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South Asian "Lovers" of the Ahl-e Bait: Hindu and Non-Shiʿi Muslim Traditions of Devotion

Who are devotees of the Imams and Ahl-e Bait in South Asia? Do we count only the Shiʿa as active participants in Muharram and other rituals dedicated to Imam Husain and his family? Who are the authors of mourning poetry and stories commemorating the battle of Karbala? As in other parts of the Islamic world, non-Shiʿi communities have long shared in traditions of venerating the Imams and Ahl-e Bait, actively participating in Muharram through the construction of replicas of Imam Husain's shrine-tomb at Karbala (*taʿziya*), and have been celebrated authors of mourning poems in the epic *marsiyah* and the episodic *nauhah* genres that are just as grief-inducing as those written by Shiʿi authors.

In the religious imagination of devotees in diverse locales in the subcontinent, from the Telugu- and Kannada-speaking regions of the Deccan plateau in South India to Panjab and the "Hindi-belt" of North India, the Imams and Ahl-e Bait have been absorbed into the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses. Likewise, the cosmic battle fought between Imam Husain and the ʿUmayyad caliph Yazid's army at Karbala – the ultimate clash between the "good" of preserving the original prophetic message of Muhammad and the "evil" of hereditary kingship divorced from religion – has been reimagined

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by South Asian Hindus and Muslims as a complement to the great Indic epic traditions narrating tales of duty (*dharma*) and just leadership (*rajadharma*), the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.

Muharram beyond Shiʿism: The "Composite Culture" of Commemorating Karbala in South Asia

With the arrival of Sufis and Shiʿa in the Indian subcontinent beginning at least as early as the eleventh century, Muharram became a distinctly South Asian religious event and ritual. Nadeem Hasnain and Abrar Husain, two sociologists specializing in Shiʿi social practices and institutions, describe Imam Husain as the first *satyagrahi* whose non-violent resistance to Yazid's political tyranny inspired Mahatma Gandhi's anti-colonial movement (1988, 155). According to Hasnain and Husain, traditions of Sunni and Hindu devotion to "Husain baba" reflect the "common heritage and composite culture of our pluralistic society" (1988, 156). In this chapter, the inclusive nature of Muharram ritual, as a tradition shared and shaped by multiple religious communities, will be demonstrated. The religious conviviality that contributed to the formation of South Asian Muharram ritual, literary traditions, and material practices is often conceived as an expression of a "composite culture" of shared practices of shrine visitation, saint veneration, and their propitiation. This compositeness is usually articulated through the riverine imagery of "Ganga-Yamuni *tahzib*" (culture), a religio-political discourse affirming Indian culture and religion as conducive to positive and deep interreligious encounter. Ganga-Yamuni *tahzib*, a term used by both Hindus and Muslims, incorporates an implicit reference to the Triveni Sangam in Allahabad, one of India's most sacred sites, at which the confluence of the Ganga (symbolizing Hinduism) and the Yamuna (referring to Islam and the Muslim dynasties) Rivers converge with the mythical Saraswati River. The significance of the riverine imagery of the Ganga-Yamuna Rivers invoked in this concept of a composite culture based on the principle of the *sangam* (meeting point, confluence) means that while diverse

religious communities participate in and contribute to events such as Muharram, the fundamental integrity and identity of each constituent religious tradition is maintained (Ruffle 2016, 59–60).

Despite the appearance of the convergence of culture and religious practice in the concept of Ganga-Yamuni *tahzib*, I do not classify everyday South Asian Shiʿism or non-Shiʿi practices of ʿAlid devotion as "syncretic." Ganga-Yamuni *tahzib* does not conform to the prevailing models, such as alchemical syncretism, also known as colloidal suspension, that have prevailed in religious studies scholarship to explain the participation of Hindus and Muslims in one another's religious activities in South Asia (Burman 2002; Das 2003; Kassam 1995; Mayaram 1997; Roy 1983; Talib and Mitra 2017; Waseem 2003). A colloidal suspension is the result of two irreconcilable substances coming into contact that will inevitably separate with time; an example of this would be oil and vinegar. As Tony K. Stewart and Carl W. Ernst observe in their discussion of syncretism, "in this model, religious or cultural essence triumphs over history" (2003, 587). Such a syncretic model privileges the notion of the intrinsic purity and original essence of a religious tradition that is immune to change. The problem with syncretism as a heuristic model is that it is ahistorical, essentialist, and presumes a pure "root" tradition (Stewart and Ernst 2003, 586).

Dr. Syed Akbar Naqvi (d. 2016), a Pakistani art critic, framed the religio-cultural context of South Asian religious pluralism in which Muharram has been shaped by Shiʿi, Hindu, and Sunni communities as one of tolerance (*rawadari*). According to Naqvi, *rawadari* is an integral element of the culture of al-Hind, by which he refers to the religio-cultural and historical heritage of the Indian subcontinent's diverse communities (2010, xxix–xxxi). Naqvi's concept of *rawadari*, while in some respects reflecting the spirit of Ganga-Yamuni *tahzib*, harkens back to the Mughal ethos of *sulh-e kull*, the practice of balance and compromise that promotes harmony and respect toward the non-Muslim "other" (Kinra 2013, 261).

You might wonder why I have included a separate chapter in this book that focuses on non-Shiʿi devotees to the Imams and Ahl-e Bait and their participation in ritual events such as Muharram. In both

India and Pakistan, the rhetoric of political and religious actors since the second half of the nineteenth century has emphasized communal and sectarian polarization and the creation of Muslim-Shiʿi "others," causing shared traditions of devotion to fade to the background of public discourse and belying the realities of everyday religious life for practitioners from diverse religious communities–Shiʿi, Sunni, Hindu, and others. The case studies and examples that I present in this chapter point to a more complex religio-cultural history in South Asia in which Shiʿi heroic figures are acclaimed through song, poetry, and stories, and venerated through rituals of offering and vow-making. Their memory is invoked and made present through an astonishing diversity of material objects.

The Husaini Brahmins: Hindu Devotees of Imam Husain

Wah Dutt Sultan,	Oh, King Dutt
Hindu ka Dharm	A follower of the Hindu religion
Musalman ka Iman,	And the Muslim faith,
Adha Hindu, Adha Musalman.	Half Hindu, half Muslim.

Attributed to the mischief-making Sufi chess player of the eleventh century, Wahun Pir, this praise poem is popularly invoked to valorize a group known as the Husaini Brahmins. This caste of brahmins trace their origins to the Gandhara region, located in contemporary northwest Pakistan between Peshawar and Taxila. The region has long been associated with governmental administrative and military service. In addition to being referred to as "Husaini" Brahmins for their rituals of devotion to Imam Husain, which will be discussed below, this caste is more formally known as Mohyal. There are seven groups that make up the clan, including the Datts, mentioned in the poem above.[1]

[1] In addition to the Datt, the six other clans that comprise the Mohyals are the Bhimwal, Chhibber, Lau, Mohan, Vaid, and Bali.

In India and Pakistan, Hindus actively participate in mourning the martyrdom of Imam Husain and his family at the battle of Karbala. The Husaini Brahmins' ancestor Sultan Rahab Datt is believed to have fought on behalf of Imam Husain's cause at Karbala. According to traditions told by both Indian Shiʿa and the Husaini Brahmins, in the period prior 610 CE when the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelations, and in the years leading up to the battle of Karbala in 680, there was a population of Hindus who lived in Arabia, where they worshipped the god Śiva. These Hindus were involved with the Arabs in the extensive trade networks that crisscrossed land and maritime routes between India and the Middle East. This particular history situates Rahab Datt in close relationship with the Prophet Muhammad and his grandsons Hasan and Husain, and at the battle of Karbala, it is claimed Rahab and his seven sons fought alongside the Imam.

From this frame narrative, multiple versions of the origin story emerge relating how the Mohyal Datts became known as the Husaini Brahmins. One version tells of the terrible moment when Shimr ibn Zi'l-Jawshan, a commander in the ʿUmayyad caliph Yazid's army, cut off Imam Husain's head and trampled his lifeless body beneath the hooves of his horse. In this account, Rahab Datt and his sons had journeyed from Mecca in search of Husain and his entourage, missing the bloody battle and arriving after the massacre of the Imam and the others on *ʿashura* (10 Muharram). Rahab Datt and his sons set off in pursuit of Shimr and the rest of Yazid's army as they triumphantly carried Imam Husain's severed head as a spoil of war. Datt and his sons overtook this grim caravan in Kufa and seized the Imam's head, which they lovingly washed before taking it to Damascus. Of course, Rahab and his sons were captured by Yazid's forces, who demanded return of the Imam's head. Rahab beheaded one of his sons and offered this head in exchange for Husain's blessed head; they refused. He then decapitated his second son, and so on until all seven of his sons were dead, yet Yazid's forces refused to leave without Husain's head – nothing less would suffice. Finally, after one long year, Rahab was left sonless

and Husain's head was finally taken to Damascus, where it was buried.[2]

The heroic sacrifice of Rahab's sons and battlefield bravery is recounted in a Panjabi *kabitt*, a poem composed in a four-line quatrain. The *kabitt* narrates the history of the Datts' settlement in Arabia, their battlefield heroism, Rahab's valiant sacrifice of his sons, his unwavering loyalty to Imam Husain, and the return of the Mohyal Datts to North India.

1. Sidh Viyog Datt, warrior styled Sultan, was a descendant of Sidh Jhujha, who settled in Arabia.
2. From his taking up his residence in Arabia he was made Mir-Sidhani. Offering prayers to the Brahm Ad-Guru deity he acknowledged Punj as his priest.
3. He came of the lineage of Bhardwaj the Saint, and settled in Arabia to sacrifice his head in the interests of Husain.
4. The well-known Sahas Rai and Hars Rai, sons of Sidh Datt, are to maintain honour in the field.
5. In the maintenance of honour in the field, they are lions in arms; with dagger in hand they were as strong as Rama.
6. Raipun, the pure-minded, furthers the welfare of his country. Dharo, Miro Datts took to settle in Arabia.
7. When the great warrior Datts issued from Arabia, their mounted forces marched to the music of clarions and camel-drums.
8. In great pomp and grandeur, the Datts readily armed with spear and shield.
9. The Datt braves caused terror in cutting their enemies asunder.

[2] By some accounts, Imam Husain's head is buried in the ʿUmayyad Mosque in a tomb known as the Mashhad Ra's al-Husain, located close to the *mashhad* of John the Baptist, who also has a shrine dedicated to his head in the mosque.

10. The cowards deserting, soon were lost to sight. They (the Datts) helped Husain and never turned back.
11. The Datt warriors alone fought bravely in the field,
    and plundered the fort of Kufa.
12. When they won the field drum was beaten; Husain
    was avenged and the people shouted "bravo," "bravo."
13. The seven sons of Rahib throwing in their lot
    with the faithful few on hapless Husain's side.
    Died as Datts fighting dreaming their death
    But friendship's welcome sacrifice.
14. Offspring of Husain! Forget not thy father's friend
    Rahib, once enthroned in Arabia's city ere thy father's end.
    Wherefore the name of Datt recite
    In thy prayers to Allah, at morn and night.
15. From Harya's Port with uplifted sword
    They entered Rum, Sham, and the dying city trod.
    Their war-cries resounding to the ominous beat
    Of their camel-drums.
16. Ghazni fell to the advancing host then Bukhara
    And turning to the land of Sindh their eyes
    Qandahar soon fell to the victor's prize.
17. They crossed the Attock, the historic stream, whose bosom bore
    Barbaric host or cultured Macedon. And trod once more
    Their Panjab. Whence with the Macedon in days of yore,
    They sought the fateful Arabian shore.

Source: T.P. Russell Stracey, *History of the Muhiyals: The Militant Brahman Race of India*, 2nd ed. (Lahore: Silver Printing Press, 1938), 127–134.

In the aftermath of Karbala, the Datts demonstrated their unflagging allegiance to Husain's religious and political cause by joining Mukhtar ibn Abi ʿUbaid al-Saqafi's (d. 687) rebellion against the

ʿUmayyad caliphate.[3] Mukhtar and his rebels staged guerilla warfare against the ʿUmayyad governor ʿUbaidallah ibn Ziad, whose complicity and participation in Imam Husain's martyrdom resulted in the siege and ultimate destruction of the fort at Kufa. Following their battlefield success, Mukhtar established a quarter in Kufa for the Hindus, the Daʾir-e Hindiyyah, the Indian quarter, which exists even today. In the eighth century, the Datts faced revenge and oppression from the ʿUmayyads for their ʿAlid loyalty. This caused many of the Datts and other *sayyids* or blood descendants of the Prophet Muhammad to migrate to India. Upon returning to the subcontinent, they acquired the name "Husaini Brahmin."

According to Nonica Dutt, a history professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, the loyalty Husaini Brahmins have for Imam Husain is inscribed on their bodies. In a meeting with the Pakistani Urdu author Intizar Hussain (d. 2016), Professor Dutt, a Husaini Brahmin herself, described the ritual cutting of *mundan*: "Now, I will tell you about a sign each and every Husaini Brahman carries with him/her. On his/her throat s/he bears a line of cutting, which is indicative of the fact that s/he is the descendant of those Brahmans whose throats were cut in the battle of Karbala" (Husain 2008, 298). After the birth of a child, Husaini Brahmins, like other Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities, observe the ritual of the first cutting of a child's hair, usually in either the first or third year of life. This first cutting of a lock of hair is an auspicious purifying act performed to ensure the long life of the child and to protect him or her from the evil eye (*nazr* or *kartut*). For the Husaini Brahmins, the *mundan* ceremony has an added symbolic dimension; in addition to tonsuring the child's hair, a small cut is made along the neckline

[3] Hagiographical accounts of Mukhtar's rebellion were first written in Persian in Iran in the Safavid period (r. 1501–1722); the story was later introduced in India and translated into Urdu and other local languages. Known collectively as *Mukhtar-namah*, these narratives are written in simple Urdu and depict Mukhtar and his compatriots in the pro-ʿAlid rebellion as heroes in their epic battle of good against the evil the ʿUmayyad caliphate is made to represent.

to symbolize the throats of Imam Husain, his family, and supporters at Karbala, cut by Yazid's army.

This overview of the history of the Husaini Brahmins' origin story, of which I relate just two of multiple narratives, does not aim to determine historical truth. Rather, my goal is to reveal the ways in which Husaini Brahmins place their ancestor in proximity to the Prophet Muhammad, and to Imam Husain at the battle of Karbala, thus validating their martial caste status and their traditions of ʿAlid devotion.

Husaini Brahmins have traditionally been visible and committed participants in Muharram ritual. During Muharram in cities such as Delhi, multiple religious communities continue to take *taʿziya*, replicas of Imam Husain's shrine-tomb at Karbala made of a bamboo frame covered with colored paper and flowers, and metal standards known as *ʿalams* that represent individual members of the Ahl-e Bait, out in procession on the days leading up to *ʿashura*. In Kalyanpuri in east Delhi, Husaini Brahmins take a *taʿziya* out in procession on *ʿashura*, and they publicly weep and participate in acts of self-flagellation known as *matam* to show their love for Imam Husain and his family (Akram 2014). Husaini Brahmins fast on 10 Muharram and wear black clothing during the days of mourning, the *ayyam-e ʿaza*, to show their solidarity with the Shiʿa, with whom they share the memory of Husain's sacrifice and suffering at Karbala.

The Husaini Brahmins remain steadfast in their loyalty and devotion to Imam Husain, although some reports indicate that younger members of the community are moving away from public participation in Muharram *taʿziya* processions, including setting up *sabil* stalls to distribute water and cooling fruit-flavored *sharbat* drinks. Yoginder Sikand has described the Husaini Brahmins as a "rapidly vanishing community" in terms of its youth moving away from participation in boundary-crossing ritual and devotional practices (Sikand 2004). Despite pressure exerted by both Hindu and Muslim ideologues to conform to clearly defined religious boundaries, the history and devotional practices of the Husaini Brahmins point to the universal message of striving for political justice and good governance that Imam Husain's opposition to Yazid represents.

Chapter 1

Pirla-Panduga: "The Festival of *Pirs*" among Hindus and Sunnis in South India

Don't weep Don't weep innocent Fatima
We will come and go once in a year
Maulali is our father Mohammad is our grand father
...
The name of Allah is a protection for you
The blessings of gods and demigods on you.
All the lords went to Sadanabadiri
They held a procession in Sadanabadiri.
(Telugu Muharram song quoted in B. Rama Raju 2004, 21)

The Deccan plateau is a semi-arid region shaped like a triangle located in the southern part of India. Deccan is the English derivation of the Prakrit word *dakkhin*, which itself is derived from the Sanskrit, *dakshina*, southern, referring to the region's location. The modern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Maharashtra are four of the eight states that comprise the Deccan region. Beginning in the fourteenth century the Deccan was ruled by a series of Muslim dynasties, some of which espoused Shiʿism as their state religion. This was particularly true of the Qutb Shahs of Golconda-Hyderabad (r. ca. 1496–1687), who were steadfastly Shiʿa, and the ʿAdil Shahs of Bijapur (r. 1489–1686), where a number of sultans also professed a Shiʿi orientation. The Muslim rulers of the Deccan sultanates ruled as religious minorities over their numerically superior Hindu subjects. For the Shiʿi sultanates, particularly the Qutb Shahs, these kings ruled as Muslims who were affiliated with a minority community within a larger Deccan melting pot made up of different religious sub-groups that we tend to label under the rubric of Hinduism: Vaiṣṇavas, Śaivas, Śaktas, and Lingayats.

The Qutb Shahi sultans were members of a microscopic elite community ruling over diverse communities of people professing devotion to various gods and goddesses and different expressions of Islam, including devotion to the Prophet's family, the Ahl-e Bait,

and to Sufi saints, the *pirs* whose tomb-shrines populate the Deccan plateau. It was in the Qutb Shahs' political interests to cultivate these devotional practices and find emotional, material, and ritual linkages to Muharram and the commemoration of Imam Husain's martyrdom at Karbala. Based on the diverse political, social, and religious milieux of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Deccan, it made sense that Shiʿism, Muharram, and everything associated with its commemoration needed to become "Indian." How does Muharram become Indian and why might it matter? Through their patronage and sponsorship of Muharram rituals, how did the Qutb Shahi sultans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries introduce and make meaningful Imam Husain, his nephew Qasem, the bridegroom of Karbala, his half-brother ʿAbbas, the valiant water-carrier (*saqqah*), and Fatimah, who bears eternal witness to the suffering of her family, to Hindus and Sunnis living in towns and villages far beyond the imperial capital of Hyderabad? How was this received in the region's villages and towns among non-Shiʿi communities with no cultural memory of Karbala and Imam Husain? ʿAlid devotion was encouraged by tapping into the devotional modes and motifs of local Hindu and Sufi-oriented communities, primarily through personalized and intimate devotion to a chosen deity through the practice of *bhakti*. ʿAlid modalities of intense and emotional devotion were expressed in three ways: first, as love for the family of the Prophet Muhammad, the Ahl-e Bait; second, through the veneration of Sufi spiritual masters (*pir*) at their tomb-shrines; and third, through the prevailing motif of hero worship in social, religious, and politic life in South Asia, particularly in the Deccan, where the figure of Qasem in particular is glorified as the bridegroom-hero, *dula-vira* (van Skyhawk 2008, 128).

In towns and villages throughout Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, northern Karnataka, and in parts of Maharashtra since the late sixteenth century, a variant of Muharram known in Telugu as *pirla panduga*, the "festival of *pirs*," is celebrated by Hindus and Sunni Muslims. *Pirla panduga* can be understood from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, it is a ritual of cultural memory of the martyrdom of Imam Hasan and Imam Husain at Karbala that is

imagined through hyperlocalized contexts and refracted through the Indic epic traditions of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Despite the inclination one might have to describe *pirla panduga* as an exemplum of the ethic of "give-and-take" that has historically characterized the fuzzy boundaries of Indian religious identity formation prior to the establishment of the British Raj in the mid-nineteenth century, we must consider the ways in which this form of Muharram, in the absence of Shiʿi ritual practitioners and outside of urban centers, maintains a fundamentally "Muslim" identity. This Muslim identity, albeit one that reflects highly localized cultural, linguistic, caste, and gender values, uses the events of Karbala and other saintly figures who become associated with Imam Husain to link together cultural memory through sacred objects, poetry, and the mapping of sacred space that is connected with the construction of sacred buildings for ritual and pilgrimage activities.

Pirla panduga blends an expression of Islam that is deeply inflected with Sufism and South Indian *bhakti*, and incorporates elements of hero-worship. Muharram-*pirla panduga* rituals center around a core group of figures from Shiʿi history: Imam Husain, Imam Hasan, Fatimah al-Zahra, ʿAbbas, and Qasem. In the ritual domain of *pirla panduga*, history is compressed, bringing Fatimah (d. ca. 633) and the second Imam, Hasan (d. 670), into the action of the battle of Karbala although they both died long before the actual event. Devotees cry out, "Hasan! Husain!" or "Asan! Usan!" in the Deccani regional languages of Telugu, Kannada, and Marathi. This enumerative compound (Sanskrit: *iteratara dvandva*) represents Hasan and Husain as a martyred pair, never as individuals. While Imam Hasan was not present at Karbala, the slogans shouted by devotees form a *dvandva* unit with his brother Husain through which multiple forms of memory are invoked. The brothers are variously valorized as heroic warriors (*vira*), they are venerated and feared as powerful demi-gods whose wrath (*ugra*) must be avoided, and they are loved as saintly figures.

Devotion to *Piru-Swami*

Muharram devotional rituals among Sunnis and Hindus in the Deccan are centered around metal standards that are called *pir* in Telugu. Shiʿa and Urdu speakers know these metal crests representing Imam Husain and members of the Ahl-e Bait as an *ʿalam*, which I discuss in detail in Chapter 4. In Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere in the Deccan, the *pir* takes on blended Hindu-Muslim names such as *piru-swami* (*pir*-lord), *pirla-devullu* (*pir* gods), or the Muslim "Turk" god, *turaka devudu* (Mohammad 2013, 16). The word *pir* has traditionally been associated with Sufism and exemplary individuals who have accomplished spiritual mastery and even performed miracles (*karamat*). The *pir* devotion associated with the Prophet Muhammad, Imam Husain, and other religious exemplars is accorded a casteless and "god-like" status in the Deccan (Mohammad 2013, 11). By referring to metal crests as *piru-swami*, the spiritual power and charisma of the Sufi *pir*, the material objects associated with Muharram, and the absorption of Muslim saints and prophets into the Hindu pantheon is established by compounding Urdu (Islamic) and Telugu (Hindu) terms.

Among the Telugu-speaking weaver communities along the Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka border, *pirla panduga* has most likely been celebrated since the seventeenth century, when the Qutb Shahi sultans spent lavish sums of money to foster the observance of Muharram in the districts beyond the imperial capital of Hyderabad. Lacking reliable written sources to document the celebration of *pirla panduga* in this area prior to the mid-nineteenth century, we are obliged to turn to the British *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, created by William W. Hunter in 1869 and published in 1881. The *Imperial Gazetteer of India* offers a statistical account of the history, geography, populations, and economic practices of the different regions under British administration, including parts of the Deccan. British colonial observers of Hindus and Sunnis performing rituals associated with Shiʿism described the veneration of *pirs* in towns and villages in the Deccan as

"Hindu Muharram" (Kanalu 2016, 130). The British did not realize that centuries before, the Deccan sultans spent vast sums of money to sponsor and promote the celebration of Muharram in towns and villages far beyond the imperial capital, institutionalizing a cultural memory of Imam Husain and the events of Karbala through narrative forms and ritual and material practices that acquired the cultural imprint of Deccan rural life. Muharram was not simply an urban religious phenomenon. Nor did they understand the elasticity that characterizes everyday religion in South Asia, where a complex repertoire of narratives and material images can be woven together from multiple traditions, both Hindu and Muslim, to create an expansive universe in which Hasan-Husain and Rama-Śiva are all heroic figures, and where Fatimah and Sita fuse together as paradigms of female piety and women's suffering.

When Muharram begins, Sunnis and Hindu weaver castes prepare the *pirla-devullu*, which most often take the shape of metal hands (*panjah*) made of silver, bronze, or brass, for installation outside the local mosque or in the town square (*katte*) under a banyan tree (Kanalu 2016, 132). *Panjahs* are also installed in special *pirla-makanam* or *pirla devullu gudi*, buildings for their display and for the performance of special offerings and supplications by devotees. Both *pirla-makanam* and *pirla devullu gudi* are compound phrases in which the first word *pir* is the Urdu term meaning "lord." *Makanam* is also an Urdu word that has been "Telugu-ized," meaning house. *Pirla devullu gudi* is a compound of Urdu and two Telugu words, to convey the meaning, "the *pir* deities' temple" (Kanalu 2016, 132–133). The ways in which this space is built and defined as sacred is inherently Islamic because the *panjah* is understood by its devotees as representing the spiritual power of Muslim spiritual heroes of the past (the Prophet Muhammad, Husain, Hasan, Fatimah, and Sufi saints). Significantly, these spaces and objects are shaped by a shared South Asian spiritual economy through which contiguous patterns of everyday religious practice, including supplicatory vows, processions, poetry, and song facilitate the integration of Hindu practices into *pirla panduga*.

Panjahs are usually installed in pairs, either Hasan-Husain or the Prophet Muhammad and his daughter Fatimah. The larger, foremost of the *panjahs* is the *pedda devudu* ("big" deity), and the smaller is the *sanna devudu*. Hasan is always represented as the "big" deity and Husain as the "little" deity. Throughout the Deccan, Hasan is always venerated as the *pedda devudu* in *pirla panduga* because of his status as the eldest brother. The *panjahs* are considered wrathful (*ugra*) figures, possessed of extraordinary power that must be supplicated and respected by its devotees. Hasan-Husain *panjahs* frequently take the form of sword and shield (*isi* and *gurani*), reinscribing these brothers as valiant warriors on the Karbala battlefield in the religious imagination. Naveen Kanalu has observed that the explicit representation of the Hasan-Husain *panjahs* as weapons through sword and shield iconography, as well by attaching bamboo shoots and red cloth, invokes an incident from the epic *Mahabharata* when Arjuna hid weapons for his four other Pandava brothers in a banyan tree before they went into hiding for one year in the kingdom of Virata. Significantly, the weapons are recovered by Arjuna to fight their enemies the Kauravas when they come to capture cows—a recurring theme in blended narratives about Hasan and Husain in South Asia, which portray them as Muslim (and vaguely Shiʿi) protectors of cows, and therefore sympathetic to Hindu religious values (summarized from Kanalu 2016, 132; see also van Skyhawk 2008, 135).

Ownership of the *pirla-devullu* in some towns along the Andhra Pradesh-Karnataka border is maintained by Sunni families. Hindus contribute money to the upkeep of the *panjahs*, however, the fact that Sunni families claim hereditary ownership reflects a fundamentally Islamic tinge to the performance of *pirla panduga*. Despite the monopoly on ownership of the *panjahs* by Sunni minority groups in these towns, *pirla panduga* asserts a strongly Hindu tone due to the diverse castes and communities that participate and contribute to the festival's ritual economy. When the new moon is sighted at the beginning of the month of Muharram, a pit is dug outside the mosque (*masidu* in Telugu) following the call to prayer. The Hasan-Husain *panjahs* are removed from the trees from which they hang during the year and are installed by the pits. After the *panjahs* are removed from the trees they are attached to long bamboo sticks and decorated with green and red

cloths, and they may also be adorned with parasols, floral garlands, and peacock feathers. During the ten days of Muharram, devotees fast in memory of Hasan and Husain's suffering at Karbala, which includes abstaining from sexual intercourse, drinking alcohol, or chewing pan. Some people, particularly men and boys, may go around their village during Muharram begging for food to remember the suffering of the inhabitants of Damascus who had insufficient food during Yazid's reign. Hospitality is also shown toward the *panjahs*; devotees offer puffed rice, palm sugar, and incense over which the opening verses of the Qurʾan (*Fatihah*) are recited. Some of the offerings are distributed to festival participants and the remainder is returned as blessed food (*tabarruk* or *prasad*) to take home and share with the family.

On each of the ten days of Muharram, a different *panjah* is taken out in a procession through the village. Each procession focuses on the martyrdom of a different Karbala hero or local saint. Some *pirs*, however, were never at Karbala, such as Kullyappa ("the Lord with the cap"), the *pir-swami* at the center of pilgrimage and Muharram rituals in Gugudu, Andhra Pradesh, who is considered by locals a member of the Ahl-e Bait and a founding saint of the town.[4] Outside of the urban context of Hyderabad, the largest city in the Deccan with its long Shiʿi history and minority community concentrated in the Old City, the *pirla panduga* variant of Muharram is intensely localized, making it difficult to generalize about how Husain's martyrdom is commemorated, although I shall highlight some continuities in practice and belief.

Pirla panduga and veneration of the *pirs* is auspicious, bringing good fortune and spiritual reward for the coming year. The practice of temporary asceticism (*faqiri*) in emulation of the *pirs* can help individuals to cultivate an improved moral and ethical outlook. *Pirla panduga* fosters a spirit of generosity and charity among its devotees, who offer red clay pots known as *matkis* or *dutti* that are filled with a palm sugar *sharbat* to the *pirs* as a way of remembering that Imam Husain and his family were denied food and water from 7 Muharram, causing terrible thirst for the children. Water, bread, and other special foods are distributed as

[4] For a history of *pirla panduga* and associated rituals for Kullyappa in Gugudu, see Mohammad 2013.

prasad (leavings) after they are offered by devotees to the *pir*. These foods are also specially prepared and distributed to participants during *pirla panduga* and to the poor during these festive days as a meritorious act. On 10 Muharram, large numbers of people gather in villages, and thousands congregate in the pilgrimage town of Gugudu for the fire-walking ritual, which is known as *ag ka matam*. Wood is gathered to make a roaring fire that is burnt down to hot embers that are spread out in the firepit (*alava*) to make a gauntlet over which devotees walk barefoot, some carrying the *pir*. This act is performed in memory of the scorching heat and hot sands of Karbala that Husain and his entourage endured. The feet of the faithful do not get burned as they walk across the *alava*. The fire-walk is a test of faith (*imanu*) that is a central tenet of the temporary asceticism of *faqiri* that is encapsulated in this explanation by Obulesu, a Dalit devotee of Kullyappa, the *pir*-saint of Gugudu:

> Once we put on the red thread, our *imaanu* [faith] reaches its pinnacle. Since our *imaan* is stronger, even if we walk through fire we won't feel the heat of it. You cannot see anyone complaining, not even of simple bruises. *Niyyatu*[5] [pure intention] is important. *Faqiri* ritual actually prepares you for everything, including the final fire-walk. So, the fire-walk is an ultimate test for our purity in performing rituals. Sometimes even Muslims wonder how this could happen! Purity has no caste. If you've a real heart, *pirs* even walk to you and embrace you.
>
> Source: Afsar Mohammad, "Following the *Pir*: Temporary Asceticism and Village Religion in South India," in *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual*, vol. 5, *Transfer and Space*, ed. Axel Michaels, Gita Dharampal-Frick, Robert Langer, and Nils Holger-Petersen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 160.

[5] Note this is a Telugu adaptation of the Arabo-Persian term *niyyah*, used elsewhere in the book.

Once the physical and spiritual test of the fire-walk is passed, the mood lightens and the *pir* is taken for a final procession through the streets receiving offerings of palm sugar. Offerings of incense ash are received by devotees, which is taken to place on body parts of themselves and their families in need of healing. The final act is the immersion of the *pirs* in a river or other body of water, where the bamboo poles and cloths that decorate it are removed and discarded until next year. The return of the *pir* to its resting place is accompanied by a cry, "*albida, albida*," farewell, farewell.

Dulha! Dulha!: Sunni and Hindu Possession Rituals for the Bridegroom Qasem

Imam Husain is undoubtedly the subject of intense devotion in the subcontinent by Shiʿa, as well as diverse religious groups, both Muslim and Hindu. The martyrdom of Qasem, the 13-year-old son of Imam Hasan, is observed on 7 Muharram in special mourning assemblies known as *mehndi ki majlis* to commemorate his battle-field wedding to Husain's ten-year-old daughter Fatimah Kubra. Throughout the subcontinent, Qasem's intercessory powers are harnessed through the *naʿl sahib*, the horseshoe that came from Imam Husain's loyal horse Zuljanah, which was brought to the Deccan by a pilgrim in the sixteenth century. When the *naʿl sahib* relic was established in Hyderabad in the sixteenth century, people began to believe that Qasem's spirit resided in it. *ʿAlams* called *naʿl sahib* associated with Qasem proliferate in the Deccan and are much revered by Hindus who make offerings and petitions to it for assistance in getting married, becoming pregnant, or protecting the family from illness or harm. There is also a strong tradition of spirit possession connected to rituals focused on Qasem the warrior-bridegroom (*dulha*).

In these henna mourning assemblies, poems and narratives are recounted that describe the wedding rituals of Qasem and Fatimah Kubra as explicitly South Asian. They perform the pre-wedding *mehndi* and *sachaq* rituals in which the families of the bride and groom exchange gifts. The joy of the battlefield wedding between these two exceptional youths is tragically ended when Qasem was martyred on the battlefield. Amplifying the impact of this catastrophic event, Fatimah Kubra and Qasem's marriage was unconsummated.

In a Telugu song of mourning, Husain's sister Zainab recounts the joyous wedding rituals that took place just moments before Qasem went to the battlefield where he fought heroically, slaying many of Yazid's most fearsome commanders before being martyred. The following Telugu poem interweaves the auspicious dress, food offerings, adornment practices, and matrimonial rituals that bond together a couple with Zainab's lament of the incompletion of Qasem and Fatimah Kubra's wedding:

The thread bound on the wrist is not yet removed O Khasim
O Husain
The heap of rice poured in your skirt is not yet untied O Khasim
O Husain
The trinket worn on the forehead is not yet taken off O Khasim
O Husain
The coils of the turban have not yet been unfolded O Khasim
O Husain
The new pajama bought the day before yesterday has not yet been
put on O Khasim O Husain
The blanket bought the day before yesterday has not been put on
O Khasim O Husain
The shirt that you wore is not effaced O Khasim O Husain
The crease of the cap that you wore the day before yesterday is still
afresh O Khasim O Husain
The candy distributed yesterday is still in stock O Khasim O Husain
The dry *khajur* [dates] distributed yesterday is still in stock O Khasim O Husain

The garlands plaited yesterday are still unwithered O Khasim O Husain
The *panbidas*[6] prepared yesterday are still unused O Khasim
O Husain.

(B. Rama Raju 2004, 22–23)

The event that Zainab describes in this poem seems to be suspended in mid-action. A series of rituals have been performed, however none of them have been completed, leaving each act in a state of limbo. In each line of the poem Zainab describes a wedding that hangs in ritual suspension, the listener understands the immediacy of two intertwined events, the battlefield wedding and Qasem's martyrdom are nearly simultaneous and calamitous events.

Only exemplary youth such as Fatimah Kubra and Qasem, through the specifically Indianized gender roles and rituals that cast them as spiritual and socio-ethical exemplars and by virtue of their blood relationship to the Prophet Muhammad, can endure such tribulations. The first stanza of an epic *marsiyah* poem written by the eighteenth-century North Indian poet Mir Muhammad Rafiʿ Sauda (d. 1781) echoes the sense of the "unnaturalness" of Fatimah Kubra and Qasem's battlefield wedding:

Friends! Hear of the injustice wrought by the celestial orb!
For the son of Hasan, it has set its heart on an unnatural wedding;
That bride and groom have joined together in such a union,
The shroud's inauspicious thread has been tied to this wedding.

(Adapted from Ruffle 2011, 136)

The final line of the first stanza of Sauda's *marsiyah* is echoed in the opening line of the Telugu mourning song in which Zainab describes the rituals of an idealized South Asian wedding turned

[6] *Pan-bira* is a preparation of the astringent areca nut, which colors the mouth red when chewed, and slaked lime (*chunam*), mixed with aromatic spices such as clove and cardamom, which is wrapped in a betel leaf (*pan*). *Pan-bira* are often given as gifts of hospitality or as a sign of affection; significantly, they are also presented to confirm relationship, particularly at the time of a wedding engagement.

upside down: The shroud's inauspicious thread has been tied to this wedding (Sauda) / The thread bound on the wrist is not yet removed O Khasim O Husain (Telugu mourning song). In the Telugu song, the *kautuka* is a thread that is bound on the groom's right and bride's left wrist before the marriage ceremony (Goldman 2005, 391). The threads or fabric of the funeral shroud (*kafan*) is in diametrical opposition to the auspicious act of tying the wedding thread binding together groom and bride as husband and wife. The funeral shroud permanently and irrevocably shatters that marital bond, which we see in the following stanzas of Sauda's *marsiyah*:

It was that severed head that was the family's henna ceremony,
Like *sachaq* pots bound about an elephant, such are the wounds around his neck.
In this vile circumstance, the bridegroom's gift to his bride was his sleeve,
In what land is there such a tradition of *sachaq*?

The bride's tray of *mehndi* has come,
The in-laws have been congealed in the brother-in-law's blood;
The bride has smeared her hand in her husband's blood,
This color is the mode of the wedding season.

No sooner was the bride adorned for union with her husband,
Then she said, "There is no remedy from God for this state of widowhood.
For whom he gave everything, he went to battle and was slain
Now, what is the point of this passion and love?"

Removing her nose ring, she surrendered it over to me,
She admonished herself, pouring dust over her head in grief.
The corpse is coming, where are his mourners?
Now is not the time for words and discourses.

(Adapted from Ruffle 2011, 137)

These stanzas of Sauda's *marsiyah* describe South Asian wedding customs that largely have their origins with Hindu communities, and

which have been adopted by Muslims and made their own. Fatimah Kubra's status as a girl-widow is a popular theme for Indian poets and *majlis* orators (*zakir*); she is simultaneously represented as strong and pathos-inducing because of her willingness to sacrifice her husband and her auspicious status for the political and religious cause of Islam. On 7 Muharram, the day in the Karbala cycle dedicated to Qasem's battlefield wedding and martyrdom, poetry and mourning assembly discourses focus on the proper performance of Indian wedding rituals, and the expression of South Asian anxieties and taboos about widows and their remarriage (Ruffle 2011, 110).[7]

The deep cultural, religious, and social pressures exerted on men and women to marry compels devotees to seek Qasem's intercession. Seeking assistance from the "bridegroom of Karbala" is a popular act performed by unmarried men and women during Muharram. On 7 Muharram, unmarried people attend mourning assemblies and enthusiastically reach for the trays of henna (*mehndi*) that are passed around when Qasem's *ʿalam* is taken out in its dual wedding-funeral procession. An unmarried person takes a small amount of the henna paste and smears it on the right palm (*mehndi lagana*) in a small circle with the belief that Qasem's spiritual power will produce a good marriage alliance. The frenzy that the passing around of the *mehndi* tray creates highlights the premium that is placed on marriage in Indian cultures (Ruffle 2011, 127).

Following on the vows made over the henna tray (*mehndi ki mannat*) seeking Qasem's intercession in finding a good husband or wife, so too is the bridegroom-warrior's assistance requested in the granting of children. Qasem's assumption of the *naʿl sahib* ("sir horseshoe") form, referring to the horseshoe from Imam Husain's

[7] The Indic taboo against widow remarriage is in tension with the *sunnah* (lived tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad, who declared "marriage is my *sunnah*. He who does not act upon it shall not be mine." Among Muslim nobility in India, there has been a sense of dishonor in widows remarrying, indicating the diminution of orthodox law to local customary practice, particularly in the domain of "personal law," which pertains to issues of marriage, divorce, and inheritance (for further discussion see Ruffle 2011, 140–142).

horse Zuljanah, is manifested in his role as the protector of children (himself childless), sought out by female devotees to intercede in all manner of child-related issues. *Naʿl sahib* induces young men to enter into trancelike or possessed states in which he variously inhabits the body of Zuljanah, galloping through the streets, or carries the heavy *ʿalam* as though bearing the body of the martyr.

Jaffur Shurreef's 1832 ethnography of Deccani Muslim religious practices includes a lengthy description of rituals associated with Qasem, including women's supplications for the birth and protection of children:

> On the way from place to place the Dūlā[8] is stopped by wives praying for the blessing of children, or the removal of a rival, or the casting out of a Jinn or other evil spirit. To secure a son the Dūlā general directs a flower or two to be plucked from the jasmine garlands that deck his rod, a bar of silver or iron ending in a crescent or horseshoe, and covered with peacock feathers . . . No woman can be possessed by the Dūlā spirits . . .
>
> Some, in ignorance of the Law, make a thing like a human figure, and put the horseshoe on it as a head . . . A woman makes a vow to the horseshoe, "If through thy favour I am blessed with a son I promise to make him run with thy procession." Should a son be born to her she puts a parasol in his hand and makes him run with it . . . Something of the bridegroom's spirit is supposed to dwell in the horseshoe, which works miraculous cures.
>
> Source: Jaʿfar Sharif, *Islam in India: Or the Qānūn-i-Islām: The Customs of the Musalmāns of India*, ed. William Crooke, trans.G.A. Herklots (London: Routledge, [1921, 1972] 2017), 158ff.

[8] *Dulha* or bridegroom, here representing Qasem.

This condensation of Shurreef's[9] account of the *dulha* procession reveal two ways women petition the *naʿl sahib ʿalam* associated with Qasem. Women pray directly to the *ʿalam* asking for the blessing of pregnancy or for an ill child to be cured. Qasem's intercession through the *ʿalam* directs women to either pluck flowers from garlands that are placed around its "neck" or other parts of its body (for discussion of the anthropomorphic qualities of the *ʿalam*, see Chapter 4). Women also make vows (*nazr o niyaz* or *mannat*) to the *naʿl sahib ʿalam* promising that should a son be born; she will make him it run in the procession for a certain number of years in fulfillment of her request. Qasem is also believed to heal sick children. Mothers who have made vows to the bridegroom (*dulha*) dress their child in green and send him out to beg the next year during Muharram to fulfill their vow and as a form of humility and gratitude for Qasem's protection (Kunte 1977, 350, quoted in van Skyhawk 2008, 131).

As the *naʿl sahib*, Qasem is channeled by young male devotees in South Asia through rituals of possession, an explicitly masculine Muharram ritual. In Banaras in North India, a young man taking the form of the possessed *dulha* (bridegroom) inhabiting Qasem's *naʿl sahib* persona rears through the narrow streets and lanes restrained by a group of caretakers. A blurring of boundaries between the duality that the *naʿl sahib* indexes is witnessed in the young man's possession. Is he possessed by Zuljanah, or it is the bridegroom-warrior Qasem who possesses him? In his state of possession, the young man exerts tremendous strength as he drags the group of men who hold him to protect him as he runs through the streets, and he exhibits spiritual might as he traverses burning coals with his bare feet. Hours later he returns to the *dargah* where he began and leaves his trance, an extraordinarily powerful, transformative, and exhausting experience (Katz 2004, DVD).

[9] Known by this unusual spelling of his name, the editors of the most recent edition of Jaffur Shurreef's *Islam in India* have elected to transliterate our nineteenth-century author's name following more conventional scholarly methods, rendering it Jaʿfar Sharif. For the sake of clarity, I refer to this author as Jaffur Shurreef.

The Shrine of Bibi Pak Daman in South Asian Muslim Cultural Memory

In South Asia's Shiʿi sacred geography, Lahore stands alone as the one place where six women of the Ahl-e Bait who survived the battle of Karbala are buried. Bibi Pak Daman is a small shrine located down a long brick-paved alley, lined with stalls selling religious books, devotional objects, flowers, and ornately embroidered cloths (*chadar*) to present to the tombs that contain the tombs of Ruqayyah bint ʿAli ibn Abi Talib[10] and five other female relatives identified as either her daughters or the sisters of Muslim ibn ʿAqil, a cousin of Imam Husain, who was martyred by the Kufan governor Ibn Ziad (Zaidi 2014, 307). Ruqayyah's tomb is believed by her devotees to predate the shrine-tombs of the myriad Sufi male saints that populate Lahore, including that of Sayyid ʿAli al-Hujwiri (d. 1072), popularly known as Data Ganj Bakhsh, who frequently performed visitation (*ziyarah*) to Bibi Pak Daman, where he meditated and prayed. According to the hagiographical narratives that circulate in Lahore and throughout Pakistan to explain how these six women appeared there, the city's Shiʿi essence derives from Ruqayyah's father, ʿAli's foretelling the challenges and suffering that would befall his children and grandchildren at the hands of their ʿUmayyad rivals. ʿAli instructed Ruqayyah that she should travel east to Sindh and Hind after the battle that was to come, which would cause the martyrdom of her brothers. There, he promised the people would be open to their Muslim identity and be loving followers of the Ahl-e Bait (Zaidi 2014, 309).

There are several types of stories about Ruqayyah and more generally about the Bibi Pak Daman shrine that tell about its origins, establishing a link between the Ahl-e Bait, Lahore's physical landscape, and the epic heroes of the *Ramayana*, particularly Sita. Bibi Pak Daman participates in a broader shrine or "*dargah* culture" that transcends the communal categories "Hindu" or "Muslim" and

[10] Ruqayyah was ʿAbbas's sister and Husain's half-sister.

resists notions of syncretic or hybrid practice (Bellamy 2011, 6). Bibi Pak Daman and other Muslim saint shrines are both local and cosmopolitan, which we saw in our discussion of Deccani Muharram rituals, and will observe in future chapters on material objects, built space, and literature and aesthetics. I draw on Carla Bellamy's study of the Husain Tekri shrine complex in Madhya Pradesh, which she describes as "ambiguously Islamic," (Bellamy 2011, 113). Not tied to a particular religious tradition, it is rather specifically South Asian, drawing on subcontinental religious discourses, themes, and values that are understandable and meaningful to devotees. Bibi Pak Daman is likewise an explicitly South Asian shrine. Like other South Asian Islamic shrines, "the sources of the site's authority are not fixed, but rather are determined by context, audience, and constantly changing combinations of Islamic names, narratives, and objects; these sources are in some cases historically Islamic, and in other cases equally at home in both the greater Islamic and greater Hindu traditions" (Bellamy 2011, 18).

The narratives told about Ruqayyah emphasize her piety, bravery, chastity, and ability to triumph over her tormenters, ultimately inspiring them to convert to Islam based on her exemplary model. Most narratives about ʿAli's daughter are rooted in ambiguity, ending with Ruqayyah and her five companions passing into a state of occultation (*ghaybah*). The concept of *ghaybah* developed as a central theological tenet for the Ithna ʿAshari ("Twelver") Shiʿa with the "greater occultation" (*al-ghaybah al-kubra*) of the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, in 941 CE. One hagiographical narrative intriguingly establishes a parallel between Ruqayyah and Sita, King Rama's wife, the queen of the dharmic kingdom of Ayodhya and heroine of Valmiki's Sanskrit epic *Ramayana*, in which she is swallowed by the earth after being asked to complete a second ordeal to prove her fidelity to her husband. According to tradition Ruqayyah, likewise, was swallowed up by the earth.

The origin narrative of Bibi Pak Daman begins when Husain's eldest son, the fourth Imam Zain al-ʿAbidin, the lone male to survive the battle of Karbala, dispatched Ruqayyah, her five companions, and a caravan of 300 members of the Bani Hashem from Medina in 685 CE

for India. In Sindh, Ruqayyah preached the message of Islam and told people about the tribulations endured by her family. Moved by her words, many Hindus converted to Islam, which caught the attention of some of the local Hindu *rajas*, as well as the ʿUmayyad caliph in far-away Damascus. So concerned about the situation were the ʿUmayyads, they sent the general Muhammad ibn Qasem, future conqueror of Sindh, to capture Ruqayyah and bring her back to Damascus. Like countless others, Qasem was entranced by Ruqayyah's oratorical skill and instead became a devotee of the Ahl-e Bait! Soon after, the *raja* of Jaisalmer aligned with the ʿUmayyads to arrest Ruqayyah and bring her to trial for her sedition, although this was soon thwarted by the conversion of the king's son to Ruqayyah's message of devotion.

The situation for Ruqayyah, her family, and her followers seemed little different in India than it had under ʿUmayyad political rule in the Middle East. The message of Karbala and its ethic of justice (*ʿadalah*) was empowering for many new devotees to the Ahl-e Bait. However, it proved to be an intractable problem for those in power who sought to silence her and eliminate her subversive teachings. As opposition mounted, Ruqayyah gathered together the women of her family and they prayed to God for His help. At that moment, a hole opened up in the earth, swallowing the six women. For Hindu converts this moment echoes a similar moment in Tulsidas's sixteenth-century Awadhi recension of the *Ramayana*, the *Ramcaritmanas* (The lake of the deeds of Rama) when Sita is asked by her husband King Rama to submit to a second trial by fire (*agnipariksha*) to prove her fidelity. This event is narrated in an appended concluding chapter of the *Ramcaritmanas*, the *Uttarakanda*, in which Sita, fed up with her husband's inability to trust her fidelity, asks Mother Earth (from which she was born) to take her back in proof of her chastity.

Since Ruqayyah likewise vanished into the earth, her devotees believe that she never died. Instead, they believe she is in a state of occultation (*ghaybah*) in which she is simultaneously absent and alive but not physically present. Accordingly, we cannot describe Ruqayyah's shrine as a tomb because she is not dead and buried. The lack of a body further complicates the articulation of sacred space and its gendering at Bibi Pak Daman. For devotees, the lack of the six women's bodies

means that the walls that were erected around the site where they went into occultation had to be protected by a veil (*hijab*) and through the practice of sexual segregation (*purdah*). Traditionally, this meant that men were not allowed to enter the sacred precinct of the shrine (a more extended discussion of this tradition appears in Ruffle 2015).

A rich repertoire of gendered rituals in which Shiʿi, Sunni, and Hindu women participate center on votive requests and intercessory petitions for the conception of a baby, success for a child in study or work, and the curing of sickness. A popular tradition tells that the six camels that Ruqayyah and her five companions rode from Medina to India were swallowed up by the earth at the same time as the six pure women. These camels were turned into different types of trees, which can be found in the shrine complex. Most notable is a large wan tree with a thick, gnarled trunk. Women seeking to conceive a baby chew on the leaves of this wan tree (Khalid 2017). Infertile couples are given five leaves, each person chewing two and a half leaves in order for the woman to conceive (Chawla, Shoeb and Iftikhar 2016, 234). As we can see, at some point in the history of Bibi Pak Daman, entry to the shrine was restricted to women in order to protect the saints' honor (*ʿizzat*) and sexual purity through the imposition of sexual segregation (*purdah*), excluding men from the "tomb" precinct where devotees believe the women went into occultation.

These overlapping narratives and miraculous acts performed have made Bibi Pak Daman a sacred space of intercession and place of prayer for Shiʿi, Sunni, and Hindu women, causing disputes about the sectarian orientation of the shrine and leading to intervention by the Chief Administrator of Auqaf[11] in the Central Zone of

[11] *Waqf* (pl. *awqaf*) is a charitable endowment of various types of assets (land, buildings, or money) that is given in the form of an inalienable gift to Muslim religious, educational, and medical institutions. Such endowments are bestowed in perpetuity and cannot be revoked through sale, inheritance, or other means of transfer. A *waqf* is comprised of three contractual parties: (1) the *waqif* or donor who establishes the charitable endowment, (2) the *mawquf ʿalayh*, who is responsible for ownership of the property, and (3) the *mutawwali*, who is responsible for the administration of the property and discharging all terms of the *waqif's* endowment (for further discussion see Abbasi 2012, 124).

Lahore. In post-Independence India, the Wakf Act 1954 placed all *awqaf* under governmental control. Administration and upkeep of mosques, *dargahs*, *imambaras*, *ʿashurkhanahs*, and the payment of salaries for *qazis* (*shariʿah* court judges), imams, and *dargah* attendants (*khadim*) fall under the purview of the Wakf Act 1954 (amended in 1995), and later of individual state *waqf* boards. A similar situation prevails in Pakistan. The government of Ayub Khan (1958–1969) implemented the West Pakistan Auqaf Properties Ordinance, 1959 and established the Ministry of Auqaf in order to rein in the perceived power wielded by Sufi *pirs* in the countryside. As with India, all of Pakistan's provinces and territories maintain *waqf* boards, which have diminished the individual control and administrative power of religious institutions.

During ongoing renovations that took place at the shrine between 1968–1970, sectarian tensions developed between Sunnis and Shiʿas regarding community rights to engrave the names of their holy figures within the shrine precincts. While the gravestones for the six women were being refurbished with their names, the committee members overseeing the renovation work also saw fit to add inscriptions with the names of the twelve Shiʿi Imams, much to the consternation of some members of the Sunni majority that comprises the devotees who visit the shrine. On 27 July 1971, sectarian strife broke out between the two over the inscription of the names of the four Rashidun caliphs (Abu Bakr, ʿUmar, ʿUthman, and ʿAli) in one of the buildings in the shrine precinct. The invocation of the names of the Rashidun, with the exception of ʿAli, is an abomination for the Shiʿa who believe the first three caliphs were usurpers.

As tensions continued to rise, the Lahore Auqaf Department intervened in order to mediate the situation. Both Sunnis and Shiʿa referred to their religious history and claimed Ruqayyah as their own. For the Sunni community, Bibi Pak Daman was a Sufi shrine; for the Shiʿa, the space was a site of cultural memory. Unable to resolve the conflict, a series of compromises were proposed, including: 1) no male be allowed to enter the tomb precinct of Bibi Pak Daman; 2) no meetings can be held in the shrine; 3) no sectarian call to prayer (*azan*) can be made; 4) no signboards may

be put up in the shrine, and 5) nothing can be said or done to injure the religious sentiments of any particular religious group (Kalra and Ibad 2019, 74). The final proposal reflects Chapter 15 of the Pakistan Penal Code regarding offenses relating to religion. Section 298 pertains to uttering words with the deliberate intent to injure religious feelings. While the intention behind such a provision in the Penal Code may be good, in practice, what causes harm or injury to religious feeling is highly subjective and open to abuse by the complainant in a legal case. The October meeting further amplified tensions between the two religious groups requiring a follow-up meeting and a new set of proposals to resolve the conflict. In March 1972, the following six proposals were presented: 1) socially respectable (*sharif*) men may enter into the grave precinct; 2) the shrine will be considered Sunni, although Shiʿa will be permitted to perform their rituals without interference; 3) the names of the Rashidun caliphs may be engraved in the Jalal al-Din Haidar shrine; 4) no meetings may take place in the shrine of Bibi Pak Daman; 5) certain types of meetings may take place in two locations only: in the mosque and in the shrine of Mai Tanur; and 6) no signboards may be put up in the shrine (for further discussion see Kalra and Ibad 2019, 74–75). Conflict between the Sunnis and Shiʿa enabled the state Auqaf Department to assume much of the management of the Bibi Pak Daman shrine, taking away the shrine's autonomous management of daily activities such as the distribution of free food (*langar*) to pilgrims and the management of large festivals (Kalra and Ibad 2019, 75).

Conclusion

Despite the recent emergence of competition and conflict between Sunnis and Shiʿa over the historical memory and management of the space of Bibi Pak Daman, we see how rituals, sacred spaces, and devotional objects enable diverse religious communities of

devotees to seek the intercession of the Ahl-e Bait in their petitions for success in marriage, the conception and birth of a child, and for the protection of their family. Bibi Pak Daman is a Sufi shrine for some and for the Shiʿa the space reflects their history and community. Yet for both, the place is rooted in deep traditions of ʿAlid devotion. It was at Bibi Pak Daman that the great Sufi ʿAli al-Hujwiri, more affectionately known as Data Ganj Bakhsh ("the Lavish Giver," d. ca. 1072), was known to have regularly prayed, reflecting the sacred status of the shrine by non-Shiʿa in the medieval period.

ʿAlid devotion has been a constitutive element in the formation of South Asian Ganga-Yamuni culture (*tahzib*). Shiʿi material culture and Muharram ritual have played an important role in the religious calendars of Hindus and Sunnis throughout the subcontinent. In South Indian Telugu, Kannada, and Marathi poems about Hasan and Husain, the brothers are akin to the heroic kings of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Fatimah's suffering is shared with that of Sita from the *Ramayana* in the religious imagination and personal experiences of Hindu and Sunni village women who tell their stories. In village Muharram, Hindus and Sunnis weave together in a complex web, Sufi *pir* veneration, Indic votive rituals and epic narratives, and elements of Shiʿi rituals into to their own systems of devotion.

For Husaini Brahmins, an origin story that places the founder of their group at the battle of Karbala with Imam Husain and his family, where they also sacrificed their lives, is a source of community pride and an explanation for their caste-defying martial identity. Although the history of the Husaini Brahmins is somewhat murky with multiple origin narratives in circulation, the facticity of these narratives is not of paramount importance in considering their role in shaping South Asian everyday Shiʿism. In many regards, as we have seen in this chapter, ritual and material aspects of everyday South Asian Shiʿism transcend communal and sectarian boundaries and are shaped by multiple communities of devotion to the Ahl-e Bait.

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Theoretical Lessons

- As a heuristic model for the study of South Asian religions, syncretism is ahistorical and assumes a "pure" source tradition. A number of more productive, alternative models have been in circulation in the subcontinent since the sixteenth century to explain practices of religious and cultural convergence and cooperation in South Asia, including Ganga-Yamuni *tahzib*, tolerance (*rawadari*), and absolute civility (*sulh-e kull*).
- The ways that the Karbala event, the Imams, and Ahl-e Bait are rooted to the subcontinent through rituals, narratives, and the construction of spaces of ʿAlid devotion can be described as falling under the rubric of being "ambiguously Islamic" (Bellamy 2011, 113). They belong to no specific religious tradition, rather draw on subcontinental discourses, themes, and values that are understandable and meaningful to diverse religious communities.