CHAPTER FOUR

Understanding the Language of Pain and the Shia Cultural System

(i)

The majalis is a form of collective rememberance constituted of renditions of nohas and sermons. The language of this rememberance is rooted in the Shia cultural system; it reveals a distinct world view which is structured around the experience and articulation of the pain and sorrow of the martyrdom of Hussein.

The constitution of the language and the act of its dissemination creates the distinct Shia identity and demarcates it. Chapter four and five focus on these two aspects of the process of the creation of the Shia identity. This chapter focuses on the language of the nohas and sermons. It looks at the language as comprised of a system of ideas in terms of which the Shia world view is structured. (Chapter five looks at the intonational structure – the act of dissemination of this world view and the act of ‘becoming’ – which produces the Shia self and space).

Pain and sorrow and other aspects of suffering are social. These are induced by an interaction between the individual and the wider political economy. Hence they are both individual and collective. The attempt is to understand the nature of transaction between the two. The individual perceptions of pain are determined collectively. Pain, though an intensely private experience, is supra-individual. It is structurally perceived and experienced in the supra-individual, socio-historical context. The internal world of pain and suffering is created by external world. However, though structured, perceived and
experienced in a supra-individual socio-historical context, the question is, what role does the latter play in coping with and dealing with the pain that it generates. How does it provide for an expression of pain; and how does it structure the language expressing pain. The attempt is also to understand and decipher this language and its grammar, in order to assess its potential to express reality and its function in the social and cultural construction of a community.

While investigating language, one has to investigate the structure of experience which is determined by the socio-cultural context within which it is located. Wittgenstein (1953) in his theory of language and its relation to pain, views language as a rule-governed activity. To him pain has to be understood within the parameters of transactions between the collective and the individual. The perception of pain is private, in that no body can know with certainty the nature of 'my' pain. However, pain is public in that the language expressing pain is common to all human beings and is not confined to a person. The language of pain has a grammar, which is social. The sound a person makes to express pain becomes an expression only as it occurs in a particular grammatical context.

Pain has various social manifestations and ways of expression, eg., on the one hand, it is expressed through anger, scream, silence, tears, fear, anxiety, alienation, sense of meaninglessness; and on the other hand it is expressed in poetry, prose, literary writing, religious discourses etc.. These two broad manifestations of pain are crucial. When viewed as related to each other, as in a continuum, these provide significant insights as to how culture is involved in the movement from one to another. Implicit in
this continuum is a movement from natural instinctive response to pain to a culturally-structured and articulated response.

As forms of expression of pain, nohas as poetry and sermons as prose are culturally structured. The use of poetry and prosaic form of expression in the majalis throws light on the manner in which culture structures the articulation of emotional responses.

(ii)

**Form of content: prose and poetry**

Both the sermons and the noha's (verses) are discourses addressed to a particular audience. The function of both is to evoke pain and draw the response of weeping, loud lamentation and breast-beating. Sermons are prosaic as opposed to the verses. Both consist of a content, which is consciously structured to evoke the desired response.

Lukac's distinction between an essay and a poem succinctly throws light on the different ways in which each form functions. In his "Die Seele and die Formen" Lukacs states that essays are concerned with the relations between things, with values and concepts, in fine, with significance, whereas poetry deals in images, the essay is the abandonment of images. Forms fill the function in an essay that images do in poetry. Form is the reality of the essay and form gives essayist a voice with which to raise questions. (Said, 1984: 51-52.)

A poem, in the generally accepted notion, is a spontaneous creation, an emotional impulsive act, inspired by anything which appeals to the poet. As opposed to this view, Poe makes the genesis of the poem look much more deliberate than could possibly have been the case. As demonstrated by his poem, the 'Raven', a poem emerges as a rationally
created work (Burke 1966) The noha as a genre of verse is located within this matrix of understanding poetry provided by Poe.

A verse can be understood in terms of sheer poetics, i.e. in terms of itself or in terms of the motivation of the writer. The important question here is whether the work of an artist is separate from his own personal order, disorder or is it an aspect of language in general, located in a larger socio-cultural-historical context and consciously used by the writer with a specific purpose or motivation. The value of the nohas is not so much in their poetic quality, than in treating them as an aspect of language in general, the elements and symbols of which lie in and are derived from the Shia cultural system. Nohas have a narrative form and are structured to perform (like the sermons) a dual function, viz:- of evoking an emotion of intense pain and sorrow and of spreading the message of Islam.

Both genre of texts (sermons and verses) have certain significant features which need to be highlighted. The language used in both is full of tropes such as synecdoche, irony, metonymy, metaphor, epigrams and antithesis, particularly oxymorons (especially in nohas) which are effective in evoking intense emotional responses among the audience.

The difference lies in the performative aspects of the two. The delivery of the sermons is highly dramatized. It is an exercise in oratory marked by the extensive use of rhetoric of voice modulation; body movements, e.g., throwing up of arms, head and beating of the chest while talking, knitting of eyebrows and various other facial expressions conveying pain, use of distinct verbal expressions as (Hi!) denoting unbearable pain etc. In other words, it has a definite intonational structure. All these
elements vary in accordance with the stage at which the sermon is, viz., fazael or masaeb. The dramatization and the accentuation of rhetoric strategies increase as the sermons moves to the climax –(from fazael to masaeb). These strategies are as important as the content of the sermon to evoke the desired response. The nohas on the other hand serve the function primarily through the use of a narrative form, the use of tropes and the rendering them in musical tunes accompanied by breast beating, which provide a rhythm. The narrative form and the usage of the language together throw up images, which evoke a response of intense pain manifested in weeping and lamentations.

The sermons are a juxtaposition of didactic, descriptive and narrative forms. They are straight accounts. The emotion is evoked through detailed narrative description of the event as it actually happened, through the use of oratory skills of the zakir, while in nohas, the emphasis is on the words and feelings and images associated with words.

“In a general way the term image’ is used for any mental conception, from whatever source it presents itself, which gives rise to speech, but in current usage the word is applied to passages in which, carried away by your feelings, you imagine you are actually seeing the subject of your description and enable your audience as well to see it.” (Longinus, 1965: 121).

However, as Longinus points out, imagery means one thing with orators and another with poets. In oratory, imagery means to produce vividness of description, and in poetry its aim is to work on the feelings through the use of words in a particular way. In both cases the attempt is to stir up feelings. The imagery of the poet displays a good deal of romantic exaggeration, and everywhere exceed the bounds of credibility, whereas the finest feature of the orator’s imagery is always its adherence to reality and truth. The
source of imagery is outside the speaker i.e. in the Shia cultural system. This distinction is very clear in the nature of the sermons and the nohas.

(iii)

**Note on the method of understanding the language**

In “The Struggle with the Angel,” Barthes makes a distinction between structural analysis and textual analysis

“...Textual’ is used with reference to the contemporary theory of the text, this being understood as the production of significance and not as philological object, custodian of the letter. Such an analysis endeavours to ‘see’ each particular text in its difference, which does not mean in its affable individuality, for this difference is ‘woven’ in familiar codes, it conceives the text as taken up in an open network which is the very infinity of language itself structured without closure; it tries to say no longer from where the text comes (historical criticism) even how it is made (structural analysis), but how it is unmade, how it explodes, disseminates, by what coded paths it goes off...” (Barthes, 1977: 126-27)

Textual analysis is founded on ‘reading’ rather than on the objective structure of the text, the latter being more the province of structural analysis.

The analysis, which follows, attempts at such a ‘reading’ of the nohas and sermons, and is in that sense textual. The focus is not on the objective structure of the text, but rather on how it disseminates. The assumption of the analysis is that the structures of the text are intricately related to the systems of experience and values transcending individual work, and central to the community within which the work/text of the narratives is generated. Hence the analysis is in that sense contextual as well. Further, even though the focus is not on the objective structure of the text (which is the province of structural analysis), structural analysis is the basic entry point into the
interpretative activity of decoding dissemination and locating it within the framework of cultural system of the community.

Speaking of the language of a narrative, Barthes (1977) makes a distinction between linguistic language and discourse (a distinction which is central to the analysis of nohas and sermons in this chapter). To Barthes, linguistics stops at the sentence which cannot be reduced to the sum of words which compose it and thereby constitutes a specific unit. "Discourse is no more than the succession of sentences composing it. From the linguistic point of view there is nothing in discourse that is not to be found in sentence; yet it is evident that discourse itself is organized and through this organization it can be seen as the message of another language, one operating at a higher level than the language of linguistics." Hence to Barthes, discourse with its units, rules and grammar forms the object of a 'second linguistics'. Although an autonomous object, discourse must be studied from the basis of linguistics. Briefly, then, a narrative can be seen to have two levels, viz., a) level of language of linguistics and b) level of language of discourse – which is the level of meaning.

The analysis of a narrative involves an understanding and a decoding of its language at these two inter-related levels. A narrative, like a sentence has several levels of meaning, i.e., it can be described in several ways, eg., phonetically, phonologically, grammatically, contextually. Each of these levels are in a hierarchical relationship. No level, on its own, can produce meaning. A unit of a particular level takes on meaning only when integrated with a unit at higher level.

To understand a narrative is to recognize its construction in 'storeys' to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative thread on to an implicit vertical axis. To read or
to listen to a narrative is not merely to move from one word to another; it is also to move from one level to the next'. Meaning, to Barthes is not at the end of a narrative but it runs across it. He talks of three levels of description in a narrative work: (i) Functions (in the sense used by Propp and Bremond); (ii) Action (in the sense used by Greimas, when he talks of characters as actants); (iii) Level of narration (roughly the level of 'discourse' in Todorov.)

These three levels are linked together according to a mode of progressive integration. A function only has meaning in so far as it occupies a place in the general action of the actant and this action, in turn, receives its final level of meaning from the fact that it is narrated and entrusted to a discourse which possesses its own code. There have been other attempts to describe the various levels of a narrative. Todorov talks of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations or of syntax and semantics.

Old rhetoric divided its field into: (i) elocution (verbal), (ii) disposition (syntactic), (iii) invention (semantic).

The Russian Formalistic, e.g., Propp, studied in terms of (a) stylistic, (b) composition and (c) thematic.

Contemporary linguistic theory distinguishes between, phonology, syntax and semantics.

Whatever the terminology, the analysis of a narrative involves operation at the level of the linguistic language and at the level of 'meaning' or discourse. Here, in the interaction between the two levels, which is a movement from one language to another or from first meaning to the second, the linguistic language is, the 'vehicle,' and there lies the process of decoding 'meaning.
The present analysis is an attempt to decode the 'second' language-discourse of the Shia. The attempt is to gain access to this discourse by examining the structure of the language of linguistics and the effect of this on the narrator-audience interaction within a wider socio-cultural matrix.

**Language and narrative structure**

The world created by a piece of narrative prose or poetry is a creation of linguistic technique, which is a craft in language. The writer-speaker uses language as a medium. The structure of whatever he communicates is directly under the control of the writer's manipulation of language, and simultaneously of the reader's or 'listener's creative sympathy; his desire and ability to realize and release the technique from verbal clues deposited by the author.

Choices of words and sentence types possess conventional reverberations, associations for members of a reading community. When a linguistics which is sensitive to these community associations of language is employed, it can enable the interpretation of a writer's linguistic structures in relation to the values and preoccupations of the community for which he writes.

Texts are structurally like sentences, i.e., the categories of structure proposed for the analysis of individual sentences in linguistics can be extended to apply to the analysis of much larger structures in the texts. (Fowler, 1983)

In virtually every linguistic theory a sentence is regarded as a combination of a 'form' and a 'content'. In modern transformational generative grammar, in the revolutionary style of grammar invented by Noam Chomsky, this is expressed as a painting of a surface structure and a deep structure. Surface structure is the observable on
the expressive layer of the sentence; most concretely, sound or written symbol; somewhat more abstractly, syntax; word and phrase order. Deep structure is the abstract content of the sentence: the structure of meaning which is being expressed. Surface structure is experienced directly and deep structure is retrieved only by a complex process of decoding. Surface structure has two important properties for the construction and reading of a narrative: (i) linearity, that is, sentences, not their meanings, which are abstract move from left to right, in space or time, and shifting the reader's attention along and sometimes impending it. Linear sequence may be used to suggest narrative time; (ii) It also conveys logical relationships: it has ways of signaling differentials of importance among the parts of a complex system of meanings, and for picking out what is new information as contrasted with the already known, given or presupposed meanings communicated by in sentence.

The surface structure of a text, like the surface structure of a sentence, has qualities such as sequence, rhythm, and spatial and temporal expressiveness of various kinds. It also includes many features which are traditionally associated with the idea of 'style', particularly, those features depending on the rhythm of sentences and of their arrangement in a sequence. It is the most perceptible and visible dimension of a work. It constitutes the physical aspect of the text. The textual surface structure is a series of sentences linked up to form a continuous and cohesive sequence. The stream of sentences implies a definite pace and rhythm of reading, a particular ordering in the presentation of information, guiding the reader's listener's attention and controlling of his memory.

There is an intimate connection between the ordering of information and the required
'voice-tune' of a reading, so the relationship between syntax and information is a central topic in textual structure. (Fowler, 1983: 13).

Deep structure is the structure of meaning of interpretation mediated through the linguistic language or the surface structure. It is the level of discourse (Barthes associative plane of language). It involves the viewing of a text in terms of different aspects such as dialogue, point of view, attitude 'world view, and 'tone'. All these being the indication in language structure of the narrator's beliefs, the character of his thought processes, the types of judgement he makes; similarly, for the narrator and the characters within the fiction; and the whole network of interpersonal relationships between the author, character of the implied reader, as these are mediated through language.

To Halliday (1978), the linguist should always appeal to the function of an utterance, in its social and interpersonal context, in order to explain why that utterance manifests its particular structure. He postulates that language structure is ultimately motivated by the contextual functions which it is called up on to fulfill.

Text as discourse

Thus seen, every text is a discourse, an act of language by an implicit author who has definite designs on an identifiable implied reader. Meaning is produced in the dialogical interaction between the two, implicit in which is a transaction between word and world. Meaning is produced by virtue of the shared membership of the two in a community bound together through the acceptance/ recognition of common metaphors and world views.

The author draws upon these to organize his text, in order to fulfill the purpose with which the text is written/spoken. The test of a perfect text lies in the extent to which
it is able to achieve the purpose for which it is written. In the context of nohas and sermons, their categorization as 'good' depends on the extent to which they are able to draw out tears (manifestation of pain). Thus the author of the two strives to imbue the text with all elements which can evoke pain.

**Elements of a text**

What are the element which when introduced in a text renders it suitable to the category of 'perfect' or 'good'?.

Longinus treatise, "On the Sublime" (1965) has proved to be of relevance, to understand the nature of these elements.

Longinus focuses on the qualities and devices that make for or militate against the production of the sublime. The term 'sublime' as used by Longinus does not stand for the usual meaning associated with it today, i.e., an outstanding and unusual exaltation of conception and style. To Longinus, it signifies a certain distinction and excellence of expression, by which authors have been enabled to win immortal fame. To him sublimity is an innate, inborn gift, but it must be cultivated among other ways by imitation or emulation of writers who have shown themselves capable of achieving sublimity; act is necessary, if the natural ability is to be used to the best effect.

His treatise is concerned with the discussion and illustration of five sources of the sublime. First and most important source is grandeur of thought and the ability to form good conceptions. This takes its rise in nobility of soul or character. (In this context Longinus speaks of the use of imagery, which is discussed later in detail). The second source of sublime is vehement and inspired passion. The third source is effective use of stylistic and rhetorical figures. The fourth source is to be found in diction and phrasing;
this includes skillful use of metaphors and other figures of speech. Finally comes the dignified elevated composition, i.e., an insistence on the most effective arrangement of words, and the conception of organic unity.

The emphasis is on the 'form' of the text, which includes elements of the language of linguistics and its effect on the 'deep structure', i.e., meaning of content. He emphasizes the grandeur of conception and expression and the effect on the meaning of the work as received by a 'receiver' who could be a reader, a viewer, or a listener.

Considering, the nature and purpose of sermons and nohas, their 'production' is an 'art' of achieving the 'sublime'- a certain distinction and excellence in expression – which hence achieve the purpose for which they are produced, viz:-, perpetuation of grief to the extent that it induces processes of introspection, relatedness to the collectivity, and the defining of the 'self' of the Shia's.

The analysis of the texts of sermons and nohas have been made within the framework of this perspective.

(iv)

Sermons

A major effect of imagery when used in oratory is that it can infuse much passion and energy into speeches, and when combined with argumentative passages it not only persuades the hearer, but also actually masters him. The sermons and nohas operate in two ways, viz:-, (i) through the force of ideas. (ii) through the use of rhetoric strategies to strengthen the force and impact of these ideas particularly of oratory skills of voice modulation and the accompanying body language, in other words through an intonational structure. ( The latter will be discussed in chapter V).
Fazael – Islam as an ideology:

The fazael consists of praising the glory of Islam. This part is structured with the aim of invoking pride in an individual of being a Muslim. The choice of ideas and themes around which the fazael revolves is vast. Any theme can be picked up from the Quran. The sanctity and value of the principles of Islam are established by constant reference to their practice by the Ahl-i-Bayt. Islam is projected as a religion of tolerance, love, truth and justice, through illustrations from the lives of the Ahl-i-Bayt, eg., in one sermon the zakir cited the following example while explaining the notion of ‘Jihad’ (relating it to Islam’s belief in the ‘right to life’). (refer Annex II of the thesis)

...These days whenever a terrorist is arrested in Kashmir and asked ‘why do you do this?’ the answer always is ‘Jihad Fisabil Allah’ (i.e. Jihad in the name of Allah). What is Jihad? The essence of Jihad is epitomized in the life of Hazrat Ali who did not raise his sword inspite of bearing all kinds of atrocities. When confronted by his opponent in the battle of Khandaq, Ali said to him ‘Accept Islam and give up the way of untruth.’ The opponent refused. Then Ali said ‘well! if you don’t want to accept Islam and want to continue pursuing the path of untruth, then go away from here. ‘The opponent refused to comply yet again, and continued to insist on battle. Then Ali said ‘all right, if you will not listen to advice, if you will not even go away and will insist on fighting, then you strike the first blow’. This is the spirit of Jihad, these are the elements of Islami: jihad, Jihad is not fought hiding in Ibadatgahs (places of worship) Jihad is fought for truth and in the open. This is the lesson we learn from Hussein! salavat!” (send salutations to the household of the Prophet) (Annex II).

The narration of this is done in a voice full of pride and religious fervour, the head is held high, and the chest out. Jihad ‘the religious war’ is defined as war for truth. Jihad has been the primary means of spread of Islam particularly in its initial stages, and the term conjures up an image of intolerance rigidity and fanaticism. The choice of this particular concept and its depiction is conscious and deliberate. The zakir destructs one image that
is put forward by the terrorists and which is in conformity with the stereotype accepted in general, (generality here is used in the Durkheimian sense) which is intolerant and fanatic, and reconstructs another (in his opinion ‘true’ image), through the example of Ali. Ali’s tackling of the opponent in three stages is crucial in this reconstruction. The three stages highlight the nature of a dialogue, which at no stage is rigid and autocratic. Initiation of war is not presented, as an option at all, neither is forcible conversion. Hence Islam is democratic, open, tolerant and rational. This is a ‘high’ point in the sermon and the sending of ‘salavat’ is very significant. It’s a pause which performs two functions, viz:-, it is a pause which allows for the importance of the content, emphasised by the speaker to sink into the minds of the listeners, while at the same time, enthusing the listeners and over time overwhelming them into believing it. Secondly it gives the zakir a breather.

The use of contemporary events and contexts is an important means of achieving the desired response from the listeners. A look at some more sections of the sermons makes this clearer.

“...In Islam there is no forcible imposition of any kind by any one individual on another. The philosophy of Tawhid (belief in one Allah) can not be forced on any one. The emphasis is on the use of your 'Aql' (mind intellect). There is no jabr (force) in Islam. You accept the religion only if you want to. No body can force it on you. All the tenets of Islam become compulsory only when you have accepted the religion of your own will (ikhtiar). There is a difference between jabr and ikhtiar, when the Prophet was asked to distinguish between the two, he asked the enquirer to stand on one leg. The man did. The Prophet then asked him to lift both his legs. The man said he would fall if he did that. The Prophet said that the former was ikhtiar and the latter jabr. Islam gives freedom to all. When you accept a law you follow it. Salman Rushdie misused his freedom. No ‘fatwa’ would have been placed on him had he been a non-Muslim. He had accepted the religion and therefore should have followed its tenets...’ (Annex II)
Here again the image of Islam is reconstructed this time through the explication of the opposition between *jabr* and *ikhtiar*, and the evoking of ‘fatwa’ on Rushdie justified in this light.

**Islam as the ideal: the use of biographies to reconstruct the past**

The past is consciously reconstructed in a manner which highlights the positive side of Islam. The manner of this reconstruction is a part of the strategy of evoking a particular response, and is hence significant.

The historical reconstruction of the past is around important persons. It is these persons who lend importance to the events. These persons are the people from the family of Muhammad, and their friends. They are shown to stand up against injustice, acts of dishonour and falsity. What is important is the manner in which they resist. They resist within a framework of a value system, which is ‘truly’ Islamic – fearless, humble, and firm, without aggression, with composure, without malice and without a sense of vengeance. The dialogue between Ali and his opponent at the battle of Khandaq reveals this (among other examples). Consider the following.

“...Once Gabriel came to Ali and asked if Ali would be able to sacrifice his love for Hussein, for ‘Truth’ Ali answered ‘yes,’ he would. He then asked Masooma (Fatima) the same question. Imagine, what the mother must have felt on hearing this question because even as a child Hussein used to feel very thirsty and Fatima used to place a glass of water at his bedside, she would jump at the slightest sound from him to give him water. Gabriel had foretold the destiny of Hussein of which Fatima was aware. What must Fatima have felt when she sighted the moon of first Muharram? What must have Umme Laila, Kulsum and Zainab felt on seeing the moon? What did Hussein himself feel when he saw the moon? “...Sabr is also a form of Jihad. People in Medina taunted Hazrat Hasan and addressed him as ‘the humiliator of Momin- (believers)’. To this he responded saying one should be quiet and have sabr. Yet another example is in the Zulfikar (the sword of Hazrat Ali), which when drawn out spelt
doom for those who confronted it. This sword was given to Ali by Allah because he had faith in Ali that he would use it with restraint. For twenty-five years Hazrat Ali lived in silence and lived an ordinary existence. This is the extent of his sabr. He had the Zulfikar and yet he did not raise it. This was his Jihad.

"...In Islam you feel unhappy in other’s unhappiness. You share the grief of others. Hussein’s Karbala shows, that may be you are on the wrong, but you can also see the right way and correct yourself. We are here referring to Hazrat Hoor, the general of Yazid, who was sent with a huge army to fight Hussein. On the night before the battle Hoor was very restless. His son asked him why he was so restless. Hoor said, “Can’t you hear the sounds of children crying? I am responsible for their plight. I am standing between hell and truth. Hoor seemed to look yellow that day. I look yellow, because I am not able to decide which side to go to. He finally decided to go to the side of the truth. His son said he would accompany him too. They both set out for Hussein’s camp. When Hussein’s comrades saw them approach. They felt that the two were coming to attack them. But Hussein said ‘No! he is our guest, go and welcome him’ Hoor came to Hussein and said, ‘please tie my hands as I am guilty.’ Hussein embraced Hoor and said “Hoor you are our guest at a time when we have nothing to offer you.” To this Hoor said ‘you can give me the knowledge of Jihad’ (ilm-i-Jihad). (Annex II)

The use of biographical accounts in the process of reconstruction is significant. It performs the dual function of projecting Islam as a religion of love and tolerance, (in contrast to the prevailing stereotypical image of Islam as a religion of fanatics) and making a political statement through which it dissociates Islam and the Muslims from ‘other’ Muslims involved in terrorism and those following Islam with a fanatic zeal.

The biographical anecdotes referred to are accounts of certain periods of life of the various characters. It is not a chronological narration of life history of sacred figures. It focuses on events, which throw light on the virtues of the characters. What is important is the ‘character’ of the personae. Whether the characters of Hussein, Zainab etc., were in reality so is not the question. What is relevant the fact that their characters are constructed
to achieve the purposes of transmitting the values of Islam and reinforcing the identity of Muslims.

**Kinship bonding**

"...The style of thought in which large entities, such as the nation are invested with the status of a ‘natural’ entity often involves the use of kinship terms as metaphors for defining the relationship between individual and collectivity. Such metaphors are used extensively in oral discourse, to create a sense of community..."(Das,1995:125).

The kinship relations, particularly the emotional bonding involved in the relationships are consciously and effectively used by the speaker to evoke an intense response of pain among the listeners and through this create a sense of community. This emerges clearly particularly in the masaeb.

Consider the following. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, each of the ten days of the first Ashura is dedicated to the martyrdom of one character. The following is an example of the narration of the martyrdom of Abbas, the right hand man, and the cousin of Hussein, in one of the majalis attended.

"...Oh look! People! Ya Allah! The arm carrying the Alam (flag) has been chopped off by the ruthless men! (the pitch of the speaker’s voice begins to rise) Hi! Now Abbas is holding the Alam in the other hand (the pitch rises further, voice cracking, the speaker almost crying)...Hi! Now the brutes have chopped off the other arm too and look! O members of the Shia community! Abbas has lost both his arms but he is still not letting the Alam of Hussein to fall. He is now holding it between his teeth. Arre! Look how they have killed him, he is now dead!!"

By this time the speaker is screaming and speaking through sobs and with the final narration of the climax – the death of Abbas – he breaks down.
The background of the death of Abbas is of paramount significance (in fact, the account of martyrdom is preceded by highlighting the importance of Abbas). Three facts are of significance to understand the pain evoked by the narration. First, that Abbas is the cousin of Imam Hussein. Second he is portrayed to be of a flawless character. His loyalty to and his love for Hussein and his family are exemplary. (In fact one zakir, drew a parallel between the relations between Hussein and Abbas and Ram and Laxman). For this reason he is the most appropriate person to carry the Alam of Hussein symbolizing honour and integrity. His not letting the ‘flag’ fall till his last breath reveals the intensity of his loyalty and commitment to uphold the honour of Hussein and his family. Third, Abbas did not die fighting, he died trying to fetch water for his five-year-old niece (daughter of Hussein). Sakina. The entire camp had been thirsty and hungry for three days. Sakina was fretting and begging for water. Abbas could not bear to see the child suffer, so he picked up his sabeel (water container made of leather) and without paying heed to the consequences he dared to go to the river Euphrates, which was heavily guarded by the enemy to get water for Sakina. He had managed to fill the sabeel, when he was caught and surrounded by the enemies. They first ripped apart the sabeel and then his arms and then his head was severed from his body. He thus died trying to get water for Sakina, and trying to protect the honour of Hussein – by protecting the Alam. It is these three facts which conjure up an image of brutal unfair death, evoking pain and tears.

The use of emotional bonding between kinsfolk to evoke pain and tears is further illustrated by the following examples. In the narration of martyrdom of Ali Asghar the
six-month-old son of Hussein, the masaeb begins with a description of the deep attachment of the child to Hussein, then follows the narration of his martyrdom.

"...A time came when Hussein was left all alone. There survived only a sick son Zain-ul-Abidin. In pain Hussein called out ‘Is there anyone here?’ On hearing this call, the ill Zain-ul-Abidin called out to his Phoophee (paternal aunt) and asked her to give him his sword, so that he could go and fight and help his father. At the sametime there was another being who heard this cry of Hussein, the six month old lying in the jhoola (cradle) – He heard the call and while trying to respond, he fell out of the cradle. There was chaos in the tent. “What happened?” Hussein asked. Zainab, his sister narrated what had happened. On hearing this Hussein asked for the baby and hugged it close to his heart. The baby’s eyes were sunk in, his lips dry from thirst and hunger of three days.

“Hussein can not bear this sight and takes Ali Asghar to the enemy and pleads... you kill me but give water to this baby.” Hussein tells the baby to show his thirst. The baby runs his tongue over his lips, as if saying ‘my father speaks the truth’ The enemy wants to kill Ali Asghar, but is ordered to kill Hussein. He raises his bow thrice but can not shoot. Pisar-i-Zad (the commandant) says ‘you are my best archer. why are you not shooting?’ The soldier says ‘whenever I try, a woman in white comes and tells me ‘don’t kill my child!’ This is Fatima, who is so close by. And what sort of an arrow does he have? He has such dangerous arrows that each could pierce seven walls at a time.

“The soldier (Hurmala) shoots. The baby jumps and lunges his neck forward, anticipating that the arrow was moving towards Hussein. Hussein is in agony as the arrow pierces the infants neck and pins it to Hussein’s arm. He wants to throw the gushing blood on the ground, but the earth cries. ‘Don’t Hussein! Don’t do this, for if you do I wont be able to feed the generations to come anymore,’ Hussein, then wants to throw it up into the sky, when the sky echoes ‘don’t do that oh Hussein! For if you do, it won’t rain again!’ So Hussein weeps and smears his face with blood saying ‘Lord’ I will meet you like this on Doom’s Day and ask you, what this means!” Hussein can not carry the burden of the six-month-old! He places him down seven times. Oh! look at his pain! He reaches the tent and calls out to Zainab. Zainab comes out and screams at the sight of the bleeding neck. Hazrat Hussein goes and buries the little baby. He has no water to wet the mud of the grave. His tears wet the grove. On Sham-i-Gariban when Hussein was dead and his tents were looted and head hung on spear-ends, it was found that the number of these heads were 71 and one was missing. Pisr-i-Zad said, ‘Where is the 72nd head? He was told that it was that of a baby who had been buried by Hussein. Pisr-i-Zad ordered his men to dig the ground and pierce all over with spears, find the body, cut the head and put it on the spear. Ya ‘Allah! His men pierced and pierced all over, till they came to spot which was soft. They pierced this
spot and when they pulled out the spear it was the body of the six month old baby!” (as narrated in one of the majalis)

It is the kinship bonding between Abbas-Hussein-Sakina in one case and between Hussein and Ali Asghar in another, which is the primary source of getting a tug at the listener’s heart. It is the bonding consisting of unquestioning love, affection and faith in his righteousness, which gives the martyr the strength and courage to lay his life for Hussein. The sacrifice of a brother for brother, of uncle to quench the thirst of his niece, touch the heart and, give meaning to the martyrdom.

The narration of events does not focus on deeds of valour and courage of men in the battle field. In fact, it is noteworthy that there is no description of the battle. There is no description of a martyrdom in battle field, the emphasis is on the details of dying where the enemy comes across as deceitful and martyrdom is seen as a consequence of deceit of the enemy. Further, the focus is on the effects of the deceitful battle, on relationships, particularly kinship relationships – the effect of subjecting the individuals to pain, dishonour, and deprivation. The masaeb uses these to make constant appeals to the emotions of the listener.

When Hussein reluctantly allowed the 14 years old Qasim, the son of his older brother Hasan, the following account is what served as the primary tear jerker.

"Fourteen years old Qasim goes to meet his mother Umme Farwa and to say 'Khuda Hafiz (farewell) Farwa blessed him...look at the heart of the woman who lets her 14 years go to die for his uncle. No body has suffered as much as Hussein, but the masaeb and the sufferings of Zainab and Qubra were greater. Zainab had two sons, both of whom were martyred. She martyred her nasl (lineage) to save her brother’s lineage She raised Ali Akbar (Hussein’s son) like her own son. And when Ali Akbar was ready to go to the battle field, Hussein told him to go and bid
farewell to his phophee and mother in their tents. And O people! (hazreen) seven times the curtain of the tent was raised (indicating somebody was about to come out) and seven times it fell. You can imagine how the women must have bid farewell to him. Each time he must have lifted the curtain to go, they must have pulled him back and clung to him in pain. Can you imagine the pain and suffering of these women?"

The effect of martyrdom on women as mothers, sisters, wives and daughter is an important source of evoking pain.

(v)

**Verses: Nohas**

Nohas at best can be described as lyrics, in that they are always intended to be sung (though their rendering is referred to as ‘reading’, music being associated with celebrations) and express emotions. More specifically they could be referred to as elegies (a subdivision of lyric) i.e. poems, long or short, of mourning or some sorrowful theme. Further they are dramatic in the sense that the poet often speaks with a single voice that is not his own and tries to give sympathetic, explanatory expressions to an alien personality. Nohas are elegies, mourning the martyrdom of Hussein and his camp, narrating the miseries of those who survived. They are not chronological narrations, of events. They are emotional accounts of the miseries of Hussein and his family and are consciously structured to stir emotions of the listeners, who are also participants. This is significant, as nohas are responsorial in form. The leader, usually the composer of the noha, begins by reciting a line and then others in the group (which comprises the entire audience which has been a listener and a non-participating receiver during the sermon’) join in refrain to the accompaniment of beats produced by the collective beating of the breasts.
The *nohas* as a form of poetry function to arouse the emotion primarily by throwing up images through various kinds of associations which are deeply rooted in the Shia cultural system.

The *nohas* (like the sermons) also involve a reconstruction of the events, but the reconstruction and recollection is coloured by the perceptions of those who did not participate in the battle, who were present and witnessed the martyrdom. The focus is not on factual description but on the feelings and consequent thoughts of these witnesses who were also close associates of Hussein. Even the apparently factual description of the event is a subjective and emotional.

The description is not of what happened chronologically, it rather revolves around the confrontation of good and bad, evil vs truth, and the martyrdom of ‘good’ for the survival of Truth. Martyrdom is portrayed as a conscious acceptance of death (deceitful) so that ‘Truth’ prevails. The choice of words and phrases is significant as they are conscious choices and lead to certain associations in the mind and consequent imagery to evoke the emotion of pain.

In *noha* 1. (Annex I) there is an unseen narrator, there is an addressed audience of believers (*Momin*) there are characters and there is the narration of the event. A narrative pattern is constituted through the use of a vocabulary which becomes meaningful when viewed in terms of certain unstated terms of oppositions.

The narrator first establishes the characters of those in confrontation.

Unstated implicit terms of opposition

- Seventy two versus Lakhs
- Piro Payamber versus Devil
Then the place of confrontation and the survival conditions are described

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desert</th>
<th>Ravage</th>
<th>Karbala</th>
<th>Deprivation</th>
<th>Scorching heat</th>
<th>Thirst, hunger</th>
<th>Scream of Doom</th>
<th>Battle field.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The last part narrates the suffering of those who survived.

The above description in the chart above can be read as follows:

In the first part, the unfairness and injustice of the combat is established by the numerical ‘72.’ There were seventy members on the side of Hussein (of which a large number were also women), who were the noble godly people (*Piro Payamber*), on the other side were lakhs of soldiers trained for warfare. They represent the evil by the very fact of being ‘soldiers’ ready to attack a group in which only a few are trained and the rest are women and children. These *Piro payambar* are travellers with limited equipment for survival to last for a specific time, away from their own familiar territory, in unfamiliar domain without the securities of a ‘household. This unfamiliar territory is Karbala, which is a desert and implies hunger, thirst, heat, death, ravage. They are forced
to live in such conditions while what they actually should have, is a grand existence by virtue of being *Ahl-i-Bayt*. The men die for Truth leaving behind a widowed bride, sisters, mothers and daughters. Jubilations of marriage are transformed into pain and mourning of death and widowhood. The associations with suffering, forbearance, pain as borne by women e.g. Qubra the widowed bride (daughter of Hussein married to Quasim), Bano and Umme Laila (mothers of the Ali Akbar and Ali Asghar) Zainab (sister of Hussein) are very strong. The *noha* thus conjures up powerful images of atrocity injustice and suffering and evokes an intense emotional response among the listeners.

Karbala is established as the site for confrontation between 'good' and 'evil' and of the production of a value system and a related code of conduct. Upholding values implies a conscious acceptance of pain, suffering and loss of loved ones with fortitude, grace and forbearance.

Identification of pain and suffering with hardships, brutality, death, widowhood, humiliation of the *Ahl-i-Bayt*, transforms pain from an abstract concept into a lived reality. It brings it out of the realm of the private and the individual, to that of the public and collective. The voice of narration which is intimate emotional, subjective and often of one of the *Ahl-i-Bayt*, and the focus on emotional responses to suffering, bring Karbala within the actual, experienced domain of the listener. Hence a majority of the *nohas* are structured around the martyrdom of the male members of the *Ahl-i-Bayt* and the suffering of the female members.

The activities, rituals and beliefs associated with the 'everyday' domestic life – birth, marriage death – are the locales around which the narratives revolve and which
bring the atrocities and sufferings within the realms of peoples experiences and renders
the agony graspable.

*Noha* 3, 5, 6, 7, (Annex I) focus on the martyrdom of Qasim. In these *nohas* the
narration of Qasim’s martyrdom is primarily through the use of imagery associated with
marriage and its associated rituals and ceremonies. All *nohas* of Qasim make strong
references to ‘*Mehndi*’ (henna an important ritual associated with marriage and bride
hood), the dressing up of the bride (*nath, mehndi, afshan* i.e.shiny power applied to the
parting of the ‘hair by married women’-, *banni, bella*, *kohl, sandal, odni, kangan, suhagan*). *Noha 7* proceeds in three parts in which ‘death’ is highlighted by drawing
parallels with the marriage rituals. The first part describes the arrival of the dead body of
the groom. Usually the arrival of *barat* creates excitement in the bride side. A wave of
joy and excitement runs through the house, women, children crowd the door eagerly to
get a glimpse of the groom. The groom is greeted and welcomed with the performance of
rituals, laughter, and singing. The house rings with peals of laughter, song sounds of joy
and blessings. The *noha* speaks of the arrival of the *barat* from the battlefield. The
grandeur is of the arrival of the ‘body’ as opposed to the person’ of the groom. The *body*
is ‘injured’ as opposed to being healthy, fit and handsome. There is crowding at the door,
but not with joy, but in pain. The welcome is with weeping and lamentations as opposed
to it being with songs and laughter and joy.

In the second part, the parallel is with the reception of the *barat*. After the arrival
of the *barat* the elders, especially women,’ hustle around arranging for guests to sit, for
food and drinks to be served, to ensure that the bride is ready etc. The *noha* describes this
hustling to arrange for people to sit to mourn, for the bride to be fetched so that she sees

112
the face of the groom, or as in noha 5, to ensure that the bride is properly dressed as a widow which is effectively expressed in the laments “remove her ‘nath’, rub off the afshan and the sandal, remove the kohl! Make her wear a randsala – robe of a widow, remove her kangana! etc., it is also expressed in laments which transform her from a bride to a widow – “she whose forehead glistened with afshan, whose hands were decorated with ‘henna’. Mud is now smeared on her face! who a night before was a suhagan (married women) today widowhood hovers over her head!”

In the third part parallels are drawn with the hospitality rendered to the groom and his party. Usually the ‘barat’ is welcomed with sherbet, what to talk of sherbet, when there is not a drop of water to drink hence the question of what to offer.

The trauma of a death is further highlighted by source of the laments. In noha 3 for example, the mother’s lamentation “said Qasim’s mother, there comes the ‘mehndi’ of the ‘dulha’ (groom) from Karbala. My creator has shown me the ‘mehndi’ of the groom from Karbala”. Here the ‘pain’ of the ‘mother’ is brought out with the use of the image of arrival of henna from Karbala- standing for battle, deprivation and death, rather than from the ‘house of the groom and her resigned acceptance of the pain, her despair come across in her reference to the ‘creator’ (khaliq)

‘How the marriage suits them
. Soaked in blood are the wrists wearing kangana with what grandeur has death come to the tent”.

In noha 7, consider the following:

‘Unveiled and distraught are Zainab and Kulsum (sisters of Hussein and Phophees of the bride and the groom).
‘Distraught Bano (wife of Hussein) weeps, her heart torn apart

In noha 6, laments come from Zainab (sister of Hussein)

“...Says Zainab to Shah – I’m at a loss (kuchh sujhta nahin) where o brother is the body of Qasim Banna”.

The pain of a sister, and aunt comes through her being at a total loss, asking for the groom and his body at the same time.

Nohas 9 to 15 focus on Zainab. She was the sister of Hussein who later (after the martyrdom) became the spokesperson and who took charge of spreading the message of Karbala. Her role in the institutionalization of the spread of the message of Karbala is primary. She was the one who initiated the process of mourning and gave it its present structure and form. She holds a special place of honour among the Shias. A large number of nohas focus on her. She is represented and addressed to in several roles, viz., -as the leader who carries the torch of Islam till the next Imam is ready, as a mother who martyred her two sons for the cause of Islam, as a sister who stands by her brother and is a solid pillar of support to Hussein and his family, as an aunt. (Phophee) who is pained and distressed by the suffering of her niece Sakina and suffering and martyrdom of her nephews Qasim, Ali Akbar and Ali Asghar. She emerges as the role model of Shia womanhood.

In noha 9, Hussein addresses and appeals to Zainab to take on the responsibility after he dies. The noha is didactic in nature in that Shah (Hussein) gives instructions to Zainab regarding what to do after he dies. He refers to her as ‘Ma Jaee’. i.e, from the same mother – His instructions are in the form of appeals, not commands, full of pathos, and compassion based on deep understanding of the pain that the aftermath of martyrdom
will cause her. It consists of appeals to maintain patience, not to lose control, however much the pain and do the needful with love and responsibility, respond and stand up bravely to the needs of the hour, eg.,

‘Shah willed, bear all sorrow Zainab and let not a word of complain touch your lips, “When Shimr-i-Lai, cuts my neck, as I bend down in prayers do not came out unveiled from your tent...”

The noha lays out a code of conduct which comes through sharply through the imagery of behaviour in extreme conditions, when all justifications exist to deviate from the ideal norm.

The components of an extreme situation where the normal ideal typical responses break are effectively stated, viz., brutal, ruthless slaughter of kinsfolk, atrocities on helpless etc. Upholding the values under such circumstances is the ultimate test not only of the values themselves but of the individual’s conviction in those values. Thus Hussein’s plea to Zainab to show forbearance in sorrow; not to lose sense of propriety in crisis (when Hussein’s throat is cut in prayers, it is the pinnacle of deceit and injustice and fertile ground for throwing away the codes of conduct and losing control and break the norm); protection of the weak and the vulnerable – (when he refers to the brutal man handling of Sakina and helping the sick son out of the ravaged and burning tents); looking after the infant. Finding the first drop of water and giving it to Sakina with a smile, and finding strength to look at his cut head hung on a spear, renders values as inseparable form a way of living.
The characters of different age groups are effectively used to highlight appropriate behaviour patterns of love, respect, compassion, forbearance and strength, to be maintained, particularly in crisis.

Zainab ‘the woman,’ the torchbearer, takes up the torch. But the assumption of this responsibility is not easy not and without pain. Zainab’s lamentations describing the painful moments of what she witnesses, indicate the struggle and suffering she goes through to uphold the code of conduct. In noha 10, she emerges as a strong yet a human and a vulnerable character who rises to the occasion inspite of witnessing the brutal unfair massacre of her brothers and nephews as she bids, farewell to Hussein.

“Today I’ve cried on the coffin of Akbar Ah! Wept for Abbas, zulm (actrocity) has reached its limits”. 

Her despair and distress is brought out effectively by the use of imagery of ‘search’, eg., “where is the youth of Akbar, the valour and protection of Abbas?” The imagery of a vulnerable, innocent one lost in the myr of cruelty and deception is very powerful.

She is insecure but has to be strong. Her insecurity and vulnerability as a woman who has always been behind veil and protected by men, but who now has to step into the role of men and her struggle to deal with this dilemma, comes across in her questions “Brother how will I console the widows. How will I face the court bareheaded. How do I console Sakina, where do I find you?.

But she comes through the struggle. With determination and sense of purpose ‘Let the sister hug you, O brother! Let me help you mount the horse and say good bye! (Noha 11). Similar, images are evoked in nohas 13 and 15, which also focus on Zainab.
\textit{Noha} 13,14 and are significant. Here the narrator recalls the painful moment when Abbas died. 'There was no heir except helplessness. Zainab is presented as a person who takes charge. In the absence of 'men' she became the protector and the leader.

“She became Ali, Abbas and also Shabbir’ For the frightened children, the daughter of Ali was the guard. She consoled everyone, but she herself was drowned in tears.”

Here Zainab is a struggling brave woman who stands up to meet the demands of a crisis, inspite of her vulnerability as a woman.

Her leadership and valour, her pain, anguish and vulnerability are effectively projected, in the description of how she readies her self to fight when she sees the approach of a horse rider, in \textit{noha} 12.

“What have you come for now? Everything burnt, my brother is dead, go away!

I say this to you in the name of Mustafa! I am the daughter of Nabi, I am the daughter of Sayeeda.”

The reference to her heritage highlights her honoured status. The \textit{noha} is interesting in that the horse rider is her father Ali, who comes from the 'other' world, drawn by the pain and suffering of his daughter. Her valour transforms into vulnerability the moment she recognizes her father. This is significant. The relationship between father and daughter is signified as that of protection security and dependence. And it is through this dialogue where she breakdowns and pours out her heart, lamenting his late coming – as in \textit{noha} 12 that her vulnerability and the enormity of the task she undertakes is projected. \textit{Noha} 12 consists of Zainab reproaching her father saying ‘Now you come
father, when all is over” “where were you when ...and there is a description of events in terms of a series of question
“when Ali Akbar was dying”? when Abbas lost his arms and no one was besides him?” “When I had to see the head of my brother getting cut? " When Sakina was being slapped....

The perceptions of the survivors particularly the voices of women, provide the content of the *nohas*. These perceptions are structured around emotions of love for kinsmen – brother, father, son, nephew. The lyrics define the bonding between the kin, the sense of loyalty and commitment to those loved. The events thus described acquire a meaning deeply locating it in the socio-cultural context of the Shia. Take the *Nohas* 18,19, 8 of Sakina, Abbas and Ali Akbar. Consider *noha* 8 about the 18 years old Ali Akbar. It is structured around the feeling of a ‘mother’, a mother, who dotes on her child and ensures he doesn’t get hurt. The *noha* traces the love and care of the mother ‘Umme Laila’ from when Ali Akbar was born till he dies. In the process, it reveals the intensity and depth of a mother’s love and agony at the loss of the one she nurtured from her heart. “That was one day when the spear just brushed past his chest and Umme Laila fainted (such was her love that she could not bear even a little scratch on her son).
“This is one day, when some one should see the scene in Karbala, the spear is through the chest and the mother has to see it”.

It is significant that most of the voices of the narration are female - Zainab, Umme-Laila, etc. In *noha* 12, 15, Zainab’s outburst is a lament of the sufferings of the survivors, particularly women. Here the outrage of the women of Ali’s household being made to walk without veil through bazaars, which were decorated, comes across starkly.
The ‘decoration’ of bazaar, implies decoration of a public place, a public celebration of the humiliation of women as opposed to their being honoured and protected in the privacy of their homes. The image of the extent of ‘shame’ experienced by the women especially those of the sacred family of the Prophet is clearly conjured through the description of their plight in Sham. In noha 14, this theme continues where the zakir seeks to experience what the women felt by actually visiting the bazaar and wondering’ how long did it take for Zainab to walk the distance which he covered in just a few minutes? The answer is provided by a mujavir –(the caretaker of the Shrine of Hussein). The distance, he says, which the Zakir covered in minutes, was covered in what seemed to be a century to Zainab. This answer is significant. The use of time – century as opposed to minutes – is effectively used to convey the intensity of humiliation experienced by Zainab. Sakina, the five year old girl, voices the agony of a child (noha 18,19). The child’s, search for security, ‘her fear and inability to understand why her uncle has not returned with water, why is their death and ravage all around, why is her shirt soaked in blood highlights the starkness of the senseless unjust brutality. Further these narration by women are narrations and descriptions of their suffering as witness to the death of the males and of the post battle sufferings of women and children. The ‘women’ emerge as agents of communication of horrors of atrocity and also as agents of ‘honour’. Their dishonour is the dishonour of the community. Further between the battling men, the final form of victory is not defeat in warfare, but in the humiliation and dishonour of the women of the defeated group. Hence women on the one hand are the most vulnerable in that they are the ultimate victims, on the other hand this very vulnerability is their source of strength when they face this truth and accept the challenge
and stand up for the cause of truth, in the absence of men', transforming them into communicators and torch bearers of the message of Hussein.

The suffering, anguish and pain, transforms the tragedy into a source of contemplation and elevation of the spiritual strength and makes it a source of brotherhood, honour and identity, e.g., noha 22, 23, 24. These nohas could be taken as constituting a unit.

The theme of noha 24 is ‘Revolution’ Karbala and its associated characters and events are presented as elements of a revolution. Source of which is the ‘mourning’ (matam) of Shabbir (Hussein) Hussein represents revolution of thought (fiqr) which arose from Karbala. Thought acquires significance by virtue of being associated with Hussein, and Ali. And the nature of this thought is healing, providing enlightenment. It is spiritual.

The war and its consequences are used to describe elements of revolution. Revolution is the rise of a value system which emphasizes self-control, equanimity, courage, goodwill, faith and strength of spirit particularly in crisis. Consider.

“Revolution is cutting swords with blood, is taking spears on the heart, is to get your house ravaged and yet thank God:, It is to smile and string the bow. to watch the dead body of a young men.’.

The value system is conveyed effectively through the imagery of fight, not with sword but by letting it cut you first, by the piercing of a spear in heart and not by turning ones back.

The noha, having defined revolution, goes on to define the function of this revolution – spreading the message of Karbala, and decoding this message ,viz.,
destruction of arrogance and hatred, awakening of the world, hoisting the flag of such
‘Faith’ (Din) which believes in destruction of arrogance and hatred; which believes
peace, self control and restraint.

The spread of this message is through matam of Hussein. The noha moves to the
form of dissemination continuing till today ‘the matam of young boys who get
themselves to bleed with the motion of matam’ (striking of chest), who shed the blood of
Hussein, their mother’s watch in pain, unveiled with pride and sorrow. This is the
‘miracle’ of Fatima and the thought of Hussein.

The mothers are identified with Fatima (the mother of Hussein). The source of
strength of youngsters to shed blood is the ‘thought’ of Hussein.

This ritual of ‘matam’ is the light in darkness. It is the source of all etiquette, and
the entire life. Karbala is presented as a symbol of a method of confrontation of tyranny
and injustice. It gives the message of non-violence.

There is, through these series of imageries a final definition of ‘revolution’ that
the travails, the tragedy of Karbala is transformed into a mode of contemplation, a way of
looking at life a world view and a way of life – a non-violent way.

“That there is no fear no-joy in the assembly of mourners, to narrate thus the
sorrow of Hussein... That cry of weeping which resounds in the skies is the cry
of Revolution.”

That Karbala is used as a symbol and a mode of contemplation is clear in noha 15
– where ‘everyday’ is the day of matam, and every place is Karbala, i.e., everyplace is a
place where the struggle between justice and injustice continues. The people who believe
in this are the Shia’s
Distinct usages of the linguistic language perform the function of conjuring images at the associative paradigmatic level of language to give meaning to the themes and verses.

Sermons and particulars *nohas* rely heavily on the use of figures of rhetoric of the linguistic language to evoke images and consequent passionate responses from the audience.

There is an extensive use of oxymorons (a special form of antithesis whereby two contradictory qualities are predicated at once of the same thing) epigrams, hyperbole littorals, metaphor, metonymy in the verses. This is particularly clear in *nohas* dealing with the martyrdom of Qasim, eg., *noha* 7 use of oxymoron.

"...Hussein brings the body of the groom from the battle-filed. Look! With what grandeur brings he the injured body of the groom. “Ah! Banut has become the widow.. make her wear the widow’s robe.

*Noha* 14 brings out the acuteness of Zainab’s suffering through the following use of antithesis, epigrams, hyperbole.

"...Recognize me! I have come from prison, wearing a sheet of pain” “...She who passed through the market place, unveiled, remember.” “...I died with every step that I look unveiled.” “...I covered my head for your honour...”

Similarly with *Noha* 15,

"...Saw each and every flower, each petal was red there was none, that was not soaked in blood..” (hyperbole) Reference to Zainab as ‘daughter of Fatima’ (metonymy) “...She became Ali Abbas and also Shabbir (metaphor) consoled everyone yet was herself drowned in tears (antithesis).
The use of these figures of speech draw upon the cultural constructs of Shias and enthuse the audience with religious fervor, faith and passion.

They add another dimension to the nohas and sermons. They make them heavily indicial.

Barthes talks of two main classes of unit, viz., functions and indices, which allow for a certain classification of narratives. The indicial units refer not to an act but to a more or less diffuse concept which is nevertheless necessary to the meaning of the story, psychological indices concerning characters, date regarding their identity, notations of atmosphere etc. (Barthes, 1977: 92)

In noha 15, eg., Zainab’s and the women’s journey through the bazaar acquires its due gravity through the use of descriptive terms, which are indicial in nature, eg.,

All around were lakhs of onlookers....this is a moment of tremendous feeling

...exposed to all eyes.

...If I could only be given the Flag of Abbas to use as my veil"

The responsorial form of the nohas and their renditions to melodious, touching tunes, accompanied by beats provided by the beating of the chest (matam), are also indicial aspects of critical importance in the collective renderings, and have the effect of enthusing passion and bring out pathos and tears.

(vii)

The narrator, the audience and the community

The majalis (which is comprised of sermons and recitations) ensures that the painful past is not forgotten. This annual process of foregrounding the collective memory, of ‘not forgetting’ is the mainspring of the Shia cultural system. The majlis becomes a site for
production of ‘meaning’ through a dialogic interaction between the narrator, the audience and the community. The role of the narrator zakir and the narration process (Zakiri) is central to this process and is, examined in the next chapter.