

Intizar Husain: *Sīrhiyān*

[From Gopi Chand Narang (ed.), *Intizār Husain aur un ke afsāne*, Aligarh, Educational Book House, 1986, pp. 303-320: originally published in *Šahr-e afsos*, Lahore, Maktaba-e Karvan, 1973, pp. 62-83.]

[Translated with slight abridgements (marked as in the photocopy) by Muhammad Umar Memon as 'The stairway' in Intizar Husain, ed. M.U. Memon, *An unwritten epic and other stories*, Lahore, Sang-e-Meel, 1987, pp. 50-69, also in Khalid Hasan and Faruq Hasan, eds., *Urdu short stories from Pakistan*, New Delhi, Vikas, 1986, pp. 241-254.]

The Shia background

A basic understanding of this background is essential for any appreciation of the story from p. 306 on. The following brief note should help:

Shia consciousness is dominated by the martyrdom of *Imam Husain* at *Kerbela* [*karbalā-e mu'allā*], where his tomb [*dargāh*, etc.] is the centre of Shia pilgrimage. Mourning for Kerbela reaches its annual peak in the first ten days of *Muharram*, especially the 10th *Muharram* [*āšūrā*], but continuing to the 40th day [*cihlum*]. The *imambara* with its mourning chamber [*azā-xāna*] is the centre of Shia ritual, and is used to store the objects sacred to the memory of the martyred Imam which are taken out on the annual *Ashura* procession [*julūs*]. Besides the *ta'ziya*, a model of the Imam's tomb at Kerbela, these objects include the banners [*alam*] whose poles are topped with the Shia symbol of the upright hand [*panja*], whose five digits symbolize the Five Holy Ones [*panj tan-e pāk*], i.e. the Prophet, Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Husain.

[p.303]

sīrhiyān	f.p. stairs, staircase
be-kalī	f. restlessness, unease
ṭhaṇḍā sāns lena	to heave a sigh
harkat k.	to move, to stir
kī jān meṅ jān ānā	to be restored to life, to be relieved
dharkā	m. fear, apprehension
kā dhyān rakhnā	to pay attention to
lahja	m. tone
avval-e šab	m. beginning of the night
šaitānī	of the devil
vasvasa	m. evil suggestion, prompting
bunyād	f. basis
āxir-e šab	m. end of the night
sadqa denā	to give alms
dharaknā	to throb, to palpitate

2

tahayyur
kaifiyat
gahrā

m. wonder
f. state
deep

qissa
honā
tarḳā
paṭ se

m. story
m. something which is going to happen
m. dawn
quickly, suddenly, 'with a snap'

[p.304]

sar-gardān
parešān
bihtarī
nānā
marhūm
peṛā
daunā
pattā
vuzū k.

wandering, confused, 'lost'
distressed, worried
f. improvement, things getting better
m. maternal grandfather
late, deceased
m. pera [a kind of sweet]
m. leaf-basket
m. leaf
to perform ablutions [before prayers]

inhimāk
karvaṭ lenā
murda
barkat
nišānī
jhijaknā

m. concentration, absorption
to turn on one's side, to turn over
m. corpse
f. blessing
f. sign, mark
to be startled, to hesitate

sābit k.
kāl
qadre
buland āvāz
be-vaqta
par i'tibār k.
ihtiyātan

to prove, to establish
m. famine
somewhat, rather
[= *ūncī āvāz*] f. loud voice
untimely
to trust
cautiously, as a precaution

jhunjhlāhaṭ
kamāl
bayān k.
gharī
garmānā
'ajab
mazāq
dikhnā

f. irritation, annoyance
amazing, extraordinary
to tell, to describe
f. moment
to become heated, to become angry
amazing, strange
m. joke
[intrans. of *dekhnā*] to be seen, to appear

[p.305]

bašar
fitrat

m. man, human
f. nature

rafū-cakkar honā	to buzz off, to go away
sire se	from the beginning
yān	[= <i>yahān</i>] here
had honā	to go too far, to be too much
bāliṣṭ	f. span [between thumb and little finger]
koṭhā	m. flat roof
chat	f. roof
chupnā	to be hidden
qadam utāmā	to lower the feet, to set feet down
iṅṭ	f. brick
muṅder	m. parapet-wall, low roof-wall
surāhī	f. flask, pitcher
#adrā	
korā	fresh, new
lālṭen	f. lantern
battī	f. light, wick
mandā	dim, faint
kam k.	to lower [wick]
cāṅd	m. moon
tel	m. oil
gul honā	to be extinguished, to go out
muṅh hī muṅh meṅ	[talking] to oneself
burburānā	to mutter, to mumble
bujhnā	to be extinguished, to go out
simatnā	to shrink

[p.306]

bistar	m. bedding, bed-roll, bedclothes
cāṅdnī	f. white cloth
camaknā	to shine
bistar ke nām	'as nominal bedding'
du-sūtī	f. a kind of light cloth
sameṭnā	to roll up
takya	m. pillow
ba-taur	by way of, as
sirhāne	at the head [of bed]
chirkāo k.	to sprinkle [water]
loṭā	m. lota, pot
khurrā	rough, coarse
chiraknā	to sprinkle
nangā	naked, bare
pīṭh	f. back
tārī	f. cool moisture
bhīgā	wet, damp
bāl	m. hair, i.e. fibre of string bed

soñdhā	fresh-smelling [like wet earth/clay]
xuṣbū	f. perfume
ṣāmma	m. sense of smell
mu'attar k.	to perfume, to scent
sum	[= <i>gum sum</i>] silent, mute
khañkārnā	to clear the throat
galā	m. throat
'alam	m. 'alam, the spear-headed banner of Husain
mubāarak	auspicious
hama-tan	totally, completely
mutavajjih	attentive
karvaṭ badalnā	to turn over
muñh k.	to face, to turn the face
savere	early
janeñ	[= <i>jāne</i>] who knows?
karvateñ lenā	to toss and turn
ke hon meñ	as it was about to happen
jhapkī	f. doze, nod, nap
laṅkharānā	to stumble, to stammer
kapkapī	f. trembling, shaking
imām-bāra	m. imambara, where Muharram equipment is kept
vāñ	[= <i>vahāñ</i>] there
sabz	green
lahrānā	to wave
paṭkā	m. sash
lacaknā	to bend, to sway
cāñdī	f. silver
panja	m. panja, hand symbolizing the Five Holy Ones [the Prophet, Ali, Fatima, Hasan, and Husain]
cakā-cauñdhī	f. being dazzled
ru'b	m. awe
tārī honā	to overcome
jism	m. body
sakta	m. trance

[p.307]

zihn	m. mind
rauzan	m. skylight, smoke-hole, 'aperture, chink'
kiran	f. ray
channā	to be strained, to be shed
lakīr	f. line
'azā-xāna	m. mourning chamber
lobān	m. incense
basnā	to be scented, to smell
sonā	m. gold

zau	m. sparkle, light
rešmī	silken
sunahrā	golden
rupahlī	silver
goṭā	m. lace edging
ṭaṅknā	to be stitched
kināra	m. border
bīc	middle, in the middle
āvezān	hanging
jhuknā	to bend, to bow, to droop
jhār	m. chandelier
šīša	m. glass
kone-dār	having corners, i.e. cut glass
an-ginat	countless
phalī	f. pendant
laṭaknā	to hang
jāne	who knows?
haft-rang	seven-coloured, like a rainbow

haule	slowly, softly
taknā	to stare at
bašārat	f. good news

tairnā	to swim
camak	f. flash
lahrānā	to wave
lahar	f. wave
mānd par jānā	to fade, to subside
tašvīš	f. anxiety, concern

ab ke baras	that year, the next year
fīkr-mandāna	worried, anxious
dhīmā	soft, low
julūs	m. procession

[p.308]

marte dam tak	until one's dying breath
šān	f. splendour, pomp
za'if	feeble, weak [from old age]
bharrānā	to become hoarse
chalaknā	to overflow, to brim over
ṭhandā sāns lenā	to heave a sigh

gum sum	silent, completely lost, struck dumb
aṛā	awkward, complicated, tangled
tīrchā	crooked
cihlum	m. the 40th day after 1st Muharram
tālā parnā	lock to be in place, 'remain locked'

6

an-jān	unknown
zor k.	to exert itself, to gather strength
cupke cupke	silently, stealthily
ki[n]vār	m. door, one of pair of doors
darār	f. crack
jhānkā	to peep
joṛ	m. joint
pair	m. foot
tālā lagnā	to be padlocked
kundī	f. door-chain
pakarnā	to seize
jālī	f. grating
jhilmil	m. sparkle, flash
ru'b khānā	to be filled with awe, to be terrified
āp hī āp	of its own accord, by itself
dharaknā	to thump, to hammer
ho lenā	to take oneself off, to leave
tah-xāna	m. cellar, underground chamber
zīna	m. staircase
tārik	dark
ru'b tāri honā	awe, terror to overcome
kauriyālā sānp	m. spotted snake, braided snake
rivāyat	f. tradition
ke mutābiq	according to
chernā	to tease, to provoke

[p.309]

cunānce	in this way, for instance
gil-gilā	slimy, clammy
šai	f. thing
khaṅkārṁā	to clear the throat, 'without a sound'
suṛ suṛ k.	to rustle, to slither
ghusnā	to get inside
jamnā	to stay where one is
kā jāiza lenā	to survey
jurat	f. daring
[ki] qasam khānā	to swear [by]
[ko] yaqīn ānā	to believe, to be sure
kauriyen	fp. [dialect for <i>kauriyān</i>] white spots
divāl	f. [dialect for <i>dīvār</i>] wall
jhaṭ se	straightaway, immediately
dhar dhar k.	to thump loudly, to pound
sahmā	scared
ek sāth	all at once
sahn	m. courtyard
ku[n]ān	m. well

(7)

pakkā #man	brick-built f. wall, coping
ujālā maddham sāya gahrā tah lahreñ lenā jā-ba-jā bijlī parchāñ	m. light faint, dim m. shadow deep f. depth to wave, to ripple here and there, everywhere f. lightning f. shadow, reflection
jin haṭ bāolā buzurgāna paglā	m. jinn 'get away with you!' mad, crazy like a wise old man [= <i>pāgal</i>] mad

[p.310]

āvāz lagānā gūñj lahriyā gardan dhak dhak k. be-i' tināi	[= <i>āvāz denā</i>] to call out f. echo wavy f. neck to beat, to palpitate f. lack of concern
cup cāp zāil honā jahālat ittā jab hī thorā hī bāsā #rāja bāsath mahal	quite silent to vanish, to pass away f. ignorance [dialect = <i>itnā</i>] this much therefore, that's way 'hardly' [dialect = <i>bādsāh</i>] m. king m. palace
jannat gunāh k. allāh miyāñ 'azāb tāng	f. paradise to sin m. God m. punishment f. leg

[p.311]

jhalaknā	to shine, to glisten, to flash
camrā	m. leather

dol
 sañbhāl lenā
 phurtī se
 rassī
 unglī
 hathelī
 jild
 ragarnā
 chīlnā
 dūbnā
 mīṭhā
 mithās
 lazzat
 thāmnā
 ok
 jī bhar-ke
 gorā
 dhulvāñ
 motī sā
 patlā
 hoñṭ
 martaba
 dhār
 tar-ba-tar
 #phandā lagnā

mannat
 aulad
 karbalā-e mu'allā
 imām
 rauza
 du'ā māñgnā
 sābir
 #choṭe hazrat
 dargāh
 jalāl
 barasnā
 ra'sa
 tāri honā

din jānā
 mu'jiza
 vāqī'a
 pair
 jakarnā
 hilnā
 haṭna
 zār-o qatār ronā
 xuddām

m. bucket
 to take hold of, to grab
 quickly
 f. rope
 f. finger
 f. palm
 f. skin
 to rub
 to skin, to scrape
 to sink
 sweet
 f. sweetness
 f. pleasure, delight
 to hold
 f. hand cupped for drinking
 to one's heart's content
 white, fair
 sloping
 pearl-like
 thin, fine
 m. lip
 [= bār, daf'a] time
 f. stream
 wet through
 to be strangled...

f. vow
 f[s]. children
 Kerbela the Exalted
 m. Imam [Husain]
 m. tomb
 to seek a boon
 patient
 the Younger Majesty [i.e. Husain's son??]
 f. court, i.e. tomb
 m. majesty, glory
 to rain, to be shed
 m. palsy, the shakes
 to come upon on one unexpectedly

day to pass
 m. miracle
 m. happening, event
 m. foot
 to grab
 to move
 to get out of the way, to retreat
 to weep bitterly
 m. servant, guardian

be-adabī

f. rudeness, disrespect

[p.312]

sarkār
manānā
pīṭnā
zarīh
sargoṣī
durust

f. government, i.e. 'sanctuary'
to appease
to beat the breast
f. grave
f. whisper
alright, normal

kamāl hai
#jabāhī lenā
#gum mathān

'amazing!'
to yawn
silent

jhūṭā
xāmoṣī
se fāida uṭhānā
ho so ho
god bharnā
tarḳā
āñkh jhapaknā
ṣer
harbaṛānā
ṣu'ā'
phūṭnā
cambelī
god

false
f. silence
to take advantage of
come what may
to have [child] in the lap, to be with child
m. dawn
the eye to blink, to doze
m. lion, tiger
to start up restlessly
f. ray
to burst
f. jasmine
f. lap

pur-jalāl
furāt
ke sirhāne
lipatnā
dabdaba
ṭapaknā
'āṣūra
niḡāh ṭaharnā

full of grandeur, grand
m. the river Euphrates [in Iraq]
at the head of
to be wrapped, to be folded
m. majesty, glory
to drip, to ooze
m. Ashura, the 10th Muharram
'the eye to stop', to bear to look at

sac muc
xīra k.
koṭhrī
#lahriyā
lau denā
ḡhakā chupā
goṣa
ujjiyālā
jagmagānā
munavvar
damaknā

truly, actually
to dazzle, to blind
f. room, closet
m. waviness
to flame
covered and hidden
m. corner
bright
to glitter, to shine
bright
to glow, to shine

10

zau denā
patang
katnā

to give off light
f. kite
to be cut

[p.313]

rūṭhnā
kaṭ
tai k.
nivār
ḍor
cutkī
surang
fizā

to get angry
f. cut
to cross, to traverse
f. bed tape
f. string
f. pinch, grasp
f. tunnel
f. atmosphere

paigambarī
taraqqī k.
naīn
paresānī
āvāra-vatanī
gāib hona
kātnā
khūndnā
khūnde hai
rahve hai
muṇḍer
bandar
ḍāñṭnā
xudā tumhārā bhalā kare

prophetic
to make progress, to go far
[colloquial = *nahīn*] no, not
f. trouble, distress
f. homelessness, wandering
to disappear
to cut [short]
to trample
[dial. = *khūndtā hai*]
[dial. = *rahtā hai*]
m. roof wall
m. monkey
to scold, to tell off
'may God be good to you!'

[p.314]

ṣahzādī
#sarka??
nek-baxt
nuqsān uṭhānā
aṭvāñṭī khaṭvāñṭī lenā
manṣā
sīna
gardan
pachtānā
gota lagānā
phan

f. princess

fortunate
to suffer injury
to take to one's bed, to sulk
f. desire
m. chest
f. neck
to be sorry
to dive
m. hood [of cobra]

mas k.
mutabarrīk
larḱharānā
ra'sa
cauñknā

to touch
blessed, auspicious, fortunate
to stumble, to stutter
m. shaking
to be startled, to start

thartharī
parosī
cirāg jalānā
mājarā

f. trembling
m. neighbour
to light lamp
m. incident, occurrence

[p.315]

dhundhlānā
ḍagmagānā
tūr
ho lenā

to grow misty
to roll, to sway
m. arrow
to run away

nigāh daurānā
vusūq
girift
āstīn
jakarnā

to look around quickly
m. confidence
f. grip
f. sleeve
to tighten, to grasp

ūnghnā
seha
kāñṭā
jahāñ ke tahāñ
sun
gurrānā
ke sahāre
ojhal

to doze
m. porcupine
m. thorn, quill
on the same spot
numb, paralysed
to growl, to screech
with the support of, 'using'
hidden

pasīne kī talī
po[ñ]chnā
bigarnā
laṭ
sañvārnā
sahmā
dahṣat-zada
be-irāda
mor
roṣan-dān
maidān
se pare
daraxt

f. line of sweat
to wipe
to be ruined, to be dishevelled
f. long hair, lock
to set in order, to rearrange
frightened
terror-stricken
involuntarily
m. corner, bend
m. ventilator [hole in wall letting light in]
m. plain
beyond
m. tree

[p.316]

gāibī duniyā
xabar-dār k.
jādū-garnī
camkānā
āina

f. the unseen world
to warn
f. sorceress, witch
to flash
m. mirror

barhnā
lajājat
andāz
sahārā denā

to go towards, to go up to
f. entreaty, begging
m. way
to support, to help, 'lift up'

ulajhnā
bā-qā'ida
xarrāte lenā
cāndni

to become entangled
regular
to snore
f. moonlight

pāintī
nālī
barsāt
nikās
pešāb

f. foot of bed
f. gutter, drain
f. rainy season
m. outlet, exit
m. urine

[p.317]

uṅḍelnā
gat gat pīnā
xāsā
gumān

to pour out
to gulp down
quite
m. suspicion, feeling

hūn
āhaṭ
ṭhoknā
sādagi
sāmīl

yeah?
f. sound of soft footsteps
to thump, to nudge
f. simplicity, innocence
included

muxātab k.

to address

[p.318]

tasavvur
fizā-e yād
jhilmīl k.
gālā
cuṭkī meṅ pakarnā
vāqi 'āt
girift meṅ ānā
ralnā milnā
abraḡ
gulāl
zara
damak
cunnā
ṭangnā
farq k.

m. imagination
f. the expanse of memory
to sparkle, to twinkle
m. ball of cotton
to snatch hold of
mp. [Ar.p. of *vāqi'a*] events
to be grasped
to be mingled
m. talc, mica
m. red powder [thrown at Holi]
m. atom, particle
f. shining, glitter
to pick out
to hang
to differentiate, to tell apart

gunūdagī	f. drowsiness
bojhal	loaded, heavy
nīm-tārik	half-dark, i.e. 'half-lit'
ajnabī	foreign
des	m. land, country
vīrānī	f. desolation

[p.319]

jhurjhurī	f. shaking, shivering
dālān	m. outer hall, verandah
sutūn	m. pillar
cillānā	to shout, to scream
gūhjnā	to echo, to resound
pec	f. twist
bal khānā	to twist, to turn
āṅgan	m. courtyard
mahtābī	f. a kind of firework
'aks	m. reflection
adh-kaṭā	half-cut
bāolā	m. madman
jhilmilānā	to sparkle
hāth barhānā	to reach out
āṅkh mīcnā	to close the eyes
cakkar	m. circle, spiral
chūnā	to touch
ke barābar	right next to

[p.320]

muqayyad	imprisoned
ba-dastūr	as usual, as before
xunkī	f. chilliness, cold
dulāi	f. quilt
asar	m. trace
pur-asrār	mysterious