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Title:

Research Report 1:

**Contested Meanings and Authenticity: Indian Islam and
Muharram “Performances” in Durban, 2002**

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This paper is concerned with the contested meanings and authenticity of the festival of Muharram in present-day Indian Islam in South Africa. Most Indians arrived in Colonial Natal as indentured workers between 1860 and 1911; they were followed by a smaller number of traders from Gujarat on the west coast of India who began arriving from the mid-1870s. Despite the difficulties of indenture, migrants set about re-establishing their culture and religion in Durban. The most public expression of ritual was the festival of Muharram, observed on the tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. This occasion has historically been important to Shia Muslims because it was on this day in 680 that Imam Husain, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, was killed in battle on the plains of Karbala in Iraq by the army of Caliph Yazid I. Although denied water by the enemy Husain's group survived for the first nine days of Muharram. On the tenth the enemy's arrows killed Husain and his body left to rot in the desert sun. His head was placed on a spear and paraded in Damsacus.¹

While this is a time of lamentation for Shias who believe that Husain's father Ali should have succeeded the Prophet, rituals surrounding the martyrdom came to be observed by many Sunni Muslims and Hindus in India. Titus observed that 'nowhere else in the world of Islam are the Sunnis so largely imbued with Shia ideas and customs as in India.'² Legend has it that this tradition originated in India with the Shia wife of Emperor Timur at the end of the 13th century. She had taken a vow to visit the mausoleum of Husain annually in Iraq but was unable to do so as a result of a serious illness. As a solution, a replica of the mausoleum was placed in her presence during the first ten days of Muharram.³ Its observance spread in India during the Mughal dynasty, which had strong links with the Shia Safavid dynasty of Iran.⁴ According to Ahmad, Hindu participation was a function of 'the latitude in ritual available to Hindu lower castes and the love of spectacle, fanfare and group exhibition of passion inherent in the Indian character, as well as generalised superstition.'⁵

Muharram in Colonial Natal, 1860-1910

Muharram was the first communal Indian ceremony observed in Natal. The three days annual leave to which indentured workers were entitled by law was given during Muharram. Even Hindus were given leave during Muharram rather than one of the many festivals that are part of their religion, though they comprised a majority of the Indian population.⁶ In 1904, for example, 86.2 per cent of Indians were Hindu and only 9.9 per cent Muslims.⁷ Whites referred to Muharram as "Coolie Christmas". Thus, for example, when requesting leave for indentured Indians to attend the festival, Abdul Kadir, Indian Interpreter, informed the Protector that the 'Moharram alias Coolie Christmas will begin on the 3rd of January 1878.'⁸

Muharram festivities included public processions by neighbourhood groups from the first to ninth, and their converging on the tenth to immerse taziyah's in water. The Taziyah, which translates into 'mourning', was an ornately decorated, gaudy simulacrum of the martyred Husain's mausoleum at Karbala. It ranged between 15 to 25 feet in height and consisted of three levels with the base about ten feet square. Taziyahs were built with great care and the task was passed from generation to generation. Families believed that failure to continue this tradition would lead to severe tragedy.

Competition among Indians regarding the most attractive taziyah gave Muharram a competitive edge that was detrimental to public order. According to Police Inspector Richard Alexander, 'there was natural jealousy between the different parties respecting their ability to build pagodas and other 'Artistics devices' (Alexander 1902).⁹

Muharram festivities began on the first and lasted until the tenth. Close to the site where the taziyah was built stood the 'imambada', an area demarcated as a site of worship for devotees during the ten days. Each taziyah group built 'panjas' which were replicas of the human hand. Participants told James Meldrum, a British visitor, that panjas represented the raised right hand of Husain as he was going out to battle. Panjas were clothed in green and smothered in garlands of flowers brought by devotees who believed that they had the power to cure problems.¹⁰ From the fifth to the ninth, Indians marched through neighbourhoods with their taziyahs, drumming continually and beating sticks, a source of great nuisance to whites.

The tenth was marked by groups of Indians gathering around each taziyah and pulling it by hand, all the while singing 'marsiyas' or lament songs to the memory of Husain, beating on drums, dancing wildly or carrying out stick fights. Dancers known as 'tigers', who painted their faces and body and wore masks to resemble tigers, led Taziyahs. Participants believed in the potency of the taziyah and offered fruits, vegetables, sugar, money and other objects in return for the birth of a son, long life, cure from illness, and so on. The tenth began with a 'gatka', a play in which some participants represented Yazid's army and others Hussain to symbolise the actual battle. This was followed by (kushti) wrestling competitions. Tigers' were usually champion wrestlers and represented their district or plantation in kushti to determine the best wrestler. The fragmented processions made their way to Umgeni River where taziyahs were immersed in water to remind participants of the suffering that Husain endured when he was denied water.¹¹ For a contemporary newspaper the Umgeni represented 'Coolieland'.¹² The day ended with taziyahs being immersed in water.

Despite strong disapproval from the authorities and middle class Hindus, the festivities of Muharram continued to be observed annually. It served many important functions. Muharram provided Indians with an opportunity for expressing a self-conscious local community identity in the first instance, but also signalled the participation of Indians in a broader collective by drawing them together, and fostering 'Indianness' in relation to whites and Africans. Muharram thus allowed a heterogeneous group of people to constitute a collectivity.¹³ Muharram was the only opportunity for Indians from self-contained plantations to get together in an environment that militated against this. Muharram provided a break from the routine and daily grind of plantation life, what Falassi refers to as a 'time out of time',¹⁴ and helped release stresses associated with the regimented labour arrangement. The ritual of Muharram served different purposes for different individuals. While it served a religious purpose for some in Colonial Natal, aspects of leisure and perhaps protest appealed to others. The intermingling, and wrestling, drinking, music and dancing skills, provided an escape from the drudgery of everyday life and crucial recreation at a time when this was in short supply.¹⁵

Reformist Islam and Changing Meanings of Muharram

The decades after 1910 were witness to rapid change. As African labour rendered Indians superfluous in farming, mining and the public sector, there was urbanward migration of Indians. In Durban, for example, the number of Indians increased from 17,015 in 1911 to 123,165 in 1949.¹⁶ This was accompanied by an expansion in educational opportunities. Before the 1950s religious education, comprising the rudiments of Islam and languages like Gujarati and Urdu, was the major priority of Muslims. During the 1950s leaders like A.I. Kajee and A.M. Moolla combined religious and secular education through institutions like the South Coast Madrassah State Aided School, Ahmedia State Aided Indian School, Anjuman Islam State Aided School and Orient Islamic High School.

This was boosted by increased state investment in education. The coming to power of the National Party (NP) government in 1948 had paradoxical consequences for Indians. While segregation was intensified in every facet of life, Indians were recognised as permanent citizens in 1961. Expansion of educational opportunities resulted in economic mobility. The impact of education is reflected in the rise in the numbers of Indians who regarded English as their home language from six per cent in 1951 to ninety-three per cent in 1996. Mass education was critical in reshaping conceptions of self and religion. It gave Muslims direct access to the printed word and resulted in a shift from religion being 'taken-for-granted' to Islam being thought of as a self-contained system that could be distinguished from other systems. This inspired debate among Muslims and resulted in formulation of clear statements of belief, which heightened sectarian distinctions. Islam became a subject to be 'explained' and 'understood' rather than 'assumed'.¹⁷

Muslims contested hegemony of 'their' version of Islam. The clearest divide was between popular Islam and 'scripturalist' traditions. As Joffe points out, the 'graduated spectrum of belief between these extremes of religious practice' gave way to more rigid distinctions from the 1960s as reformist Islam, known as 'Deobandi' or 'Tabligh', made inroads.¹⁸ The reformist tradition took root in India when Mawlana Nanautawi (1833-77) and Gangohi (1829-1905) opened a madrassah in Deoband in 1867. They had fought against the British during the 1857 uprising. Defeated, they remained aloof from political activity and attended to Muslim educational and religious needs.¹⁹ They were concerned that compromises with Hinduism had resulted in strong syncretistic developments in Indian Islam, and targeted 'popular' behaviour such as visitation to the tombs of saints, belief in the intercessionary role of saints, and practices associated with Muharram, which they considered to stem from Hindu culture. In short, Deobandi's subjected the 'Indian' heritage of Indian Muslims to scrutiny, and advocated a 'pure' Islam shorn of the historical experience of being Indian and Indian cultural survivals.²⁰

Closely allied was the Tabligh Jamaat, which was instrumental in spreading Deobandi ideas. The word tabligh is derived from the Arabic root *b-l-gh*, which means 'to communicate' a message, while jama'at is translated as 'party' or 'organised collectivity'. The term 'Tabligh Jamat, very simply, means a 'preaching party'²¹. This transnational religious movement was founded in Delhi in the 1920s by Muhammad Ilyas (1885-1944), who had studied at Deoband²². Ilyas sought to create a grassroots movement that

would close the gap between Deobandi ulema who taught in religious schools and wrote esoteric scholarly treatises, and illiterate Muslim masses²³.

The Tabligh movement first made inroads in South Africa among Gujarati traders in the early 1960s. Goolam Mohammed Padia, a businessman from Umzinto on the south coast of KwaZulu Natal, known popularly as 'Bhai' (brother), was instrumental in spreading Tabligh ideology. Bhai Padia was exposed to Tabligh activities during a pilgrimage to Makkah. Arabia was one of three centres that provided impetus for the expansion of Tabligh, the others being the Tabligh headquarters in New Delhi and London.²⁴ Impressed by what he saw, Bhai Padia visited New Delhi where he learnt Tabligh methods and philosophies firsthand. While most early adherents were Gujarati traders, the movement subsequently attracted support from Memon and some Urdu-speaking Muslims in South Africa.²⁵ An indication of the growth of Tabligh is that whereas the first ijtima, an annual gathering over Easter, attracted 300 people to Ladysmith in 1966, the ijtima in Durban during Easter 1999 attracted over 25,000 people. Institutionally, this tradition was represented in Natal by the Jamiatul Ulama (hereafter Jamiat), established in 1952 to 'guide generally the Muslim public in complete consonance with the laws of Islam'.²⁶

Muslims were diverse and tabligh activities were strongly resisted in Natal. The strongest challenge was from groupings broadly termed 'Sunni', who took inspiration from the scholar Ahmed Riza Khan (1856-1921) of Bareilly, India. Khan wrote more than one thousand tomes. At the centre of his teaching were the Prophet, his descendants or Sayyids, and Saints. To his large, mainly rural, following Khan was a mujaddid ('reformer'). Like him, they had no interest in adopting reform, and emphasised rituals and defended orthodoxy in alliance with hereditary pirs of the countryside²⁷. Popular Islam was the de facto religion of most Indian Muslims in Durban until the 1970s. This popular tradition was given organisational expression through the Sunni Jamiatul Ulema of South Africa (1978), Darul Uloom Aleemiyah Razvia (1983) and Imam Ahmed Raza Academy (1986). At the opening of the Darul Uloom in January 1983, the principal, Mawlana Noorani Siddiqui asserted emphatically:

We are the followers of Badsha Peer and Soofie Sahib, and this Darul Uloom has been built to safeguard their moral preachings. And Hazrath Badsha Peer and Hazrath Soofie Sahib were the followers of Sultanul Hind Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti, who in turn was the follower of the Holy Prophet. Disunity is caused by the new ideas of people who differ from Badsha Peer and Soofie Sahib.²⁸

Changing Meanings of Muharram

This paper focuses on Muharram activities in Durban in March 2002, and how these contented traditions and meanings are played out in the day-to-day lives of Muslims and their understanding of Islam. According to the 1996 Census there were 553,585 Muslims in South Africa out of a total population of 40 million. Indian and 'Malay' Muslims comprise the largest sub-groups, with 236,315 and 246,433 respectively. While most Malays live in the Cape the majority of Indian Muslims live in KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng. Durban is home to the largest concentration of Indian Muslims,

79,630, in South Africa. Residential dislocation and uprooting of large numbers of Indians as a result of Group Areas from the 1950s, economic mobility due to increased educational opportunities, and discursive impact of Islamic reformist movements have reduced public aspects of Muharram. Participants are fewer in number, the form of public festivities has been toned, while old symbols have assumed new meanings.

Many long-accepted aspects of Muharram have been condemned by reform-minded Muslims as heritage of Hindu culture. As reformist Islam took hold from the 1970s, there was a shift in emphasis to waiz (sermons) in mosques, which usually started with the story of Husain, to which was added the morals to be drawn from the incident. Public festivities were condemned. Gatherings had an overwhelmingly "religious" orientation. Muharram became a commemoration rather than a festival, in which the role of Husain was de-emphasised. He no longer gave the occasion its reference point. This removed an important unifying factor because participants were no longer bound by the memory of the tragedy at Kerbala.

There was further transformation during the 1990s when reformist Ulema questioned the very notion of this being a "big" (significant) night. Speaking on 10th Muharram 2002 at a Deobandi-aligned mosque in Durban, a local Mawlana summed up contemporary reformist orthodoxy when he questioned the need to hold special prayers in a mosque to mark the occasion:

Nowhere does it mention in the Quran, or in the practice of the Prophet is it stated that we need to discuss the significance of this day of Ashura. It is not compulsory or obligatory, that is incorrect, To consider it compulsory is bidah ("innovation"). If a mosque chooses to remind you of the importance of the occasion, that is not a problem, but if they choose not to do so, that is also perfectly acceptable.²⁹

The Mawlana emphasised that Ashura was important for many reasons, not least because Muslims believe that the Final Judgement will be on this day; Prophet Moosa (Moses) was given salvation from the oppression of Phaorah; and Prophet Prophet Yunus, who had been swallowed by a whale and was in its stomach for forty days, was freed on this day. Muharram, thus, was not significant because of the martyrdom of Hussain. It was coincidental that Husayn's tragic death took place on the same day. It was an added 'crown' for Hussain that God blessed him with martyrdom on this day. But this is not the *raison d'être* for Muslims respecting Ashura. The Mawlana advised the congregation to engage in fasting, give charity freely to the needy, and engage in introspection, instead of indulging in public festivities:

This month is important because of the beginning of the New Year. So we should analyse our actions and x-ray our hearts. What good did we do during the year? Time is going by rapidly. No one can ward off death. Beautiful cars and homes, gold and silver, deposits in all parts of the world. They can all go in seconds. So why waste your life?

Above all, the Mawlana, emphasised, 'this is not a day for entertainment and pleasure, but to seek forgiveness and ask for distress and hardship to be removed from ourselves'. Apart from this, 'all other deeds, such as making 'Taziyah', giving 'sharbat' (drink) with the intention that such act shall enable the Shaheeds (martyrs) of Karbala to quench their thirst, etc. are incorrect'.

While many Muslims who have embraced reformist tendencies adhere to this perspective, others continue to carry out popular practices. But even they now attach different meanings to many old practices, reflecting an attempt to attain continuity with the past in conformity with reformist tendencies. The remainder of this paper examines the public expression of Muharram by the Badsha Peer Mazaar Society. Observance of "different" Muharrams by Muslims, who claim to constitute a single ummah, driven by opposing doctrines and practices, raises a postmodernist issue, one 'concerned with ambiguity, uncertainty, incompleteness; of concerns with a world made up of different discourses of heritage and for which there are no simple answers'.³⁰

Contested Meanings: Muharram Festivities and the Mazaar Society

The Badsha Peer Mazaar Society has maintained public aspects of Muharram festivities. Its current president, "inspiration" and chief organiser is Iqbal Sarrang whose family traces a relationship to Badsha Peer, one of Natal's most revered Saints, through his maternal great-grandfather Ajam Hoosen-Sarrang. Badsha Peer, according to folklore, arrived in November 1860 on the Truro, the first ship to transport indentured workers to Natal. He performed numerous miracles until his death in 1894. A tomb was built over his grave by Soofie Saheb, another spiritual great in Natal, who arrived in 1895 and died in Natal in 1911. His tomb site is in Riverside.³¹ Hoosen-Sarrang arrived in Natal in the early 1860s. After completing his indenture, he settled in Queen Street in the vicinity of the Jumuah Musjid where, it is held, he struck an acquaintance with Badsha Peer.³² Hoosen-Sarrang's daughter Mariam married Yusuf Essop of Commercial Road. Their son Goolam Mustapha-Sarrang (1921-1984) formed a Society in homage to Badsha Peer, and its work has been carried on by his son Iqbal. Iqbal took a keen interest in Muharram from a young age. He was always at his father's side, and it came as no surprise when Mustapha-Sarrang announced that Badsha Peer had informed him in a "vision" that Iqbal should succeed him as Khalifa of the Badsha Peer Mazaare Society.

Goolam Mustapha and a small circle of friends who were utterly dedicated to Badsha Peer, organised activities informally at his shrine. In 1945 they formalized their involvement by establishing the Badsha Peer Mazaare Society. This brought them into conflict with Soofie Saheb's family who had legal control of Badsha Peer's tomb. A decade-long conflict culminated in the Supreme Court in 1959. Justice Jansen ruled that control of the shrine, and monies that were collected from public offerings, would remain with Soofie, but the Mazaar Society could retain its name and continue to organize activities at the site.

As organiser of the Muharram, Iqbal builds a new structure each year. He receives a naqsha (silhouette) of the tazzia through spiritual "instructions" in a Basharath (dream) about a month prior to Muharram. The vision is always that of an existing Mazaar (tomb) of a great Chisti saint in India. The basic silhouette is the same. It follows Indo-Islamic architectural style, and consists of a central domed structure flanked by four minarets. The ornamentation, design and colours change from year-to-year. In 2002 Iqbal built the Dargah of Khwaja Faqir Mohamad Shah Chisti of Ahmad Nagari, Poona. Upon receipt of the vision, Iqbal located a photograph of the Mazaar from his extensive personal collection, which covers the tomb of virtually

every major Chisti pir. His vision matched the photograph of the tomb of Khwaja Faqir Mohamad. Iqbal did not sketch a formal plan of the Mazaar but grasped its shape and scale through a study of the photograph.

The building of taziyahs is a sacred undertaking. While most Muharram organisers build taziyahs at their homes the Mazaar Society has purchased land in Stratford Road, Warwick Avenue, opposite Badsha Peer's tomb. The Mazaar Society has been using the land since the 1950s, but only purchased it in 2001. Stratford Road is part of the Warwick Avenue Triangle (WAT), which is bordered by Warwick Avenue, Wills Road, Syringa Avenue and Lancers Road. This area that has changed markedly over the past few decades. Until 1970 it comprised a majority of Indian residents. In 1961, for example, there were 380 whites, 1290 Coloureds and 5930 Indians.³³ With many Indians being displaced by Group Areas, and deracialisation of South African society in post-apartheid South Africa facilitating African settlement, Africans now comprise the majority of inhabitants. This has greatly reduced support for the Mazaar Society's taziyah, and denuded Muharram of much of the passion once inherent to it.

Iqbal built a wood and iron shelter on the site, ten metres in width, six metres in length and seven metres in height. The taziyah was constructed in a shelter called the *Ashur Khana* ("room" or tent). This room represented the tent which provided shelter to Husayn at Karbala. It was built in secret, away from the public gaze. In the past, taziyahs were built clandestinely because Muharram participants competed to build the most attractive taziyah, and did not want to give away too many secrets. Though the competitive element has dissipated, secrecy remains. Volunteers began constructing the taziyah two weeks prior to Muharram. There were approximately thirty volunteers, all male, and all members of the Mazaare Society. Most were related to Sarrang. Women did not participate in constructing the taziyah nor were they permitted to enter the imambarah. Since most volunteers held permanent outside employment, construction took place during evenings and on weekends. Volunteers worked from 6pm to 11 pm each night, from 1 pm to 1 am on Saturday and 10 am to 11 pm on Sundays. *Namaaz*, an Urdu and Persian word for ritual prayers, equivalent for the Arabic *salat*, was offered daily on site.

The work was strenuous and required great skill. Volunteers have developed dexterity, creativity and artistry through many years of practice. As Iqbal's experience illustrates, taziyah-building skills are passed from generation to generation, in most cases in a line of descent. Iqbal learnt from his father Mustapha-Sarrang, and is teaching the art to his sons. Iqbal, like his father Mustapha, has been beautifying shrines and building taziyahs since he was a young boy. During the taziyah-building process responsibilities are shared, depending on talent, time and ability. Some volunteers concentrate on artistic aspects of the task, others on procuring raw materials, carpentry, provisions such as refreshments and cool drinks, electrical aspects and so on.

The taziyah designed by Iqbal was constructed to proportion in accordance with the Durban City Council's regulations, which state that the base should measure less than 4 metres in length, 3 metres in width and 4.5 metres in height. The frame of the taziyah was made in pinewood, while polystyrene foam was used for the arches. Tin foil, multi-coloured lights, brightly

coloured fabrics, mirrors and flowers were used to decorated the structure. The completed taziyah was stunning. The upper section was decorated with square domes and turrets, to which were attached finials. Recessed ovoids, large rosettes, floral motifs and other geometric patterns were set into the wall and glued to the tin-foiled cardboard surfaces.

The taziyah was ready on 5th Muharram. Iqbal and his band of volunteers performed a *ghusl* of its framework, using soap and water to wash it. Once the taziyah was purified, nobody was allowed to enter the Ashur Khana without *wuzu*, spiritual ablution usually performed prior to prayer. The Ashur Khana is carpeted on the night of first Muharram, known as 'chaan raat' (moon night), referring to the birth of the new moon which signals the beginning of a new month in the Islamic lunar calendar. A portion of the Ashur Khan was demarcated for devotional objects. This area is called 'imambada', pronounced imambarra, or 'panja' room by locals. 'Bada' means twelve in Urdu and refers to the twelve panjas, replicas of hands, that were placed on a table four metres long, 0.7 metres wide and 1.2 metres high.

For Shi'as, this space links them to Karbala, and it is here that they perform a number of duties, including devotional rituals and community education. Shias hold mourning assemblies (*majlis*), physical acts of mourning (*matam*), processions containing symbols of the martyrs (*julus*) and other rituals during these first days of Muharram to remind them of the "Days of Karabala". This is not the case with Sunnis. The panjas, like-size replicas of human hands, are placed in three rows, five at the back, four in the middle row and three in front. The twelve Panjas used by Iqbal are made of light aluminium. They were given to his father during the 1930s by the then *mujawar* ("keeper") of Badsha Peer's tomb, Lala Mia. When asked what the panjas symbolized, participants answered that they represented Husayn and his most illustrious followers who died at Kerbala. While enacting the same rituals as Shias, participants were thus giving different meaning to their actions. In Meer's recount of Muharram in the 1960s, participants believed panjas represented the twelve Shia Imams as in Twelver Shi'ism.³⁴ This changing interpretation is partly due to the impact of reformist Islam and in particular the unambiguous distance between Sunni and Shia Islam.

The twelve panjas hold a different meaning for Shias. According to the Ithna-Ashari or "Twelver" denomination of Shi'ism which is prevalent in Iran, Iraq and among Shi'as of India the Prophet of Islam was succeeded by twelve Imams. Ali and his sons Hasan and Husayn were followed by nine others Zaynul Abidin, Muhammad al-Baqir, Jafar as Sadaq, Musa al-Kazim, Ali ar-Rida, Muhammad at-Taqi, Ali al-Hadi, Hasan Al-Askari and al-Mahdi. Each was persecuted by the reigning Sunni Caliph, with the exception of the twelfth, who was taken into occultation by God in 874 and has not been seen since the "Great Occultation". He will return in due course as the Mahdi to establish justice in the world, and usher in the "final Judgement". Shi'as are required to display allegiance to the Prophet and twelve imams, to whom God has given divine responsibility for interpreting Islamic revelation.³⁵

For Shias, the five fingers on each panja represent the classical Panch (five) Pirs of Islam, 'Five Holy Ones': the Prophet, his daughter Fatimah, her husband Ali who was the Prophet's cousin, and their sons Hasan and Husayn.³⁶ Among Sunni Muslims, on the other hand, the Panch Pir

represent great saints, the combinations depending on local and individual preferences. In Punjab, for example, the five Pirs were Khwaja Qutb-ud-Din, Moin-ud-Din Chisti, Nizam-ud-Din Auliya, Sultan Nasir-ud-Din Mahmud and Nasir-ud-Din Abu Khair. One or more of them would be replaced by local patrons elsewhere. As Schwerin has pointed out, 'the five saints are in fact any five personages the worshipper likes to mention; and the fact that a man describes himself as a Panch Pira implies generally that he is indifferent as to the saints'.³⁷

1st – 4th Muharram: 15 - 18 March 2002

The performances of Muharram proceeded from a calm beginning to a rousing, emotionally charged climax on ninth and tenth Muharram, the day of Ashura, the day on which Husayn was martyred and which is the centre of the ritual mourning period. The overall ritual comprised of a number of small parts, which include mourning, expository discourse, evocation of Karbala and ziyarat, pilgrimage to the tomb of Badsha Peer. Muharram began with the sighting of the new moon, as do all Islamic months because days are counted from sunset rather than sunrise in the Islamic calendar, on the evening of Thursday, 15 March 2002. Participants felt blessed because 1st Muharram was on Jumuah, the most blessed day in the week. The Ashur Khana was carpeted on 'chaan raat' and a number of activities held in the Panja Room. This included zikr, a recitation of blessing or praise for the Prophet; sajda shareef, recitation of the names of pious individuals; salami (salutation to the Prophet), tilawat of the Quran; and fateha, petitionary prayer to God.

Around twelve of the thirty volunteers fasted for the ten days. During this period they abstained from food and water from sunrise to sunset. Those who did not fast abstained from luxuries like meat. The simpler diet was made up of vegetables, bread and soup, in sympathy with the suffering of Husayn and his followers. Volunteers shared in communal meals each evening. The practice of 'dulhas' staying in the imambada for ten days has ceased. There was no recitation of a majlis; singing of marthiyas, lamentation poetry about Imam Husayn; 'matam', physical act of mourning; or recreation of the encounter at Karbala, which are central to Shia observance of Muharram. While the public was welcome, attendance was confined mainly to volunteers. This reflects largely the impact of Group Areas and movement of Indian Muslims from the area. Given high crime rates and fear of night travel, few are prepared to make the journey to Warwick Avenue, which has a reputation as a high crime area, due to the proximity of the Markets and Bus and Taxi stations.

5th – 9th Muharram: 19th – 22 March 2002

The panjas were introduced for the first time on the fifth night. Ghushl of the panja was performed, followed by a khatam and dua, in which participants sought pardon and forgiveness from God in the event they erred during the construction of the taziyah or were disrespectful in any way. Five panjas were placed on a sandbank outside the Ashur Khana, called *shawk*, meaning pedestal. It was five metres square and 20 centimetres in height. Clean sand was obtained from the Umgeni River to fill the *shawk*. Next to the *shawk* was the *nishaan*, a pole approximately four metres high, on top of which was a red and green flag, with a moon and star drawn on it. Green is

considered an important colour in Islam, while red signifies the blood of the martyred Husaun.

Participants seeking redress from difficulty made a *manath*, or vow, for a specific period, usually three years, five years, seven years or life. The *manath* involved a special plea for assistance from God; in return they vowed to support the Muharram for the number of years specified in the vow. Participants make an effort to attend the same taziyah each year, but can perform the rituals elsewhere if personal circumstances so dictate. Those who have taken a *manath* go around the sandpit in an anti-clockwise direction seven times. They wear white, usually a *kurta* (loose-fitting shirt) and *izzar* (pants), with a green and red sash around the waist. Participants carry the panja with the hand touching their forehead, like a coat of arms. They are regarded as *Sawari*, which refers to a person on horseback, and which in this context signifies those going into battle at Karbala. As devotees walked around the *shawk*, three or four individuals had to hold onto them tightly around the sash because they were in a trance and almost uncontrollable. Women are not permitted to engage in this action; the few who made vows sat meditatively in the *Panja* Room.

Night of the 10th , Ashura Night

The final and tenth night is known as *Shab-i-Bedar* or *Qatl* (“massacre”), the evening before Ashura day, when the public attended on a larger scale. For locals it is known simply as Ashura Night. Around Asr (mid-afternoon) on the ninth, volunteers met at the site to begin preparations for the climax the following day. After Maghrib prayer (sunset), when the tenth officially began, the taziyah, which was hitherto secluded, was taken outside the *imambadah*. It symbolically bore the coffins of the dead at Karbala. It was bright and ornate, the culmination of a month of hard work, devotion and love.

The taziyah was terracotta in colour, with the inside painted white and cream. The dome was yellow with a moon and star in pure gold, which was made by Mustapha-Sarrang half a century ago. Sunni taziyahs are more colourful than those of Shia's, made of bright paper and illuminated with lights. For Sunnis there is a sense that Husayn, through his death, won an important victory for Islam. They see less need for mourning and more for celebration because, as martyr, Husayn is seen as going directly to Heaven. For Shi'as the occasion is about remembering Husayn's death, not celebrating but mourning it, and it has a sense of a real funeral procession. It is a far more somber and solemn occasion (Schubel, 1993: 136). A *shamiana*, cloth roof or awning made from calico, was placed on the taziyah. Calico is used because it is associated with death in Islam. After Esha (night) prayer participants made zikr, kathme kwajgaan or khatam of great saints and ate communally. They stayed awake as late as possible because this is what Husayn supposedly did on the eve of the battle of Karbala.

10th or Ashura Day

The tenth is the most spectacular day of Muharram. Proceedings began shortly after noon when members of the Mazaar Society met at the Ashur Khana. Shortly after noon, they performed the Zuhr (midday) namaaz, khatam and fateha. Around 1:00 pm the gathering marched through

Warwick Avenue, West Street and into Russell Street to the shrine of Badsha Peer at the Brook Street cemetery, carrying banners, alams (standards), tabuts and taziyahs. Thirteen taziyah groups from various parts of Durban, all linked to the Mazaar Society, gathered at the shrine to pay homage to Badsha Peer. After making a *fateha*, each group began its march to Umgeni River seven kilometres away. Iqbal and his group marched through Victoria Street, into Soldiers Way and thence into Umgeni Road. The taziyah was placed on a steel cart built by Goolam Sarrang in the 1950s and pulled manually, reaching Umgeni River four hours later. Crowds have progressively declined over the years, and around a thousand people attended across twenty-five taziyahs from all parts of Durban, including those who went directly to the river. Unlike past decades it was conspicuous that the crowd was almost wholly Muslim in composition. Taziyahs met at the Connaught Bridge on the bank of the Umgeni River. Each taziyah leader read a *fateha*, while those who were fasting opened their fast at sunset.

The white calico in the taziyah was removed, dipped in the river and thereafter tied to the front of the taziyah. The cloth 'made the taziyah cold', according to Sarrang, meaning that it signified an end to the taziyah. The taziyah itself was not buried or dumped in the river, as had been the practice historically. Given restrictive legislation and environmental concerns, the wood was saved for use next year, the foam buried because it is regarded as sacred and not to be touched by anyone, while the cart was stored at the Ashur Khana in Stratford Road. The cart and taziyah were towed back on a vehicle, and not drawn, while the people made their way home individually. On the third day after Ashura there was a *fateha* at the Ashur Khana, and lunch (*kitchra niyaz*) was served on the first Sunday following Asura.

The tame ending is in stark contrast to Shias, for whom the night following the tenth is known as *Shami-i-Ghariban*, "Night of the Unfortunate Ones", which commemorates the women and children who were witness to the events at Karbala, whose tents were burned, veils pulled off and who were paraded through the streets of Kufa and Damascus. These women, who included Imam Husayn's sister Zainab, are important because they witnessed the events and related what happened to the world.³⁸

Muharram at the Soofie Darbar, Riverside

Muharram celebrations at the Soofie Darbar provided a variation to that of the Mazaar Society. Soofie Saheb, who arrived from Ratnagir, Bombay, in 1895 established the shrine of Badsha Peer in central Durban as well as a mosque and khanqah at Riverside. By the time he died in 1911 Soofie Saheb had built eleven mosques and khanqahs throughout Southern Africa.³⁹ These were crucial in establishing a distinct Islamic identity within the disparate working-class Muslim population. Central to the popular Islam established by Soofie Saheb were visitation of the tomb of Badsha Peer, celebration of the birthday of the Prophet and public observation of Muharram festivities. Control of the Darbar passed from Soofie Saheb (d. 1911) to his son Abdul Aziz (d. 1947). Goolam Mohammed (1912-1978), Abdul Aziz's eldest son, took over leadership of the Trust at Riverside when his father died.

From the time of Soofie Saheb, the respective Khalifa applied yearly to the City Council for permission to hold the street procession from the Darbar to Umgeni River and back. Applications were granted subject to stringent conditions: routes had to be adhered to; there was to be no drumming in the vicinity of European premises; the procession and ceremonies were not to become a source of annoyance to the neighbourhood; taziyahs were not to exceed twelve feet in height, there was to be no hindrance to vehicular traffic on the public roads or interference with other pedestrians, and promoters of the ceremonies and processions comply with the requirements of the local police. Permission to use loudspeakers was denied. Processions were only allowed to carry harmoniums on motor vehicles and not by hand because “the carrying of harmoniums by hand unnecessarily impedes the progress of the procession, and tends to hold up and obstruct traffic”.⁴⁰

It was during Goolam Mahomed’s Khalifate that Riverside was declared a White area and the family ordered to evict its home in 1968. The history of a people and tradition was erased under the guise of Group Areas. *Daily News* reporter Dorothy Mclean lamented:

Almost unnoticed, the old established village of Riverside on the north bank of Durban’s Umgeni River is disappearing – under the Group Areas decree – from the pages of Natal history. Within a few months nothing will remain to tell the colourful story of an Indian community who for most generations lived out their peaceable, industrious lives beside the river.....⁴¹

Despite numerous appeals, the Soofie family was forced to vacate the Darbar, excepting the mosque, on 15 October 1968. Goolam Mohammed and family relocated to nearby Kenville. A family memoir recalled:

Words cannot adequately describe aptly the emotions and thoughts that were running through the minds and hearts of all those present when the buildings were mercilessly destroyed by the bulldozers, which resembled huge dragons; it seemed as if the Day of Qiyamat (Judgement) was at hand. Seventy three years of history and rich heritage, sweat and toil, dreams and visions, were left in tatters overnight. But the inspiring memories of this great vibrant centre will always be treasured and nothing would obliterate it.⁴²

The authorities destroyed the entrance to the Darbar, original wood and iron house of Soofie Saheb, the kitchen and dining hall of the orphans, the madrassah, dispensary and residential home.⁴³ Only worshippers were allowed to enter the mosque, as the area surrounding it was set aside for White occupation. Architect John Haskell asked

Was it really necessary? The Riverside group was one of the best I have ever seen. Only the mosque and tomb of the founder are standing. Gone are the rest of the group – the lovely gateway and the delicate tracery of the school. It is irrelevant who uses them. These building have an architectural value just as the temples of Ancient Greece have. Those temples are preserved for their beauty, not for any religious significance they might had had.⁴⁴

Goolam Mohammed passed away unexpectedly on 13 January 1978 and was succeeded as trustee by his sons Mohammed Saied and his deputy Abdul Aziz. They extended the tomb in 1985, when a twenty-ton gold dome was placed on the tomb of Soofie Saheb, the first renovation to be carried out on the tomb. The eviction of the Soofie family from Riverside brought an era to an end. It marked the last time the taziyah street procession was organized. Thereafter, a taziyah was built and housed at the Darbar, where a permanent Ashur Khana has been built next to the museum. A hand-carved taziyah made of solid oak was constructed in 1996 by Zaid Soofie, great-grandson of Soofie Saheb. Its base is three metres square and it measures five metres tall with the dome. The taziyah houses one panja, a hand made of pure gold. The purpose of the panja, according to Soofie, is primarily to right the great injustice done to Husayn. After Husayn and his followers were killed, their body parts were paraded around the streets of Damascus. Devotees now show respect to the panja as a means of showing reverence to those who had been shamelessly abused. The panja represents symbolizes those body parts, and some devotees place flowers on the panja as a mark of respect.⁴⁵

Due to Group Areas restrictions, the routine and practices of Muharram were changed. Devotees visited the Darbar during the ten days of Muharram to fulfil their obligations and vows. The taziyah remained in the Ashur Khana for devotees to pay their respects. During the ten days devotees brought along sharbat and other offerings in respect of manaths they may have undertaken. The poor are usually fed with offerings of food. The crowd got bigger as Karbala neared. From the eight it was fairly sizeable and on the main day of the tenth, it numbered between three to four thousand. During this period the crowd indulges in communal prayer and meals. The people are fed standard Muharram fare such as kitchra and sharbat, and they participate in Quraan-reading, zikr, marsiya (laments to Husayn), naath, salami, waiz and fateha. An interesting Muharram offering Niyaaz are green apples. Few participants were aware of its significance, though one or two participants thought that when Husayn was suffering at Karbala the angel Gibrael was sent with an apple to ease his pain.

Soofie Saheb's national importance was recognized in November 1980 when the National Monuments Council of South Africa declared the Riverside mosque and mausoleum a national monument. He received even greater posthumous recognition in September 1999 when the Durban Metro Council renamed the Lower Bridge Road, where the mosque is situated, the 'Soofie Saheb Drive' in honour of his work among the poor.⁴⁶ Despite political changes that would allow street processions the Soofie's have decided not to undertake street processions. It was also very noticeable that there was an absence of participants getting *haal* as they did not build a *shawk* around which people marched.

Wounds of Devotion: Fire Walking⁴⁷

As Karbala was a military campaign involving intense suffering, some Muslims feel the need to experience physical acts of mourning to appreciate Husayn's suffering for participating in Muharram activities. The custom of *Ag ka Matam* or fire-walking is rare in Durban. It is not part of the Muharram activities of the Mazaare Society or Soofie Darbar. Even among Shias, fire walking only occurs among Indian Muslims and is not practiced in Iran (Schubel, 1993: 143).

One of the few Muharram commemorations to include fire-walking is organised by Nabee Ameer of Ashvale Road, Unit 9, Phoenix. This township was developed for Indians north of Durban in the mid-1970s to accommodate victims of forced removals from Group Areas. Nabee's father, Ameer Imam Essop and grandfather Imam Essop, had been pioneer taziyah builders in Clairwood from the early twentieth century. When Indians were forced out of Clairwood the family moved to Phoenix in 1978. This did not stop their Muharram activities. Council homes and land were extremely small. Fortunately for the Ameer's, a park was situated behind their home. Ameer Essop negotiated with the City Council to use part of the land for Muharram. The family built taziyahs from their first year in Phoenix. In the beginning old devotees from Clairwood traveled long distances to be part of Ameer's taziyah. Gradually, as some residents moved to Chatsworth, the distance became too great to travel. This was not a problem as local residents began patronising Ameer's taziyah. Following Ameer Essop's death in 1996, his four sons Nabee, Ebrahim, Iqbal and Sadick Mohammed continued the tradition. As eldest son, Nabee became khaliff. The brothers are grateful for the guidance provided by their uncles and other elders initially, though they now consider themselves 'seasoned' taziyah-organisers.

The origins of firewalking as a means of demonstrating devotion are unclear. According to folklore, fire signifies the burning of the tents of women following the martyrdom of Husayn. Another legend is that in a petty kingdom in the province of Sindh, the British had entered into collusion with a Sunni Ruler to bar Muharram rituals. To keep the faithful out of the imambadah British and Sunni rulers set fires in front of the entrances of the imambadah. However, participants "miraculously" walked through the fires without being harmed (Schubel, 1993: 152). Whatever the historical origins, the image of fire is important in the Islamic world. It represents the fire of hell and is the Quranic symbol for the oppression of the religious by those who reject God's guidance (Schubel, 1993: 145).

Firewalking and flagellation are public activities performed communally, rather than solitary acts of pious mortification. In Phoenix, a sizeable crowd numbering around 500 took part in the activities on the night of tenth Muharram. Approximately fifty individuals walked through the fire pit, referred to as 'hot panja' by participants. While the crowd was mixed, and included men and women of all ages, only men walked through the pit. The ceremony took place at the back of Ameer's house, where a permanent Ashur Khana and fire pit have been built. The fire pit is approximately three metres in length and two metres wide. A wooden fence has been built around it to prevent members of the public entering and making it *na-paak* (spiritually and physically unclean). The pit is dug each year to allow additional wood to be stacked and burnt.

Participants, called "sawari boys", make a manath (vow) for assistance to address problems they might be faced with or facilitate success in worldly matters. To prepare for the walk, participants abstained from meat, and were restricted to a diet of vegetable for ten days. This sparse diet is in sympathy with Husayn who endured great suffering. Participants were firm in their conviction that they would be severely injured if they failed to observe this "fast". The sawari boys prepare spiritually by abstaining from sexual intercourse, consuming intoxicants or indulging in other worldly

pleasures. Unless their “mind was clear”, Baccus pointed out, they would be burnt while crossing the “hot panja” and certainly be deprived of spiritual benefit. On the ninth night, the night preceding the actual fire-walk, the “sawari boys” underwent *cold sawari*, “cool your feet” session, to prepare mentally for the big occasion. After the Esha prayer they were taken from the *Ashur Khana* and led around the pit by the two *mujawars* (keepers), Nabee's brothers Ebrahim and Iqbal. As they circled the pit five times, water was sprinkled onto their feet to “cool” them down for following night. They were forbidden from entering the pit.

There were around fifty *sawari boys* on the night of the tenth. Organizers began making the fire at around 3 pm. 120 hundred bundles of wattle wood was piled high and burnt, slowly disintegrating into charcoal. An attendant constantly raked the burning ashes as the fire died down, to keep the surface level. The fire was left to settle. By 8 pm grey ash had settled with red coal burning beneath. The large crowd was kept at bay and instructed to stay at least 40 feet from the fire pit, as participants hold that observers can cast *nazr* if their shadows fall on the pit or participants.

In the dark night the intensity of heat and light radiated by glowing coals was glistening. Excitement and tension developed gradually as the crowd got larger and huddled together in the fire-walking arena. The procession began after participants had made *ghusl* (bath) and performed Esha (night prayer). At one end of the wooden fence was a marquee (tent), a temporary structure next to the *Ashur Khana*, in which *lobaan* and other incense burnt, creating a surreal atmosphere.

The main panja, called ‘Barra Imam’ (‘Big Imam’), and approximately 600 mm X 150 mm, represented the twelve Imams as one composite being. There five other ‘little panja’, approximately 500 mm by 150 mm, which represented Husayn, Hassan, Ali, Fatima and Qasim, a child killed at Karbala. Panjas, made of copper and brass, were built by Nabee's grandfather Imam Essop. Several participants placed a scarf on the Bibi Fathima panja as a mark of respect. Each little panja represents an ailment afflicting a particular part of the body and it is these that were handed to devotees. The Barra Imam is only utilized where an individual makes a long-term commitment of three, five or seven years.

The two *mujawars*, Ebrahim and Iqbal, handed participants the respective panja on which they had made a *manath*. Ebrahim took care of all spiritual matters such as *dua*, *namaaz* and so on during Muharram. Participants circled the *shawk*, a gravesite outside the tent, before crossing the “hot panja”. Most participants were in their twenties. The youngest, just five, was carried across the pit by his father. The youngest boy to walk across the pit barefoot was eight years old. Younger participants walked after the adults had crossed and when the pit was a little “cooler”.

The “sawari boys” wore long *kurtas* up their knees, pants, red or green *topees* and a matching red or green cloth around the waist, which the “holder”, a friend or family member chosen to help them cross the pit, clutched tightly. The holder also wore a *kurta* but this was not mandatory. *Sawari boys* held the panja and walked with it across the pit, guided by their “holder”. As soon as they took hold of the panja, they went into trance. By the time they crossed the pit they were uncontrollable and the panja had to

be forcibly removed from their grip so that it could be given to the next devotee. Akin to women who did not go into the battlefield at Karbala, the Bibi Fatima panja does not leave the tent.

The 'sawari boys' walked briskly across the flames as some members of the crowd chanted salaams, or praises to the Prophet. The fittest and strongest of the men were followed through the "hot panja" by the old and very young. No one was injured during the procession, which lasted approximately two hours. In fact, there was no haste to finish. The "sawari boys" were given time to prepare themselves mentally and spiritually and cross when they 'felt' ready. Participants said that walking across the pit was a physically painless activity; the main sensation was that of walking through cold water. As Baccus pointed out, as soon as he took hold of the panja he was in a state of trance and did not even know where he was walking.

Once all the devotes had walked across, the pit was drenched with water and the fire left to die an inevitable death. When the 'sawari boys' recovered their senses, butter and rose water were applied to their legs to ease the strain the heat caused on the foot. Healing was prompt and without long-term scarring. No one reported enduring injuries or burns. In past years the odd 'sawari boy' did occasionally get burnt; this was seen as an indication that his preparation had shortcomings and lacked total sincerity.

As soon as all the sawari boys had completed the crossing, they gathered in the Ashur Khana, where the panjas were placed on the rack. Ebrahim, the mujawar, made a communal dua. Devotees were then given a cool sweet drink, *sherbet*, *kitchra*, a traditional thick lentil soup, *malida*, a sweet offering made from bread flour and sugar, and apples. *Sharbat* was drunk to quench the thirst felt by Husayn, the *kitchra* is meant to give strength for the activities of tenth, and *malida* signified food given to nine-month old Asghar Ali who could not be fed whole pieces of bread on the battlefield. The bread was crushed, and sugar added for Asghar to eat. Asghar, the son of Abbas Ali who was married to Imam Husayn's sister, was the youngest person at Karbala. Devotees then made their way home and gathered the following afternoon for the trip Umgeni.

Participants offered varying explanations for their involvement. Several felt their ability to cross the pit without damage showed the power and willingness of God to intercede on their behalf. For others, the image of passing through fire symbolised Husayn's pain. According to Baccus, experiencing fire allowed him to connect directly into the paradigm of Karbala. It gave him a "deep feeling and hurt" for Husayn and "the suffering they went through". Until around two decades ago devotees commonly participated in acts of flagellation such as cutting their back with knives or chains, as a ritual act of mourning for the death of Husayn. This, however, no longer features in contemporary Muharram activities.

The following day devotees, led by Nabee, proceeded to Umgeni by car. They did not take along the large taziyah. Instead they took four small taziyahs, measuring 300 mm by 300mm, red and pink asta flowers, as well as niyaaaz offerings (*kitchra*, apples, *malida*) to the river. The flowers were brought by those who had taken manaths, while the taziyahs represented the manaths of all devotees. At Umgeni the small taziyahs and flowers were put into the river, a communal prayer was made, and the devotees returned to Nabee's

house with the niyaaz, which was distributed to the gathered crowd. Nabee builds a large taziyah each year, which is housed in the Ashur Khana. There is no prescribed method for building taziyahs; it just depends on what interests Nabee each year. After the tenth, the trimmings on the taziyah are dismantled, while the frame remains intact for use the following year.

Conclusions:

According to Thaiss ...

A ritual and social world is a never-ending process of negotiation. What taziyah once was in India, it is not today; and what it is today, it will not be tomorrow, although in that process various participants try to fix its meaning to reflect their view of the world.⁴⁸

As our study of Muharram in present-day Durban shows, participants are constantly re-negotiating the meanings of Muharram commemorations in terms of their changing ideas of what constituted correct belief and practice. This illustrates what Sherif Mardin has shown, namely that behind the shell of old practices all kinds of reformist practices take place, while the same congregation can understand a religious ritual in different ways.⁴⁹

Muharram is a microcosm of the wider struggle for hegemony among Muslims. Pressure from the authorities, from Hindu leaders, from reformist Ulema, urbanisation, education, economic mobility, changing lifestyles, and the impact of new ideas have noticeably toned down some aspects and totally eliminated other aspects of the festival, while old symbols and practices have assumed new meanings. While the reformist tradition has proscribed public expression of Muharram, and have turned away from taziyah-making, many differences exist among those who continue to build taziyahs. Some festivities remain in-house, within the boundaries of Darbars, others take to the streets, and yet others include activities like fire-walking in their observance of Muharram, something that is considered taboo by the majority of Muslims. Much has changed in Muharram. Drinking, tiger dancing and wrestling are no longer practiced, while fire-tramping is known only to a minority of participants. There is less focus on aspects important to Shi'as. Instead, organizers have attempted to introduce aspects of reformist Islam, such as recitation of zikr and the quran into their commemorations.

The reformation drive led to emphasis on what were considered non-Islamic rituals and activities. These became contested activities among Muslims who had tolerated them until the 1970s. So while the organisers continue to organise the urs it is clear from talking and from changing practices that they have begun to have doubts about whether all the rituals and practices are correct, resulting in changes. That is why some of the participants do not focus on the religious aspect of why they are there. Thus we find the Quran and zikr are read more. They take the tomb and adapt it to their own background, education, culture, needs, hopes and beliefs. During the Urs we need to examine what participants want, and it becomes clear that they have multiple and contradictory meanings and that all of these diverse interests are reaffirmed during the Urs.

The meanings and authenticity of Muharram are socially created and hence have been historically heavily contested and constantly re-interpreted.

Muharram's "truths" reflect the deep social, historical and cultural differences among Muslims, which have resulted in conflicting views of what Muharram means, how it should be observed, which practices are acceptable and which are not, and what is authentic about it and what is invented. All social groups, understandably, consider their perspective hegemonic. The new beliefs and practices have become "custom". The festivities of Muharram reflect the wider reality that Muslims should not be seen as a single group. 'Islam' is an umbrella that masks multiplicity among Muslims. The notion of what constitutes Islamic tradition is constantly being modified, and there is never one hegemonic, universally authoritative, Islamic tradition.

Glossary:

Alam: standards.

Ashur Khana: "room", symbolises the tent that provided shelter to Husayn and his followers at Karbala.

Ashura: tenth of Muharram.

Dargah: shrine.

Fateha: an offering to God, the Prophet or a Muslim Saint.

Ghusl: bath.

Haal: trance.

Imambada an area demarcated as a site of worship for devotees during the ten days of Muharram

Izzar: pants.

Khanqah: Muslim hospice.

Kitchra: thick lentil soup.

Kurta: long shirt.

Kushti: wrestling.

Malida a sweet offering made from bread flour and sugar.

Mataam: mourning.

Manath: vow.

Mawlana: priest.

Musjid: mosque.

Marsiya: a poem of mourning, especially mourning the massacre of Husayn and his companions.

Muharram: the festival to commemorate the tragedy of Karbala. Also the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

Mujawar: the keeper of a shrine.

Namaaz: prayer, the Islamic form of worship performed at least five times daily.

Napak: impure.

Nazar: evil

Niaz: blessed food.

Nishaan: a pole.

Pagoda a representation or model of the tomb of Husain.

Panja: replicas of the human hand.

Pir: saint

Qawwali: devotional singing.

Salam: greeting.

Sawar: rider.

Shamiana: a cloth roof or awning from calico used to cover on the taziyah.

Shaheeds: martyrs.

Sharbat: sweet drink made from milk.

Shawk: refers to a pedestal made from sand, possibly representing a grave.

Silsilah: Sufi order.

Tabut

Taziyah: a representation or model of the tomb of Hassan and Husain.

Topi: cap or hat worn by Muslims, especially during namaaz.

Ummah: universal Muslim brotherhood.

Waiz: religious sermon.

Zikr: a recitation of blessing or praise for the Prophet.

¹ G Thaiss, "Contested Meanings and the politics of authenticity. The 'Hosay' in Trinidad", in Akbar S. Ahmed and Hasting Donnan eds, *Islam, Globalization and Postmodernity*, (London: Routledge, 1994),38-62), 40

² Murray T Titus, *Indian Islam. A Religious History of Islam in India*. (New Delhi: Oriental Books Reprint, 1979, original 1930), 92

³ "The Story of Muharram", in *Indian Opinion*, 28 January 1933.

⁴ Thaiss, "Contested Meanings", 41

⁵ Aziz Ahmad, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1964, Reprinted 1999), 157

⁶. NAR, CSO 299/1910, Protector Polkinghorne to Town Clerk, 11 November 1909

⁷ Population Census, 1904

⁸ NAR, II, 1/3, 520/1877, Abdul Kadir, Indian Interpreter, to Protector Graves, 1 December 1877

⁹ *Natal Advertiser*, 23 April 1902

¹⁰ J. Meldrum, 'The Moharrem Festival in Natal'. Title of journal unknown, dated 1893. Killie Campbell Library. PAM 297 MEL

¹¹ Garcin de Tassy (Translated by M Waseem), *Muslim Festivals in India and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 56

¹² *Natal Mercury*, 9 December 1910. 'Coolie' was a derogatory term used by Whites to refer to Indians. As Valentine Daniel has shown, 'coolie' is a mixture of Gujarati and Tamil terms and has to do with a denial of personhood and suggestions of someone devoid of morals. Breman, Jan and Daniel, E. Valentine. 1992. "The Making of a Coolie", in E. Valentine Daniel, H. Bernstein and Tom Breass eds. *Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants in Colonial Asia* (London: Frank Cass) pp. 268-295.

¹³ Colleen B Cohen, "'This is de Best": Festival and the Cultural Politics of Nation Building in the British Virgin Islands, *American Ethnologist*, 25, 2 (May 1998): 189-214, 202

¹⁴ A Falassi ed., *Time Out of Time. Essays on Festival*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).

¹⁵ See G. Vahed, "Constructions of Community and Identity Among Indians in Colonial Natal, 1860-1910: The Role of the Muharram Festival". *Journal of African History*. Vol. 43 (2002): 77-93

¹⁶ University of Natal, Department of Economics. Natal Regional Survey, 1952. *The Durban Housing Survey*. (Durban: University of Natal Press), 35.

¹⁷ Dale F. Eickelman, "Mass Education and the religious imagination in contemporary Arab societies", in *American Ethnologist*, 19 (4), 1992: 643-655.

¹⁸ Joffe, George. 1998. 'Maghribi Islam and Islam in the Maghrib: the Eternal Dichotomy' in Westerlund, David and Rosander, A. eds. *African Islam and Islam in Africa* (London: Hurst & Co.), 68.

¹⁹ See B. Metcalf, Metcalf, B. 1982. *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

²⁰ Jones, Kenneth W. 1989. *Socio-religious reform movements in British India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 8.

²¹ Sikand, Yoginder. *The Origins and Development of the Tablighi-Jama'at (1920-2000). A cross-country comparative study* (Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2002), 8.

²² Anwarul Haq, M. *The Faith Movement of Moulana Muhammed Ilyas* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1972)

²³ Sikand, *Origins and Development of Tablighi-Jama'at*, 67.

²⁴ Sikand, *Origins and Development of the Tablighi-Jama'at*, 217.

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- ²⁵ Moosa, E. "World's 'Apart': The Tablighi Jamat under apartheid 1963-1993", in *Journal for Islamic Studies*, 17 (1997): 28-48, 33
- ²⁶ Mahida, E. 1993. *History of Muslim in South Africa. A Chronology* (Durban: Arabic Study Circle, 1993): 33
- ²⁷ Jones, *Reform movements in British India*, 72.
- ²⁸ *Muslim News* 11 February 1983
- ²⁹ The lecture was recorded. The Mawlana did not wish to be named
- ³⁰ Thaiss, "Contested Meanings", 39
- ³¹ See Badsha Peer Mazaar Society. 1998. *60 Golden Years of Devotion to the Most Illustrious Saint in the Southern Hemisphere* (Durban: Badsha Peer Mazaar Society).
- ³² The following sections are based mainly on interviews with Iqbal Sarrang.
- ³³ Maharaj, B. 1999. 'The Integrated Community Apartheid Could Not Destroy: the Warwick Avenue Triangle in Durban', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25 (2) June 1999: 249-266, 255
- ³⁴ F. Meer, *Portrait of Indian South Africans*. (Durban: Avon Press) 1969, 179
- ³⁵ Pinault, David. *The Shites. Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 6.
- ³⁶ Schubel, Vernon James. *Religious Performance in Contemporary Islam. Shii Devotional Rituals in South Asia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 19
- ³⁷ Schwerin, Kerrin Graefin V. 1981. 'Saint Worship in Indian Islam: The Legend of the Martyr Salar Masud Ghazi', in *Ritual and Religion Among Muslims in India* (Delhi: Manohar, 1981): 143-160), 153
- ³⁸ Schubel, *Shii Devotional Rituals*, 19.
- ³⁹ Soofie, M.S. and Soofie, A.A. 1999. *Hazrath Soofie Saheb And His Khanqaha* (Durban: Impress Web)
- ⁴⁰ (NAR, 3/DBN, 4/1/4/283, Town Clerk to D&DMA, 1 September 1954)
- ⁴¹ *Daily News*, 11 November 1967
- ⁴² Soofie and Soofie, *Soofie Saheb*, 153.
- ⁴³ *Daily News* 1 June 1969
- ⁴⁴ *Daily News* 12 November 1968
- ⁴⁵ Interview, Abdul Aziz Soofie, 27 January 2000
- ⁴⁶ *Post*, 29 September – 2 October 1999
- ⁴⁷ This part of the paper is based on interviews with organisers Nabee Ameer and Ebrahim Ameer in March 2002, participant Faisal Baccus and Mohammed Vahed who attended specifically to record events on the night of the tenth.
- ⁴⁸ G Thiass, "Muharram Rituals and the Carnivelesque in Trinidad", *ISIM Newsletter*, 3/99
- ⁴⁹ In his study of Islamic reform in nineteenth and twentieth century Turkey, Serif Mardin focuses on the life of Seyyid Bediuzzaman Nursi who developed a Deobandi orientation within a well-developed Sufi frame. See S. Mardin. 1989. *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Life of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York)