

Book Review

**Syed Qamar Abbas Trimizi, *Masnad-e-Hussain Asghar (RA)*; Rawalpindi: Mehmood Brothers Printers, Gawalmandi, 2015.
Pages: 309; Price: Rs 500/-**

Any discussion on culture and history of the sub-continent is incomplete unless it is extended to include different religious figures, among them Islam being the second most influential one. To understand the impact of Islam on this region, one needs to understand the history and demographic dynamics of the Middle East, where the Abrahamic religions spread to the world from. Apart from the divine book, Hadith and lineage have gone a long way to shape Islam. Egged on by inter and intra-familial conflicts and controversies, many sects and sub-sects have been given birth to. All the same, there remains some shared room – common practices and studies. *Masnad-e-Hussain Asghar (RA)*, a research-based book by Syed Qamar Abbas Hussaini Trimizi, a veteran journalist working with The News International as news editor, is meant to explore this room in the light of the life of Hussain Asghar (AS), a narrator of Hadith and sire to many saints that have left their mark on vast tracts of population the world over, including the sub-continent.

Trimizi dig deep into the minutest of details laying out the lineage of Hussain Asghar (AS). For example, he juxtaposed more than five conflicting accounts about the mother of Hussain Asghar (AS) for the reader to be able to draw

picture on bigger canvass. The exhaustive approach with which he treats the subject is close to Muslim historians like Sheikh Mufeed and Abu Jafar Al Tabari.

In her book "After the Prophet (PBUH)" published in 2009, Lasley Hazleton calls Tabari's work as "magisterial history of early Islam which comes in 39 volumes in English translation". Tabari narrated multiple versions of events exhaustively leaving it up to the reader to connect the dots. Objective of his book is to record Hadith narrated by Hussain Asghar (RA) in one volume as earlier they were scattered in many books and sources. Now, the audience can easily access a large cache of 81 Hadith in a neatly drafted book.

Why Hussain Asghar (RA)? Trimizi is fired up to do this task by research gap on this towering yet less known personality of Islam and his own family lineage. Hussain Asghar (RA) is the sire to his family that has migrated from Patyala (India) to Warah, a village in Jhang (Pakistan) at the time of Partition. For Trimizi, Hadith is the main focus of his book which is why there is a photo of green-doomed mausoleum of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in a golden frame against the background of green on its cover page. However, his book can be divided into three parts: profile of Hussain Asghar (RA), the 81 Hadith he narrated, and the saints from his offspring who dotted parts of the sub-continent.

None of the three dimensions are any less important. There was no formal system of recording Hadith in the first century after the Prophet (PBUH) as word of mouth by prominent personalities was enough. With the passage of time, need for compiling it was felt and narraters like Imam Nisai, Imam Bokhari, Imam Ahmad Bid Hamble, Imam Trimizi, Hakin Nisapori etc from Sunni sect got down to it. Though Hussain Asghar (RA) was from the House of the Prophet (PBUH), Imam Bokhari and Imam Muslim included no Hadith from him in their volumes for reasons best known to them.

Hadith compilers like Sheikh Saddok, Sheikh Tosi, Sheikh Kaleeni, Sheikh Mofeed etc from Shia sect narrated

Hadith from Hussain Asghar (RA). To understand his importance for Shia, one needs to look at his family tree: the son of Imam Zainul Aabideen, who had survived the carnage in Karbla. Zaid and Imam Bakir were his brothers. Imam Bakir is the fifth Imam of Shia twelvers while Zaid died fighting the Ummayyad caliph Hisham Ibne Abd Al-Malik and a sub-sect of Shia followed him. Called Zaidiya, nowadays this sub-sect is under fire in Yemen from allied forces led by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Like Iman Bakir and his son Imam Jaafar, Hussain Asghar (RA) praised Zaid but did not take active part in his armed struggle. Till date, both Shia twelvers and Zaidis revere Hussain Asghar (RA) and rely on his Hadith.

Ummayed dynasty perpetrated its pre-Islamic enmity against Banu Hashim generation upon generation. Hussain Asghar (RA) being from Banu Hashim had to live a tough life as he survived nine rulers from Ummayed dynasty, followed by two from Abbasid. Hussain Asghar (RA) died in 157 H at the age of 57. He was survived by 12 children who in their time showed the spiritual powers they inherited from their father. Up to 19 clans found their genesis from the five sons of Hussain Asghar (RA) and some of them still thrive.

Most of the time, Hussain Asghar (RA) narrated Hadith from members of his family. He narrated many Ahadith that shed light on the ways for prevention and cure of diseases, historical conflicts, might and grandeur of the people of God, marriage and cancellation of marriage, war and its tricks and above all the circumstances in which Imam Ali (AS) lived and the troubles his family suffered through the history.

Trimizi took it upon himself to discuss in detail the eleven generations of narrators of Hadith from Hussain Asghar (RA). From the perspective of culture and history with respect to the sub-continent, the fifth chapter of the book dealing with the saints of sub-continent from Hussain Asghar (RA)'s offspring is a treasure trove. However, Trimizi is of the view that the portion of his book dealing with Hadith is prime as he intends to write down a separate book on these saints in detail. He has quoted extensively from chronicles of the

British government, religious books of Sikhs, and Islamic history. Adopting tried and tested techniques of ethnography, he spent time with and interviewed those close to these saints to present as much clear a picture of the phenomenon as possible.

Shah Ahmed alias Tokhna is the first saint to have come to the sub-continent from Trimiz. Some historians opine that Tokhna is a Turkish word meaning 'standing' and was associated with Shah Ahmed as he stood outside the room of his spiritual leader all through the night until he woke up and opened door for him. Others are of the opinion that it is a Persian word meaning somebody who has never committed a sin. Trimizi put out both of the meanings refraining from drawing an either-or situation for the reader. Via Sindh, Tokhna came to Lahore and spent the rest of his life there. His shrine is also in Lahore where a large number of devotees go and say their prayers. Tokhna has a link with one of the most revered personalities buried in Lahore – Beebian Pak. Trimizi points out that according to one account of history, these legendary ladies were Tokhna's daughters, as has been carved out into his tombstone; however, a dominate historians believe these ladies predated him. Historians are divided on his era as some say he was in fourth Hijri century and others say it was sixth.

Meeran Shah Hamid alias Hussaini Naubahar was known for his noble deeds. The legend has it that the king of that time dreamed Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) reprimanding him for imprisoning Naubahar's father Shahabuddin and others. The king was remorseful and gave Shahabuddin the hand of his daughter in addition to 12 villages including Gohla. Naubahar passed away in Gohla and his shrine is there. In 1918, Punjab District Gazetteer mentioned the annual *Urs* at his shrine in which mentally challenged women were made to put their heads in a hole in the shrine to get cured. His offspring played a vital part in enlightening the people of Gohla with education. They adopted Taqya (a practice through which Shia Twelvers hide their religion for fear of their life) at the time of partition and

later some of them migrated to Jhang and then Kabirwala in Pakistan, where their families are still playing their part in welfare of masses.

Wajhuddin alias Badaruddin alias Pir Budhu shot to fame when he backed Sikh Guru Goband Singh in fight with Rajas of Hido Pahari at Bhangani, six miles from Paonta in February 1786. The legend has it that four Pashtun sardars came to Pir with their men seeking job as King Aurangzeb had laid them off. On Pir's recommendation, Guru hired them but at the time of war, three of them joined the rival forces of Raja Bhem Chand for better salary and one stayed back. It was insulting for the Pir, who collected about 700 of his family members and followers to aid Guru. Pir's men fought fearlessly and routed the enemy. His sons and grandsons died in the war and this loss was too much for him to bear. Governor of Sadhora killed the Pir brutally on March 21, 1704 for helping Guru. Later, Banda Singh, a disciple of the Guru, wrought havoc on Sadhora and Muslims took shelter in haveli of the Pir with the hope that the Sikh armed men would show reverence to the Pir for his help to their Guru but they were wrong. The Sikhs killed all indiscriminately. However, the Sikhs who looted and killed Muslims at the time of partition remembered the Pir and offered his family to stay in Sadhora peacefully if they want and their escort to the border if they want to go to Pakistan. They family opted for Pakistan and Sikhs escorted them to the border. On their way, Sikhs of other villages offered them gifts. The Pir has found mention in Sikhs' sacred book Guru Granth.

Qazi Noorullah alias Shaheed Salis was a religious scholar, poet, literary figure and expert orator. He had a special place in the court of King Akbar. He was appointed chief justice at that time and he would take care of different Fig of Muslims deciding a case. His devotion to Hazrat Ali (AS) spurred hatred among his rivals but they could not harm him during the time of Akbar. Later, however, King Jahangir gave him a painful death as he did with other scholars and spiritual figures. He wrote about 90 books. Arif

Hussain Hussaini, a known religio-politico leader of Shia Twlevers in Pakistan was also from the offspring of Hussain Asghar (RA). Due to his proactive role in organising the community, he was shot dead in 1988 and was buried in his native town of Paiwar.

All through his book, Trimizi maintained higher standards of objectivity which is typical of a professional researcher and journalist. He could have hired a big publisher for his book but marketing himself is not his nature. Besides, he wanted this book to be a means to benefit the seekers of knowledge in the society. So he went for higher quality and cheaper price.

Reviewer's Note

In the review, first names of known figures were used to avoid confusion surrounding lengthy Arabic names.

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