

## Husayni Literature: Aspects and Prospects

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### Abstract

This study examines Husayni literature as a dynamic cornerstone of Shi'i Islamic classics centered on Imam al-Husayn and the Ashura event. It traces its evolution across historical periods, languages (Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali, and English), and cultural contexts, including sympathetic non-Muslim contributions. Employing a literary-historical methodology, the study surveys primary sources such as hadiths, ziyarat texts, maqal narratives, and elegiac poetry, alongside secondary encyclopedic works and post-1979 publications (1357 SH/1979 CE), to delineate genres ranging from pre-Islamic prophecies to transnational receptions. Key findings reveal the uninterrupted continuity of Husayni literature, from divine origins (Quranic allusions and Imamic hadiths) and martyrdom accounts by Ashura survivors to modern elegies by figures such as Mir Anis and Mir Mosharraf Hossain. This literary tradition transcends religious boundaries through works by Hindu authors such as Premchand and Sarojini Naidu. The study highlights distinctive literary artistry (rajaz poetry, marsiyas), religious depth (ziyarat exegeses), and socio-political resonance in fostering Shi'i identity and ethical reflection. Finally, the paper advocates for the inclusion of Husayni literature in global anthologies and proposes a research agenda for digital archiving and comparative analyses with world martyrdom traditions.

**Keywords:** Husayni literature, Imam al-Husayn, Ashura, Shi'i Islamic classics, Maqal narratives.

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## Introduction

Shi'i Islamic literature is credited with possessing a variety of classics. These are by no means limited to merely literary works, although the designation "classic" often directs readers toward that genre. As classics are, by definition, works that are "standard [and] exemplary" (Perry, 2012, p. 263), they claim a "universal meaning, to dealing with questions of general philosophical import" (Fleischmann & Newman, 1993, p. 216). Such works admit "a variety of interpretations while preserving an underlying essence" (Kermode, 1975, as cited in Fleischmann & Newman, 1993, p. 216). Classics do not simply return the reader to an obscure ancient world; rather, they foster an awareness of an uninterrupted relationship with a glorious past, awakening a sense of historical continuity and dignity (Beard & Henderson, 1995). In short, a classic stands "the test of time and outlasts changes" (Baldick, 2015, "classic"). They are works that are reread, rendering new lessons with each encounter (Calvino, 1981/1986).

This study argues that Husayni literature, as a cornerstone of Shi'i Islamic classics centered on Imam al-Husayn and the Ashura event (61 AH/680 CE), has evolved dynamically across historical periods, languages, and cultural contexts. It reveals a distinctive literary artistry, religious depth, and socio-political resonance within the Shi'i tradition and broader world literature. Consequently, this study seeks to answer the following research question: How has Husayni literature evolved across different historical periods and languages, and what are its distinctive dimensions within the broader context of world literature?

## Definitions and Scope

There are several seemingly synonymous terminologies that require clarificatory discrimination. Some experts may regard "Islamic literature" and "Muslim literature" as interchangeable; however, they are distinct. Muslim literature refers to any literature produced by Muslims, irrespective of content or theme. For example, the Arabic poems composed by the Iraqi poet Abu al-Tayyib al-Mutanabbi (915–965 CE/303–354 AH) in praise of contemporary rulers are instances of Muslim literature (Arberry, 1967). Likewise, many personal anecdotes regarding the manners of kings in the *Gulistan* by Sa'di (ca. 1209–1291

CE) have little relationship with purely Islamic teachings. In the same vein, Sa'di's elegy for the last Abbasid ruler, al-Musta'sim bi'Allah (1242–1258 CE), is not strictly "Islamic" literature, as the Abbasids are not regarded as religious figures in this context.

In contrast, Islamic literature encompasses two primary pillars: the Holy Quran and the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the Infallible descendants of the Prophet Muhammad). From this perspective, the various genres within the Holy Quran fall under Quranic literature. Scholars like Perry (2012) argue that classics engage with universal themes; this paper aligns with that concept by treating Husayni literature as a classic within the Shi'i tradition.

While some scholars, such as Salibi (1962), critique certain Orientalist works for Umayyad biases, this paper deliberately includes a sympathetic scope that embraces both Shi'i Muslim perspectives and non-Muslim literary contributions. Unlike Lammens (1927), who has been criticized for a dismissive tone, this study highlights sympathetic voices such as Premchand (Zaidi, 2022) and Sarojini Naidu. By expanding the discourse, this paper suggests that Husayni literature deserves recognition within global literary anthologies—a position not widely emphasized in prior scholarship.

### Historical Development

The *Ahl al-Bayt*-oriented portion of Islamic literature may be divided into several categories:

1. **Quranic References:** Verses pertaining to the Prophet's household, such as *Sura al-Kawthar*.
2. **Prophetic Hadiths:** Events such as *Ghadir Khumm*, highlighted in the Quran (5:67) and followed by abundant hadith literature.
3. **Tragic Narratives:** The episode of Ashura (61 AH/680 CE), for which there are exhaustive references.
4. **Hagiography and Eulogy:** Works produced in praise of the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their associates.

Viewed from this perspective, a work on the life of Umm Salamah (ca. 681 CE/62 AH) falls within the scope of Islamic literature due to her devotion to the Prophet's household. By the same token, the historical

works of non-Muslims who devoted their talents to this cause—such as the poems of Indian activist Sarojini Naidu—are included within the scope of Islamic literature due to their central themes.

### **Methodology**

This study surveys Husayni literature by including works related to Shi'i Islamic literature with a focus on Imam al-Husayn, spanning from early historical sources to contemporary texts, especially post-1979 (1357 SH/1979 CE) Islamic Revolution publications. The literature examined encompasses multiple languages including Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali, and English, reflecting the transnational and interreligious scope of the subject matter. Sources consulted include primary hadith collections, historical accounts, ziyarat-texts, and secondary encyclopedic compilations and scholarly works. The paper adopts a literary-historical methodology aimed at tracing the evolution and multifaceted nature of Husayni literature while also offering evaluative insight into its literary and cultural significance."

The paper classifies itself as literary-historical with evaluative observations on Husayni literature's place in world literature contexts.

### **Various Genres and Forms of Husayni Literature**

Husayni literature makes a noteworthy branch of Islamic literature all because of its central figure, the third Infallible Imam al-Husayn. Throughout history, Husayni literature has been a type of literature devoid of any interruption or any counter-movement. A comprehensive history of Husayni literature starts from the hadiths that pertain to the sublime status of his soul prior to his physical creation and graceful birth. According to a reliable hadith, the souls of the Infallible Ahl al-Bayt, including that of Imam al-Husayn, were created long before the creation of Adam. According to Islamic sources, soon after Imam al-Husayn was born, the Archangel Gabriel, accompanied by 1,000 angels, descended to the Prophet to congratulate him and convey the congratulations of Allah. There Gabriel informed the Prophet of the tragic martyrdom that would happen to Imam al-Husayn (Majlisī, 1373 SH, pp. 477-78). From this account up to any literature in praise of Imam al-Husayn and connected with various aspects of the materials associated with him falls within the scope of Husayni literature.

There are several noteworthy considerations as per Husayni literature. In the first place, the original makers of this literature were Allah, the Prophet, and the Infallible Imams. Some portions of this literature belong to various pre-Islamic times, before the advent of Islam. This pertains to the moments when the Divine prophets Adam, Abraham, and Jesus Christ mourned the tragic martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn.

The Islamic period of Husayni literature may receive further subdivisions. Some of these pieces of literature are Quranic, hence Divine, prophecies and indications. To adduce but one example, according to a piece of hadith quoted from the 11<sup>th</sup> Infallible Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari, the Quranic mysterious letter “Kāf” in the beginning of the Quranic sura Maryam (Mary) refers to Karbala.<sup>1</sup> (See Qarashi, 1387 Sh/ 2008 [1352 Sh/ 1973], s.v. KāfHā Yā‘AynSād.)

In addition to the above-stated Quranic indication, there are several brief indications of the tragic episode of the Ashura Battle of Karbala in the speeches of the Prophet Muḥammad, Imam ‘Alī, and Imam al-Hasan. Apart from the Prophet’s frequent references to Imam al-Husayn’s martyrdom (see, for instance, al-Amīnī, 1384 AH/1965 CE, pp. 34-145), there is an indication hinted by the first Infallible ‘Alī. It is thus: on the way back from the Battle of Ṣiffin, Imam ‘Alī stopped in the region of Karbala for performing the dawn salat. After that, he picked up some soil, smelled it, and remarked that it was fragrant. Then he turned to his companions and indicated it was the same location that the Battle of Karbala would certainly take place. (Najmi, 2012, pp. 270-72)

A considerable portion of Husayni literature has come from Imam al-Husayn, the pivotal figure of the event of Ashura. Within the vast and varied ocean of the hadiths so far quoted from the third Infallible Imam al-Husayn, those that refer to the tragic event of Karbala make a considerable section, hence frequently quoted and anthologized in various collections. There are various types of Husayni literature. One type is concerned with his explications of certain Quranic fragments and verses. (See al-Ḥilū, 2009/ 1430 AH). Another type is concerned

<sup>1</sup> There is a hadith quoted from the 11<sup>th</sup> Infallible Imam al-Hasan al-‘Askari (232-260 AH/ 846-874) on the authority of Sa’d b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Qummī (d. 300 AH/ 912) in that the letter Kāf alludes to [the tragic episode of] Karbala.

with his guidance and explications of Islamic creeds and doctrinal tenets. (For a reliable source in this regard, all complied from authoritative sources, see Muhammadi Rayshahri, 2006/ 1385 Sh).

Martyrdom-oriented Husayni literature makes the much vaster portion of this glorious and ever-radiant branch of literature. This is because the greatest amount of literature so far produced has been under the influence of the tragic martyrdom fate that he correctly anticipated and willingly admitted and welcomed. It has been in effect of the matchless (and triumphant) martyrdom fate of Imam al-Ḥusayn and over 100 of his loyal companions that the Islamic religion has since survived. Some piece of this martyrdom-themed literature was created by Imam al-Ḥusayn and his companions who were martyred. The rest was produced the Ashura survivors, the eye-witnesses of the horrible crimes committed on the plain of Karbala. (Ashura is another designation of such survivor-created post-martyrdom literature.) Here mention must be made of the electrifying and disclosing talks of Hazrate (Hz.) Zaynab's talks at Kufah and Damascus that soon changed the Umayyad enemy's victory celebration into political scandal and shameful disgrace. (See, for example, Ḥikmatnīyā, 1988, pp. 77-80, and pp. 144-153)

A noteworthy class of Husayni literature is concerned with the ziyarat-texts issued in his favor (as well as in favor of his martyred companions). A pilgrimage-prayer, a ziyarat-text is a compact and insightful text that teaches the pilgrim basic and fundamental lessons about the character and career of the dignitary to who the pilgrim has already paid a humble visit, all out of sincere devotion. The highest number of ziyarat-texts in favor of Imam al-Ḥusayn were issued by the Fifth Infallible Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir (57-114 AH/ 677-733 [himself a survivor of the Ashura Battle of Karbala]) and the sixth Infallible Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (83-148 AH/ 702-765).

All the Infallible Imams were zealous to revive and keep the memory of Imam al-Ḥusayn afresh throughout history. For this purpose, they always recommended Muslims to pay visits to the tomb of Imam al-Ḥusayn and encouraged them to produce elegies and mournful poems to this end. There were instances where a Shii Muslim composed a devotional piece (e.g., a short ziyarat-text composed by Ibrāhīm b. Abī

al-Bilād (d. 184 AH/ 800) in favor of Imam al-Ḥusayn, and approved by the seventh Infallible Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim (128-183 AH/ 745-799). (See, Qummī, 1937/ 1316 Sh, p. 428)

Connected with the ziyarat-literature, mention must be made of encouragement literature.<sup>2</sup> The Infallible Imams who came after Imam al-Ḥusayn encouraged people to seize every opportunity to pay pilgrimage, or at least pay a salaam, to Imam al-Ḥusayn. (See al-Iṣṭahbānāʿī, [1995/ 1416 AH] for a good collection of such encouragement indications.)

There is also a type of prohibition literature in relation to making pilgrimage to Imam al-Ḥusayn. There are hadiths that prohibit people from forsaking paying pilgrimage to the tomb of Imam al-Ḥusayn. An instance is the indication that Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq made in that if a person does not pay pilgrimage to the tomb of Imam al-Ḥusayn on purpose throughout his life, he would deserve being thrown into the Hellfire, and in case he might be permitted to reside in the Divine paradise eternally and forever, rather he would be permitted to be only a guest of the Paradise dwellers. (Ibn Qūluwayh al-Qummī, 1356 AH/ 1937, p. 193; qtd. in Majlisī, 1386 Sh/ 2007, p. 216)

Mournful literature occupies the greatest portion of Ḥusayni literature. Martyrdom-themed narratives (in Arabic and Persian *maq̄tal*) make the salient feature of typical Husayni literature. *Maq̄tal* literature focuses on the tragic scenes of the martyrdom fate of any of the Ashura martyrs of the Battle of Karbala. At times, the concept receives extension to include the martyrdom-like demise of the Ashura survivors, e.g., Imam al-Ḥusayn's little daughter, Ruqayyah bt. al-Ḥusayn, who died of intense grief and unbearable psychological pressure at the sight of her father's severed head in Damascus.

Husayni literature, particularly those in the realm of the genre of *maq̄tal*, focus on the details of the martyrdom fate of certain individuals. Most often, the *maq̄tals* of the close relatives of Imam al-Ḥusayn are recounted. The martyrdom fate of others are reviewed briefly. Therefore, a great majority of the *maq̄tal*-themed people are Imam al-

<sup>2</sup> This type of encouragement literature can be compared with advice literature that pertains to establishing and practicing favorable morals, e.g., the Quranic Sura Luqman [31] and Sura al-Ḥujurāt [49] are packed with advice literature.

Ḥusayn's younger, half-brother al-‘Abbās b. ‘Alī, his sons, ‘Alī al-Akbar and ‘Alī al-Aṣghar, and his nephew Qāsim b. al-Ḥasan.

There are various types of *maqtals* according to the recounters. The original recounter may be an Infallible personality, any of the Infallible Imams, whether any one present in the episode of Ashura or not. There were only two Infallible Imams who were present in Karbala, namely, the fourth Infallible Imam ‘Alī al-Sajjād (38-95 AH/ 658-714), and the fifth Infallible Imam Muḥammad al-Bāqir. Remarks of the rest of the Infallible Imams are likewise equally acceptable, simply due to their being infallible and veracious dignitaries.

In addition to the above, there are accounts or reports recounted by non-infallible but reliable personalities. These accounts concern those rendered by certain Ashura survivors or reporters, e.g., Ḥasan b. al-Ḥasan, also known as al-Ḥasan al-Muthannā (d. 85 AH/ 704), and his wife Fāṭimah bt. al-Ḥusayn (51-117 AH/ 671-735), both of them Ashura survivors.

As for the Ashura recounters, the confessions of certain war criminals are also reliable. Some of them were arrested, put on trial, and executed by al-Mukhtār b. Abū ‘Ubayd al-Thaqaṭī (1-76 AH/ 622-687). These accounts make various parts of the crimes the Umayyads committed on Ashura.

Regarding the literary genres used in the Husayni *maqtal* literature, most of them are in both prose and poetry. Although many productions are in prose, they do contain some poems, especially certain *rajazes* (battlefield spontaneous poems) composed by Ashura martyrs. In later literary works, some people retold greater portions of the whole events in the form of poems. Here mention must be made of the Shii Iraqi cleric and judge, Muḥammad Ṭāhir al-Samāwī (1292-1370 AH/ 1875-1850) who composed a long *urjūzah* (an Arabic didactic poem) in 1250 distiches (*bayts*) (equal to 2500 lines) *Majāli al-Lutf bi’Arḍ al-Ṭaff* (1360 AH/ 1041), a book of versified history of the land of Karbala and the Ashura Battle occurred therein. In Iran, for sure Muḥtasham (1500-1588 AH/ 905-996) has been prominent for his famous 12-strophe (12-*band*) elegy. Although many poets have imitated or incorporated and appropriated his poems in their own works, he has since remained almost the number-one Husayni poet in Persian. In a like manner,

mention must be made of the Indian poet Mir Anis (1803-1874). Mir Anis devoted his literary talents to composing elegies (*marthīyahs/marsiyahs*) in memory of Imam al-Ḥusayn throughout his life and literary career. In effect of his religio-literary endeavors and sincere efforts, the literary genre of elegy (*marthīyah*) has been raised to the highest of all genres of the Urdu literature. (See T. Grahame Bailey, 1932, p. 61.)

Here it is timely to make a distinction between a source and a recounter. While a source is a document left or remained, e.g., an account, a report, a speech, a piece of hadith, a letter, and the like, a recounter or a reporter is oftentimes a person who gives a report of what he or she noticed of such an event. Hence, one must make a distinction between a first-hand or primary source or document in contrast to secondary sources. Likewise, a recounter may be highly authoritative in whose account or report experts have full confidence. Examples of such highly authoritative recounters are the Infallible Imams and the eyewitnesses and survivors of the Ashura Battle of Karbala.

Reliable and sound hadiths make the most authoritative sources of Husayni literature. As for the sources that pertain to Husayni literature, in general, and the Ashura episode, in specific, the most authoritative of them are the hadiths remained, with their chains of authorities all sound and trustworthy. Some sources are beyond doubt in terms of reliability. A medieval source is the book *Kāmil al-Ziyārāt* of Ja‘far b. Muḥammad b. Qūluwayh al-Qummī (d. 368 AH/ 978), a book largely devoted to Husayni hadiths. Although mostly concerned with the pilgrimage-prayers, i.e., ziyarāt-texts, issued in favor of Imam al-Ḥusayn, it is regarded as a highly reliable source. In addition, the *Biḥār al-Anwār* (110 vols.), compiled by the late Allama Muḥammad-Bāqir Majlisī (1037-1111 AH/ 1628-1699) contains a good and reliable collection of hadiths of Imam al-Ḥusayn. In recent years, particularly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran, great encyclopedic collections appeared, all concerned with the words and discourses of Imam al-Ḥusayn. The 16-volume *Dānishnāmih-yi Imam al-Ḥusayn* [The Imam al-Ḥusayn Encyclopedia] published under the guidance of the late Muḥammad Muḥammadī Rayshahrī (1325-1401 Sh/ 1946-

2022) is a prominent work. There have been several abridged versions and an English translation of one of its abridged editions, too.

Explications of the ziyarat-texts in favor of Imam al-Ḥusayni fall within the scope of Husayni literature. Throughout Islamic history, and particularly within recent two centuries, some scholars endeavored to try their hands at producing expert exegeses of the certain ziyarat-texts. The famous Ashura ziyarat-text has received several translations, with commentaries and exegetical explanations. The most famous of them is a seminal book the late Mirza Abū al-Faḍl Thaqaḍī Ṭihrānī (1273-1316 AH/ 1856-1898) wrote, entitled *Shafā' al-Ṣudūr fī Sharḥ Ziyārat al-‘Ashūr* (first published in Bombay, India, in 1310 AH/ 1892). There has appeared an English exposition and exegesis of the same ziyarat-text by Khalfan (2009-2013), too.

### **Transnational Reception**

Husayni literature takes in almost the highest number of Shii Islamic history books. Although the final sections of most Husayni history books turn into *maqals*, there are certain differences between *maqals* and Husayni history books. History books shed light on much broader aspects of the historic movement of Imam al-Ḥusayn, take into account certain socio-cultural aspects and backgrounds of the focal historical period, i.e., the period and circumstances that led to the events concerned. In contrast, *maqals*, i.e., martyrdom narratives, seldom take the reader back to far and wide historical backgrounds and the undercurrents of the events that finally emerged. They focus mainly on the events of Ashura, or any certain day when the martyrdom episode took place. While history books sound like mere academic and scientific studies of events, with little purpose to emotionally impress the reader, the *maqal* accounts focus on arousing the reader's sentiments so as to make the audience or reader shed tears and feel sympathetic with the martyred dignitary. While Husayni history books aim to give historical awareness, a *maqal*, in its Arab socio-religious context, is supposed to be read aloud for the audience to listen to it and to shed tears. For this purpose, there are more elegies and mournful poems in *maqals* than in history books.

A Husayni piece of work may be written by a non-Shii and/or a non-Muslim. Judged by its contents to be in favor of Imam al-Ḥusayn, the book, treatise, or paper, must be sympathetic to the plights and hardships Imam al-Ḥusayn and his camp suffered. It must be a relatively much later publication phenomenon.<sup>3</sup> Much later, in England the British historian Edward Gibbon (1737-1794) touched upon the Ashura Battle of Karbala in his history book. (See, Gibbon, vol. 2, pp. 250-251.)

Not every work that deals with the event of Ashura or Imam al-Ḥusayn deserves being regarded as a Husayni piece of scholarship or literature.<sup>4</sup> The main criterion for a non-Shii or non-Muslim work to be regarded as a work (includable in the outer circles) of Husayni literature is that the author must be sympathetic to the cause of Imam al-Ḥusayn. Merely making a reference to him or the Ashura episode of Karbala does not suffice. There are some notable works. Consider, for example, the British Orientalist Simon Ockley (1678-1720) who provides a synoptic and clear account of the Ashura Battle of Karbala in his book *The History of the Saracens* (2 vols., 1708-1718; 6<sup>th</sup> ed., 1857). In his interpretations, he finally takes sides with the second Umayyad ruler Yazīd (Ockley, 1857, pp. 413 and 419). Therefore, his book never deserves to be included within Husayni literature, although it may be taken as a non-Muslim's outsider reflections on the whole event of

<sup>3</sup> In the time of the Umayyad ruler Yazīd (26-64 AH/ 647-683) at who order the massacre of Karbala took place, there was a Byzantine delegate to the court of Yazīd at Damascus. The first one, whose name is not mentioned in Shii Islamic sources, witnessed Yazīd's disrespectful treatment of the Ashura survivors and the severed heads of Imam al-Ḥusayn and the rest of the Ashura martyrs. When he expressed his deep indignation and bitter resentment, Yazīd ordered his swordsmen to kill him on the spot. The Byzantine empire of the time, Constantine IV (Flavius Constantinus, ca. 650-685) dispatched a second delegate to Damascus. The second Byzantine delegate sent back a short message to Constantine IV; in it, he gave a brief report of the Ashura Battle of Karbala. As Byzantine officials were supposed to be Christian, that report may be regarded as the first non-Muslim, and particularly Christian, martyrdom report of Imam al-Ḥusayn.

<sup>4</sup> Such works deserve to be regarded as anti-Husayni writings. On top of this category comes the poems Yazīd composed when he noticed the severed head of Imam al-Ḥusayn in his court at Damascus.

Karbala. Another instance can be found in the works of the Belgian Arabist and Orientalist, Henri Lammens (1862-1937). Despite his expertise in Arabic literature, he always took sides with the Umayyads, hence his article on Imam al-Ḥusayn in the first edition of *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1913-1936, vol. 3, 1927, p. 339) cannot be regarded as a work within the broader realm of Husayni literature. Lammens was severely criticized by other Christian scholars for his sarcastic tone and severely disgusting attitude toward the Prophet, on the one hand, and his excessive leaning towards the Umayyads, on the other hand. (See, Salibi [1962])

Husayni literature may receive some occasion-oriented subdivisions. Some works and ziyarat-texts concern the anniversary of his graceful and blessed birth. Others may concern his martyrdom anniversary, i.e., Ashura, and the fortieth day after his martyrdom, i.e., Arbaeen.

It is timely to make a remark concerning the ziyarat-texts in favor of Imam al-Ḥusayn. A great majority of the ziyarat-texts in his favor have been authored by Infallible Imams. Some of them were produced by certain companions of the Infallible Imams who succeeded Imam al-Ḥusayn. Since the time of the major occultation of the 12<sup>th</sup> Infallible Imam al-Mahdī, i.e., from 329 AH/ 940 onward, some leading scholars such as Sayyid b. Ṭāwūs al-Ḥillī (589-664 AH/ 1193-1265) composed some ziyarat-texts.

The famous Ashura ziyarat-text deserves special attention in wide array of Husayni literature. On top of all the ziyarat-texts comes the famous Ashura ziyarat-text whose chain of authorities reaches Allah. This is regarded as the special grace of Allah in favor of Imam al-Ḥusayn. It is the widely discussed ziyarat-text due mainly to have its original source in the Divine inspiration. It is well documented that the Prophet Muḥammad received it from Allah and then transferred it to his immediate successor, the first Infallible Imam ‘Alī. It has many implicatures in that Allah was the earliest mourner of Imam al-Ḥusayn, and that his unique sacrifice had received Divine appreciation much earlier than the Ashura Battle of Karbala take place. (For a good and recent study of the famous Ashura ziyarat-text, see Mahmoodi [1401 Sh/ 2022]).

Within the broad realm of Husayni literature, it deserves to mention that certain sympathetic works written by non-Muslims. Although these works are not expected to contain many and certain details, they are noteworthy for their sympathetic tone, positive attitudes, and historical considerations. In this category, one may find certain works of Premchand (1924, 1928). Premchand (original name, Dhanpat Rai Srivastava, 1880-1936) intended to set a ground for peaceful co-existence of Hindus and Muslims in the Indian Subcontinent, hence his dramatic play on Karbala. According to Nishat Zaidi's preface to her English translation of Premchand's masterpiece, the "play *Karbala* reveals how cultural translation can act as an efficacious tool in nation-building." (Zaidi, 2022, p. x). In the Indian independence movement, whenever the Indian youth needed political energy, the Hindu literary figure Sarojini Naidu recounted an account of Ashura and Karbala for them to revive the spirit of struggle in them.

Husayni literature has proved to be far beyond the man-created and conventional boundaries. There is no language restriction. Mir Mosharraf Hossain (1847-1912) produced his Bengali Husayni elegiac play, *Bishad-Sindhu* (1885), later on translated into English under the title of *The Ocean of Sorrow* by Fakrul Alam in 2016. Khalfan (2009-2013) produced his exegesis of the famous Ashura ziyar-at-text originally and basically in English. Husayni literature trespasses all boundaries. Many works on Husayni literature are available in other languages, both Islamicate and otherwise.

There is no author's-religion restriction, either. Premchand was a Hindu and produced his play *Karbala* first in Hindi in 1924 and then produced its revised version in Urdu in 1928. Likewise, Sarojini Naidu who was a Hindu figure composed some of her English poems on Imam al-Husayn.

Husayni literature deserves more serious and reflective attention on trans-national or hyper-religious levels. It is a pity, hence seriously deplorable and equally questionable, that and why Husayni literature has not been treated a distinct and respectable branch of world literature in such great works as *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. In it, there is only a brief (and rather inadequate) reference to

both the genre of marsiya and Mir Anis in the entry devoted to Urdu literature. (Naim, 2012, p. 1498).

### **Conclusion**

Husayni literature is a dynamic type of Shii Islamic literature flowering in various types. Wherever there is a Shii Muslim community, one may expect to find some of form of Husayni literature. An originally Shii Islamic branch of literature, it has not been introduced in anthologies of world literature in English at it rightly deserves. Hence, the present work is meant to make just an introductory and overall account of it in English.

The paper finds that Husayni literature is a dynamic and enduring branch of Shii Islamic literature, deeply rooted in religious history and cultural memory revolving around Imam al-Husayn and the Ashura tragedy. It demonstrates how this literature transcends linguistic, religious, and national boundaries, encompassing works in languages such as Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Bengali, and English. The study confirms that Husayni literature occupies a unique place within the Islamic tradition, combining literary, historical, and devotional elements to preserve the memory of Imam al-Husayn across centuries. The thesis that Husayni literature is both a potent cultural force and a rich literary tradition is reaffirmed, with the paper highlighting its multifaceted nature: it includes hadiths, historical narratives, elegiac poetry, pilgrimage texts, and political-religious discourses. This literature not only informs religious identity but also fosters communal solidarity and ethical reflection among Shii Muslims and beyond. Despite its significance, the paper notes that Husayni literature remains underrepresented in global literary anthologies and scholarly discourse outside Islamic studies.

Concrete research agendas proposed include:

1. A comprehensive global cataloging and digital archiving of Husayni literary texts across languages and formats.
2. Interdisciplinary studies exploring the intersection of Husayni literature with history, theology, and political movements.
3. Comparative literary analyses between Husayni literature and other martyrdom or elegiac traditions worldwide.

4. Examination of the role of Husayni literature in contemporary diaspora identities and transnational religious movements.
5. Critical exploration of non-Shii interpretations and appropriations of Husayni themes in global literature.

### Limitations of the Study

The study acknowledges several limitations, including the challenges of accessing rare primary sources, the linguistic breadth complicating exhaustive surveys, and the relative scarcity of comprehensive secondary scholarship in languages accessible to all researchers. Additionally, the paper's evaluative remarks are constrained by the evolving nature of Husayni literature and its diverse expressions, which may vary across cultural contexts.

These findings collectively attest to the rich cultural, historical, and literary significance of Husayni literature while inviting further scholarly attention to expand understanding and appreciation of this vital tradition within and beyond Islamic literary studies.

### Appendix

#### *Abbreviations used in this study:*

AH: Islamic lunar calendar

b.: Arabic *ibn*, son of

bt.: Arabic *bint*, daughter of

ca.: Latin *circa*, about

comp.: compiler, compiled by

ed.: editor, edition, edited by

e.g.: Latin *exempli gratia*, for example

f.: from

H.z.: Persian f. Arabic *Hazrat*, a respectful title

i.e.: Latin *id est*, that is

qtd.: quoted

Sh: Islamic solar calendar

s.v.: Latin *sub verbo*, under the headword or title

trans.: translator, translation, translated by

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