

The Myth

The inspirational source of the *marthiya is*, of course, Karbala¹, and there is something so deeply pathetic, so tremendously sublime, and bewilderingly enigmatic about one's perception of Karbala!

That God's own man, beloved of the Prophet, holding all authority from God, and master of Time and Destiny, the aim and end of Creation, its support and mainstay, the symbol of all that is holy and sacred, the inheritor and custodian of the Prophetic charisma, should meet what looks like total destruction, overwhelmed by forces of darkness in a state of utter helplessness, is not a mere historical event, not even the fall of a house, but almost a cataclysm in the divine order of things.

Such ambivalence between the physical and the metaphysical levels of existence cannot fail to strike the deepest chords in man's moral and spiritual constitution and raise questions about the quiddity of divine dispensation and the mystery of human destiny – what a covenant, what fulfilment, what reward.

The matter now passes from the rational to the existential realm, and through the pressure of emotional intensity, it becomes interiorized as experienced reality. And as this experience is shared universally, it becomes part of collective consciousness.

To the startled, kindled imagination, Karbala¹ becomes the focal point of human history, all the past leading up to it and all the future—until the Day of Judgement—flowing out of it, a fiery moment in which the beginning of time and the end of time coalesce.

Legends, symbolising the meaning and significance that cannot be expressed through ordinary modes of communication, and which have yet to be expressed (so irrepressible and imperative is the urge) cluster around the fact. This constellation of legends forms a sort of myth (*mythos*, as distinguished from *logos*), a timeless cosmic drama in which all the forces of creation and chaos take part in an epic battle between the congregated might of darkness and the flickering inextinguishable beacon light of Heaven and Earth, a fertility myth of the resurrection of faith and truth, an apocalypse of redemption and intercession, and the final justification of the ways of God to man.

Karbala¹ has thus become a compendium containing signs and intimations of Man's predicament, his

journey through this vale of suffering and tears, his social and spiritual values, his destiny and final redemption. And just as the Greek poet hewed out of the granite mass of Greek mythology the shades of his tragedies and epics, so a gifted artist like Anis or Dabeer sees the integrated outline of his *marthiyas* etched out in the different episodes or parts, or combinations and relations of parts of the inexhaustible tale of Karbala'. And as the tale is inexhaustible, so are the *marthiyas* that emerge out of it innumerable—limited only by the insight and imagination of the poet.

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