

## Contemporary Karbala Narratives and The Changing Gender Dynamics in Shi'i Communities

### Introduction:

The commemoration of the 'Battle of Karbala', which took place in 680 A.D, is the locus or the 'root metaphor'<sup>1</sup> around which Shi'i rituals and devotional practices are located. The Karbala narratives that are derivative from this historic event, the martyrdom of Husayn being seen as a key moment in Shi'i history, form the basis of the Ashura commemorations and are therefore a defining paradigm in Shi'ism. In the earlier narratives, women were largely seen as passive victims of the Karbala tragedy and know largely through the trials and tribulations they faced (Aghaie 2006; Cole 2002; Mufid 1981). In the past few decades however a gender-dynamic transformation has taken place with regards to the transmission of the Karbala narrative (Bard 2010; Zahab 2008; Deeb 2006) which has consequently brought about renewed attention to and a re-evaluation of the role of women in the aftermath of the Karbala battle.

A key element in these transformation has been the reinterpretation of character of Sayeda Zaynab, the sister of Husayn, which bears significant consequences for Shi'i women (Bard 2010; Zahab 2008; Deeb 2006). The changing nature of gender construction through Zaynab's character in the Karbala narratives is useful in exploring the way in which Shi'i women are attempting to exert their agency and are reformulating their roles in their societies. Given the fact that there is no 'uniform Shi'i community'<sup>2</sup> and local cultural influences determine the development of the gender dynamics to a large extent, this paper will focus on the changed

---

<sup>1</sup> Aghaie, Kamran Scot ed. *Women of Karbala : Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*. 2005.p 9

<sup>2</sup> Deeb, Lara. *An Enchanted Modern: gender and public piety in Shi'i Lebanon*, Princeton University Press. 2006. p. 36-45

gender constructions in the popular Karbala narratives in the differing contexts of Lebanon, Iran and Pakistan and underline the agentive role of Zaynab as a common factor in these transformations in diverse cultural contexts. It will also explore how the present day socio-political conditions, which have contributed to the transformation of religious belief into a political ideology, have politicized the role of women. It will also highlight that the consequence of this transformation has multiple meanings and implications for the future presence of Shi'i women in the public sphere. This paper will argue that Shi'i women have always been present in the public sphere with their involvement in the Ashura commemorations but that their presence has been 'invisible' until recent times (Deeb 2006; Milani 1992). It will also attempt to show that the positions and practices of Shi'i women are not only determined by the ethical and political landscape in their respective religious communities but also contribute to its construction. (Deeb 2006; Bard 2010; Bucar 2011)

### **Transformations in the Traditional Narratives:**

The earlier, traditional Karbala narratives are largely focused on personal expressions of grief, which reinforced the community identity built on 'a shared sorrow and suffering' and emphasized individual experiences of salvation rather than collective political or social activism. In the traditional accounts of Karbala, as a battle against corruption and evil which highlights persecution, exclusion and suffering of the Prophet's family or the *Ahle-Bayt*, women have not been excluded from the narrative entirely but rather they have been ever-present but largely as invisible and subsidiary characters. (Aghaie 2005; Deeb 2006; Mufid 1981) In keeping with the traditional exclusion of women from historical analysis throughout the field of history

and Middle Eastern/Islamic studies as has been the norm (Hosseini 1998; Milani 1992) Shi'i women's significance and involvement in the symbols and rituals of Karbala have been overlooked or at least underemphasized.<sup>3</sup> The Battle of Karbala is largely considered to be 'a male event' revolving around the sacrifice of Husayn and the lack of visibility of women in these narratives can be assessed in the context of the fact that these narratives have been primarily written by men about men and for a male audience, which can account for the presence of women as 'shadow characters'.<sup>4</sup> Even in the instances when they are visible in the narrative the women of Karbala are only known through the suffering of their male kin and the hardships they endured in the absence of men. Furthermore, when women were mentioned in these texts, as was frequently the case, they were usually placed outside the discussion in the sense that men were the speakers and they were speaking about women rather than to them. (Hamdar 2009; Aghaie 2006; Deeb 2006)

In some of the earliest available accounts Zaynab, the central female character in Karbala is described as being 'weak with grief', 'choked with tears', 'unable to control herself' and 'tearing at her clothes and hair in despair' in the aftermath of Karbala.<sup>5</sup> This trend of representations, portraying the Karbala women as weak and passive actors can be observed to have persisted until the twentieth century (Bard 2010; Hamdar 2008; Deeb 2006) and were in keeping with what was largely seen as the submissive position of Shi'i women in their traditional societies. The discussion on women in many classical Shi'i religious texts such as the *Nahjul-Balagha*

---

<sup>3</sup> Aghaie, Kamran Scot ed. *Women of Karbala : Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*. University of Texas Press, 2005 .p 22

<sup>4</sup> Deeb, , Lara. 'From Mourning to Activism: Sayyedah Zaynab, Lebanese Shi'i Women, and the Transformation of Ashura', in *Women of Karbala*, 2005. pp. 241-66 also Aghaie, Kamran Scot ed. *Women of Karbala : Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*. University of Texas Press, 2005.

affirmed such subservient roles (Hosseini 2002). The most conservative and traditional sections of the Shi'i society, supported by the majority of the ulema, have thus viewed the role of women as essentially being 'domestic supervisors' who are excluded from the larger society and are incapable of intellectual or political decision-making. In these accounts women are largely relegated to the private sphere where they have no mechanisms to 'act independently of men'.<sup>6</sup>

However recent scholarship has begun to question the long observed assumption of a rigid dichotomization of public versus private space in Shi'i Muslim societies and negates this distinct separation of spheres. Instead, what has emerged as a accurate mode of analyzing Shi'a women is a far more nuanced conception of the Shi'a community that allows for relative fluidity and interaction between what would traditionally have been labeled 'women's world' and 'men's world'. (Bard 2010; Deeb 2006; Aghaie 2005) Such analysis observes that both men and women have been and are still equally involved in the Ashura public rituals and commemoration activities. Infact there is even evidence of men playing a supportive or 'instrumental' role in women-only rituals, while women play a similar role as enthusiastic patrons and participants in male-dominated rituals. (Bard 2010; Zahab 2008; Deeb 2006; Cole 2002). It is only in the recent decades however when women's public involvement has become politicized and institutionalized that it has consciously and forcefully become 'visible'.<sup>7</sup> It is in this context, when the earlier accounts of the women's predominant victim hood are no longer current, that the reinterpretation of the role of women in the Karbala narratives becomes noteworthy.

---

<sup>5</sup> Al-Mufid, Shaykh. *Kitab al-Irshad: The Books of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams*. Translated by I.K. A Howard. Tahrike Tarsil e Quran Inc. 1981 p. 348-349

<sup>6</sup> Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shi`i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi`ism*. Yale University Press. 1987. p 183

<sup>7</sup> Bard, Amy. *Look Who's Talking Now: Voice and Authority in Pakistani Shi'i Women's Gatherings* 2010. p 402-403

The new Karbala narratives attribute authority and significant intercessory power to revered female figures, in a way aligning Shi'ism itself with positive dimensions of the 'feminine' (Deeb 2006; Hamdar 2008; Bard 2010). These contemporary Karbala narratives emphasize the courage and strength of the women and show them as 'defiant in the face of tragedy'.<sup>8</sup> The characters of the Karbala women are represented as active individuals whose struggle in the aftermath of Karbala is no less important than the men and their intellectual skills and oratory powers are equated with the combative powers of their male kin. In short they have become 'equal partners' in the narrative.<sup>9</sup> The repositioning of the narrative of the women's as active witnesses of the battle of Karbala whose mourning and defiance has even been described as a 'jihad of words'<sup>10</sup> without which the tragedy of Karbala would have faded into oblivion.( Hamdar 2008; Deeb 2005; Shariati 2001)

It is significant to note that the increasingly gendered Karbala themes and narratives gathered momentum in the 1960's clearly as a result of a combination of factors such as the heightened awareness of transnational feminist ideals in the modern era, the emphasis on 'nativist' ideals that did not subscribe to Western values, the rise of resistance movements against foreign occupations, and social and political developments. It was in this context that the 'woman question' entered the political discourse of the twentieth century emerging nation-states (Afary 2009; Hosseini 2002; Afshar 1998) and that the Karbala narratives have undergone a significant transformation which involves the restructuring, reordering or reprioritization of the emphases of Ashura commemorative practices and their meanings. That is to say, while the

---

<sup>8</sup> Shariati, Ali. *Ali Shariati's Fatima is Fatima*. translated by Bakhtiar, Laleh. Shariati Foundation, Tehran , 2001

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

soteriological aspects takes precedence in traditional Ashura commemorations, the new narratives are predominantly 'political' and 'revolutionary' in nature which reflects on the way the role of women is framed in them (Deeb 2005; Shariati 2001; Afshar 1982).

### **The Socio-political Context:**

In Iran as the oppositional discourse intensified during the Shah era, Karbala themes and symbolism were overtly used to mobilize the masses (Afary 2009; Hosseini 1998; Afshar 1998, 1982). The Shah was compared to Yazid and Husayn's martyrdom came to symbolize the struggle of the Iranian people against the oppression and corruption of the regime. In this period prominent Iranian intellectuals and religious scholars alike Ali Shariati and Morteza Motahhari questioned and dismissed the passivity of the Karbala women as mere mourners to be a 'wrong practice' which was 'untrue'.<sup>11</sup> Shariati highlighted Zaynab's role in sustaining and furthering Husayn's movement 'at a time when all of the heroes of the revolution are dead' and lamented the fact that she has been turned merely into 'a sister who mourns'.<sup>12</sup> He criticizes both Muslim women who unquestioningly accept their traditional role and modern, Westernized women who, by aping the West, become mindless puppets of Western agenda. He saw the latter as conforming to an imposed definition of femininity (Shariati 2001). The role of women was deconstructed to involve an active participation in the socio-political context. Agentive narratives of Zaynab were presented as an alternative to the Western ideals of women encouraged during the Shah's era, as 'the role models and educators of young girls on the

---

<sup>10</sup> Deeb, Lara. 'From Mourning to Activism: Sayyedah Zaynab, Lebanese Shi'i Women, and the Transformation of Ashura', in *Women of Karbala*, 2005. pp. 241-66 Hamdar, Abir. *Jihad of Words: Gender and Contemporary Karbala Narratives*. The Yearbook of English Studies, Volume 39, Numbers 1-2, 1 July 2009, pp. 84-100(17)

<sup>11</sup> Shariati, Ali. *Ali Shariati's Fatima is Fatima*. translated by Bakhtiar, Laleh. Shariati Foundation, Tehran, 2001. also Aghaie, Kamran Scot. *Martyrs of Karbala: Shia symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*. University of Washington Press, 2004 p.122-126

proper social roles of women in the Islamic societies' and served as ideals of chastity, purity, and self-sacrifice.<sup>13</sup> Later the Islamic regime in Iran used them manifestly to influence the roles of social and political behavior for women. <sup>14</sup> In this context the character of Zaynab was seen as the 'Lioness of Karbala' and by associated the Iranian women were encouraged to become 'lionhearted women'.<sup>15</sup> The character of Zaynab was re-energized and has been instrumental in establishing and constructing new female identities in Iran, so much so that the 'Zaynabic way' ostensibly became 'the ideal way' for all Iranian women.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly in Lebanon, Ashura commemorations have undergone a transformation in recent decades, from rituals manifestly focused on mourning to one highlighting social activism (Hamdar 2009; Norton 2007; Deeb 2006). The concept of Ashura has come to be significantly 'modernized'<sup>17</sup> in Lebanon leading to a tangible shift in the gendered Karbala narratives and themes. Motivated by the marginalized Shi'i position, one key aspect of the modernizing movement was an emphasis on religious reform, much of which was focused around Ashura, and especially the explicit linking of the Ashura history to a contemporary activist discourse. This movement involved multiple strains and was continually catalyzed by a series of events, the 1978 and 1982 Israeli invasions of Lebanon and the subsequent occupation of southern

---

<sup>12</sup> Shariati, Ali. *Ali Shariati's Fatima is Fatima*. trans. Bakhtiar, Laleh. Shariati Foundation, Tehran, 2001p 83-146

<sup>13</sup> Afshar, Haleh. "Khomeini's Teachings and Their Implications for Women." *Feminist Review* 12: 59-72. Palgrave Macmillan Journals. (1982) also Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. 'Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran'. Princeton University Press. 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Chelkowski, Peter J. 'Iconography of the Women of Karbala', in *Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, ed. by Kamran Scot Aghaie (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005, pp. 119-38 (p. 40-42) , also Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. 'Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran'. Princeton University Press. 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Khomeini, Ruhollah. 'Address to a Group of Women in Qum', in *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (40-80)*, trans, and annotated by Algar, Hamid .Mizan Press, 1981.

<sup>16</sup> Milani, Farzaneh. *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*. Syracuse University Press, 1992.

<sup>17</sup> Deeb, Lara. *An Enchanted Modern: gender and public piety in Shi'i Lebanon*, Princeton University Press. 2006

Lebanon until May 2000; the 1978 disappearance of Musa al-Sadr ; and the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran (Norton 2007; Deeb 2005). Concurrent with these events, widespread opposition to traditional form of Ashura commemorations began to emerge among pious Shi'i Muslims. Such opposition also reflected trends in Iran, which had contributed to the emergence of a new Ashura discourse, linking it to an alternative and revolutionary Shi'ism, in contrast to a politically quietist one. A wide community of pious Lebanese Shi'i Muslims, which was created with the help of these new shared reformed narratives, practices and meanings associated with the Ashura commemorations, has been crucial to the formation of the 'pious modern' <sup>18</sup> Shi'i women became less 'sentimental' and more agentive. Given the context of the abject 'backwardness' that was assigned to the Shi'i population of Lebanon, there was a manifest struggle to define gender roles and ideal womanhood which were inadvertently intertwined with the political stakes of being modern in the contemporary world. (Norton 2007; Deeb 2005) Women were called to become fully engaged within their society, to make their voices heard 'as the women of Karbala did'<sup>19</sup> and to find pious or enchanted ways of 'being modern'.<sup>20</sup>

In Pakistan, the world's largest Shi'i community after Iran, the political context is significantly different from Iran and Lebanon, but the Iranian Revolution has had a significant impact and influence within the Shi'i community in Pakistan. In a sense the politicized Karbala narratives were transferred to Pakistan through an osmotic effect of the extensive transnational networks which connected the Pakistani Shi'is with Iran (Bard 2010; Zahab 2008; Hegeland 1995). In the 70's and 80's the predominant Karbala narratives in Pakistan established Zaynab

---

<sup>18</sup> Deeb, Lara. 'From Mourning to Activism: Sayyedah Zaynab, Lebanese Shi'i Women, and the Transformation of Ashura', in *Women of Karbala*, 2005. pp. 241-66

<sup>19</sup> Hamdar, Abir. *Jihad of Words: Gender and Contemporary Karbala Narratives*. The Yearbook of English Studies, Volume 39, 1 July 2009 , pp. 84-100(17). 98



as the 'co-hero of Karbala', as being the first person to proclaim the message of her family 'loudly and publicly' after the martyrdom of Husayn. <sup>21</sup>In this way Zaynab's renewed agency was used in a different context against the Sunni oppressors and persecutors in Pakistan. Eminent scholars declared her character to be so crucial to Karbala that because of her 'the names of the enemies of the Prophet's family no longer needed to be suppressed in carefully crafted, ambiguous texts' thereby alluding to the Sunnis as the enemies. In Pakistan therefore the Karbala narratives were transformed by the influence of the Iranian revolution, the potent interrelationship between gendered cultural practices and contemporary currents such as the Shia-Sunni sectarian tensions. (Bard 2010; Zahab 2008; Hegeland 1995)

Thus the impact of the transformation of the Karbala narratives has been of a different nature in Pakistan. As Cole has argued, elite Shi'a women have historically played 'a significant role' in promoting Shi'i beliefs and ritual practices in South Asia, because of which the role of the Karbala women was already presented as agentive in many ways.<sup>22</sup> Since the sixteenth century Shi'i women in the subcontinent have enjoyed 'a great deal of independence' which contributed to the development of a 'specifically feminine Shi'i discourse' that was more syncretic and innovative than the 'scripturalism' of literate males. In Pakistan consequently Shi'i women have been more 'liberal' and 'visible' in Pakistan's public sphere.<sup>23</sup> So much so that the Shi'i women's agency is constrained in the religious sphere and becomes problematic when they have to contain it within the religious framework defined by their male supervisors (Bard 2010;

---

<sup>20</sup> Deeb, Lara. *An Enchanted Modern: gender and public piety in Shi'i Lebanon*, Princeton University Press. 2006 p.4

<sup>21</sup> Aghaie, Kamran Scot ed. *Women of Karbala* University of Texas Press, 2005.

<sup>22</sup> Cole, Juan R. *The Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722- 1859* . University of California Press, 1988.p.10-15 also Bard, Amy. *Look Who's Talking Now: Voice and Authority in Pakistani Shi'i Women's Gatherings*

Zahab 2008; Hegeland 1995). However with the presence of new agentive Ashura gender narratives, the visibility and agency of women within the religious spaces has increased significantly, which is a result of the Shi'i religious institutions in Pakistan becoming highly 'Perisianized'.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the Iranian influence in Pakistan, comparative analysis demonstrates that the women's positions of these two communities are quite distinct given their distinct religious and political experiences. (Bard 2010; Zahab 2008; Hegeland 1995) In the same way the Shi'i women's experiences in Lebanon can be differentiated from those in Iran. (Deeb 2006) Clearly the roles and positions of women throughout the Shi'i world is more 'a matter of cultural rather than religious determination'.<sup>25</sup> In spite of the different cultural contexts however there is commonality in the nature of these gender transformations based on the revised roles of Fatima and Zaynab. An interesting shift in the present narratives is that the character of Zaynab has come to overshadow that of Fatima.

### **Fatima and Zaynab - A Revision of Roles:**

The 'politicized' and 'modernized' narratives, place a great reliance on the characters of Fatima (the Prophet's daughter and Husayn's mother) and Zaynab. Significantly In the traditional narratives Fatima's character is fore-grounded above Zaynab and she is seen as the

---

<sup>23</sup> Zahab, Mariam Abou. "Between Pakistan and Qom : Shi'i women's madrasas and new transnational networks 2008. p 124. also Hegeland, Mary Elaine. *Flagellation and Fundamentalism: American Ethnologist*. 25. 1998- p 240-266

<sup>24</sup> Zahab, Mariam Abou. "Between Pakistan and Qom : Shi'i women's madrasas and new transnational networks 2008. p 126. also Bard, Amy. *Look Who's Talking Now: Voice and Authority in Pakistani Shi'i Women's Gatherings* -2010.

<sup>25</sup> Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: ...* Yale University Press. 1987. p 245

driving force behind Zaynab's agency in Karbala. (Aghaie 2005; Mufid 1981) Although Fatima was not alive at the time of Karbala, the shadow of her presence and her intellectual legacy is ever present through the narrative. Fatima is considered the paramount female model of piety in Shi'i Islam and who is remembered not only for her piousness but for her 'unending', sorrowful mourning for her father, husband, and children, which 'will continue until the Judgment Day'. (Shariati 2001, Momen 1987) Her influence on Shi'ism is such that even Shi'i laws such as those of divorce and inheritance are said to be more 'accommodative' for women in large part because of the important position held by Fatima which is crucial for the line of Imams after Ali since it is through her that they inherit their link with the Prophet.<sup>26</sup>

Many early Shi'i texts, like Hussein Vaiz Kashefi's classic the *Rowzat al-Shohada*, focus on her character sometimes even more so than the male characters. (Aghaie 2006, Hosseini 1999) In his 1971 work 'Fatima is Fatima', Ali Shariati also highlighted the 'deep and revolutionary influence Fatima's memory evokes in breadth of transformation in the Muslim societies'.<sup>27</sup> However while Fatima's life is romanticized as such, it remains overcast with gloom and epitomizes traditional Shi'i ideals of 'silent suffering' and 'covert defiance' rather than offering an agentive model for emulation. (Norton 2006, Shariati 2001) In Shariati's portrayal of her as in those before him, Fatima 'died of grief' over the injustice accorded to the family following her father's death.<sup>28</sup>

More often than not Fatima is presented as the epitome of the 'submissive' and 'docile' Muslim woman, while the 'dynamic' and 'rebellious' persona of Aisha ( the Prophet's wife) is

---

<sup>26</sup> Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: ...* Yale University Press. 1987.. p 183

placed in opposition to her (Hegeland 1995; Mernissi 1992). These narrow binary characterizations are contestable in many ways but they seem to have become a points of reference for scholarship on Muslim women. Eminent Muslim feminist scholars use the Aisha vs. Fatima model to construct a narrative in which Aisha was the champion of women's rights in the early days of Islam and Fatima's meek and private personality was the cause of conservatism and segregation of women in Islam. In so many words Mernissi even places the responsibility of the imposition of veiling on Fatima, whose preferences were held in great regard by the Prophet. (Mernissi 1992) This construction of Fatima's character can be debated through the presence of acceptable traditions in which Fatima publicly demands her rights, although this is treated as a lamentable situation in orthodox Shia discourse. In this sense then the agentive character of Zaynab also cuts across this assertive and passive binary characterization of Fatima and Aisha as the two oppositional Sunni vs. Shia models for Muslim women.

### **The 'Authenticated' figure of Zaynab:**

Zaynab's character has been an integral part of the Karbala narrative but there is a qualitative change in the way her character is represented in the contemporary versions. In her agentive role Zaynab is the 'protagonist par excellence'<sup>29</sup> who had inherited 'her father's fiery

---

<sup>27</sup> Shariati, Ali. *Ali Shariati's Fatima is Fatima*. translated by Bakhtiar, Laleh. Shariati Foundation, Tehran , 2001 p.79

<sup>28</sup> Ibid p. 108-205

<sup>29</sup> Chelkowski, Peter J. 'Iconography of the Women of Karbala', in *Women of Karbala: Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*, ed. by Kamran Scot Aghaie (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005, pp. 119-38 (p. 40-42)

tongue' and 'her mother's forbearance'.<sup>30</sup> In the new narratives, her stoic heroism in the face of adversity, becomes comparable to her brothers and affirms her centrality in it. In a way the reformulated character of Zaynab links history to the contemporary moment.(Bard 2010)

Present day narratives underline her role as 'an educator of the public', 'a spokesperson for the Ahle-Bayt', 'an orator exposing the atrocities of the Umayyad dynasty' and revealing the truth about the Karbala tragedy.(Deeb 2006; Aghaie 2005; Shariati 2001) In her famous speeches in Kufa and Damascus she is seen as performing the 'highest form of jihad' and representing the voice of the opposition at a time when it was 'an unthinkable option'.<sup>31</sup> Zaynab speeches to Yazid are seen as manifestly having accomplished a number of goals tied to Husayn's struggle, dismissing the authority of Yazid and bringing shame and disgrace upon him, so that 'her words were sharper than the swords'.<sup>32</sup> Zaynab speeches and sermons, which were considered to be extensions of Husayn's uprising, had a significant effect on the public and political climate of the time and consequently her role is seen as a major catalyst in the creation of 'a full fledged Shia movement' in the aftermath of Karbala.<sup>33</sup> In this way it was Zaynab's 'jihad of words' shook the foundation of Yazid's rule, set the scene for its fall, and kept the Karbala tragedy alive by setting a precedent for mourning commemorations that have lasted for centuries. It is in this context that Cole underlines the central role of Zaynab as the 'conqueror of Damascus'. (Cole 2002) Therefore the narratives of Karbala are derived largely from the deeds and words of

---

<sup>30</sup> Deeb, Lara. 'From Mourning to Activism: Sayyedah Zaynab, Lebanese Shi'i Women, and the Transformation of Ashura', in *Women of Karbala*, 2005. pp. 241-66

<sup>31</sup> Shariati, Ali. *Ali Shariati's Fatima is Fatima*. translated by Bakhtiar, Laleh. Shariati Foundation, Tehran , 2001 p.79

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Hamdar, Abir. *Jihad of Words: Gender and Contemporary Karbala Narratives*. The Yearbook of English Studies, Volume 39, Numbers 1-2, 1 July 2009 , pp. 84-100(17).

Zaynab and the paragon of piety and sacrifice that emerges from the Ashura have become embodied in her.

The discernable shift in the narrative of Zaynab from those commemorative forms which can be labeled as 'traditional' to those that they consider to be more 'authentic' (Deeb 2006) can be seen as 'authentication' - a continual process of labeling particular practices and beliefs 'traditional' (*taqlidi*), and distancing from them, embracing in their stead practices and beliefs that are considered 'true' (*haqiqi*) or 'correct' (*sahih*).<sup>34</sup> In the transformation of Ashura commemorations therefore, Zaynab's behavior has been reinterpreted manifestly in a way to underscore the activist elements in her role and character. According to the 'authentic views Zaynab's earlier passive role has been 'misinterpreted'<sup>35</sup> and instead representations of Zaynab as being 'defiant in defeat'<sup>36</sup> are considered to be authentic. Authenticated versions criticize traditional portrayals of Zaynab for their exaggerated emphasis on her tears and transform her plaintive mourning into renderings that accentuated her courage, strength, and resilience. Zaynab became the person who 'stood up in the face of the oppressor' and became the 'victor'.<sup>37</sup> The transformation of Zaynab's character can thus be seen as a 'rhetorical strategy' in which the ascription of feminine dimensions to sites and practices more typically legitimized by patriarchal Islamic authority.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Deeb, Lara. 'From Mourning to Activism: Sayyedah Zaynab, Lebanese Shi'i Women, and the Transformation of Ashura', in *Women of Karbala*, 2005. pp. 241-66

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p.148.

<sup>36</sup> Pinault, David. *The Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India*. Palgrave. 2001 p. 82-83

<sup>37</sup> Deeb, Lara. 'From Mourning to Activism: Sayyedah Zaynab, Lebanese Shi'i Women, and the Transformation of Ashura', in *Women of Karbala*, 2005. pp. 241-66

<sup>38</sup> Bard, Amy. *Look Who's Talking Now: Voice and Authority in Pakistani Shi'i Women's Gatherings* 2010. p 402-403

In the reformulation of Zaynab's behavior at Karbala, three characteristics are emphasized, her strength of mind, her dedication to others, and her courage to speak. These qualities are manifestly expected to inform the Shi'i women's expected roles as the mothers, wives, or sisters and Zaynab's compassion and her outspokenness is understood to be a model for public activism.( Bucar 2011; Zahab 2008; Deeb 2006) Pious Shi'i women's emulation of Zaynab as an activist rather than a passive mourner is especially significant as it reflects a major shift in the way Shi'i women perceive themselves to be agentive which ultimately determines the levels of women's visibility and public participation. Their vigorous engagement with the public sphere is seen by the Shi'i women as being in keeping with Zaynab's reformulated role at Karbala, that of a survivor and bearer of the message of revolution to others. Consequently women's role in Shi'i societies has been critically redefined by such reinterpretation and has had major ramifications for the community participation of pious Shi'i women in the public sphere, allotting to them a responsibility for public engagement parallel to that of men.

It must be pointed out however that this modernization and authentication of the Karbala narrative also has the tendency to 'over intellectualize' the narrative. A rigid dichotomy between the emotional and the rationalized versions of the Karbala narrative, where the traditional, backward (*mutakhallif*) narratives 'only make people cry' and the 'authenticated or cultured (*muthaqqaf*) ones teach lessons' (Deeb 2006), is problematic because it seeks to separate the political from the spiritual and tends to overlook the innate spiritual message of the Karbala tragedy which still seems to hold significance for a majority of the Shi'i population. Recent scholarship suggests that Shi'i women seem resistant to such division into oppositional constituents and seem unwilling to give up on their spiritual identity (Bard 2010 ; Zahab 2008).

Consequently while Shi'i women have readily welcomed an agentative role in the public sphere they seem to have refused to give up on their spirituality. Present manifestations of this desire to seek a balance between the spiritual and the political message of Karbala continue to be affirmed from the evolving experience of Ashura commemorations in Lebanon, Iran and Pakistan where women are still ostracized for their 'emotionalism' and 'sentimentality' in Ashura commemorations. (Bucar 2011; Bard 2010; Deeb 2006) As Bard notes, 'The emotional intensity of the mourning rituals and ceremonies continues to distill complex, conflicting and sometimes intangible components of the Karbala into something touchable, tasteable, visible and audible' for the mourners.<sup>39</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

The prominence of gender as is framed in the contemporary Ashura narratives and highlighted in the agentative character of Zaynab reveals Shi'i women's transforming self-perceptions pointing towards 'a shifting multi-sided authority' in their roles.<sup>40</sup> The reinterpretation of Zaynab's dynamic and proactive role has played an important role in inspiring hundreds of women in the southern suburbs of Beirut to volunteer their time and energy for the welfare of their community. Women in Iran are utilizing the salient example of Zaynab as an outspoken, strong, and compassionate activist to push the boundaries of what is 'acceptable' and 'expectable' for Shi'i women by contesting and affirming religious mandates in order to expand their roles within their religious communities and national politics. (Bucar 2011; Afary 2009) In Pakistan a consequence of the shift in the Karbala narratives has been the increased visibility of Shi'i women in the religious sphere who are enacting their voice within

---

<sup>39</sup> Bard, Amy. *Look Who's Talking Now: Voice and Authority in Pakistani Shi'i Women's Gatherings* - 2010

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.



their religious traditions to rival that of men, while attending to the changing political context with acute awareness.

Therefore while the earlier Karbala narratives and rituals served to restrict female agency in certain ways and reinforce gender segregation, they are now providing opportunities for women to play significant roles in public and religious spheres, and to reinforce the centrality of women to Shi'i beliefs. These agentive reinterpretations of narratives and rituals have manifestly helped women to promote their social status by developing and maintaining extensive social networks within their societies (Bucar 2011; Zahab 2008; Deeb 2006). In this way the transformed Shi'i symbols and rituals have served a variety of social, psychological, and spiritual functions for Shi'i women (Deeb 2006; Bard 2010). The implications of such transformations, where the Shi'i women have reclaimed the religious spaces in the public sphere, can be significant. Once women have made an agentive space and claimed such a visible position for themselves in the religious public sphere in this way, it will be extremely difficult for patriarchal manipulation to appropriate and subvert such agency. In this sense the contemporary Karbala narratives seem to have effected long lasting repercussions for the role of Shi'i women in their societies and have somewhat become a vehicle for women's emancipation.

## Bibliography

**Al-Mufid, Shaykh. *Kitab al-Irshad: The Books of Guidance into the Lives of the Twelve Imams*. Translated by I.K. A Howard. Tahrike Tarsil e Quran Inc. 1981**

Kitab al-Irshad is one of the most famous and earliest scholarly works of Shi'ism by Shaykh al-Mufid who is considered to be 'one of the pillars of Shi'ite learning'. Written in 1022 AD it also presents one of the earliest surviving accounts of the Karbala tragedy in Shia history. Given that it has been written by one of the earliest and recognized Imami Shi'i writers of his time, it is considered as one of the definitive Shi'i works on the history of the Imamate. This book describes the lives of the twelve Shi'i Imams extensively and briefly describes the circumstances of the Imamate of each Imam. It gives evidences of their Imamate and an outline of the *nass*, or the nomination of each Imam, the virtues of each Imam, and the circumstances of the death of all the Imams and the disappearance of the last Imam. Al-Irshad, then, represents a valuable insight into the Karbala tragedy and a noteworthy contribution to the history of the Imamate.

**Afary, Janet. *'Sexual Politics in Modern Iran'*. Cambridge University Press, 2009.**

Afary is a historian of modern Iran and her work focuses on a generation of Iranian feminists who are trying to read religious texts strategically and tried to encourage reinterpretation of orthodox and patriarchal reading of Islam in the light of women's concerns. Afary's work outlines the efforts of Iranian women to transcend Western oppositional categories and binaries and underlines their attempts 'to articulate an independent feminist voice that demarcates the women's movement from both the native Islamists and Western imperialist patriarchies. In the light of her findings Afary concludes that a sexual revolution taking place behind the veil and closed doors in contemporary Iran, one that is promoting reforms in marriage and family laws, and demanding more egalitarian gender and sexual relations.

**Afshar, Haleh. "Khomeini's Teachings and Their Implications for Women." *Feminist Review* 12 (1982): 59-72. Palgrave Macmillan Journals. Web. 3 Apr. 2012.**

Haleh Afshar is a British professor and prominent Shi'i Muslim feminist who grew up in Iran but has remained distant from her homeland as a result of threats she has received from criticizing Ayatollah Khomeini's stance on women as un-Islamic. Her work analyzes the rule of Khomeini as a fascist dictator, and draws similarities between the manipulation of women under his reign and the regimes of western figures Hitler and Mussolini, Afshar highlights the female support Khomeini was able to gain during the revolution by praising the traditional roles of mother and wife, but only to show how it also functioned to disguise Khomeini's true suppression of female equality. The revealed discrepancies between Khomeini's speeches to women and his teachings on marriage, incest, divorce

and women's legal status form the basis of her argument that despite the visible role women played in the Revolution, their true equality had been demolished by Khomeini, and further support of his reign by females further enables their oppression.

**Afshar, Haleh. *'Islam and Feminism : An Iranian Case-study'*. St. Martin's Press, 1998.**

Afshar is a prominent Islamic feminist who offers a case study of the efforts of Shi'i women to question patriarchal interpretations of Islam in Iran and presents a holistic picture of an increasing rapprochement between secularist and Islamist women in pursuit of common egalitarian gender goals. Her study outlines the similarities between the women around the world but also points out the particular circumstances and specific constraints which dictate different priorities and diverse approaches under specific contexts. In her analysis however both groups become hostage to the terms of the very discourse they intend to subvert, whether Islamist or feminist, and often end up generalizing and essentializing women's roles in similar ways.

**Aghaie, Kamran Scot ed. *Women of Karbala : Ritual Performance and Symbolic Discourses in Modern Shi'i Islam*. University of Texas Press, 2005.**

The contribution that this book makes is the way in which it highlights that the Shi'i symbols and rituals which have been used at times to restrict women's activities and social roles, have also served as a means for empowering women and have helped to promote a sense of gender-specific identities for women. The contributors to this books highlight in diverse ways how Shi'i women have generally been very actively involved in religious rituals, both in women-only rituals and in gender-mixed public rituals. While women's roles are similar in some ways to those of men, they are shown to be also distinct. Shi'i symbols have been gender coded in significant ways. These symbols have been used to define the ideals of women's behavior. Further, some symbols are gender specific while others are gender neutral. These sets of symbols have been used to reinforce distinctions between the genders, while at the same time stressing the centrality of women to the symbolic repertory of Shi'ism.

**Aghaie, Kamran Scot . *Martyrs of Karbala: Shia symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*. University of Washington Press, 2004.**

This study examines patterns of change in Shi'i symbols and rituals over the past two centuries to reveal how modernization has influenced the societal, political, and religious culture of Iran. Moharram symbols and rituals are among the most pervasive and popular aspects of Iranian culture and society. The Martyrs of Karbala traces patterns of continuity and change in three aspects of Iranian life: the importance of these rituals in promoting social bonds, status, identities, and ideals; the ways in which three successive regimes (Qajars, Pahlavis, and the Islamic Republic) have either used these rituals to promote their legitimacy or have suppressed them because they viewed them as a potential political threat; and the uses of Moharram symbolism by opposition groups interested in overthrowing the regime

**Bard, Amy. *Look Who's Talking Now: Voice and Authority in Pakistani Shi'i Women's Gatherings* - in Khan , Naveeda ed. *Beyond Crisis: Re-evaluating Pakistan*, Routledge, 2010**

This article explores the architecture of rhetorical strategies that are used at Muharram mourning gatherings in Pakistan. She points out that one of the outcomes of such rhetoric is the ascription of feminine dimensions to sites and practices more typically legitimized by patriarchal authority. Bard questions popular and generalized assumptions about Pakistani women's limited education and social motivations for religious participation by focusing on Shi'i women in Pakistan. She also challenges received wisdom about the derivative nature of Shi'i women's assemblies viz-a viz those conducted by male orators and suggests that there exist potent interrelationships between ideologies of gender, gendered cultural practices and certain contemporary currents in Pakistani society, notably Shia-Sunni sectarian tensions.

**Bard, Amy. *Desolate victory: Shi'i women and the Mars'iyah texts of Lucknow*. Dissertation, Columbia University, 04/ 2002.**

The genre of *Marsiyah* is poetry in Urdu which sacralizes the family of Prophet Mohammad, forming a focal point of the mourning rituals in Shi'i communities in South Asia. In her dissertation, Bard analyzes the social and poetic significance of Urdu Marsiyah texts in Shi'i mourning assemblies in South Asia. This texts uniquely situates the *marsiyah* in women's mourning assemblies and assesses their involvement in the genre which in turn seems to have a powerful link with women's survival narratives. On a broad level the *marsiyah* recitations highlight the existence of a linguistic community, which shapes itself and creates meanings and narratives for itself through such poetry.

**Bucar, Elizabeth M. *Creative Conformity Creative Conformity :The Feminist Politics of U.S. Catholic and Iranian Shi'i Women*. Georgetown University Press , 2011.**

Bucar makes good use of rhetorical analysis to illumine the ways Roman Catholic and Shi'i women carve out space for themselves while sustaining connections with their respective communities. She compares the feminist politics of eleven US Catholic and Iranian Shi'i women and explores how these women contest and affirm clerical mandates in order to expand their roles within their religious communities and national politics. She demonstrates how women contribute to the production of ethical knowledge within both religious communities in order to expand what counts as feminist action, and to explain how religious authority creates an unintended diversity of moral belief and action. Bucar finds that the practices of Catholic and Shi'a women are not only determined by but also contribute to the ethical and political landscape in their respective religious communities.

**Cole, Juan R . *The Roots of North Indian Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq: Religion and State in Awadh, 1722– 1859* . University of California Press, 1988.**

Cole traces the influence of Shi'i rule in North India to development of Shi'ism in Iran and Iraq. He also highlights the development of religious communalism and conflict in the predominantly Shi'i North Indian State of Awadh. He also examines the relationship of the Shi'i clergy to the state and the clerical reaction to British imperialism and capitalism. the book reveals that the Shi'i clergy advocated policies that caused resentment among Sunnis and Hindus, thereby promoting religious communalism and setting the stage for modern communal conflict. The Shi'i learned men took government posts in support of Awadh's Shi'i nawabs and shahs and Awadh state support, in turn, helped transform Shi'ism from a persecuted sect to a dominant, if still minority, religious establishment. Cole's study supports the view that Muslim communalism in Northern India had genuine historical roots and was not simply an elite strategy of modern Muslim politicians. He also speaks in detail about the role women played in formalizing and encouraging Shi'i rituals.

**Cole, Juan R. 'Women and the Making of Shi'ism' in *Sacred Space and Holy War: The Politics, Culture and History of Shi'i Islam*. IB Taruris. 2002 .**

Cole makes a distinction between the beliefs and practices of Shi'i women and those of the Shi'i men. Cole points out that while Shi'ism is seen as a scriptural, patriarchal religion, with a powerful corps of clergy who claimed a monopoly on spiritual authority. There was no question of any sort of feminism in nineteenth-century *Lucknow*, of course. But it is reasonable to ask whether Shi'ite women there succeeded in elaborating a religious discursive practice that had feminine elements. Such arguments usually preclude the posing of questions about the ways in which women might be empowered by Shi'ite Islam, or the ways in which they themselves have helped shape this religion. the devotional lives of pre-modern Shi'ite women. Cole shows that the elite Shi'ite 'begams' were in a position to influence Shi'ite devotion in *Awadh* because of their vast wealth and their visible political roles. These women were often literate, and knew a great deal about Shi'ite law and ritual. They also had the leisure to pursue those devotions The discovery that Shi'ite women might have had some forms of empowerment even within their patriarchal religion would not, of course, in any way deny their oppression.

**Deeb, Lara. *Piety politics and the role of a transnational feminist analysis*. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 15. 2009.**

Based upon field research conducted in al-Dahiya – the southern suburb of Beirut – since 1998, the paper examines pious Shi'i women's engagements with transnational discourses about gender roles and stereotypes about Muslim women. This study focuses on the ethnographic case of pious Shi'i Muslim gender activists in Lebanon in order to argue for the necessity of considering transnational discourses on gender and Islam in the analyses of piety. suggests that political and social contexts are critical aspects of modern formations of piety, and that scholarship should aim towards multifaceted and non-reductive analyses that incorporate transnational discursive and political-economic

contexts into discussions of piety politics in ways that are not necessarily constitutive and that are always contextually contingent.

**Deeb, Lara.** *An Enchanted Modern: gender and public piety in Shi'i Lebanon*, Princeton University Press. 2006.

Deeb depicts a vibrant society in which women and men enthusiastically participate in a vast and complex network of social services and successfully argues that Islamism is not static or monolithic, and that Islam and modernity are entirely compatible. For the Shi'i, modernity should include a spiritual component; hence the title phrase 'enchanted modern'. A certain tension exists between ordinary individuals and religious scholars as to who has the right to interpret the proper role of religion in public and private life. Deeb has organized her book into two parts. In the first, she introduces the reader to al-Dahiyya, the Shi'i suburb of south Beirut in which she carried out her research. In the next section, she then traces the history of the Shi'i community in Lebanon and takes up religion in daily life, the meanings of Ashura, the importance of community, women's public piety, and finally, contradictions in the ideal of public piety. She also emphasizes the overwhelming importance of the Islamic Revolution in Iran to the Lebanese Shi'i.

**Hamdar, Abir.** *Jihad of Words: Gender and Contemporary Karbala Narratives*. *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Volume 39, Numbers 1-2, pp. 84-100(17), 1 July 2009

This paper discusses the discourse of female jihad in contemporary Karbala narratives of Shi'i Islam, specifically Twelver Shi'is. It argues that a gender-dynamic transformation has emerged with regard to the transmission of the Karbala narrative, as well as a renewed attention to the role of women in the aftermath of this battle. Today, the retelling of the story of Karbala involves positioning the role of women within a discourse that can only be described as a 'Jihad of Words' that the female descendants of the Prophet, such as Zaynab, undertook. Moreover, the paper highlights the fact that the gender-infused themes within the Karbala narratives have been influenced by contemporary socio-political events in certain countries such as Lebanon and Iran.

**Hegeland, Mary Elaine.** *Flagellation and Fundamentalism: Transforming meaning, identity, and gender through Pakistani women's rituals of mourning*. *American Ethnologist*. 25. 1998- p 240-266

Hegeland describes the expansion of Shi'a Muslim women in ritual involvement resulting from the growth of religious transnationalism in Peshawar. Pakistan has increasingly faced restrictive ritual constructions of femininity and fundamentalist ideology. In mourning rituals they have encountered symbolic complexes that reinforce men's role as repositories of holy power and succor and remind them of their own unworthiness to shed blood on behalf of Imam Husein and his cause. Because of binding ties to family, religious group, and representatives of the sacred, the women have not been inclined to protest overtly male authority and dogma. Rather than denying or contradicting symbolic and verbal deprecations of femininity outright, they have devoted themselves to the active

participation in commemorative rites. Hegeland speaks about the way in which they have used these rituals to develop their own self-confidence, performance abilities, entertainment, fame, and social support, disclosing through the performative aspects of their ritual activity, their agency and transformative achievements. She examines how women engage with religion and rituals in practice and present potential for agency and individual creativity.

**Hosseini, Ziba Mir. *Religious Modernists and the "Woman Question": Challenges and Complicities* in Eric Hooglund (ed.) *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution: Political and Social Transition in Iran since 1979*, Syracuse University Press, 2002.**

Hosseini highlights a pattern that was set early in the twentieth century Iran when the "woman question" entered the political discourse of the emerging nation-state. The dividing lines and positions were then clear-cut: those who raised the issue and argued for women's rights were identified with secular discourses and modernism; those who avoided the issue adhered to religious discourses and traditionalism. Subsequently, the rise of political Islam and women's massive participation in the 1978-79 Revolution and since then in the political life of the Islamic Republic changed the context and dynamics of the "woman question" and opened a new phase in the politics of gender in Iran. There were clear signs of the emergence of a new line on women, one that had the potential to bring about much wider changes. It not only challenged the hegemony of orthodox interpretations of the *sharia* but also questioned the very legitimacy of the laws enforced by the Islamic Republic. She examines two texts by Ali Shariati and Abol-karim Soroush, the two most influential lay intellectuals before and after the Revolution, whose ideas and writings encouraged varied passions and reactions.

**Hosseini, Ziba Mir. *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran*'. Princeton University Press. 1999.**

Mir-Hosseini's work indicates that the Islamic discourse on gender in Iran is on the threshold of a major transformative shift and that the Shi'i clerics are increasingly engaging with 'the woman question' and feeling compelled to come up with a more pragmatic responses to the new realities of the modern times. Mir-Hosseini's major contribution towards the gender debate is that this work presents an unprecedented encounter on gender issues between the Islamic feminist perspectives and the orthodox Shi'i clergy who represent two different conceptual frameworks, worldviews and mode of argumentation. Hosseini's findings ultimately assert that Islam and feminism are not incompatible but rather inevitable given that Islam is no longer an oppositional force in the national politics but rather the official ideology in Iran.

**Khomeini, Ruhollah. 'Address to a Group of Women in Qum', in *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*., trans, and annotated by Hamid Algar . Mizan Press, 1981. (40-80)**

This is an extensive anthology of Ayatollah Khomeini's speeches and teachings pertaining to the role of women, that were produced in the time surrounding his rule over Iran. The

presentation of this collection argues for Khomeini's revival of the true identity of Muslim women and attempts to demonstrate the power he sought to give to the female population in Iran through such a conceptualization. The volume contains messages Khomeini gave to Iranian woman during the revolution, as well as his answers to various questions posed to him regarding the status of women. Khomeini is seen to emphasize women as the pillars of society, continually insisting upon the imperativeness of their presence in the Islamic world as mothers, wives and the educators of all Muslims. The last of the six sections discusses the crimes perpetrated against women by imperialism and the Pahlavi regime, and serves to support Khomeini's ideology by focusing on adversities women have faced and will face in the absence of his interpretation of Islam.

**Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite*. Basic Books. 1992.**

According to Mernissi, Mohammad as the founder of Islam asserted the equality of women, rejected slavery and envisioned an egalitarian society and his wives were not just background figures but often shared decision-making with him. Mernissi claims that successive religious and political Muslim male elite manipulated and distorted Islamic sacred texts, from the seventh century onward, in an effort to maintain male privileges. She uses textual analyses of the Hadith, words and deeds attributed to the Prophet, to support her reinterpretations of the historic roots of Islam and its modern tendency to reduce woman to a "submissive, marginal creature."

**Milani, Farzaneh. *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*. Syracuse University Press, 1992.**

Milani presents an insightful critique of Iranian women's writings over the decades, highlighting the intense relationship of Iranian women with literature. She describes Iranian literature as a haven or a surrogate home, 'a place to return to and to embark from'. She identifies the current Iranian women's literature as a persistent effort to negotiate the aesthetics of silence and free women's public voice. She also explores the symbol and institution of the veil in Iran and situates it in the context of women's marginalization from the conventional spheres of identity. She also speaks about women's 'invisibility' in religious rhetoric.

**Momen, Moojan. *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*. Yale University Press. 1987.**

This books presents a detailed survey of the history of the majority of Shi'i community, the Twelver Shi'is. It contributes towards a comprehensive definition of Shi'i Islam and its differences from Sunnism. The book is one of the earlier modern critical scholarship on



Shi'i history, a field which had previously been the domain of orthodox religious history, which still has great influence on the religion's self-understanding. The book is a meaningful exposition of all the significant ideas of Twelver Shi'ism and its relationship with other sects of Islam. It is a coherent assembly of factual information, Shi'i dynasties, noteworthy events and biographies.

**Norton, Augustus Richard. *Hezbollah: A Short History*. Princeton University Press. 2007**

Norton analyzes the organization and evolution of Hezbollah and its current role in Lebanese politics. He describes it to be more than just a terrorist organization, as a comprehensive provider of social services to Lebanon's disenfranchised Shiite masses, and a highly respected political player, known to forswear corruption. Norton extensively explores the ways in which Hezbollah seeks to be a Shi'i Muslim organization in the Twenty first century. He also presents an insight into the debates around Ashura commemorations with the religious leaders like Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah continually trying to prescribe 'appropriate' ways of remembering Ashura and show shows the traditional bloodletting rituals are condemned by such leaders for being 'pragmatically improper'. With this emphasis on understanding the Karbala tragedy ethically and normatively, Norton shows how the traditional Ashura practice of demonstrative tears and sensational rituals has come to be looked down upon by the religious elite but still persists in Lebanon.

**Pinault, David. *The Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India*. Palgrave. 2001**

The Horse of Karbala is a study of Muharram rituals and interfaith relations in three locations in India: Ladakh, Darjeeling, and Hyderabad. These rituals commemorate an event of vital importance to Shia Muslims: the seventh-century death of the Imam Husayn, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, at the battlefield of Karbala in Iraq. The book looks at how publicly staged rituals serve to mediate communal relations: in Hyderabad and Darjeeling, between Muslim and Hindu populations; in Ladakh, between Muslims and Buddhists. Attention is also given to controversies within Muslim communities over issues related to Muharram such as the belief in intercession by the Karbala Martyrs on behalf of individual believers. Pinault also highlights the role women play in Shia devotional literature

**Shariati, Ali. *Ali Shariati's Fatima is Fatima*. translated by Bakhtiar, Laleh. Shariati Foundation, Tehran , 2001.**

The text of *Fatima is Fatima* can be divided into two parts. In the first part (which contains the expanded version of Shari'ati's lecture, he defines the 'woman question' and the dilemmas that contemporary Muslim women face. In the second part which was added when the text was published, Shari'ati presents an account of Fatima's life and enumerates the honors that Islam has bestowed upon women. He urges Iranian women to emulate

Fatima as a model symbol and a heroine, and to learn to fight injustice and oppression. He also highlights the importance of Zaynab's character who continued with Husayn's movement at a time when 'all of the heroes of the revolution are dead' and the breath of the forerunners of Islam has ceased in the midst of our people, when but she has been turned merely into 'a sister who mourns'.

**Zahab, Mariam Abou. "Between Pakistan and Qom : Shi'i women's madrasas and new transnational networks" in *The Madrasa in Asia. Political Activism and Transnational Linkages*. Martin van Bruinessen, Farish Noor and Yoginder Sikand (eds), Amsterdam University Press,(2008) p 123-140**

In this chapter Zahab points out the influence that the Iranian Revolution has had on the religious public sphere in Pakistan. She describes extensively how Pakistani Shia Muslim women, who are highly educated, are the most prominent women in Pakistan's public sphere. With the emergence of new transnational religious networks between Qom and Pakistan, Shia women are also increasingly making a new space for themselves within the religious discourse. Zahab highlights the fact that there has been significant transformation in the visibility of Shia women in the religious sphere where the presence of women had largely been repressed in the past.