

'ALA DARB AL-HUSAYN NA'SHAQU AL-SHAHADAH"ON HUSAYN'S PATH WE LOVE MARTYRDOM": COMMENTS ON SHĪ'Ī HYMNS

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Abstract

The present article discusses Shī'ī hymns in Iraq, some Persian Gulf countries and Lebanon as broadcast in the numerous Shī'ī satellite stations and websites. The hymns consist of lines of poetry or literary prose recited with mournful melodies. The hymns are recited at various Shī'ī religious occasions by a singer called *al-rādūd*. The hymns express Shī'ī religious ideas or address various social issues. The article discusses the concept of Shī'ī hymns and their role in the spread of the Shī'ī creed. It surveys the evolution of Shī'ī hymns from their beginnings, when their recital was limited to the *husayniyyas*, until the present, when they appear in video clips. The article also discusses the hymns' many themes, mostly taken from the doctrines of Twelver Shī'ism, and their effects on the believers.

Keywords: Shī'ī hymns, Shī'a, Twelver Shī'ism, self-flagellation, *husayniyya*, *al-rādūd al-husaynī*.

Introduction

The birth of folksongs

It is not known when folksongs first came into being, but clearly they go back to early antiquity. In the Creation story of Genesis we read that Lemekh, son of Cain, made the first harp. Today's songs are thus a continuation of very ancient rites.¹ King David is depicted in the Bible as playing the harp and singing religious songs, and is traditionally considered as the author of Psalms.² The Bible also tells us that women were in the habit of meeting the men, upon their victorious return from battle, with songs.³ Work songs have a rhythm and melody that fits the work pace. They are sung spontaneously by laborers as they work and mitigate the harshness of their toil. Songs are originally composed by creative people, but after they come into popular use, they undergo changes in structure. They become the possession of the nation as a whole and their original composer is forgotten. However, the fact that their originator is not known does not detract from

¹ Khouir Jeries, *Al-Fūlklūr wal-ghinā' al-sha'bī al-filasṭīnī*. (Haifa: Majma' al-lughā al-'arabiyya, 2013), p. 44.

² On David playing before King Saul when the latter was in an evil mood, see I Samuel 16:23: " And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him".

³ See I Samuel 18:6-7: " As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'".

their importance. As such songs are passed on from one generation to the next, they undergo changes in their language, melody, themes and forms.⁴

With respect to Muslim hymns, Dr. Šāliḥ al-Ghazālī says:⁵ Muslim hymns were not known in their current form before the last decade of the fourteenth century AH, but theologians believe that their roots go back to the following two antique types:

1. Caravan songs and youngsters' songs, both of which were sung in the times of the Prophet and his Companions and subsequently underwent some modifications, in line with developments in the modern period.
2. Songs composed by members of mystic brotherhoods,⁶ which underwent considerable changes, including elision of elements of polytheism and amusement.

He goes on to state: Hymns had their beginnings in Egypt and the Levant, whence they spread to other Arab countries and beyond. However, the idea of the hymn did not reach its current form before the last decade of the fourteenth century AH. Marwān Kujak in the introduction to his *Anāshīd islāmiyya* says: These hymns came gradually to approach the meanings of the Qur'ān and the principles of Islam, until the last decade of the fourteenth century AH.⁷ 'Alī al-'Umarī confirms this and notes: The beginnings of this hymn go back to the 1960s, when the focus was mainly on praising the Prophet, both in moderate and, at times, in excessive terms. The Egyptian and Levantine schools were at the forefront. Its propagandist, educational and heroic values were promoted by both schools, although the Levantine school stressed mainly propagandist symbols.⁸

Folksongs and music

Folksongs are characterized not only by simple language and delicate phrases, but also by the simplicity and spontaneity of their melodies, a feature that they had from the very beginning. Folksongs are the most pleasurable and entertaining folk genres, thanks to their joyful melodies. It is the richest of these genres, for it combines words, rhetoric, form and melody, which together create a pleasing psychological effect in the individual. Folksongs have an effect that other folk arts lack, and therefore can be found in most rites that accompany the individual, from birth to death, in the most emotional, sensitive and critical moments of one's life.⁹ Melody and words are the basic components of a folksong, which can rarely be found separately. There do exist some ancient folk poems which are not sung and have survived to this day through constant transmission, albeit in a form that is not free from corruptions due to incorrect transmission. Among such poems we may mention folk biographies of the Prophet and poems composed by reciters of *zajal* poetry. According to Nimr Sirḥān, "the great similarity between folksongs and folk poetry does not explain

⁴ For more on this, see: Khourī, *al-Fūklūr wan-ghinā' al-sha' bī al-filasṭīnī*, p. 45.

⁵ Al-Ghazālī Šāliḥ b. Aḥmad, *Ḥaqīqat al-nashīd wa-ḥukmuḥu*, (no place of publication, no publisher: 1413/1992), p. 5.

⁶ Al-Sulaymānī 'Abudullāh, *Al-Bayān al-mufīd 'an ḥukm al-tamthīl wal-anāshīd*, 2nd printing, (no place of publication, no publisher, 1410/1989), p. 27.

⁷ Kujak Marwān, *Al-Anāshīd al-islāmiyya*, 3rd printing, (Kuait: Dār al-arqam, 1987), p. 5.

⁸ Al-'Umarī 'Alī b. Ḥamza, *Uṣūl al-nashīd al-islāmī al-mu'āšir*. (Amman: Dār al-umma lil-nashr wal-tawzī', 2009), p. 16.

⁹ Khūrī, *al-Fūklūr wal-ghinā' al-sha' bī al-filasṭīnī*, pp. 45-47.

in any way the obscurity that surrounds the independent nature of this poetry, its unique features and its limited extent".¹⁰ Folk poetry and folksongs thus exist side by side. Folk poetry was passed on orally and thus spread among the people as words, rhythms and rhymes.¹¹

The Arabs in pre-Islamic times would sing their poems at social gatherings, fairs and festivals. Among the means used by the Shī'a¹² today in order to spread its creed are hymns and poems recited in the *husayniyyas* and on various religious occasions. Such hymns play an important role in the dissemination of ideas, in addition to the pleasure derived from their melodies. And with today's technologies, they spread very quickly. For these reasons I have chosen to make a study of this subject, which has, to the best of my knowledge, not received any independent scholarly attention so far.

The present study will discuss the concept of Shī'ī hymns, their role in the dissemination of the Shī'ī creed, their evolution, the themes which they contain and their characteristics, all issues which, as far as we are aware, have not been researched before.

Methodology: In keeping with the nature of the subject, the following methodologies were used:

The inductive method: Collecting comments on Shī'ī hymns broadcast on Shī'ī channels and relevant websites. These were then classified and conclusions drawn from them.

The descriptive-analytical method: This method "attempts to describe the phenomenon of the study's subject, to interpret, compare and evaluate in the hope of arriving at meaningful generalizations that increase our knowledge of the phenomenon in question, without the researcher intervening in its course".¹³ The descriptive-analytical method was used in this study in order to analyze the contents of Shī'ī hymns and to compare them to each other in order to reveal the extent of additions to them, repetitions of information and themes, and points that require further study, or that have yet to be studied at all.

The study's contribution:

The study will make an important contribution for the following reasons:

- The non-existence, to the best of our knowledge, of any exhaustive research into this topic.
- The great importance attached by the Shī'a to hymns, which it takes care to disseminate through its various media.
- The great number of hymns disseminated through the Shī'ī media.

Research questions:

- What are Shī'ī hymns?
- What were the stages in their evolution?
- What themes do the hymns address and what are their characteristics?
- What role do the hymns play in the dissemination of the Shī'ī creed through the electronic media?

¹⁰ Ibid.,p. 45.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² In this article, the words Shī'a, Shī'ism, etc. refer to Twelver (Imami) Shī'ism.

¹³ Al-Khaṭīb, 'Āmir. *Muḥāḍarāt fī l-minhaj*. (Gaza: Maktabat al-Quds, 2003) p. 25.

ShĪ'ī hymns: What are they and what was their role in the dissemination of ShĪ'ism?

The term "religious hymn" in the present context refers to poems and prose literary texts, usually recited in a sad melody that evokes pain and tragedy at various ShĪ'ī festivals and other occasions.¹⁴ The hymns address themes of religious doctrine or religious precepts.¹⁵ ShĪ'ī hymns play a great role in the dissemination of the ShĪ'ī creed.

One ShĪ'ī writer¹⁶ has made the following observation regarding the status of hymns: "Just as we need specialists to study the great gift and artistic legacy of the Prophet's family, peace be on them, in all fields of knowledge and science, such as Islamic law, exegesis, and natural and social science such as astronomy, chemistry, medicine, psychology and sociology, we also need people with artistic talents and literary abilities, who are able to present the biography of the Prophet's family, peace be on them, to depict their noble mission's position in popular language, so that it is understood by the public-at-large and can communicate with its sentiments, feelings and emotions".

He adds that "scholars address the mind, but not everyone is interested in scholarly discourse or can comprehend it. However, addressing the heart and the emotions is a language which communicates with everyone and with which everyone can interact".

This quote clearly shows the importance of hymns in ShĪ'ism, due to their ability to arouse the emotions and to convey the ShĪ'ī message to the masses. Hymns are intimately connected to the ShĪ'ī creed, as noted by a famous composer of hymns:¹⁷ "The foundation of our artistic movement is serving the Islamic heritage, most importantly the infallible and pure Prophet's family, for whom my spirit is ransom". Hymns among the ShĪ'a is thus an intellectual movement that calls for the dissemination of Islam and knowledge of the Prophet's family.

Stages in the evolution of the ShĪ'ī hymn

ShĪ'ī hymns went through two main stages.

The first stage is represented by the *ḥusayniyyas*, with which hymns were closely associated. *Ḥusayniyyas* are gathering places for the performance of religious rites, such as the mourning ceremonies of 'Āshūrā' and others, during which the believers congregate and show their loyalty to the ShĪ'ī creed and their love for the Prophet's family. They serve as the main forum in which the ShĪ'ī faith is declared. They are, in fact, treated by ShĪ'īs as more important than mosques. *Ḥusayniyyas* are found wherever ShĪ'īs live; in many ShĪ'ī neighborhoods one finds more than one *ḥusayniyya* and they are often founded by endowments.¹⁸

¹⁴ See the article "Anāshīd al-sunna bi-Lubnān" by Fāṭima Barrī Badīr: www.islamonline.net.

¹⁵ See al-'Umarī 'Alī b. Ḥamza, *Uṣūl al-nashīd al-islāmī al-mu'āṣir*. (Amman: Dār al-umma lil-nashr wal-tawzī', 2009), 7ff.

¹⁶ Ḥasan al-Ṣaffār, a Saudi ShĪ'ī cleric (b. 1958) in al-Quṭayf. The quoted passage is taken from his introduction to a collection of panegyrics in verse on his own website: www.saffar.org.

¹⁷ The Lebanese hymn composer Aḥmad Hamdānī, in an interview with the "Al-Kawthar" channel: www.alkawthertv.ir.

¹⁸ For a discussion of the differences between mosques and *ḥusayniyyas*, see the relevant video on www.muslim.net; see also the article "al-Sha'ā'ir al-ḥusayniyya mādhā ta'nī 'ind al-Imām al-Mahdī" by Muḥammad 'Alī al-Ḥilw: www.llazeinnab.org/vb/showtheadphp

The Shī'ī scholar Muḥammad 'Alī al-Hilw explains the importance ascribed by Shī'īs to participating in the rites performed at the *ḥusayniyyas*: "The performance of the *ḥusayniyya* rites reflects the extent of the nation's willingness to sacrifice and adore. By means of these rites it confirms that it has reached a state of spiritual tautness with respect to the imam al-Ḥusayn, peace be upon him".¹⁹ We may conclude from this statement that the rites, sermons and hymns of the *ḥusayniyyas* serve as important sources of spiritual nourishment for the Shī'a believers.

The *ḥusayniyyas* constitute the first stage in the evolution of Shī'ī hymns, one whose presence is still felt today and whose vigor among the believers has not abated even after the emergence of the second stage, which we call "video hymns", whose appearance has not sapped the strength of the *ḥusayniyyas*. Both stages thus work hand in hand.

The second stage is represented by videoclips, in which the hymns use contemporary language rendered in contemporary style: "The Shī'ī mourning rites, their visions and values, have moved from the auditory to the visual level. Images are very good at conveying the message and at expressing loyalty to the Prophet's family". In the previous stage they repeated the hymn with the reciter while in the new stage the singing is in choral style, accompanied by masterly images and graphics. In both stages Shī'ī satellite channels were filled with such hymns, in accordance with the great public demand for hymns that express loyalty to the Prophet's family and of grief for the death of al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī and for the wrongs committed, in its view, against some members of the Prophet's family, and some other issues as well.

Themes of Shī'ī hymns

A perusal of the Shī'ī hymns on the internet reveals that their themes are taken from the Shī'ī creed and that they are infused with grief and a sense of having been wronged. Shī'ism is suffused with mourning and grief, which dominate the Shī'ī mentality, although there also exist hymns that are sung at happy occasions, on holidays and the birthdays of the imams.

One important theme is the messianic figure of the *mahdī*,²⁰ who is described as follows in hymns:

He in whom the universes live and from the sun of whose eyes the stars refuse to set

The following lines are from a hymn recited by the *rādūd*²¹ Nizār al-Qaṭarī:²²

O *Mahdī*, let the Merciful permit you Make me understand, o partner of the Qur'ān
O spirit of humanity your secret, the secret of God's oneness²³

¹⁹ Al-Hilw, Muḥammad 'Alī. "al-Sha'a'ir al-ḥusayniyya mādhā ta'nī 'ind al-Imām al-Mahdī: www.llazeinnab.org/vb/showtheadphp (accessed 2.3.20).

²⁰ According to Twelver Shī'ism, the *mahdī* is the twelfth imam, who disappeared (the "great occultation") and who will, so the Shī'īs believe, appear again shortly before the end of the world and the Resurrection. See: al-Ṭabarī Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustum. *Dalā'il al-imāma*, (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-a'lamī, 1988), 220-314; Sachedina A. *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of the Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981).

²¹ *Rādūd*, from a verb meaning "repeat" is the reciter of hymns, whose lines are repeated by the congregants.

²² A child prodigy who could recite the Qur'ān at age eight, born in Qatar (5.6.71), a popular *rādūd* in Kuwait, with his own Shī'ī children's channel. See <http://www.nazaralqatari.net/index.php?lang=arabic>

²³ <http://www.nazaralqatari.net>

And in a hymn of the Al-Mahdī Channel:²⁴

Where the God of heaven summoned you disseminate justice throughout the world
May God the Exalted One be blessed in you o secret of being²⁵

An important theme in Shī'ī hymns is the pilgrimage to the imams' tombs, for blessing and supplication.²⁶

Other themes found in Shī'ī hymns:

- The deification of 'Alī and his family:

O 'Alī, say: He is Allāh, One 'Alī, none is comparable to him²⁷

Another hymn describes 'Alī as the master of fire and wind, as he who defeated Pharaoh and Haman, as the enforcer of punishment and requital.

May God be blessed in you, o secret of being²⁸

- The event of Ghadīr Khumm:²⁹

The religion became complete on the Day of Ghadīr
The victorious lion became my prince
The day on which grace was achieved after the approval
And Islam was completed in the last verse
The path of guidance the light of sovereignty³⁰

- Shī'ī hymns sing the praises of certain Shī'ī cities, whose sanctity is deemed the equal of that of Mecca and Medina. In the following hymn the city of al-Najaf³¹ is extolled as a pilgrimage destination:

Around Muḥammad his tears flow to al-Najaf after prayer in your mosque he
performed the pilgrimage³²

- Another theme is the wrongs committed against the Prophet's family and the rights stolen from it:

²⁴ Launched in 2008, for the purpose of "disseminating the ideas and characteristics of the Shī'ī school", according to its founders. See: Za'farān al-Haytham, *Al-Faḍā'īyyāt al-shī'īyya al-tabshīriyya: Dirāsa waṣfiyya ma'a taḥlīl muḥtawā qanat al-kawthar al-īrāniyya*, (Cairo: Markaz al-tanwīr lil-dirāsāt al-insāniyya, 2010), p. 110.

²⁵ www.youtube.com/watch?v=gircrozu

²⁶ See, for example, the poem "Hadam qubūr a'immat al-Baqī'" ("Destruction of the graves of al-Baqī'"), by the Iraqi poet, journalist and critic Ḥaydar al-Asadī (b. 1987) in <http://www.alnoor.se/author.asp?id=1320>. The poem is an attack on the Saudi government, here referred to as "the Jews of Najd", and on various early Islamic personages deemed to have wronged 'Alī and his family.

²⁷ Cf. Q 112: 1, 4; see: <http://yazeinb.org>

²⁸ www.youtube.com/watch?v=gircrozu-yu

²⁹ Ghadīr Khumm is a location between Mecca and Medina in which the Prophet is said to have delivered a sermon shortly before his death, in which, according to the Shī'a interpretation, he affirmed 'Alī as his successor. See al-Amīnī Muḥammad Hādī, *Īd al-Ghadīr fī 'ahd al-fā'imīyyīn*. (Tehran: Mu'assasat al-āfāq, 1417/1997); 'Abd al-Ḥusayn al-Amīnī, *Al-Ghadīr fī l-kitāb wal-sunna wal-adab*, (Qom: Mu'assasat dā'irat al-fiqh al-islāmī, 2004), Part I; al-Kurbāsī Muḥammad Ṣādiq, *Sharī'at al-īd*, (Beirut: Bayt al-'ilm lil-nābihīn, 2009), pp. 57-59; Vecchia Vaglieri L, "Ghadīr Khumm", *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new edition, II, pp. 993-994.

³⁰ <http://shiavoice.com/play-12219.html>

³¹ A Shī'ī city in southern Iraq, the site of the imam 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib's tomb.

³² <http://www.roadeed.net/showthread.php?t=12102>

We lived through a period of oppression without parallel by criminals, terrorists
and mercenaries

How is it that a group with no religion and no conscience and he who slaughters
ten will be called "prince"³³

- Calls for unity among Shī'īs and among adherents of different Shī'ī religious authorities (*marāji* ') also abound:

Do not say "I am an [adherent of] Shīrāzī, I am an [adherent of] Sīstānī" do not
say "I am an [adherent of] Aḥqāqī and I am an [adherent of] Rūḥānī

Khāmena'ī" do not say, or "They [are adherents of] Khurasānī" do not say "I am [an
adherent of] Tabrīzī and I am [an adherent of] Mīlānī

We are all Shī'a and the creed is one all the religious authorities and the Prophet
and his family and followers are my model³⁴

- Another theme is the celebration of various anniversaries, such as the imams' birthday and the Day of al-Ghadīr, on the 18th day of the month Dhū al-Ḥijja, which Shī'īs maintain was the day on which 'Alī was appointed as the Prophet's successor.
- A rather new theme in Shī'ī hymns is praise for contemporary religious and intellectual leaders, especially the imam Khomeini, leader of the Iranian Revolution, and hymns expression Shī'ī political aspirations.³⁵ An example of the former type is the following, composed by Abū Muḥammad 'Asākirī:³⁶

On the path of al-Ḥusayn	we love martyrdom
We pledged allegiance to Khomeini on	the path of leadership
We continued and continued	to al-Ḥusayn's victory
And Khomeini's creed	source of happiness
We are all faith	we are all will ³⁷

Distinctive features of Shī'ī hymns

An examination of Shī'ī hymns reveals the following features:

- Shī'ī hymns serve as a mold into which the Shī'ī ideology is poured, not as mere instruments of amusement.
- Hymn reciters (*al-rādūd al-ḥusaynī*) enjoy a very high standing, as the loftiest class of Shī'ī propagandists: "They influence the people and society through their behavior, their gift and their loyalty to the Ḥusaynī platform. For all who are faithful to the platform are close to al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, according to Shī'ī belief, and all who are close to al-Ḥusayn, it is closeness to

³³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiwsr73ZlxU>

³⁴ <http://www.noaim.net/vb/showthread.php?t=45175>

³⁵ For example, the hymn *ma'a l-fajar qūmū* ("Arise with Dawn") performed by Aḥmad Hamdān: http://arabic.irib.ir/Pages/Sound_gallery/downloadsound.asp?id=2629. See the interview with him on the al-Kawthar network: <http://www.alkawthartv.ir>.

³⁶ An Iranian hymnist who moved to Lebanon in 1983. He lives in Baalbek, where he instructs Shī'ī in the performance of hymns. See: al-Ḥusaynī Laṭīfa, "Fī darb al-Ḥusayn na'shaq al-shahāda", *Baqīyyat Allāh* issue 336, 2009, URL: baqiatollah.net/article.php?7254 (accessed 24.5.2021).

³⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVZQv1-05H4> (accessed 2.3.2020).

God, may He be exalted, and all who come close and improve their standing with God, God will improve their affairs and make them beloved of the people".³⁸

- For this reason, hymn reciters (*rādūd*) are frequently interviewed in the press and on television, and addressed with honorifics, such as mullah,³⁹ ḥājj, sayyid,⁴⁰ etc.

In an interview with the *rādūd* Nizār al-Qaṭarī on the Iranian al-Kawthar channel, he was asked his opinion of one of his colleagues. He replied with the following words of praise: "This is a very difficult question. Who am I to give my opinion on them? They are the servants of al-Ḥusayn. Who am I to say my opinion of them? I am too small to express my opinion on these giants. I am too small. May God give them good recompense, they perform the rites and gatherings for al-Ḥusayn in the best way".⁴¹

- The emotional aspect is very prominent, if not dominant, in Shī'ī hymns. The sad melodies affect the emotions, as do the quality of the recital, the purity of style and the power of the music, together with the reciter's ability to evoke feelings of grief.⁴²
- The *rādūd*'s voice is usually mellow and rich in tones, attracting the audience to the hymn's words.⁴³
- Hymn in videoclips are often accompanied by sad, emotional images or an enactment of the scene of the killing of a prominent Shī'ī figure, which have a great effect on the viewer's spirit.⁴⁴
- Most hymns are composed in colloquial Arabic. The pronunciation is often very fast, and the text not easily understood by someone not fluent in the dialect in question.⁴⁵
- Grief is the predominant element in the hymn. It is expressed by means of the following devices:
 - The *rādūd* and his audience weep during the performance of the hymn.⁴⁶

³⁸ <https://saihat.net/vb/archive/index.php/t-94758.html>

³⁹ Mullāh, literally "one full of knowledge and wisdom", is a Shī'ī honorific in common use in Iran and elsewhere. For more details, see: Roy Olivier, *The Failure of Political Islam*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 28–29.

⁴⁰ Sayyid or "master" is an honorific bestowed on descendants of the Prophet, or more widely on any member of the Hāshimī clan.

⁴¹ <https://www.alkawthartv.ir>

⁴² Examples of this are the hymn "Yā mazlūm" ("O Wronged One"), by the *rādūd* Ḥusayn al-Akraf, recited on the procession of the people of Bahrain to Karbalā' on the Fortieth Night: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28HuKf_MMhu; the hymn "Lā tansā l-waṣiyya" ("Do Not Forget the Legacy"), recited by Bāsim al-Karbalā'ī: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6XpqLKDsK8k>.

⁴³ See, for example, "Ubaret al-madd al-shī'ī 2015" ("Operetta of the Shī'ī Expansion 2015), by the reciter Aḥmad al-Bahādilī: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCpGRh0xzhI>.

⁴⁴ For example, an Iraqi videoclip entitle "Yā khūya shayyāl al-'alam" ("O Brother Banner Bearer") by the poet Ḥaydar Ya'qūb al-Asadī: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_w4z6U5tIA.

⁴⁵ For example, the following clip by the reciter Ḥusayn Fayṣal: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FyFKrYz0iHY>

⁴⁶ For example, note the weeping and wailing over Abū al-Faḍl al-'Abbās by the *rādūd* 'Ammār al-Kinānī: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xFdxp7P9sU>.

- The *rādūd* is in the habit of shouting at his audience if he feels that they do not repeat after him energetically enough. He also often uses of terms of respect, such as "O nation of Islam", "O sons of al-Ḥusayn", in order to provoke a more enthusiastic response.⁴⁷
- Some hymn-saying gatherings are accompanied by self-flagellation.⁴⁸
- Hymn recitals are occasionally accompanied by the use of swords and other sharp instruments, with which the congregants wound themselves in order to express their grief at the fate of the imams.⁴⁹
- Mourning processions are mass events, with men, women and children, who loudly repeat the words of the reciters.⁵⁰
- In addition to Arabic, hymns are also performed in Persian, Urdu and English.
- Many Shī'ī hymns are aimed at children, as demonstrated by the huge number of them broadcast on the Shī'ī Al-Hadī satellite children's channel, and on internet websites. As explained by one reciter,⁵¹ "The hymns that we perform with the children also focus on enduring Islamic tokens, such as celebrations of the birthdays of the twelve imams, of Fāṭima and of the Prophet, as well as the days of their deaths. Another reciter⁵² states: "Children are the men of the future, and a sector of present society [...] If we do not take care today, I expect that in future it will be very difficult to easily draw them to Islam or to Islamic teachings. Now the matter is easy; it is possible with a single poem or cartoon".

Shī'ī satellite channels and their role in the dissemination of Shī'ī hymns

After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 the number of Shī'ī satellite channels rose rapidly, after years in which the Shī'a was oppressed in Iraq. By 2016 the number of such satellite channels had reached 53,⁵³ while in 2018 the number had risen to 216, broadcasting from Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain and elsewhere. These channels broadcast Shī'ī hymns to the accompaniment of self-flagellation, mourning gatherings and other Shī'ī occasions, usually in an atmosphere of grief. The broadcasts include audio and video materials that induce weeping, including skillful presentations of the stories of the killing of al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī. The hymns are mostly performed by Iraqi hymn singers, whose vocal and acting skills can make thousands in the audience, whether physically present or as listeners or viewers, weep bitterly.⁵⁴

47 See, for example, the hymn "Mit'anī mashāy" (I came on foot) by the Mullah 'Umar al-Kinānī: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ag41q8yD08>.

48 Self-flagellation (*laṭm*) is a traditional act of mourning over the death of al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī, usually to the accompaniment of a slow melody.

49 For an example of self-flagellation with an iron whip (*zanjīl*), see: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=LU0kOFBOetA>.

50 See, for example, the following videoclip of the procession of the Fortieth Day (20 Šafar 1435 AH), led by the *rādūd* Bāsim al-Karbalā'ī: <http://youtube.com/watch?v=t1b258C0knU>.

51 Aḥmad Hamdānī, in an interview with the Al-Kawthar channel: www.ALKAWTHEAR.com.

52 The *rādūd* Nizār al-Qaṭarī, also in an interview with the Al-Kawthar channel. See previous note.

53 Fāḍil Salwā, "al-Qanawāt al-faḍā'iyya al-shī'iyya ilā rtifā' wal-khāfi a'ḡam!", on the Janoubia website, 13.10.2016: <http://janoubia.com> (accessed 1.10.2020).

54 Za' afrān al-Haytham, *Al-Faḍā'iyyāt al-shī'iyya al-tabshīriyya: Dirāsa waṣfiyya ma'a taḥlīl muḥtawā qanat al-Kawthar al-īrāniyya*, (Cairo: Markaz al-tanwīr lil-dirāsāt, 2010), p. 14.

Shī'ī hymns on internet websites

There are many websites devoted to the dissemination of Shī'ī hymns. Some sites focus on famous *rādūds*, some on hymn-performing bands, and some only broadcast the hymns themselves, with no accompaniment. Below is a non-exhaustive list of such websites.

Websites devoted to famous reciters:

www.abather.net (website of Abā Dhurr al-Ḥalawājī)

www.zarazalqatari.net (website of Nizār al-Qaṭārī)

www.meerza.com (website of Mīrzā Ḥusayn Kāẓim)

www.mollajalil.com (website of Jalīl al-Karbalā'ī)

Websites devoted to hymnal bands:

www.razaweya.net (website of the Ahl al-Bayt hymnal band)

www.aharah.com (website of the Wa'd al-Samā' band)

<http://alfuka.ba7r.ort> (al-Fulk al-jāriya clubs)

Websites that present unaccompanied hymns:

www.mahdimedia.net (Yā Madī Net audio website)

www.alanwar-sounds.com/ (website of the audio al-Anwar library)

www.kasaed.net (website of poetry of devotion)

www.alawjam.com (website of al-Awjām Com)

All these websites enable those who browse them to download hymns at no cost. The most famous *rādūd*, Nizār al-Qaṭārī, explains: "I have a website and a club which I called 'Multaqā l-shu'arā'' ('The Poets' Rendezvous'), which is open to any poet, or anyone, if he is not a poet ... The door is open and one can register whether one wants to place a poem there or enjoy the poems that are already there. There is no need to register to enter the site or the club. The door is open to all poets. I do not set bounds to my interaction with any poet who posts a poem in the club. I take the poem and read it".⁵⁵

To sum up, Shī'ī hymns have a broad media presence. The hymns are very accessible and can be easily downloaded or listened to, or even read, since the texts of most are available on the websites.

The contents of Shī'ī hymns

Shī'ī hymns focus mainly on themes of oppression, for the sense of having been wronged is very strong in Shī'ism. This sense takes a number of forms:

1. Social injustice: Shī'īs feel rejected, accused of heresy, and their lives forfeit.
2. Political injustice: Shī'īs feel politically isolated and devoid of rights, despite the fact that they are the majority.

A clear example of a hymn expressing these sentiments is "Ibdhū l-fiqārak yā 'Alī" ("With your Dhū l-Fiqār, o 'Alī"), recited on anniversaries of the deaths of Shī'ī imams. The *rādūd* chants in a

⁵⁵ Nizār al-Qaṭārī in an interview with the Al-Kawthar website: www.alkawthar.com.

mournful voice and his audience repeats his words and beat their chests as a sign of identification with his grief:

We lived through a period of oppression without parallel by criminals, terrorists
and mercenaries
How is it that a group with no religion and no conscience and he who slaughters
ten will be called "prince"

These lines reflect the Shī'ī perception of the history of oppression by the Sunnīs. The reciter then goes on to compare the peaceful creed of the Shī'īs, who follow in 'Alī's footsteps, with the hostile approach of the Sunna:

O 'Alī, your religion is magnanimous Islam while their religion is immorality,
terrorism and slaughter
This is a maxim known and clear to us a suspicious sperm cannot be put
right⁵⁶

The idea of wrong-doing perpetrated against the Shī'a as expressed in the hymn also has the aim of convincing Sunnīs that the Shī'īs have indeed been mistreated and deprived of their rights.

But the hymns do not express only emotion. They also express political, social, ideological and intellectual ideas.

Among the political themes in Shī'ī hymns we find, for example, vilification of the Saudi regime, as a representative of the Sunna and a country which, according to the Shī'ī view, does not adhere to Islamic religious law.⁵⁷

At the ideological level, many hymns calumniate the Prophet's Companions. For example, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb are accused of idolatry, as in the following lines:

God's messenger turn, they have set fire to the house come to Fāṭima and
extinguish the flave
The idols have persecuted her they have plunged a nail into the heart of the throne

Another hymn describes the Prophet's Companions thus:

Did not the Companions betray their Prophet? By God, he who is pleased with them
has no conscience
They bore the firewood, may their hands perish may torment from heaven fall on
them⁵⁸

Hymns occasionally also express ideological positions, as in the following example, in which the Wāhhābī Sunnīs are accused of being un-Islamic:

These ideas of Wāhhābism are against the Muslim nation
These ideas of Wāhhābism are against humanity
These ideas of Wāhhābism are against the ideas of Shī'ism⁵⁹

⁵⁶ See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpkgqHDSd5c>.

⁵⁷ See, for example, the hymn "Hadam qubūr a'immat al-Baqī'" ("Destruction of the Tombs of the Imams of al-Baqī'": <http://www.alnoor.se/author.asp?id=1320>.

⁵⁸ Performed by the *rādūd* Bāsim al-Karbalā'ī: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-uzHI2bCFK>.

⁵⁹ Performed by the *rādūd* Jalīl al-Karbalā'ī: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqYc_hYKvdg.

Conclusion

The present study has provided a survey of Shī'ī hymns, beginning with the emergence of folksongs, Islamic hymns and folk poetry and music. It explained the meaning of Ḥusayni hymns, their evolution, the themes which they contain and their presence on the internet. The study showed the close relationship between the hymns and the Shī'ī ideology, the emotional effect the hymns have on adherents of the Shī'ī creed, and their cleric-approved use in inculcating Shī'ī concepts and as accompaniment to Shī'ī rites. The study found that the hymns express core Shī'ī doctrines, couched in carefully crafted words and melodies and packaged attractively⁶⁰ in order to affect the emotions and arouse the enthusiasm of Shī'ites. It also found that Shī'īs are exploiting to the full the possibilities afforded by the electronic revolution, such as the internet and smart applications, in order to disseminate the hymns, which in turn serve to disseminate Shī'ī doctrines and religious ideas.

⁶⁰ Al-Fārūq Nahāl 'Umar, *Al-Di'āya al-shī'iyya min sirdāb al-imām ilā 'irsh al-faqīh*, (Cairo: al-'Arabī lil-nashr wal-tawzī', 2017), p. 249.