

biographical *tadhkiras* of Mughal officers and of Persian poets, wrote in the middle of the eighteenth century, he drew on fourteenth-century compilations at Khuldābād or Dawlatābād which are inaccessible (see op. cit., pp. 8-9) and there is no reason to doubt the historicity of this account.

12. *Jawāmi' al-kiln*, p. 183.
13. *Mir'at-i Sikandarī*, ed. Misra and Rahman, Baroda, 1961, p. 18. All the Mss. of the *Mir'at* read *Maṅḡhī*, in place of *Maṅḡḡalgarh* which is found in *Tabaqāt-i Akbarī* and *Faṛīshṭa*. All three accounts must derive from an earlier chronicle of Gujarat (possibly the *Ma'āthir-i Maḥmūdshāhī*, Storey no. 979). As Sir E.C. Bayley pointed out, *Maṅḡalgarh*, a dependency of the Rānā of Citawr, is more likely to be correct, see *The Local Muhammadan Dynasties: Gujarat*, London, 1886, p. 77; S.C. Misra. *The Rise of Muslim Power in Gujarat*, p. 149.

7

The Art of the Urdu Marsiya*

C.M. Naim

Within the Urdu literary milieu the term *marsiya*, unless preceded by some qualifying phrase, refers only to one thing: a poem describing some event related to the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Imam Husain, at Karbala, composed, more often than not, in the six-line stanza form, *musaddas*. Further, it always implies a very specific context: it is to be declaimed in a somewhat dramatic fashion at a *majlis-e 'azā*, i.e., a gathering of devout people seeking to obtain religious virtue by listening to the story of Imam Husain and his companions and by shedding tears over their tragic fate. Thus, it should be kept in mind that a *marsiya* in Urdu is primarily not meant for private perusal in moments of leisure, that it has a particular public-religious context, and that it also has a somewhat edifying goal beside the usual literary purposes that any good poetry has.

Marsiyas in Urdu were first written in the 16th century in South India, in the kingdoms of Golkonda and Bijapur, which were Shi'ite in orientation and closer to the Iranian religious traditions than the Turk and Pathan kingdoms of North India. In the beginning, *marsiyas* were written either in the two-line unit form, *qasida*, or in the four-line unit form, *murabba'*. No particular meter was preferred, both long and short meters being equally common. These *marsiyas*, not overly long, were usually sung, often set to some suitably mournful raga. In the *murabba'* form the fourth line was often a refrain, repeated by the accompanyists of the *marsiya*-reciter and perhaps also by the audience. The recitations took place both

outdoors in a procession and indoors. For that reason, the early *marṣiyas* were shorter in length as well as simpler in structure, than is the case now, and emphasized more the grief-inducing (*mubkī*) elements of the narrative, such as the death of some hero and the consequent lament (*bain*) over his corpse. *Marṣiyas* in the *qasīda* form were generally more atomistic, whereas the *murabba'* form seems to have allowed better thematic continuity. In either case, the story element was not overly emphasized. All this is also true for the early, i.e., the 18th century, *marṣiya* in North India, with the addition that the North Indian poets used a great many more forms for their poems, and that their poems tended to be a bit more fragmentary.¹

Slowly, over a century or so, the *musaddas* came to be regarded as the most suitable form for a *marṣiya*. That preference, it seems, was directly related to certain contextual developments. Firstly, the *marṣiya* moved indoors permanently. Secondly, the poets, instead of singing, took to declaiming it, using dramatic gestures and other devices of elocution. The singing style was given a new name, *sōz-xvānī*, and the earlier traditions were reserved for that purpose alone. The new *marṣiya*, however, developed its own traditions very soon, 19th century Lucknow, with its Shi'ite state, contributing the most to its development. Thus, by the middle of the 19th century, there were established what came to be regarded as the fundamental characteristics of a good *marṣiya* in Urdu. These were as follows:

1. A *marṣiya* was invariably in the form of a *musaddas*, the first four lines of each stanza (*band*) having one rhyme-scheme (i.e., the *qāfiya* and the *radif*), and the remaining two lines, referred to as the *ṣip*, having another. Usually the first four lines extended the story line, while the *ṣip*, expected to be an exceptionally good couplet, provided a kind of pause in the discourse. This format, while avoiding the monotony of a single rhyme-scheme, allowed for moments of rest in the process of public presentation.²

2. Certain medium length meters were preferred, specially those that could enhance the dramatic effect sought by the declamatory style of presentation.

3. Each *marṣiya* was usually devoted to just one hero or incident, and showed conspicuous narrative continuity. Secondary themes were allowed, but only when they complemented the main theme.

4. Each *marṣiya* had all or some of the following constituent sub-sections in so far as they might be allowed by the chosen theme.³

I. *cehra*: a prologue which could have for its subject praise of God, the Prophet, or Ali, praise of the poet himself, description of some natural phenomenon, or some other matter that could be considered related to the main theme, such as the hardships of a journey or the emotional intensity of filial ties.

II. *mājarā*: some event or incident that would introduce the main hero. In this section the story element was much emphasized.

III. *sarāpā*: a detailed description of the physical and/or spiritual qualities of the hero.

IV. *ruxṣat*: after due preparation and taking leave of the Imam, the hero's departure from the Imam's camp.

V. *āmad*: the hero's arrival on the battlefield.

VI. *rajaz*: the hero's declaration of his noble ancestry, personal virtues, and superiority as a warrior.

VII. *jang*: a description of the actual battle, either one on one or one against many, often both. This often contained sub-sections in praise of the hero's horse, sword, etc. Quite often a long section would describe the intense heat of the day to underscore the plight and the courage of the hero, who faced his enemies without having taken a drink of water for many days.

VIII. *ṣahādat*: the hero's death on the battlefield, having been wounded by the enemy horde. In the case of the Imam, he is killed only after he stopped fighting at a command from Allah.

IX. *bain*: the lamentations of the female relatives of the hero.

X. *du'ā*: the pious sentiments of the poet himself, often of a prayerful nature, expressed in just one or two stanzas. These may contain the name of the poet, and, rarely, also the name of some patron.

Needless to say, the above scheme was not entirely inflexible. Individual sections could be moved around, particularly the initial ones. Also, not all *marṣiyas* could have all the sections. For example, a *marṣiya* describing the Imam's departure from Medinah could not possibly have a *ṣahādat* scene. The full scheme was found mostly in those *marṣiyas* that dealt with the events of the 10th of Muharram, A.H. 61. What is important to note, however, is the keen sense of organization and proportion that all good *marṣiya* writers showed. They didn't directly plunge into the tragic parts, nor did they allow a monotonously lachrymose effect throughout the poem. They displayed a fine awareness of the needs of their audience. The audience wanted pathos as much as a confirmation of their faith, brave heroes as well as tragic figures, situations that would increase the listener's own fortitude in the face of adversity as well as situations that would force even the hardest heart to melt. As one analyses a *marṣiya* one sees clearly how the poet intersperses periods of relative relaxation and exaltation with periods of intense emotional involvement, gradually leading toward the highly charged lamentatory outburst at the end. The second, tears-inducing, type of stanzas are referred to as the *mubkī* parts, while the first kind are called *zair-mubkī*, and in a good *marṣiya* they would be intermingled very carefully. The *marṣiya* writer sought to gain from his audience *rāh* (shouts of bravo) in the beginning and *āh* (shrieks of despair) at the end, the audience being at one and the same time a body of connoisseurs of literature and a gathering of piety-oriented believers. Thus, to use some more indigenous categories, a *marṣiya* writer sought to excel in three things: *bazm*, *razm*, and *baln*, i.e., the milieu away from the battlefield, the milieu of the battlefield, and the lamentations, respectively.

In order to make the above matters more clear, let us analyse the famous *marṣiya* of Mir Anis (1802-1874) that begins with the line: *jab qat' kī musafatq-e ṣāb āftāb nē*, "When the sun cut short the night's long trail"¹⁴ It is in the form of a *musaddas*, its meter being a variant of *muḥḥari*, and consists of 197 stanzas (*band*). Although its main theme is the martyrdom of the Imam himself, several secondary themes are

also introduced, making it more interesting, but not unusual. A rough analysis suggests the following sections. (Numbers in the brackets refer to the stanzas).

I. At the first signs of dawn, the Imam awakens his companions; they gather for the morning prayer, each of them a paragon of spiritual virtues—(1-10; *mājarā*, containing some elements of *sarāpā* too).

II. A description of the morning in the wilderness, nature itself sings praises of the Creator—(11-21; *cehra*).

III. Ali Akbar, the Imam's eldest son, says the call for the prayers; his aunt, Zainab, who particularly loves him, cries out in anguish and premonition—(22-26; *mājrā* no. 1 continues).

IV. On the Imam's side there is a congregational prayer, on the enemy's side preparations for battle; as the Imam ends the prayer some arrows fall near him, making him anxious about the children; he goes into the tents to bid farewell to the ladies—(27-40; end of *mājarā* no. 1, beginning of *ruxsat*).

V. Abbas, the Imam's half-brother, stands guard at the door—(41-42; *sarāpā* of Abbas).

VI. The Imam asks Zainab to bring him the relics of his ancestors—the robes of the Prophet, the sword of Ali, etc.—and gets ready—(43-53; *mājarā* no. 2, containing also the *sarāpā* of Husain).

VII. The banner of the Imam is brought forth and the young sons of Zainab beg her to recommend their names to the Imam; she scolds them—(54-68; *mājarā* no. 3).

VIII. The Imam praises the children of Zainab, then at her recommendation sends for Abbas to give him the banner—(69-74; end of *mājarā* no. 3, beginning of *mājarā* no. 4).

IX. Abbas takes the banner; Husain's youngest daughter, Sakina, asks Abbas to bring her some water from the river; Hussian and Abbas leave the tents—(75-88; end of *mājarā* no. 4; *ruxsat*).

X. The martial aspects of the Imam and his companions; they are praise by the houris—(89-96; *sarāpā*).

XI. The Imam's enemies start the battle; his companions go out to fight and are killed one after another; the Imam brings each corpse back to the tents—(97-108; *mājarā* no. 5).

XII. It is mid-afternoon and the Imam is all alone; he

goes into the tents to take a final look at his infant son, Ali Asghar; a deliberately shot arrow kills the infant in the Imam's lap; the Imam buries the tiny body—(109-113; *mājarā* no. 6).

XIII. The Imam comes to the battle field—(114-115; *āmad*).

XIV. A description of the intense heat—(116-126; *cehra* no. 2).

XV. After a heated exchange between the Imam and the commander of the enemies, Ibn Sa'd, the battle begins; the Imam fights with the entire army; his sword is praised in detail—(127-152; *jang*).

XVI. Unnerved by the ferocity of his attacks and the intensity of the heat, the Imam's enemies seek his refuge; the Imam, as befits him, sheaths his sword—(153-162; *mājarā* no. 7).

XVII. Ibn Sa'd taunts his soldiers and two of the most fierce attack the Imam; at a command from Allah, Husain unsheaths his sword again and kills them both—(163-175; end of *mājarā* no. 7; *jang* no. 2).

XVIII. Another Divine Command now tells Husain to cease from battle; the Imam obeys the Will of Allah, is surrounded by the enemy and killed—(176-186; *shāhādāt*).

XIX. Husain's mother laments in Paradise; his sister, Zainab, laments on the battle field; Husain's voice is heard comforting her—(187-196; *bain*).

XX. A concluding stanza of pious sentiments and modest self-praise—(197; *du'ā*).

At this point, before proceeding further, it would be useful to make note of two features that seem to be both common and crucial to all *marṣiyas*. Firstly, what may be called the *leitmotif* of the Urdu *marṣiya*, a belief that life is followed by death followed by life again. In other words Life (transitory) → Death (transitory) → Life (eternal). Secondly, the development of the themes, primary and secondary, in terms of binary oppositions. These binary distinctions arise out of a conviction that Islam itself is anchored in a dichotomy between ISLAM and NON-ISLAM.⁵ They gain greater scope and effectiveness from another dichotomy that is crucial to the understanding of most Islamic literatures, that between the

zāhir (the external or the obvious) and the *bāṭin* (the internal or the hidden), the two layers of meaning or significance that every word or act is believed to have. In the above-mentioned *leitmotif*, the cessation of life is only the *zāhir* of death, its true meaning, the *bāṭin*, is the eternity of the hereafter. Thus, a true "Muslim" would look at the internal meaning of death and welcome it, whereas a "Non-Muslim" would be afraid of death and cling to life here. In the *marṣiya* under review, there is a group of people led by the Imam who challenge the authority of Yazid, the temporal Caliph. Their action, however, is a rebellion on the exterior alone, its internal meaning is the submission to a greater authority, the Command of Allah. The Imam and his companions are just, and thus must endure injustice at the hands of the soldiers of Yazid, the usurper. As "Muslims" they are aware of the end; as against their opponents they prefer the comforts of the hereafter. They are men of spirit; they don't care if their bodies are broken. They suffer privations to nurture their spirits. The Imam has submerged his will in the Will of God, and his companions have done likewise through him. They have become a part of the cosmos. When they pray, everything in nature prays; when they are wrathful, nature is wrathful too. They live in a cosmic time which is infinite; their enemies are fated to have only a transitory glory. Husain is killed but his Islam is triumphant. Yazid wins the battle but has lost the war. In the eternity of the hereafter, the Imam is blessed, Yazid is cursed.⁶

Returning to the *marṣiya* under discussion, if we try to distinguish between the *mubkī* and the *ḡair-mubkī* stanzas we find an interesting organization of material.

Section	ḡair-mubkī	mubkī
I. <i>mājarā</i> no. 1 (1-10)	1-17	18
II. <i>cehra</i> (11-21)	19-25	26
III. <i>mājarā</i> no. 1 (22-26)		
IV. <i>mājarā</i> no. 1/ <i>ruxṣat</i> (27-40)	27-33	34-35
V. <i>sarāpā</i> (41-42)	36	37-39
VI. <i>mājarā</i> no. 2 (43-53)	40-43	44-45
VII. <i>mājarā</i> no. 3 (54-68)	46-49	50
	51-66	67-68
VIII. <i>mājarā</i> no. 4 (69-74)	69-81	82-83

IX. <i>mājarā</i> no. 4/ <i>ruxsat</i> (75-88)	84-85	86-88
X. <i>sarāpā</i> (89-96)	89-96	
XI. <i>mājarā</i> no. 5 (97-108)	97-105	106-113
XII. <i>mājarā</i> no. 6 (109-113)		
XIII. <i>āmad</i> (114-115)	114-123	124-126
XIV. <i>cehra</i> (116-126)		
XV. <i>jang</i> (127-152)	127-153	154
XVI. <i>mājarā</i> no. 7 (153-162)	155-161	162
XVII. <i>jang</i> no. 2 (163-175)	163-177	
XVIII. <i>ṣahādat</i> (176-186)		178-196
XIX. <i>bain</i> (187-196)		
XX. <i>du'ā</i> (197)	197	
Totals	148	49

What immediately strikes us is the fact that only one-fourth of the *marṣiya* consists of *mukbī* material; the rest is expressive of exaltatory ideas, celebrating the piety, bravery, resoluteness, and other virtues of the heroes of Karbala. Further, except for the natural, long outburst at the end, the *mukbī* stanzas have carefully been placed, usually in ones and twos, at various strategic points. They act as brief but sharp reminders of the main tragic theme as well as neat transition devices between major sections. There is no doubt that Mir Anis has put much careful thought in this organization of his verses and that it was primarily dictated by the demands of oral presentation.

In another famous *marṣiya* (*namak-e xvān-e takallum hal faṣāhat mērī*, "My fair speech is to conversation as salt is to food."), Mir Anis has listed the many things that he as a poet desired God to bestow on him.⁷ "O Lord," he begins, "Give me eloquence that would soften rocks into wax//Give my verses the force that crying has." Next he says, "May I follow none but my ancestors//Let my verses show no confusion, no obscure word, no bad elipsis." He desires to be able to create scenes depicting both the *bazm* and the *razm*, using only the everyday speech of the gentry. He prays, "Let my *marṣiya* be not devoid of sad discourses." In conclusion, he writes the following *tīp* couplet: "May I depict grandeur, describe hardships, sing praises too//May the listeners' hearts rejoice, and grieve, and also acclaim."

Another feature that deserves to be noted is the depiction in Urdu *marṣiyas* of indigenous socio-cultural values and practices: the heroes and heroines are Arabs but they behave like the gentle-folks of Lucknow. Their social mores, marriage customs, uniqueness of feminine speech-habits, family relationships, these are all Indian, specifically of the Muslim upper classes of Lucknow. To a pedant that may seem detracting, if not ridiculous, but if we keep in view the fundamental goal of the *marṣiya* writer—make the piety-filled audience respond in an intense emotional manner—we shall have little to object to. The Indianness in descriptions and details brings those events closer to the Indian audience, and makes it easier for it to identify with the martyrs. A historically accurate Arab milieu would have created a wide gulf between the poem and its audience, thwarting the poets in their effort to present an ideal being who could yet be emulated.

Concerning a related matter, Muhammad Sadiq has remarked, "By assigning such a large place to pathos the poets as well as their readers and listeners appear to have overlooked a very important fact, namely, that if the characters are made to wallow in distress, they would come perilously close to losing their dignity and therefore forfeiting the readers' respect."⁸ No doubt the fear that is expressed is valid. Many examples can be found where the poet may appear to have lost the necessary sense of proportion. We should, however, refrain, on our part, from projecting our own time-and-space bound values on people of a different period and place. We may not like the ideals of manhood that 19th century Lucknow cherished, we may even regard the heroes of the Urdu *marṣiya* as being slightly effete or overly sentimental, but there is no gainsaying the historical reality of those ideals, and that is what the 19th century masters were seeking to portray. Husain is resolute in the face of incredible odds, yet he is sentimental enough to shed tears too; for shedding tears was a sign of being human as well as a cherished value in the Shi'ite milieu of the 19th century Lucknow.⁹ In any case, as indicated in the analysis above, better poets do not over-emphasize the *bain* section, giving it only a relative prominence.

If we look at a *marṣiya* in isolation, i.e., outside of its context of a *majlis*, we may get a feeling that it presents only a

despairing vision. That it begins with life, but ends in death. As already pointed out, that is not truly the case. In a *majlis*, a *marṣiya* is preceded and followed by a *fātiha*, a prayer that essentially confirms the immortality of the human soul. The tears of the audience are themselves a witness to the fact that the sacrifices of the Imam and his companions had not been in vain, that in their death lay their victory. Thus the events of Karbala become the story of what should be the ideal role for mankind in this world. No wonder then that we come out of a *majlis* filled with admiration and exultation, not dejected and despairing.¹⁰

Urdu *marṣiya* writers are often criticised for being repetitive. At the same time, they are also faulted for using contradictory and conflicting details in different *marṣiyas*. Once again, the criticism arises out of a lack of sensitiveness to the true context of the *marṣiya*. The *marṣiya* writers were not writing long epics about all the events of Karbala. Rather, they wrote longish poems about individual heroes and incidents. And they did that more than once, in fact several times over, as was demanded of them professionally. That naturally led to repetition, and, sometimes, to apparent contradictions, which would indeed create in us an adverse reaction if we were to read a large number of *marṣiyas* at one time. But that is not the proper context. A *marṣiya* exists only for the purpose of being read in a *majlis*, and as such, it is essentially the high point of a religious ritual. Rituals, in order to maintain their efficacy allow little or no variation. The devotees come to a *majlis* with certain expectations, which have to be met. A radical departure from the traditional pattern may perhaps produce an interesting poem, but cannot be expected to imbue it with that power of alleviation that a more traditional *marṣiya* would have for the piety-minded listeners.

Further, things do appear differently when we turn to the poetry of a master craftsman such as Mir Anis. Within the rigid pattern available to him, he is successfully innovative and original. He uses, in different *marṣiyas*, different legends about the same person, but remains within individual *marṣiyas* faithful to the requirements of the particular story. One example will suffice. Abbas, a half-brother of Husain, is one of the chief heroes of Karbala. In India, the observances on the

8th of Muharram are particularly identified with him. In the four-volume edition of the selected works of Mir Anis, we find thirteen *marṣiyas* exclusively about Abbas.¹¹ In all of them certain themes or topics are always present, some exclusive to Abbas, the others required by the conventions of the *marṣiya*. In the first category would come references to Abbas being given the banner by Husain, Abbas receiving an empty water-bag from his favorite niece, Sakina, with the plea to bring her some water, Abbas fighting his way to the river and filling the bag, but refusing even to wet his own lips; Abbas' horse following his master by not taking a drink; and the martyrdom of Abbas on the way back from the river. The second category would cover the more general matters, such as *āmad*, *rajaz*, *jang*, etc. A closer look shows, however, that in the initial *ḡair-mubkī* sections, Anis has found much scope for variety. (Often that is also true for the other sections.) Consider the following brief descriptions of the *mājarā* sections in the thirteen *marṣiyas* on Abbas.

I. (*'abbās-e 'alī šer-e nayastān-e najaf hai*, "Abbas b. Ali is the lion of the reed-jungle of Najaf"): the birth of Abbas; Abbas' mother gives him into the care of Husain; Abbas tells Ali his devotion to Husain.

II. (*'abbās-e 'alī yūsuf-e kan'ān-e 'alī hai*, "Abbas b. Ali is the Joseph of the Canaan of Ali"): a description of Abbas' love for Husain; Abbas tells his mother why he is so devoted to Husain, which event is then described by her to Husain; a description of the two tombs in Karbala.

III. (*yā rab jahān mēn bhāī sē bhāī judā na hō*, "O Lord, may never a brother be separated from his brother"): a meditation on the importance of fraternal ties; the sad plight of Husain after his elder brother Hasan's death; his relief and joy as Abbas grows up.

IV. (*ḡul āmad-e 'abbās kā hat fauj-e sitam mēn*, "The hordes of tyranny are in turmoil as Abbas comes"): the soldiers in Yazid's army talk in awed terms about Abbas; they lose heart thinking of Abbas' bravery, and become bold only after a harangue by their commander.

V. (*'abbās-e 'alī gauhar-e daryā-e šaraf hai*, "Abbas b. Ali is a pearl of the ocean of honor"): the poet praises Abbas; Abbas is to Husain what Ali was to the Prophet.

VI. (*jātā hai šēr-e bišā-e haidar furāt par*, "The lion of the forest of Ali goes to the Euphrates"): Husain expresses grief at the impending death of Abbas.

VII. (*jab qaṣḍ kiyā nahr kā saqqā-e ḥaram n?*, "When the water-carrier of the harem set out for the river"): Husain tries to stop Abbas, but he insists on leaving for the battlefield; Abbas tells Husain how he was instructed by his mother on her death-bed never to forsake Husain.

VIII. (*ai iṣḡ-e zubān jauhar-e taqrīr dikHādē*, "O sword of the tongue display your sharpness of speech"): a description of the 10th day of Muharram; after Qasim's death, Abbas grieves over the delay in his own martyrdom; Husain's son Ali Akbar gets ready to join battle, but Abbas complains to Husain and insists on going first.

IX. (*āmad hai karbalā ké nayastā NmeN šēr kī*, "Now arrives the lion in the reed-jungle of Karbala"): Abbas is on the battlefield; Shimr, an evil man who would later kill Husain, makes a nasty comment; Husain rushes to Abbas and restrains him; they bid farewell to each other.

X. (*jāb ran mēN sar-butand 'alī kā 'alam huā*, "When the banner of Ali was raised high on the battlefield"): the battle drum sounds in Yazid's camp; battle begins, and all the companions of the Imam are killed, except for Ali Akbar and Abbas; Abbas claims precedence; the enemy spies carries the news to the camp.

XI. (*abbās-e 'alī qibla-e arbāb-e vafā hat*, "Abbas b. Ali is the cynosure of the people of fidelity"): the journey to Karbala; on the 10th of Muharram, Husain makes his final plea for peace, when Abbas reaches the battlefield, Shimr tries to woo him away through flattery; Abbas rebukes him, but the shouts of the Yazidi soldiers cause concern in Husain's camp; Abbas' wife, feeling ashamed, sends out her young son to get the facts.

XII. (*jab lāšā-e qāsim kō 'alamdār né dékHā*, "When the banner-holder saw the corpse of Qasim"): Abbas goes to the Imam and indirectly asks permission to join the battle; Husain asks Abbas' permission for the same purpose; Abbas now comes out explicitly and insists that he should go first; the two go into the tents; Abbas talks with Zainab and gets her to champion his cause.

XIII. (*āmad hai jigār-band-e Šah-e qil'a-šikan kī*, "Now arrives the beloved son of the king who pulled down forts"): a spy of Amr tells him of the events in Husain's camp; when Abbas reaches the battlefield, Ibn Sa'd tries vainly to win him over; Shimr's nasty remarks make Abbas enraged.

These brief descriptions do not indicate the degree of variety in the details of these *mājarā* sections; nor have we indicated here the variations and innovations that Anis has introduced in the *ruṣṣat* and *jang* sections. Suffice it to say that even a casual reading of these thirteen *marṣiyas* does not leave one with an impression of repetition and monotony.

Another way to reduce monotony, adopted by Mir Anis and other good poets, is to use carefully chosen epithets, along with his name, to refer to the protagonist of a *marṣiya*. Take for example the previously noted *marṣiya*: *jab qat' kī musāfat-e šab āstāb nē*, "When the sun cut short the night's long trail." It is about the Imam Husain, son of Ali, but in its 197 stanzas, the name Husain is used only 34 times. The rest of the time, Anis uses 72 different epithets, repeating only a few of them more than once. Such is the case also with the secondary characters. These epithets not only add a touch of variety but also act as reminders to the audience of the various attributes of the heroes of Karbala and of the many legends about them.

There is, however, another kind of monotony that does make itself felt due to a lack of individualization of these heroes and heroines. Given the religious constraints, the characters in a *marṣiya* had to be ideal beings. Not even a suggestion of some fault can be allowed with reference to Husain and his companions; his opponents, on the other hand, have to be completely evil. Thus the protagonists in the *marṣiyas* are all anonymously ideal. Hardly any trait can be shown to belong exclusively to one and not to the others in the same camp. Even the two persons who do stand out somewhat carefully—namely, Zainab and Abbas—do so not because of some special traits, but rather due to the fact that are seen inter-acting with the great many more persons than the others. They stand out because we see them in a vast variety of situations, but they do not develop as characters in the process of the poem.

tradition from G.E. von Gruenbaum, *Muhammadan Festivals* (New York, 1951), pp. 91-94.

10. Cf. Gustav Thaiss, *op. cit.*, pp. 356-357.
11. *mīr babar 'alī anīs, marāṣī-e anīs* (Lucknow, n.d.). Reprint of the edition first published in 1876.
12. *mas'ūd ḥasan rizavī, razm-nāma-e anīs* (Lucknow, 1957).
13. Quoted in the article, "Epic," in Alex Preminger, et al., *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, 1974), p. 246.
14. Elsewhere I have shown how the Urdu *marṣīya* cannot be regarded as the true precursor of the modern Urdu *nāẓm* (a continuous poem on a particular topic, in blank, free, or rhymed verse). Naim, *op. cit.*, p. 10. For a vigorous, but partisan, defence of the Urdu *marṣīya* against all criticism, see 'alī 'abbās ḥusānī, *urdu marṣīya* (Lucknow, 1973).

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Three Poems of Iqbāl

A.L. Basham

Not being a specialist in the field of Islamic Studies, I cannot offer a worthy contribution to the memorial volume in honour of my old friend Aziz Ahmad. I must, however, record my sincere affection for him, and my deep sorrow at his passing. Urbane and tolerant, gentle and affectionate, he was always a delightful companion, and I still have very happy memories of long talks with him, about everything and nothing, in the Common Room of SOAS when we were colleagues there. I met him also on two occasions during his last illness, and was intensely moved by the courage and faith with which he accepted pain and the certainty of impending death. Since Aziz was a great master of the Urdu language, and a fine literary man as well as a scholar, he might have appreciated the following very humble efforts at expressing in English the thoughts of the greatest Urdu poet of this century.

The background to these translations needs explaining. On the occasion of the centenary of Iqbāl's birth a small society of which I was president, the Asian Society of Canberra, decided to organize a dinner (strictly *ḥalāl*) in the poet's honour. A fine amateur *qawwāl*, who happened to be resident in Canberra, agreed to chant some of Iqbāl's poems after the meal, and my colleague Dr. S.A.A. Rizvi prepared a brief talk about the great man. But, as it was realized that most of those present would be ignorant of Urdu, it was necessary to provide translations of the poems recited. So, at short notice, I prepared these three translations, helped by Dr. Rizvi in interpreting some of the more difficult passages, and I read them