

Mourning Rituals among Shi'ite Muslims of Kashmir valley: An Ethnographic account

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1. Aim

The paper aims to present a holistic picture of different mourning rituals associated with the martyrdom of *Imam Hussain*, the grandson of the *Prophet of Islam*, practiced by the Shi'ite Muslims of Kashmir valley of Indian State.

2. Data & Methods

Qualitative techniques like Case Study and Ethnography were employed. The data were collected through Interview and Participant observation.

3. Results

Shia Muslims of Kashmir valley practice various rituals to commemorate the sufferings and martyrdom of *Hussain*, the grandson of Prophet of Islam, in the battle of Karbala. An ethnographic prism of mourning rituals among Kashmiri Shi'ites offers a hands-on panorama of symbolism in such rituals as *majlis* (religious meetings), *Marsiya Khwani* (elegy recitation), the *alam* (a standard of flags), *matami jalus* (procession) *Noha* (the song of the lament), as well as those rituals uniquely linked to the memorialized grief of Ashura as in *Dogh/Sina-zani* (rhythmic breast beating), *Hankal/Qamazani* (self-flagellation), *sabil* (source of drinking water), *Shabih/Tabut* (Hussain's coffin) and *zuljanah* (riderless horse of Karbala), are presented as the living symbol of the massacre. Kashmiri Shi'ites observe and practice these rituals with passion and fervour, thus identifying themselves with the macro Shi'i unity.

4. Conclusion

This culture of lamentation over the sufferings of Ahl e bayt e Rasool - the members of the house of the prophet of Islam in general and the tragic death of Hussain- the grandson of Prophet in particular, has become an indisputable identity of the Shi'ite community both at macro as well as at the micro levels. The martyrdom of infallible Hussain, the scion of the Prophet's lineage, who was slain along with other 71 men, including his closest family members and followers, has held an existential importance in a wide variety of cultural spheres in which Shia Muslims around the world and Shias of the Kashmir valley, as not an exception, participate.

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