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## **Feeling religious – Feeling secular? Emotional style as a diacritical category**

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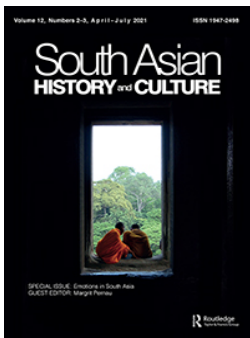


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## Feeling religious – Feeling secular? *Emotional style* as a diacritical category

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### ABSTRACT

This article compares the different styles in which an Atheist movement in the South Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and a community of Twelver-Shia Muslims in Hyderabad, the capital city of Telangana, engage with emotions of heroism and grief respectively. Heroism and grief are not approached as clearly defined or ‘felt’ mental entities but as complex compounds of diverse feelings and affective dynamics, which are inseparably entangled with the intellectual, social, material, and historical dimensions of specific practical projects: a quest for a fundamental and holistic transformation of society in the case of Atheist activists and the cultivation of a morally upright and pious life in accordance with the way of Islam in the case of Twelver-Shias. By mobilizing the concept of *emotional style* as a diacritical and comparative category, the aim is not to compare grief and heroism as either mutually exclusive or commensurable in any direct or essentialist sense; instead, my aim is to juxtapose two condensed ethnographic accounts in order to rethink the role of emotions for describing the historical and contingent production of differences between the secular and the religious within concrete practical and political contexts. The article focuses in particular on how controversial debates among Atheists and Twelver-Shias around the nature and appropriate expression of emotions – as well as the varying understandings and practices of critique implied in these debates – function as a means for the two communities to both construct and contest their boundaries as minorities within a shared discursive environment of religious nationalism.

### KEYWORDS

Atheism; Shia Islam; Hyderabad; Andhra Pradesh; comparison; emotional style; critique; minority; religious nationalism

This article explores how a systematic focus on emotions offers an opportunity to historicize the secular/religious binary by approaching the difference between secularity and religion as the product of practices of critique that are conditioned by specific political contexts. By comparing how a movement of explicitly irreligious Atheists in the South Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and a religious community of Twelver-Shias in Hyderabad, the capital city of Telangana, engage with emotions, I seek to develop the concept of *emotional style* as an analytical category for describing a specific aspect of difference between forms of lived secularity and lived religion. Instead of either positing a reified, essential distinction between the secular and the religious or simply dissolving it in mutual historical entanglements, I argue that a comparison of emotional styles allows describing a specific, historically contingent dimension of difference: this dimension pertains to the style in which Atheists and Shias attend to and problematize emotions in relation to their own boundaries and internal heterogeneity as minorities in present-day South India.<sup>1</sup>

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A focus on emotional styles seems furthermore promising, insofar as the topic of emotions has had a 'comeback' in interdisciplinary scholarship on religion as part of a larger turn towards the senses, the body, materiality, and media. This can be termed a comeback because religious emotions had played a central role in the formation of the comparative study of religion as an academic discipline distinct from Christian theology.<sup>2</sup> By inheriting a Romantic and in certain regards Protestant concept of religion, comparative religion was substantially influenced by the so-called phenomenology of religion, which regarded a supposedly interior realm of feelings, beliefs, and experience as both the origin and true locus of religion.<sup>3</sup> Since the second half of the twentieth century, however, assumptions about religion as a transhistorical phenomenon *sui generis* have been criticized from various quarters.<sup>4</sup> As a corollary, the idea of religious emotions – and more generally the use of 'religious' as a substantialist qualifier – has become suspect not just as a remnant of Christian theology but as a crucial element of the larger imperial and colonial formations of power within which nineteenth-century concepts of religion had emerged.

In recent iterations of the critique of the phenomenology of religion, the material, embodied, sensual, and mediated aspects of religious practices – and the emotions involved therein – have moved into the very centre of efforts to rethink the theoretical and methodological setup of the study of religion.<sup>5</sup> This take on a 'materialist phenomenology of religion'<sup>6</sup> converges with current developments in the history of emotions, which explore how individual and collective emotions function as sites that link knowledge, embodied experience, and practice by rendering them persuasive, authoritative, and efficacious within historically shifting ways of being-in-the-world.<sup>7</sup> In rethinking the concept of religion and the role of religious emotions, this critical scholarship has demonstrated how imperial and colonial projects of power were based on the construction of antinomic and substantial distinctions, for example between religion and secularity, reason and emotion, subject and object, the individual and society etc. Within this framework, the secular appears no longer as the opposite or absence of religion, just as emotion is no longer cordoned off in a sphere of the irrational; instead, current approaches focus on historical and conceptual entanglements within political contexts.

A pertinent example are studies on so-called religious sentiments in South Asia, which show how colonial and postcolonial state apparatus have claimed 'secular reason' in order to not only contain and manage religious emotions but also to regulated and shape them in ways that *produced* them as being incompatible with secular reason to begin with.<sup>8</sup> Put bluntly, such studies argue that modern concepts of religious communities as being based on 'religious' emotions are themselves 'secular', in the specific sense of being produced within secular epistemological and political regimes. Focusing on the role of religious communities within modern, secular states is, of course, only one among many other possible approaches to studying emotions in South Asia.<sup>9</sup> It is, however, a particularly apt one for the purposes of this article, because discourses of religious nationalism, religious pluralism, and state secularism provide a frame of reference that renders the otherwise disparate groups of Atheists and Shias comparable – and thus also distinguishable – in terms of religious/nonreligious minorities.

The heuristic value of contrasting Atheists and Shias derives neither from an intrinsic comparability nor a particularly intense form of direct interactions; it stems from the fact that both communities can constitute their identities and boundaries as *minorities* within a discursive framework of religious nationalism that has required projects of Indian political secularism to be articulated in idioms of religious pluralism.<sup>10</sup> Hence, I propose to move beyond notions of absolute or mutually exclusive difference – be it between religions or between the religious and the secular – and retrace instead how shared historical and discursive environments produce emotional styles that are comparable precisely insofar as they are 'partly similar and partly distinct.'<sup>11</sup>

There is a substantial and growing body of scholarship on Shias in South Asia,<sup>12</sup> and Twelver-Shias in particular are readily recognized as a distinct religious community not only in public discourse but also in academic approaches. While critical scholarship problematizes the construction of Shi'ism as a discrete 'religion', it nonetheless tends to acknowledge this construction as the

outcome of an ongoing historical project of transformation and boundary work.<sup>13</sup> Atheism as an explicitly nonreligious way of life, by contrast, has so far received less attention and, due to being only tenuously organized in most cases, appears moreover to be a less apparent social formation.<sup>14</sup> I use the capitalized word ‘Atheism’ as referring to individual activists and groups, mostly from Hindu and Telugu-speaking backgrounds, who identify as atheists, rationalists, or humanists. While the activists among whom I have conducted fieldwork in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana argue about the proper meaning and use of these terms, they nonetheless agree that atheism – in the sense of disbelief in god(s) and irreligiosity more generally – is their commonly shared and necessary philosophical basis. They furthermore recognize each other as belonging to a cohering activist movement that aims for social justice and equality by ridding society of religions and related institutions like the caste-system.

While this article draws from two separate projects involving fourteen and nine months of ethnographic fieldwork among Atheists and Twelver-Shias respectively, its aim is not ethnographic but conceptual. I will therefore construct two condensed and synthetic accounts of Atheist and Shia emotional styles that are meant to create an explicitly stark profile in order to theorize and give contour to the concept of emotional style and, in a second step, flesh out its heuristic potential for what I call a diacritical approach to secular and religious ‘difference.’ Although I will describe Atheist and Shia emotional styles as ‘heroism’ and ‘grief’ respectively, I want to stress that I neither approach them as two discrete emotions nor provide an ethnographically thick description of the ‘felt qualities’ involved in people’s engagements with them. Felt emotions are complex and ambivalent, insofar as grief and heroism can – and in this case indeed do – contain aspects of each other as well as other emotions like love, fear, or pride.

Moreover, my interlocutors may not mean – let alone feel – the same thing when talking about emotions, not only because they tend to use different linguistic codes (Telugu and Urdu) but also because emotions acquire complex and shifting semantic layers throughout their discursive history.<sup>15</sup> Love for Imam Hussain in a Shia mourning ritual is most certainly not the same ‘feeling’ as the love for fellow human beings enjoined in the framework of secular humanism; the heroism of contemporary Atheists may not feel the same way or mean the same thing as the heroism of a medieval Rajput warrior. Even relatively recent histories, like the political rise of the Hindutva movement since the 1990s for example, may impact significantly what it means and feels like to be an Atheist or Shia Muslim in contemporary India.

Hence, my aim is not to compare Atheists and Shias as two monolithic and bounded collective entities characterized by either reified or ethnographically reconstructed feelings of a secular or religious kind but to compare them with regard to the historically contingent *style* in which they currently attend to and problematize emotions in critical and self-reflexive ways. I propose the concept of emotional style because it allows locating difference and comparability in a reflexive and adverbial *how* as opposed to a substantive *what*. I thus conceptualize emotional styles by analogy with diacritics: Diacritics are typographical signs intended to mark different practical engagements (reading, pronouncing) with one and the same letter in order to produce a *perceptible difference* in phonetic value, that is, a different pronunciation.

The concept of emotional style has been proposed as a means to historicize and pluralize emotions in relation to specific cultures, communities, or subsets within communities, spaces, or historical periods.<sup>16</sup> It points specifically to the vexing issue of agency and structure with regard to the relationship between either individual and collective or dominant and subcultural aspects of emotions. In contrast to adjacent concepts like emotional regime, emotional habitus, emotional knowledge, or feeling rules, the concept of style emphasizes the role of social, spatial, or otherwise contextual *contingencies* in producing aesthetic variability and diversity within the emotional norms and practices of larger ‘feeling communities.’<sup>17</sup>

In its original theoretical context of rhetoric and aesthetics, style is a relational and situational category, which does not describe fixed properties but the requirement to adjust rhetorical means to specific audiences and speech contexts.<sup>18</sup> Since the Renaissance, this notion of ‘appropriate fit’ has

referred more specifically to interrelations between form and content and constituted the basis for style's evaluative and taxonomic function. Despite diverging theories of style within art history and criticism, the recognition and description of style is an important device for interpreting works of art, for placing them within historical periods, for ascribing them to specific authors, and for eventually evaluating their artistic qualities. Style is usually understood to be neither individual nor collective but rather the product of individual choices within a set of historical, normative, spatial, material, temporal, interactional or otherwise contextual constraints. A central methodological difficulty for art historians has been the task of specifying and justifying the criteria selected to decide which elements or features of a given work's form and content are deemed significant and constitutive for defining its style.

I propose to address this difficulty as an empirical rather than a methodological question. I understand style as a diacritical and therefore reflexive practice. By asking about the emotional styles of Atheists and Shias, I do not seek a substantial or pre-existing difference between secular and religious emotions; rather, I am interested in the practices of critique whereby Atheists and Shias debate criteria of 'appropriate fit' between the form and content of emotions as well as their relation to specific practical and/or political projects. Hence, I am interested in how Atheists and Shias reflexively produce difference through the specific ways in which emotions are implicated in their attempts to police and thereby constitute the internal and external boundaries of their communities.

### **Mental revolution: the emotional style of Atheist heroism**

Whenever I met Dr. Vijayam, director of the Atheist Centre, one of the oldest Atheist institutions in Andhra Pradesh, I used to leave with my bag spilling over with an amount of books and documents that I could hardly carry. But when I asked for the book 'Śṛṣṭi Rahasyam'<sup>19</sup> (The secret of creation), written by Gora (Goparaju Ramachandra Rao), the founder of the Atheist Centre and Dr. Vijayam's father, he felt the need to comment on the book in a more elaborate way than usual, warning me that people had in the past misunderstood the text. I was looking for the book because its publication in the late 1960s had provoked acrimonious rejoinders by another stalwart Atheist philosopher, Ravipudi Venkatadri.<sup>20</sup> This triggered a heated, public debate, which members of the Atheist movement still remember vividly; it is a crucial episode in the local history of the movement.

In the book, Gora developed a pragmatist epistemological critique of both creationist and materialist theories of the origin of the universe and rejected both as forms of causal determinism (Telugu: *hētuvādam*) denying human freedom, agency and hence the possibility of morality. He stressed the empirical superiority of materialism over creationism but maintained that both were contradictory, insofar as their proponents *theoretically* foreclosed human agency and freedom while deploying them practically for the sake of the moral projects they sought to advance through their theories. This, he argued, introduced a duplicitous disjuncture between words and deeds, which was symptomatic of a condition of 'mental slavery'<sup>21</sup> (T.: *bhāvadāsyam*).

The latter concept is crucial, because members of the Atheist movement tend to define their activism in opposition to mental slavery rather than religion; they consider the former to be a general principle at the heart of all social evils whereas religion is 'merely' its most congenial and historically enduring manifestation. Hence, Gora's book sparked intense controversy among Atheists, as he located theories of materialist evolutionism (*padārthaparīṇānavādam*), to which most Atheists readily subscribe, dangerously close to the concept of mental slavery. According to Dr. Vijayam, the debate got out of hand because Gora's critics failed to understand his use of the Telugu word '*hētuvādam*,' which is a technical term in Sanskrit epistemology for either causal determinism or the middle term of an inference. However, it is also a translation of 'rationalism,' which is a widely used alternative label for the Atheist movement. Gora arguably rejected the epistemological soundness of the epistemological principle but not the legitimacy of the movement.

However, in his scathing – and equally famous – rejoinders, Ravipudi Venkatadri asserted that Gora was no Atheist at all and that his arguments were unscientific, escapist, nihilist, fanciful, and foolish among other things; Gora's writings betrayed that he was one of those people who reclaimed Atheism but remained at heart 'anonymous theists'<sup>22</sup> (T.: *ajñāta āstikulu*). Given Gora's self-understanding as a pragmatist, Ravipudi's critique was particularly stinging. He argued that Gora's ideas about Atheism as a form of revolutionary, practical morality were based merely on 'sentiments'<sup>23</sup> (English in original) or 'emotion'<sup>24</sup> (T.: *udvēgam*). These had led to Gora's social reform projects that may perhaps appear revolutionary to 'ex-Hindus'<sup>25</sup> (T.: *māji hindū matasthulu*) but had nothing to do with Atheism. According to Ravipudi Venkatadri and many other Atheists, it is precisely the inability to extricate oneself from religious or other kinds of sentiments which defines the condition of mental slavery and leads to inconsistencies between words and deeds (e.g. calling oneself an Atheist revolutionary but engaging in Hindu social reform).

While some of my Atheist interlocutors seem slightly embarrassed about the ferocity with which this and other intellectual brawls have been carried out in public, others talked about them with a sly smile, as if mischievously enjoying the spectacle. However, most of them knew about this particular debate, could readily give personal interpretations of it, and remembered it as a momentous episode in the movement's history. While there are certainly rivalling factions within the Atheist movement, I argue that such episodes of fundamental internal critique and their continuous remembrance have not fragmented but helped to constitute the Atheist movement.<sup>26</sup> Even though Gora and Ravipudi Venkatadri staged their approaches to Atheism as mutually exclusive and incompatible, most of my interlocutors 'follow' both of them and recognize them as two of the most important leaders of the movement. It is widely accepted that Ravipudi Venkatadri was the better philosopher, but Gora indubitably gained the upper hand as far as actual projects of practical activism were concerned; one excelled with words, the other with deeds.

Given my interest in emotional styles, it may seem counterintuitive that I started with this summary of a philosophical debate; more so, since Atheism is often reduced to questions of disbelief, intellectual arguments, and philosophy.<sup>27</sup> Apart from a certain arrogance or belligerence attributed to Atheists and their claims to rational prowess, the emotional dimensions of Atheism and other forms of irreligion seldom come into focus. While the *grand récit* of enlightened, secular reason versus religious emotion and irrationality has been deconstructed on many accounts, there is hardly any research on what this would entail for the emotional constitution of Atheism as a form of *lived* secularity. A closer look at contemporary Atheist discourse and practice in South India reveals, however, that emotions are anything but marginal in attempts to live irreligiously. Instead of analysing the philosophical details of the intellectual debate adumbrated above, my approach addresses three aspects of my Atheist interlocutors' engagement with such debates: (1) public and even vociferous critique has not endangered the cohesion of the Atheist movement but is part of its narrative and commemorative self-constitution; (2) references to sentiments and emotions, including the concept of mental slavery play a central role in practices of critique; (3) the distinction of words and deeds as two kinds of practice and their relation to emotions provide a grid for Atheists to both formulate and manage instances of fundamental intellectual disagreement.

For my Atheist interlocutors in South India, religions are at best an obsolete survival from a primitive stage of human evolution and, at worst, a malicious tool of social exploitation in the hands of an establishment of cunning, selfish manipulators capitalizing – in a literal sense – on the gullibility and fear of the common people. Most will agree that it is both, insofar as it derives from mental slavery. Atheists never tire of clarifying that they consider mental slavery to be a general human condition or a state of human civilization that lies at the core of all religions and, ultimately, any kind of injustice, inequality, and oppression irrespective of whether it occurs in forms readily identifiable as religious.<sup>28</sup> Atheists are known to emphasize the irrationality and ontological baselessness of religion as a matter of 'superstition' or 'blind belief' (T.: *mūḍhanammakam*), but the concept of mental slavery – as well as Atheism as the freedom from mental slavery – ultimately describes a social and emotional condition.<sup>29</sup> As the word 'slavery' (T.: *dāsyam*) suggests, it is an

essentially relational concept designating a situation of inequality, unfreedom, and dispossession between human beings, and more specifically between ordinary human beings and those who claim to know, represent, mediate, or embody some sort of superior or supernatural power. This slavery is 'mental' (T.: *bhāva-*) because it is not necessarily the product of physical coercion but the result of a more or less willing and active acquiescence into subordination due to blind belief in the claims made by the promoters of religion.

I characterize this not only as a social but also an emotional condition, because the semantic range of the Telugu word '*bhāvaṃ*,' which I translate here as 'mental,' can cover emotions and affects as well as ideas or opinions. This polysemy does not preclude that Telugu speakers differentiate between intellect and feeling or that one or the other connotation may be salient in particular usages of the word; it rather indicates that the concept of *bhāvaṃ* foregrounds the relatedness rather than the categorical distinctness of intellectual and emotional processes in determining a person's actions. Actual use of the concept of mental slavery in Atheist discourse shows that it refers to situations where people behave in ways that are illogical or detrimental to themselves even though they may know better.<sup>30</sup> As both Gora's and Ravipudi Venkatadri's arguments demonstrate, the problem of mental slavery and superstition is precisely their tenacity in the face of rational knowledge, empirical disproof, or even genuine personal disbelief.

While atheists stress the necessity of spreading rational thinking and do not doubt the capacity of scientific knowledge to unequivocally disprove religious worldviews, they are under no illusion that their efforts in this regard meet with little success when it comes to actually weaning people off religion. What ultimately holds people in thrall to mental slavery is religious 'ideology' (T.: *bhāvajālam*), which ensnares people in a range of deeply entrenched social pressures operating on the basis of emotions and sentiments, the most significant of which is fear. While fear of divine or karmic retribution may come to mind, Atheists are often more cynical in their assessments. They maintain that, the occasional pious devotee notwithstanding, a majority of 'believers' tend to observe religious ways of life solely for fear of social disapproval, twisted notions of respectability (T.: *maryāda*), selfish desire for personal gain, or for compensating the moral disorientations of modern life. Hence, Atheists consider religious ideology harmful not only because it inculcates wrong ideas about reality but above all because it establishes a sort of 'emotional habitus'<sup>31</sup> that makes people impervious to having their ideas rectified by rational knowledge.

I am here not interested in assessing whether these concepts of mental slavery and religious ideology provide accurate representations of religion but in exploring what it entails for the emotional style of organized Atheist activism when religion is understood as an emotional habitus and Atheism as the attempt to extricate oneself and others from its grip. It is possible to specify a repertoire of emotions that frequently appear in Atheist discourse and are deemed necessary or constitutive of an Atheist way of life. This repertoire clusters around an affective core of heroism: fearlessness, courage, boldness, steadfastness but also curiosity, ardour, and wholeheartedness. While contrary emotions like fear, vacillation, or despondency are of course also present in Atheist lives – and accounts thereof – they are 'non-Atheist,' as it were, insofar as they signal deficiencies, blockages, or uncomplete transitions to Atheism.

Within the overall dynamic and assertive quality of the Atheist emotional repertoire, the most salient 'negative' emotions are feelings like loneliness, isolation, or alienation, but they tend to set off and heighten rather than jeopardize a person's heroic resistance to mental slavery. Atheists call such resistance and the extrication from an ideological emotional habitus 'mental revolution' (*bhāvaviplavam*), which they consider to be the very essence of Atheism (rather than merely disbelief in gods); in fact, many Atheists refer to their movement as the 'movement for mental revolution' (*bhāvaviplavōdyamam*). The negative side of heroism is linked to a pervasive trope of the extreme difficulty – some critics of Atheism say impossibility – to practically implement Atheism as a positive and constructive way of life able to sustain not only an individual life of freedom and social recognition but also collective bonds of family, community, or society. Many of my interlocutors described intense feelings of relief, inspiration, even elation when they for the first



time encountered others 'like them' and learned of people who had managed to live openly and successfully as Atheists.

It is important to note how this 'emotional profile' of Atheist heroism is gendered, as I have synthesized it largely from personal and autobiographic accounts of male activists making up the vast majority of the movement.<sup>32</sup> Accounts by women,<sup>33</sup> and especially accounts by men about women,<sup>34</sup> are equally oriented towards a repertoire of heroism but frequently emphasize a more radical and substantial transformation from mental slavery to Atheism, which is mostly initiated externally – usually by men. Hence, 'contrary' feelings like fear or trepidation are given more space in women's stories, while men tend to stress the spontaneity and intransigence of their innate Atheism; the resulting experiences of loneliness and alienation may be 'negative' but further magnify and authenticate male heroism.

Instead of exploring the 'felt' qualities of emotions as discrete objects of inquiry, I propose to focus here on the way in which they are integrated into the Atheist project of mental revolution and how and to what effect Atheists attend to them. One such effect has already become apparent, namely the way emotions are implicated in producing gender differences between male and female Atheist activists. The emotional style of Atheists, however, goes beyond differential allocations of specific emotions – much less emotionality as such – to one or the other gender, or religious and nonreligious people for that matter. A first distinctive characteristic is the way emotions are conceptualized and enacted essentially as a function of an overriding concern with the process, imaginary, and aspiration of the fundamental transformation called mental revolution. An injunction for totalization is a second characteristic, as mental revolution requires not only the transformation of all domains of one's personality and everyday life – signalled by the manner in which the concept of *bhāvam* and its derivative *composita* foreground the entanglement of intellectual, emotional, and behavioural dimensions – but also the relatedness of the individual and society. The professed purpose of the Atheist movement is after all to reconstruct society by freeing people from emotionally enforced social strictures and thus setting them on the path towards an all-encompassing secular humanism.

The ideal of totalizing mental revolution leads to a third, crucial characteristic, which emerges from the debates among Atheists about the method and manner (T.: *paddhati* or *dhōraṇi*) of actually realizing that ideal. As mentioned above, Atheists are staunch defenders of rationality and its corrosive nature with regard to religion. However, their own experience of the resilience of religious emotional habitus has produced a consensus among them that the indispensable precondition, if not the only way, to change people is to exhibit or embody mental revolution in an exemplary fashion. At the heart of Atheists' debates about their activist endeavour is the question of how to make the transformations of their own emotional habitus perceptible for others. The answer is that neither words (professions of Atheism) nor deeds (practical implementation of Atheism in all spheres of life) but only an appropriate fit of both can authenticate that a given individual has indeed realized a total mental revolution.

Especially this third characteristic of the Atheist emotional style entails a pervasive hermeneutics and critique of the sincerity of one's own and others' mental revolution. The distinctive feature of this hermeneutics is the circumvention of an interior/exterior binary, which sets it apart from what has been described as the specifically Protestant origin of modern frameworks of sincerity.<sup>35</sup> Rather than probing a person's 'interior' realm of ideas/emotions (*bhāvam*) in order to ascertain if it matches their outward behaviour, Atheists tend to problematize sincerity primarily in relation to the exterior – and that means *perceptible* – realm of words and deeds.<sup>36</sup> Hence, the possible transformation of an emotional habitus – or rather the sincerity of it – cannot be expressed directly or explicitly but only be perceived as a function of the appropriate fit of the totality of a person's publicly perceptible behaviour. Even if staunch adversaries like Gora and Ravipudi Venkatadri agreed on little else, they did not speculate about supposedly 'interior' thoughts and emotions but made them perceptible by reading them off of the publicly apparent relationship or disjuncture between words and deeds. Here, the diacritical nature of the category of style becomes particularly

relevant because it points to the way sensual perception is bound up with critical evaluation and considers both in relation to how things are done, rather than what they are or what they mean. In order to further clarify the contours and analytical purport of the concept of style, the next section portrays a different emotional style cultivated by the community of Shia Muslims in the city of Hyderabad.

### Religious mediation: the emotional style of Shia grief

While waiting for a friend in the Shia quarters of Hyderabad's Old City, a man whom I had briefly met a few weeks before – I will call him Asghar – engaged me in a conversation about the local Shia community. Knowing that I was there to do research, he took me to a nearby tea shop, somewhat out of the spotlight of the main street, in order to tell me about the sectarian rift between Akhbaris and Usulis. He had seen that I was spending a lot of time with the latter, so he felt the need to explain that they were not real Shias and that their rituals of mourning and self-mortification (Urdu: *'azādārī*) were not true. Since I had not observed any overt ritual differences – except for maybe a slightly more rapturous feel at Akhbari events – I asked if their grief (U.: *ḡam*) was 'fake' (U.: *naqlī*). He shook his head and clarified that their emotions were genuine (U.: *aṣṡī*), but they would not be accepted by the Imams in heaven. The problem with Usulis was that they did whatever their spiritual leaders said, whereas Akhbaris were following only the Quran and the sayings of the prophet and the Imams. Everybody was enjoined to directly study these sources of religion rather than give blind obedience to fallible human beings. He interspersed his explanations with copious quotations in Arabic, not only to authenticate his explanations but also to demonstrate that he was indeed practicing what he was saying. He is the only member of his family who joined the Akhbaris around five years ago, which caused trouble at times. When I asked him why he had changed his allegiance, he replied laconically: 'Like you, I was doing research.'

During Asghar's explanations, I noticed from the corner of my eye that a man in the booth next to ours kept on turning around, while overhearing our conversation. He suddenly got up, squeezed himself onto the bench next to Asghar, and announced in English that he wanted to talk to us for a bit. Asghar seemed nervous and soon excused himself, paid for his tea, and left. The man, whom I call Ali, introduced himself and started inquiring on whose behalf I was doing research and whether I had permission. After explaining my situation and university affiliation, he cautioned that the kind of difference Asghar had been elaborating on was merely 'temporary.' Maybe after six months, they would be no more, but they would still appear in my texts; I should therefore focus on the overall unity of Shias who were all going towards the same goal. Our discussion was stopped short by a call from my friend inquiring about my whereabouts.

Although the differences within the community were a common theme in my conversations with Shias, most of them were eager to mitigate their importance even while explaining their nature and relevance. Sectarian or other kinds of differences were spoken about frequently and spontaneously, but often in hints and insinuations, indirectly, or in the broadest terms possible; if initiated by me, however, direct inquiries about internal tensions – or relations with other religious communities like Sunnis or Hindus – were regularly brushed aside as unproblematic or insignificant, while simultaneously conveying that nothing less was at stake than the true nature of Islam. Here, I will not pursue the theological details of sectarian differences or reformist discourses but rather focus on (1) the highly ambivalent nature of internal heterogeneity and critique within the Shia community and (2) the way in which critique revolves around the intricate entwinement of emotions with ritual practices and ideas of mediation.

In contrast to Atheism, whose emotional side is often neglected – if it is acknowledged at all – the public perception of Shia Islam tends to be based almost entirely on the extraordinary display and enactment of intense emotions, especially the emotion of grief (Urdu: *ḡam*) or mourning (U.: *'azā*). Rather than theological, juridical, or historical specificities, the image – and to a significant extent the self-understanding – of Shias in Hyderabad is defined primarily by the annual rituals of

mourning and spectacular self-mortification they perform in the Islamic months of Muharram, Safar, and Rabi al-Awwal (68 days in total). These rituals are intended to commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husain, his family, and followers during the battle of Karbala in 680 CE. Shias as a group are sometimes considered to be inordinately emotional and oversensitive, especially by some of my Sunni interlocutors who linked this not only to the particularities of their religious practices but also to a sense of insecurity and defensiveness that comes with the peculiarity of their doubly minoritized status in Hyderabad: they are a minority within the overall, predominantly Sunni Muslim community, which is a minority at a national scale but quite powerful locally; Hyderabad is, after all, considered one of the most important locales of Muslim culture in India. Before addressing the topic of emotional excess, which is crucial for Shias, I want to explore how the concept of grief, akin to Atheist heroism, refers to a complex emotional repertoire rather than a single, clearly delimited feeling. The central reference point for the ritual production of grief during mourning rituals are the events surrounding the battle of Karbala, in which the strife regarding the worldly and spiritual leadership of the Muslim community after the death of prophet Muhammad culminated in a violent, military confrontation.<sup>37</sup> Beyond this political context, the events at Karbala are accorded a prime soteriological significance, as they constitute a nodal point on a larger cosmic canvas of the struggle between good and evil.<sup>38</sup> The survivors of the battle, especially Imam Husain's sister Zaynab, are credited with inaugurating a tradition of commemorative mourning and witnessing (an important etymological component of the Urdu word for martyr, *shahīd*), which kept the memory of the valour and magnanimity of the martyrs as well as the depravity and unjustness of their enemies alive. It thereby ensured not only the survival of what Shias hold to be true Islam but also the means and possibility of redemption in its intimate relation to suffering. The immediate aftermath of Karbala becomes the originary moment of – and itself a theme in – a long tradition of narrative elaborations in various literary, performative and ritual genres, media, languages, and regional variations, which constitute what Syed A. Hyder calls an 'ever-changing narrative landscape'<sup>39</sup> of Karbala.

A large part of Shia socialization consists of learning to inhabit this landscape, which is less a single, unified story or message than a vast assemblage of varyingly detailed episodes and scenes linked to particular personalities or events with distinct emotional 'tonalities.' While the evocation of Karbala during mourning rituals is certainly intended to move participants to tearful grief, this is achieved through the skilful exploitation of the many emotional nuances contained in different narrative elements: the production of grief for the martyrs pivots on its juxtaposition with pride in Abbas' battle heroics, heart-breaking pity for Ali Asghar's helplessness and thirst, reverence for the beauty of Fatima Kubra's spousal love and loyalty, awe for Zaynab's courage to speak truth to power, fortitude in imagining Hurr's eleventh-hour change of heart, or contrition for one's own shortcomings in light of all this. In many mourning gatherings, the portrayal of the martyrs' virtues (U.: *faḍā'il*) is as integral and, I would argue, efficacious for producing grief as is the illustration of their sufferings (U.: *masā'ib*).<sup>40</sup> Most importantly, true grief springs from love (U.: *muhabbat*) for the prophet's family, which is why my interlocutors in Hyderabad consider mourning (U.: *azādārī*) to be essentially an expression of love.

The narrative landscape of Karbala is furthermore embedded in a larger performative and material culture that includes not only sacred objects and materials used in rituals but also body techniques (ranging from various kinds of self-mortification to re-enactments of concrete events) and symbolic mappings of the sacred geography of Karbala onto the cityscape of Hyderabad (e.g. through replicas of important Iranian and Iraqi shrines).<sup>41</sup> Feelings and expressions of grief thus thrive on carefully choreographed and materially mediated emotional rhythms within a given ritual, between different kinds of rituals and variations within kinds, as well as alternations during the ritual calendar that also include joyful times and celebratory rituals (U.: *jašn*) as well as regular Islamic festivals (U.: *īd*). Especially the former but also relatively quiet and mellow mourning practices, like nightly family visits to Ashurkhanas and especially women's everyday rituals, have

received much less scholarly attention than the spectacular and extremely intense public practices of mourning and self-flagellation performed by men.<sup>42</sup>

The felt quality of grief is thus internally complex and ambivalent. Even though it is clear that days of *'azādāri* should be a time of sombre mood and abstinence from all kinds of indulgences, most of my interlocutors in Hyderabad look forward to it with anticipation. There is a specific kind of pleasure to be derived from the social and religious intensity that accompanies the collective production of grief. And this production is, moreover, subject to historical and local variation, as can be gauged by colonial descriptions of the important mourning processions on Ashura (10 Muharram) in Bombay, which evoke the atmosphere of 'a rather light-hearted and joyful festival.'<sup>43</sup>

Then again, the heuristic relevance of the category of emotional style, as I propose it here, is not located in specifying only *what* Shias feel but in *how* they engage with, problematize, and make perceptible what they (are supposed to) feel. It is therefore important to pay attention to the controversial ways in which the emotional regime and feeling rules of the narrative landscape of Karbala are addressed by Shias as an ethical 'paradigm.'<sup>44</sup> Beyond its relevance for ritual life, the narratives around Imam Husain's martyrdom at Karbala encode a *'husaini* ethics,<sup>45</sup> which provides moral frameworks for how to be a perfect Muslim, a good husband, a dutiful wife, a loving daughter, a protective brother etc. While the values of the framework are hardly contested, the decisive and divisive question pertains to the manner of their practical application.

As already mentioned, the Twelver-Shia community in Hyderabad is divided along the lines of a majority of Usulis and a minority of Akhbaris, who disagree mainly on the role and capacity of clerical authorities (U.: *mujtahid*) in guiding the community in the absence of Imams, the last of whom is believed to have entered into the so-called Major Occultation in 941 CE. Akhbaris argue that only the Quran and the hadiths, which include sayings of the twelve Imams, provide valid guidance, while Usulis allow greater scope for human reasoning (U.: *ijtihad*) – and the scholarly experts of it – in interpreting and mediating divine revelation to the Muslim community. Among my interlocutors in Hyderabad, the intricate theological, imamological, and juridical matters involved in these approaches often boil down to who represents the 'real' Shias and, therefore, true Islam. This is where questions of emotional style become relevant because being a Shia is inseparably tied to feeling grief and love for the family of the prophet. It is via their emotions that people can enter into communion with the prophet's family and hope for their blessings in everyday life as well as their intercession with God on the final day of judgement.<sup>46</sup>

As was already adumbrated by the brief vignette at the beginning of this section, neither Akhbaris nor Usulis tend to articulate the nature of their difference in terms of the genuineness or sincerity of emotions. Akhbaris claim that Usulis' grief lacks a foundation in personal study and understanding of the reasons and meanings (U.: *maqṣad*) behind mourning rituals; they criticize that their emotions are engendered by blindly following a bunch of clerical leaders, who are accorded a degree of authority and obeisance that they, as fallible men, should not be entitled to. From the Usuli perspective, which is the perspective of the dominant establishment, Akhbaris are often dismissed as misguided, presumptuous, and uneducated upstarts who anyway lack the necessary knowledge to make good on their lofty ideals of individual scholarly responsibility. It becomes even clearer what is involved here in terms of emotional style by looking at a third faction within the Shia community, which mounts a much more radical critique against both the dominant Usulis and their Akhbari challengers.

This group of reformers technically belongs to the Usuli fold but within the sectarian dynamics in Hyderabad it stands outside the classificatory logic of the Usuli/Akhbari divide as it opposes both in their local manifestations. The group orients itself towards the Post-revolutionary clerical establishment in Iran and espouses an activist interpretation of the Karbala paradigm emphasizing the need to implement *husaini* ethics in concrete political, social, and economic programmes, as opposed to a quietist and 'apolitical' retreat to ritual activity and private piety. While activist and quietist interpretations are not mutually exclusive or absolutely distinct, they are linked to different temporal frameworks (soteriological, progressive, historical, cyclical etc.) and therein also diverge in their assessments of the nature and

purposes of individual and collective grief as either a means for intercession and redemption or a conduit for a creative emulation and political animation of the gendered moral ideals encoded in the Karbala paradigm.<sup>47</sup> From the vantage point of reformers, the mainstream Hyderabadī Shias waste their time weeping in mourning rituals. Even though the sincerity of their tears is not in doubt, the mourners are criticized for excessive displays of emotions and for failing to give ‘practical shape’ (U.: *‘amālī šakl*) to the ethical and political purport of those emotions.

Beyond issues of ritual excess, pompous wastefulness, and escapism, the incendiary aspect of reformist criticism concerns a more fundamental and resolute rejection of some of the central ritual forms of Hyderabadī *‘azādārī*, especially practices of bloody self-flagellation and practices of votive requests for intercession addressed to the family of the prophet and their material representations of symbolic or iconic kind. While reformers judge the former ‘haram’ according to Islamic legal principles,<sup>48</sup> they deem the latter to be superstitions that can verge on idolatry (U.: *širk*). In a more general sense, they reject a large portion of the distinctive ritual and social life of the mainstream Shia community as an essentially non-Islamic cultural artifice, which has resulted from too long a history of exposure to the Hindu environment in India – and which will lead to the community’s continued ‘backwardness’ in the future.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to reformist notions of Islamic purity,<sup>50</sup> the majority of Shias take pride in their distinctive ritual life as testimony to their piety and their long and eminent history in the region. They understand their cultural forms as Indian, rather than Hindu, and thus foreground discourses of national identity, heritage, and inter-religious harmony rather than religious pollution.<sup>51</sup> Reproaches of ritual excess and pollution are countered by deriding reformers as ‘Taliban,’ which evokes notions of foreignness and, more significantly, marks reformers themselves as excessively emotional ‘fanatics’ as far as their quest for original purity is concerned.

The emotional style of Shias thus revolves around the interplay of notions of purity and (appropriate) intensity – rather than notions of genuineness or sincerity – which are problematized in relation to the ritual, social, temporal, national, and geopolitical frameworks in which the evocation and enactment of emotions are embedded. Hence, the dynamics between Usuli, Akhbari, and reformist groups in their relation to ideas about the ‘realness’ and appropriate expression of grief are essentially tied to ideas about the nature, legitimacy, and purity of the larger network of *media* within which grief is embedded as a conduit between the faithful and God.<sup>52</sup> The concept of media is understood here in an expanded sense, as it includes prophets, Imams, *mujtahids*, sacred scriptures, oral traditions, individual intellectual pursuits, collective ritual practices, material and symbolic environments, narrative landscapes, nationalist discourses, transnational projects of religious reform, as well as social relations of power between clerics and laypeople, genders, or socioeconomic classes.

## Conclusion

The above explorations of the emotional styles of Atheists and Shias in South India demonstrate that even though the former tend to be perceived as particularly averse to emotions and the latter as particularly prone to them, emotions play a central role in the lives and projects of both communities. Furthermore, emotions like heroism or grief emerge not as clearly defined or ‘felt’ mental entities but as complex compounds of a multiplicity of feelings and affective dynamics, which are inseparably entangled with the intellectual, social, material, and historical dimensions of specific practical projects: a quest for a fundamental and holistic transformation of society in the case of Atheist activists and the cultivation of a morally upright and pious life in accordance with the way of Islam and the will of God in the case of Shias. Atheists’ emotional style is grounded in a project of transforming emotions by extricating oneself and others from a socially instituted emotional habitus of mental slavery (T.: *bhāvadāsyam*), while Shias seek to cultivate emotional mourning (U.: *‘azādārī*) by inserting themselves in networks of legitimate social and religious media functioning as conduits between the faithful and God. Where Atheists are centrally concerned with totalization and the scope of emotional transformation, Shias are preoccupied with the intensity of emotions and the mediated forms of their evocation and expression. Finally, Atheists engage in hermeneutics of sincerity based on appropriate relations between

publicly perceptible words and deeds of heroism, whereas Shias deploy hermeneutics of purity focusing on the nature and legitimacy of the media involved in the production of grief.

With this blunt juxtaposition, I do not claim that those projects and, more importantly, the felt quality of emotions involved in them are either mutually exclusive or comparable in the sense of being commensurable in a direct or essentialist sense. Instead, the concept of emotional style I tried to develop in this contribution revolves around the way people debate and also disagree about the role of emotions within concrete practical projects and, more specifically, with regard to the *manner* (T.: *dhōraṇi*) or *form* (U.: *śakl*) of realizing those projects. As a *diacritical* category, emotional style points not only to the different ways in which emotions are made perceptible by debating their form and content but above all to how people problematize that perceptibility with regard to historically specific criteria of appropriateness such as respectability (T.: *maryāda*), religious legality (U.: *ḥalāl*) or – as it will transpire in the following paragraphs – national belonging.

The concept of emotional style thus includes an important reflexive dimension of moral discernment and evaluation, through which people negotiate the internal heterogeneity of their communities as well as their location within larger social and historical contexts (the Indian nation, the Muslim world, the condition of human civilization etc.). The analysis of emotional styles as a comparative endeavour does not presuppose a bounded and taken-for-granted difference between religion and secularity – or between religions – but retraces the significance accorded to emotions in practices of critique that establish and contest those differences in the first place. This allows for a new perspective on the secular/religious binary precisely insofar as, historically, that binary has often been articulated as – or even collapsed into – binaries of reason and emotion or critique and belief.<sup>53</sup> By focusing on the reflexivity of *dia-critical* emotional styles, we may gain insight into the specific roles that emotions as well as critique play for communities that are positioned in different ways vis-à-vis the secular/religious binary and its socio-political ramifications.

It is precisely the entanglement of the emotional repertoire of heroism with a problematization centred in transformation, totalization, and sincerity that makes *open* and *explicit* criticism of even the minutest signs of insincerity constitutive for Atheism. The relationship between heroism and an imperative to critique is also an effect of the particular location of organized Atheism within a longer discursive history of Indian religious nationalism. Currently dominant majoritarian and Hindu nationalist articulations of religious nationalism notwithstanding, secularism in India has come to be defined – or rejected – as religious pluralism, and national belonging has been figured through membership in one of the ‘legitimate’ communities constituting that religious plurality.<sup>54</sup> Within this framework, Atheists have become a largely invisible and, to a certain extent, impossible minority: to reject religion entirely and unequivocally as a form of mental slavery requires and produces heroism because it threatens to propel oneself out of the frame of the Indian nation. Open critique, and especially religious critique, is the foundation that makes the relationship between Atheism and heroism seem natural and to a certain degree inevitable. However, an entwinement of heroism and critique is not in any essential or substantial way Atheist or secular, as it may also occur in other marginal or ‘deviant’ groups, including religious ones. What makes it secular is the particular reflexive style in which Atheists constitute it as a diacritical marker for their own self-understanding as irreligious; in other words, it is secular in the recursive sense that Atheists use it to differentiate themselves from a religious – or in their terms ‘mentally enslaved’ – environment.

Critique plays a very different role among Shias, and even though it may be equally ubiquitous, it is often delivered in more veiled or circumspect terms. Many of my Shia interlocutors tend to dismiss sectarian rifts and differences as either impermanent or ultimately insubstantial. As a community that is commonly considered religious, the Shia is firmly lodged within the hegemonic framework of religious nationalism, but its place within the Indian nation is for the same reason premised on its perceptibility as coherent, united, and religious. However, the position of Shias, and Muslims more generally, is precarious because the supposedly ‘foreign origin’ and ‘transnational ties’ of their religious community can and have become the very basis

for their exclusion from a nation that has increasingly come to be defined through a majoritarian conflation of Indian with Hindu.<sup>55</sup> Against this background, the discourses and symbols of martyrdom as *self-sacrifice* at the heart of Shia grief have become an efficacious idiom to perform an inward-looking and depoliticized form of communal religious identity that balances the requirements of religious nationalism and pluralism but leaves less room for practices of vociferous internal or external critique.<sup>56</sup>

Along such lines, a more systematic inquiry into historical trajectories – including the conceptual history of terms like *bhāvaṃ*, *gam*, or *sentiment* – can offer an important diachronic perspective to the largely synchronic discussion of emotional styles that I have pursued in this contribution. It is precisely at the intersection of a conceptual history and comparative ethnography of emotions that the diacritical concept of emotional style can gain its full heuristic and analytical potential.

## Notes

1. In this article, I follow my interlocutors in Hyderabad who, when speaking about themselves in English, use the word “Shia” (without the qualifier “Twelver”) as noun and adjective rather than Arabic derivations like “Shi’i,” “Shi’ite,” or “Shi’ism.”
2. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History*, 245–55.
3. In the disciplinary history of religious studies, the term phenomenology does not refer to the more well-known philosophical traditions linked to names like Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, or Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This philosophical tradition, however, is an important source for current critiques of the so-called phenomenology of religion; see below and especially Vásquez, *More than Belief*.
4. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*; Chidester, *Empire of Religion*; McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion*.
5. Houtman and Meyer, *Things*; Engelke, “Religion and the Media Turn”; and Grieser and Johnston, *Aesthetics of Religion*.
6. Vásquez, *More than Belief*, 59–122.
7. Riis and Woodhead, *A Sociology of Religious Emotion*; and Knoblauch and Herbrink, “Emotional Knowledge.” For an overview of developments in the history of emotions see Pernau, “Introduction” (this volume).
8. Ahmed, “Specters of Macaulay”; and Viswanath, “Economies of Offense.”
9. E.g. Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics*; Orsini, *Love in South Asia*; Pernau, “Feeling Communities”; and Chatterjee, Krishnan, and Robb, “Feeling Modern.”
10. For accounts of the links between religious nationalism, pluralism, and secularism in India see: van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism*; Tejani, *Indian Secularism*; Needham and Sunder Rajan, *Crisis of Secularism*; for a discussion of the relationship between secularism and nonreligion see: Quack, “Relational Approach.”
11. Beekers, Dilger, and DeHanas, “Rethinking Difference,” para. 10.
12. Cf. Robinson, “Introduction.”
13. Jones, *Shi’a Islam*; and Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*.
14. Besides literature on the Tamil Non-Brahmin movement, there are to my knowledge only two current monographs on the topic, which may be consulted for more detailed historical and ethnographic context on the contemporary Atheist movement in India: Quack, *Disenchanted India*; and Binder, *Total Atheism*.
15. Pernau, “From Morality to Psychology.”
16. Middleton, “Emotional Style”; Illouz, *Cold Intimacies*; Reddy, “Emotional Styles”; Gammerl, “Emotional Styles”; and Knoblauch and Herbrink, “Emotional Knowledge.”
17. Pernau, “Feeling Communities.”
18. The following is adapted from: Lang, “Style” and Ross, “Style in Art.”
19. Gora, *Sr̥ṣṭi Rahasyam*.
20. Venkatadri, “Nēnū Nāstikuṇṇē”; and Venkatadri, “Nāstikulunnāru, Jāgratta!”
21. Gora, *Sr̥ṣṭi Rahasyam*, 88.
22. Venkatadri, “Nāstikulunnāru, Jāgratta!,” 178.
23. Venkatadri, “Nēnū Nāstikuṇṇē,” 188.
24. *Ibid.*, 180.
25. *Ibid.*
26. For a more extended discussion of this argument see Binder, *Total Atheism*, 37–70.
27. Jacob Copeman and Johannes Quack have pointed out the irony that the growing interest of social scientific scholarship in matters of materiality seems to have skipped the materiality of materialism, which continues to be approached primarily as an intellectual stance; Copeman and Quack, “Godless People.”

28. See e.g. Ramakrishna, *Nāstikatva Siddhāntam*; Gora, *Positive Atheism*; and Lavanam, *Nāstikatvaṃ Abhivṛddhi Caritra*.
29. Binder, “Magic Is Science.”
30. Gora, *Nāstikatvaṃ*, 96.
31. Illouz, *Cold Intimacies*, 62–66; for an illustration of such a notion of emotional habitus from an Atheist perspective see: Ramakrishna, *Prajākavi Vēmana*, 12–16.
32. See, e.g., Gora, *We Become Atheists*; Gora, *Nēnu Nāstikuṅṅi*; Lavanam, *Nā Smṛtipadhaṃlō*; and Aruna, *Siddhāntam*.
33. Gora, *Gōrātō Nā Jivitaṃ*; and Subbamma, *Pātivratyaṃ Nuṅḍi*; see also Binder, *Total Atheism*, 215–25.
34. Bhaskar, “Saraswati Gora.”
35. For an elaboration of the Protestant framework of modern sincerity see Keane, *Christian Moderns*. For reflections on how this framework and its assumptions about human personhood relate to South Asian traditions and their postcolonial transformations see Appadurai, “Topographies of the Self”; Bate, “Ethics of Textuality”; Lempert, *Discipline and Debate*.
36. This has been articulated most explicitly by Gora, *Positive Atheism*, 47–50.
37. Haider, *Shi’i Islam*. It bears mentioning that Sunnis also deplore and condemn the events at Karbala and the violent deaths of the prophet’s family as a tragic calamity, even though they may hold a different view on their causes as well as their theological, political, and ethical significance.
38. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*.
39. Hyder, *Reliving Karbala*, 74.
40. Howarth, *The Twelver Shi’a*.
41. Schubel, *Religious Performance*; and Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*.
42. D’Souza, *Partners of Zaynab*; and Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood, and Everyday Practice*.
43. Nejad, “Urban Margins,” 331.
44. Fischer, *Iran*, 12–26.
45. Ruffle, *Gender, Sainthood, and Everyday Practice*, 5.
46. Cf. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*.
47. Deeb, “Emulating and/or Embodying”; and Fischer, *Iran*.
48. For a summary of the arguments involved in this debate see: Pinault, *Horse of Karbala*, 29–55.
49. Mirza, “Travelling Leaders”; and Mirza “Lost Worlds.”
50. See e.g. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival*.
51. While harmonious relations with Hindus are important to the mainstream of the Shia community and are linked to both a nationalist framework of Indian religious pluralism and a discourse about the universally human appeal and purport of the message of Karbala and the Imams, reformers tend to be more invested in “inter-sectarian” harmony and rapprochement with Sunni Islam, as they emphasize global solidarity within the Muslim world.
52. For a review of approaches to mediation in scholarship on religion see: Engelke, “Religion and the Media Turn.”
53. Asad, Butler, and Mahmood, *Is Critique Secular?*
54. Cf. footnote 10.
55. Hansen, *The Saffron Wave*; Jalal, *Self and Sovereignty*; Sherman, *Muslim Belonging*; and Binder, “Religion, Aesthetics.”
56. Freitag, “South Asian Ways of Seeing.”

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