

Home > The Revolution of Imam al-Husayn (a) > Lamentation Poetry > V. The Value Of The Poetry About Al-Husayn > The third reason: The profusion of verses in lament for al-Husayn

Lamentation Poetry

The effects of the revolution of al-Husayn began to appear through the poetry of lamentation for the martyrs of the revolution and in the poetry of regret and repentance by those who had stayed away from giving support to the revolution or had actually participated in fighting against it.

The relative paucity of such poetic references in the first period after the revolution is due to the fear of persecution by the Umayyads who launched a wide-scale campaign to keep the effects of the revolution within narrow confines. This was after they discovered the danger from the reactions which the revolution had unleashed.

The outbreak of the rebellion in the Hijaz against the Umayyad regime, its extension to Iraq and elsewhere, and the outburst of acts of vengeance against the Umayyads and their supporters, at the end of the Umayyad era and the beginning of the 'Abbasid state, released a flood of poetry of lamentation for the revolutionaries of Karbala', which has continued to pour out right up to the present time.

* * *

One of the richest fields of Arabic poetry is the poetry of lamentation when we observe the vast amount of poetry composed in lament for al-Husayn, in particular and for the revolution of al-Husayn at Karbala', in general. It is clear that the poetry composed in lament for al-Husayn and his followers and the event of Karbala', generally, is much greater and more natural than that on any other single subject. This is not confined to classical Arabic, for the colloquials of Iraq and the Gulf possess a vast inheritance of this lamentation poetry about al-Husayn and his revolution.

Persian poetry about this event is like Arabic literature but, perhaps, there is even more of it, for it contains very many works of lamentation and praise for al-Husayn and his revolution in a variety of styles.

Indeed Shi'ite Muslims have composed poetic works on this subject in any language they speak—Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and others. These works are vaster than their compositions in other fields.¹ The

phenomenon of poetry of lament for al-Husayn in Shi'ite literature did not only arise as a result of the tragedy of al-Husayn having an emotional appeal. In addition to that it also had a religious aim which was to preserve for ever in poetry an act of piety.

In what follows, we will study this phenomenon from several aspects.

I. The Doctrinal Background To The Literature Of Lamentation For Al-Husayn As A Manifestation Of The Revolution Of Al-Husayn In Popular Consciousness

It is reported that Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq said: 'No poet recites a line of poetry about us without the support of the Holy Spirit.'²

He also said:

'God has built a house (*bayt*) in Heaven for whoever recites a line (*bayt*) of poetry about us.'

Abu Harun al-Makfuf reported: Abu 'Abd Allah (i.e. Imam Jafar al-Sadiq) said to me,

'Abu Harun recite to me about al-Husayn.'³

I recited and he wept. Then he said,

'Recite as you were reciting.'

He meant with emotion.⁴

So I recited:

Pass the grave of al-Husayn and speak of his great purity.

'He wept and then asked me to give him more. I recited another ode. He wept and I heard weeping behind the curtain. When I had finished, he said to me: 'Abu Harun, whoever recites poetry about al-Husayn and weeps making ten others weep, Heaven is decreed for him. Whoever recites poetry about al-Husayn and he weeps and he makes one other weep, Heaven is decreed for them both....'⁵

Abu 'Umara al-Munshid reported that Imam Jafar al-Sadiq asked him,

'Recite to me the verses of al-'Abdi about al-Husayn.'

He recited to him and he wept. Then he recited to him and he wept. Then he recited to him and he wept. By God, he continued to recite to him with weeping until he heard weeping from the house. He said:

'Abu 'Umara, whoever recites poetry about al-Husayn and makes fifty others weep, will have Heaven as

a reward. Whoever recites poetry about al-Husayn and makes forty others weep will have Heaven as a reward. Whoever recites poetry about al-Husayn and makes thirty others weep will have Heaven as a reward ...⁶

Al-Harith al-A'war reported that 'Ali said:

'By my father and my mother, al-Husayn will be killed on the outskirts of Kufa. By God, it is as if I am looking at wild animals of all kinds stretching their necks towards his grave weeping and lamenting for him throughout the night until morning. If that is the case, beware of being estranged from him.'⁷

Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq told Sufyan ibn Mus'ab to recite to him about al-Husayn. He told Umm Farwa and his family to come near. When they were present Sufyan recited.

Umm Farwa, weep much with flowing tears . . .

Umm Farwa shrieked with grief and the women shrieked. Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq called for the door to be shut while people of Medina were gathering outside. He sent a message out to explain to them that a boy had fainted and that was the reason for the women screaming.⁸

* * *

The Imams of the Holy Family honoured the poets who composed this kind of poetry in lamentation and praise of the Holy Family and of al-Husayn, in particular.

An example of that is the words of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir to al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi when the latter had recited an ode to him about his love for the Hashimites as the noblest of men. Imam al-Baqir said, 'You will continue to be supported by the Holy Spirit as long as you defend us, the members of the Holy Family.'⁹

During the days of *tashriq* immediately after the great pilgrimage (*hajj*), al-Kumayt asked for permission to visit Imam al-Sadiq and wanted to recite an ode to him. It troubled the Imam that they should be reminding themselves of poetry during the great days of the pilgrimage. However, when al-Kumayt said that it was about the Holy Family, the Imam was satisfied. He called some of his family and brought them near.

Then al-Kumayt began to recite and the tears flowed. When he reached the words about the archers firing on al-Husayn, Imam al-Sadiq raised his hands and said, 'O God, forgive al-Kumayt for his past and future offenses, whether secret or public, and give him what will please him.'

The poetry which the Sh'ia recite in lamentation for al-Husayn and the Holy Family is not, in the majority of cases, poetry for special occasions. Rather it is an activity which emotion and religion brings forth.

Emotion brings it forth through the close relationship between the Shi'ite individual and his Imam who led

a revolution and was wickedly oppressed.

Religion brings it forth as represented in some of the texts which we mentioned which urge the recitation of poetry about the Holy Family and which awaken a desire for it. It is also represented in the personal attitudes which the Imams of the Holy Family adopted towards the poets who wrote about al-Husayn. We have already dealt with some of this earlier.

For this reason and that, the composing and recitation of poetry became a religious act which entered into the glorification of the rites of God. Al-Husayn had not striven for personal glory through his revolution. He had undertaken it to serve the people on the basis of the guidance of Islam. Therefore, to make the revolution live on in his person and to spread its slogans and influence in society through poetry and other things is an act of piety. *Whoever exalts the rites of God that will come from the piety of the heart.*¹⁰

The poets themselves have expressed this religious vision of their poetic works in lamentation of al-Husayn as a result of the direction of the Imams of the Holy Family. Among the earliest poetic texts which reflect the religious vision of the poetry of lament for al-Husayn are the words of Abu al-Aswad al-Du 'ali Zalim ibn 'Amr (d. 69 at the age of 85) in his ode in which he laments al-Husayn and those of the Hashimites who were killed with him.

There he wishes that he could have been a shield to protect them and thereby he would have gained eternal reward from God.¹¹

Another example is the words of Abu Muhammad Sufyan ibn Mus'ab al-'Abdi al-Kufi (d.c. 120 in Kufa) from his ode about the Holy Family. He addresses 'Ali as a leader who drove armies away from the rich soil. The poet himself tells how he has fought for 'Ali with ideas and words, using poetry and orations as weapons.

If 'Ali is pleased with him, he does not care about any who are displeased with him. All he wants is to be accepted as his companion through love of him and piety. With such friends his soul will find comfort from fatigue.¹²

Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi (d. 126) spoke to Imam al-Baqir after reciting one of his odes to him and the Imam offered him money which he would not accept, 'By God, I have not said anything about you for which I want to be given a worldly reward. I will not accept anything as compensation for it because it belongs to God and His Apostle.'

Then the Imam replied:

'You will have what the Apostle of God mentioned: You will continue to be supported by the Holy Spirit as long as you defend us, the members of the Holy Family.'

Al-Kumayt said in his *Hashimiyyat* that it was through the love of the Holy Family that he approached

God when he was in distress.

Another example of that kind is the verses of al-Sayyid al-Himyari, Isma'il ibn Muhammad (d. 183 or 187 in Baghdad). He declares that he has made the family of the Apostle a means by which he hoped to attain salvation from destruction. How could he be blamed for loving those whom he had made the method for him to attain Heaven?

Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i, the founder of the school of law, (d. 204 in Egypt) composed an ode in lament for al-Husayn. In it, he said that, if he had committed a fault in loving the family of Muhammad, it was a fault from which he would not repent, for they would be his intercessors on the Day of Resurrection when important decisions were made plain to the onlookers.

Di'bil al-Khuzai (d. 246) asked in one of his famous poems how a man could blame the family of the Prophet, for they were always his beloved friends and the family of his trust. He had chosen them to be good to himself because they were the best of the best men. He called on God to increase his love for them and to increase their love for his good deeds. He sought Paradise from God through love of them.

* * *

With these examples, we have given sufficient evidence of the religious background of the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn. A researcher would find manifestations of this religious background in the poets of lamentation for al-Husayn in all periods from the first century of the hijra until today. We will observe that the religious background of the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn is at its strongest in the late periods.

II. The Hostile Attitude of the Authorities

We have seen how the Imams of the Holy Family explained the high rank with God and the promised reward in Heaven for those who composed poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn and the Holy Family.

We have also seen how they used to honour their poets, call upon them and shower them with love and concern. Further, we have seen how this attitude gave this poetry of lamentation a religious incentive alongside its emotional incentive. These two factors made the poets of the Sh'ia and others increase and diversify this quality in their poetry.

Here we must be mindful of an extremely important matter connected with the great reward from God reported by the Holy Family –some of which has already been mentioned– for those who compose or recite any poetry about the Holy Family. The modern reader may be surprised and ask himself whether such a simple action deserves the great rewards which are reported in the texts from the Imams of the Holy Family.

In answer we would say that this high rank, which the poet or the reciter of poetry about al-Husayn

receives, is not absolute. It arises out of the nature of the conditions which prevailed at that time.

Poetry in praise or lamentation of the Imams of the Holy Family and especially of al-Husayn, speaking about the injustice done to them and denouncing their oppressors . . . all this encompassed a political attitude which rejected the existing authority. It also meant a political attitude which supported the Holy Family and their political and legislative program. As literary history demonstrates, the poets were constantly under observation by the political authorities of the time.

For a poet or writer to reveal his support for the Imams of the Holy Family through poetry or a book was liable to lead to his death at the hands of the men in power, or to expulsion and banishment, or to imprisonment and seizure. This was due to the fact that in the past an attitude expressed in poetry did not merely mean an intellectual and emotional attitude; it also meant a political attitude.

It then becomes clear that work of this size and importance appropriately provides its author with the high status which the text reported concerning this matter speak of and entitles him to great honour and praise from the Imams of the Holy Family.

In the rest of this section, we will see a picture of the hostile attitude of the authorities which violently punished every poet who answered the call of the Holy Family.

When the composition and recitation of poetry and the writing and publishing of books about the Holy Family, and especially about al-Husayn, became a cultural activity, which did not expose the author to any danger or cause him any hardship from the authorities, it was still a noble and blessed activity and the author was still sure of a reward from God. However, it certainly did not attain the level of merit and nobility of the heroic poets who sang of the revolution and tragedy of the Holy Family in those harsh circumstances; for by that they exposed themselves, their families and their children to the most terrible dangers.

Through their poetry, they attained their absolute commitment to the cause of the individual Muslim to the extent that the circumstance and means allowed them at that time. In what follows we will give a picture of the suffering of these men who were entitled, as the heroes they were, to praise and honour.

* * *

Throughout the different political epochs, during the Umayyad period, then the 'Abbasid period and what followed it, the ruling authorities realized the danger of this kind of poetry. It enflamed religious zeal and strengthened the doctrinal and emotional relationship with the opposition; it raised doubts about the legitimacy of the existing government.

As a result of this realization, the authorities persecuted the poets of the Holy Family. Because of this the poetry of lamentation used to circulate secretly among the Shi'a; and the poets would keep it hidden from the authorities and be anxious that they should not get to know of any of this poetry, for if they

knew of any of it, they would pursue them.

Here we refer to the reply of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq to the people of Medina who came to inquire after hearing the sound of weeping. He kept the real reason hidden from them and told them that a boy in the house had fainted. In all probability Imam al-Sadiq's behaviour was as a result of his desire to keep Sufyan ibn Mus'ab's reputation as the author of the ode unknown and to protect him from the oppression of the authorities.

Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani has reported: 'A group of later poets, whom I will not mention here as I do not want to be unduly long, all composed poems of lamentation for al-Husayn ibn 'Ali. None of the poems of lamentation of the poets of the earlier period have come to us. These poets did not make that public out of fear of the Umayyads. '13

This quotation demonstrates that composing poetry of lament for al-Husayn was a prohibited activity which was punished. Later there was some relaxation. We should not forget that Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani wrote his book, *Maqatil al-Talibiyyin*, during the Buwayhid period, after the 'Abbasids had become weak and the Sh'ia had gained some ability to express their beliefs publicly.

Ibn al-Athir reported in his history the ode of A'sha Hamdan in which he lamented the Penitents (*Tawwabun*). He described how they marched in a state which sought piety and which was repentant for what had happened to al-Husayn through their desertion of him. Then they met the army who came against them at the Battle of 'Ayn al-Warda and fought with sharp swords. Then Ibn al-Athir added concerning the poem: 'It was one of the things which was kept hidden at that time.'¹⁴

In the Dictionary of Poets (*Mu'jam al-Shu'ara*) of al-Marzubani, it is reported that 'Awf ibn 'AbdAllah al-Azdi wrote a long ode in which he lamented al-Husayn. 'This poem of lamentation was kept hidden during the time of the 'Abbasids and only emerged after that.'

It included a derogatory verse about Mu'awiya.

Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi was almost killed when Hisham Ibn 'Abd al-Malik heard his poems called the *Hashimiyyat*. He only escaped death through a trick by which he was able to flee from prison.

He has explained in his poetry the hostility and censure he faced as a result of the attitude which he expressed publicly in his poetry. He said that he hated the Umayyads and was hated by them. While he found fault with them, they blamed him. The ignorant members of his tribe blamed him for loving the Holy Family but not to love such noble people was shameful and disastrous.

His relatives hated him for loving the Holy Family and those who were not so close as his relatives gave him troubles so that he suffered. People pointed at him and hoped that he would fail but they, in fact, were the ones who were failing. Some even called him an unbeliever for loving the Holy Family, while others accused him of sinfulness for doing it. As a result of loving the family of Muhammad, he was in

constant fear wherever he went. He asked what his crime was and his conduct that he should be treated in such a way.

* * *

When Harun al-Rashid heard of the ode of Mansur al-Numayri in lament for al-Husayn and praise of the Holy Family, he became very angry and ordered Abu 'Isma, one of his generals, to go immediately to al-Raqqa. He ordered him to apprehend Mansur al-Numayri, cut his tongue out, kill him and send his head to him.

When Abu 'Isma arrived at the gates of al-Raqqa, he saw the funeral cortege of al-Numayri coming out of it. He went back to al-Rashid and told him of al-Numayri's death. Al-Rashid remarked: 'If I had found him dead, I would have burnt him in the fire.'

Di'bil al-Khuzai explained his fear in one of his famous poems. He says that he hid his love for the Holy Family because of the obstinate opposition to the people of truth. Although he was frightened in this life with its struggles, he hoped for safety after death.

* * *

In the literature of lamentation for al-Husayn, there has arisen an element known as the poetry of the Jinn in lamentation for al-Husayn.

In his book, *Kamil al-Ziyara*, Ibn Qawlawayh al-Qummi devoted a chapter to this subject which he entitled: 'The Wailing of the Jinn for al-Husayn ibn 'Ali. In it, he gives examples of this poetry. These are characterized by being short utterances which are usually weak and trivial. Many of them have been attributed to historical figures, like the well-known rajaz verse of al-Tirmimah al-Tai.

O my Camel, do not fear my urging . . . etc.

In much the same manner there have been other verses attributed to Jinn in many of the books of history and literature. It seems to us that most of this poetry is by unknown human poets who wanted to spread propaganda on behalf of the revolution and who wanted to take part in one of the cherished acts of piety without endangering themselves and exposing themselves to the punishment of the authorities.

Therefore they composed these verses and attributed them to the Jinn. Perhaps some of this poetry was the work of the women who used to devote themselves to exclamations of grief at the women's rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, they might have wanted to create wonder and amazement by attributing their exclamations of grief to creatures who were not human. This would fit in with the popular mentality which craves for such things.

Whatever the case may be, this phenomenon clearly indicates the atmosphere of fear and caution which prevailed in literary circles and among the ordinary people when they approached the subject of

composing or reciting laments for al-Husayn and the Holy Family.

However, this hostile attitude, which successive governments adopted towards the subject of lamentation for al-Husayn, did not affect the growth of such poetry. It may even have increased its growth and fervour. The poets of the Sh'ia began to carry it out in a spirit of self-sacrifice and piety.

The hostile attitude of the authorities towards this lamentation made these authorities become, in popular consciousness, partners in the Umayyad pattern: it made them become, in popular consciousness, participants with the Umayyads in the persecution of al-Husayn.

III. Poetic Content And Man S Psychological Disposition

The poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn gives a picture of the psychological disposition of the Shi'ite, in particular, and the Muslim, in general.

The poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn is sad without being submissive and defeatist in the face of the cruelty and challenges of the existing situation. That it should be and is something which is generally natural and acceptable in the genre of lamentation poetry. How could it be otherwise, when it springs from a true emotion of love and real anguish in the heart, as is the case in the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn?

How could it be otherwise, when, in addition to the emotional motive, it springs from a religious motive, as is the case in the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn? However, the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn is not only this. There is also a spirit of glory and a spirit of vengeance in it. It is full of ideas of power and threatening against those who participated, in one way or another, in the atrocity of Karbala¹: the Umayyad regime and its supporters.

The poet who writes of al-Husayn expresses, in his poetry, his readiness to struggle and sacrifice to gain vengeance against the criminals who committed the crime of killing al-Husayn, his family and his followers at Karbala¹.

In the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn, which has comedown to us from the first and second centuries of the hijra, one will find many examples which are full of these ideas.

In what follows, we will examine some of the examples of the kind of poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn.

The Umayyad Period

Among these poets was 'Ubayd Allah ibn al-Hurr al-Ju'fi. He was one of the outstanding leaders in Kufa and had refused to help al-Husayn when the latter had asked him to. Then he regretted his action and lamented al-Husayn and his followers in a poem in which he shows his grief, his regret and his desire

for vengeance.

Later he proclaimed his rebellion against the Umayyad regime as represented by 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad. He gathered his followers around him and went to Karbala'. He looked at the places where al-Husayn and those with him had been killed. Then he went on to al-Mada'in. There he recited a poem.

In this poem he blamed himself for his failure to support the son of the daughter of the Prophet, This failure filled him with a grief that would not leave him, He remembered standing at the graves of those who had been killed and prayed to God for them.

He described them as heroes and the best and bravest of them. Then he promised vengeance on their behalf. Thus, this poem of lament expresses the profound grief and regret in his heart and gives the threat of vengeance.

'Ubayd Allah ibn al-Hurr al-Ju'fi was killed in 68 after a battle in which he fought against 'Ubayd Allah ibn al-'Abbas al-Sulami, one of the generals of Mus 'ab ibn al-Zubayr in Kufa.

* * *

Sulayman b. Qatta al-'Adawi al-Taymi composed a poem when he passed Karbala ' three years after al-Husayn had been killed. He described how he passed by the graves of members of Mohammed's family. The sun had become sick and the land had shaken at the killing of al-Husayn, He describes the treachery of the tribes of Qays and Ghani in killing al-Husayn and promises them vengeance to come for the shedding of such blood. The dead body of al-Husayn on the banks of the Euphrates brings shame and disgrace to Muslims. The sky and the stars wept at his death.

In these verses there is a portrayal of real grief and the threat and promise of vengeance. However, the threat is not made specifically at the Umayyad regime but at the tribes of Qays and Gham. Yet we could consider his threat against the tribe of Qays to be a threat against the whole regime in view of the fact that members of the tribe of Qays made up the vast majority of the Umayyad army at Karbala'.

* * *

Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali, Zalim ibn 'Amr (d. 69) composed a poem in which he described the one who brought news of al-Husayn's death as the conveyor of tidings of the death of religion and piety. He declared that harsh men of Nizar killed the sons of 'Ali on the banks of the Euphrates.

He called upon men to follow the truth and defend al-Husayn and his family from the tyrannical hypocrites. They are the best of men in the eyes of God. Men should be guided by them and it is ungrateful to God to reject their guidance.

Although this poem is without fervent emotion, it nonetheless, reinforces the religious idea of the Holy Family and its call for vengeance.

* * *

Al-Fadl ibn al-'Abbas ibn ' Utba ibn Abi Lahab ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib ibn Hashim composed a poem in which he described how he wept for the death of the noblest man. Again he blamed the tribesmen for killing Husayn and his followers. He said that in every tribe there flowed the blood of the family of Hashim.

Their life and death belonged to God and God would be the judge of their goodness on the Day of Resurrection. Every life that is lost has a wali who is entitled to vengeance, and the wall for the blood shed at Karbala' was approaching. He was the one who would rise over the murderers and conquer them. When the two parties met before God, the enemies of the Hashimites would see which party belonged to the pure Prophet.

The threat of vengeance in this poem is clearly stated.

* * *

Al-Fadl ibn al-'Abbas b. Rabi'a ibn al-Harith ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib composed a poem in which he gave a broad wide-sweeping picture and showed the ancient struggle which existed from the time of the Apostle of God. He showed the sufferings of the 'Alids from the earliest times: how they were killed and imprisoned; how their rights were ignored and no attention was paid to God's injunction about the Prophet's next of kin.

However, the Prophet belonged to the family which the 'Alids belonged to and their enemies would be punished. When they had been summoned to guidance, they turned away from it. They rejoiced that they had killed the believers from the family of Hashim and their supporters. Justice would come to them at the hands of revolutionary tribesmen.

Then the poet mentioned some of the supporters of the 'Alids who were killed in the early wars of Islam and those at the battle of Siffin who had died as martyrs fighting for Imam 'Ali, men like Dhu al-Shahadatayn (Khuzayma ibn Thabit) and 'Ammar b. Yasir.

He went on to mention other 'Alid supporters who became martyrs when Ziyad was governor of Kufa, men like Rashid al-Hujari and Mitham al-Tammar. Then he turned to revolutionaries who were martyred at Karbala' with al-Husayn, men like Zuhayr and 'Uthman ibn 'Ali.

He demanded that these men be restored to life and threatened vengeance against those who had killed them. In particular, he pointed to the possibility of vengeance coming from Yemen where there were men whose fathers had been loyal supporters of religion and Imam 'Ali.

* * *

'Awf ibn 'Abd Allah ibn al-Ahmar al-Azdi, one of the Penitents (*tawwabun*) who revolted against the

Umayyads under the leadership of Sulayman b. Surad al-Khuzai's to demand vengeance for al-Husayn, composed a poem of lamentation. It appears that the poem may have been composed during the revolt.

In the poem he called for al-Husayn's death to be proclaimed as the death of the noblest man. It was the poor and needy, the deprived who would weep for al-Husayn. Al-Husayn was an Imam who had every right to complain about many of his followers, for he was exposed to lances and swords and betrayed on the banks of the Euphrates.

The poet urged the *umma*, which has become lost and gone stupidly astray, to return to God. He then declared his intention to fight against Yazid with an army and to test which of the two groups was really more cowardly. The poet called on anyone who wept for al-Husayn whenever the sun rises or darkness falls. He reviled the people who sent for al-Husayn and gave him false promises of support but were not with him at the battle to defend him.

He probably included himself among such people, for he goes on to say that he wished now that he had been there. If he had been there, he would have struck out against these hateful enemies and defended al-Husayn with his sword for as long as he was able to.

* * *

The poet, Abu Dihbil Wahb ibn Zam'a al-Jumahi was a contemporary of Mu'awiya ibn Abi Sufiyan and his son, Yazid. He used to compose poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn and defamatory poems against the Umayyads so that he had to avoid people. He lived in the first century of the hijra. 15

In one of his poems, he gave a picture of his passionate concern for the dead heroes at Karbala. The nobility and integrity of those who were killed there is contrasted with the sinful extravagance of the Umayyads, with their drinking and their humiliation of chaste women.

The poet saw that Islam had been corrupted and was wandering blindly in the darkness with nobody to lead it as a sinful man was in control of affairs and was incapable of putting anything right. This corruption of Islam had been caused by those who had killed al-Husayn. These men, namely the Umayyads, had turned away from good in order to preserve their transitory power.

The poet then gave another pitiful picture of the events at Karbala¹ where a child was killed by arrows and children were left orphaned with no one to console them. He, then promised that he would always remember events and weep over them. Finally he promised to fight against the Umayyads and either die or defeat them.

In this ode, we find an awareness of the real situation in the Umayyad regime: luxury and oppression, deviation from Islam in accordance with passion for government and domination. There is also a sincere grief and a clear and open spirit of vengeance. It is a vengeance which is drawing near but it is not merely retaliation and a cure for himself. It is only to restore justice and bring truth back to its rightful

place.

* * *

In our view, this kind of poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn was the kind of lamentation poetry which prevailed during the Umayyad period, despite the assumption which has been made of the existence of other examples which do not represent the spirit of the age nor the psychological characteristics of the Shi'ite in that age.

In the 'Abbasid period the call for vengeance against the Umayyads becomes almost inaudible in the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn. Its place is left to the kind of poetry of lamentation, in which there is grief and in some of which there is satisfaction that the 'Abbasids have avenged the martyrs of Karbala'.

The Umayyads used to represent the rival who had committed the crime. The Shi'ite poet gave expression to his and the Shi'ite people's desire for vengeance against them by threat, promise of punishment and incitement to vengeance. We believe that the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn which has come down to us from that period is only a few of the examples of such poetry.

Most of this kind of lamentation poetry, and particularly the most violent in impact and the most lavish in ideas of force and vengeance, has been lost and its effect forgotten because of the circumstance prevailing at that time. These were circumstances of fear of persecution and death which made the poets of the Shi'a keep this kind of poetry secret, prevented the narrators from recording it and stopped the people from reciting it. Thus only a little has come down to us.

2. The Early 'Abbasid Period

The Umayyad state came to an end and its authority was inherited by another state in accordance with a new mental attitude towards understanding the task of government and in accordance with a new style in carrying government out. Thus the direct rival and his state had come to an end and another state had come into existence as a result of using the slogan, 'Vengeance for al-Husayn'. This was the Abbasid state; they were Hashimites and descendants of the uncle of al-Husayn.

The poets of the Shi'a and other poets naturally continued to compose poems of lament. However, some of the poets attempted, in their laments, to reflect the new situation which had come about through the rise of the 'Abbasid state on the ruins of the Umayyads.

Some of the poets composed odes in lamentation for al-Husayn, in which there was grief but in which there was also –as we have indicated earlier– joy and gladness at the fact that the wicked Umayyads had received their promised punishments at the hands of the 'Abbasids.

Among such poets was 'Abd Allah ibn al-Mu'tazz (247–296). Ibn al-Muttazz provides us with two examples of such poetry. In the first he claims that the 'Abbasids have punished the Umayyads for the

wrongdoing. They have made the Umayyads taste the fruits of sin. If it had not been for the 'Abbasids, the blood of al-Husayn would have flowed at no cost and to no avail.

In his other ode he claims that the 'Abbasids did not just weep with tears for al-Husayn. In fact they wept with the blood which flowed from their swords which destroyed the Umayyad state. (Is this a suggestion against the Imams of the Holy Family and their Shi'a?) He goes on to assert that it was the 'Abbasids who raised the slogan of his name in battle. They let their hair fall long over their shoulder in grief and they put on black clothes in mourning for him.

* * *

Another of these poets is al-Qasim ibn Yusuf ibn Subayh, who died at the beginning of the third century of the hijra. His brother was Ahmad b. Yusuf b. Subayh, one of the most excellent secretaries of al-Ma'mun (d. 212). His brother al-Qasim died after him.

In one of his poems, the poet lamented for al-Husayn and described the dreadful acts of the Umayyads including their recognition of Sumayya as the mother of Ziyad as a result of an illicit relationship with Abu Sufyan, and the resulting attempt to declare Ziyad legitimate and therefore the legitimate brother of Mu'awiya.

He recalled that the Umayyad might was destroyed at the battle of al-Zab. This poem is an explanation that it was the 'Abbasids, 'the ones who sought that vengeance', who achieved it. They were the ones who killed the Umayyads, they were the ones who 'crushed with a crushing blow' (*hashamu bi-hashimatin*), the Hashimites, the 'Abbasids.

Perhaps the 'Abbasids, themselves, were behind this attempt to form a tendency within lamentation poetry, which would portray them to the Shi'a as bringers of divine vengeance, so that thereby they might gain popularity with the Shi'a of the Holy Family and use that to diminish the intensity of 'Alid opposition to them. This opposition, which had emerged soon after the establishment of the 'Abbasid state, had become very severe.

This view may be supported by the fact the authors of the poem, which we have just discussed, were both men who belonged to the 'Abbasid regime.

'Abd Allah ibn al-Muttazz ibn al-Mutawakkil ibn al-Mu'tasam ibn Harun al-Rashid was an important prince in the ruling 'Abbasid family. It was in his own interest and that of his family that he should spread a poetic attitude in lamentation poetry which adopted the idea that it was the 'Abbasids who had achieved vengeance for al-Husayn.

There can be no doubt, even for a moment, that he composed the poem of lamentation for al-Husayn out of his own and his family's special interests, not out of any genuine emotion. His attitude towards the descendants of Abu Talib (Talibids), in general, and the 'Alids, in particular, was an attitude of hostility

and hatred. In his collection of poems, he has an ode of forty lines in which he defames the Talibids and the 'Alids.

Al-Qasim ibn Yusuf was from a family which worked in the service of the 'Abbasids and their regime. His brother, Ahmad ibn Yusuf Subayh (d. 212), has been described as one of the most excellent of the secretaries of al-Mamun. Our poet, al-Qasim, was put in charge of land-tax of the Sawad in Iraq. 'He collected more of it than anyone else in the time of al-Ma'mun.'

This is reported in the book, *al-Awraq*, of al-Suli. That quotation means, in effect, that he oppressed the people and treated them harshly, even though he improved his position with his master, al-Ma'mun.

This attempt may have been part of an overall plan to reduce the influence of the 'Alids in the Islamic mind, in general, and the mind of the Shi'a of the Holy Family, in particular.

The Imams of the Holy Family relied on several factors in the mind of the *umma*: that their behaviour was regarded as ideal and free from any faults and blemishes; they were the descendants of the Apostle and connected to the Imamate in a successive chain through designation; that they were oppressed by the Umayyads in terms of the fact that the Umayyads had usurped authority after the Commander of the faithful, 'Ali, insofar as Imam al-Hasan had not been able to continue in government; and that they were the source of Islamic legislation for the laws by virtue of being the heirs of the Apostle's knowledge; and therefore were Imams of the Muslims.

The 'Abbasid plan was to thwart this by trying to deprive them of these qualities. They constantly attempted to belittle the Imams of the Holy Family. They tried, in vain, to disfigure their reputation in the eyes of the people. Yet their behaviour was transparent and obvious to anyone.

The 'Abbasids attempted to demonstrate that the Imams of the Holy Family were ignorant of the injunctions of Islamic law. They failed after having made some attempts with Imam al-Rida and Imam Muhammad al-Jawad. Thereafter they turned to encouraging the growth of other legal tendencies.

The 'Abbasids tried to deprive them of the quality of being sons of the Apostle of God in a negative way, by concentrating on the son of the daughter not being a son, and in a positive way, by concentrating on the paternal uncle being a closer relation to a person than the son of his daughter.

They did this because they were sons of al-'Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet and from that they maintained that they were more entitled to the caliphate than the Imams of the Holy Family from the line of al-Husayn and that they were more entitled than the sons of al-Hasan to the caliphate which was inherited from the Apostle of God.

The 'Abbasids attempted to deprive them of the quality of being oppressed by explaining that it was they who had taken vengeance for al-Husayn and the other Talibids who had been martyred during the time of the Umayyads. It, then, followed that the Talibids, and especially the 'Alids, had attained their objective

through the vengeance which had been taken and therefore did not have anything further to complain about.

If there was a plan like this, it failed completely and achieved absolutely none of its aims.

As far as our research is concerned, the attempt to form an attitude in the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn, which adopted the idea that vengeance was achieved through the 'Abbasids soon failed.

The basic contradiction between the aspirations of the 'Alids, especially in the line of al-Husayn, and the 'Abbasids clinging on to power was liable to thwart any attempt to lessen its intensity. The 'Abbasids tried to wipe out completely their Alid opponents. They drove them out of every land and stifled their activity with a ferocity that has had no parallel. This policy led to the 'Abbasids becoming like the Umayyads in Shi'ite consciousness. Indeed they were portrayed as even worse and more despicable.

As a result, a poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn grew, which was full of the demand for vengeance against the 'Abbasids as well as condemning the Umayyads.

Among the poets of this kind of lamentation poetry is Mansur al-Numayri (d. 190 or 193). In one extract of a poem, he declared that the family of the Prophet and those who loved them were silent out of fear of being killed. The Christians and Jews were given safety while those from the *umma* of Islam were in distress.

Ibn Qutayba commented in his book, *al-Shi'r wa-al-Shu'ara* that al-Rashid recited one poem by Mansur al-Numayri after the latter had died and declared that he wanted him captured and burnt.

In this poem the grief expressed was moderated but it painted a clear picture of the problem faced by the descendants of al-Husayn. The most serious allegation in it was that the poet considered the 'Abbasid government to be a legal continuation of the Umayyad government which killed al-Husayn.

He regarded the vengeance against the 'Abbasids as the same as the vengeance against the Umayyads because the attitude of both the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids towards the offspring of the Prophet was one and the same. He asked, 'Are you jealous that I love the sons of Muhammad?' Then he taunted them with the words, 'Let there be dirt in the mouth of the man who is jealous.'

He declared that they had treated the offspring of the Prophet with harshness. Finally he threatened that there were men ready to fight with weapons on behalf of the family of the Prophet. Perhaps this was what caused Harun al-Rashid to order him to be killed when he heard his poem. However, when they reached him, he had already died and his funeral cortege was going to the grave.

Di'bil ibn 'Ali al-Khuza'i (148-246) composed a similar kind of poem to the one just mentioned. In it he cursed the Umayyads who were led by the devil. He then turned to the shocking treatment they meted out to the women in al-Husayn's camp.

After this he brought out the following fact, that the corrupt regime was using the people to support its members and its government apparatus without any concern for the good of the people. The result which emerged from the people's consent to the wicked regime was that they had lost their personality, they had lost 'the nobility of life and that is precious.'

Di'bil promised the family of Muhammad that he and his people would prevail for them, in time to come, 'over the cursed people, who are grim-faced (*'abus*).' Thus he was promising vengeance. But vengeance against whom? Against the Umayyads? The Umayyads had disappeared, never to return, and Di'bil was born after the fall of their regime. (There may be an allusion to what Di'bil is intending in his words 'one day we will prevail over a cursed people who are grim-faced (*'abus*).')

The Arabic word *'abus* comes from the same root as 'Abbas and it may be used as a deliberate allusion to the 'Abbasids.) At any rate it seems clear to us that he, like his predecessor, Mansur al-Numayri, was speaking about vengeance against the legal continuation of the Umayyads as represented by the 'Abbasid regime which was no better in relation to 'the family of Muhammad' than the Umayyad regime. Indeed it may have been worse than it on many occasions.

* * *

In another poem of lamentation, Di'bil describes how al-Husayn was cheated by men, who marched against him while saying, 'this is the leader of men.' This was the way people repaid Muhammad for bringing them divine revelation; they opposed him by opposing his son. All the tribes were involved and partners in shedding al-Husayn's blood. They carried out killing, capturing, burning and plundering just as if they were raiding Byzantine territory.

Yet the poet said that there was a way in which the Umayyads could be excused, for their family had been among the first opponents of the Prophet and as soon as they got the opportunity they returned to their disbelief. However there could be no excuse for the 'Abbasids' treatment of the family of the Prophet. The poet turned his attention to Tus where he had been staying at the grave of the pure man. This is a reference to Imam al-Rida who was poisoned by al-Mamun.

He pointed out that there were two graves in close proximity at Tus, one was the grave of the best of men, namely Imam 'Ali Rida, and the other was the grave of the worst of men, namely the 'Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid. He contrasted the two and in a bitter verse declared that 'the abominable would not profit by being close to the pure nor will the pure suffer any harm by nearness to the abominable.'

* * *

These poets include al-Bisami-'Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Nasr ibn Mansur ibn Bisam al-Baghdadi-(d. 302). When the 'Abbasid Caliph al-Mutawakkil destroyed the tomb of al-Husayn, he wrote verses in which he declared that if the Umayyads had killed the son of the daughter of the Prophet, his own relatives, the 'Abbasids had treated him in a similar way by destroying his grave. In fact it seemed that

they were sorry that they had not taken part in killing and were trying to compensate for that by pursuing his corpse.

Another of such poets was al-Qadi al-Tannukhi-Ali ibn Muhammad-(d. 342). He wrote a refutation of the ode in which Ibn al-Muttazz had defamed the Talibids and the 'Alids. He said that Ibn al-Mu'tazz had accused them of rising up in revolt with the slogan of vengeance for Zayd (the brother of the Imam al-Baqir who was killed in a revolt against the Umayyads).

Then he turned on him and accused the 'Abbasids of using a similar slogan. He recounted the 'Abbasids' mistreatment of the Talibids and 'Alids: the oppression by al-Mansur and al-Ma'mun's poisoning of Imam al-Rida.

Thus in popular consciousness the 'Abbasids had changed into symbols of oppression like the Umayyads because they had followed a policy of murder and persecution against the 'Alids and their Shi'a.

Al-Sharif al-Radi (359-406) was one of these poets. He, too, wrote comparing the attitude of the later 'Abbasid regime with that of the earlier Umayyad regime and complaining of their treatment of the 'Alids.

3. The Later 'Abbasid Period

In the second half of the 'Abbasid era and the period after it, the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn changed generally into poetry of tears without any challenge, spirit of resistance or slogans of vengeance. This is not to deny the existence of some poetic works which preserve the spirit of the old school of the Umayyad era. However, these are works which lack sincerity and reality. Their challenges are merely imaginary heroics divorced from reality.

We find many examples in the poetry of later poets like al-Sayyid Haydar al-Hilli, and others like him. This genre confirms the rule which states that whenever the situation becomes bankrupt and decayed there emerges a literature of compensation which searches for imaginary acts of heroism or re-enacts past acts of heroism which have no connection with the life which is being lived.

Perhaps some of the poetic works of al-Sharif al-Radi in this historical period are exceptions to this rule in respect to our subject. In these works, he used to point to the Fatimid state in Egypt as a representative, in some ways, of the 'Alids and, therefore, as a candidate to take revenge for them on the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids.

In one poem he reminded the Umayyads that vengeance was waiting for them in distant lands. Swords were ready and horses waiting in their stable. He was waiting for the day when the swords would strike them down. Perhaps there may be in these verses an allusion to the Mahdi.¹⁶

He, also, has poetry of this kind which does not speak about the immediate situation even though there

are allusions in it to the circumstances which he is living through. This is represented as suppressed resistance to the 'Abbasid government under whom he was living.¹⁷

His brother, al-Murtada, wrote in similar vein.¹⁸

In this period, the poetry for al-Husayn changed into pure lament without any spirit of challenge and slogans of vengeance. The immediate symbols of vengeance had been destroyed with the fall of the Umayyad state and the deaths of the Umayyads and the desecration of their graves.¹⁹

In addition to this there was the break up which had occurred within the 'Alid ranks. The 'Alids of the line of al-Hasan had continued the struggle against the 'Abbasids trying, in vain, to ignite the land with revolution. It had brought destruction, death and banishment to them and those of the Shi'a who supported them.

On the other hand, the Imams of the Holy Family had laid down another policy. This was to build a cultural structure for the individual Muslim and to form a cultural climate for opposition which would be based on changing the mental attitude of the popular base of the existing government through ideas. This was to be achieved by transforming the Shi'a into an effective intellectual force in ordinary society.²⁰

At this time lamentation poetry for al-Husayn, like the *ziyara*, still had to be considered as a cultural factor which participated with other cultural factors in consolidating the relationship of the individual with Islam as it struggled and with its men and movements.

Although as a result of the change in the political situation in this period, namely the disappearance of the Umayyads, the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn had lost the justification for one of its elements, the element of challenge and vengeance, it did neglect to mention the Umayyads just because they had disappeared. In the same way they have continued to be mentioned in every age and their memory has been preserved.

However it was not as an object of revenge but merely in order to curse them and denounce them, their policies and their deeds. At this stage in the development of the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn the 'Abbasids were added as a result of a change which had entered into the psychology and circumstances of the Shi'ites.

* * *

There were two objects of enmity to the Fatimids: the Umayyads in Spain, who were their political rivals and the heirs who traced the descendants back to the Umayyads in Damascus, who had killed al-Husayn and persecuted the descendants of 'Ali; and the 'Abbasids in Baghdad, who were their political rivals in Egypt and Syria, who had pursued the policy of the Umayyad, and gone beyond it, in persecuting the descendants of 'Ali.

The poetry of lamentation and the poetry of praise, which included the expressions of pride and lamentation that the Fatimid poets pressed upon their master on great occasions, differs in its content from the lamentation poetry of the East in the same period.

It contains the spirit of threatening and promising punishment and it raises the slogans of vengeance. It recalls the political and military victories achieved by the Fatimids as being a support for religion and vengeance against its enemies, the killers of the Holy Family, who were the guarantors of the religion of God; it counts them as more than victories.

The outstanding representative of this kind of poetry in this period among the Fatimids was Muhammad ibn Hanī' ibn Muhammad ibn Sa'dun al-Andalusi (320 or 326–362). In a poem in which he praised the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah, he also mentioned what happened to al-Husayn. He related that the accomplishments of the Fatimid Caliph were not through luck. Men must be united on a path that leads to truth.

They were eager to fight for religion as it called to them that it had been oppressed. The 'Abbasid caliphate was ridiculed as dependent on others and described as wandering aimlessly between the power of the Buwayhids from Daylam and the Turks.

As a result of the Fatimid Caliph doubts have been removed and truth was no longer oppressed. Then the idea of the oppression of truth made the poet turn his thought to Karbala'. He mentioned how there al-Husayn was deprived of water to perform ritual Ablutions for prayer and although the Euphrates was overflowing with water, he was allowed none to drink.

He described the stifling atmosphere of the desert and the deprivations of al-Husayn. He referred to the humiliation of the womenfolk of al-Husayn. Then he declared that 'the best grandson of Muhammad 21 was destroyed but the next of kin who would take vengeance was not destroyed.' (This is probably a reference to Imam 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin whom the Fatimids claimed to be descended from through Imam al-Baqir and al-Sadiq. It was the Fatimids, in the eyes of the poet, who would take vengeance.) He then says that even worse than the Umayyads were those who had been contemporary with the events but later desecrated the corpses. This is a reference to the 'Abbasids.

The attack on the 'Abbasids was continued when Ibn Hanī' raised a historical problem of great importance, even though the historical texts do not assist him in his claim. It is that al-'Abbas helped Abu Bakr to seize power after the Apostle and kept authority away from 'Ali ibn Abi Talib.

In another poem in praise of the Fatimid Caliph, al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah, he declared that behind the rights of the son of the Apostle here were lion-hearted men who were well-armed. He asked God that the Fatimid Caliph might now scatter the Umayyads.

In what are obvious references to the suffering of al-Husayn at Karbala', he talked of depriving them of water to drink and wash with. Then he went on to accuse men of lying when they claimed that the

Umayyads had rights. They had, in fact, stripped away the right of the wasi, the true Imam who has been stipulated to act on behalf of the *umma*.

Ibn Hani ' again praised the Fatimid caliph in another poem but this time he mentioned the conquest of Egypt and criticized the 'Abbasids. He told the inquiring 'Abbasids that Egypt had been conquered. Vengeance for the son of the Prophet had not been lost. It was the descendants of the grandson of the Prophet who were the true rulers not the 'Abbasids.

He asked them whether there were verses in the Qur 'an about the grandson of the Prophet or about their ancestor who was a late convert to Islam, 'Abbas. He accused them of imprisoning the noblest of men, namely the 'Alids, in Iraq. Then he gave a warning that soon there would be little left of the 'Abbasid empire for them. The world would be transferred to the family of Muhammad and the rights of the Talibids would be restored.

In this way, Ibn Hani ' continued to raise the slogans of vengeance and victory on behalf of the Fatimids in Egypt and North Africa against the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids at a time when these calls had ceased to be heard in the lands of the eastern caliphate and the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn and poetry in praise of the Holy Family had lost this element from the elements which formed it.

Another of the Fatimid poets was Prince Tamim, the son of the Caliph al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah (d. 374). He composed an ode in lament for al-Husayn. He declared that as a result of the attack of the Umayyads on the Holy Family, he would pursue them until they departed but they would find no safe haven anywhere.

* * *

We will now leave this Fatimid poetry in order to return to the poetry of lamentation in its original land. We notice that, after the fall of the Umayyads, it was transformed into poetry of grief without any challenge or spirit of vengeance towards them. However, this was not a transformation into despair; it continued to throb with the hope that the great day of vengeance would come.

After the fall of the Umayyads, the idea of immediate vengeance lost its place in the poetry. Instead the idea of vengeance by the Mahdi, who would fill the world with justice and fair treatment after it had been full of injustice and oppression became one of the outstanding features of the poetry of lamentation from the second century of the hijra onwards up to the present time.

The Mahdi was the one who would take vengeance for al-Husayn and all the oppressed against their oppressors: Umayyads, 'Abbasids and others. His punishment would be terrible as it would correspond with the hideous crimes which these oppressors had committed.

The doctrine of the Mahdi provided a psychologically cohesive force for the Shi'ite. Thus he did not despair, he was not destroyed psychologically as a result of the discovering that the 'Abbasids—with

regard to the 'Alids and their Shi'a—were only a Hashimite version of the Umayyads, or that they were even worse than the Umayyads.

We find that the 'Abbasids and those who came after them are considered, in Shi'ite consciousness, as a legal continuation of the Umayyads. Many of the texts of prayers of *ziyara* include passages which contain curses against the Umayyads and renunciations of those who followed them, those who were their partisans and those who continued their practice.

The nature of things demanded that the Shi'ite should waste away and become utterly broken as a result of the harsh and bitter situation. However, many factors connected with religious law and with doctrine, among which was the doctrine of the Mahdi, preserved his psychological cohesiveness and provided him with hope of future happiness.

The doctrine of the Mahdi provided a psychological and doctrinal refuge which saved the Shi'ite from despair about worldly victory. This despair seemed likely in the early period, to cast its shadow over the psychology of a section of those in the Shi'a.

Dik al-Jinn (161–235 or 236) has expressed his hope that the oppressors would receive their punishment in the Hereafter. He told his soul to be steadfast and endure. People were rushing around on the earth while its master, the Mahdi, was awaited to exact a settlement. Then on the Last Day the slain (al-Husayn) would arise and his killers would be asked why they had done it. Dreadful punishment in Hell would then follow. Until then, there must be resignation. In the future, the one who was awaited would come.

We find this spirit of worldly defeat, submission to tyranny and hope for change and for vengeance in the Hereafter is widespread in the lamentation poetry of the period later than this. However, though evidence that this idea was not expressed in other texts, as far as we know, it seems that despair had given way to the great expectation of a great worldly victory at the hands of the Mahdi.

The third century of the hijra sees the beginning of this idea, namely the idea of the Mahdi, in the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn. Among the first poets, in whose poetry this idea appears, is Di'bil al-Khuza'i (148–246).

In an ode in lament and praise of the Holy Family, he declared that if it was not for him whom he hoped to come soon, grief would break his heart. The revolt of the Imam was certain and he would come forward in the name of God and with His blessings. He would distinguish right and wrong for the Shi'a and would repay men with blessings and punishment. The poet told his soul to rejoice for not far away everything was coming.

Al-Qasim ibn Yusuf, the secretary, (died in the first half of the third century of the hijra) said in part of an ode in lamentation of al-Husayn that he hoped that a hand which brought healing to the grief in the heart would bring them the Mahdi who would arise and take control (*al-qa'im al-mahdi*) sooner or later.

Another poet, 'Ali ibn Ishaq al-Zahi (318–352) mentioned concerning the Holy Family that men's eyes flowed with tears for them because of the way those tyrants treated them. How God would change things for the oppressor with the man who would arise (*qa'im*) with justice, publicly announcing the truth!

Ali ibn Hammad (d. latter half of the fourth century) recorded in part of an ode in lamentation for al-Husayn an address to the Mahdi. He called upon the awaited Imam and asked him when the promise which he had given would be fulfilled. Then the poet affirmed the certainty that God would fulfill his promise so that they would see the standard of victory.

The rising of the Imam was certain. He would arise and establish the pillars of religion with swords and spears. He would administer the law with justice, fairness and guidance helped by Jesus, Joshua and al-Khidr. The poet, referring to himself by name as Ibn Hammad, hoped that he might be able to unsheathe his sword and strike against the enemies of his masters. However, if he died before then, he would continue to fight against them by cursing them in his poetry.

In part of an ode by Mihyar al-Daylami (d. 428), he said that the time might soon come when truth would rise over the world and deficiency would be overcome. He knew that God had brought about some things but his heart would not be comforted until he heard the call of the man who would arise and set things right, the Mahdi.

In these verses Mihyar saw that vengeance had come to the Umayyads at the hands of the 'Abbasids. However, it was insufficient vengeance, and he was waiting for the great vengeance at the hands of the Mahdi.

Al-Sayyid al-Murtada (355–436) continued into a new period the expression of the hope of victory at the hands of the Mahdi as a fixed element in the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn.

Later, we will examine some of the examples from the later centuries and the fourth century of the hijra.

* * *

Another element was introduced into the lamentation poetry alongside the idea of vengeance through the Mahdi. From the middle of the fourth century an idea began to appear in lamentation poetry that the vengeance would not belong to this world. It would only occur in the Hereafter. The role of the poet became limited to the enumeration of merits, the portrayal of the tragedy of Karbala¹ and bringing people close to God, through lamentation poetry, in the hope of gaining reward and entering Paradise.

Perhaps Abu Firas al-Hamdani (320–357) was the first poet in whose poetry this idea appeared in its first beginnings. Later it became firmly rooted in lamentation poetry. However, this is a matter which should be treated with caution. Attention should be paid to the personality and psychology of Abu Firas, his position with the authorities and the nature of his Shi'ism as well as the geographical position of the Hamdanid state between the 'Abbasids and the Fatimids.

All of that may have militated against his own view that revenge and vengeance were worldly and personal. Does the appearance of the idea of revenge in the Hereafter in this poetry indicate that the cause of the Holy Family had begun, at his time, to lose its political effectiveness in ordinary life in the area and to have become a sacred historical subject only, as happened later?

Abu Firas composed an ode in lamentation for al-Husayn in which he mentioned that God seemed forbearing towards the wickedness of wicked men. Yet such men were damned and punishment would eventually come to them, even though they now seemed to think that they could kill God's children and no punishment would come to them. They even managed to suppose that they would be able to drink from the waters of Paradise while al-Husayn drunk his own blood which they had shed!

Among the poets, in whose lamentation poetry this idea appeared, is Abu al-Hasan¹Ali Ahmad al-Jurjani al-Jawhan (d.c. 380 A.H). He composed an ode in lament for al-Husayn in which he described how God saw the killers of al-Husayn dripping with his blood. They stood abashed before God while God announced that they were people who had become surrounded by evil and had exchanged true faith for the unbelief of the blind.

They killed al-Husayn as he was suffering from thirst and now they hoped for God's kindness at the waters of Paradise. Then, the poet called on God to take vengeance on them for all the evil that they had done. He asked the killers of al-Husayn what they would say in the Hereafter when Fatima was their adversary and the judge on behalf of the oppressed was God.

The poetry of Sahib Isma'il ibn 'Abbad (326–385) also uses this idea and he repeats it in more than one ode.

In one of these odes he gave a similar picture of the Last Day. Fatima surrounded by her father, her husband and her sons would come looking for judgment. She would ask God why her children were slaughtered. God would tell her not to worry, as these people were all doomed to eternal punishment in Hell-fire.

In another poem Sahib ibn 'Abbad told the Shi'a not to grieve. They could be sure of God's concern and they should not try to hurry it. Soon they would see those who hated the Shi'a in the depths of the pit of Hell while they would be blessed by being with God and the Prophet in the garden of Paradise.

The same poet repeats similar words of comfort in another ode. He told the Shi'a not to worry, for on the Day of Resurrection there would be satisfaction for them when Hell-fire blazed with the crackling sounds of punishment.

Then Muhammad and his entrusted delegate (*wasi*), namely 'All, together with his two grandsons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn would arise for the judgment of the wrongdoers by God, who is all-powerful, all-conquering. There God would seize the evildoers and Hell-fire would receive them.

Sahib ibn 'Abbad remarked in another poem that if Muhammad saw the suffering at Karbala', if he had seen the grief-stricken sister of al-Husayn, Zaynab, being taken prisoner by one of the murderers of al-Husayn, Shimr, he would have complained to God about this—and he did complain to God about it. In the end Shimr would come before God and he would be most entitled to his punishment.

Another of the poets who used this idea was 'Ali ibn Hammad al-'Abdi al-Basri. (He was born at the beginning of the fourth century of the hijra and died towards the end of it.)

In one ode he described a terrible picture of the punishments of the murderers of al-Husayn in the Hereafter. He said that the enemies of al-Husayn and his followers would learn the truth on the Day of Resurrection. Fatima would come forward surrounded by troops of angels. In her hand she would have the shirt of al-Husayn daubed with his blood, and the angels would weep at the sight of it. Then God would call out: 'Where is Yazid?' Yazid and his followers would be brought forward, dragging their feet, and their faces would be black.

Then God would order them to be killed and then brought back to life. All the sons of Fatima would kill them, while the Shi'a witnessed this. Then God would gather al-Husayn's murderers in Hell-fire where they would live forever. When their skins had been thoroughly cooked by the fire, new skins would be given them to be burnt again.

Al-Sharif al-Radi was another of the poets who used this idea. In one ode, he described the Apostle of God's attitude towards the murderers of al-Husayn on the Day of Judgment. He would complain to God about them. And what hope was there for people whom the Apostle of God complains about? He would tell God how they had not given refuge to his family, they had not defended it and they had not supported it.

They had changed the religion which he had brought them and had treated his family dreadfully. He declared to God that on that day he would be their adversary and he would come before God and them as one who had been oppressed.

Another of al-Sharif al-Radi's odes in lament for al-Husayn warned the killers of al-Husayn that just as they attacked people who were deprived of water on the banks of the Euphrates, so would they be attacked and deprived of the eternal waters of Paradise. There at Karbala ' the wicked had dealt out evil. Now in Heaven they would receive evil. At the final hour, they would be judged by the just grandfather, the Prophet, of the men whom they killed.

Among these poets, there was also Mu'in al-Din Yahya ibn Salmama al-Hasfaki (460–553). In one of his poems he pictured al-Husayn's death on the banks of the Euphrates. The Euphrates nearby could see him thirsty but 'Ubayd Allah ibn Ziyad, the son of a father who made fraudulent claims about his lineage, denied him water. Yet his death would light a blazing fire. God would be sufficient to bring punishment to those who had oppressed al-Husayn and his family.

In this way the idea of divine punishment in the Hereafter against the oppressors alongside the idea of vengeance against the oppressors carried out by the Mahdi became two established elements in the poetry of lament for al-Husayn.

We can observe the extent of the change which had come upon the psychology of the individual when we compare this attitude which threatened direct vengeance. When the threat of divine punishment is made, it is made into a worldly tool that is looked for and exists.

Some of the verses of Khalid ibn al-Muhajir ibn Khalid ibn al-Walid expressed that idea. In them the poet warned the Umayyads that the tomb at Karbala' would be remembered and God would be sufficient for them in His anger.

Later other ideas came into the lamentation poetry for al-Husayn. One of these was the idea of salvation through the composing of poetry of lament for al-Husayn. The poet wrote his ode and at its end he begged the Holy Family and al-Husayn to be intercessors for him with God on the Day of Resurrection. Frequently he would mention his own name in the poem as if he was putting his signature at the end of the poem. This has been apparent in the poetry of lament since the ninth century of the hijra.

Another idea was of abstinence from the world and disparagement of it. This idea appeared in a limited form in lamentation poetry from the fourth century of the hijra. However, it then disappeared only to re-emerge with some force in the tenth century of the hijra.

The third idea which began to appear in lamentation poetry for al-Husayn was the idea of fate. God had decreed what had happened. If it had not been for that, what had happened would not have happened.

The entry of these ideas into the poetic content of the lamentation indicates the emergence of a change in the psychology, the situation of life and way of thinking of the Shi'ite. The poets expressed these changes indirectly through their lamentation poetry.

Basically the cause of Karbala' was no longer able to influence the daily political life of the people as a political cause. The connection between the people and political struggle for this cause had been broken. Those who aspired to authority seem to have abandoned the use of the slogans of Karbala' in their wars and struggles. Yet, the power of these slogans to have political influence in the general mentality, still continued.

There was no longer a symbol to which the emotion of revenge was directed in the existing political situation, for every political grouping in the political arena in the Islamic world were all consciously attached to the cause of al-Husayn and acknowledged its justice. Yet it was considered as something which had happened in history, not as something which had meaning for the present time.

Indeed Shi'ism, in one way or another, had destroyed all the artificial patchwork introduced into Islam. The 'Abbasids had lost their power when the system of emirates came to be applied throughout the

caliphate. The actual rulers in Baghdad became the Shi'a or those who put forward a claim of belonging to the Shi'a, while the rulers in Egypt were the Fatimid Shi'a.

At that time factors of internal break-up in the Islamic world began to carry on the destructive work of tearing apart the great political entities within it and then in dividing up smaller political entities also. They prompted religious, political, racial and regional groupings into civil wars which brought, in their wake, ruin, despair and destruction to the people and harm to the towns and countryside.

This political situation was accompanied by the growth of the Sufi movement with its different tendencies and origins so that it became a great cultural power in opposition to the traditional Islamic scholars and in opposition to the other cultural forces of literature, science and philosophy. Sufism became the cultural and religious spring at which the ordinary man drank.

The Muslim suffered expulsion from his home and land, from tyranny, from a loss of dignity, and from the plundering of his provisions and food. He was in constant fear for his life, his honour and his dignity. He suffered from devastating famines and plagues which used to destroy thousands of people. He suffered from the destruction of towns and the countryside by armies, which left behind them ruins and despair.

As a result of this situation, the Muslim formed a pessimistic outlook, fearful of the future, in which, if there was any hope at all, it was very little. This situation produced a favourable environment for the acceptance of the ideas and tendencies of the Sufism, of resignation which concentrated on the concept of death, the negation of the self, the evil in the world and the corruption in the soul.

It was anxious to abandon worldly activity and it put forward a concept of asceticism, which was not Islamic, an asceticism which had a negative attitude towards life and worldly activity.

We have put forward the view that this asceticism was not Islamic, because Islamic asceticism, as presented in the Qur'an and Sunna and the activities of the great representatives of Islam in the law and conduct, is a positive asceticism which combines the idea of productive work and a positive constructive attitude with a psychological and rational cohesion during disasters and tragedies, without the world occupying all man's activity and without it possessing all the areas of his thoughts.

This new psychological situation was reflected in the Muslim's life and formed all his cultural activity. Included in that was the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn, which contained this outlook of surrender and despair of any change.

As a result of this, the lamentation poetry for al-Husayn was cut off from its real place in the community. It spoke of the atrocity as history. It spoke of the glorious deed and compared the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids on the one side, with the 'Alids on the other. It expressed tearful emotions of grief.

The revolution of al-Husayn became emotional and religious. It was treated as one of the rituals, and not as a real effort in the daily situation of man in his relations with authority and society. Among the new

intellectual elements which entered into lamentation poetry for al-Husayn, as a result of the psychological situation of man, were: (a) disparagement of the world and fear of its influences. This was one of the effects of Sufi asceticism of resignation; (b) the view that lamentation for al-Husayn was a means of salvation in the Hereafter; (c) we will find in the middle of the third century of the hijra the beginnings of the expression of the idea of destiny in the poetry of lamentation. The poet expresses the view that what happened would not have happened unless God had decreed it. Sometimes we have even found some astrological ideas.

* * *

With regard to the first of the three elements mentioned above, we sometimes find it expressed in a direct form and at other times in an indirect way which is clear to anyone who has studied the general atmosphere in which the lament was composed.

Among the examples of direct expression are the verses of an ode of Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Sanawburi (d. 334). In these verses, the poet exclaimed that the cares of life would cease and his prayer for an easier life would be answered when he went to his death. As for a man who was constantly seeking profit, when such a man praised his activity, he should be told that praise for the family of Muhammad was more profitable.

Another example of this kind are the verses of Sahib Isma'il ibn 'Abbad (326-385). These suggested that the desire for vengeance of al-Husayn was now worldly and such emotions would not purify the man of religion.

A further example comes from the poetry of 'Ali ibn Hammad al-'Abdi (d. towards end of the fourth century). In his verses, he complained of time which controlled changes in fortune and had two tongues and two faces in the world. It had harmed the Holy Family and scattered them. It seemed to have sworn to destroy men, whether they were obstinate men or men of religion.

An ode by al-Sharif al-Radi (359-406) portrayed a mournful resignation to the tragic death of al-Husayn. It expressed thoughts like, 'There is no one to hope and nothing to hope for.' He went on to suggest that the ultimate end of men was annihilation just as the ultimate end of twigs was to wither away.

Despite the fact that everyone capable of weeping wept for al-Husayn, the situation had remained the same for a long time and those left without children remained without them. Desires were only sadness and concern for him and one was left perplexed and grief-stricken after the son of Fatima had been swallowed up by death in a waterless desert.

The vizier 'Abd al-Mujini 'Abdun (d. 520) composed verses in a similar vein. In these verses he complained of time which brought affliction after destruction. Time involved conflict because whenever it showed the two sides to any problem, these would become swords and spears fighting against each

other. There could be no peace.

If one tried to escape from the world and war, it was always there ready to disturb one. When one was happy with something, it was only to make it distant from you. States disappeared and memories of them vanished. The poet feared for everything which was protected and in which trust had been put.

In this way did this tendency in lamentation poetry grow. We will find it of increasing prominence in later centuries.

It might be argued that this kind of attitude is natural in the poetry of lamentation, and we can find it at all periods and among all people. Death raises great questions in the mind about existence and destiny. These questions produce a special mental vision of events.

However, in answer to that, we would say that there is a clear difference between the attitude, which comes about as a result of the blows and tragedies of life, and the established philosophical attitude which grows out of an intellectual and psychological situation which gives its imprint to man's behaviour and attitude towards events.

The latter is what we witness in the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn in this period. The poets of lamentation for al-Husayn, in representing and expressing this view, are expressing their vision of their milieu and their times because—as we have already mentioned—this view imprints itself on the cultural and artistic production of the man of that period just as it imprints itself on the behaviour of great sections of the people.

Nonetheless we admit that the amount of expressions of this ascetic spirituality is much less in the lamentation poetry for al-Husayn than we would expect to find. In our view, this is due to two reasons, the first of which is general and the second particular. The general reason goes back to the Shi'ite attitude toward Sufism in general.

This Shi'ite attitude, as a result of the efforts of the scholars of Islamic law towards Sufism, has been less influenced by Sufi movements and tendencies. Therefore their influence has remained limited. (One should observe the relations between Shi'ism and Sufism.) Certainly, the Shi'a had their Sufi orders just as they were influenced by the general Sufi atmosphere, and a rich Sufi literature grew among them. However, the Shi'ite was less influenced by the Sufis because he remained much closer to the scholars of Islamic law.

The particular reason goes back to the nature of the tragedy of al-Husayn. There is in Shi'ite consciousness an awareness of the power of the Umayyad presence as a direct and indirect cause of all the tragedies and sufferings which befell the Holy Family at Karbala' and before and after it. This powerful presence of the Umayyads has made the Shi'ite, when exposed to tragedy, see only its anticipated objective causes without looking for transcendental causes.

Were he to do that, he would be looking for acceptable excuses for the Umayyads. He has no desire to do that, either psychologically or emotionally. Thus he is inclined to put the burden on them entirely without finding any excuses for them in the transcendental world or the immediate world.

* * *

The idea of lamentation for al-Husayn being a means of salvation in the Hereafter is found at a very early period in the lamentation poetry for al-Husayn. It exists at the beginning of the second century of the hijra in the work of one poet, Sufyan ibn Mu'sab al-'Abdi al-Kufi, who died at about 120 in Kufa.

In one of his odes about the Holy Family, he addressed the Commander of the faithful and told him: 'I have made love of you a companion of piety and you have increased their companionship for me as if they are the best of companions.' He went on to say that he made his soul tired in praising 'Ali in the knowledge that its rest would come as a result of that tiredness caused by praising 'Ali.

We have put forward this poem despite our doubts about the genuineness of its attribution to the first century of the hijra, because of our doubt about the circulation of this style of dedicating odes to the people who were being praised. This was something which is only known of in a much later period of history. However, we put forward this poem in order to say that, on the assumption of its genuineness, it would be the first text to include this kind of dedication as far as we are aware.

This doubt is based on the doubtfulness of the use of this style of dedication as we have said. These verses are also attributed to Ibn Hammad al-'Abdi (d. towards end of the fourth century). As for the origin of the idea of salvation through poems of praise and lamentation, it has a doctrinal basis in the Sunna of the Prophet where there are texts which make love and affection for the Holy Family and their followers a means of pleasing God, of course in accordance with keeping the rules of the Islamic way of life (sharia).

We observe that al-'Abdi, the poet, did not confine the attainment of salvation to love and praise. He, also, coupled action with it. Thus he was loyal to the Islamic way of life. He said: 'I have made love for you a companion of piety, and you have increased their companionship for me as if they are the best of companions.' Such an idea is missing from lamentation poetry, and we do not find any expression of it until the beginnings of the fourth century of the hijra where we find that it has become a widespread characteristic in the odes of praise and lamentation for al-Husayn by the poets of the Shi'a.

However, we do find it in another form which is in terms of the words alone, or in terms of the love alone, as a way to salvation in the Hereafter. It is, however, seldom that we find the poet expressing his concern about the Islamic way of life (*shari'a*) in this area.

Among the poets who portray this idea in their poetry is Ahmad ibn al-Hasan al-Sanawburi (d. 334). His poetry portrays this idea alongside keeping close to the Islamic way of life (*shari'a*). In one poem he said that those who followed the guidance of the family of Muhammad would be successful. He, himself,

strove and toiled to do that and nothing else. Perhaps God would forgive him his sins.

Another of the representatives of this idea is Kashajim (died 350 or 360). In one poem he refers to the praises given to the Holy Family. He tells them that he needs to love them when he is summoned to the final judgment, for he is certain that through his love for them his sins will fall from him like dust.

Al-Zahi (318–352) is another of these poets. In some verses, he says that they hope that God will remove their grievous sins through their grief and weeping for the Holy Family, and that it will bring them intercession from the grandfather of the Holy Family, the Prophet.

A poet who expresses similar sentiments is Sahib ibn 'Abbad (326–385). In one poem he describes himself growing old and hopes that this praise for the Holy Family of the Prophet will bring forgiveness for his sins. They are masters who take praise rightfully as theirs and leaders whose glory is spread by word and by the sword. Ibn 'Abbad, mentioning himself by name, hopes to gain closeness to them by his praises of them and that these praises will bring perfection.

In another poem Ibn 'Abbad declares that he praises God, Lord of the throne, and his masters, the Holy Family. He calls on a Kufan to recite these words. Yet he makes it clear that he, Ibn 'Abbad, is their author, again he mentions himself by name. Then he adds that he seeks Heaven through these praises.

Ibn Hammad al-'Abdi (d. towards end of the fourth century hijra) is one of the poets of lamentation for al-Husayn who, in our view, uses this style of dedication most frequently and also most frequently expresses the idea of salvation through his love and praise of the Holy Family.

In one poem he asserts, using his name, Ibn Hammad al-'Abdi, that the only work he has is to use the letters *mim* and *'ayn* in poetry. The letter *mim* is the ultimate of his hopes as Muhammad belongs to it. (It is the first letter of Muhammad's name.) The letter *'ayn* is most concerned with 'Ali (the first letter of his name) who is a delight of the eye (*'ayn* in Arabic and therefore also of the letter *'ayn*). He calls upon God to bless them whenever the sun rises and sets.

At the end of one of his odes he asks God to receive his poem in praise of the Holy Family and that the reward for his poem should be fulfilled, namely that his scale should be balanced with good on the Day of Judgment. He goes on to say that he loves and praises them and curses anyone who avoids them. He declares that he never praises them out of acquisitiveness but only out of love for them. Mentioning himself by name, he says that Ibn Hammad hopes for the reward of heaven through praising them.

Another of the poets using these expressions is Mihyar al-Daylami (d. 428). In one poem, he asks how much his praises of the Holy Family will help him. He tells them that it is their duty at the Resurrection to weigh his balance with good if it is short in weight. Then he asserts that he is certain that his hopes in them will be true on that day, and not false.

In another poem, he talks about how much the man who envies him wished that he had not been alive at

that time so that the poet could compete with him through composing poetry in praise of the Holy Family. He tells his rival that the rival's desire is for the world while he knows that the black marks in God's account of his action will become white on the Day of Resurrection through his praise of the Holy Family.

The poet, Tala'i ' ibn Zurayk (d. 556) also wrote verses expressing similar ideas. In one ode, he tells his masters from the Holy Family that although his spear had not helped them in battle, he would support them with his verses. He has written poetry to preserve their memory and glory. Then he goes on to say that he hopes that through his love and sincerity towards them he will escape from Hell–fire in the life to come.

Ibn Jabr (420–487) composed poetry with similar sentiments. In some of his verses, he says that if you weep for the Holy Family, you will meet them with a joyful face in the Hereafter. The poet asks God to make his love of them a shield for him against the evils of oppression and unbelief. Then he hopes that when the debts of the enemies of the family of Muhammad keep them locked out of Heaven, his poetry in praise of them will redeem his debts and bring him success.

The poets of lamentation for al–Husayn have continued to express this idea in this fashion right up to modern times. We will study later where the poetry of lamentation has adopted other forms and other content.

What is the psychological background of this poetic attitude?

From the beginning of the fourth century of the hijra, the Shi'ite had lost his active contact with his doctrinal symbols. In this his situation was similar to the Muslim in general. He, too, had lost his active contact with his doctrinal symbols. Pessimistic and negative thoughts began to dominate. Action lost its sincere and transforming power in his consciousness.

A Sufi tendency and attitude influenced by ideas of magical powers over things prevailed in the popular Islamic mentality. Words and, in the most favourable circumstances, emotions and good intentions became the things which, the Muslim imagined, would be able to change the situation.

Because of this psychological and cultural situation, its effect began to appear even in Islamic law (e.g. a great concern with the forms and practices of worship, hypothetical problems in juris–prudence, numerous vows, the ceremonies of the Prophet's birthday and the recitation of certain texts to gain victory in battles).

The misery of the Shi'ite has increased, as a result of his sectarian affiliation, because not only was he continuing to face, in many of the historical stages of this period, official hostility, he even began to face popular antipathy.

This was when some of the extremist theologians and legal scholars of the Sunnis succeeded in presenting the Shi'ite to their common people as being outside Islam. Perhaps the growth of Persian

Shi'ism and its adoption of a political character through the foundation of the Safavid state helped in the growth of hatred toward the Shi'a outside the authority of the Safavid state.

IV. The Themes Of The Poetry Of Lamentation For Al-Husayn

The poetry of lament for al-Husayn is generally in agreement with the genre of lamentation poetry in many of the shared themes which inevitably abound in lamentation poetry. The poetry of lament for al-Husayn differs from the rest of lamentation poetry by the fact that it, alone, deals with some themes which arise out of the special nature of the subject.

Whether independent of or included with others, the poetry of lament comes in several ways.

Sometimes, it comes independently when a poet composes an ode which is solely concerned with lamenting for al-Husayn and the martyrs at Karbala'. Most of the poetry of lament for al-Husayn is like that.

Sometimes, it comes as part of a general lament for the Holy Family. Sometimes, the lament comes in the context of a defamatory poem about the Umayyads.

Sometimes, it comes in the context of praising some rulers or leaders. This was the case in some of the poems of praise of Muhammad ibn Hani' al-Andalusi (320 or 326-362) about al-Mu'izz li-Din Allah, the Fatimid. The same occurs in some of the poems of praise by al-Qadi al-Julays 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn al-Husayn (d. 561) about the good ruler, Tala 'i' ibn Zurayk.

With regard to the person to whom the poem of lament for al-Husayn is addressed, it can come in the following ways: Sometimes, it is a speech to the poet's soul and a conversation with himself. Sometimes, the address in it is made to the Apostle of God, and it is a presentation of the incidents and circumstances of the revolution and other such topics.

Sometimes, the address in it is made to the Twelfth Imam, the awaited Mahdi. Sometimes, the address in it is made to the Commander of the faithful, 'Ali ibn Talib or the Lady Fatima, the fair.

Sometimes, it is addressed to the Islamic *umma*. Sometimes, it is addressed to the Umayyads. Sometimes, it is addressed to the Hashimites. One poem may include several forms of address.

In what follows, we will examine, in brief, the themes of the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn. We will not persist in giving examples from the poetry on every theme because such elaboration would serve little purpose and the specialist can easily find the example for himself.

Human Grief

The assumption made about lamentation poetry is that it has been composed to express emotions of sadness and grief for the loss of a noble person. Therefore, the expression of human grief is a common

feature in all lamentation poetry. The laments may include a number of features by which it expresses this grief.

There is a kind of lament which is given the name 'dirge' (*nadb*). It is concerned only with the expression of the emotion of grief and occurs frequently in the lamentation poetry for al-Husayn, whether ancient or modern. It is recited with a kind of loud wailing. Sometimes it is accompanied by bodily movements like striking one's face in grief.

Among the examples of that are the verses attributed to al-Rabab, wife of Imam al-Husayn. In it she cries out to al-Husayn, saying that she will never forget al-Husayn who was killed by the spears of enemies, who left him a corpse at Karbala'.

Another example is given by al-Mufid in his book, *al-Amali*. He says that Dharra, a professional wailing-woman, saw in a dream the Lady Fatima, the fair, who accompanied her to the tomb of al-Husayn and wept. She told her to recite some verses in the wailing manner. (It is said that these verses were by one of the Kufan poets.)

The verses call upon the eyes to overflow with tears and make them fall copiously. They should weep for the dead on the Banks of the Euphrates, whose heart was left broken.

* * *

At this point we should notice that there is a kind of lamentation poetry for al-Husayn which is not concerned with the expression of grief as is the case in the rest of lamentation poetry. It is in fact without any expression of grief. It is the kind of lamentation poetry for al-Husayn which could be termed a 'eulogy'.

In it the poet does not express his grief and sadness. He only speaks of the virtues and qualities of al-Husayn and the Holy Family in facing the wicked actions of their enemies. This kind of poetry is usually artistically weak and is lacking in any beauty.

Nature's Grief

This is an extension of human grief. Frequently a poet makes nature a partner in his grief. Or he may regard the momentous tragedy as not so much a human catastrophe as a cosmic one. For this reason the material world trembles at the terrible tragedy which has befallen al-Husayn, his family and his followers.

The poet sees grief in the earth, in the sky, in the mountains and in the seas. He questions them and holds a dialogue with them about the disaster. When he sees that they continue as they were, he is surprised and amazed that the mountains have not split asunder, that the earth has not swallowed up its inhabitants, that the seas have not sunk into the earth. that the stars have not fallen like meteorites on

the criminals.

Sulayman ibn Qatta (d. 125) gives expression to some of these sentiments in the poem where he describes how he passed the houses of the family of Muhammad. On the day of the tragedy he had never seen anything like it. The sun had become sick because of the killing of al-Husayn, and the land trembled.

Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i expresses similar ideas in his poem where he says: 'The world shook for the family of Muhammad. Solid mountains almost melted for them. The stars sank down and constellations quavered. Veils were rent and caves split open.

Abu al-Firas al-Hamdani (320– 357) described in another poem how the sun changed, on the day it happened, and the clouds wept blood because of what they had seen.

Some of the poets make the animal world behave like the material world. A poet may consider that the animals in the desert and the forests are sad and sorrowful, perhaps even weeping.

The Grief of the Angels and the Jinn

Another of the cosmic manifestations of grief for al-Husayn is the picture given by lamentation poetry of the grief of the angel and the jinn. An example of that can be cited from the poetry of al-Sanawburi (d. 334). The poet declares that jinn, man and the noble angels all weep, without exception, at the limbs dyed red with his blood.

4. The Virtues of the Holy Family

Their Personal Virtues

The poets of lamentation poetry demonstrate the noble natures of the Holy Family, their self-sacrifice, their knowledge of the Islamic way of life (*shari'a*), their clemency and forgiveness towards those who wronged them and attacked them, and their bravery and skill. In his exposition of their great courage, a poet will indicate that the courage of al-Husayn, his family and his followers was such that it would ensure the defeat of the enemy army unless God had decreed otherwise.

This theme of the personal virtues of the Holy Family, alongside their other virtues, is one of the most frequently occurring themes in the lamentation poetry for al-Husayn.

Their Religious Virtues

On this subject, the poet reviews the honour God has bestowed upon them in the Qur'an, their great knowledge of the Islamic way of life (*shari'a*), the fact that they are the true successors of the Apostle of God, the designation made on 'Ali at al-Ghadir and the other texts referring to them, the Tradition of the Apostle about the two weighty things he was leaving as guides to the *umma* after his death (the Qur'an

and his family), the way that they were wronged by being denied the caliphate. All these ideas, and others like them, are also frequently occurring themes in lamentation poetry.

Their Family Background as Direct Descendants of the Apostle of God

The Shi'a of the Holy Family laid great emphasis on this unique quality which the Imams of the Holy Family enjoy, with all that it entails in terms of sanctity, respect and rights of inheritance.

The poets who supported the Holy Family made this a basic theme of all the poetry which they composed, whether in praise of or in lament for the Holy Family. They were aware that kinship was, and still is, a most important influence providing a moral power to a relative, especially in early Islamic society.

The argument of kinship was used at the meeting held in the hall of the Banu Sa'ida by the Ansar after the Prophet's death against their aspirations to succeed the Apostle of God in the political dispute which took place between the Ansar and the emigrants of the Quraysh about who had the right to succession after the Apostle of God. The spokesman of Quraysh argued: 'Who can dispute our right to the authority of Muhammad while we are his next of kin and his tribe.'

Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib has made the bitter comment on what took place at the hall of the Banu Sa'ida, that since Quraysh had argued that they were closer in kinship to the Apostle of God than the Ansar and therefore had more right to succession, it was more fitting for them to hand over power to the Hashimites as they were closer in kinship to the Apostle of God than the rest of Quraysh.

In the general view, this aspect of close relationship used to be a strong argument in support of the demand of the Shi'a of the Holy Family that the government should be handed over to their Imams. For this reason it was one of the basic intellectual, political and legal preoccupations of the Umayyad regime, and after them the 'Abbasid regime.

It appears that the Umayyads in Syria took refuge in creating a general impression with the people that the Prophet had no other kin than them. The words of the Syrian delegation to Abu al-'Abbas al-Saffah (the first 'Abbasid caliph) after the fall of the Umayyad regime indicate that, for they swore that they did not know that the Prophet had any other kin than the Umayyads.

Sometimes the Umayyads used storytellers, whom they frequently employed, to accomplish this aim. They were, also, anxious to follow a policy of isolating the Syrians from contact with any outside cultural influence.

Outside Syria, the Umayyad regime, and afterwards the 'Abbasid regime, strove in another way, namely culturally on the basis of jurisprudence and relationship. Both regimes concentrated on the argument that the son of the daughter was not a direct descendant, and that therefore al-Hasan, al-Husayn and the Imams who were descendants of al-Husayn were not direct descendants of the Apostle of God.

An example of the attempts in the Umayyad period is a violent dispute between al-Hajjaj al-Thaqafi and Yahya ibn Ya'mur al-'Adawani al-Basri (d. 128). In it al-Hajjaj denied that al-Hasan and al-Husayn were direct descendants of the Apostle of God. He tried to produce evidence for that from the Qur'an. Yahya ibn Yamur put forward the Qur'anic proof that the son of the daughter was a direct descendant.

This was when God counted Jesus as among the progeny of Abraham with the words: *'We gave him Issac and Jacob, each of whom We guided. And before We guided Noah, and among his progeny, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses and Aaron. Thus do we reward those who do good. And Zakariya, John and Jesus...*²² There is a much greater distance between Jesus and Abraham than there is between al-Hasan and al-Husayn and Muhammad.

The 'Abbasids too, were unable to distort the true nature of the family background of the 'Alids. At the same time they were also exposed to great danger from this family claim of the 'Alids, for we can observe that the descendants from the line of al-Hasan strove unceasingly to raise difficulties for them. For this reason, the 'Abbasids concentrated on trying to repudiate the 'Alid claim that they were more closely related to the Apostle of God, and therefore had more right to the caliphate than the 'Abbasids.

The 'Abbasids maintained this by arguing, with regard to the problem of the son of the daughter and the paternal uncle and the sons of the paternal uncle, that the sons of the daughter were not direct descendants and had no right to inheritance, whereas the paternal uncle had closer kinship than the son of the daughter and more right to inheritance. Thus they aimed to put 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and his progeny outside the law because the Prophet died while his paternal uncle, al-'Abbas, was still alive.

In this way the problem was given a legal dimension.

The 'Abbasids intimated to the poet, Marwan ibn Abi Hafsa who was an anti-'Alid who hated the Holy Family, that he should introduce this argument into his poetry. He composed an ode in which he maintained that it was not right that the sons of daughters could be heirs before paternal uncles.²³

The problem had now become a subject of heated poetic controversy. It raised a storm of reactions from the poets of the Shi'a. They reviled the 'Abbasids through Nathala, wife of al-'Abbas, in order to show the difference between her and the mother of the 'Alids, the Lady Fatima, the fair. They brought up the subject of the way al-'Abbas became a Muslim and the fact that he was among those who embraced Islam only at the conquest of Mecca by the Prophet.

One of the poets who replied in this way was Jafar ibn'Affan al-Ta'i (d.c. 150). He pointed out in one of his poems that the daughter received half of the inheritance while the uncle was left without any share. In any case a late convert such as 'Abbas had no right to any inheritance as he only prayed as a Muslim out of fear of the sword.

Al-Shaykh al-Saduq has reported in his book, *'Uyun Akhbar al-Rida*, that a group of men came to visit Imam 'Ali al-Rida. They saw that he had become changed and they asked him why. He replied: 'I have

spent the night awake thinking about the words of Marwan ibn Hafsa' –he recited the verse previously mentioned – 'and then I fell asleep. Then I saw a man who had taken hold of the door–post while he was reciting verses.'

In these verses quoted by Imam 'Ali Rida, the poet in his dream declared that polytheists did not have the rights of those who had been supporters of Islam. The sons of the daughter did have a share in inheritance from their grandfather but the paternal uncle was left without any.

A late convert such as al-'Abbas had no right to any inheritance as he only prostrated himself as a Muslim out of fear of the sword. The Qur'an has told of his true merit and judgement has been passed against him. The son of Fatima, who is extolled by his name, possesses the right of inheritance to the exclusion of the sons of paternal uncles. The son of Nathala remains standing hesitantly and weeps while the true kindred are happy.

It appears that the 'Abbasids went to extremes in their attempt to distort the reputation of the 'Alids and undermine their family background. They even used poetry against them, something which had never happened in Islam. The first to do this was the 'Abbasid prince, 'Abd Allah ibn al-Mu'tazz (244 296).²⁴

Almost a century later, in the fourth century of the hijra, he was followed by the 'Abbasid Muhammad ibn 'Abd Allah, who is known as Ibn Sakra. There must have been others beside these two who took part writing defamatory poetry against the 'Alids. This defamatory poetry was, however, met by a storm of protest from the poets of the Shi'a, who matched it with verses in which they lampooned the 'Abbasids and extolled the virtues of the Holy Family.

Among the replies made to Ibn Muttazz are the poems of al-Qadi al-Tannukhi (d. 342), Tamim ibn Ma'ad al-Fatimi (d. 374), Safi al-Din al-Hilli (677–752). It seems that the poets of the Shi'a did not dare to reply to Ibn al-Mu'tazz during the period of 'Abbasid strength and power. The replies which have come down to us are much later than the time of Ibn al-Mu'tazz, since the earliest of them is al-Qadi al-Tannukhi who died half a century later than Ibn Muttazz.

The Shi'ite poet, al-Husayn ibn al-Hajjaj (d. 391) wrote replies to the 'Abbasid Ibn Sakra.

* * *

We have devoted some space to the discussion of the problem of kinship and family background in order to explain the emphasis which the Shi'ite poets gave to the Holy Family in their poems of praise and lament. Indeed the relationship was subjected to Umayyad and 'Abbasid attempts which aimed at belittling this importance, or even at rooting out its importance by denying the evidence for the great significance of kinship and its legal and political implications.

Therefore the Shi'ite poets directed themselves to making it a reality in the general consciousness of the *umma* by causing every contrary attempt to be doomed to failure. They were given the greatest possible

success in that.

The Human Enemies of the Revolution

Mention is frequently made in the lamentation poetry for al-Husayn of the group of people or individuals who had some role in the revolution, whether at the beginning, during the actual events or in the course of its consequences.

The Muslims

When Muslims are mentioned in the poetry of lament for al-Husayn in terms of blame, it means the supporters and friends of the Umayyad regime. These are described as traitors to their faith and their religious duty; they are rebels against God.

They are regarded as men who abandoned giving support to what they believed to be true because they preferred the world and its ornaments. They are considered to be men who broke faith with the Apostle of God by not safeguarding him through his offspring.

Sometimes the poet accuses them in terms of the law by considering them as men who have disobeyed their religious obligations. At other times he accuses them in moral terms by describing their treachery, their lack of trustworthiness and their disloyalty.²⁵

The Kufans and the Iraqis

These are regarded as the Muslims most responsible for what happened. They wrote to al-Husayn asking him to come and promising to support him. They reneged on their promises. Yet they did not limit this to breach of faith and desertion.

Some of them, including most of their leaders, actually stood alongside the Umayyad oppressors despite the letters which they were involved in writing to ask al-Husayn to come to them. Verses by Tala'i ibn Zurayk show this. He describes how when the tribes of Iraq summoned al-Husayn, he answered them. Yet when he summoned them, they did not listen. Hypocrisy was spread among them at Karbala' when they had claimed to belong to the Shi'a. May God punish them for what they did.

The Umayyads

These are considered the real criminals who were directly responsible. At their head come Mu'awiya and his son, Yazid. Other attacks on the Holy Family which took place during the Umayyad period are mentioned and the Umayyads take the blame.

Other men and Women

In particular the poets mention Hind, the mother of Mu'awiya, Summayya, the grandmother of 'Ubayd

Allah ibn Ziyad, among other women through whom the Umayyads and their followers may be cursed. Ziyad and his son, 'Ubayd Allah are mentioned together with Umar ibn Sa'd and Shimr ibn Dhi Jawshan as being, with Yazid, the worst criminals at Karbala '.

The Women of the Holy Family

Another theme of the lamentation poetry are the women of the Holy Family. The Lady Fatima, the fair, is frequently mentioned and consoled for the death of al-Husayn when the dreadful events are described.

Zaynab is mentioned: her state on the journey; her state at Karbala ' ; her conversations with al-Husayn and al-'Abbas, or with her nephews, 'Ali al-Akbar and 'Ali Zayn al-'Abidin, or with her sister, Umm Kulthum, or with her niece, Sakina. Her circumstances when they were taken prisoner are mentioned and the words she spoke to Shimr, 'Umar ibn Sa'd, Ibn Ziyad and Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, or to the Umayyad soldiers generally.

Sakina, the daughter of al-Husayn, is remembered in scenes with her father, Imam al-Husayn, before his death and in a pathetic scene after his death on the battlefield, and also in conversation with Shimr.

Al-Rabab, the wife of Imam al-Husayn, is particularly mentioned when her child, 'Abd Allah, is discussed. This element concerned with the women of the Holy Family in lamentation poetry is not only presented for its own sake. It is also presented as one of the elements which raise emotions. When it is mentioned for its own sake, the women are presented as a group and not as individuals.

This happens when the 'daughters of the Apostle of God' are humiliated by the Umayyads or the Kufans or the Muslims. Some of the scenes of battle are dealt with in this way especially, like the burning of the tents and the women and children fleeing from the fire, or the plundering of al-Husayn's camp and family by the Umayyad soldiers, or becoming prisoners and the scene of the women and children being made to ride on emaciated camels without humps, or the scene of the heads raised on spears in the midst of the prisoners.

The Children and the Young Men of the Holy Family

The children of the Holy Family are seldom mentioned as an independent theme in the poetry, and even less frequently than that are the names of the children given. The exception is 'Abd Allah, the baby who was slaughtered, as he was in the lap of his father, Imam al-Husayn, by an arrow which was shot at him. The other children are rarely mentioned.

An example of one being mentioned are the verses of al-Nashi ' al-Saghir Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Abd Allah ibn al-Wasif (271-365). He describes little Fatima, whom grief has clothed in the garments of humiliation, calling to her grandfather, saying, 'Grandfather, after such a loss, we want revenge.'

The young men of the Holy Family are occasionally mentioned, in particular when there is a description

of those of the Hashimite young men who were killed. The poets then bring out the most moving aspects about them: their beauty, their bravery, their thirst and their self-sacrifice.

The most frequently mentioned are al-'Abbas ibn 'Ali,' Ali al-Akbar ibn al-Husayn and al-Qasim ibn al-Hasan.

The Story of the Battle

The poets usually describe the battle which took place at Karbala¹ in a general way but in some cases in great detail. In the poetry of some of the later poets of lamentation, the story is presented in the form of a dialogue which the poet recounts: 'He said . . . They replied . . . One man said . . . One woman said . . . ' Sometimes it is presented in the form of a speech to the Apostle of God, 'O Grandfather . . . '

Some poets mention only the events without giving their more distant causes while others indicate the causal relations between the battle at Karbala¹ and the problem of the caliphate. They see the earlier mistake of depriving 'Ali of the caliphate as being responsible for forming the attitudes which finally led to the catastrophe at Karbala¹.

Water and Thirst

Thirst is one of the basic themes of the poetry of lament for al-Husayn. The poets have given expression to it in several ways. They picture the sufferings from thirst of al-Husayn, the women, the children and the rest of the men. They turn their attention to the river Euphrates whose water is deprived to the Holy Family with various expressions of blame such as, 'How far off is your water, O Euphrates!'

Al-Sanawburi (d. 334) gives some examples of the treatment of water and thirst in lamentation poetry. He described al-Husayn being driven from the waters of the Euphrates as a misfortune which brought further misfortune.

He was not able to drink from it while the swords drunk deep draughts of his blood. The poet asked the Euphrates why it had not helped when it gave water to wicked men and women to drink, Yet how many of the sons and daughters of Fatima had been kept away from it without having committed any crime.

Karbala¹: The Bank of the Euphrates and the Graves

Every ode of lamentation mentions Karbala¹ or the Bank of the Euphrates. The name Karbala¹ is associated in lamentation poetry with grief (*karb*) and misfortune (*bala*¹). The poets frequently repeat this idea.

It appears that in the early poetry Karbala¹ was treated as an object to be blamed and cursed because it had witnessed the deaths of the Holy Family. We know of one example including such as a curse which is attributed to al-Rabab, the wife of the Imam.

She calls to al-Husayn and declares that she had not forgotten when the swords of the enemies were directed against him and how they left him dead at Karbala'. Then she calls upon God not to water the banks of the river at Karbala'.

However, it appears that this attitude did not continue for long. The idea which becomes most repeated with regard to Karbala' –perhaps because of the reports which the Holy Family circulated among their followers– is that Karbala' is blessed and sacred ground. In lamentation poetry, Karbala' became a beloved land because it contained the bodies of the holy loved ones. It became the practice of the poets of lamentation to speak of it with grief and love.

In poetry it then came to receive prayers for divine blessings and for God to water it. It is still, in some of the poetry, a place of grief (*karb*) and misfortune (*bala'*). Yet it is a grief which happened and its role has finished and a misfortune which took place and the people involved endured it. Now it has become a place of loved ones, an area of sad memories, a scene of legendary heroism, a place where the angels of God come down, and a site of divine blessings for those who are honoured by making pilgrimages to it.

Mansur al-Numayri (d. 190 or 193) wrote a poem in which he reported that time was attacking the son of Fatima in the soil of Karbala' while the traces of the abodes of the people sleeping in their graves were being destroyed. The poet calls for greetings and blessings to be upon that place and for God to send unceasing and hoped for rain upon it.

In another poem al-Sanawburi calls on the pilgrim to greet Karbala' and not to be disgusted at such greeting but to speak as lovingly as he can. He calls upon him to greet the abodes whose outlines on the banks of the Euphrates have become well-known signs. They should be called the abodes of the Apostle of God and the fountain of messages.

There should be the prayer for peace to be upon them for as long as the sun and moon rise over creation. The poet goes on to say that he stopped at the graves and spoke to them. Then he stopped at the best of them; pure grave which contained the purest of bones. The most fragrant breeze is for those whom it blows upon from the pure flowers on the hillside. Let rain fall upon the ground in the mornings and let rain not part from it in the evenings.

In another poem al-Sanawburi calls on the man urging his camel along to stop and not to move on from the bank of the Euphrates at Karbala'. It is the place where his desire has led him and he asks the camel-driver to share in his desire. The land on the bank of the Euphrates at Karbala' is the land which belongs to God and a land of guidance. He calls on everybody whether coming at night or in the morning to greet the bank of the Euphrates and its inhabitants in their graves.

The poet Muhammad ibn al-Husayn, known as Kashajim, (d.350 or 360) mentioned in one of his poems that the day was dark at Karbala'. Then it cleared of clouds while they lay slaughtered. The rain does not cease falling on that land and every sunrise reckons up its coming in the morning and in the night.

The Humiliation of Quraysh and the Humiliation of Islam and the Muslims

From the first century of the hijra, the poet of lamentation poetry for al-Husayn regarded the killing of al-Husayn and his family and followers as a humiliation of Islam and Muslims. On rare occasions the poet considers that the killing of al-Husayn has brought humiliation to Quraysh or to the Hashimites.

Abu Rumayh, Umayr ibn Malik al-Khuzai (d.c. 100) wrote a poem in which he declared that clouds of tears were racing across his eyes. They would not dry up after the tears were shed until they flowed with tears again. They were weeping for the family of the Prophet Muhammad.

How many were these tears, yet how few in view of what happened! Those people had not drawn their swords while their enemies killed them when they were drawn. The man from the Hashimites killed on the bank of the Euphrates was the most humiliated man of Quraysh and Quraysh were humiliated as well.

Perhaps this poet and other like him were giving expression to a tribal view of the subject and regarding what happened as a personal struggle. Soon, however, this misleading view gave way to the correct view of the subject.

Throughout the Islamic era the poet of lamentation poetry has considered what happened as an Islamic concern, meaning Islam as a religion and the Muslims as an *umma*. What happened at Karbala ' was sacrilege against Islam and an act of aggression against Muslims.

When Abu al-Rumayh recited these verses, previously mentioned, to Fatima, daughter of al-Husayn and she heard the words, '. . . the most humiliated man of Quraysh and Quraysh were humiliated as well,' she said to him, 'Abu Rumayh, do you speak of it like that?' 'How should I speak of it, may God make me a ransom for you?' he asked. She replied, 'Say: . . . the most humiliated man of the Muslims and the Muslims were humiliated as well.' He is reported to have said that after that day he only recited verses in the way she told him.

The poet of lamentation considered that al-Husayn was a hope for Islam which had been extinguished when the Umayyads killed him. Therefore Muslims were humiliated by his death.

Abu al-Aswad al-Du'ali (d. 69) had said: 'O conveyor of the news of the death of religion, who announces the death of piety, arise and announce his death and the death of his family'

Ja'far ibn'Affan (d. 150) had said: 'Let whoever can weep, weep for Islam. Its laws have been lost and misappropriated. In the morning al-Husayn was defiled by spears. Swords drunk from his blood and took a second draught.'

Mansur al-Numayri (d. 190 or 193) had said: 'I would have sacrificed my life for al-Husayn when he went out towards death never to return. That was a day which advanced with the sword against the

summit of Islam'

The Meeting with the Apostle of God and the Holy Family

The poet of lamentation frequently asks the Umayyads directly, or he asks the killers (the Umayyad army), or he asks the *umma* (the helpers of the Umayyads): How will you meet the Apostle of God, 'Ali and Fatima on the Day of Resurrection? What will you answer when they ask you about your attitude towards their sons? How will you ask them to intercede for you with God when will you have done what you have done to their sons?

An example of that is the verses of Umm Luqman bint 'Aqil ibn Abi, Talib. She said: 'What will you say if the Prophet asks you: What have you, the last *umma*, done with my offspring and my family after my death? Some of them are prisoners and some of them are stained with blood.'

Similarly Mansur al-Numayri has said in his verses: 'Woe upon the killer of al-Husayn, you have gained a burden which will make the one who carries it fall down. With what face will you meet the Prophet when you have become involved in killing al-Husayn? Will you ask for his intercession tomorrow or not?'

Another example of that is from the verses of al-Jurjani al-Jawhari. He said: 'They were abashed before their father on a day that he saw them dripping dizzily with red blood. He will say: O *umma* what error surrounds? You have exchanged faith for the unbelief of the blind. What crime did I commit against you when I brought the good of the Qur'an?'

The Martyrs.

The martyrs who were killed at Karbala' with Imam al-Husayn are given special honour in lamentation poetry. Hardly any poem is without some mention and praise of them, sometimes for their religious conscience and at other times for their loyalty to the Prophet. In every case, the poet lays emphasis on their courage and their self-sacrifice by dying with the Imam.

Among the poets who mention them is 'Ubayd Allah ibn al-Hurr al-Ju'fi (d. 68). He calls upon God to let the rain fall constantly on the souls of those who set out to help al-Husayn. He describes himself standing at their graves while his stomach churns with grief and his eyes fill with tears.

He swears by his life that they were heroes in the battle which they hurried to. Then he imagines how they consoled one another by helping the son of the daughter of the Prophet with their swords like fierce lions. If they were killed, every pious soul should have become shocked at that. No one has seen more excellent men than them; they were leaders and the flower of men in the face of death.

Talha ibn 'Ubayd Allah al-'Awni al-Misri (d. 350) also composed verses about them. He said: 'His close associates defended him and embraced the swords and spears. They were seventy against thousands

and they were covered in wounds. Then they all were struck dead and met their fate.'

The emir Muhammad al-Susi (d. 370) described their heroism in some of his verses. He told of the man who brought the news of the death of a great man on the banks of the Euphrates. It was the news of the death of al-Husayn. The poet says that he wishes he could sacrifice his soul to alleviate how al-Husayn was surrounded by enemies. Yet he was with men who helped each other, comforted each other and fought the fiercest battle until they died.

The Hardship the Poets Faced because of their Allegiance

We find this phenomenon in the poetry in praise and in lamentation for the Holy Family from the first century of the hijra and it has continued to appear on the tongues of the poets until the beginnings of the modern period. It reflects the atmosphere of the terrorization which the Shi'a used to face from the authorities and groups of people who were fanatically opposed to them when the Shi'a tried to express their own doctrinal views.

We have given many examples of this kind of phenomenon in the poetry of praise and lamentation during the course of this discussion. Another example can be cited from the verses of al-Sharif al-Murtada. In these, the poet declares his love for the family of the Prophet and asserts that he will never turn aside from it even though men may blame him for it.

He tells those who blame him for his love of the Holy Family that to be insincere is blameworthy. He tells them not to revile him with their errors, for he will never submit.

Support with the Tongue

Another of the themes of this poetry is the poet's view of his poetry of praise or lament as a support for the Holy Family with his tongue after he had not been able to help them with his hand because he had forsaken them and then regretted his action, or because his circumstances did not help him, or because he came at a later time than them.

An example of regret for forsaking al-Husayn in lamentation poetry is contained in the poem of Ubayd Allah ibn al-Hurr al-Ju'fi. He said: 'A treacherous commander and a treacherous son ask: 'Haven't you killed al-Husayn ibn Fatima?' My soul is full of blame because I deserted him and gave my pledge of allegiance to this man who breaks his covenant.

O how I regret that I did not help him. No soul can make up that regret. I am full of grief because I was not one of his defenders. That will stay with me even if I leave.'

Verses, which illustrate sorrow at not being with al-Husayn because circumstance did not help the situation, are those of al-'Awf al-Azdi, one of the repentant (*tawwabun*) who took part in the revolt to gain vengeance for the blood of al-Husayn: 'Would that I had been present with him at that time.

I would have defended him by striking against his hateful enemies. I would have defended him for as long as I was able to fight. I would have used my sword against them.'

Mansur al-Numayri provides an example of a poet expressing regret that he lived too late to be of assistance. He wishes that he had been here with his hand on his sword. He would have offered himself to death against the swords and never forsaken al-Husayn and his family.

Al-Sharif al-Radi declares: 'Even though I was absent in time from supporting you with the sword, I have not been absent with my mouth.'

Al-Sharif al-Radi has another idea with regard to this theme in some of his poetry. He considers that the opportunity of supporting al-Husayn with the sword did not escape him because he lived too late to be at the Battle of Karbala'. He can help al-Husayn with the sword by taking vengeance for him and realizing the aims of his revolution.

This is a matter which was still possible during his own time but obstacles and impediments prevented it from being attained. He hoped that these obstacles would be removed so that he could achieve his ambition. There is no doubt that al-Sharif al-Radi is there alluding to his ambition to take control of the caliphate and make it an 'Alid caliphate instead of it continuing as an 'Abbasid one. He repeats this idea in a number of poems.

Most poets, throughout the ages, conclude their poems of lament by declaring that they are sorry that they missed the opportunity of giving support with their hand and are limited to giving support with their tongue.

* * *

This is an outline of the themes of the poetry of lament for al-Husayn. We have presented it in order to make both the scholar and the reader aware of the basic ideas in this vast poetic inheritance prior to the modern period.

V. The Value Of The Poetry About Al-Husayn

If we considered the poetry of lament for al-Husayn as an artistic work, we would come to a judgment about it which would differ from our judgment of it if we were considering it for its educational value.

The artistic value of the lamentation poetry for al-Husayn does not correspond in any absolute way with its vast size. While the poetry of the first three centuries includes many outstanding pieces, the situation is different from this from the third century onwards insofar as artificiality and weakness of expression began to prevail in this kind of poetry.

Most of it lacks imagination and artistic expression. Much of it might be considered rhymed prose, as if

the poet has put one of the books about the death of al-Husayn into rhyme with the addition of some books about the virtues of al-Husayn. Similarly much of it is identical in expressions and images.

This does not mean that during this long period there were not some excellent and outstanding works in the poetry of lament for al-Husayn. There is no doubt that the scholar will find many like the poems of lament by al-Sharif al-Radi and Mihyar al-Daylami.

However, we are discussing the general impression of this poetry after the third century of the hijra until the beginnings of the modern period. There can be no doubt that its vast quantity in no way corresponds with its qualitative value as a work of art.

We consider that the responsibility for this weakness of quality in the artistic aspect of this poetry of lament for al-Husayn is due to a number of reasons

The first reason

During this period, this poetry came under the influence of the general cultural situation. The Arabic language had become weak; literature and the sciences had fallen into decay. The idea prevailed over men of culture that they should preserve the models of the ancients without them having the linguistic and artistic resources to enable them even to copy them.

The language of poetry declined until the colloquial almost prevailed over it. During this period the poetry of lamentation was affected by the same tendencies which affected the rest of the poetry.

The second reason

Most of the poets of lamentation poetry for al-Husayn in this period, or at least many of them, were not poets at all; they were religious scholars or men trained in religious scholarship. Their poetic and artistic culture did not go beyond a knowledge of the poetic metres. Thus they were dealing with a subject which needed an artistic spirit which most of them lacked, and which needed an artistic culture which most of them lacked.

They used to compose poetry about al-Husayn with the motive of it being a work of piety. In this way you will not find any poem by them about any subject other than al-Husayn and the virtues of the Holy Family, seemingly written in response to the directives from the Imams of the Holy Family about writing poetry, which we discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

Many of these poets, then, did not have the artistic competence to compose a poetic work of art, even by the standards of the poets of their own age whose own poetry did not enjoy any real artistic value. We can, thus, assume that many of them were writing poetry in lamentation and praise of al-Husayn and the Holy Family with a mentality better attuned to writing about syntax, or grammar, or jurisprudence, or the other subjects which were put into *rajaz* verse so widely during that period.

The third reason: The profusion of verses in lament for al-Husayn

In this long period which we are discussing in terms of the value of its lamentation poetry, there were many poets who had restricted their poetic composition to the subject of lament for al-Husayn and praise for the Holy Family and they did not go beyond that to anything else.

There were poets who had written dozens of poems in lament for al-Husayn and dozens of poems in praise of the Commander of the faithful and the other Imams. There is no doubt that this profusion, when added to the weakness of poetic culture and the decline of the literary language at that period, was responsible for the artistic weakness of the poetry, both in form and content.

These, then, are the causes which we consider to have been responsible for the poor artistic value of the poetry of lamentation for al-Husayn during this long period.

We say this in the knowledge that we have only studied examples of each of the poets of this period, which we consider to be sufficient to make a judgment about the poetry of the poets which we have not been able to study. This has brought us to the view that a comprehensive study of all the lamentation poetry would lead a scholar to a similar judgment about the artistic benefit of lamentation poetry in this period.

However, the poetry of lament for al-Husayn throughout the ages is a subject rich in possibilities, which is suitable for a variety of types of research which could deal with it from the artistic aspect, for its historical evidence, and from the viewpoint of doctrine, psychology and sociology.

We have already given our estimation of the artistic aspect of lamentation poetry for al-Husayn. However, its educational value differs greatly from its artistic value. The educational value of the lamentation poetry for al-Husayn is real, important and of decisive influence.

This poetry continued its educational task of guidance which had been intended for it when the Imams of the Holy Family directed their Shi'a to compose and recite it.

Throughout the different Islamic epochs, it has shared with the other cultural currents, the pilgrimage (*ziyara*) and the rites of remembrance, in nourishing the Shi'ite individual with the basic concepts of the attitudes and great ideas of Shi'ism and in strengthening the relationship of the Shi'ite individual with the revolution of al-Husayn.

The weak artistic value of much of this poetry in the periods of Islamic decline did not affect its educational role. Perhaps, it even helped it to carry out its role with greater success. Most of this poetry was composed to be recited at the rites of remembrance for al-Husayn, which were attended by the ordinary people.

These were, in most cases, illiterate and incapable, by virtue of their linguistic paucity and their own

colloquial language, of understanding complicated artistic expressions and rhetorical images which needed an artistic culture which was not available to the vast majority of them. For this reason, simple speech close to their own colloquial language and with a musical beat was more in tune with their understanding and more influential on them.

Thus, this poetry—with its concepts, ideals and morals— became part of the culture of the ordinary Shi'ite individual and then part of his intellectual fabric. The rituals of 'Ashura' every year in the month Muharram and the gatherings for the rites of remembrance in other days during the year provided an opportunity for thousands of men and women to attend meetings in honour of al-Husayn and to hear the story of the battle and the history of Islam.

Much of this poetry recited by the mourners was intermingled with all this. Then at a later period, the preachers from the pulpit for al-Husayn became involved with it as well.

The educational value of the lamentation poetry for al-Husayn was important in the past and it will continue to be so in the future for as long as there is the pulpit for al-Husayn. The techniques of modern equipment are the channels which take this poetry to the people and renew for them their relationship with the revolution of al-Husayn and its ideal. They fix it in their hearts and minds as a living symbol of the struggle to attain truth and justice and of martyrdom for the common good.

1. One poet, Shaykh Ahmad al-Biladi, one of the poets of the twelfth century of the hijra, composed a thousand odes in lamentation of al-Husayn which he put into two large volumes, cf. al-Amini in his Encyclopaedia. Shaykh Khali'i Jamal al-Din ibn 'Abd al-Aziz, one of the poets of the ninth century of the hijra, has a collection of poetry about Imam al-Husayn. I have come across the collection of Shaykh Hasan al-Datistani, one of the poets of the thirteenth century of the hijra, all of which is about the Battle of Karbala'. Shaykh Muhammad al-Shubaki, a poet of the twelfth century of the hijra, has a collection of poems in praise of the Prophet and his family and another in lament for them, which he named the Flood of Tears (Sayl al-'Ibarat) It contains fifty odes. I have an anthology (al-Muntakhab) by Muhi al-Din al-Turayhi, who died in the twelfth century of the hijra. In this book there are dozens of odes whose authors are unknown. Similarly there are hundreds of works about the martyrdom which tell the story of al-Husayn and provide poetic quotations which were composed to lament for him. There are collections of manuscripts in public and private collections in which there are hundreds of odes about al-Husayn, whose authors are unknown. Cf. Adab al-Taff, I, 18.

2. Shaykh al-Saduq, Muhammad b. 'Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Babawayh Abu Jafar al-Qummi, 'Uyun Akhbar al-Rida (Qumm, 1377), I, 7.

3. Ibid.

4. It appears the rites of remembrance of al-Husayn had already reached an advanced stage at the time of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq insofar as he named a special style of recitation.

5. Ibn Qawlawayh, op. cit., 104-6.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid, 79-80.

8. Al-Kulayni, Rawdat al-Kafi, Tradition no. 263.

9. Al-Kashshi, al-Rijal, 181

10. Qur'an, 22:32.

11. Jawad Shubbar, Adab al-Taff, (Beirut, 1969), I, 101.

12. Ibid., I, 179-180.

13. Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Maqatil al-Talibiyyin*, 122.
14. Ibn al-Athir, *al-Kamil*, 186–9.
15. Al-Sayyid, Muhsin Amin, *A'yan al-Shi'a*, I, part II. 163
16. Jawad Shubbar, *op. cit.*, 11, 278.
17. *Ibid*, II, 215.
18. *Ibid*, II, 274, 276, 284–5.
19. If we take into account a much later period than the period of the setting up of the 'Abbasid state, the idea of vengeance was still useful. It was a slogan which was raised in some of the wars of expansion in order to attract the allegiance and support of some sectarian groups. Timurlung had conquered Damascus under the slogan of 'Vengeance for al-Husayn from the descendants of Yazid ibn Mu'awiya', meaning by that the people of Damascus. Cf. Muhammad Ja'far al-Muhajir, *Hayrat al-Lubnaniyyin* (unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of St. Joseph, Beirut), 48.
20. Perhaps the realisation by official cultural leadership in Islamic society at that time, of their general political influence over the authorities, was what made them examine every literary text carefully to find out its relationship with the intellectual attitude of the Imams of the Holy Family. In the same way as it was said that the author of a literary work was Shi'ite, it was also said of the literary work that there was 'the smell of Shi'ism' in it or that there was loathsome Shi'ism' in it, and other similar warnings. All these were intended to prevent ordinary man from coming into contact with this intellectual tendency.
21. It should be noticed that Ibn Hani speaks of al-Husayn as 'the best grandson of Muhammad'. It is clear that this arises out of al-Husayn being suitable—because he actually rose in rebellion—to be a subject for poetry which was of service to the political aims of the Fatimids against the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids. It was also useful because the contemporary descendants of al-Husayn did not have any great political ambitions. On the other hand, Imam al-Hasan, because he did not actually rise in rebellion—was not suitable to be a subject for poetry which was in accord with actual political objectives. In addition to this, the descendants of al-Hasan were involved in revolution to get control of the government. Therefore to use them for moral support would have been inappropriate for the Fatimids since they wanted the government for themselves.
22. Qur 'an, 6:84–85.
23. Abd Allah ibn As'ad al-Yafi'i al-Tamimi, *Mirat al-Janan wa-Ibrat al-Yaqzan* (Hyderabad, 1337 A.H.) I, 271–272.
24. Ibn al-Muttazz has been described as the most hostile person to the 'Alids in the umma in a piece of poetry which was composed on his failure to keep power against al-Muqtadir after having received the pledge of allegiance for the caliphate in 296. Ibn al-Athir, *op. cit.*, VIII, 17. The same author also comments (*ibid.*, 18) on the pledge of allegiance to Ibn Mu'tazz that one of the most surprising features of it was that al-Husayn ibn Hamdan, despite his strong Shi'ite attitude and his inclinations towards 'Ali and the Holy Family, strove to achieve the pledge of allegiance for Ibn al-Muttaz even though the latter was hostile towards 'Ali and extremely hostile to the 'Alids.
25. Cf. Jawad Shubbar, *op. cit.*, I, 192 which gives an example by Ja'far ibn 'Affan.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/revolution-imam-al-husayn-shaykh-muhammad-mahdi-shams-ad-din-al-amili/lamentation-poetry>