

Zainab Bint e Ali
Saviour of Shia Islam

By

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ZAINAB BINT ALI (SA) ---SAVIOUR OF SHIA ISLAM

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

In the annals of recorded history of the Great Religions there has never been a succession of three generations of women who nurtured that religion. In Islam, the first was Umm ul Momineen Khadija tul Kubra SA, Queen of Arabia, the first Moslem woman: her daughter Fatima Bint Muhammad SA, titled ‘Leader of women in the universe’: and her illustrious daughter called Zainab Bint Ali SA, whose story follows. These three are a line of beacons of spiritual light till eternity among Muslims. During the struggle of good against evil culminating in the events at Karbala in 61 AH, Bibi Zainab SA supported her brother Imam Husain AS in life, and after his martyrdom, was the main propagator of the meaning of his unique sacrifice. “In the Book of Adoration, Karbala and Damascus are intertwined. Husain AS wrote the first, Zainab SA authored the other chapter”--- Allama Iqbal.

Saiyed Mohib Asad’s essay is compelling and researched. We need to publish more such studies to pass on to coming generations the main features of the choices exercised by Imam Husain AS at Karbala and the reasons thereof. Allah blesses the author of this work.

---IFTIKHAR ARIF SI, HI,

CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL LANGUAGE AUTHORITY, ISLAMABAD.

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FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

It is imperative to mention that Lady Zainab SA is titled as “Shareeka-tul-Hussain” as if her dignity is worthy of note due to her partnership in bearing Imam Husain’s most strenuous responsibility. Facing the unceasing misery of Karbala, then Kufa and then Damascus with complete determination is the reflection of her perfection. Bibi Zainab, while briefing the philosophy of ‘masaib’ in her sermon at the castle of Obaidullah-Ibne Ziad said “Adversity comes due to love” Furthermore, in Yazid’s palace she warned him by declaring that: “It’s not governance that you have, it’s rather a mere chance”

Saiyed Mohib Asad remained associated with the field of administration as a senior officer in the service of Pakistan as his career; his dedication to his maslak is well known to us and appreciated. His presentation on Saani-e Zahra, Bibi Zainab SA is valuable in that;

- The events are chronologically portrayed, each accompanied with a reason influencing its importance.
- His span of historical analogies is very useful connecting the events around Karbala to many of our present day practices.
- His record of masaib is, by and large accurate as per our Authorities.

I would like to pray for Saiyed Mohib Asad --- “May Allah make this writing a source of prosperity for him here and as well as in the hereafter” I would inculcate the readers to improve their knowledge (Ilm) and acts (Amal) by studying this powerful piece of writing. Was Salam --- SYED SHAHENSHAH HUSAIN NAQVI.
SPEAKER, MASJID BAB-UL-ILM, KARACHI.
OCTOBER 2016.

786/110;

Abbreviations;

POH-----Peace be on him.

SA-----Salam Allah Aleha.

AS-----Allehis Salam.

AH-----After Hijrah.

AD-----Anno Domini.

BH-----Before Hijrah

BIBI ZAINAB, SALAM ALLAH ALEHA

Preface

The exalted position of Bibi Zainab SA among the Asana Ashari Shia is well known. To them, besides the incidence of her high birth in the core of the Prophet POH's family, her deep association and later propagation of Imam Husayn AS's mission confer on her the right to the highest esteem, devotion and edification.

I have written this short monograph in all humility. This is not a work of scholarship, but a personal tribute to the Lady as I see her; one among millions of her devotees.

I enjoin upon my family to read this essay to the end, and then to recite the ziarat at appendix.

Many authors have written on Bibi Zainab SA and I have drawn on their scholarship. I pray for those departed and bless the living.

I dedicate this to my wife Nigar, a dotting admirer of Bibi Zainab SA and a year-long azadaar of Imam Husayn AS.

Initial Reflections

Early Muslim history is drawn from some written records and the rest by the recital of 'traditions' which were passed on from generation to generation till reduced into writing by scholars. Except for the Koran, the first books on the happenings in the life and times of the Prophet POH were written at least ninety years after the Prophet's demise. These reports can be broadly divided into two parts. The first are the reported 'Ahadees' (biographical events in the Prophet's life). From these Ahadees, scholars have culled the 'Sunnah' (practices) of the Prophet POH, and various directives given by him on a wide variety of everyday routine activity for Muslims. In the second category are reports of other events of importance like wars, treaties, lives of Companions of the Prophet POH, and suchlike. This can broadly be called general history.

Within forty years from the passing away of the Prophet, the Ummah (adherents of the Prophet POH) divided into two distinct streams, though the font remained the same. One group came to be termed the Shian (followers) e Ali AS, who believed that Imam Ali AS was designated by the Prophet POH to succeed him as leader of the Ummah after the Prophet's demise. The others were a much larger group who founded the Umayyad and Abbasid Caliphates (successors to the Prophet POH) which together ruled over the Ummah for nearly three hundred years. These two dynasties made it their state policy to reduce the status of Imam Ali AS and to denigrate him in every possible manner. This policy was a defensive mechanism as the Caliphs were ever mindful that they were usurpers of the rights of Imam Ali AS and his descendents.

To appease these temporal heads, anti-Imam Ali AS literature became a very lucrative industry. So, thousands of so called reports which abased Imam Ali AS's status were cooked up and widely publicized both from the pulpit and in written propaganda. On the other hand, the Shia scholars were collecting their own materials which turned out to be highly laudatory of his personality, character, and conduct of Imam Ali AS.

A lot of myth has surrounded several obvious distortions. One which has always rankled with me is that we keep being told by Ulema and scholars of all schools that the Prophet OHP and his family always had straitened financial circumstances.

Historically, that is untrue. The grandfather of the Prophet was the keeper of the Kaaba—the richest shrine in that cotemporary time. Recall his herds of camel that he had demanded back from Abraha of the Elephants infamy. The Bani Hashim was a very powerful sub-tribe. The Prophet OHP was a very successful trader at a very young age. He was married to the richest woman of Arabia of the times.

Economic space was always immense to the Ahl e Bayt. Ali AS may have worked in a date-palm grove to establish the dignity of labor. He may have sat in the shop of Meesam and sold dates on a day to show his approval of trading as honorable, but he was never a poor man in need. His elder son Hassan AS was feeding hundreds of visitors at his palatial house---no questions asked—on the very self-same day. Facts from history.

The other myth is that the Sunni and Shia Islam are fundamentally different. This is totally untrue as the two schools share all the basics of this great religion without exception. Actually, a great deal of this discord between the sects has been fostered as a policy by non-Muslim 'scholars of Islam' who set out to widen the breaches in the Ummah. Their trick is to quote from Muslim historians to authenticate their hypothesis, many of whom were unreliable and politically biased as submitted earlier in this paper. Due to the colonialism of Muslim lands by western powers and their surrogates in the last three hundred years, the present day researcher has so many conflicting viewpoints to contend with.

Luckily however, there is a set of Muslim scholars whose writings are balanced, fair, and supported by agreed evidence drawn from impeccable early sources. In this digital age, one hopes that software can be developed so that major points of difference can be resolved and the Ummah can proceed to integrate, re-build itself, and find its rightful place in the comity of nations.

Birth and Early Life of Bibi Zainab SA

Although, the life of the Prophet POH is generally well-known, thanks mainly to the researchers who have written scores of commentaries on the Koran, the life of many from his family, especially the 'women of the house' are shrouded in respectful and sometimes awed non-reporting. Be that as it may.

Bibi Zainab SA was the elder daughter of Fatima Binte Muhammad SA and Imam Ali Bin Abu Talib AS. According to the findings of the Ulema of the Asana Ashari Shias, she was born on the 1st of Shaaban in the 6th Hijri (15DEC627 AD). Another tradition suggests that her date of birth is the 5th Jamadi Aawwal of the 6th Hijri (21SEP627 AD).

Her name is composed of two Arabic words, namely 'Zain' which means adornment, and 'Ab' which is the word for father. Together these words mean 'adornment to her father'. This name was bestowed on Bibi SA by her grandfather, the Prophet POH.

The first five years of her life were probably the happiest as these were the times when the Prophet POH was heading the newly established Muslim Commonwealth at Medina, and her father Imam Ali AS was the undisputed first prince of the state. She was the princess royal of the house of Imam Ali AS and the much beloved sister of Imam Hasan AS and Imam Husayn AS, themselves the dearest and treasured sons of the Prophet. The house was replete with esoteric learning, social pre-eminence, physical chivalry, mental strength, emotional compassion, and spiritual peace.

Modern psychology has empirically suggested that experiences passed through the first six years of life shape a person's character for the rest of their lives. There may be some validity in this theory when we look at the life-behavior of the Bibi Zainab SA, as she seems to have internalized the loftiest qualities of head and heart inherited from her illustrious ancestors, going back to the prophet Abraham AS.

Equally, as for Imam Husayn AS, Zainab SA is entitled to various early portions of the Ziarat e Warisa. Her later achievements proved that in her genes she carried the courage, forbearance, charisma, compassion and the impregnable resolve to serve Allah's Will in the face of every testing circumstance—qualities inherited from a long line of ancestors who were prophets of Allah, among them, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and the Prophet Muhammad OHP.

The demise of the Prophet POH on the 27th Safar of the 11th Hijri, (23MAY632 AD) let loose the divisive demon of sectarian strife in the Islamic polity, which continues to date. However, the issue of succession to the Prophet POH is not the subject of this paper. Here we are concerned only with the effect the Prophet POH's death had on the life of Bibi Zainab SA and this was devastating. Within three months of the Prophet POH's demise, her exalted mother, Bibi Fatima SA passed away, broken hearted at the treatment meted out to her and her husband by the establishment of the time.

Imam Ali AS decided to opt out of the power struggle and to devote all his time to his first love, which was the pursuit of knowledge in general, and the study of the Koran in particular. As the senior Companions of the Prophet were disallowed from traveling out of Medina for security reasons, most of his time was spent in the Mosque or at his home. He was therefore able to spend time with his children, four at that time, and inculcate in them the highest and the noblest qualities of head and heart. He made Hasan AS, Husayn AS, Zainab SA, and Umm e Kulsoom SA persons of such pre-eminence that to the present day they exist in the daily conscience of billions of devotees. Another empirical example of the many miracles attributed to Imam Ali AS.

So, at the age of six, Bibi Zainab SA ended up as the manager of her father's house which was frequented by men of the finest intellect, and political leaning of all sorts. The younger sister Umm e Kulsoom SA was too young to help, and it is said that all the men of the household, which included three Imams of the Shias, deferred to her even at this tender age because they bore her much love, and she was such a prodigy that she managed all issues with aplomb and wisdom. Our Bibi Zainab SA was denied the pleasures of childhood by circumstances, but she turned adversity into advantage, and grew into a very accomplished and dominant young lady. The later wives of Imam Ali AS are known to have been affectionate and deferential to Zainab SA due to the high station of her mother being the Prophet POH's daughter.

At the age of eleven Bibi Zainab SA was united in a 'nikah' with her cousin Abdullah Bin Jafar Bin Abu Talib, but she shifted to his house as his wife several years later. Abdullah bin Jafar was the son of Jafar bin Abu Talib AS and was born in Ethiopia during the second Hijra (7BH) ordered by the Holy Prophet. Jafar led a group of 83 Muslims. On hearing the news of Abdullah's birth, who also happened to be the first male offspring of two Moslem parents, the Prophet OHP expressed his joy at the news publicly---an act of great rarity for him.

Abdullah accompanied his family to Medina once the Prophet OHP migrated there. Jafar bin Abu Talib was martyred at Ohad soon afterwards, and was rewarded by The Prophet OHP with the title of ‘Saiyed ush Shuhada’---, the same title passing on to Imam Husayn AS after Karbala.

Jafar joined the household of Ali AS, took up commerce as a career, and became very wealthy in a short time. He was famed throughout Arabia for charity, chivalry and eloquence—all virtues treasured by the Arabs of the time. Abdullah bin Jafar was one of the richest people of Medina and a famous philanthropist, commonly referred to as the ‘Bahrul Joud’ which translates as ‘Ocean of Charity’

By the time she came to live in Abdullah’s house, Bibi Zainab SA was already well versed in the Koran, gave lectures to the women of Medina on Islam, on ethics, and other philosophical topics. Her standing as a scholar earned her the title of ‘Aqeela e Bani Hashim’. Such titles were not easily come by in the Medina of the time which was full of men of the highest intellect from all corners of the expanding Muslim Empire. Her half-brother Abbas AS later was referred to as ‘Qamar e Bani Hashim’ for his good looks, chivalry and great prowess as a warrior and his scholarship. These two later became legendary saints of Shia Islam.

Bibi Zainab SA’s younger sister Bibi Umm e Kulsoom was later given in wedlock to Muhammad bin Jafar, so the two daughters of Bibi Fatima were wives of two brothers who were sons of their paternal uncle, Saiyed ush Shuhada Jafar bin Abu Talib.

Middle Life

Her husband Abdullah Bin Jafar waited patiently till Bibi Zainab SA went to live with him, whereupon, she was received with great affection and respect, for she was the grand-daughter of the Prophet, and thus entitled to special consideration by all, including her husband. Their marriage was an ideal mix of togetherness and space for each other. She bore him three sons namely Ali, Aon, and Muhammad, and one daughter named Umm e Kulsoom. In addition to her own home Bibi Zainab SA continued to be very attentive to the house of her father and those of Imam Hasan AS and Imam Husayn AS, as the politics of the time impinged on their safety and security and this was a serious concern for Bibi Zainab SA.

It was easy to keep in touch as their houses were in close proximity. The Bani Hashim to which Hazrat Abdul Mutallib and his progeny belonged was socially the most elite sub-clan of the Quraish of Mecca, as they held the keys to the Kaaba. When the Prophet migrated to Medina, the clan settled in a tight cluster in an area to the east of the present-day Masjid e Nabawi. They had many houses in the same area. Their leader and godfather after the Prophet POH was Imam Ali AS, and the whole tribe of Bani Hashim, and their many adherents stood solidly behind Imam Ali AS in his policy of the time. Bibi Zainab SA was an advisor to her father in all matters relating to the education, welfare and spiritual edification of her grandfathers’ followers.

In the year 35 AH (656 AD.) the Caliph Osman was assassinated by a large mob consisting of rebellious troops, disaffected bureaucrats, and disenchanting townsmen. Imam Ali AS was then anointed Caliph by popular acclaim. He entered on the office with reluctance. Earlier, in a famous sermon now titled 'shaq-shaqiya', he had rejected the advice of his adherents to wage war to obtain the Caliphate, by averring that temporal power was to him as meaningless as the 'sneeze of a goat'. This was not rhetoric as his conduct throughout the fifty-eight years of his life so far reflected little love for the material aspects of life. As Caliph also, he had a very Spartan way of life.

From the very first day of his rule, he was bitterly opposed by the Omayyad, a sub-clan of the Quraish, which was the ruling clan of Mecca before the advent of Islam. The leader of the Quraish of Mecca was Abu Sufyan bin Hakam, who had led the Anti-Prophet POH pagan army at Badr, Ohad, and Khandaq, and converted to Islam after the Prophet POH took over Mecca in the 8th AH (629 AD). Many of Abu Sufyan's family and kinsmen had been personally killed by Imam Ali AS in single combat in the three above-mentioned battles, and so the Omayyad bore Ali AS much ill-will and looked at him with inveterate hatred.

The Caliph Osman also belonged to Omayyad's clan and had appointed his kinsman Muaviya bin Abu Sufyan as the Governor of Syria, then the richest province of the Muslim Ummah. Muaviya gradually had put together a large standing army, and had started to dilute the control of the Caliph at Medina by carefully orchestrated acts of disregard and sometimes utter disobedience to the central authority. By the time of Osman's demise, Muaviya was a self-contained potentate. He initially considered outright rejection of Imam Ali AS's assumption of the Caliphate, but later realizing that the rest of the Ummah was with Imam AS, swore the oath of fealty, reneged on it soon afterwards, and went in open rebellion against Imam Ali AS, ---within a year of the latter's resumption of office.

Bibi Zainab AS was a close observer of these events and continued to engage in the matters of state. When Imam Ali AS decided to shift his seat of governance to Kufa from Medina in view of the expanded Muslim Ummah which now stretched from inner Africa to central Asia, Bibi Zainab SA, and her husband Abdullah bin Jafar also shifted to Kufa with their family. Bibi Zainab SA was then in her early thirties.

It must have been with great sorrow that she watched the incessant attacks on her father's government, the conspiracies afloat daily to discomfort him; and the wars that were thrust on him by Muaviya and other enemies disaffected due to his strict adherence to justice and fair play. In the five years of his rule, three battles were forced on him, all of which he won, ---like always. So, Ali AS's enemies had him assassinated in the Masjid at Kufa. He passed away on the 21st of Ramadan 40 AH (21JAN661 AD)

Imam Hassan AS succeeded his father as the Caliph by popular acclaim, but he, like his forbears, despised violence and did not want internecine wars to go on, as he saw them fracturing the Ummah. Muaviya continued to plague him, so for the sake of unity in the

Ummah, Imam Hassan AS, entered into a treaty whereby he allowed Muaviya to head the government of the Ummah. The truce of Imam Hassan AS was from a position of both moral and temporal high ground, as he was the elder grandson of the Prophet POH, and so pre-eminent by birth. He also was in command of the only undefeated army in the Ummah. So, Imam Hassan AS exercised this option by carefully crafted policy. So militarily weak was Muaviya at the time that the treaty was dictated by Imam Hassan AS word for word, and Muaviya meekly signed on the dotted line.

Among others there were three conditionalities in this treaty which must be mentioned. Firstly; Muaviya would strictly adhere to the injunctions of the Koran and the Sunnah (practice) of the Prophet POH in all matters of state. Secondly; the vilification campaign launched by the Omayyad against Imam Ali AS will cease immediately. Thirdly; at the death of Muaviya, Imam Husayn AS would be the Caliph of Muslims. Muaviya signed the treaty but as later events proved; he had no intention of abiding by any of the covenants.

No doubt Bibi Zainab SA acquiesced to Imam Hassan AS's thinking as she was a consultant and advisor to her brothers in all matters, whether personal or political. The family of the Prophet POH returned to Medina and went back to their enclave of the Bani Hashem next to the Masjid e Nabawi. There, they resumed their duties as interpreters of the Koran, tutors of ethical and moral values, and the betterment and welfare of the Ummah. The first 'dastarkhwan' (Open house) in Muslim history for feeding of the poor and the travelers was established by Imam Hassan AS. And to this day this charitable act is widely followed by Shias worldwide to honor their second Imam.

Hassan AS was assassinated by poison administered to him by a female agent of Marwan bin Hakam, the governor ay Medina in the 49th AH(661 AD), leaving Imam Husayn AS as the sole surviving grandson of the Prophet, and according to the treaty of Imam Hassan AS with Muaviya, the Caliph-in-waiting after Muaviya.

Leading to Karbala

From 40 AH (661 AD) to 60 AH (680 AD), Muaviya had twenty years to consolidate his hold over what had become by then the Muslim empire. He appointed governors, military commanders, tax-collectors, and laid the foundations of dynastic rule. A true son to his father, Muaviya continued to nurture an implacable hatred for the Bani Hashim, and particularly the house of Imam Ali AS. Towards the end of his long life, listening to the Azaan in the Masjid e Amvi in Damascus one morning, he publicly stated that he had tried all his life to have the name of the Prophet POH eliminated from the call, but had failed. His was a revisionist approach to the nascent religion, and he passed on this philosophy to his son, and anointed heir Yezid.

Muaviya died in 60 AH (680 AD) but before that he appointed Yezid as the next Caliph, in contravention of the treaty with Imam Hassan AS, which had stipulated that after Muaviya, the Caliphate was to pass on to Imam Husayn AS. To make the succession

certain, he asked the leaders and grandees of the court at Damascus to swear allegiance to Yezid during his last illness. Most Syrian courtiers were bought out and did. Muaviya cautioned Yezid that to consolidate his rule, he had to get the nod from Imam Husayn AS. This was essential as Imam Husayn AS's had a prior claim on the Caliphate according to the written treaty signed by Muaviya.

After the death of Muaviya, Yezid asked all his governors to ensure allegiance to him by all citizens according to a ritualistic custom of the day. This 'order of the day' was quickly disseminated to all corners of the huge empire. The appointment of Yezid as Caliph horrified all right-thinking Muslims of high rank. Yazid's personal lifestyle was profligate in the extreme. He maintained a large harem of non-Muslim prisoners of war, imbibed alcohol in public, and played games of chance, forbidden in Islam. He was a noted poet of the time, and much of his poetry was on themes secular, romantic, and venal. He had publicly doubted the 'wahi' sent by Allah on the Prophet POH, terming it as a subterfuge by the Bani Hashim to establish an empire for their sub-tribe. The sons of Abu Sufyan wanted to return to the social order of Pre-Islam where the Quraish presided over a godless citizenry. They made no secret of this, either.

Another very important political player of the time was the Omayyad Marwan bin Hakam. He was a son-in-law of the Caliph Osman, and later governor of Medina appointed by Muaviya to that post. It was Marwan who had Imam Hassan AS assassinated by poison administered to the Imam by one of his wives in 49 AH (661AD). The orders had of course come from Muaviya. Marwan did not allow Imam Hassan AS to be buried next to the Prophet, as Imam Hassan AS had willed. The funeral cortège of Imam Hassan AS was waylaid by the army, and his corpse was riddled with arrows on Marwan's orders. Imam Hassan AS was later buried in a graveyard nearby called the Jannat e Baqi, next to his revered mother.

Gaining rapid promotions, Marwan ended up as First secretary to Muaviya in the last years of Muaviya's life, and thus was a principal architect of the events that unfolded in that era. Marwan was despised by the Prophet POH for his devious and conspiratorial ways and was exiled from Medina by the Prophet POH. At another times, he was publicly snubbed by Imam Ali AS, and came out in open rebellion to Imam Ali AS by active participation in the Battle of the Camel. Marwan bin Hakam is one of the most accursed characters in Shia Islam.

The demand for allegiance to Imam Husayn AS was made by Walid, the governor of Medina in a meeting called for the purpose. Marwan was present in Medina but being the notorious physical coward that he was, did not sit in. Imam Husayn AS refused point-blank to endorse Yazid's legitimacy. He stated that like his father, he too abhorred power politics, had no desire to be Caliph, but that '*somebody like me would never approve of somebody like Yezid*'. This was the defining statement for it established the high moral ground and station of Imam Husayn AS. He was the sole surviving son of the Prophet, and thus the first among Arabs by birth. His personal conduct and virtue were widely acclaimed as first rate. Yezid, on the other hand was descended from a freed slave of the Bani Hashim, and his personal life was third rate. Imam Husayn AS went away telling

the governor to forget about allegiance to Yezid now or ever. At this news Marwan told the governor to send a raiding party and have Imam Husayn AS killed, but the governor got cold feet.

Marwan returned to Damascus and advised Yezid to have Imam Husayn AS assassinated by whatever means he could. Walid was relieved of his charge, and a new governor was appointed in Medina to do the needed. Being informed of the threat to his life, Imam Husayn AS left Medina for Mecca, on the 28th Rajab 60 AH (3MAR680 AD). He took with him his immediate family, some scions of the Bani Hashem, his servants, and a few adherents. Mecca was considered a place of sanctuary and refuge, where the Prophet POH had forbidden all violence. Imam Husayn's retinue extended to several kilometers, composed of hundreds of camels and horses, tentage and household details, cash and armament. He stayed in Mecca for about four months, when he got the news that Yezid, in disregard of Mecca's sanctity had sent a group of forty assassins disguised as pilgrims to slay Imam Husayn AS.

A Unique Incident

Among the group which accompanied Imam Husayn AS, were several of his half-brothers—sons of the Amir ul Momineen AS. Among them was the legendary Abbas bin Ali AS, famed throughout Arabia for his valor, learning, and a total commitment to the cause of Imam Husayn AS. The news of the assassins' arrival at Mecca infuriated Hazrat Abbas AS. So, one morning when the Kaaba was surrounded by pilgrims he climbed atop the holy cube and addressed the gathering. He introduced himself as a servant and protector of Imam Husayn AS. He said that he was addressing them from atop the birthplace of the father of his Imam and master Husayn AS. (Note that he was referring to the birth of Ali AS which had happened within the chamber. Now, Ali AS was as much his own father too, but out of noble rectitude, Abbas AS referred to the Kaaba as the birth-place of his Imam Husayn's illustrious father; not his own too.) He told them that he was aware of the cowardly assassins' intent and was putting them on notice that if a hair of the Imam was harmed he, Abbas AS would translate it into a personal vendetta, and would re-visit them in the fiercest of manners. He reminded them of his own performance at various theaters of wars fought by the Muslims where he had earned the reputation of being one of the foremost warriors of the faith. He told them to lay off their evil intent as Imam Husayn AS was protected by the flower of the most pre-eminent tribe of Arabia—namely the Bani Hashim. Abbas AS's oration must have sent the chill down many backbones that day as he was dreaded by his enemies.

This oration of Hazrat Abbas AS takes us back to another historical event. In the self-same Mecca there had been another similar conspiracy but that was against the Prophet OHP. During the early years of the call to Islam, the tribal leaders of the city had conspired to assassinate the Prophet AS. When the news got to the sons of Abdul Mutallib AS, the uncles of the Prophet OHP were much enraged. One day Hamza bin Abdul Mutallib climbed to the top of the Kaaba and gave a historic admonishing to the Prophets' enemies. His reported speech went, broadly, as follows:

“Know me. I am Hamza bin Abdul Mutallib. We are the keepers of this place. Many of you may not know me as I am often out of Mecca on my favorite pastime which is the lion-hunt. I kill lions—sometimes in single combat. Have done it for years, in Arabia and Africa. Now this nephew of mine, Muhammad by name, son of my dear departed brother Abdullah is much beloved by me. He is very precious to us and we endorse his calling and mission. We value him above all else. On my return recently, I am informed that some so-called notables intend to do him harm. Take notice that if a single hair of my nephew’s head is harmed, I, Hamza will give up the lion-hunt, return to Mecca and hunt you. If his killer is known, he will be put to the sword—if not—all you so-called notables will be put to the sword. Period.”

Departure from Mecca

The city of Kufa had a large number of his father’s adherents and they invited him to Kufa where he would be secure in their midst. Thus, to safeguard the sanctity of the Kaaba as enjoined by the Prophet OHP, and to save himself and his family from the any harm, Imam Husayn AS accompanied by about a thousand followers set off on the road to Kufa from Mecca on the 8th Zilhaj 60 AH (7SEP 680 AD).

This caravan headed by the Imam was several hundred strong and may have stretched for several miles, as many adherents of the Ahl e Bayt followed him.

Yezid was informed of the joy among citizens of Kufa at the news of Imam Husayn AS’s impending visit, and totally lost his nerve. He transferred his cousin Ubaydullah bin Ziyad (referred to, often, as Ibne Marjana) bin Abu Sufyan who was governor of Basra to Kufa, and gave him instructions to put down the suspected rebellion, also sent a large sum of money with the order. Ubaydullah moved quickly. He murdered or arrested all chiefs suspected of having sympathy for Imam Husayn AS, and then opening the gates of his deep treasury bought off the other notables he could not touch because of their tribal strength. He put the town of Kufa under curfew.

When the news of this turn of events reached Imam Husayn AS at one of his night stops, he gave matters deep thought. He consulted Bibi Zainab SA and his other senior adherents, and then called an assembly of his camp. He informed his companions that he had decided to carry on towards Kufa regardless, and he feared total annihilation of all who stayed with him, as he would never submit to Yezid. He told them to go home as this was not their fight, but his only. Many left, but about a hundred of his follower stayed.

At Karbala

Husayn AS preceded towards Kufa by a less frequented route, but was chased by a contingent of Ubaydullah’s army, and forced to stop at the grove town of Karbala, then on the banks of the River Euphrates. This was on the 2nd of Muharram 61 AH. He was asked to submit to Yezid, and in return would be re-instated to privilege, monies and

honor. Husayn AS laughed off the offer, sent a message to Ubaydullah that he be given right of way to travel out of Arabia, or be left in peace. Ubaydullah sent a return message that allegiance to Yezid was the only way out. Husayn AS said no.

Husayn AS had already been visited by a Kurdish chief soon after his arrival at Karbala. He was requested by the visitor to come with him to Kurdish territories which were independent of the Caliph at Damascus. Husayn AS graciously declined the offer. He told the Kurdish prince that in this unequal fight the matter to be decided was of the trueness of the 'Wahi' on the Prophet, which Yezid disputed. So, said Husayn AS that *he was here because he had to be here*, and would also, therefore, *stay here*. Husayn AS's asking Ubaydullah for a safe passage was only to convey to the people that he had wished to avoid the conflict in all possible manners. Imam Husayn AS had choices but his was a very conscious decision to convincingly rout Yezid by getting killed. He foresaw that his slaying would finish off the Sufyanides, and thus bury the challenge to his grandfather's Prophethood for all time.

Although Imam Husayn AS was with a very small group, the rulers were scared of a general uprising in his favor, and so a division of the Syrian army under the command of Amr bin Saad was dispatched to put him down. Emissaries were dispatched to tribal heads friendly to Yezid that the Kharijites were ready to attack Kufa, and that the Caliph needed help. Several thousand tribesmen responded and traveled to Karbala. Sub-clans of tribes whose members had been killed by Imam Ali AS in the Prophet's wars also descended on Karbala in the form of hordes, so that by the 8th of Muharram, Husayn AS's small group was surrounded by a multitude numbering thousands. To pressurize Husayn AS into submission Amr cut off the water supply to his camp from the River Euphrates on the 6th Muharram, but to no avail.

On the 9th Muharram Husayn AS mounted a camel and went into the heart of the gathering of his enemies and addressed them. He introduced himself at length, and then asked why they were determined to soil their hands and souls with the Prophet's blood. One section responded by asking for submission to Yazid's caliphate; another more rowdily ranted that they hated Imam Ali AS and wanted revenge for all their elders that Imam Ali AS had personally killed in the Prophets' wars. Husayn AS replied that as Yezid was evil and anti-Islam, he was not fit to rule the Ummah. To the others he offered no apology. He exhorted them to desist from the great sin that they were contemplating, but that if they did not listen to reason even now, he would fight them. Bibi Zainab SA was a firsthand witness of the entire proceedings, and fully behind her brother despite the foreseeable ruin.

The battle of Karbala was joined on the morning of 10th Muharram 61 AH (9 OCT 680 AD). In a ghoulisn dance of death which lasted till the early afternoon, Imam Husayn AS's entire group was massacred one by one. Putting aside the Arab custom of single combat, every fighter who appeared from Imam Husayn AS's camp was set upon by unruly groups which collectively slew each with exemplary brutality. His companions first, then his family, ranging in age between ninety years and six months, were ruthlessly slaughtered

Zainab SA had taken a vantage point which still bears her name, and watched the gory activity with fortitude and in full command of her senses. She saw the slaying of six sons of Imam Ali AS, her own two sons, Aon bin Abdullah, and Muhammad bin Abdullah, other sons of Ja'afar bin Abu Talib, and those of Aqueel bin Abu Talib; all of them the flower of the Bani Hashim. She looked on as her beloved nephew Ali Akbar bin Husayn AS fell, and then her trusted and treasured 'Qamar e Bani Hashem', the standard bearer Abbas bin Imam Ali AS.

From her hillock she saw her nephew Qasim bin Hassan go into the battlefield and take on the hundreds who quickly surrounded him. The young warrior fought with desperate courage, till he faltered on his horse and called upon Imam Husayn AS to come to his rescue. At this the Imam rushed towards Qasim from one side, and Abbas bin Ali AS galloped to his nephew's aid from another side. The rabble wielding spears, axes, lances, swords and rapiers that were surrounding Qasim ran helter-skelter at the sight of the two famed sons of Imam Ali AS bearing down at them. In the melee which followed, Qasim was torn from limb to limb. Horror-stricken, Bibi Zainab SA continued to watch as Imam Husayn AS got off his horse, spread his cotton mantle which was a cover for his upper body on the ground, put the body parts of his nephew on it, and then carry the blood-stained sack on his back into the ladies' tents. Bibi Zainab SA went into the tent of Qasim's mother, wept with her, consoled her, and then returned to her station.

Another heart wrenching time was when Imam Husayn AS brought the baby Ali Asghar into the field and asked the surrounding army to provide a small drink of water to the fainted infant. Amr bin Saad told his Chief of Archers, a villain named Hurmala to kill the child. Hurmala used one of his heaviest arrows. The resultant effect was that the baby was impaled onto Imam Husayn AS's arm, the arrow slicing his tiny neck from 'ear to ear'

And then Imam Husayn AS was left alone---all his blood family, friends and adherents dead, their bodies still warm under the merciless October Karbala sun. He entered the tents and proceeded to the one where his eldest son Ali AS lay in a dead faint from a high fever. He hugged his son, covered his face in kisses, and transferred the mantle of the Imamate to his first-born.

The leave taking from the 'women of the house' must have been painful in the extreme for the Imam. The ladies stood in two lines facing one the other and Husayn AS bade each an individual farewell, consigning all to the mercy of Allah. Turning finally to Bibi Zainab SA, he kissed her on her shoulders, entrusted the house to her care and bade her to remember him, Husayn AS, in her night vigils. We have it on the authority of Imam Zain el Aabedeem AS that he never saw his aunt miss her 'namaz e shab' even during all the travails after Karbala. Not a single night, irrespective of the place or circumstances which were hideous in the extreme.

Because there was no aide to assist the Imam to mount his horse, it was Bibi Zainab SA who held the reins of the war-steed 'Zuljinah', steadied the magnificent Horse of Karbala till the 'light of the eyes of Ali AS' and the 'bliss of heart of Bibi Zahra SA' was firmly

in the saddle. Without another look backwards, the Imam galloped into the horde till he was lost among them.

The ferocity and viciousness with which Imam Husayn AS was killed can be imagined from the historical record of the battlefield which states that when he finally fell from his horse, there were thirty-three arrows embedded in his body, and he carried the scars of thirty-four other wounds. A very strong tradition states that when Imam Husayn AS finally fell from his horse, he was for a while impaled on a bed of arrows till these broke and he came to ground.

Imam Husayn AS was then decapitated, and later the body of the Prophet's beloved grandson was overrun by horses, grounding it as mincemeat in the sands of Karbala. But before the horses were brought out, Bibi Zainab SA walked over to her brother's headless body, and standing next to it raised her arms to the heavens and said, " Oh Allah, accept this, our sacrifice in Thy way." This presence of mind, and a view of the holistic picture at the exact time of the most distressing personal tragedy is mind-boggling to lesser mortals, but then, this was the family of the Prophet, and not any lesser person.

In the annals of Muslim history, the most lauded warrior-hero is Imam Ali AS. On this all sects are agreed. Yet in a much-read 'durood' (laudatory tribute) which bears his name, one of the foremost scholars of Shia Islam, Muhammad bin Hassan Al-Tusi differs. In a passage where he recounts the qualities inherited by Imam Al-Mehdi AS from his forbears, he uses the term 'Saulat' (grandeur) for Imam Ali AS, and Shaja'at (valor) for Imam Husayn AS. In his own lifetime Imam Ali AS had identified Imam Husayn AS as the bravest of his many sons.

Sham-e-Ghariban

The evening of the 10th Muharram (Aashura), universally referred to as the Sham-e Ghariban is mourned with an obsessive intensity by the Shia. The evening of Aashura is titled the "Sham-e-Ghariban"; my translation being 'the evening of the dispossessed'.

The army of Amr ransacked the camp of Imam Husayn AS, now occupied only by the 'Harem e RasoolAllah', and the sole surviving male, Ali bin Husayn AS. The tents were set on fire, and their considerable belongings looted. The women and children were rounded up like so many cattle and were force-marched to Kufa the next morning. Ali bin Husayn AS had not gone to battle as he was very sick with a high fever. Gradually he recovered his health, but in the meanwhile it was Bibi Zainab SA who looked after her bereaved and grieving family. She had already saved the life of her nephew by dragging him out of his burning tent; now she delved into her deep reserves of wisdom and physical strength and did unbelievably gallant things. That the hordes did not kill Ali bin Husayn AS also is absolutely inexplicable; it can only be explained as a miracle of some sort.

Let us try to re-capture what it may have been like.

Firstly, unlike popular images, the camp of Husayn AS was vast. There were at least 70 camels, over a hundred horses, scores of tents, personal wearing apparels of over a hundred people, raw foodstuff, plenty of the currency of the time, (The Imam had purchased the land of for his camp from the Bani Asad for 60,000 Dinars). Besides there were all the implements of self-defense like swords, lances et al. The relics of the Prophet OHP, Ali AS, Hassan AS, were among the property in the camp. The soldiers of Amr went on a looting spree after the commander had the tents set on fire.

In their pell-mell of greed, the mounted soldiers over-ran and killed several children.

The camels and horses were driven away through the self-same field where the still warm corpses of the martyrs lay in various disarray. 17 ladies, one nobleman, and around ten children sat in a huddle in the sand, with the bright light of the moon in its 11th nightly appearance. Sometimes at this time, Sakina bint al-Husayn SA, four year old, most beloved daughter of the slain Imam slipped out of the group and wandered off in an attempt to reach her father's body. There is such pathos here. Mourning the evening with obsessive intensity, one can empathize with the Shia.

After Karbala

Coming from a woman of fifty-four, whose whole life so far had been spent in ease and comfort, albeit political tribulations and personal tragedies, Bibi Zainab's behavior in the weeks that followed Aashura was absolutely superhuman.

Amr bin Saad ordered that the severed heads of the martyrs be impaled on lances and held aloft for all to see, and to snatch the chadors of the women so that they were also in the public view. This was no greater indignity that could be foisted on any high-born Arab lady and a matter of great shame and trepidation for them. The family of the Prophet POH was famed for its 'ismat' (retiring grace). So for them the deprivation of the veil was an extreme torture. Not being used to the public glare, the captive ladies would attempt to hide behind Zainab SA who herself had nobody to hide behind.

For those readers with a craving for more detail, I suggest a perusal of the one of the several Ziaraat (salutations) addressed to Bibi Zainab SA. This one is called the Mufjea. The first part reflects her connection to the Ahl e Bayt of the Prophet, the second to her qualities of head and heart, and the third to her sufferings at Karbala. The ziarat's last part is historic and relates to the various talks she gave in the marketplace in Kufa, the court of Ubaydullah, and finally at the Masjid e Amwi in Damascus in the face of Yazid surrounded by all the grandees of his court. These addresses are studies in courage, forbearance, and personal bravery of this remarkable lady.

Soon after the events at Karbala, and even before that Yazid's propaganda machine had started to churn out various spins on the truth to minimize the monstrosity at Karbala, and to forestall the expected backlash to it. The first said that it was a family feud between

two houses of the Quraish. The second said that it was a battle between two claimants to the Caliphate. The third said it was a rebellion by the Bani Hashem against established authority and thus injurious to the public order within the Ummah. The fourth said that Imam Husayn AS had been stubborn and was the attacker on the army of the Caliph. The fifth was the most interesting and said that it was Ubaydullah who was solely responsible for the killing of Imam Husayn AS and that Yezid knew nothing of it, nor had given any such order.

The establishment at Damascus had planned to whitewash the truth, buy out critical tribal chiefs, put down small rebellions if any, and fully consolidate Yezid's hold on power. They expected to erase Imam Husayn AS's memory from the public mind with the same finality as they had obliterated his body on the banks of the Euphrates. They thought that they had done away with Bani Hashem once for all, as nearly all the males from the line of Abu Talib AS had been murdered in the battle at Karbala. They discounted any serious threat now from Ali Bin Husayn AS, and never even considered Zainab SA as a challenger. They expected the remaining Bani Hashim to cave in, ask for quarters, and retire to private life.

They thought that they had finished their business with Bibi Zainab SA. The problems for the house of Abu Sufyan multiplied when they realized that she had not quite finished with *them*. Whereas, the Caliph had most of the nobles, grandees, tribal chiefs, and other power brokers in his pocket, Bibi Zainab AS decided to use the people's power against the establishment.

In Kufa

Ubaydullah Ibne Ziyad had clamped a curfew in the entire town of Kufa now for over a month. The gates to the walled city were locked and guarded, and the streets were replete with state spies in the pay of the governor. The Kufans had invited Imam Husayn AS, to come and promised him safety and honor but later—due to fear and uncertainty as well as the brutality of Ibne Ziyad they resiled from their intent. But the town was restive—and knew not much of the events unfolding sixty miles away at Karbala.

It was to such a Kufa, where only a decade earlier she was the doted-upon Princess Royale that on the third day of Aashura, Bibi Zainab SA returned heading a train of captives consisting of women and children mounted on camels without any upholstery, and with the severed heads of the men of the Bani Hashem impaled on lances.

In the market-place of Kufa, surrounded by a bewildered hoard of onlookers who had been ordered to gather there by the governor to come watch the fate of rebels to the state, Bibi Zainab SA delivered a landmark sermon which turned things on their head. She introduced herself, and individually identified the heads on the lances, praised her brother Husayn AS and explained the reasons for his martyrdom. She then hurled invectives on Yazid and Ubaydullah. Word spread like wildfire that the family of the Prophet OHP had been decimated. The town of Kufa erupted into spontaneous wailing.

Men started to tear out their beards and women beat their chest—at the same time heaping abuse at their own menfolk—calling them by invectives that can only be found in the Arabic language, for their betrayal of the House of the Prophet OHP. Many women of Kufa divorced their husbands then and there for betraying the Imam; told them not to enter the conjugal house again as they were now ‘naMahram’ to the women. Bibi Zainab SA retorted by stating that no amount of contrition would wash out their o guilt for their broken oaths of fealty to Imam Husayn AS and that the people of Kufa were condemned in perpetuity for their cowardice. That afternoon Kufa went into the first throes of rebellion against the Sufyanides and changed forever into the stronghold of the Ahl e Bayt that it is to date.

Ubaydullah had the prisoners brought into his court where she traduced the courtiers and the grandees and gave a severe tongue lashing to Ubaydullah to his face. She addressed Ubaydullah by the sobriquet of ‘Ibne Marjana’ for it was well known that Ubaydullah’ father Ziyad was born of an illicit liaison between Abu Sufyan and famed courtesan of Arabia named Marjana. At other times Ziyad was called ‘Ibne Abeeha’, meaning ‘son of his father’ an expression which had much currency at the time and was applied to persons of doubtful paternity. Ashamed and angered, Ubaydullah ordered that she be silenced, and that Ali bin Husayn AS be killed. At this she rushed forward and covered her nephew, asking to be slain first. The soldiers retreated, refused the governor’s orders, and turned on him with drawn swords. Seeing that the mood in the court was fast turning against him, Ubaydullah hurriedly called off the gathering and ordered that the survivors of Karbala be sent to Damascus post-haste.

Contingents of the army were raised to escort the party to Yazid’s court from a Kufa now very restive and in near revolt against the governor. The major killers of Imam Husayn AS’s party, who had rushed to Kufa to claim their promised rewards from Ubaydullah, fled empty-handed, including Amr bin Saad, who had been promised the kingdom of Raey in Persia.

The address that Bibi Zainab SA gave in the marketplace at Kufa has been variously reported as one of the greatest pieces of oratory ever heard in that town. She interspersed her sermon with quotes from the Koran. Her speech was so well crafted that it went straight to the soul of the listeners. Among them was a blind man who asked those around him if the Day of Qiamat was upon them as he was sure that it was Ali AS on the pulpit.

Bibi Zainab SA’ sermon had two other far reaching reactions. Firstly, a band of pilgrims left Kufa for Karbala the same day and became the first group of zaireen to walk to the grave of Imam Husain AS. They called themselves the ‘tawaabeen’. Ever since that year, millions of pilgrims have walked from Kufa to Karbala in the Arba’een season---a ritual practice now called ‘Rumee’ and likely to follow in perpetuity. In 2016, a band of pilgrims consisting of 110 men and women, (the oldest 74 years and the youngest 15years) walked from Mashhad in Iran to Karbala—a distance of 1870 kilometers!!! Every year, millions of pilgrims walk hundreds of miles to be present at Karbala on the day of Arba’een (20th Safar).

The appearance in the court of Ubaydullah must have been doubly mortifying for Bibi Zainab SA as this was the same court where her father presided over the affairs of the state only twenty years earlier. Yet she held her own here also, and reduced the governor to a confused, scared and trembling man.

The Road to Damascus

The journey by camel train from Kufa to Damascus must have taken twenty five to thirty days. Due to the fear of state-wide revolt, the entourage commander decided not to travel along the Euphrates, which was widely frequented route, but instead took a more circuitous road away from major settlements. So, the painful journey of the bereaving group, constantly reminded of their helplessness at the sight of the heads of their men borne on lances must have taken even longer.

It was the month of October when days tend to get very cold and the nights are frigid in that part of the world. The physical discomfort which must have been the lot of the bereaved, grieving band of women and children, with the only male being Ali Zain el Aabedeem AS is too painful to be imagined. The Imam was in chains and handcuffs, and an iron halter girdled the blessed neck.

Syed Usman Marwandi (1177-1247) better known as Lal Shahbaz of Sehwan Sharif in Sindh, during his studies at Najaf did research and on the weight of the halter and found that it was eleven kilograms heavy. (Lal Shahbaz obtained a stone of that weight, had it fastened to a rope, and wore it for the rest of his life as a necklace. Still hangs over his grave at Sehwan)

What the contingent commander could not do was to keep inquisitive people away from the group as he needed local rations and water to sustain his men. So, at all the night-stops, throngs would gather. Bibi Zainab SA recited the story of Karbala over and over again to these assemblies. The great love which pervades the Muslim soul for the Prophet POH was, and continues, to border on the fanatical. Thus the common folk, on hearing of the travails of the Prophet's family cursed and abused Yezid, and on a few occasions attempted to free the captives.

Rough statistics of the details of this caravan say that the distance travelled was nearly 1600 kilometers and passed through over 79 big and small settlements. Bibi Zainab SA and Imam Zain ul Abideen spoke to over a hundred congregations big and small, before the party reached Damascus. The task of keeping the zikr of Husayn AS going had taken a brilliant beginning. This zikr continues to date. In one of the oddest twists which is again inexplicable, Husain AS is mourned by several non-Moslem religions. The masses which march to Karbala during Rumees each year contain thousands of non-Moslems. Such is the transcendence of the sermons of Bibi Zainab's over history. How amazing. How very amazing.

One of the night-stops of the train of captives was in the city of Halab. The prisoners were housed for the night in a Christian seminary. The Abbot in charge knew the exalted position of Imam Husayn AS and so asked the escort commander to be given the severed head of the slain Prince for the night. The soldiers asked a fee for it which the Abbot settled. The Abbot handled the head with great reverence, washed it, and then cast a likeness for posterity. The next morning he returned the head of Husayn AS to the soldiers. The stone on which the Abbot had placed the head for washing got a residue of the blood of the Prophet POH's son. This stone is on view to the present day at the Mashhad e Husayn at Halab in Syria.

At a stop near Homs, just past the city of Halab (Aleppo) in Syria, the attack from the enraged people was so severe that the army abandoned stations and ran up a hill. Ali bin Husayn AS intervened to save the lives of Yezid's soldiers! A memorial to the event still exists, called Muqam e Zain ul Aabedeem AS, about 40 kms out of Halab on the Damascus highway. It is a much visited shrine.

Zainab SA's eloquent oratory had the ripple effect of sending the message of Imam Husayn AS far and wide; that he had laid down his life as a conscious decision to save Islam from extinction, and that now the religion was safe.

Many children of the captives died on the road to Damascus. Some fell off camel backs, some died of exhaustion and lack of food. The soldiers were under orders to inflict maximum pain, misery, and humiliation on the captives—so did their worst. Throughout these weeks Bibi Zainab is seen as an invincible source of solace, comfort and love to the group. It was, no doubt, her indomitable will which saw the captives through this unimaginably pain-infested odyssey.

At Damascus

By the time the Karbala captives reached Damascus the events at Karbala had gained much currency. There were rumblings of revolt and Yezid could sense power slipping. Although he felt secure in Damascus, the news from the provinces was not good for him. His innate viciousness and evil nature, however, was not dimmed. He had the captives brought into his court on a camel-train through the main marketplace called the Hameediah (winding row of shops for over a mile) and made them wait in the cold, at the gates of the Masjid e Amwi for nearly sixteen hours before admittance to a general assembly of sycophants. The ladies of the Prophet's family were bare-headed, broken-hearted, bereft of hope, and barely able to stand due to the fatigue and grief of so many months.

When finally the captives were brought into a fully assembled court, Yezid started off by making fun of the Bani Hashem, and gloated in the revenge he had extracted from the family of Imam Ali AS for the slaying of Yezid's ancestors by Imam Ali AS at the battle of Badr. He tapped the head of Husayn AS with a cane, at which one companion of the

Prophet POH shouted at Yezid and told him to desist as he (the apostle) had personally seen the Prophet kiss that head over and over again, many times.

A strong feeling of remorse spread in the court. Bibi Zainab SA addressed Yezid by calling him a descendant of her family's freed slaves. (Historically true). She lauded the qualities of her brother, and challenged Yezid's claims of having triumphed over Imam Husayn AS. She foretold that Yezid's rule would be over shortly. She said that although Imam Husayn AS and his companions had been killed at Karbala without mercy or remorse, Yezid would never be able to erase their memory, nor twist the rightness of their cause in public consciousness. Her eloquence, directness, and bravery touched the basest hearts, and loud rumblings of disapproval for Yezid began to echo in the large hall.

Ali bin Husayn AS was asked to speak next. His speech is a classic that must be read. Yezid in a drunken stupor brazenly asked the young Imam to introduce himself to the court. Ali bin Husayn AS told the assembly that he was the son of Allah's Prophet POH, and of Imam Ali AS. He said that he was also the son of the Kaaba, that of the fountain Zamzam, and the hills of Safa and Marwah. He calmly informed the audience that his father Imam Husayn AS had been mercilessly butchered at Karbala along with seventy companions, consisting both family and friends. He informed them that this sacrilege was ordered by the heretical, godless usurper presiding over the court. He told courtiers that the captive ladies in their midst were from the Harem e Rasool Allah.

A riot broke out in the massive hall. Yezid was abused and cursed by his erstwhile lackeys as even the basest of them was moved with shame and remorse. At this stage, the whole assembly was in frenzy, and so to calm the raised tempers of the nobles Yezid ordered that the Azaan be proclaimed. So loud was the cacophony that the voice of a single Muezzin (Azaan intoner) was lost in the uproar. Yezid asked that several Muezzins call the Azaan together so as to be heard. When the name of Muhammad POH was announced during the Azaan Ali bin Husayn AS addressed Yezid and asked, "Tell me Yezid. Was the Messenger of Allah POH my ancestor or yours?" After that the court had to be dispersed by Yezid's soldiers. To this day the Azaan at the Masjid e Amwi is called by more than one Muezzin, intoning together.

That performance of Yezid on that day is well-documented. Modern analysis of his behavior suggests that he was bipolar bordering on the megalomaniac. One moment he is seen arrogant beyond reason, and the next, sobbing in remorse; one moment gloating on the annihilation of the Ahl e Bayt and the next, cursing Ubaydullah for the slaughter of the innocents. One moment he is seen as the king, and within moments of that, a trembling joker ready to fall off the pulpit. Noblewomen present in the court, and the larger extended family of the Quraish saw the cameo, and was horrified. Within hours Yezid was the butt of scorn and then open abuse from his own kith and kin. The women of his house wept openly over the severed heads and were the first to offer condolence to Bibi Zainab SA. Mourning for Husayn AS began in the house of the accursed Yezid.

Yezid had the whole party imprisoned in a compound just outside his palace, except Ali bin Husayn AS who was held in a room on the south side of the Masjid e Amwi. Yezid

had the severed head of Husayn AS placed a few feet away. The cruelty of the man is sickening. Husayn AS's little daughter Ruqaiyya, also called Sukaina, could not take it anymore. She wilted and died in the jail and is now interred in a magnificent building sited at the place where the jail used to be.

It is not clear how long the Harem e Rasool Allah was kept in the jail at Damascus. Historians differ, but it seems to have been more than few weeks but not much longer. As soon as the news of the happenings at Karbala got around, there were rebellions against Yezid all over the empire. His governors were overthrown at some places, and the army became undependable.

Kufa rebelled first, and Governor Ubaydullah bin Ziyad ran away—first to Basra and then to Yemen. In 683 AH—three years after Karbala, he put together a 40,000 strong army and attacked Kufa. He was met by a lightly-armed army of 11000 sent by Amir Mukhtar who then controlled Kufa, Ubaydullah's army was annihilated by the Kufans and he himself was slain.

Damascus too was getting restive. Delegations started to arrive at court to find out what had happened to Imam Husayn AS. So Yezid decided to offer release to Ali bin Husayn AS; claimed to regret whatever had happened at Karbala and offered blood-money as compensation for the martyrs of Karbala. Bibi Zainab SA was consulted by the Imam. She said that she would accept release, not blood-money, but on three conditions. Firstly, that she be accommodated in a house large enough to receive condolences from the women of Damascus. Secondly, that the severed heads of the martyrs be returned to her along with the property looted at Karbala on Aashura. Thirdly, she wished to travel to Karbala to bury the heads of the martyrs in their proper place.

So keen was Yezid to be rid of the prisoners now that he agreed to all conditions without ado. Consequently, Bibi Zainab SA invited the women of the city to a general gathering and recited the events of Karbala to them. The audience was so touched that all wept openly and bitterly. This was the first 'Majlis e Husayn AS' and it was held within half a mile of Yazid's court. The women of Damascus started to visit her house to offer condolences, and the events at Karbala which the establishment wished to sweep under the carpet became well known in the four corners of the Ummah in the few weeks that Bibi Zainab SA stayed at Damascus. The adherents of Imam Ali AS started to repeat them to each other and then in their private gatherings. The institution of the Majlis e Husayn AS was born.

Return to Medina

Bibi Zainab SA traveled back to Karbala from Damascus and buried the severed heads at their respective places. En route, Zainab SA continued to publicize the events that befell at Karbala, and the happenings at Damascus to the people who gathered to see the Ahl e Bayt at their night stops. The scene of the arrival back at Karbala is best left to the

imagination of the reader. Mothers mourned their sons for the first time; sisters their brothers; widows their husbands; and Ali bin Husayn AS wept for them all.

The arrival back of the remnant of the group of the Bani Hashem who had left Medina on the 28th of Rajab the previous year must have been heart-wrenching for all. Here was Bibi Zainab sans brothers, sons, nephews, other attendants---massacred as she watched horror-struck. There is a tradition which states that so gaunt and drawn was Ali Zain el Aabedeen AS that many of his relatives looked twice before they recognized him.

Scholars, over centuries, have researched as to when anyone saw Bibi Zainab SA weep openly after Aashura, and they have found no instance till she got back to Medina. It was at the graves of the Prophet OHP, and her mother that the steely resolve broke, and a flood of tears cascaded.

To me personally, the most poignant moment when Bibi Zainab SA set eyes on Bibi Umm ul Baneen SA. (Lady wife of Ali AS, mother of Abbas AS). How would two mothers so fond of each other condole the brutal slaying of six sons—four born of one and two of the other. Words cannot express the pathos of the situation—to me, at any rate; two leading ladies of the Prophet's House----staring at each other with vacant eyes, way beyond tears or words.

The lamentations of the Ahl e Bayt at the grave of the Prophet ignited a revolt against Yezid. The disaffection spread throughout the empire which literally broke into pieces, each part flying off from the center. As a backlash to Karbala, the Kufans revolted and broke the Syrian yoke. Their leader, Mukhtar e Sakafhi quickly rounded up the captains of groups which had attacked Imam Husayn AS at Karbala, and put them to death, some by beheading; some by hanging; some by being thrust in fire; some by tearing of limb from limb; some by being fried in boiling oil; some were hacked to pieces; several were skinned alive. Mukhtar made sure that not a single notable attacker of Imam Husayn AS escaped his revenge.

Then Medina revolted, and Yezid sent the Syrian army to sack the Prophet's city. His demonic commander, Muslim bin Uqaba entered the holy city and let loose a reign of terror. Ten thousands residents of the Prophet's city were killed and their women dishonored. The Bani Hashim scattered and went to Yemen and Egypt. Ali bin Husayn AS stayed on and was a witness to all the atrocities. His house became the sanctuary for many families under threat, and he protected and fed all who came for safety to him. Although Yezid had the army quarter its animals in the Masjid e Nabwi, his commanders kept a respectful distance from Ali bin Husayn AS. Such was the moral ascendancy of the fourth Imam of the Shias.

As a last kick to Yezid, his own kinsmen, the Quraish of Mecca revolted and Yezid's hand-picked governor was sent packing. One of Yazid's steadfast enemies, Abdullah bin Zubayr took over Mecca and declared himself as the Caliph. This man has the dubious distinction of being inimical to both, Imam Ali AS and to Muaviya. His father Zubayr was killed in the battle of the Camel by Imam Ali AS's army. Muaviya had forewarned

Yezid that Abdullah was an inveterate enemy; so should be killed at first opportunity. The foxy Abdullah bided his time, and as soon as he saw Yezid weakening, revolted.

Yezid sent an army to sack Mecca. The Syrians besieged the town and made several forays into the town, one time damaging the Kaaba. However, before the Syrian army could enter the town, Yezid died of an unknown ailment and the army lost heart, lifted the siege and returned to Syria. The year was 664 AH, just three years after the martyrdom of Imam Husayn AS at Karbala

Yezid's son Muaviya II refused the throne. After the death of Yezid, the young man ordered the court assembled. Expecting to pay homage to a new Caliph, the grandees of the court congregated dressed in their best finery. Muaviya II entered the hall, climbed the stairs to the pulpit, and from there he addressed the assembled leaders of the Umayyad Empire. He said that he wished to announce his abdication from the Caliphate as the throne was soiled with the blood of the Prophet POH of Islam and thus no right-thinking Muslim could occupy it. He said that his father Yezid had committed a grave sin by having Imam Husayn AS slain at Karbala. He said that all ancestors of Imam Husayn AS were superior in every way compared to his own. He said that his father Yezid was a usurper and had wrongfully occupied the Caliphate which was Imam Husayn AS's by right. As such, said Muaviya II, he had no right to be sitting where he was. He finished his talk, got down from the pulpit and left the hall occupied by bewildered courtiers.

Muaviya II retired to his private house, did not come into public again, and is reported to have died within the month. There was talk in Damascus that Marwan had had him poisoned.

The wily Marwan, seeing the end of the Sufyanides, seized the throne, and to add insult to injury took a wife of Yezid called Umm e Khalid into his harem as well. Marwan, who was in his eighties then died within a year.

The adherents of Imam Ali AS made the cause of Karbala their spiritual sustenance. Bibi Zainab SA and the other survivors of Karbala told and re-told their experience over and over again. The Majlis e Husayn AS as we know it, was formalized as an art form in the times of the fifth Imam, Mohammad bin Ali Al Baqar AS and survives to this day. It starts with a recitation from the Koran, followed by eulogies to the Prophet POH and Imam Ali AS, and ends with the pain suffered by Imam Husayn AS and his family at Karbala. Over the centuries, a vast literary treasure has accrued in both poetry and prose on these events. Imam Husayn AS lives on in the hearts and minds of the adherents of his father Ali AS, who make up nearly twenty-five percent of the Islamic Ummah, and can be found all over the planet. With their rituals and symbol, the Shia has been likened to the Catholics in Christianity. Be that as it may, it is now settled history that Husayn AS's struggle would have gone waste but for its propagation by Zainab SA.

Later Life

It is amazing that the life of Bibi Zainab SA after her return to Medina from Karbala is largely unknown. It is almost as if she was forced to come into the public after her chador was snatched from her head in Karbala, but as soon as she returned to Medina, her 'hijab' being restored, she receded once again into private life as befitting the high-born lady that she was.

The four years after Karbala were very eventful. As predicted by Bibi Zainab SA, Yezid disappeared from the scene, and the fame of Imam Husayn AS's gallant defense of the faith spread from Morocco to India. Bibi Zainab SA's mission that lasted only a few weeks was crowned with success beyond belief.

She is known to have visited with her cousin Nafisa bint Hassan AS who at that time was a living saint in Cairo Egypt. Marwan and his descendents continued to harass Imam Ali AS's progeny, so they had to travel often just to find some interlude of peace and quiet. Many settled in Yemen, Iran, and other parts of the Muslim empire. The Caliphs, with all his army, money, temporal sway and political power ever remained petrified of the eleven sons of Imam Ali AS who succeeded him as Imams of the Shias, despite the fact that the latter never took up arms against the Caliph. All of them, without exception, led quiet lives, were teachers and interpreters of the faith. Even so, the establishment of their respective times ensured that all of them died unnaturally.

Sometimes before 80 AH (699 AD) which is the year of the death of her husband Abdullah bin Jafar, she traveled with him to Damascus, where he owned private property. The property was situated in a village called Raviaa, in a suburb of Damascus called Ghauta. According to one report, during one of her sojourns to settle some property matters in Damascus, she was killed by one of her servants at the instigation of the Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malak bin Marwan.

Her grave which was initially known as Al-Sot was housed in a simple room, at the place where her magnificent mausoleum stands today. One of the earliest visitors to honor her memory was Nafisa, wife of Ishaq bin Jafar Sadiq AS who visited in 193 AH (808 AD). Now there is evidence that an even earlier pilgrim to her grave was one of her sisters, Sakina bint Imam Ali AS. A headstone found about fifteen years ago, was carbon-tested for age. It bears the name of that lady, and the Ulema are agreed that the headstone is genuine and an epitaph to Sakina bint Imam Ali AS. So a large building to preserve her remains is at present under construction in another suburb of the city of Damascus.

A mosque bearing the name of Zainab AS was constructed in 500 AH (1106 AD) near her grave the Al-Sot, and has been there ever since. It is now adjacent to the main shrine, and a building of quality. In the year 768 AH (1366 AD) a local landlord, Husayn bin Musa Husayni established a trust endowing a large tract of land surrounding the Al-Sot for development of a befitting shrine. In 1302 AH (1884 AD), the 32nd Ottoman Caliph Sultan Abdul Aziz had a building with a dome constructed on the site. Various

improvements to the main building and addition of facilities for pilgrims were done over hundreds of years funded by donations from all over the world.

The present infrastructure dates back from 1950, when a master-plan was formulated by Engr. Mehdi Raza Murtaza, and the Government of Iran became a major partner. The over-all superintendence of the shrine is with the department of Auqaf of the Government of Syria, and the present 'Key-holder' is Dr. Hani Murtaza whose family are the traditional keepers of the shrine for many generations. Several very large buildings surround the shrine now, including mosques, academies, hotels, and other lodging houses. The village of Raviaa which had a population of barely 250 at the time when Zainab SA was interred there is now a town called Zainabiya with a population of 250,000, not counting the pilgrims who flock there by their hundreds of thousands each year.

In recent times all the Grand Ayatollahs of Shia Islam including Aqa Brujerdi, Aqa Khomeni, Aqa Behbahanee, Aqa Mohsin Hakeem, Aqa Shariatmadar, Aqa Seestani and many others have come and prayed at Bibi Zainab SA's shrine. Some scions of the Aqa Aamli's family are buried in the quadrangle surrounding her shrine.

The master plan is still under execution, and only the strongest and finest building materials are being used.

Bibi Zainab SA's Living Legacy

Historians, scholars, commentators and analysts of Islamic history are agreed that if it were not for the propagation of the happenings at Karbala by Bibi Zainab SA the event would have been lost to history, or at best would have been mentioned as a footnote.

Every year, in the weeks following Aashura there is a mention of Bibi Zainab SA in practically every majlis. Her horrendous sufferings are related; her oratory, courage, valor, wisdom and strength in the face of overwhelming official power are the wonder of the audience. There is an almost surreal grip which she has on the imagination of her followers, the majority of whom have no idea of contemporary history, politics, or the issues at stake. What they all realize, however, is that but for her Husayn AS's valor and consequent martyrdom at Karbala on the day of Aashura would not be known to them.

Vali Nasr, in his book 'The Shia Revival' referring to Zainab SA says, and I quote, "That Husayn AS's heroism became legendary and gave form to Shi'ism is very much her doing. Shi'ism owes its existence to a woman". What can one add to that?

The great love and devotion bordering on adoration which the Shia have for her is nurtured from early life, through various rituals that are inherent in Shia observances till Bibi Zainab SA becomes a part of their sub-conscious. To a vast majority of Shias, Bibi Zainab SA is a supernatural figure to which they turn for sustenance and support in times of distress, calamity and personal tragedy

Over the centuries many documented miracles have occurred in and around her shrine. Especially noteworthy are miracle cures attributed to her intercession. These matters are common knowledge to her adherents.

Articles like rosaries, shrouds, rings and suchlike brought from shops surrounding Zainab SA's shrine are treasured in a manner far beyond their commercial value. These are considered holy and awe-inspiring and can be found in all Shia households where these have pride of place.

Among many, there are three titles by which Bibi Zainab SA is alluded to which are particularly noteworthy. At times she is referred to as 'Shareekat al Husayn AS', which in nearest translation means 'Equal partner of Imam Husayn AS (in his mission)'. Another honorific is 'Sahib al Ismat us Sughra' which translates to 'Lady of the retiring grace'. This title becomes extremely poignant to the Shia in view of the exposure of the ladies of the house of the Prophet POH to public gaze after Karbala. The third noteworthy title is 'Sahib al museebat ul uzma' which means the 'Lady of the great Sorrow'. This title is a source of much grief to the Shia, as this reminds them of the harrowing travails she underwent at Karbala on the day of Aashura and later.

Because she was a renowned scholar in her own right, it is no wonder that Damascus is emerging as the third biggest center of Shia theological learning after Najaf and Qum. There are several academies functional at present, with students drawn from all over the Muslim world.

Postscript

The Quraish of Mecca was the residents of a city which was on a major medieval trade route. The shrine of Kaaba was a huge money spinner for the tribe as the idols housed in the rectangular building attracted many worshippers from all over the known world. The offerings from the pilgrims kept the Quraish in grand style. They were the major beneficiaries of the booty from the shrine. The Prophet POH was himself born into this selfsame family of privilege, but after his investiture as the bringer of Allah's last message to mankind, he invited the chiefs of the Quraish to give up idolatry and to accept the new faith based in egalitarianism, justice, fairplay, and compassion. They rejected the faith and made his life so difficult, that just for physical survival, the Prophet migrated to Medina.

The arch-enemy of the Prophet POH and leader of the Quraish was Abu Sufyan. He led the Meccans in three wars against the Prophet. Despite all opposition to it, the faith prospered, and finally in 8 AH the Prophet POH re-entered Mecca as the victor. Abu Sufyan and his fellow grandees accepted Islam then, but always nurtured a deep skepticism about the Truth of the Message. Abu Sufyan, his son Muaviya, and grandson Yezid made it their life's mission to reverse the clock, and go back to their pre-Islam status. The Prophets injunction that if "a deformed Abyssinian slave has greater knowledge of the book of God, hear him and obey" was quite unacceptable to their

arrogant psyche. But Aashura trashed Yezid and the thought process of his supporters for all time to come. Bibi Zainab SA made sure that her brother's reasons for standing up to the establishment of the time were carefully explained to the Muslim masses.

Imam Husayn AS's blood re-visited itself on all who were responsible for its shedding. Very soon after Karbala, the slayers of Husayn AS and his family were identified, arrested and decimated. Ubaydullah bin Ziyad, Amr bin Saad, Shimr, Hurmala, and all their local supporters met a bloody end at the hands of Mukhtar Sakhafi. It is an amazing fact that the cause of Yezid's death is not documented anywhere.

The Umayyad caliphs kept killing each other for ninety years, during the span of which time they went through thirteen Caliphs. The Umayyad dynasty was overthrown by a combination of the emerging Abbasids and the Shia in 129 AH. The end of the Umayyad dynasty came in a ghastly manner. In a prearranged banquet in the Masjid e Amwi, all the Umayyad princes and their male heirs were arrested and suffocated to death by being stitched in wet leather body-bags- then left to dry in the scorching sun in the mosque's vast courtyard; watched by the hordes of Damascans. This was the same building where the severed head of Husayn AS rested for a few days seventy just a century earlier.

When just after the noon of Aashura, Imam Husayn AS himself went to do battle at Karbala; all male members of his house were dead. There was no one to hold the reins of his horse so that he could mount it. Bibi Zainab SA did that job. Husayn AS went off and after a little while the horse came back rider-less.

In the past millennium and a half, political power in Islam states has generally been in the hands of regimes firmly hostile to the Ahl e Bayt., These kings and Caliphs have owned and used for various purposes, millions of horses. But those imperial horses lived their life, and then went into unknown graves. Incredibly, the rider-less Horse of Karbala, still called "Zuljinah" walks the streets in hundreds of habitations all over the world on the day of Aashura every succeeding year, for over a thousand years and will, in the foreseeable future. It is so because this Horse was last sent off by the savior of Shia Islam, Bibi Zainab SA.

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