or assists the oppressed Sakina.

Zeynab several times refers to Sakina and Fāṭima, Imām Ḥuseyn's daughters, as orphans. The term orphan (*yatim*) is derived from the Arabic root *y-t-m*. According to Shaham, it denotes 'a child, below the age of puberty who has lost his father.' The importance of observing an orphan's rights is emphasized in the Qurʾān. For instance, the property of an orphan has to be preserved for him until he reaches to the age of puberty, when he is free to manage his property. Despoiling the property of an orphan is prohibited.

In the *ta’ziya* texts the theme of orphans is used to emphasize the cruel and irreligious behaviour of Yazid and his commanders who neither obey God's commands, nor follow social customs. The *ta’ziya* composer emphasizes the innocence and loneliness of the victims to highlight the unjust behaviour of the Umayyad caliph.
Zeynab as Defender

In the ta’ziya texts, Zeynab is present at almost all the events. When the family of Imām Ḥuseyn is humiliated by the enemy, she does not remain silent. She always refers to her rank and dignity. Her honourable lineage is a weapon. At Yazid’s court, when Sakina is asked about the reason for her sadness and why she beats her chest and her face. Sakina answers in tears that she is lamenting for her father. Hearing this, Yazid tells her, ‘You are correct, being an orphan is very hard, but now that you have come near me, you can be my daughter’s slave girl’ (124). Zeynab then defends Sakina, cursing Yazid in a loud voice and wishing him to be dumb and blind. She continues: ‘Who are you that you want to have a slave-girl from the family of the Prophet? Should Sakina who is the love of Fāṭima the Prophet’s daughter] ‘serve you as a slave-girl?’ (124). Yazid talks about Zeynab’s father and grandfather, Imām ‘Ali and the Prophet. He says, ‘Is this she whose father conquered the world with his sword? Is this she whose mighty grandfather was lifted to the throne by God?’ Then he thanks God that Zeynab is now humiliated and dishonoured (124). Although Yazid intends to mock her, his words show the dignity of Zeynab and her family.

Zeynab and the Mother of Qāsem

In the ta’ziya texts, Qāsem’s mother is a close companion for Zeynab. She follows Zeynab’s suggestions. Zeynab trusts her and turns to her in extreme circumstances.

After the battle of Karbalā, Sakina, Fāṭima and ‘Umm-e Kulṭūm lament for Imām Ḥuseyn and other members of the family who were killed. Zeynab tries to calm them but she cannot. She then asks the mother of Qāsem to arrange a mourning assembly. She answers, I will do it, O woman of power (or rank) (be čašm ey bānūy-e bā-eqtedāram) (201). Her answer shows Zeynab’s influence among her family. Zeynab asks her to mourn for the oppressed (those killed at Karbalā). Qāsem’s mother prepares a space for mourning for the martyrs (202). The episode shows that in the ta’ziya texts, mourning and lamentation are expected to calm a person.
Zeynab and the Antagonists

Zeynab and Yazid

According to the ta’ziya texts, Yazid orders to his commanders to kill Imām Ḥuseyn and his companions and to arrest his household. During the imprisonment period, Yazid’s men behave savagely to them. Zeynab is such a strong woman that Yazid is frightened of her influence. For Yazid, Zeynab is a real opponent and a major threat to his authority. So he puts her under a lot of pressure to make her remain silent in the face of his cruel and immoral behaviour.

Yazid’s cruellest act towards the prisoners is that he orders them to be led around in public places, such as the bazaar, without any veil or head-scarf. In the ta’ziya texts we see several references to this event. For instance, Yazid thanks God when he sees Zeynab humble and dishonoured. Zeynab answers: ‘Seventy maids of Medina eat from my table, such am I / I am unveiled among the people, and yet the Holy Spirit, like a lady’s maid, is proffering a veil’ (125). Here, Zeynab shows her rank both in this world, among the people of Medina, and before God. Not being allowed a veil does not prevent her from defending herself and her family.

Another act by Yazid that Shiites particularly loathe, and the protagonists criticize, is that he striking the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn, in the presence of the Imām’s household and sisters. For instance, in one episode, Zeynab and Imām Ḥuseyn’s daughter, Sakina, say several times that Yazid strikes the head of Imām Ḥuseyn (81). This behaviour is highlighted in the ta’ziya of ‘the Bazaar of Damascus,’ in which Imām Zeyn al-Âbedin, the son of Imām Ḥuseyn, criticizes Yazid when he strikes Imām Ḥuseyn’s head. Yazid then orders the executioner to kill Zeyn al-Âbedin (127). In the same ta’ziya, when the head of Imām Ḥuseyn is taken to the ruins to be shown to Imām Ḥuseyn’s family, Zeynab says that the blackness of his lips shows that Yazid has beaten him (133).

In the ta’ziya texts, Yazid’s rancour toward Imām Ḥuseyn’s family is shown in several episodes. For instance, when the family of Imām Ḥuseyn is released and they return to Medina, the people of Medina commiserate with them, wailing and mourning for Imām Ḥuseyn. Yazid is informed of this, and regrets allowing Zeynab and Sakina to live. He says,

čerā be kuštan-e Zeynab nemūdehim quṣūr
Sakina ra nanemūdim az če zenda be ġūr (204).
Why did we neglect to kill Zeynab?
Why we did not bury Sakina alive? (204).

In addition to showing his deep hatred for Zeynab and Sakina, there is an allusion to the worst custom attributed to pre-Islamic Arabs, that of burying newborn girls alive. By his words, Yazid shows that he is not a Muslim, but rather a pagan at heart.

Zeynab is not frightened by Yazid’s authority. She threatens to reveal his unjust behaviour to people. For instance, when the captives are being taken to Damascus, Zeynab tells the audience that, when she reaches Damascus, she will say what has happened and will disgrace Yazid (26). When the survivors of Imām Huseyn’s household arrive as prisoners at the court of Yazid, Zeynab several times speaks harshly to Yazid and reminds him of his dishonourable lineage and his savage behaviour. She warns him of the divine punishment that awaits him on the Day of Judgement.

Zeynab and Šemr

Šemr is Yazid’s commander, whose cruel behaviour to Imām Ḥuseyn’s family, and specifically to Zeynab, is emphasized in the ta’ziya texts. He is the archetype of oppression, a person who killed Imām Ḥuseyn while he was thirsty. In the ta’ziya texts he is described as a heartless person who is happy with his own unjust behaviour. He slaps the children of Imām Ḥuseyn and humiliates them. For instance, after the day of ‘Āšūrā, Šemr goes to arrest Imām Ḥuseyn’s family and to take them to the court of Yazid. Zeynab is the first woman whom he seeks, and he wants to taunt her. Zeynab is not present when he enters, and Šemr tells the people,

\[
\text{khabar dahid be Zeynab du češm-e tu rowšan}
\]
\[
\text{kunān ze rāh resid Šemr-e zel-jowšan (204).}
\]

Tell Zeynab, ‘Now your eyes are delighted
Now Šemr has come in his armour’ (204).

The expression ‘your eye is delighted,’ (češm-e tu rowšan) is used when a loved one returns from a journey. But Zeynab hates Šemr, as her father’s murderer; he is being sarcastic and taunting her. Šemr’s utterance increases the audience’s hatred for him.
Šemr annoys Zeynab by reminding her of her frustrating situation on the plain of Karbalā and in the court of Yazid. For instance, in the taʿziya on 'the Death of her holiness Zeynab' (majles taʿziya vafāt-e haẓrat-e Zeynab), Šemr says to her that she must go to the bazaar without headscarf or veil, and be dishonoured (205). This harks back to what happened after the day of Āšūrā, in Damascus. The forced unveiling of Zeynab and other women of Imām Ḥuseyn's family is so important that the audience is reminded of it repeatedly, in almost all the taʿziya episodes.

When Zeynab sees the cruel behaviour of her enemy, she raises her voice and protests. She is presented as the voice of righteousness and justice; she does not remain silent. She curses Šemr and reminds the audience that he is responsible for her death. Zeynab says,

\[
vāy ke ān Šemr-e dūn ān sag-e kāfer resid
\]
\[
′umr-e man-e khasta jān az setamaš sar resid (204).
\]

Alas! Despicable Šemr, that infidel dog, has come
The life of this broken soul has reached its end because of his injustice (204).

Zeynab provokes two responses in the audience. On the one hand, she talks harshly to Šemr, damns him and reminds him his ancestors were pagans, creating admiration for her in the audience. On the other hand, she addresses the audience as an oppressed, helpless, sorrowful woman who has been left without any support because the men have all been killed in battle, except for Imām Zeyn al-ʿĀbedin, who was too ill and very young. Zeynab says,

\[
musalmānān hamin Šemr-e laʿin ast
ke az dastaš del-e zāram gormin ast
hamin ast ān ke āmad Karbalā vāy
Ḥuseyn rā sar burid ʿū az qafā vāy
hanūz az khanjaraš az rāh-e bidād čekad khūn-e Ḥuseyn ān Shah-e owtād (205).
\]

O! Muslims this is that damned Šemr
Because of him, my bitter heart is so sorrowful.
Alas, he is the one, who came to Karbalā,
Alas, he beheaded Ḥuseyn.
The blood of Ḥuseyn, the King of the pillars, is still dripping from his dagger, because of his injustice.

Here, Zeynab addresses the audience as O! Muslims (ey musalmānān). Her helplessness and her critique of Šemr’s deeds encourage them to take part in the ta‘ziya.

**Zeynab and Ibn al-Ziyād**

Ibn al-Ziyād is another of Yezid’s commanders. After the battle he orders his army: ‘set fire to the tents of the household of Imām Ḥuseyn and trample the bodies of the dead.’ In one episode, when the prisoners have been taken to his palace, he strikes the lips of the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn with a stick, as Yezid does, and says, ‘I was afraid of you.’ At that moment, Sakina laments, referring to the head of her father as ‘you’ (tu), as if her father was still living, rather than as ‘it’ (ū). She says,

\[
\text{čūb zad Ibn-e Ziyād vāy, vāy, vāy} \\
\text{bar lab-e tu az ‘enād vāy, vāy, vāy (81).}
\]

Ibn al-Ziyād is striking, alas, alas, alas,
On your lips, out of enmity; alas, alas, alas (81).

Zeynab repeats Sakina’s words, in an address to her own dead mother, Fāṭima. Zeynab says,

\[
\text{fāṭimā ey mādaram vāy, vāy, vāy} \\
\text{khāk šuda bar saram vāy, vāy, vāy} \\
\text{čūb zad Ibn-e Ziyād vāy, vāy, vāy} \\
\text{ra’s-e barādar baram vāy, vāy, vāy (81).}
\]

O! My mother Fāṭima, alas, alas, alas
Dust is on my head, alas, alas, alas
Ibn al-Ziyād is striking, alas, alas, alas
On my brother’s head, in front of me; alas, alas, alas (81).

Then Zeynab says to Ibn Ziyād,
čūb mazan ey dağā vāy, vāy, vāy
bar sar-e Shāh-e hodā vāy, vāy, vāy
tešna-ye khuškida lab vāy, vāy, vāy
bas ke bedida jafā vāy, vāy, vāy
ey dağā pur jafā kun hayā vāy, vāy, vāy (81).

You imposter! Do not strike, alas, alas, alas
The head of the King of Guidance, alas, alas, alas
His lip is dry with thirst, alas, alas, alas
He has suffered much tyranny, alas, alas, alas
You imposter, oppressor, be ashamed of yourself; alas, alas, alas (81).

Sakina then repeats almost the same words, and at last Ibn al-Ziyād himself, referring to the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn, says,

mizanam az khayzarān bar lab-o dandān-e tu
mišekanam az 'enād bas del-e yārān-e tu (81).

I beat on your lips and teeth with a bamboo rod,
I break your friends' hearts because of my enmity (81).

In these lines, Ibn al-Ziyād's striking the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn is referred to four times. The composer uses a rhetorical figure 'repetition' (takrir), by repeating the compound verb 'to strike with a stick' (čūb zadān), in the words of Ibn al-Ziyād, Sakina and Zeynab. The repetition is used to motivate the audience. For them, Ibn al-Ziyād's behaviour is a sign of his enmity for the family of Imām Ḥuseyn. Thus, they hate him and curse him.

In these lines, Zeynab criticizes Ibn al-Ziyād and calls him an imposter or deceiver (dağā), and an oppressor (pur jafā). Ibn al-Ziyād asks Zeynab what her name is. She says, 'I am one whose young sons you have killed, I am Zeynab who has seen the mark [of fate] on her brother (dāḡ-e barādar), and I am Zeynab who is arrested by your hand […].' We see that she is constantly referring to Ibn al-Ziyād's cruel behaviour to Imām Ḥuseyn, her sons and herself, reminding the audience how oppressed they are. Ibn al-Ziyād then praises God, because he has taken the caliphate from the family of the Prophet, and dishonoured Zeynab. Zeynab asks for help from her mother (Fāṭima) and her father (Imām 'Ali). She says to Ibn al-Ziyād: 'God bestowed salvation on us, we are loved because of his Prophet and you
will be publicly disgraced [...]’ Ibn al-Ziyād threatens Zeynab, saying, I will order your head to be cut off. Zeynab will not be silenced: she curses him,

O cursed one, O cursed one, you are the son of Marjāna; now hear of the dignity of the son of the Prophet [...] . God bestowed his grace on Imām Ḥuseyn from the cup of martyrdom. While you, you impure one, will be disgraced because of your behaviour. O infidel! Keep silent do not babble. God will pour fire from hell into your heart (82-4).

Ibn al-Ziyād orders his executioner to kill Zeynab, but Sakina intervenes. She laments and demands that Ibn al-Ziyād should leave Zeynab alive, because the children of Imām Ḥuseyn have no other supporter but her (81-84).

In the above episode, we see that Zeynab identifies herself by her relationship to the martyrs, while she identifies Ibn al-Ziyād as the son of Marjāna, in order to disgrace him. Zeynab curses him, reminds him that he killed her children and brother, while she praises her father and brother. For Zeynab, martyrdom was God's bounty for Imām Ḥuseyn. She addresses her enemy loudly and fearlessly. In imitation of her, a Shiite should protest against oppressors, and there is nothing to fear: Imām's martyrdom is the grace of God for the best of His servants.

The first couplet of the passage cited above shows the belief in the presence of saintly spirits. Zeynab talks to her father and her mother as if they were alive and could see her and help her. For instance, she says, ‘Come my mother, cover my hair, see how red-faced I am because of shame’ (81). Her utterance teaches the audience that they too can benefit from the assistance of these saintly spirits, in opposing an oppressive ruler.

Notes

3 For more information on the term parda (veil) and its symbolic meaning in Persian poetry (classic poetry and Qājār dynasty) see A.A. Seyed Gohrab, 'The Symbolism of Veiling and the Poetics of Unveiling in Early Modern Persian Poetry'


6 The compound word 'parda dāri' (lit. to proffer a veil) means to show a person respect. In contrast, 'parda dari' (lit. to draw aside a veil, to reveal a secret) means to dishonour a person.


8 J.E. Tucker, 'Women in the Middle East and North Africa: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in *Women in the Middle East*, p. 126.

9 Kūfah is the city whose people invited Imām Ḥuseyn to lead them and release them from the tyranny of Yazid, the successor of Mu'āwiya; but when Imām Ḥuseyn was surrounded by the army of Yazid at Karbalā they did not assist him.

10 After the battle of Karbalā, the martyrs are beheaded and their heads are taken to the court of Yazid. Yazid beats on the severed head of Imām Ḥuseyn with a stick. See Abū Ja'far Muhammad Ibn Jarir Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, p. 176.


14 For more instances of the presence of the soul of the holy figures see: H. Ṣāleḥi Rād Darbandsari, *Majāles-e ta'ziya*, pp. 50, 129, 156.


17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., p. 87.

19 *begū šahid česān gašt ān Imām-e hudā* (203).


21 On the Day of Judgement my mother / has to intercede the sin of the nation by these deposits (211).

*bāyad ānke mādaram kunad be rūz-e jazā / šafā’at-e gunah-e khalq rā zin amānathā* (211).


23 Ibid., p. 83.
24 According to Majālis-e ta’ziya, Amir Muṣayeb was a follower of Imām Ḥuseyn. Before the battle, the Imām sent him a letter asking for help. When Amir Muṣayeb arrived at Karbalā, Imām Ḥuseyn had already been killed. See H. Şāleḥī Rād Darbandsari, Majālis-e ta’ziya, pp. 59-72.

25 A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, Layli and Majnūn, p. 166; Daniel Madigan, in Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān, under Preserved Tablet.

26 Šahrbānū and ’Umm-e Laylā are both the wives of Imām Ḥuseyn. Šahrbānū was the daughter of the last Iranian King Yazdgerd III. She was arrested by Arabs when they invaded Iran. She was taken to Medina where she married Imām Ḥuseyn. See D. Pinault, ‘Zaynab bint ‘Ali and the place of the Women of the Households of the First Imāms’, in Women in the Medieval Islamic World, p. 80.

27 T. Fahd, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Sakina.

28 See ‘majles-e ta’ziya gārat-e khaymagāh-e ahl-e karbalā’ and ‘ta’ziya Amir Muṣayeb’ in H. Şāleḥī Rād Darbandsari, Majāles-e ta’ziya.

29 gātel-e bābām ān šah-e dowrān / āmada čūn kunam musalmānān […]
ey azizān yatīm-a afgāram / rah dahīdam ke khowf az ū dāram (205).

O Muslims! My father’s killer, the king of the age / is coming, what can I do […]?
O my friends, I am an orphan and wounded / Help me, because I am frightened of him (205).

30 For instance, what do you want with such an orphan? (az yatimi čunin če mikhāhi?) (205) Zaynab and ‘Umme Kulṭūm several times refer to Fāṭima and Sakina saying: They are both orphans; their hearts are broken in two by grief (in har du yatīmand az ġam del du nimand) (205).

31 R. Shaham, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam (second edition), under Yatīm.

32 Ibid.


34 The wife of Imām Hasan (the elder brother of Imām Ḥuseyn) is called ‘the mother of Qāsem’ in the Majāles-e ta’ziya.

35 H. Şāleḥī Rād Darbandsari, Majāles-e ta’ziya, pp. 197-214.

36 See ibid., Majles-e ta’ziya Durra-ye ʿadaf, Mjlise ta’ziya bazaar Šām, Majlese ta’ziya vurūd-e be Medina.

37 King of the pillars refers to five unseen supports who sustain the world’s existence.