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Karbala Mourning among the Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī Shīʿa of India: Doctrinal and Performative Aspects of Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn's Arabic *Marthiya*, "O King of Martyrs" (*Yā Sayyida l-Shuhadāʾī*)

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Abstract

The *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament—a poignant fifty-one-stanza Arabic *marthiya* composed by the Ṭayyibī Dāʾī l-Muṭlaq Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1385/1965)—holds an iconic status in the Karbala tradition of the Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī Shīʿa of India. This article transcribes, translates, and analyses the lament to showcase a distinct religious tradition within a hybrid cultural milieu. The lament's forms intersect with Arabic poetic conventions set in pre-Islamic times; its themes overlap with Twelver-Shīʿī Karbala laments in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu from the Middle East and South Asia; and its performance stems from melodic Persianate-Urdu recital. Simultaneously, it reflects the Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī heritage, particularly the teachings of al-Muʿayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078), including the fundamentals of their Imāmate doctrine and the salvific importance of weeping for Ḥusayn.

Keywords

Karbala – *marthiya* – Imām Ḥusayn – Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn – India – Arabic poetry – Ṭayyibīs – Fāṭimids/Ismāʿīlīs – Dāʾūdī Bohra – al-Muʿayyad al-Shīrāzī

Over the centuries, poets and prose writers from different Shīʿī denominations, far-flung lands, and varying linguistic and cultural backgrounds have composed numerous elegies and narratives recounting the martyrdom of the Prophet Muḥammad's grandson Ḥusayn (d. 61/680) in Karbala. Of these, a handful of texts have become widely established within their faith communities, such that they form the recognizable face of these communities' Karbala lament rituals. Perhaps the best known is Kāshifī's (d. 910/1504) ten-chapter Persian epic, *Rawḍat al-shuhadā'* (Garden of martyrs), widely performed in the Twelver Shīʿī world. For the Ṭayyibīs of India (Dāʿūdī Bohra Fāṭimid-Ismāʿīlī Shīʿa; more on them shortly), that iconic status is held by *Yā sayyida l-shuhadāʾī* (O king of martyrs), a fifty-one-stanza Arabic lament (*marthiya*) composed in the early twentieth century by their fifty-first Dāʿī l-Muṭlaq, Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1385/1965).¹ This poem—henceforth referred to as “the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament”—has characterized and framed the Ṭayyibīs' Karbala commemoration since its composition in 1348/1929. In this article, after I briefly introduce the reader to the Ṭayyibīs' Karbala mourning tradition and to Sayf al-Dīn and his literary legacy, I transcribe, translate, and analyse the lament, never studied before in Western academe, to demonstrate its distinct religious tradition within a hybrid cultural milieu.

Ṭayyibī works remain largely unpublished and the community's practices remain mostly unscrutinized. In this article, I cite manuscripts from the Ṭayyibī Daʿwa's private libraries and publications from specialized community bookstores and refer to personal observations of community events and individual practices to contextualize the tradition and the lament.

In the fourteen hundred years since Karbala, Muslims, especially the Shīʿa, have continued to mourn Ḥusayn as an integral part of their religiosity. The names of the martyrs, the manner of their killing, the cruelty of the enemy, the thirst endured by Ḥusayn's company, and the suffering of the women and children are all deeply familiar aspects of the Karbala tragedy and are recounted in Ṭayyibī sermons and elegies during Muḥarram and other occasions. Part of this vibrant, ongoing tradition of Ṭayyibī Karbala mourning, the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament has had an extraordinary impact on Ṭayyibī religious life. Eloquent in diction, moving in theme, and encompassing the entire Karbala narrative in a cosmic-theological yet deeply personal epic, it has become the

1 Translated here as “king”, *sayyid* in its original pre-Islamic context means literally “chieftain” of a tribe. In the Ṭayyibī tradition, *sayyid* denotes a religious leader and is frequently used interchangeably with *mawlā* (master or lord).

* Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn was the author's grandfather.

keystone for every public recounting of the Karbala tragedy. Since Ḥusayn is mourned in almost every sermon, the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament is recited in almost every Ṭayyibī religious assembly. Because the Ṭayyibīs deem the Dāʿī to be the living standard-bearer of Ḥusayn’s call to truth, the lament holds weighty authority for them. Children memorize stanzas in religion classes, and many adults recite stanzas, some even the entire poem, in moments of personal grief or even as part of their daily liturgy. Within the centuries-long tradition of Ṭayyibī elegies, the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament has become the hallmark of the Karbala tradition.

The Tradition: The Ṭayyibīs and Their Karbala Laments

The Ṭayyibīs are a Shīʿī Muslim community based in India belonging to the Mustaʿlī branch of the Fāṭimid-Ismāʿīlīs.² They profess allegiance to the twenty-first Imām, Ṭayyib (b. 524/1130), son of the Fāṭimid Imām-Caliph Āmir (r. 495-524/1101-1130), and to the “concealed” Imām in his line known by the name of his forebear, Ṭayyib. The ancestors of the Ṭayyibīs in India converted to Islam in the fifth/eleventh century at the hand of missionaries sent to Gujarat and the Deccan by the Fāṭimid Imām-Caliph Mustanṣir (r. 427-487/1036-1094). Their religious institution—like that of the Fāṭimids—is termed *Daʿwa*, referring to Qurʾanic verse “The true *daʿwa* (‘call’) belongs to God”.³ Their leaders, deemed vicegerents of the concealed Imām, hold the title *Dāʿī*, or one who calls to God; the full title is *al-Dāʿī l-Muṭlaq* (Dāʿī with full authority). In India, the community is often called “Bohra”, meaning “honest merchant”, presumably because many of the earliest Hindu converts belonged to that profession. They mostly speak the Indo-European language Gujarati in an Arabic- and Persian-infused form called “*Lisān al-Daʿwa*” or “*Daʿwat nī zabān*” (language of the *Daʿwa*). Several Ṭayyibī denominations have branched out over the centuries on the basis of different lines of leadership. The majority denomination are the Dāʿūdī Bohra, to whom our poet belongs, and “Ṭayyibī” in this article refers to them. Currently, they reside mostly in India and Pakistan, with a small indigenous community in Yemen and diaspora communities worldwide.

2 For an overview of the history and doctrines of the Ṭayyibī Daʿūdī Bohra, see T. Qutbuddin, “Bohras” (with a fuller set of primary and secondary source references); T. Qutbuddin, “Daʿūdī Bohra Ṭayyibīs”; S. Qutbuddin, “History of the Daʿūdī Bohra Ṭayyibīs”; Blank, *Mullahs on the Mainframe*.

3 Qurʾan 13:14: *Lahū daʿwatu l-ḥaqq*.

The Ṭayyibīs have inherited a rich tradition of Karbala lament. Developed from Fāṭimid practices in North Africa and Egypt in the fourth/tenth through sixth/twelfth centuries that included the recitation of lament poetry for Ḥusayn, sermons relating the Karbala narrative, and a commemorative “banquet of grief” (*simāt al-ḥuẓn*),⁴ the tradition progressed through an early Ṭayyibī phase in Yemen up to the tenth/sixteenth century,⁵ and continued thereafter in India. Their present-day Karbala rituals are grounded in this early heritage. They include nine days of Muḥarram sermons (*majālis al-wa‘ẓ* or *majālis al-‘azā*), in which, in addition to mourning Ḥusayn, emphasis is on dissemination of Ṭayyibī learning; on ‘Āshūrā’ especially but also on other occasions, an impassioned narration of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom (*maqṭal* or *shahādāt*); weeping; breast-beating with the palm of the hand (*mātam*; Urdu: *sīnā-zanī*); visitation (*ziyārat*) of Ḥusayn’s shrine in Karbala, as well as that in Cairo, where Ḥusayn’s severed head is believed to be buried; “banquet of grief” meals (*niyāz*); and recitation of elegies (referenced in the sing., *marthiya*). These rituals are similar to those of their Twelver Shī‘ī brethren in South Asia, but there are other Twelver mourning rituals—passion-plays, banner processions, candle lighting, effigy burning, self-flagellation, and virtual visitation⁶—in which they do not engage.

Over the centuries, Ṭayyibī savants have composed elegies in Arabic, Urdu, and Lisān al-Da‘wa, and these are recited in private and public Ṭayyibī events alongside Urdu elegies composed by Twelver Shī‘ī poets. The most widely recited Arabic elegies come from the pens of three eminent Da‘wa personages who were also prolific poets. The nineteenth Yemeni Dā‘ī, Sayyidnā Idrīs ‘Imād al-Dīn (d. 872/1468), wrote two *marthiyas* for Ḥusayn; one opens with these lines: *Ḥuẓnun adhāba jawānīḥi wa-fu‘ādī—wa-asāla dam‘i mithla fayḍi l-wādī. Lammā dhakartu banī l-nabīyyi Muḥammadin—wa-muṣābahum bi-akuffi āli Ziyādī* (A grief that melted my body and my heart—that made my tears flow like the flood rushing down the valley. I recalled the family of the Prophet

4 On Fāṭimid sponsorship of ‘Āshūrā’ assemblies of mourning in Egypt in al-Azhar Mosque and the royal palace, see Maqrīzī, “Mā kāna yu‘mal fī yawm ‘Āshūrā’”, in *Khiṭaṭ*, vol. 2, pp. 417–421. See assessment of ‘Āshūrā’ as a popular Fāṭimid festival in Walker, “Egyptian Popular Festivals”, pp. 69–76. For the North African period, see Nu‘mān, *K. al-Majālis wa-l-muṣāyārāt*, pp. 396–397. For Karbala prose addresses in Cairo, see al-Mu‘ayyad al-Shīrāzī, *al-Majālis al-Mu‘ayyadīyya*, vol. 1, pp. 34–36 (majlis 9); vol. 2, pp. 309–310 (majlis 150). More on these shortly.

5 For Yemen, see references to ‘Āshūrā’ mourning assemblies in ‘Imād al-Dīn, *Nuẓhat al-afkār*, passim.

6 “Virtual visitation” refers to ritualized recitation of prayers and greetings, without physically being present at the shrines.

Muḥammad—and their killing at the hands of the children of Ziyād).⁷ The Indian scholar Sayyidī ‘Abdē-‘Alī Muḥyī l-Dīn (d. 1326/1908), who was Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn’s teacher and mentor, composed nine *marthiyas* for Ḥusayn; one opens with these lines: *Yā Ḥusaynan wa-mā nasītu Ḥusaynā—qad talaqqayta fī riḍā Llāhi ḥaynā ... lahfū nafsī lā yanqaḍi li-Ḥusaynin—wa-dhawīhi wa-ṣaḥbihi l-muṣṭafaynā* (Ḥusayn! I have not forgotten you, O Ḥusayn! You accepted death in compliance with God’s will.... My soul will not cease its laments for Ḥusayn and his family and companions!).⁸ The third source is Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn himself, who composed the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā’* lament and who was particularly influenced by the laments composed by his mentor, Muḥyī l-Dīn. Following Sayf al-Dīn, the tradition has continued.

The Poet: Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn (1888–1965)

The fifty-first Dā‘ī l-Muṭlaq of the Ṭayyibī Dā‘ūdī Bohra, Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn came from a long line of Dā‘īs and Da‘wa savants. The son of the forty-ninth Dā‘ī, Sayyidnā Muḥammad Burhān al-Dīn (d. 1323/1906), his lineage goes back eight hundred years to Rājā Tārmal, vizier of the Rajput ruler of Gujarat, Siddharāja Jayasimha (r. 1094–1143 CE). Rājā Tārmal, along with his brother Rājā Bhārmal and Siddharāja himself, was among the first converts to Fāṭimid Shī‘ī Islam in the subcontinent. Rājā Tārmal’s son, Sayyidī Fakhr al-Dīn al-Shahīd (fl. sixth/twelfth century), Sayf al-Dīn’s forebear, was one of the first local missionaries of the Fāṭimid Imām-Caliph Mustanṣir in India.

Sayf al-Dīn was born in Surat in 1888, became Dā‘ī l-Muṭlaq in 1915, moved to Mumbai in 1932, and died there in 1965.⁹ His magnificent shrine, the Rawḍat Ṭāhira, with its marble walls inscribed with the entire Qur’an in gold letters, is now also the final resting place of his successor and is visited daily by thousands of devotees. The Ṭayyibīs’ spiritual leader for half a century, he heralded a period of advancement for institutions of social welfare, male and female education, and community organization. Respected as a scholar, visionary, and unifier, he served five consecutive terms, until his demise, as the unanimously elected chancellor of Aligarh Muslim University. When he paid his first visit to Aligarh in 1953, Dr. Zakir Husain (d. 1969)—then vice chancellor of Aligarh University and later president of India—said in his welcome speech

7 ‘Imād al-Dīn, two *marthiyas* in *Dīwān*, MS; *Subḥat*, pp. 130–151.

8 Muḥyī l-Dīn, nine *marthiyas* in *Dīwān*, MS; *Subḥat*, pp. 188–220.

9 On Sayf al-Dīn’s career, see the Ṭayyibī publication *A Golden Panorama*; S. Qutbuddin, “History of the Da‘udi Bohra”, pp. 301–305; Toorawa, “Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn”.



FIGURE 1 Sayyidnā Tāhir Sayf al-Dīn delivering a sermon in al-Masjid al-A'zam (Saifee Masjid), Mumbai, in the early 1960s

that whereas earlier chancellors had been rulers with *sikka* (coin) struck in their names, this chancellor, although he held no worldly dominion, possessed “a *sikka* stamped on the hearts of the Muslims of India”.¹⁰

In addition to his duties as head of the community, Sayf al-Dīn was a prolific author and poet.¹¹ He wrote more than forty Arabic books, titled *Rasā'il* (sing. *Risāla*) *Ramaḍāniyya*, issuing a treatise every Ramaḍān between 1335/1917 and 1384/1964. Their lengths ranged from about a hundred pages in the earliest to six hundred in the later ones. He also composed more than ten thousand verses of Arabic religious poetry and a handful of poems in *Lisān al-Da'wa*.¹²

10 On Sayf al-Dīn's relations with Muslim and Hindu leaders in India and his teachings of communal harmony, see Abde-Ali Qutbuddin, “Vision of the Dawoodi Bohra Muslim Leader”; T. Qutbuddin, “Teachings and Practice of Sayyidna Taher Saifuddin”.

11 On Sayf al-Dīn's literary production, see T. Qutbuddin, “Da'udi Bohra Tayyibis”, pp. 342-343. On his *Risālas*, see Aziz Qutbuddin, “Taḥmid”, pp. 254-287.

12 Published earlier in the *Risāla Ramaḍāniyya* of their year of composition, Sayf al-Dīn's Arabic poems were posthumously collected in his *Dīwān* under the title *Jawāhir al-balāgha*; his *Lisān al-Da'wa* poems—published earlier as individual chapbooks—are anthologized in *Dhikrā shahādat al-Ḥusayn*, pp. 64-70, 81-114, 186-196. Several texts,

The vast collection of his transcribed Lisān al-Da‘wa sermons through his fifty-plus years of preaching are also preserved in the Da‘wa archives, as are transcripts of some Urdu speeches given to Muslim communities. In both prose and poetry, he elucidated doctrine, history, and law, offered counsel for living a godly life and preparing for the hereafter, and praised the Prophet Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, the Imāms, the Dā‘īs, and other spiritual savants. In his prose works, he incorporated a large portion of the Ṭayyibī prose and poetic heritage in excerpts prefaced with his own rhymed-prose introductions. His *Dīwān* also contains laments for his immediate predecessors and a beloved daughter and sister, as well as three long poems of around two hundred verses each, one titled “Philosophy of the intellect”, another that praises the Imams and offers lengthy counsel, and a third that is autobiographical and describes the milestones of his tenure as Dā‘ī.¹³

Sayf al-Dīn composed several prose and poetry laments for Ḥusayn. In addition to the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā* lament (his first, composed, as mentioned earlier, in 1348/1929), his poetry corpus includes four further elegies regularly recited in Ṭayyibī assemblies. Two are Arabic elegies in traditional two-hemistich *qasīda* form: (1) *Yā imāma l-ḥaqqi mawlānā l-Ḥusayn* (O true Imām, Mawlānā Ḥusayn), forty verses, *ramal* meter, composed in 1363/1944;¹⁴ and (2) *‘Alayka salāmu Llāhi maḥlūma Karbalā* (God’s peace on you, O slain Imām of Karbala), forty verses, *ṭawīl* meter, composed in 1378/1959.¹⁵ Two earlier laments are in Lisān al-Da‘wa: (3) *Mātam karō Ḥusayn ‘alayhi l-salām nō* (Mourn Ḥusayn, peace upon him), forty verses, composed in Muḥarram 1360/1941—this elegy also has an Urdu version;¹⁶ and (4) *Karbala mā sū balā mā Muṣṭafā nī āl chhē-Karbala mā sū Ḥusayn ibn-ē ‘Alī nō ḥāl chhē* (What calamity has befallen Muṣṭafā’s

translations, and audios are published online at the “Fatemi Dawat” website, “<https://www.fatimidawat.com/prayers/qasidas-marsiya-and-salaams/>” (cf. “Qasidas,” “Nohas” and “Munajaats”).

- 13 (1) Sayf al-Dīn, *Dīwān*, vol. 1, pp. 400-412, composed 1382/1962, 177 verses, beginning: *Al-‘aqlu fī l-insāni a’lā l-jawharī*. On this poem, see T. Qutbuddin and Aziz Qutbuddin, “*The Intellect is the Essence of the Human—The Arabic Poem of the Intellect (Qasīdat al-‘Aql)*”. (2) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 17-42, composed 1366/1947, 352 verses, beginning: *Ālu Ṭāhā l-a’immatu l-atqiyā’ū*. (3) *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 384-393, composed 1382/1963, 121 verses, beginning: *Al-ḥamdu li-Llāhi l-‘aliyyi l-qādirī*. On this poem, see Aziz Qutbuddin, “Qasīdah-Autobiography of Syedna Taher Saifuddin”.
- 14 Sayf al-Dīn, *Dīwān*, vol. 2, pp. 325-328; *Majmū‘at barakāt ‘Āshūrā*, pp. 75-82; *Dhikrā shahādat al-Ḥusayn*, pp. 32-37.
- 15 Sayf al-Dīn, *Dīwān*, vol. 2, pp. 182-187; *Majmū‘at barakāt ‘Āshūrā*, pp. 83-89; *Dhikrā shahādat al-Ḥusayn*, pp. 38-43.
- 16 *Dhikrā shahādat al-Ḥusayn*, pp. 198-209.

progeny in Karbala! What suffering has Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī endured in Karbala!), fifty-one verses, likewise composed in 1360/1941 during a trip to Sri Lanka (then called Ceylon).¹⁷ The opening line of this last Lisān al-Da‘wa poem echoes the Twelver Shī‘ī Sharīf Raḍī’s (d. 406/1015) famous Arabic lament *Karbala lā zilti karban wa-balā—mā laqī ‘indaki ālu l-Muṣṭafā* (Karbala, may you always face trouble and calamity! What suffering has Muṣṭafā’s progeny endured on your soil!),¹⁸ further demonstrating Sayf al-Dīn’s familiarity with sister traditions. In addition, one of his lengthy Lisān al-Da‘wa counsel poems contains nine stanzas recounting the Karbala tragedy, including two narrating the final moments of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom that are often recited in Ṭayyibī gatherings.¹⁹ Finally, he also composed nine prose addresses in literary Arabic called *salām* (greetings) to Ḥusayn, three to six pages each, for pilgrims to recite during their visits to Ḥusayn’s shrines in Karbala and Cairo.²⁰

The Sayyid al-Shuhadā’ Lament

Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn composed the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā’* lament during one of his visits to Karachi in pre-Independence India in 1348/1929. First reciting it in Muḥarrām sermons during the visit, he published it later that same year in his Ramaḍān treatise titled *Ṣibghu nūr* (Hue of light).²¹ The lament opens by addressing Ḥusayn with “O king of martyrs” (*Yā sayyida l-shuhadā’ī*). This same address also forms part of a two-line refrain repeated at the end of each stanza: “I grieve for you, Ḥusayn, O king of martyrs” (*wā-lahfatā yā Ḥusaynā—yā sayyida l-shuhadā’ī*). The first stanza sets up the poem in an intimate, personal frame, with direct address to Ḥusayn and a first-person possessive pronoun identifying the poet as one who weeps for him—“I shall weep for you through the age” (*ṭūla l-zamāni bukā’ī*). It also introduces in kernel form the main elements of the poem: Ḥusayn’s name, his lofty status as the pure Imām, his tragic martyrdom in Karbala, and the theme of ceaseless weeping for his suffering. These compressed allusions foreshadow the contents and philosophy of the poem. The poem’s poignancy is achieved through emotive flourishes which include expressions of grief (e.g. *wā-lahfatā*, *passim*, and *āhin*,

17 Ibid., pp. 193-196.

18 Raḍī, *Dīwān*, vol. 1, pp. 44-47; partially cited in ‘Imād al-Dīn, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 4, p. 189, probably Sayf al-Dīn’s source.

19 *Dhikrā shahādat al-Ḥusayn*, pp. 89-90, beginning: *Shimr yē āwī nē thokar nē mārī* (Shimr came forward and kicked Ḥusayn to the ground).

20 *Al-Barakāt wa-l-qurubāt*, vol. 1, pp. 32-77.

21 Sayf al-Dīn, *Ṣibghu nūr*, pp. 144-157.

stanza 2), moving expressions of personal relationships, especially Ḥusayn's with his sister Zaynab and his daughter Sakīna (stanzas 12-15), and an epic presentation of Karbala as a battle between good and evil. Most Urdu elegies produced in the subcontinent, including those composed by Ṭayyibī Bohras, focus on one particular hero or theme;²² in contrast, the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament lays out the main features of the battle, including the martyrdoms of Ḥusayn and other individuals from the Prophet's family and the events following Karbala. These parallel the major elements of the Ṭayyibī sermonic recounting of Karbala. Overall, the lament follows the chronological progression of the *Maqṭal* (narrative of the Karbala killing), presenting the entire tragedy of Karbala in a single, sweeping tale.

In an old, audiocassette recording of Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn's 'Āshūrā' sermon of 1381/1961 in Saif-e Masjid, Mumbai—a truly fortunate find from the Da'wa archives—we hear the poet himself passionately reciting stanza 4, “*Yā ma'shara l-mu'minīnā*” (O believers, all) of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament, the congregation's response recitation, and Sayf al-Dīn's Lisān al-Da'wa rendering of the stanza enjoining them to weep (two-minute clip, “<https://youtu.be/rzTXOz4ps4Q>”).

The Poet's Preface

The following is the text of Sayf al-Dīn's Arabic preface to the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament in *Ṣibghu nūr*,²³ presented alongside my English translation. The preface is important not only as a literary artefact connected to the lament, but also for analysing the lament's Ṭayyibī mourning doctrines (more on this in the analysis).

Assembly of believers! May God shower the same mercy on you that he showered on the most pious of his servants. May he grant you freedom from the punishment of the Fire, ordain for you Paradise, and make your allegiance to your masters a shield for you from the Fire.

معشر المؤمنين رحمكم الله برحمة رحم بها
عباده الأبرار. وأعتق رقابكم من عذاب
النار. وأوجب لكم الجنة. وجعل لكم ولاء
مواليكم من النار جنة.

22 See Trivedi, “Appropriating an Iranian Literary Tradition”, p. 168; Naim, “Art of the Urdu Marsiya”, p. 110.

23 Sayf al-Dīn, *Ṣibghu nūr*, pp. 144-157.

Let us recite here a poem mourning the one for whom angels wept in the sky, when the demonic faction tore the robe of his sanctity on earth. All prophets wept for him. All legatees of their eras and savants wept for him. All believing men and women wept for him. Just as they wept for him in past times, they will continue to weep for him in future eons.

It is reported that God's Messenger (God's blessings on him and his descendants) ordained Paradise for the person who weeps, causes someone to weep, or endeavours to weep for Ḥusayn. Triumphant the person who frees himself from the Fire by weeping for Ḥusayn!

I, his servant, servant of the pious Imāms in his pure and virtuous line, and bondman of Muḥammad's pure descendants, have composed this poem. My tears pour like rain in remembrance of the suffering of my master, the Imām.

Text and Translation

The following is the text of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament alongside my translation. I have attempted to render the Arabic into lucid English that, while remaining true to the original, reads with some semblance of poetic cadence rather than as a literal crib. The translation is, therefore, not word-for-word but line-to-line; it does not adhere to the grammar of the original text but endeavours to convey the essence of the lines. Also, the poem contains allusions to Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī doctrine; less known doctrines are explained briefly in the analysis section of the article.

لنشيد ههنا قصيدة في الرثاء على من بكت
عليه في السماء الملائكة. لما فتكت به في
الأرض الأمة الهالكة. وبكت عليه جميع
الأنبياء. وجميع من كان في أدوارهم من
الأوصياء والأولياء. وبكى عليه المؤمنون
والمؤمنات. ولن يزالوا يبكون عليه كما بكوا
فيما مضى فيما هوأت.

ولقد أتى عن رسول الله صلعم أنه أوجب
الجنة لمن بكى عليه أو أبكى أو تباكى. فيا
فوز من فك رقبته بالبكاء عليه من النار
فككا.

وتلك القصيدة نظمها عبده وعبد الأمة
الأبرار من ذريته الطاهرة الطيبة. مملوك
آل محمد الطاهرين ودموعه كصوب الغمام
على مصيبة مولاه الإمام صيبة.

1. O king of martyrs
Fifth of the five robed in purity
Upon the great tragedy
that befell you in Karbala
I shall weep through the long age
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ خَامِسَ أَهْلِ الْكِسَاءِ
عَلَى عَظِيمٍ بَلَاءٍ نَأْلَكَ فِي كَرْبَلَاءِ
طَوَّلَ الزَّمَانِ بُكَائِي وَالْهَفْتَ يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
2. Son of God's messenger
Best of kings
I utter lament upon lament for you
One follows another without ceasing
Mingled with tears of blood
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
يَا بْنَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ يَا خَيْرَ شَاهِنَشَاهِ
أَهٍ عَلَيْكَ فَآهِ تَتَرَى بِغَيْرِ تَوَاهِ
مَعَ دَمْعَةٍ حَمْرَاءِ وَالْهَفْتَ يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
3. Flow out, O spirit
Gush forth, O eye
Your master is slain with a silver blade
Cruelly wielded by a ruthless enemy
Most evil of all cursed foes
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
فِيضِي يَا نَفْسَ فِيضِي فِيضِي يَا عَيْنَ فِيضِي
مَوْلَاكَ مَقْتُولُ بَيْضِ مَنْ ظَلَمَ ضِدَّ بَغِيضِ
شَرِّ الْعِدَى اللَّعْنَاءِ وَالْهَفْتَ يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
4. O believers, all
Weep for the great Imām
Weep for the blessed king
Weep for the upright master
Weep for the son of the best of all women
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
يَا مَعْشَرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ائْكُوا الْإِمَامَ الْمُبِينَا
ائْكُوا الْهُدَامَ الْبِمِينَا ائْكُوا الْوَلِيَّ الْأَمِينَا
ائْكُوا ابْنَ خَيْرِ النِّسَاءِ وَالْهَفْتَ يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
5. Weep for Imām Ḥusayn
Embodiment of truth
Wellspring of generosity
Who drank death's cup to save God's religion
Parched and thirsty in Karbala
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
ائْكُوا الْإِمَامَ الْحُسَيْنَا مَنْ كَانَ لِلْحَقِّ عَيْنَا
مَنْ كَانَ لِلْجُودِ عَيْنَا قَدْ ذَاقَ فِي اللَّهِ حِينَا
عَطْشَانَ فِي كَرْبَلَاءِ وَالْهَفْتَ يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

6. Weep long and hard
For that martyred Imām
In the morning and at night
And you shall receive abundant reward
On the day of requital
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
7. Alas for Muḥammad's exiled grandson
Martyred in Karbala
His womenfolk tormented
Driven through the wilderness
By enemy hordes
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
8. Revelation's children
Crushed in calamity's millstone
Slain by the hands of Fate
Their stars waned and vanished, one by one
On the day of 'Āshūrā'
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
9. In the forenoon, Ḥusayn called out
To the assembled foe:
I am the Prophet's grandson
Who has thirsted three full days
I ask only for a mouthful of water
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
10. Wicked, they heeded not his plea
They quenched not his thirst
They killed him
—The whole world's benefactor—
Dry and parched
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- إِنكُوا بِكَأَنَّ طَوِيلًا ذَاكَ الْإِمَامَ الْقَتِيلًا
يُنْكِرُكُمْ وَالْأَصِيلًا تُعْطُوا ثَوَابًا جَزِيلًا
فِي الْحَشْرِ يَوْمَ الْجَزَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
- أَهْ عَرِيبُ مُحَمَّدٍ فِي كَرْبَلَا مُسْتَشْهَدٍ
حَرِيمُهُ بَعْدَ نَضْهَدٍ تُسَاقُ فِي كُلِّ فَدَدٍ
فِي رُمْرِ الْأَعْدَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
- عَلَى بَنِي الْوَحْيِ دَارَتْ رَحَى الْبَلَابَا وَجَارَتْ
أَيْدِي الزَّمَانِ فَغَارَتْ نُجُومُهُمْ وَتَوَارَتْ
فِي يَوْمِ عَاشُورَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
- أَضْحَى الْحُسَيْنُ يُنَادِي بَيْنَ جُمُوعِ الْأَعَادِي
إِنِّي ابْنُ طَهٍ وَصَادٍ مُنْذُ ثَلَاثِ صَادٍ
أَطْلُبُ شُرْبَةَ مَاءٍ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
- لَمْ يَسْمَعُوا مِنْهُ قَوْلًا وَإِذْ شَقُّوا مَا سَقَوْا لَا
بَلْ قَتَلُوا مِنْهُ مَوْلَى عَمِّ الْبَرَايَا طَوْلًا
عَلَى أَشَدِّ ظَمَاءٍ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

11. I grieve for Zaynab
 She weeps bitterly for her brother
 She dyes her hair in his blood
 Her tears pour down like rain
 She has no veil on her head
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا لَهْفَتَاهُ لَزَيْنَبَ بَنِي أَخَاهَا وَتَدْبُ
 مِنْ دَمِهِ الشَّعْرُ تَخْضِبُ وَالْدَّمْعُ كَالغَيْثِ يَسْكُبُ
 وَهِيَ بِغَيْرِ رِدَاءٍ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
12. She keens: Son of my mother!
 Grandson of the Prophet!
 Noonday sun and full moon!
 Great is my sorrow
 In exile and enslaved
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- صَارِحَةً يَا بَنَ الْأُمِّ سَبَطَ النَّبِيِّ الْأُمِّيَّ
 شَمْسٌ ضُحَى بَدْرَ تَمَّ يَا عَظَمَ هَمِّي وَنَمِّي
 فِي غُرْبَةٍ وَسَاءَ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
13. Alas for my grief, Ḥusayn
 Alas for my exile, Ḥusayn
 Alas for my suffering, Ḥusayn
 Alas for my destruction, Ḥusayn
 O refuge of the pious
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا وَاعْرَبَتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 وَكُرَبَتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا وَاضِيعَتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا مَوْئِلَ الْأَتَقِيَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
14. Brother, the enemy are striking Sakina
 Their blows cause her pain
 She cries out: Rise, father, rise!
 O father, they are hurting me
 Save me from these brutes
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- أَخِي سَكِينَةُ تُلَطِّمُ تُوجَعُ ضَرْبًا وَتُؤَلِّمُ
 تَقُولُ قُمْ يَا أَبِي قُمْ يَا أَبَاهُ أَظْلَمُ
 قِنِي مِنَ الْأَشْقِيَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
15. Father, my father, where are you?
 Dearest father! Why have you gone away?
 Have you forgotten your daughter?
 Take me with you wherever you may be
 I cannot live without you
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- أَيُّ أَبِي أَيْنَ أَتَا يَا أَبَا لَمْ يَنْتَا
 نَسِيتَ هَذِي الْبِنْتَ خُذْنِي مَعًا حَيْثُ كُنَّا
 فَلَا أَعِشْ فِي النَّتَائِي وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

16. O brother! 'Alī is ill and weak
Shackled in irons
Made to walk from Iraq to Syria
Barefoot, without shoes
O the scorching heat!
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- أَجْنَى عَلِيٍّ مُدْنِفٌ مُكَبَّلٌ مُسْتَضْعَفٌ
يَمْشِي إِلَى الشَّامِ مِنْ طَلْفٍ بِلاَ حِذَاءٍ وَلَا خُفٍّ
أَهْ عَلَى الرَّمْضَاءِ وَالْهَفْتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
17. A shattering calamity
A devastating cataclysm
When daughters of the best of creation
Are enslaved by an army of criminals
And driven like slave women
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- أَجْلَلٌ بِهَا مِنْ رَمَزِيَّةٍ أَعْظَمُ بِهَا مِنْ بَلِيَّةٍ
بَنَاتُ خَيْرِ الْبَرِيَّةِ سَيِّئِ الْجُمُوعِ الشَّقِيَّةِ
يُسْقَنُ سَوْقُ الْإِمَاءِ وَالْهَفْتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
18. I grieve for 'Alī
Mirror image of the Prophet
That proud warrior
Who refused to allow
An adulterer's son to rule over God's saints
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا لَهْفَتَا لِعَلِيٍّ شَيْهِ طُهُ النَّبِيِّ
ذَاكَ الْكَيْفِ الْأَيِّ لَمْ يَرْضَ بِابْنِ الدَّيْعِيِّ
يَحْكُمُ فِي الْأَوْلِيَاءِ وَالْهَفْتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
19. I grieve for Ḥusayn's infant son
Great in virtue
A villain shot him with an arrow
He passed away—pending Judgement Day—
In his father's upraised hands
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا لَهْفَتَاهُ لِطِفْلٍ لَهُ عَظِيمُ الْفَضْلِ
رَمَاهُ نَذْلُ بَنِي لَمَضَى لِيَوْمِ الْفَضْلِ
فِي يَدِهِ الْعَلِيَاءِ وَالْهَفْتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
20. I grieve for 'Abbās
A battle lion
Strongest supporter
Of his regal brother
Who died covered in blood
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا لَهْفُ لِلْعَبَّاسِ هَرَبٌ يَوْمَ الْبَاسِ
أَصْبَحَ خَيْرَ مُوَأَسٍ لِصَوْنِهِ الْقَسَاسِ
مُضْرَجًا بِالِدَّمَاءِ وَالْهَفْتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

21. I mourn the wedding
That took place in the heat of the battle
Between pure bride and pure groom
Weeping, she followed him, also weeping
As he rushed to the battlefield
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- وَأَحْسَرَتَا لِمَلَأِكِ أَوْنَةُ الْإِعْتِرَالِكِ
رَاكِبَةٌ مَعَ رَاكِبِ بَاكِئَةٌ إِثْرَ بَاكِ
يَذْهَبُ فِي الْهَيْجَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
22. More fearsome than Resurrection
The day in which the noble Imām
At the very end of his time on earth
Bid farewell to his gathered womenfolk
And to Zayn al ‘Ābidin
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَوْمٌ مِنَ الْحَشْرِ أَرْوَعَ إِذِ الْإِمَامُ الْأَرْوَعَ
فِي آخِرِ الْعَهْدِ وَدَّعَ تِلْكَ السَّرِيَّاتِ أَجْمَعَ
وَمَزَيْنَ آلَ الْعَبَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
23. I grieve for Kisrā's daughter
Whom they bound with fetters
A chaste, virtuous lady
Mother of all the Imāms
Shining stars and pure savants
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا الْهَفَّتَا بِنْتُ كِسْرَى قَدْ أَوْثَقُوهَا أَسْرَى
كَانَتْ بَتُولًا طَهْرًا أُمُّ الْأَيْمَةِ طَرَا
الْغُرَمِ الْأَمْرِيَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
24. I grieve for Rabāb
Anguished and inconsolable
Her heart is turbulent
Her tears flow and flow
A dirge is on her lips
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا الْهَفَّتَا لِلرَّبَابِ ذَاتِ جَوَى وَكَتَابِ
فَوَادَهَا فِي أَضْطِرَابِ دُمُوعُهَا فِي أَنْصَابِ
مُنْشِدَةً لِلرَّئَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
25. I grieve for Kubrā and Ṣughrā
Who are crushed
By this great calamity
They have run out of fortitude
Enormous their grief
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا الْهَفُّ كُبْرَى وَصُغْرَى كِلْتَاهُمَا فِي كُبْرَى
مِنَ الدَّوَاهِي تَشْرَى لَا تَسْتَطِيعُ الصَّبْرَا
فِي شِدَّةِ الْعَمَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

26. Umm Kulthūm
Is ever seen
Mourning her noble brother
Her tears are blood
Her breaths intense
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- وَأُمُّ كَلْثُومٍ لَمْ تَرَ لْ تَرَى فِي مَاتَمٍ
عَلَى أَحْيَاهَا الْأَكْرَمِ تُجْرِي دُمُوعًا مِنْ دَمٍ
مَعَ نَفْسِ الصُّعْدَاءِ وَالْهَفَاتِ يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
27. She tears her garments in a frenzy of grief
She uses her tresses to veil her face
—the mirror image of a full moon—
For the enemy has snatched her cloak
How else to preserve modesty?
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- مَشْفُوقَةُ الْحَبِيبِ وَلَهُي تَسْرُّ بِالشَّعْرِ وَجْهَهَا
قَدْ كَانَ لِلْبَدْرِ شَبَهَا إِذْ نَجَّ الْقَوْمُ مِنْهَا
بُرْعَهَا لِلْحَيَاءِ وَالْهَفَاتِ يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
28. I grieve for the widows
Who clutch fatherless infants
Their noble husbands gone
Those proud warriors
Lie prostrate in the open desert
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- وَالْهَفَاتِ لِأَيَامِي يَحْمِلُنْ غُرًّا يَتَامِي
فَقَدَنْ صَيِّدًا كِرَامًا شَمَّ الْأَنْوَفِ عِظَامَا
صَرَخَى بِذَاكَ الْعَرَاءِ وَالْهَفَاتِ يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
29. I grieve for those noble women
Exposed to the enemy horde
Bereft in Karbala
Calling out
To their valiant men
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- لَهْفِي عَلَى طَاهِرَاتِ بَيْنَ الْعِدَى حَاسِرَاتِ
كَرَائِمِ نَادِبَاتِ فِي كَرْبَلَا صَارِحَاتِ
لِلْسَادَةِ الْأَسْرِيَاءِ وَالْهَفَاتِ يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
30. Their garments torn
Hearts in shock
Backs weighted with grief
Lives beset
With hardship and suffering
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- مُسَفَّقَاتِ الْجُيُوبِ مُفْجَعَاتِ الْقُلُوبِ
مُحْمَلَاتِ الْكُرُوبِ مُقَاسِيَاتِ الْخُطُوبِ
مَنْ الْبَلَا وَالْعَنَاءِ وَالْهَفَاتِ يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

31. I grieve for the children
Who wail loudly and sob
Bound with ropes
With no one to save them
Their fathers dead
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- لَهْفِي عَلَى الْأَطْفَالِ يَبْكُونَ بِالْإِعْوَالِ
قَدْ أُوثِقُوا بِالْحَبَالِ لَيْسَ لَهُمْ مِنْ ثَمَالِ
لَعِيَّةِ الْآبَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
32. I grieve for the young men
From the Prophet's family
Who fought Ḥusayn's assailants
With all their strength
And gave their lives for him
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- لَهْفِي لِأَهْلِ الْفُتُوَّةِ مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِ النَّبِيِّ
مُبَارِمِينَ بِقُوَّةِ دُونَ الْحُسَيْنِ عَدُوَّهُ
قَدَّوهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
33. I grieve for his loyal companions
Gallant and fierce
Lions of combat
Who were thrown to the earth
And died fulfilling their pledge
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا لَهْفَتَاهُ لِصَحْبٍ لَهُ كُمَاةٌ غُلْبٍ
أَسَادِ يَوْمِ الْحَرْبِ قَدْ صُرِعُوا فِي التُّرْبِ
مُؤَفِّينَ حَقَّ الْوَفَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
34. Of those radiant peers
Some were killed by spears
Others were hurled to the ground and slain
Yet others had their throats cut
On the searing sands of Ṭaff
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- فَرْنَ طَعِينِ جَرْجٍ وَمِنْ شَهِيدِ طَرْجٍ
وَمِنْ قَتِيلِ ذَيْجٍ صَلَّتِ الْجَيْنِ صَنِيجٍ
فِي الظَّفِ بِالْصَّخْرَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
35. Martyrs who fought in God's path
Men of purity and bliss
Generosity and virtue
Excellence and benevolence
Upright stalwarts, all
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- لِلَّهِ مِنْ شُهَدَاءِ أَطَائِبِ سَعْدَاءِ
أَكَارِمِ فَضْلَاءِ أَمَائِلِ نُبْلَاءِ
فِي دِيْنِهِمْ حُنَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

36. Alas for the wraith of light,
my father be its ransom!
Essence of the ages
House of the manifest lord
Pure body that the evil legion's horses
Viciously trampled
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
37. Can a believer be consoled?
Has there been a tragedy equal to this one?
Here is Ḥusayn's head
Raised high on a spear
Gleaming like the sun
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
38. Alas, the Imām's head
In a basin before the enemy
Who sits on his throne
Mocking, wielding a cane
Striking those pearly teeth
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
39. Weep, O believers! The Prophet weeps
The chaste lady weeps
Ḥusayn's exalted father weeps
His noble brother weeps
All the prophets weep
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
40. Fāṭima Zahrā' weeps
The sky weeps
The earth weeps
The radiant religion weeps
Weep for him, O believers!
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs

يَا بَائِي شَمِيعُ نُورٍ قَدْ كَانَ لُبُّ الدُّهُورِ
وَيَتِ رَبِّ الظُّهُورِ خِيُولُ قَوْمِ بُؤْمٍ
وَطِئَتْهُ بِاعْتِدَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

هَلْ مُؤْمِسٌ يَتَسَلَّى أَهْلَ كَهْدِي جُلِي
رَأْسُ الْحُسَيْنِ مَعْلَى عَلَى السِّنَانِ يَجْلِي
لَأَلَاؤُهُ كَذَكَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

يَا لَهْفَتَا فِي الطَّسَبِ رَأْسُ إِمَامِ الْوَقْتِ
وَالضِدُّ فَوْقَ التَّخْتِ يَنْكُثُ هُرَّةً بِنَكْتِ
تَغْرَا لَهُ ذَا بَهَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

إِنكُوا فَهَذَا الرَّسُولُ يَبْكِي وَهَذِي الْبَتُولُ
وَذَا أَبُوهُ الْجَلِيلُ وَذَا أَخُوهُ التَّيْلُ
فِي زُمَرِ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

فَاطِمَةُ الزَّهْرَاءِ تَبْكِيهِ وَالْخَضْرَاءُ
تَبْكِيهِ وَالْغُرَاءُ وَالْدَّعْوَةُ الْغُرَاءُ
فَأَبْكُوهُ أَهْلَ الْوَلَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

41. O legion of evil, may you be damned!
 You came together as one hand
 To stab religion's heart
 The pith
 Of God's chosen saints
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
42. O legion of evil, may you be cursed!
 You killed a soul
 Innocent and pure
 Of heavenly origin
 And radiant light
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
43. O incarnate proof of the Merciful Lord
 Essence of the ages
 Banner of the faith
 Patron of the aspirer
 Most generous benefactor
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
44. Your servant weeps for you
 Your servant mourns for you
 Your servant offers his life for you
 The verse he has composed
 Is a mark of his servitude
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
45. O just Imām
 Grandson of the best of prophets
 Son of the honeybees' sovereign
 I offer my life, my family, as your ransom
 My mother, my father, my children
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا أُمَّةَ السَّوْءِ تَبَّا لَكُمْ عَدُوْتُمْ إِبَّا
 لِقَتْلِ مَنْ كَانَ قَلْبًا لِلدِّينِ بَلْ كَانَ لُبَّا
 مِنْ صَفْوَةِ الْأَصْفِيَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
- يَا أُمَّةَ السَّوْءِ تَعَسَا لَكُمْ قَتَلْتُمْ نَفْسَا
 رَكْتَ وَطَابَتْ غَرْسَا لَمْ تَتَّمِ إِلَّا فُدْسَا
 بُؤْمِرَهَا الْوُضَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
- يَا حُجَّةَ الرَّحْمَانِ يَا صَفْوَةَ الْأَرْمَانِ
 يَا عِلْمَ الْإِيمَانِ يَا مُعْطِيَا لِلْأَمَانِ
 يَا أَكْرَمَ الْكِرْمَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
- عَبْدُكَ ذَا يَبْكِيكَ عَبْدُكَ ذَا يَرْجِيكَ
 عَبْدُكَ ذَا يَقْدِيكَ قَدْ قَالَ ذَا الشِّعْرِ فِيكَ
 أَدَاءَ حَقِّ الْفِدَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
- أَيَا إِمَامَ الْعَدْلِ يَا سِبْطَ خَيْرِ الرُّسُلِ
 يَا بَنَ أَمِيرِ التَّحَلِّي فَدَتَكَ نَفْسِي وَأَهْلِي
 أُجِّي أَيْبَ أَبْنَائِي وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

46. O descendant of Ḥusayn
My protector and guardian
Incarnate proof of the Glorious Lord
Sanctuary for the wise
Refuge for the sincere
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا بَنَ الْحُسَيْنِ الشَّهِيدِ خَيْرَ رَقِيبٍ شَهِيدِ
جُجَّةَ رَبِّ مَحِيدِ عُمْدَةَ كُلِّ رَشِيدِ
يَا مَلْجَأَ الْخُلَصَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
47. Benevolence, O Imām of the Age!
Be kind to your humble servant
Forgive his sins and draw him close
He has no refuge but you
O cool shadow of the Mighty Lord
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- يَا صَاحِبَ الْعَصْرِ لُطْفًا بِعَبْدِكَ الْقَيْنِ عَطْفًا
عَفْوًا وَعَفْرًا وَزُلْفًا لَمْ يَلْفَ غَيْرَكَ كَهْفًا
يَا ظِلَّ ذِي الْكِبَرِيَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
48. God, bless Ḥusayn
Honour him
Sanctify and exalt him
Grant him your gentlest mercy
As long as raindrops fall
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- لِلْهُمَّ صَلِّ وَسَلِّمْ عَلَى الْحُسَيْنِ وَكَرِّمْ
بَارِكْ عَلَيْهِ وَعَظِّمْ وَأَرْحَمْهُ رَبِّ تَرَحَّمْ
مَا أَتَهَلَّ قَطْرُ السَّمَاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
49. Bless, too, his grandfather and father
God's own visage
His mother and brother
His companions and descendants
So radiant and grand
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- وَجَدِّهِ وَأَبْنَيْهِ وَجْهِ الْإِلَهِ الْوَجِيهِ
وَأُمِّهِ وَأَخِيهِ وَصَحْبِهِ وَبَنِيهِ
أَهْلِي السَّنَا وَالسَّاءِ وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ
50. I ask you in their name
Dispel my hardships
Multiply my blessings
Transform my flaws to virtues
Hear my prayer, O Lord!
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- وَأَكْشِفْ بِهِمْ كُرْبَاتِي ضَاعِفْ بِهِمْ بَرَكَاتِي
بَدِّلْ بِهِمْ سَيِّئَاتِي جَمِيعَهَا حَسَنَاتِي
يَا رَبِّي أَسْمِعْ دُعَائِي وَالْهَفَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

51. Maledictions on Yazīd
 His helpers and his aides
 Cruel felons
 Who wronged the noble scions
 Of the house of Yāsīn
I grieve for you, Ḥusayn
O king of martyrs
- وَالْعَن يَزِيدَ اللَّعِينَا وَنَاصِرًا وَمُعِينَا
 لَهُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ عَلَى بَنِي يَاسِينَ
 السَّادَةِ النَّجَبَاءِ وَالْهَقَّتَا يَا حُسَيْنَا
 يَا سَيِّدَ الشُّهَدَاءِ

Thematic Frame

The following is the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament's thematic frame, presented in list format in nine broad segments:

- I. **Stanzas 1-6. The opening.** Address to Ḥusayn as the Messenger's descendant and one of the "People of the Cloak" (*ahl al-kisā'*). The poet's exhortation to himself to weep for his slain master. Direction to believers to weep, with a description of Ḥusayn's exalted stature and the reward that awaits those who weep for him.
- II. **Stanzas 7-10. Two framing laments.** Grief for the hardships faced by the Prophet's family in and after Karbala. A dramatic depiction of Ḥusayn's asking for water.
- III. **Stanzas 11-17. A narrative on the tongue of Ḥusayn's sister Zaynab.** The plight of the family immediately after Ḥusayn's killing. Dramatization of Zaynab unveiled, hair dyed in Ḥusayn's blood, piteously weeping. Her words imploring Ḥusayn to rise and defend his daughter Sakīna and his son 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn.
- IV. **Stanzas 18-22. Martyrs and leave taking.** The killing of Ḥusayn's sons, the youth 'Alī Akbar and the infant 'Alī Aṣghar, Ḥusayn's brother 'Abbās, and his nephew 'Abd Allāh, with an account of 'Abd Allāh's Karbala marriage to Ḥusayn's daughter Sakīna. Ḥusayn's farewell to his son and successor 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn and the women of the family.
- V. **Stanzas 23-31. The desolation of the women.** Ḥusayn's wives Shahr Bānū (Bint Kisrā) and Rabāb, his daughters Fāṭima Kubrā and Fāṭima Ṣughrā, his sister Umm Kulthūm, and all the Karbala widows and orphans.
- VI. **Stanzas 32-35. Mourning the martyrs.** The Family of the Prophet and Ḥusayn's companions, slain by swords and daggers, pierced by spears and arrows; their virtues.
- VII. **Stanzas 36-38. Desecration of Ḥusayn's corpse.** Horses trampling Ḥusayn's body; his severed head raised on a spear, then placed in a basin in front of the enemy.

- VIII. **Stanzas 39-47. Penultimate address, reflecting the lament's opening stanzas in loose ring-composition.** Directions to believers to weep for Ḥusayn; Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, and Ḥasan weep for him, the earth and the sky weep for him, God's *Da'wa* weeps for him. Maledictions on the evil community who killed Ḥusayn. Plea for aid to Ḥusayn and his descendant, the living Imām.
- IX. **Stanzas 48-51. Prayer.** Benedictions for Ḥusayn, alongside Muḥammad, 'Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, his companions, and his descendants, and plea for their intercession. Supplication to God to ease hardships and multiply blessings. Malediction on Yazīd and on those who supported him in killing Ḥusayn.

Analysis of the Lament's Doctrines and Performance: A Distinct Religious Tradition within a Hybrid Cultural Milieu

The *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament weaves its rich Arabic heritage of Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī doctrine and philosophy into an Indian Gujarati-Urdu-Persian context. In this section, I explore this distinct perspective and hybrid palette under four rubrics. Highlighting the lament's doctrinal anchor in Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī heritage, the first three rubrics address the following issues: the lament's presentation of the cosmic significance of Ḥusayn's martyrdom and of weeping for him in Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī philosophy; its grounding in the Fāṭimid Dā'ī al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī's (d. 470/1078) tradition of prose lament (*nawḥa*) and "*da'wa* poetry", particularly in their themes of Karbala mourning, Imāmate doctrines, symbolic Qur'an interpretation (*ta'wīl*), and closure segments of prayer and plea; and its adherence to the early historical reports of Ḥusayn's martyrdom as narrated in Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī texts. The fourth rubric of my analysis teases out disparate strands of the lament's complex synthesis to highlight its hybrid Arabic-Persian-Urdu poetic form and communal performance, particularly the manner in which its elegiac themes and classical forms intersect with Arabic poetic conventions set in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, and the way in which its melodic performance stems from Persianate Urdu practices of Karbala lament recital.²⁴ It should be noted that the lament's techniques

24 For an overview of elegy in the Muslim tradition, see the entry on *marthiya*, *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., online (Pellat, Arabic; Hanaway, Persian; Haywood, Urdu). For translations of key pieces and a summary, see Clarke, "Elegy (*Marthiya*) on Husayn". For historical development in India, see Trivedi, "Appropriating an Iranian Literary Tradition"; Naim, "Art of the Urdu Marsiya"; and Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*.

of grief evocation as well as its raw content, though not discussed beyond a few remarks in this article, also overlap significantly with Twelver Shīʿī Karbala laments in Arabic, Persian, and Urdu from the Middle East and South Asia.

Cosmic Significance of the Karbala Tragedy: The Philosophy of Weeping for Ḥusayn

In the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament's preface, transcribed earlier, Sayf al-Dīn cites Prophet Muḥammad's hadith "Whoever weeps, causes someone to weep, or endeavours to weep for my grandson Ḥusayn—Paradise is decreed for him". For Ṭayyibīs, Ḥusayn's martyrdom has existential implications. Like many others, they mourn him as the Prophet's beloved grandson, as someone who sacrificed everything for justice, and as a righteous and courageous leader, but above all, they mourn him as a redeemer. There are personal aspects to their mourning, of course. In Ṭayyibī belief, weeping for Ḥusayn is the way that we, fourteen hundred years later, can be with him in Karbala; by our weeping, we become part of the event. But these personal aspects are grounded in the redemption Ḥusayn's martyrdom brings to each individual who mourns him. In the Ṭayyibī worldview, Ḥusayn's martyrdom and the act of weeping for it are woven into the fabric of salvation, and this ideology strongly underpins the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament. The theme of weeping is common in all Arabic, Persian, and Urdu elegies, but in Ṭayyibī laments, including the earlier *marthiyas* mentioned in the section on the Ṭayyibī lament tradition, it denotes the redemptive force for believers who weep for Ḥusayn and the cosmic significance of his martyrdom.

In several of his Ramaḍān treatises, Sayf al-Dīn explains the integral role played by Ḥusayn's martyrdom in humankind's redemption. The main points are as follows: (1) The child Ḥusayn had promised the Prophet to repay the community's debt, to sacrifice his life and even his children: "I am the one for it, grandfather!" (*anā li-dhālika yā jaddāh*).²⁵ (2) He embraced martyrdom because that was God's will.²⁶ This point was emphasized also in Muḥyī l-Dīn's opening lament line quoted earlier, "You accepted death in compliance with God's will". (3) He "repaid the debts of those who went before and those who are yet to come".²⁷ (5) The Qurʾānic verse "He gave them protection from fear" (*wa-āmanahum min khawf*) alludes to Ḥusayn's martyrdom.²⁸ (6) "The testament of faith (*kalimat al-shahāda*) will remain alive till the day of resurrection

25 Sayf al-Dīn, *Nahr al-nūr*, p. 145.

26 Ibid., p. 154.

27 Sayf al-Dīn, *Tadhkiratu labīb*, p. 338.

28 Sayf al-Dīn, *Nahr al-nūr*, pp. 144-157; Qurʾan 106:4.

because of Ḥusayn's martyrdom (*shahāda*).²⁹ (7) Those who weep for Ḥusayn will receive the Prophet's intercession on Judgement Day and be rewarded with Paradise.³⁰ In summary, Ṭayyibīs believe that Ḥusayn died to redeem our sins, and that our weeping for him enables us to receive redemption.

This two-part philosophy is the backbone of Sayf al-Dīn's framing, which evokes the points discussed above. Tears permeate the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament. Observe these lines coming one after the other in the opening stanzas: "Upon the great tragedy that befell you in Karbala, I shall weep through the long age" (stanza 1); "I utter lament upon lament for you, one follows another without ceasing, mingled with tears of blood" (stanza 2). "Flow out, O spirit, gush forth, O eye" (stanza 3); "O believers, all: Weep for the great Imām, weep for the blessed king, weep for the upright master, weep for the son of the best of all women" (stanza 4). The above lines evoke the unspoken yet familiar association with the weeper's salvation. In the next few stanzas, that causal link is made explicit: "Weep for Imām Ḥusayn, embodiment of truth, wellspring of generosity, *who drank the cup of death to save God's religion*, parched and thirsty in Karbala" (stanza 5). "*Weep long and hard for that martyred Imām* in the morning and night, *and you shall receive abundant reward* on the day of requital" (stanza 6). Near the end of the lament in stanza 40, where Sayf al-Dīn again brings in concentrated directives to weep, the cosmic-theological import of Ḥusayn's martyrdom is fully disclosed in a reminder to mourners that the sky and the earth weep for Ḥusayn; indeed, God's religion itself weeps for him. This point was also made by the nineteenth Yemeni Dā'ī, 'Imād al-Dīn, in his lament, cited earlier, in which he wrote, "the sky wept for him and this world, both" (*bakati l-samā'u 'alayhi wa-l-dunyā ma'an*).

Grounding in al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī's Tradition of Prose Lament (Nawḥa) and Fāṭimid Da'wa Poetry

Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī (d. 470/1078) was a prominent Fāṭimid Dā'ī, scholar, poet, and diplomat, who used his many talents to propagate the Fāṭimid religio-political mission. His collected writings deeply influenced Ṭayyibī thought. This is especially true of his eight hundred weekly Thursday lectures, titled *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadīyya* (Assemblies of wisdom), in which he offered symbolic interpretations (*ta'wīl*) of the Qur'an and Shari'a, as well as his *Dīwān*, which, based on the same theology, formed the template for the Fāṭimid

29 Sayf al-Dīn, *Silsilat al-ni'matin 'uzmā*, p. 408.

30 Ibid., p. 411.

daʿwa poetry tradition.³¹ Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn—known to Ṭayyibīs as “Muʿayyad-i Aṣghar” (the younger Muʿayyad)—imbibed the stimulus of the original Muʿayyad in his preaching and writing. Influenced by Muʿayyad’s verse, his *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament used Muʿayyad’s Imāmate themes, as well as his plea for succour and benediction closure segments. Equally influenced by Muʿayyad’s lectures, it followed their theological teachings and emphatically and often verbatim echoed the language and content of their prose Karbala laments (*nawḥa*). Muʿayyad’s prose laments—in majālis 9 and 150—formed the opening address of his lectures which fell on or around the day of ʿĀshūrāʾ;³² they were recited regularly by Sayf al-Dīn in his Muḥarram *waʿẓ* sermons and formed the direct prototype for the latter’s *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament. As the following comparisons demonstrate, the themes and language of Sayf al-Dīn’s lament, especially in the opening and closing stanzas, are derived from Muʿayyad’s prose and poetry.

The *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament praises Ḥusayn’s virtues on a metaphysical plane as the incarnate emblem of God’s religion and his divine light. Ḥusayn is a “wraith of light”, “house of the Lord of Manifestation”,³³ and “essence of the ages” (stanzas 36 and 43). He is “religion’s heart” (stanza 41, cited above), “innocent and pure, heavenly origin, radiant light” (stanza 42), “banner of faith”, and “proof of the Merciful Lord”³⁴ (stanza 43). Poetry is dense and it alludes to doctrines without spelling them out, but if one understands the underlying theological orientation, formulaic phrases signal profound concepts. More than anything else, it is these doctrines that characterize Muʿayyad’s Fāṭimid *daʿwa* poetry tradition and form the heart of his *Majālis*—discussed in detail in an earlier publication³⁵—and they constitute Sayf al-Dīn’s theological substrate in the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament.

In addition to theological underpinnings, the final stanzas of the lament include six successive closure segments typical of Muʿayyad’s *daʿwa* poetry

31 On al-Muʿayyad’s life, works, and poetry, see T. Qutbuddin, “Al-Muʿayyad al-Shīrāzī”; T. Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʿayyad al-Shīrāzī*, passim. On his influence on Ṭayyibī poetry, see *ibid.*, pp. 299–333. On al-Muʿayyad’s *taʿwīl* theology, see T. Qutbuddin, “Principles of Fatimid Symbolic Interpretation”, passim.

32 Muʿayyad, *Majālis*, vol. 1, pp. 34–36 (majlis 9); vol. 2, pp. 309–310 (majlis 150).

33 In Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī doctrine, the Imām is God’s caliph on earth, the divinely guided guide in whom God’s light is manifest.

34 In Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī doctrine, the Imām is God’s living proof on earth, in the sense that he proves God’s existence to humans in his teachings, and also in the sense that his very presence—because he establishes God’s faith—constitutes proof of God’s existence.

35 On Imāmate doctrines in Muʿayyad’s poetry, see T. Qutbuddin, *Al-Muʿayyad al-Shīrāzī*, pp. 105–116. These doctrines are ubiquitous in his *Majālis*; e.g. vol. 1, p. 48 (majlis 12); vol. 1, p. 212 (majlis 45); and passim.

tradition that I have also discussed with copious examples elsewhere.³⁶ These Mu'ayyad-style closure segments comprise a plea for succour to Ḥusayn (stanza 43), declarations of the poet's willingness to lay down his life for him (stanzas 44-45), and a plea for succour to the Imām of the age (stanzas 46-47). They also include benedictions on Ḥusayn and his family and supporters (stanzas 48-49), entreaties to God through Ḥusayn's and his pure family's intercession to dispel hardships and multiply blessings (stanza 50), and maledictions on Yazīd and his supporters (stanza 51).

In both Mu'ayyad's and Sayf al-Dīn's poems, these closure segments are infused with theological weight. For example, the benediction represents a typical closure formula in the *da'wa* poetry tradition, yet it also illustrates its *ta'wīl*-based multivalence (stanzas 48-49). Straightforward on the surface, these lines, like most other statements in Ṭayyibī poetry that appear uncomplicatedly exoteric to the uninitiated, signal to the initiated an esoteric allusion. Observe, for example, stanza 48, which invokes God's benedictions on Ḥusayn, where the poet says, "Grant him your gentlest mercy as long as raindrops fall."

The Arabic term used to denote benedictions, *ṣalawāt*, comes from the same three-letter root (Ṣ-L-W) as the word *ṣila* (lit., joining). The Ṭayyibīs believe that *ṣalawāt* denotes the chain of Imāms who will continue unbroken in Muḥammad's line till Judgement Day.³⁷ The continuity (*ṣila*) of the Imāmate is underscored by repurposing the conventional phrase "as long as raindrops fall". In classical Arabic literature, lines like this one—"as long as the stars keep shining", "as long as the sun rises", and so on—mean "for all time". Here, the line denotes the continuity of the Imāmate for all time. The choice of the rain image is also significant. In addition to its function in the conventional pre-Islamic supplication for rain to water the grave of a slain warrior, rain in the Islamic tradition signifies God's mercy. Here, its use in tandem with *ṣalawāt* signals that just as Muḥammad is described in the Qur'an as God's "mercy for all worlds" (*raḥmatan li-l-ʿālamīn*),³⁸ the same embodiment of God's mercy continues in Muḥammad's line, in the person of Ḥusayn and those of his descendants, one Imām after another, till the last day. Stanza 49 continues the invocation of blessings on "Ḥusayn's grandfather", the Prophet Muḥammad; "his father", 'Alī; "his mother", Fāṭima; "his brother", Ḥasan; "his companions", the martyrs of Karbala; and "his descendants", the Imāms. The possessive

36 On Mu'ayyad's closure segments, see T. Qutbuddin, *Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī*, pp. 191-200.

37 Nu'mān, *Ta'wīl al-da'ā'im*, vol. 1, pp. 303-304; Mu'ayyad, *Majālis*, vol. 2, p. 396 (majlis 163); vol. 4, pp. 424-425 (majlis 373). See details in Aziz Qutbuddin, "Taḥmīd", pp. 174-176.

38 Qur'an 21:107.

pronoun “his” connects them all, each to the other, through the relationship of each with Ḥusayn.

This grouping of God’s chosen ones connected through the person of Ḥusayn signals further the integral role of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom for the continuity of God’s mercy and the redemption of humankind—in other words, for the historical actualization of the *ṣalawāt* benediction.

Ḥusayn’s descent from the Prophet (and his parentage from ‘Alī and Fāṭima, and through them, again, from the Prophet) has been a crucial theme in the teachings of most Shīʿī denominations through the centuries, and it is also prominent in the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā’* lament. What is noteworthy in our context is the particular set of subthemes within this larger theme that Sayf al-Dīn chooses to highlight, which may be traced back to subthemes that Mu’ayyad had highlighted. In stanzas 41 and 42, Sayf al-Dīn calls down curses on “the evil community” (*ummat al-saw’*)³⁹ of so-called Muslims—the word “community” (*umma*) signals that they are people who claimed to be Muslim—who killed Ḥusayn. This idea connects with Mu’ayyad’s majlis 9, in which he addresses the audience of Fāṭimid devotees saying, “May God protect you from the faction who challenged their Prophet in the case of the sons of his daughter, who attempted to destroy the house of guidance *by killing their Prophet’s family*.”⁴⁰ Mu’ayyad continues in the same text, “The Prophet who is the path to safety and the bridge to salvation for all souls deserved better than to have this calamity knock on his door, and to have *his own community’s arrows* target his home.”⁴¹ What may be seen as an otherwise dry theological point—the issue of Ḥusayn’s descent from the Prophet—is rendered poignant by the context of Ḥusayn’s assailants being themselves Muslims, who claim Muḥammad as their prophet and guide to salvation. Another kinship aspect of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā’* lament points to Ḥusayn’s purity as one of the five special members of his family, namely, Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn; stanza 1 addresses Ḥusayn as “fifth of the five robed in purity” (lit., fifth of the People of the Cloak) whom the Prophet is reported to have enveloped in a “cloak of purity” (*kisā’ al-taṭhīr*) upon the revelation of the Qur’anic verse “God wishes to remove all impurities from you, O people of the house, and to purify you fully.”⁴² This subtheme, too, is common among Shīʿī groups generally; the point

39 In Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī doctrine, every prophet and Imām is the principle of good. Loving him is good in absolute terms, and holding enmity for him is evil. For this reason, those who participated in killing Ḥusayn are called “the evil community”.

40 Mu’ayyad, *Majālis*, vol. 1, p. 34 (majlis 9).

41 Ibid., p. 35.

42 Qur’an 33:33: *Innamā yurīdu Llāhu li-yudhhiba ‘ankumul-rjsa ahlal-bayti wa-yuṭahhirakum taṭhīrā*. Nu’mān, *Da‘ā’im al-Islām*, vol. 1, pp. 35, 37.

of interest here is that it occurs in the opening lines of Sayf al-Dīn's lament for Ḥusayn, just as it occurs in the opening lines of Mu'ayyad's majlis 9 lament for Ḥusayn, where he invokes blessings on "God's Messenger ... Muḥammad, from whom and from 'the people of whose house God removed all impurities and purified them fully'".⁴³ The implication is again cosmic: that such a pure one as Ḥusayn, who was part of the larger pentad of pure ones, should be killed is a matter that is relevant to the entire cosmos. Yet another specific aspect of the kinship theme common to both Mu'ayyad and Sayf al-Dīn is the importance given to the present Imām's descent from Ḥusayn. Stanza 46 of Sayf al-Dīn's lament echoes the emphasis in Mu'ayyad's *da'wa* poetry tradition on the present (concealed) Imām's descent from the Prophet Muḥammad.⁴⁴ These lineage-based epithets for Ḥusayn and his descendant, the living Imām, signal the continuity of God's direct guidance for successive generations through Muḥammad's physical and spiritual heirs.

What is also noteworthy about the lineage markers in the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament is their sheer volume, again following Mu'ayyad's practice. Stanza 2 addresses Ḥusayn as "[grand]son of God's messenger". Stanza 4 directs believers to weep for "the son of the best of all women". Stanza 8 grieves over "revelation's children". Stanza 45 addresses Ḥusayn again as "grandson of the best of Prophets, son of the honeybees' sovereign [ʿAlī]".⁴⁵ And so on. In addition, many stanzas indirectly emphasize the familial connection, including stanza 32, which grieves for "the young men from the Prophet's family". These stanzas echo Mu'ayyad's prose laments, in which Ḥusayn's prophetic lineage and Imāmate are prominent themes. In majlis 150, for example, Mu'ayyad refers to Ḥusayn as "the slain Imām thrown upon the desert sands, son of ʿAlī Murtaḍā and Fāṭima Zahrā"; and there are many more such references that we see over and over in his lines mourning Ḥusayn.

43 Mu'ayyad, *Majālis*, vol. 1, pp. 34-35 (majlis 9). The verse is also referenced in the opening and closing formulas and in various other contexts explaining the stature of the Prophet's family in *ibid.*, majālis 36, 80, 135, 178, 199, 244, 320, 356, 365, and 376. Mu'ayyad's poetry also directly references this Qur'anic verse in a praise poem with the opening line *Salāmun ʿalā l-ʿitrati l-ṭāhira*, "Greetings to the pure progeny"; *Dīwān*, p. 287 (poem 41) and *passim*.

44 On Mu'ayyad's emphasis on the Imām's descent from the Prophet Muḥammad in his poetry, see T. Qutbuddin, *Al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī*, pp. 146-149.

45 In Fātimid-Ṭayyibi doctrine, honeybees (*naḥl*), who cooperate to protect their hive and produce sweet honey, are a symbol for believers (and for the Imāms). ʿAlī is designated the honeybees' sovereign (*amīr al-naḥl*). See Mu'ayyad, *Majālis*, vol. 1, p. 100 (majlis 23) and vol. 3, pp. 446-447 (majlis 300), citing Qur'an 16:68. See also ʿAlī's words "I am the believers' king-bee" (*anā ya'sūb al-mu'minīn*), in *Nahj al-balāgha*, ḥikma 302.

In addition to doctrinal resonances, the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament contains unmistakable verbatim echoes of Mu'ayyad's prose laments. Perhaps the most clear is the vocative phrase *Ma'shar al-mu'minīn* (Believers, all!). This phrase was Mu'ayyad's typical opening address in each of his eight hundred *majālis*. In Ṭayyibī sermons, that address, usually voiced in a passionate tone of deep grief, signals the onset of Mu'ayyad's text. Bridging to this usage of Mu'ayyad's text in the Ṭayyibī sermon, stanza 4 at the beginning of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament uses the same address, "O believers, all" (*Yā ma'shara l-mu'minīnā*) to communicate plainly to those familiar with the tradition the connection to Mu'ayyad.

Weeping for Ḥusayn, a central theme of Sayf al-Dīn's laments as discussed in the previous section, echoes Mu'ayyad's lament both in its broader aspects and in some of its specific language. Referencing the cosmic implications that make weeping for Ḥusayn an intrinsic part of belief, stanza 4's address to "Believers, all" segues into an injunction to "weep for the great Imām" (*ibkū l-Imāma l-Ḥusaynā*). This echoes Mu'ayyad's majlis 150, which, after the vocative address to "Believers, all", enjoined the audience to shed tears using the same imperative, "Weep!" (*ibkū*).

There are further verbatim echoes. Mu'ayyad's majlis 150 continues, "Make flow ... tears of blood, not water" (*afīdū ... daman lā dam'ā*), using another imperative verb (*afīdū*) which is replicated by Sayf al-Dīn in stanza 3, "Flow out (*fīdī*), O spirit. Gush forth (*fīdī*), O eye." Mu'ayyad's majlis continues further, "Will you not weep for one whose robe of sanctity the demonic faction tore on earth, prompting the angels to weep in the sky", a line that is duplicated in the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament's preface, transcribed earlier in this article, which begins with Mu'ayyad's exact phrases (in reverse order): "Let us recite here a poem lamenting the one for whom angels wept in the sky, when the demonic faction tore the robe of his sanctity on earth."⁴⁶ Yet another example of verbatim echo is found in stanza 8 of the lament, which begins, "Revelation's children crushed in calamity's millstone ... on the day of 'Āshūrā'." This repeats the lines in Mu'ayyad's majlis 9, "Truly, 'Āshūrā' is the day on which calamity's millstone crushed the family of your Prophet."⁴⁷

Conservative Historical Rendering of Ḥusayn's Martyrdom

Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn preached that all expressions of lament for Ḥusayn were to be respected. He provided monetary support for Twelver Shī'ī passion

46 Sayf al-Dīn, *Ṣibghu nūr*, p. 144.

47 Mu'ayyad, *Majālis*, vol. 1, p. 34 (majlis 9): *Inna yawma 'Āshūrā' huwa l-yawmu lladhī dārat fīhi 'alā ahli bayti nabīyikum raḥā l-miḥan, wa-jārat aydī l-zaman, wa-hutikat sutūru l-furūdi wa-l-sunan.*

play (*ta'ziya*) processions in Mumbai and Surat, and even sent Bohras to participate. But in his own discourses—in prose and in poetry, and in his *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament—he chose to anchor the narrative in early historical reports of Karbala. This conservative approach may be attributed to a desire to preserve the solemnity of the occasion, to maintain a strict distinction between commemoration and carnival. Many Shī'ī communities in India and Pakistan supplement their prose and poetry narratives of the Karbala tragedy with mythical themes added for dramatic effect. There are some clerics who remind preachers that they should be more factual in narrating Karbala,⁴⁸ but they often raise controversy by doing so, and in many elegies and live narrations in the subcontinent, folkloric additions remain common.⁴⁹ In contrast, most officially sanctioned Ṭayyibī sermons and poems, especially Sayf al-Dīn's *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament, render into verse the events as reported in the early sources, without the embellishment of poetic myths.

The Ṭayyibīs' main source for the Karbala narrative is *Maqṭal al-Ḥusayn* (Ḥusayn's slaying) compiled by the Kufan author Abū Mikhnaḥ Lūṭ ibn Yaḥyā (d. 157/774). Abū Mikhnaḥ's *Maqṭal*, now lost, is preserved in the histories of Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) and Balādhurī (d. 279/892)⁵⁰ as well as in other early histories; the Ṭayyibīs rely mostly on the presentation of the Fāṭimid Dā'ī al-Qāḍī l-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) in his *Sharḥ al-akhbār* (Elucidation of historical reports) and on that of the Ṭayyibī Dā'ī Idrīs 'Imād al-Dīn (d. 872/1468) in his *ʿUyūn al-akhbār* (Wellsprings of historical reports).⁵¹ The latter also includes a smattering of further detail that appears in, and could possibly be derived from,

48 E.g. Naqvi, *Shahīd-i insānīyyat*; Amrohvī, *Mujāhid-i a'zam*; Najafi, *Sa'adat al-dārayn fi maqṭal al-Husayn*; and the teachings of the Karachi-based scholar Syed Sharfuddin Moosvi. I thank Dr. Sulayman Hasan Abidi for these references.

49 These include elaborations of a marriage between Ḥusayn's daughter Fāṭima Kubrā and his nephew Qāsim, son of Imām Ḥasan. They also include imaginative descriptions of the heroes taking leave of the women, and tales endowing Ḥusayn's horse with speech. Some Urdu elegies borrow motifs from Hindu folk literature. See Trivedi, "Appropriating an Iranian Literary Tradition", *passim*.

50 Ursula Sezgin (*Abū Miḥnaḥ*, pp. 116-123) suggests that Abū Mikhnaḥ's original work is lost, and its various manuscripts and editions are reworked versions. Excerpts are preserved in Balādhurī's *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 2, pp. 453-519, and in Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh*, vol. 5, pp. 400-470; trans. *History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 19, pp. 91-183. Excerpts from Abū Mikhnaḥ's account are also found in Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī's (d. 356/967) *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyyin*, pp. 84-124. Using a cautious approach, I avoid in this article the possibly corrupted editions of Abū Mikhnaḥ's *Maqṭal al-Ḥusayn*, instead using Balādhurī's and Ṭabarī's more established histories to render the Abū Mikhnaḥ account.

51 Nu'mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, pp. 135-253; 'Imād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 4, pp. 113-202. 'Imād al-Dīn, as mentioned earlier, also composed Arabic elegies for Ḥusayn.

two medieval texts: the Twelver Shī‘ī Ibn Ṭāwūs’s (d. 664/1266) *al-Malhūf* [or: *al-Luhūf*] ‘*alā qatlā l-ṭufūf*’ (Mourning the slain ones of Karbala) and the Ḥanafī Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī’s (d. 654/1256) *Tadhkirat al-khawāṣṣ* (Reminder for the elite). The reports from Nu‘mān’s and ‘Imād al-Dīn’s works are distilled in *Agharr al-Majālis* (Most radiant assembly), a narrative originally compiled by Shaykh Hibat Allāh Aḥmadābādī (fl. early thirteenth/nineteenth century) under the direction of the forty-third Ṭayyibī Dā‘ī, ‘Abd-‘Alī Sayf al-Dīn (d. 1232/1817), and updated and augmented by Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn; this volume—the *Agharr al-Majālis*—serves as the Ṭayyibīs’ main handbook for the narration of the Karbala tragedy.⁵² Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn draws on these sources for his prose and poetic presentations of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom. In addition to his sermons, many of which are recorded in audio format or written transcriptions, his treatise *Nahr al-nūr al-sha‘sha‘ānī* (Incandescent river of light) discourses at some length on historical and theological aspects of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom, some of which were mentioned in the present article’s earlier section on doctrine.⁵³

The *Sayyid al-Shuhadā’* lament’s conservative rendering may be demonstrated by comparing stanzas that expound a certain theme with the historical texts’ reports of the same theme (italics are used to highlight similarities). Note that the point of the comparison is not to prove that Sayf al-Dīn directly sourced his material from the texts mentioned above, although he may very well have done so; the point is to demonstrate that the anecdotes and themes he referred to in his lament, with many specific details of the events, are for the most part ones that are recorded in those early sources.

Al-Qāḍī l-Nu‘mān reports ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn’s killing thus:⁵⁴

‘Umar ibn Sa’d’s [warriors] ... called out to ... ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ... “You are a blood relation of the Commander of the Faithful,” meaning the

52 *Agharr al-Majālis* forms part 9 of the ten-part *al-Majālis al-Āshūriyya* (‘Āshūrā’ assemblies).

53 Sayf al-Dīn, *Nahr al-nūr*, pp. 144-157.

54 Nu‘mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, pp. 152-153; ‘Imād al-Dīn’s report (‘*Uyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 4, p. 141) conforms almost exactly to Nu‘mān’s. The sources speak of three sons who were with Ḥusayn in Karbala, and their identities are sometimes confused because all three are often referred to by the name “Alī” and/or by one of two epithets rotating among them, “Akbar” (older) and “Aṣghar” (younger). Sayf al-Dīn—perhaps deliberately in order to stick to what is confirmed in the historical data—avoids using this controversial nomenclature altogether in the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā’* lament, referring to the older of the two killed in Karbala as simply “Alī” and to the younger as “the infant”. The explanation for the double confusion is complex. The historical sources agree that “Alī” was the given name of Ḥusayn’s two older sons. They also agree that the one who survived

accursed Yazīd. They were referring to the fact that [Mu‘āwiya’s sister and Yazīd’s paternal aunt] Maymūna bint Abī Sufyān was his maternal grandmother, since [‘Alī’s] mother was Laylā bint Murra, whose mother was Maymūna bint Abī Sufyān. They said to him: “If you wish, we will grant you immunity and safe passage.” ... ‘Alī replied: “God’s messenger’s kinship is more worthy of consideration.” Then he charged against them, all the while reciting these [spontaneously composed] verses:

I am ‘Alī, son of Ḥusayn, son of ‘Alī
 I swear on God’s House that I am closer to the Prophet than you are.⁵⁵
 I shall strike you with my sword and protect my father,
 By God, the *bastard’s son* [‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād] *will never rule over us!*

Abū Mikhnaḥ (in Ṭabarī) also reports the verses and Ḥusayn’s lament. Ibn Ṭāwūs adds that ‘Alī bore a close resemblance to the Prophet Muḥammad.⁵⁶ Drawing on these historical reports, stanza 18 of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā’* lament mourns ‘Alī as “*mirror image of the Prophet ... who refused to allow an adulterer’s son to rule over God’s saints*”.

The following three reports from Abū Mikhnaḥ’s *Maqṭal* as reported by Ṭabarī (and in similar words by Balādhurī) describe the desecration of Ḥusayn’s body. First, Abū Mikhnaḥ recounts the Kufan army’s trampling of the slain body under their horses’ hooves thus:

[The Umayyad commander in Karbala] ‘Umar ibn Sa’d called out to his companions: “Who will trample Ḥusayn with their horses?” Ten

Karbala was the one with the special title Zayn al-‘Ābidīn (Ornament of All Worshippers). But they differ as to whether he was the older (Akbar) ‘Alī, or the younger (Aṣghar) ‘Alī. Shī‘ī sources, including Nu‘mān (*Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, pp. 153-154, 256-266), insist that Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, the one who survived Karbala, was the older ‘Alī (then twenty-nine years old according to Nu‘mān, *al-Majālis wa-l-musāyarāt*, pp. 522-523), and the one who was killed was the younger ‘Alī (then about seventeen years old; his mother was Laylā, from the Umayyad clan). Most Sunni sources assert the contrary, calling Zayn al-‘Ābidīn the younger ‘Alī and the son of Laylā killed in Karbala the older ‘Alī. To complicate the question further, this latter ‘Alī, whose mother was Laylā, is known in South Asia (including in Ṭayyibī Bohra sermons and laments) as ‘Alī Akbar (or simply Akbar), and this epithet is used vis-à-vis Ḥusayn’s third and youngest son—an infant named in the historical sources as ‘Abd Allāh—whom the South Asian tradition knows as the six-month old ‘Alī Aṣghar (or simply Aṣghar).

55 ‘Imād al-Dīn’s report (*Uyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 4, p. 141) contains the plural “we are closer to the Prophet”.

56 ‘Imād al-Dīn, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 4, pp. 141-142; Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 5, pp. 446-447; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Malḥūf*, p. 166.

volunteered, among them Ishāq ibn Ḥaywa al-Ḥaḍramī ... and Aḥbash ibn Marthad ... al-Ḥaḍramī. *They came to Ḥusayn's [body] and trampled it with their horses' [hooves], until they had crushed the back and chest.*⁵⁷

Drawing on this historical report, stanza 36 of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament mourns "the pure *body which the evil legion's horses viciously trampled*".

Next, Abū Mikhnaḥf recounts the Umayyad governor 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād's parading of Ḥusayn's severed head in the streets of Kufa thus:

*'Ubayd Allāh ibn Ziyād raised Ḥusayn's head [on a spear] and ordered that it be paraded through the streets of Kufa. Then he called Zahr [sic] ibn Qays and commanded him to carry Ḥusayn's head and the heads of his companions to Yazīd ibn Mu'āwiya.*⁵⁸

'Imād al-Dīn specifies that Ḥusayn's severed head was raised on a spear.⁵⁹ The word "spear" is not mentioned in Ṭabarī's Abū Mikhnaḥf account, but the verb *naṣaba*, whose meanings include "placing something and raising it", is used, presumably meaning "raised on a spear".⁶⁰ Drawing on these historical reports, stanza 37 of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament exclaims, "Here is *Ḥusayn's head raised high on a spear*, gleaming like the sun."

Further, Abū Mikhnaḥf recounts the Umayyad caliph Yazīd's desecration of Ḥusayn's head in his court at Damascus thus:

When the Kufan delegation arrived with Ḥusayn's [decapitated] head ... in Damascus ... they entered Yazīd's presence, and placed the head in front of him, and narrated to him the whole story.... He gave permission for all the people to come in, and they entered. Ḥusayn's head was set up in front of Yazīd. *Yazīd was holding a cane with which he was striking Ḥusayn's mouth and front teeth....* A man called Abū Baraza al-Aslamī, a Companion of the Messenger of God, challenged Yazīd, saying: "Do you strike ... Ḥusayn's mouth? ... Many are the times I have seen the Messenger of God kissing it! Truly, Yazīd, your supporter on Judgement Day will be

57 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 5, pp. 453-455; trans. *History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 19, p. 163; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 2, p. 507.

58 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 5, p. 459; trans. *History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 19, p. 168; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, vol. 2, p. 507.

59 'Imād al-Dīn, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 4, pp. 161-164.

60 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'arab*, s.v. "N-Ṣ-B".

Ibn Ziyād, and [Ḥusayn's] supporter will be Muḥammad!" Then [Abū Baraza] stood up and left.⁶¹

Al-Qāḍī l-Nu'mān and Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī report Ibn Ziyād's—rather than Yazīd's—violation of Ḥusayn's head by striking his teeth with a cane.⁶² 'Imād al-Dīn provides both reports, Ibn Ziyād's and Yazīd's.⁶³ Additionally, Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr (d. 280/893) describes Ḥusayn's head being “*placed in a basin*” in front of Yazīd.⁶⁴ Drawing on these historical reports, stanza 38 of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament grieves, “*Alas, the Imām's head in a basin before the enemy who sits on his throne mocking, wielding a cane, striking those pearly teeth.*”

Other stanzas from the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament may also be parsed against the historical sources in the same way. The following are some cursory comparisons:

- Stanza 9's portrayal of Ḥusayn's calling out to the Umayyad army that he was the Prophet's grandson is parallel in context and content to Abū Mikhnaḥ's account (via Ṭabarī) of Ḥusayn's oration addressing the Kufans on the day of 'Āshūrā'.⁶⁵
- Stanza 16's portrayal of 'Alī Zayn al-Ābidīn's illness and shackles and his journey from Karbala to Damascus is parallel to Abū Mikhnaḥ's account (via Ṭabarī).⁶⁶
- Stanza 19's portrayal of Ḥusayn's infant son being killed by an enemy arrow in his father's arms is parallel to al-Qāḍī l-Nu'mān's narrative.⁶⁷
- Stanza 21 on the wedding of Ḥusayn's daughter Sakīna with his brother Ḥasan's son 'Abd Allāh is also based on al-Qāḍī l-Nu'mān's account. Nu'mān reports the marriage of 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan and Sakīna bint al-Ḥusayn (without, however, specifying that the marriage took place in Karbala), saying the groom was martyred before the marriage could be consummated.⁶⁸

61 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 5, p. 465; trans. *History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 19, pp. 175-176; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 2, pp. 509.

62 Nu'mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, p. 170; Sibṭ, *Tadhkirat al-khawwāṣṣ*, pp. 256-257.

63 'Imād al-Dīn, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 4, pp. 159-165, 172-173.

64 Ṭayfūr, *Balāghāt al-nisā'*, p. 70.

65 See the text of Ḥusayn's oration in Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 5, pp. 423-426; trans. *History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 19, pp. 122-124; also in Sibṭ, *Tadhkirat al-khawwāṣṣ*, pp. 251-253. See text, translation, and analysis in T. Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration*, pp. 216-227.

66 Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 5, p. 460.

67 Nu'mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, pp. 177-178; also narrated in Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 5, p. 447; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 2, pp. 497-498.

68 Nu'mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, pp. 180-181.

- Stanza 24's portrayal of Ḥusayn's wife Rabāb singing a dirge reflects the verses grieving for Ḥusayn which ʿImād al-Dīn attributes to her.⁶⁹
- The portrayal in stanzas 33 and 34 of Ḥusayn's companions killed by spear and sword amalgamates Abū Mikhnaḥ's account of the martyrdoms of Zuhayr ibn Qayn, Muslim ibn ʿUsajā, Ḥabīb ibn Muḥāhir, and other companions of Ḥusayn.⁷⁰

Of the historical themes in the elegy, there are two that I have not been able to trace back to the early sources: Ḥusayn's sister Zaynab dyeing her hair in his blood (stanza 11), and the weeping bride following the groom to the battlefield (stanza 21). Notwithstanding these anomalies, the numerous comparisons listed above show that by and large, the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament offers a conservative, factual account of the Karbala tragedy.

Hybrid Form and Communal Performance: Classical Arabic Conventions and Indian Persian-Urdu Influence

In certain aspects, the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament combines classical Arabic conventions with Persian-Urdu Indian practices. In structure, it devises what appears to be a hybrid Arabic-Persian formula of meter and rhyme. In performance, it follows the liturgical function of Fāṭimid assemblies of mourning in medieval Cairo, in combination with melodic practices of Urdu religious poetry in India.

The *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament is part of a series of poems in which Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn produced hybrid Urdu-Arabic structures. His model for experimenting in Arabic-Urdu form hybridity could be the stanzaic Arabic poem composed by his grandfather, the forty-seventh Dāʾī Sayyidnā ʿAbd al-Qādir Najm al-Dīn (d. 1302/1885), in praise of Imām ʿAlī: *Hal maḥḥaru dhī l-ʿarshi siwā šinwi l-rasūlī—fī kullī ḡuhūrī* (Is there a manifestation of the Lord of the Throne other than the Prophet's brother—in every manifestation?).⁷¹ Sayf al-Dīn composed a Lisān al-Daʿwa pastiche of his grandfather's poem in the same form and melody.⁷² He also composed several other stanzaic poems, two Lisān al-Daʿwa "counsel poems" (*naṣīḥat*),⁷³ and a handful of Arabic pan-

69 ʿImād al-Dīn, *Uyūn al-akhbār*, vol. 4, pp. 186-187.

70 Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 5, pp. 435-441; trans. *History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 19, pp. 137-143.

71 Najm al-Dīn, *Dīwān*; *Subḥat*, pp. 47-51.

72 Sayf al-Dīn, *Maḥḥar chhē bhalā kawn Khudā nā anē hamnām—Maulānā ʿAlī chhē* (Who is the manifestation of God and His namesake?—It is Mawlānā ʿAlī), *Dhikrā shahādāt al-Ḥusayn*, pp. 69-75. Text and audio recitation: <https://www.fatimidawat.com/prayers/qasidas-marsiya-and-salaams/mazhar-chhe-bhala-kon-by-syedna-taher-saifuddin-ra>.

73 Sayf al-Dīn, *Allāh taʿālā nō ḥamd tū karjē* (Give praise to God Most High) and *Birādar tū naṣīḥat sun* (Brother, listen to my counsel), in *Dhikrā shahādāt al-Ḥusayn*, pp. 81-114.

egyrics, including a five-line stanzaic poem beginning *Al-yawma ʿidu Ghadīri Khummī* (Today is the Eid of Ghadīr Khumm) which he himself characterized as being “cast in the mold of Indian melody” (*sabakahu fī l-laḥni l-hindī*);⁷⁴ and of course, the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament.

In terms of meter, the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament is based on the rare *mujtathth* meter of classical Arabic in its standard truncated form: *mustafʿilun fāʿilātun*. The metrical feet may be expressed in the terminology of the Western Classical tradition in the following sequence of long (-) and short (~) syllables: <- - ~ - / - - ~ ->. The Arabic meter is mapped on to a stanzaic form of Persianate Urdu poetry, the seven-line *haft-band*, itself derived from the classical Arabic stanzaic *musammaʿ*.⁷⁵ In each stanza of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament, the first five lines are new and the last two are a *tarjīʿ-band* refrain (lines 6-7).⁷⁶ In short, each stanza follows the pattern of 5 + 2 lines, five new and two repeated, each line in the meter *mustafʿilun fāʿilātun*.

In terms of rhyme, the formula may be expressed as <Aaaaa-XA, bbbba-XA, cccca-XA>, explained thus: The *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament’s main rhyme is the glottal stop *hamza* (ʾ) followed by the long vowel *ī* (denoted by the symbol “a” in the above formula). This rhyme is introduced in the opening stanza 1, in lines 1-5, whose rhyme words are *shuhadāʾī*, *kisāʾī*, *balāʾī*, *Karbalāʾī*, *bukāʾī*. The stanza’s penultimate line, 6, which is part of the refrain, ends in Ḥusayn’s name (*Ḥusaynā*, symbol “x”). In the first stanza, and in each stanza throughout the poem, the repeated line 6 breaks with the rhyme scheme and, by its difference, underscores the name “Ḥusayn” that sits in the highlighted slot of the rhyme word. The name, moreover, ends in a drawn-out *ā* sound, particularly suited for lament in Arabic grammar’s *nudba* (lament) form: *Ḥusaynā*. Closing the stanza, line 7 repeats the opening line (*maṭlaʿ*) of the poem, *yā sayyida l-shuhadāʾī* (O king of martyrs) and thus the main rhyme, *ī* (symbol “A”). As mentioned earlier, these two lines, 6-7, form a refrain which is repeated in each stanza of the lament: *wā-lahfatā yā Ḥusaynā / yā sayyida*

74 Sayf al-Dīn, *Anḥāru riyāḍi l-janna*, pp. 13-16; the poem is also transcribed in his *Dīwān*, vol. 2, pp. 211-214. Text, translation, and audio recitation: <https://www.fatemidawat.com/prayers/qasidas-marsiyas-and-salaams/syedna-taher-saifuddin-ra-eid-e-ghadeer-e-khum-qasid>.

75 The classical Arabic *musammaʿ* is described as follows: “[Its] single stanzas, normally all of the same structure, consist of two elements: first a fixed number of lines that rhyme with each other, the rhyme, however, changing from one stanza to the next (separate rhymes), followed by a stanza-closing line that rhymes with the end lines in all other stanzas of the poem.... One encounters the same meters (particularly *ṭawīl*, *basīʿ*, *wāfir*, *ramal*, etc.) and themes (*nasīb*, praise, wine description, etc.) in the *musammaʿ* that are also found in normal *shiʿr*” (Schoeler, “Musammaʿ”).

76 See details of *tarjīʿ-band* and *haft-band* in Thiesen, “Tardjīʿ-Band and Tarkīb-Band”.

l-shuhadāʾī (I grieve for you, Ḥusayn / O king of martyrs). In each of the stanzas after stanza 1, the first five lines are new. Of these, the non-chorus lines, 1-4, possess their own internal rhyme (symbols “b”, “c”, and so on), and line 5 conforms to the lament’s main rhyme ʾī (symbol “a”). The chorus lines, 6-7, are repeated verbatim (symbol “x”); the repeated line 7 of the chorus, as already noted, ends in the lament’s main rhyme, ʾī. For example, in stanza 2, lines 1-4 possess the internal rhyme -*hī*, i.e. the consonant *h* followed by the long vowel *ī* in the rhyme words: -*Llāhī, shāhanshāhī, āhī, tanāhī*. Line 5 goes back to the lament’s main rhyme scheme, ʾī, with the rhyme word *ḥamrāʾī*. Lines 6-7 repeat the refrain: *wā-lahfatā yā Ḥusaynā / yā sayyida l-shuhadāʾī*.

In terms of performance, the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament draws on Indian Urdu traditions combined with Arabic ones, as well as the Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī, Egyptian-Yemeni heritage mentioned earlier. Arabic elegies for Ḥusayn in the present Indian Ṭayyibī setting—like the Urdu poems of *naʿt*, *qawwālī*, and *marthiya*⁷⁷—are always voiced in melody. These Ṭayyibī elegies, as well as other Ṭayyibī Arabic poems including panegyrics for the Prophet and his family and poems addressed in prayer to God, are liturgically performed in *a cappella* recitation, collectively or individually but without accompanying instruments. The practice probably goes back many centuries. An epistle composed by Sayf al-Dīn’s great-grandfather, the forty-fifth Dāʾī l-Muṭlaq Ṭayyib Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1252/1837), records an Arabic *qaṣīda* poem that “has been cast in the mould of Indian melody, so that audiences of all assemblies can attain rapture from its loud and strong chant”.⁷⁸

Ṭayyibī Karbala laments in Lisān al-Daʿwa and Urdu are frequently performed in sophisticated melodies. Like their South Asian Urdu counterparts, some are recited with *sōz* (lit., burning of the heart) in long, drawn-out syllables, others with a fast beat accompanied by breast-beating (*mātam*). In contrast, Ṭayyibī Arabic laments usually follow a simpler rhythmic pattern of chanting similar to the Persian melodic recitation called *khwānandagī* and are typically not accompanied by *mātam*. The recitation of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadāʾ* lament falls somewhere in between. Unlike most other Ṭayyibī elegies in Arabic, it is frequently accompanied by *mātam*. On the other hand, its recitation is simpler than those of its Lisān al-Daʿwa and Urdu counterparts, though

77 On the melodic voicing of Urdu *marthiya*, see Trivedi, “Appropriating an Iranian Literary Tradition”, p. 160.

78 Zayn al-Dīn, *Risāla*, MS; excerpted in Sayf al-Dīn, *Baḥru faḍlīn kabīr*, p. 125: *Wa-qad ufrigha fī qālābi laḥnīn hindī, li-yaṭriba ahlu kullī nadī, idhā unshida ‘alayhim bi-ṣawtin ‘alī, wa-ma’a l-‘uluwwi jalī*.

more complex than those of its Arabic equivalents, and the relative complexity stems from its hybrid stanzaic form. Of the seven lines of each stanza in the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament, lines 1-4, which have the same internal rhyme, are chanted in low pitch. Line 5 moves to a higher pitch, which is continued in line 6, the first line of the refrain. The final line, 7, the next line of the refrain, descends, coming full circle to match line 1. The composer of the melody is not known—perhaps it was one of the Dā'ī's attendant clerics—but knowing what we know of Sayf al-Dīn's hands-on direction in Da'wa matters, he would likely have been the one to give final approval.

The swelling pitch reflects the build-up of the meaning. Let us take the first five lines of stanza 1. Following the same melody and low pitch, lines 1-4 gradually build up the meaning: address to Ḥusayn as the king of martyrs, description of his high station, and introduction of the tragedy and the place. Moving to a higher pitch, line 5 crescendos with a statement that completes the grammatical structure of the sentence and provides the lament's framing theme of weeping discussed at length earlier: "I shall weep through the long age." The phrase "my weeping" (*bukā'ī*) in this line comes in the emphatic final rhyme word position, and its two consecutive long vowels deepen its mournful notes. In terms of rhyme, meter, and melody, the phrase signals the main point of the poem: to weep for Ḥusayn.

Stanza 11 about Zaynab provides another illustration of the employment of rising pitch. The low-pitched lines 1-4 build up the meaning: the poet introduces Zaynab and grieves for her, then describes her as weeping for her brother and as soaking her hair in his blood, and depicts her tears pouring like rain. Moving to the higher-pitched line 5, the meaning crescendos in the shame of her unveiling: "She has no veil on her head", with the key word "veil" (*ridā'ī*) differentiated from the first four with its echo of the main rhyme of the poem, *ī*, and positioned in a place of emphasis as the final rhyme word. The first four lines, especially the painful image of Zaynab dyeing her hair in her slain brother's blood, are also starkly disturbing. But the mention of this physical object, the veil, evokes for the audience the ultimate heartrending scene of pillage that follows the killing and stems from it: the dishonouring of the Prophet's granddaughter.

A final example is the penultimate stanza 50. Again, the low-pitched lines 1-4 build up the meaning. In a follow-up from the benediction stanzas on Ḥusayn and his family, the lines supplicate God, in their name, with three specific applications: to dispel hardships, multiply blessings, and transform flaws into virtues. The higher-pitched line 5, which also utilizes the lament's main rhyme in the phrase "my prayer" (*du'ā'ī*), brings all those prayers together in a heartfelt plea: "O Lord, hear my prayer!"

A brief recording of Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn's recital of the lament in a Muḥarrām sermon was provided earlier in this article. Two further recordings illustrate the performative aspects discussed above, and they highlight the continued importance of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament in Ṭayyibī Muḥarrām ritual. The recordings also demonstrate the link the Ṭayyibīs continue to accentuate between Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn's and al-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī's laments. The first recording—from the era of the fifty-second Dā'ī—is by his second-in-command in the spiritual hierarchy, the “*Ma'dhūn*,” reciting stanza 13, *Wā-lahfatā yā Ḥusaynā* (Alas for my sorrow, Ḥusayn!), in a Muḥarrām sermon in the midst of a large Bohra congregation in the mosque in Indore, 1411/1993 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hv6iOS9QDDs>); the video clip comes towards the end of the three-hour sermon and follows on from a recitation of al-Mu'ayyad's prose lament (not shown in the clip). It starts with the words in Lisān al-Da'wa: “O mourners of Ḥusayn, we recite the *nawḥa* [lament] of Mawlānā l-Mu'ayyad al-Shīrāzī and perform *mātam*. His Dā'ī, Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn Mawlā, holds the same station, and we also recite his *nawḥa* and perform *mātam*. I, Sayyidnā [Burhanuddin]'s servant, will recite the lament. You, too, recite with me and perform *mātam*.” Then the Arabic stanza is recited in an impassioned voice with drawn-out syllables, after which the cleric seated in the audience (not shown in the clip) leads the response recitation of the same stanza, which rings out from the congregation. The camera pans out to show the roused congregation reciting together and performing *mātam*, and this segues into their *mātam* with the collective, rhythmic cry *Yā Ḥusayn* (O Ḥusayn!). The second recording is an audio recitation of the complete *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament by Bohra reciters from Mumbai, 2014 (<https://www.fatemidawat.com/prayers/qasidas-marsiya-and-salaams/ya-sayyida-ash-shuhadaai-composed-by-syedna-taher-saifuddin>).

The performative aspect of the *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament deserves detailed analysis by experts on anthropology and music. Nevertheless, the aspects discussed here suffice to demonstrate its skilled steering of pitch to emphasize emotive aspects of meaning.

Concluding Remarks

As demonstrated in the preceding pages, Sayyidnā Ṭāhir Sayf al-Dīn's *Sayyid al-Shuhadā'* lament provides a noteworthy example of the mature Ṭayyibī poetic tradition that preserves its doctrinal individuality yet closely engages with sister traditions of Karbala lament in theme, form, and performance. Opening a window into a relatively unstudied denomination of Shī'ī Muslims, the lament's analysis showcases its presentation of some fundamental concepts

of Fāṭimid-Ṭayyibī doctrine, its narration of the tragedy of Karbala in line with early historical sources, and its continuity with the writings of the Fāṭimid Dā'ī al-Mu'ayyad al-Shirāzī.

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