

Unmaking the *Taazia* Symbol from a Structural Perspective

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Abstract

Tradition and symbols are pervasive across cultures. Religio-cultural traditions are thought to have multiple origins and genres with somewhat related meanings. The Taazia myth dates back to the reign of Tamerlane in the South Asian context. Taazia was a ritual of religious syncretism in this region. It is now a common ritual observed generally by Muslims and specifically by Shia Ithna'ashari¹ Muslims in commemoration of the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It is highly symbolic and accompanied by mourning rituals. The very symbol revolves around the Karbala paradigm and the connected mourning rituals, or condolence towards the progeny of the Prophet through this ritual. The study on tradition of Taazia encompasses the evolution of this symbol diachronically in a South Asian perspective by applying the structural approach. Taazia symbolism is associated to related artifacts of sacred category used in azaadari, which are analyzed in the context of selected sites and prevalent styles of Taazias in Punjab and Sindh. The association of physical artifacts to human thought or behavior is symbolic. In this way, the very symbol (Taazia) is analyzed along with similar religious facts uncovering the inherent relationships of the units integrated in a whole (azaadari).

Key Words: Taazia, Azaadari, Ashura rituals, Symbolism, Karbala, Martyrdom of Hussain, Mourning rituals.

1. Introduction

A religious tradition is beyond mere ideas or facts. Traditions as myths and symbols often serve as a preamble of “creation”, which depends on the “linguistic behavior”, as to ‘how’ and ‘what’ is achieved out of it

¹ Twelvers Shia; those who believe in the twelve infallible imams.

(Eliade 1998 and Eller 2007). They exist across religious and cultural institutions. The underlying study of these symbols lets us uncover the innate meanings that are generally reducible to a few. There are several similarities in the kind of symbolical narratives across the globe, which can be studied both in a diachronic and synchronic perspective. The paper is focused on uncovering the *Taazia* symbol in the anthropological paradigm called structuralism². Structuralism believes that the real source of meaning and truth are deep structures that are pervasive but hidden throughout society because the source of everything is the structure.

The term in its literal sense, “*Taazia* or *Taziyeh* is originated from an Arabic word *azay*, which means to stay patient in sufferings, to console someone or to offer condolence. Other similar words coined out of this term are *aza*, *Taaziyat*, and *Taziyeh*. The very term is significant in terms of the Indo-Pak cultural practice or a ritual” (PTV Global 2011). When it comes to the conceptual definition of *Taazia*, it has a twofold meaning. Firstly, “*Taziyeh* is executed in a rhythmic way that can be termed as a passion play, which recounts the suffering of the Prophet’s (PBUH) progeny³ by re-enacting the Karbala paradigm in a dramatic order.” Perhaps, it is considered the only indigenous practise in the Islamic world. However, the *taziyeh* is more of a “ritualized morning than a ritual construct” (Campo 2009). Secondly, it refers to “a facsimile of the mausoleum of Imam Hussain (R.A), the martyred grandson of the Prophet which is carried in demonstrations during the Shi’ite mourning rituals of *Muharram*” (Merriam-Webster 2018). In a way the first definition of *Taazia* takes it as a process or a verb whereas the second one considers it as a noun, a symbol of reverence for its believers.

Taazia is seen here as a religious ritual and analyzed in terms of its anthropological theoretical explanations, the process of ritualisation

² Structuralism developed in Europe in early 1900s from Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic studies. His theories were then applied in different fields, including anthropology by Claude Lévi-Strauss. In 1950, an intellectual movement started in France which is called ‘Structuralism’ through the work of Lévi-Strauss, known as the founder of structural anthropology. The application of structural analysis in different fields is meant to inquire the structural realities underlying the ideas in anthropology, psychology, sociology, architecture and literary criticism.

³ Prophet’s progeny or ahl-e-bait, family of the Prophet (PBUH).

involved in *Azaadari*⁴ and *Taazia dari*⁵. The concept of *Taazia* as a ritual performance originated from the diffusion of stationary and ambulatory rite⁶ that co-existed for centuries. They are often carried out with a *Dasta*. The *Dasta* is often called as a display of grief (Sahapedia 2016). *Taazia* functions as a means commemorate the sacrifice of Imam. Several such symbolical rituals exist in multiple cultures around the globe. ‘These Symbols help in constructing present and past memories through narratives, practice, and other creative means to provides for people to heal them both at a personal and a collective level. The very ritual accents their voices within a mainstream public sphere where it reconstructs a silenced history of tyranny, displacement, ethnic cleansing, violence, and other related experiences’ (Al-Adeeb 2008).

When it comes to the origin of *Taazia*, both Indian and Pakistani researchers agree that Tamerlane⁷ brought *Taazia* from Iran to Delhi in fourteenth century (Aghaie 2004). It was way simpler than what we see in the subcontinent. Shahid Ali Naqvi, a researcher from Karachi in his book titled *Azaadari*, discussed the need for *Taazia*. It

⁴ The word *Azaadari* عزاداری has a Persian origin and the very concept is denoted with the lamentation and mourning ceremonies in commemoration of Martyrdom of Imam Hussain at the Battle of Karbala. The very first *Majlis* of *Azaadari* traces back to the time when the family of the Prophet was set free and Hazrat Zainab asked for a house for lamentation over his brother and the martyrs of Karbala. This very history of first *Majlis-e-Aza* held in Damascus is considered as the first of its kind which laid the foundation of *Azaadari*.

⁵ *Taazia dari* is the tradition of making *taazias* (the artifacts) to offer *taaziyat* (condolence to the progeny of the Prophet) in commemoration of the martyrdom of the grandson Imam Hussain at the battle of Karabala. The tradition of *Taazia dari* in the Indo-Pak also suggests that *Taazias* have served to be a binding force amongst different faith followers especially in pre-partition Subcontinent. *Taazia dari* and specially *azaadari* has helped to sustain the Karbala. The narratives are presented with such rhetoric that the whole Symbolology presents a live picture of the event, connects the mourners with each other and with the cause, trespasses the boundary of time and space. Each year, *azaadari* discourse is relived and revitalizes the faiths of the believers.

⁶ The term is used to refer it as their cultural rite.

⁷ Tamerlane (1336-1405) was a Turkish conqueror was born in Transoxania (current Uzbekistan). He is alternatively known as Tamburlaine, Timur Lenk, Timurlenk, Tamerlane, Timour. He was the last of the mighty conquerors of Central Asia who belonged to a Mongol tribe and is renowned for his conquests from India to Russia to the Mediterranean Sea.

reads that Timur could not take his army to the annual trip to Karbala and was busy consolidating his hold in the newly invaded territory. To serve the purpose and as a display of his reverence, a shrine model was built which was clustered with the clay of Karbala that is *Khak-e-Shifa*.⁸ It is believed to be transported for this purpose to northern India (Anvar 2005).

Taazias in the Indo-Pak region varies greatly from small to large structures. The structures are made in *peppier-mash*⁹, hard board, card board, colored paper, Styrofoam, bamboos, wood, metal, silver, steel, depending upon the availability of material or the status of the mourners. The base of *Taazia* is known as *Takht*¹⁰, which is the first piece carried out on the first day, followed by the palanquin and finally the *Jhoola*¹¹. On the tenth day of Muharram it is reconstructed and assembled completely. Several men are deployed to lift the huge artifacts. In India, *Taazia* making and the protocols of *Taazia dari* is hued by *Hindu* cultural rituals and festivals. One such example is the manner in which the devotees revere to the artifact with somberness and sacredness. Another such protocols of *Taazia* is the closure ritual known as '*taazia thanday karna*'¹²: this tradition is paralleled in indigenous cultures where these structures are immersed in Ganges at the closure cultural events similar to that of *Taazias*, however, this South Asian tradition is way older than that of the Shia ritual.

2. Review of Literature

The need for this study arose because barely any formal or academic research has been carried out and published on *Taazia* symbolism solely in South Asia from the local perspective. In order to understand *Taazia* in another parallel fashion in the neighboring countries, we can refer to the, memorial of Zarar (*yadgar-i-zareren*).¹³ The practice of

⁸ The sacred clay from the land of Karbala often molded in clay tablets to offer sujud during the Namaz ritual by the Shia Muslims.

⁹ Paper molding and recycling technique to re-use paper.

¹⁰ Flat wooden plank used as base.

¹¹ Cradle for a baby.

¹² Immersing the *taazias* in water or often termed as cooling them down at the end of Muharram ceremony, Ashura. A tradition similar to the end of Durga puja.

¹³ The middle Persian epic had been sung for centuries by minstrels and bards on the Iranian plateau.

mourning and its cultural acceptance of mourning rituals are largely shaped by the respondents' experiences, background, education and their perceptions towards *azaadars* or Shia community (Zeeshan, Chaudhry, and Khan, 2020). Apart from the public processions and demonstrations commemorating the death of Imam Hussain (R.A), the veiled floats also became the constituent of the processional *Taazia*. It is believed to stand parallel with religious notion ancestral worship¹⁴ in India.

Ahsen Yarshater calls for looking into the pre-Islamic eastern Iran to seek the bases of the tradition that provides a ready mold in the development of *Taazia*. In terms of mythemes, we can draw similarities between the personalities with a similar aura who sacrificed their lives against the tyranny of unjust rulers. The "mold" describes the life and death of a gallant prince Siavos¹⁵ who had a foreboding of his fate like Hussein about his cruel death (Yarshater 1982; Yarshater 1979). Agha Shahid Ali describes briefly their whole journey towards Karbala, in modern-day Iraq, and how they were all martyred on the tenth of Muharram (Hussain, Zeeshan, and Houswitschka, 2019).

Amir Timur (1336-1405) constructed the first *Taazia* of Hussein as his expression of devotion and carried it along on the military ventures, the very element of creative and interpretive representation of Imam Hussein (A.S) tombs have started from this time period. Artistic creation is used in glorifying the *shahada*¹⁶ of Imam Hussain (A.S) and it is seen that the creative element sometime supersedes the original construct, so that the size and shape of *taazia* are in great variety (Chelkowski 1983). The history of *Taazia* dates back to the state of Jaora, the central province, Rampur, Hyderabad, Lucknow and Bombay. It is said that a *Syed Aalim* was used to gift to

¹⁴ Durga Puja or Durgotsava, which is an annual Hindu festival celebrated over 10 days in the 7th month of the Hindu calendar to pay tribute to the Hindu goddess.

¹⁵ He knew long before his (death?) that he shall suffer innocent death and be afflicted at the hands of the king; slander and ill fortune will bring him low. There is the striking resemblance from the four verses coming from Shah-nama. The words could not be differentiated whether they are from Hussein or from Siavos: "they will strike this innocent head of mine and will place my crown in my heart's blood. I shall find neither bier, nor shroud, nor grave. Nor would any one shed tears for me in the assembly. Like an exiled shall I lie in the dust and with my head severed by the sword from my body."

¹⁶ Martyrdom

Timur a *Tabarruk*¹⁷ every year. Timur held them sacredly. Out of all the *Tabarrukat*¹⁸ that Tamerlane kept, he held the *Tasbeeh*¹⁹ and *Zareeh*²⁰ every year on *Youm-e-Ashur*²¹. The phalanges of *Tasbeeh* turned red since it was made out of *khak-e-shifa*. Timur was busy conquering *Hindustan* that year. In the second year, he was again busy with some conquest. As the third year passed, his troops demanded of pilgrimages to *Karbala-e-mualla*²². Sometime in AD 803, he decided to have a *Taazia* prepared in India to commemorate the sacrifices of the Imam (Times of India 2014).

Apart from the Indo-Pak tradition, another example of *Taazia* can be seen in the Caribbean. The East Indians carried the cultural relic to the Caribbean basin. Though the majority of East Indian immigrants were Hindus, the Shiite Muharram ceremonies continue to act in open defiance of the colonial rule. The Caribbean *hosay*²³ became a symbol of unity for them since they are attended from people practicing differing religious ideologies. *Taazia* serves as a source of unification that adjoins diverse South Asian ethnic groups. *Hosay* in the Caribbean has been influenced by African rituals but in turn, they have left an impact on the most spectacular event of Trinidad, the carnival (Emrit, 2014). It traces back to 1854 when people entered Guyana in 1838 and 1845 in Trinidad. *Hosay* is originally from Imam Hussain (R.A) and it is also pronounced as *Hussey*. Its genre is marked as the festival that happens annually in Jamaica, Tobago and Trinidad (Tortelo 2003).

Structuralism²⁴ refers to those theoretical perspectives that give primacy to pattern over substance (Barnard 2004). The patterns are similar in terms of the structural units discussed across cultures, however their meanings may differ. In his essay, Lévi-Strauss works from the awareness of the opposition towards their “progressive

¹⁷ A sacred gift often gifted from a holy or spiritual being to its followers.

¹⁸ Plural of *tabarruk*

¹⁹ Phallenges for recitation of holy verses

²⁰ Replica of Masoleum

²¹ 10th day of Muharram

²² Karbala, Iraq: the elevated and eminent

²³ Hosay is an Indo-Caribbean Muslim commemoration. Tajdah is derived from the Arabic word *Taazia* and signifies different cultural meanings. The celebration of Tajdah and Moons are in accordance with the Islamic lunar calendar.

²⁴ There are two schools of thought in structuralism, the Saussurean and the Prague. The two differs from each other in several ways.

mediation” and extends this idea to the conclusion that the purpose of Symbol²⁵ is to provide a rational construct competent enough to overcome a negation (Lévi-Strauss 1955). In reference to the *Taazia* Symbol, the mediation held by the ritual and the narratives bring solace to the mourners that help them overcome grief by reliving it. Strauss has stressed that mythemes²⁶ of whatever kind, must, generally speaking, lend themselves to binary operations, since such operations are an inherent feature of the means invented by nature to make possible the use of language and thought (Lévi-Strauss 1981). He has been accused of binary opposition²⁷ (Lévi-Strauss 1995). The characters in the Karbala paradigm can be analysed as binary operators: Imam Hussain (A.S) and Yazid. They were inherently in the opposite camps in the entire narrative.

3. Variety of *Taazias* in Pakistan

The very rituals of *azaadari* however, re-enacts through annual commemoration. In a way, *taazia* symbol in itself is a mytheme in the entire structural component of the whole *azaadari*. There are generally three predominant varieties of *Taazias* in Pakistan. The very reason this art barely flourished in Lahore is that there are no homegrown artisans. They are still struggling to keep the tradition alive.

3.1 *Taazias* in Punjab

Three different types of *Taazias* are seen in processions of *Lahore: the metallic, wooden, and paper-bamboo*. The artisans in Lahore for metallic *Taazias* are the ones who hailed from India after partition

²⁵ Lévi-Strauss postulates that Symbols exist on the raw/cooked axis. They are the products of human creation hence belong to the cultural rather than the natural elements. Symbolically, cooking marks the transition from nature to culture, by means of which the human state can be defined in accordance with all its attributes.

²⁶ Mythemes are irreducible units that are put together according to prescribed schemata. These units/mythemes form relations with each other. They are based on binary pairs or opposites, which provide the basis of the structure.

²⁷ Just as words are based on contrasts, so too is human thought, which he says is based on binary opposition. Lévi-Strauss felt that the human mind operates along lines of contrasts – good/bad, up/down, light/dark, culture/nature.

especially from Lucknow, Muradabad and Delhi. They bear the Kashmiri, Chitrai and Ukas patterns engraved on them. Often metal is fixed on the wooden structure. However, most of them are entirely made out of the metal. *Taazias* are nowadays made of German silver or brass since gold and silver are diminishing forms of art work. The gold trimmed *Taazias* are made according to the *Ganga-Yamuni*²⁸ tradition. Following the tradition, some *Taazias* are seen in the *Imam bargahs*²⁹ of the walled city of Lahore.

3.1.1 Metallic *Taazias*

There is a small *Aza khana*³⁰ near Mochi Gate known as Imam Bargah Akbar Ali Khan where two such metallic *Taazias* are placed as illustrated in Figure I and II. The *taazias* are made of silver; one represents the shrine of Hazrat Ali and the other represents the Shrine of Imam Hussain. The names of Allah, Muhammad, the first *Kalma* and the infallible are engraved in the front wall. An average size *alam*³¹ is fixed in the floor next to the *Aza khana*. It is the *waqf-e-aam*³² for over two hundred years, there is the Syed Naqvi-ul-Bukhari family, which migrated from Bukhara and settled there. This family was living in this place from the pre-partition time. 78 years old Mr. Kalb-e-Abbas shared that these *Taazias* are permanently placed in *Aza khaana*. *Majalis*³³ are conducted by a lot of people over here. He claimed that the *imam bargah* is run by Majlis-e-Hussaini trust. Ahl-e-Sunnat³⁴ inhabitants are also living here for years but they have never faced any challenges regarding *azaadari*.

²⁸ An Urdu term, often known as Ganga Yamuni tehzeeb, used for the culture of northern India central plains, considered as syncretism of Hindu culture with religious elements of Muslims.

²⁹ Sacred spaces held for practicing the Shia rituals or to commemorate the progeny of the Prophet (PBUH).

³⁰ A sacred niche in an Imam bargah where the Shia symbols are held such as alam, taaziya, jhoola, taboot etc.

³¹ A flag or a banner. It especially refers to the flag of Islam carried and raised by Hazrat Abbas (R.A) in the battle of Karbala.

³² A charitable endowment of the space made in the name of the infallible for general public in the context of *azaadari*.

³³ Shia Mourning ritual held in congregation in commemoration of the Prophet's progeny.

³⁴ A major sect of Islam.

3.1.2. Paper and Bamboo *Taazia*

The paper and bamboo *Taazia* tradition is carried on by the families that hailed from Kangra and Patiala, India. It is a 500 years old art and is carried forward by the family of Bawa Nazir. His father Bawa Talib Hussain taught this art to his sons and grandchildren. The *taazia* work begins after *Eid-ul-Azha*³⁵ and is completed by 9th of Muharram each year. These *Taazias* are carried out on 10th of Muharram each year. The paper bamboo *Taazias* are prepared in Beli Ram Gali, inside Lahore gate by the Patiala Family, which is placed on 8th of Muharram. Previously these *Taazias* were immersed in the Ravi³⁶. However, since the river has dried up and the costs have also risen, they are taken back and used next year.

3.1.3 *Chinioti Taazias*

In Pakistan, wooden Florence can be seen in the intertwined streets of the skillful artisans' alley of Chiniot. The famous *Taazia* of Multan, Jhang and Faisalabad are manufactured in Chiniot (Dawn News, 2011). The wooden *Taazias* are mainly from the Chinioti School of wooden artisanry, mainly from the Pirjah, Alvi/ Khokhar and Saharan families (Hanif 2012). One of the patrons of Shia family, Qizilbash family, is believed to possess the most expensive and beautiful *Taazia* and is considered to be the epicenter of this art which is around 180 years old. This *Taazia* is permanently placed in their ancestral Haveli inside Mochi gate³⁷.

The Chiniot School of craftsmanship and handicrafts is especially famous for its wooden carvings. They have carved geometric patterns and flowers on cellulose fibers for centuries. It is believed that the masons from Chiniot were also engaged in building the Golden Temple and Taj Mahal. Currently, the best *Taazias* across Pakistan are carved out by the Chinioti artisans across the country. The completion time

³⁵ A grand Muslim festive occasion celebrated by Muslims annually on 10th of the Islamic lunar month; Zilhaj.

³⁶ One of the five major rivers of Punjab

³⁷ One of the entrance gate to the walled city of Lahore.

takes at least 6-12 months for a *Taazia* to be completed. Since these *Taazia* are mostly made of pure wood, they are not dis-assembled or floated in river after the Muharram Rituals; rather they are placed sacredly in the *azaa khaanas* or *Imam bargahs* for later use.

One of the most famous *Taazias* from Southern Punjab is the *Taazia* of *Ustad*³⁸ and *Shagird*³⁹ from Multan. One of the leading and historical centers of *azaadari* is Multan. On *Youm-e-Ashur* a couple of the *Taazias* are taken out which are famous for their antiquity in the Indo-Pak region. A 27 feet long and seven storey high *Taazia* is known as *Taazia* of *Ustad* (figure V and VI), where as a 32 feet *Taazia* which is taken out along with it is known as *Shagird ka Taazia*. The former needs around 150 people to carry it whereas the latter is carried by 200 people. While *Ustad* was busy fulfilling his dream of preparing a huge *taazia*, his student Salman Ali started to prepare another *Taazia* at night alongside (Naqvi 2016). This student was named as Mukmo Din at another instance (Ahmed 2012). Currently, the license holder and caretaker of these *Taazia* is Khalifa Altaf. 200 years ago, Hakim Ramzani Khan, the caretaker of the *astaana*⁴⁰ and his son ordered a *Taazia* to *Ustad* Pir Bukhsh, who commissioned the artisans from Bahawalpur and Multan. The *Ustad* was delighted to see the seven storeyed masterpiece illustrated in Figure VII prepared solely by his student.

The *Taazia* of *Ustad* is taken out in the morning; however the *Taazia* prepared by *shagird* is taken out around 1:30. At 3:00 pm, both *Taazias* meet in the procession. However, the traditions continue as the *Taazia* of *ustad* leads whereas the *taazia* of *shagird* (figure VII and VIII) follows it. The *Taazia* of *Ustad* was initiated in 1812 and it was completed in 1825, whereas the *Taazia* of his apprentice, *shagird* got completed in 1854. The latter was once set on fire by some extremists in 1944, but the Gardezis of Afghanistan provided financial support to prepare it. The British government issued the first official license of *Muharram* to *Ustad's Taazia* in 1860 which leads the *Muharram* procession till date whereas the *Taazia* of *Shagird* symbolically follows at the back of the procession (Naqvi 2016). The South Asian value of subscribing to the cultural norms (the young ones follow the elders or

³⁸ Mentor/ teacher.

³⁹ Apprentice/ student.

⁴⁰ A place/ pathway for religious offering .

the mentors lead the students) is reflected in the sequence of *taazia dari* in the procession as well. In total, 105 *Taazias* are taken out in Multan each year in Muharram processions. 90 *Taazias* have been licensed to Sunni/Barelvi sects and the rest are managed by the Shia community of the city (Ahmed 2012). The very statistics on the account of *taazias* hereby determine that *Taazia* continues to be a symbol and an avenue of the fraternity amongst Muslims who pay the homage to the sacrifices of the Prophet's (PBUH) progeny.

The Alif Shah *Haveli* is another landmark of Lahore. Delhi gate speaks for its grandeur after the recent conservation and lightning that has been done to preserve the heritage site. The Alif Shah *Haveli* is a heritage house over three hundred years old in the walled city of Lahore. The street leading to this *haveli*⁴¹ is barely three to four feet high, and it was converted in *imam bargah* in 1861. This house was preserved by the authorities in 2011. This building also served as *waqf imam bargah* and considered as venue for one of the most renowned Muharram processions, which lead out from 7th till 10th of Muharram. According to the *Mutawali*⁴² of this *haveli*, this *haveli* is famous for its *taazias* that are taken out on the *chehlum*⁴³ of Imam Hussain. Baba Alif Shah lived five generations ago and was the *mutawali* of this *imam bargah*. As narrated by the current caretaker, 'Baba was a *faqeer*⁴⁴ of his time, he is descendant of Shah Shams Multan. Baba Alif Shah used to carry the *taazia* on his shoulders'. The *Mutawali* also narrated the dream of Tamerlane on constructing the symbolic replica of the tombs of Imam Hussain in the form of *taazia*.

In the *aza khaana*, two *taazias* were placed covered with cloth. The *taazia* on the right hand side is a Chinioti artifact made of sandalwood and has a history of 25 years (Figure X). This *taazia* is spread over three floors and is carried out by dozens of people and hundreds of *azaadars* who queue up to wait for their turn to shoulder this *taazia* with great reverence. But the *taazia* lying on the left hand side was tied up firmly by a black piece of cloth. When asked, the *mutawali* disclosed that this *taazia* is above two hundred and fifty years

⁴¹ Villas or Grand houses with open courtyards

⁴² Caretaker.

⁴³ 40th day after death, often marked by a solemn religious ritual in the South Asian religio-cultural context.

⁴⁴ Muslim ascetic who rejects worldly possessions.

ago (Figure IX). It is in extremely worn condition hence it is not open to the public. The *taazia* from *haveli* Alif Shah is taken out to roam around the entire city and then it ends up at Karbala Gamay Shah. The Alif Shahi *Taazia* is Chinioti in origin, however due to lack of detailing and finery, it is termed as Lahori (Hanif 2012). Its tall structure is covered with an embroidered piece of cloth. It has a summit, which tapers down to a large pedestal in Chinioti style. The wooden pedestal at the base is adorned with metallic skeet that bears the names of the *Panjetan*⁴⁵.

3.2 The Tradition of *Taazia* in Hyderabad, Sindh

The Talpurs ruled over Sindh by shifting its capital from Dadu (Khudabad) to Pucca Qilla, Hyderabad, till 1843, before they were overthrown by the British. The very first *Taazia* of the Talpurs was built under the reign of Mir Fateh Talpur in Pishori Mohalla of Fal, which is currently preserved in Aliabad. The *taazia* was ordered by Mir Fateh. His Chief, Faqir Muhammad Junejo designed a *taazia*. The very area, *Fakir jo Pir* was named after him and was inhabited later by several families hailing from India after the partition. Mirs were four brothers and all of them performed *azaadari* on *Ashura* in their *Imam bargah*.

The British colonists imprisoned Mir Naseer along with Hassan Talpur, his 16 years old son and held them for 20 years. At the age of 36, when Mir Hassan returned from Calcutta, Mirza Fateh Baig requested him to hand over *Taazia* to him, which was then kept at Aliabad in 1863. The culture of *azaadari* is believed to be funded in terms of *nazrana*⁴⁶ by the Mirs especially for food distribution in Muharram. The culture of *azaadari* in Sindh is central in Hyderabad since the Talpurs. They promoted it in their rule and its influence is mainly evident in the areas like *Faqir Ka Pir*, Tando Agha, Tando Mir Mehmood, Shahi Bazaar etc., which are located near Pucca Qilla rather than Latifabad or Qasimabad.

⁴⁵ The sacred five: Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Bibi Fatima, Hazrat Ali, Hazrat Hussain, Hazrat Hassan.

⁴⁶ Tribute

The *Pir*⁴⁷ keeps on growing as the mourners continue to join it before it approaches *Fakir ka Pir*. In Sindhi language, *Pir a Talpur* era legacy refers to an area or ground designated for *azaadari*, generally marked by an *alam*. The famous Sufi, Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai (R.A) used the *sur*⁴⁸ termed as '*kedharo*⁴⁹', which depicts the battlefield of Karbala. Zawwar Abdul Sattar Dars wrote books and booklets on the *azaadari* tradition of Sindh, where he subscribed to the very view held by Baig that it was the Talpurs dynasty that propagated this tradition in Sindh. Today, *Pirs* are iconic to the identity of Hyderabad. As the *Pir* moves, a '*nagara*'⁵⁰ locally known as '*tao*' that signals the mourners for moving forward. Also, a *Pir* without *shehnae*⁵¹ is considered incomplete. It is used to play in expression of grief, sorrow and pain endured by Imam Hussain through *mersiya/noha*.⁵² This *shehnae* is not used otherwise and is wrapped up in a piece of cloth which is sprinkled with fragrance and is taken out annually in Muharram (Khan 2019).

In Hyderabad only, there are a total of 308 *Pirs*. 50 *Pirs* are from the pre-partition time. The *Azaadar rabta*⁵³ committee of Hyderabad quotes that there are approximately 1000 *Pirs* in Hyderabad. However, they are unregistered. 15 *Taazias* hold the significance of heritage value and hence preserved in various Imam bargahs of Hyderabad such as Ellicot jo *Pir* Pakka Qila, Imam Ali Shah Bukhari jo *Pir*, Qadam Gah Hazrat Ali, Mehr Ali Shah jo *Pir* Lajpat road etc. the epicenter of this traditional *Taazia* making in Hyderabad is Wadhan jo *Pir*. Wooden, metallic, paper-bamboo and bangle *Taazias* are prepared there. The material of the *Taazia* and its grandeur speaks of the social status of the believer who orders and possesses the *Taazia*. The cost of *Taazia* starts from fifteen to twenty thousand Pakistani Rupees and goes up to Millions. Depending upon the material and grandeur, the price increases. The trend of metallic *Taazias* is not much

⁴⁷ *Pir* is also used for a procession of mourners, Zuljanah, replicas of shrine (*roza/taazia*) of Imam Hussain and Alam. They have a code and something akin to war bugle called *nagara* (drum) -that was used in (in what?).

⁴⁸ Continuo, music node.

⁴⁹ Specific *sur* used in the poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai.

⁵⁰ Specific kind of drum.

⁵¹ A local musical instrument which expresses grief.

⁵² Elegy.

⁵³ Coordination Committee of the *azaadars* which organizes the Muharram rituals.

since the cost of production is very high. Silver and golden *Taazia* are rare. However, there is one such example of *Pir* of Mai Salma, at Siri Ghat in Hyderabad, which is made of Gold (Jagirani, 2019).

4. Discussion

Anthropological theories of symbolism and religion have elaborated a fruitful commentary on the notion of ritual and ritualisation. An event analysis shows that a double event like *Ashura*, as a present commemoration of a past event, is not analytically fixed to the original happening but expanded to multiple symbols. One of them is *Taazia*. *Taazia* symbol serves as a mytheme in the overall *azaadari* rituals. The ritualistic power of this tradition unites people of differing faiths under an umbrella. In a way, *Taazia* continues to provide a sense of unification among believers and now Shi'ites. It voices all the social segments by intersecting interfaith harmony through syncretism and reduces conflicts inter group conflicts.

In "The Structural Study of Myth", Lévi-Strauss has tried to explain why differing symbols and myths across the world appear so similar. He then answers this question by understanding their structure rather than focusing on their content. On the level of the content, certain characters and narratives on events may vary extensively; Lévi-Strauss argues that their sameness is based on their structural similarities (Lévi-Strauss, 1955). *Taazias* have multiple varieties since they are dyed with the socio-cultural hues, hence their *parole* may appear different but they carry a similar *langue*: to grieve and lament through the theatrical re-enactment or public display of *Taazias* in public processions.

While unmaking the *Taazia* Symbol, *Karbala* is referred as the Symbolical narrative and *Taazia* as a symbol. For Saussure the sign is the basic element of *langue* (language), the sign alone is meaningless unless and until it juxtaposes itself with its referent, thus we can only access its meaning in relation to its referent. Here, *Taazia* is a sign in reference to the *Karbala* paradigm: philosophy of Shia mourning rituals. A culturally relativistic approach of dealing with symbols helps us identify codes "suitable for conveying messages which can be transposed into other codes and for expressing messages received by means of different codes in terms of their own system" (Lévi-Strauss 1963). Thus, the analysis of myths and other religious facts involves

the discovery of the underlying relationships between the units or details of the whole.

From the point of view of the Prague School of structuralism, we can see the stress on *Taazia* making and the core of *Taazia* as a symbol that reflects the collective ethos. In the Indo-Pak subcontinent it is seen as an element of unification among the believers who mourn for the Prophet's grandson. Since Indo-Pak is the hub of civilizations and exists as a diverse cultural mosaic from this part of the world, this ritual is one such example that connects the diverse groups and unifies the marginalized. Symbol mediates the social tensions in a society (Lévi-Strauss 1963). Hundreds of *Taazia* processions are carried out in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, which are made up of anything and everything available in that area. The essence of *Taazia* making can hence be seen as an act of reverence and devotion in the love shown through commemoration of Karbala sacrifice.

Claude Lévi-Strauss has been interested in both the internal logic of a culture and the relation of that logic to structures beyond the culture – the structure of all possible structures of some particular kind (Lévi-Strauss 1969). The material artifact, the symbol of *Taazia* could be taken as an example. The South Asian ideology on pervasiveness of the *Taazia* ritual can be traced back to their ancestral archetypes that always had an element of tangibility. Meer Hassan Ali wrote in his book that “In *Hindustan* no *Shia* family had a house devoid of *Taazia* and the community venerated *Taazia* due to which they often bowed before it in respect” (Mir 2013). Symbols and common myths permeate our thinking on both subconscious and conscious levels. In a way, the underlying logic of *Taazia dari* is synonymous with ancestral worship which serves as affirmation of the devotees' beliefs. This very symbol is something the people of this region can relate, due to the underlying cultural logic, the shared set of beliefs that we are born with in terms of collective unconsciousness (Jung and Dell 1939).

Sassure's distinctions that he pointed, which are now commonplace to both linguistics and social sciences are diachronic and synchronic, *langue* and *parole*, syntagmatic and associative (paradigmatic), and the signifier and signified. True Sassurians admit nothing in between i.e. the synchronic/diachronic distinction is absolute. In the very first sense, we can see that *Taazia* in terms of its evolution and diffusion could be seen as a symbol created in parallel with the cultural mythology, which later diffused to the other parts of

the world and took its shape in the form of the *Hussey* or *Tajdah*. In terms of its synchronic characteristics, we can see that in that very reign, *Taazias* varied across the states based on their structural formation. They served as an identity symbol for each Indian state. The design and formation varied as per the expertise of the artisans of that particular region. Not only this, the best artisans and the craftsmanship still lies with the families hailing from India in the post-partition era both in Lahore and Hyderabad as per the data illustrated previously.

Langue and *Parole*, the French words are used in terms of “language” and “speech” in a metaphorical sense (Barnard 2004). While *langue* in *Taazia* acts to serve as the way condolences are paid by differing cultural believers, *parole* serves as social behavior of real individuals. From *parole* to *langue*, the actions performed by the Mourners or *azaadars* during *Taazia dari* and along with *Taazia* are held as collective social behavior.

The third distinction is between syntagmatic and associative relations (Saussure 1974). The colors used in *Taazias* are golden; that represents sanctity, silver; preciousness, brown/black; mourning or death, green; nature and red; martyrdom and blood which stand in syntagmatic relation to each other, as do their respective cultural meanings (Smith 2007). In contrast, a paradigmatic relationship between the two exists such as golden and sanctity. This example illustrates the relational character of elements in a cultural grammar. Golden not only mean sanctity in absolute sense, but it is a symbol of sanctity only within this particular framework; grandeur of the Mausoleum of Imam Hussain (R.A). In any other domain, the meaning of the color gold may be different e.g. in an economic context, golden color represents gold, worthiness or preciousness.

The final Saussurian distinction is between the signifier and the signified in the form of the “sign” which inherently has no natural phonological properties of a word and its meaning. Likewise, the symbolic elements of a culture take their meanings both according to the given culture and according to the context in that culture e.g. *Taazia* as an artifact or symbol (signifier) has no direct relation with that of mourning or ritualized mourning, yet in the context of *azaadari*, the very relic, the mausoleum, represents the personality of Imam who is mourned (signified).

5. Conclusions

Taazia in this way serves as a symbol of unification that brings the humanity together. In the context of mourning, it holds significance for Muslims generally and Shia Muslims specifically. The heritage tradition of Lucknow is still enlivened in the walled city of Lahore and multiple *Pirs* of Hyderabad where all the previously mentioned classes amalgamate, dressed in black and perform *Nowha Khawani*⁵⁴. The Influence of cultural traditions served as vehicle for preaching of religio-cultural traditions more pervasively in Punjab and Sindh, especially Lahore and Hyderabad, due to a number of migrant families. These families of craftsmen are gauged in this artisanry over generations and continue to enculture their off springs with this artistic skill. Art of *taazia* making has been supported by the Qizilbash of Lahore and Talpurs of Sindh who have predominantly continued the *azaadari* rituals in this part of the world. Apart from Shias, it is worth mentioning that Muslims across all sects and the regional religious groups also used to keep *taazias* at their places during the days of Muharram. One such example is mentioned with reference to Hussaini teekri⁵⁵ in the book of oral traditions of Lucknow on the Shi'ite history. The Symbol of *taazia* from the Structuralist perspective in Levi-Straussian ideas is built on cultural rationale and the then need of the hour. In the context of Indo-Pak, it represents a culmination of some principles of psychic unity or 'collective unconsciousness' in opposition to Durkeimian collective consciousness.

⁵⁴ Lamentation specific to azaadari

⁵⁵ Hill

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Fig. 1 – *Taazia* of Imam Hussain placed at Qadimi Imam Bargah, Rawalpindi.



Fig. 2 - *Taazia* at Qadimi Imam Bargah, Rawalpindi.

Unmaking the Taazia Symbol from a Structural Perspective



Fig. 3 - Metallic *Taazia* of Ali Akbar (son of Hazrat Imam Hussain) at the left and Fig. 4 - *Taazia* Imam Hussain on the right.⁵⁶



Fig. 5 - Five storeyed *Taazia* prepared by the Ustad on the left.⁵⁷
Fig. 6 - The very *Taazia* of Ustad in 1950 procession.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Photos taken by the author on 28-04-2018 for her M.Phil dissertation on “Multi-sited Ethnography of *Azaadari* and *Taazia* Symbolism in Indo-Pak Tradition”.

⁵⁸ Photo taken by Owais Jaffri for Express Tribune for article published with the title United in Sorrow on 15-01-2012. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/319815/united-in-sorrow/>



Fig. 7 - Seven Storeyed *Taazia* of Shagird on the left.
Fig. 8 - Detailed image of seven storeyed *Taazia* of Shagird on the right.⁵⁹



Fig. 9 - The oldest *Taazia* of Lahore the left.
Fig. 10 - the *Taazia* currently taken out in *Muharram* each year on the Right⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Photo taken by Owais Jaffri for express tribune for article published at United in Sorrow on 15-01-2012. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/319815/united-in-sorrow/>

⁶⁰Photos taken by the author on 26-04-2018 for her M.Phil dissertation on “Multi-cited Ethnography of *Azaadari* and *Taazia* Symbolism in Indo-Pak Tradition”.



Fig. 11 -Shehnai played on elegiac tunes before Imam bargah Aliabad.⁶¹



Fig. 12 -*Taazia* in Sindh during a Muharram Procession.⁶²

⁶¹ Photo Source: Dawn News, dated : 09/09/2019.

https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=09_09_2019_115_001

⁶² Photo Source: Majid Jagirani's blog on Symbolic representation of Tazia its types and manufacturing process in Sindh

http://pechro.com/blog_details.php?blog_id=190&lang=en



Fig. 13 - Wooden *Taazia* Artisans at work in Sindh.⁶³



Fig. 13 - Artisans at work: Paper and Bamboo *Taazia*.

⁶³ Photo Source: Majid Jagirani's blog on Symbolic representation of Tazia its types and manufacturing process in Sindh
http://pechro.com/blog_details.php?blog_id=190&lang=en



Fig. 15 - Paper bamboo *Tazia* making in progress.