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# HOSAY TRINIDAD

Transcription

Drums

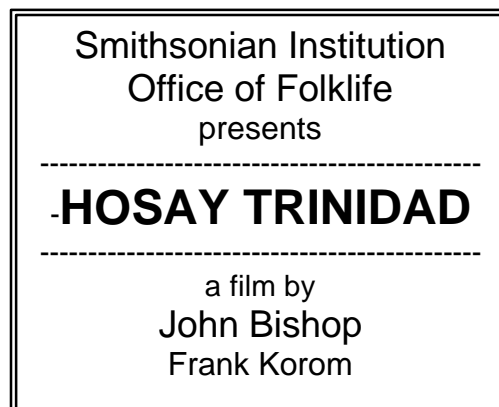
## Narrator

Trinidad is an island in the Caribbean Sea, located off the Northern Coast of South America. Sighted by Columbus in 1498, Trinidad was colonized by Europeans and largely populated by Africans who worked the plantations.

After the abolition of slavery in 1845, work on the plantations shifted to Indentured contract laborers from India who brought the religions, customs, foods, and flavors of South Asia to the island.

If you visit Trinidad in the Islamic month of Muharram, and find yourself in the rural village of Cedros or in the St. James district of Trinidad's capital, Port of Spain, you would be swept up in a bewildering procession, that integrates elements from the Middle East, South Asia, and the Caribbean.

This is **Trinidad's Hosay**.



Hosay is a passion play on a grand scale combining fervent piety with the demands of street theater as it evokes a key moment in the history of Islam.

In the 7th century, Iman Hussein, a grandson of the prophet Mohamed, marched with a small group of followers toward Baghdad to negotiate a truce with the caliph. While under the flag of peace, they were attacked and resisted heroically but by noon of the tenth day, Hussein and most his followers had been slain on the plains of Karbala in present day Iraq.

This event precipitated the split between Shiites and Sunnis that persists today. And all over the Shiite world, Hussein's martyrdom at Karbala is symbolically reenacted during Muharram.

Hosay rites in Trinidad define a community of both believers and observers. The heart of the *hosay* is ten days of prayer and fasting climaxed with three nights of drumming and processions. The key rituals are the province of a few families but the preparations that intensify in the weeks preceding the public events involve widening circles of participants.

Hosay honors a past stretching back to 7th century Iraq and solidifies relationships in the overlapping religious, racial and cultural communities of present day Trinidad.

*(Immigrant monument, shot of Port of Spain, Hamdoo on camera, street signs.)*

### **Hamdoo**

The first set of indentured immigrants, Indian immigrants that came to Trinidad was the 30th of May in the year 1845. And from then on we had a boat arriving almost every six months with Indian immigrants. From 1845 to 1917 we had approximately 100,000 Hindus and approximately 30,000 Muslims, coming within those years. The Muslims kept their identity to themselves and the Hindus kept their identity to themselves. But within the last thirty years, or forty years, I must say, that this sort of practice has been finished away with. And everybody is now freely intermixing, even though they still maintain their own religious identity.

*(Making tadjah in Balma yard, early stages.)*

### **Balma Yard**

It was not until 1854 that the first *tadjah* was built in Trinidad.

### **Narrator**

The *tadjah*, also called the *hosay*, represents the tomb of Hussein. It is built on a framework of reeds and wood covered in cardboard.

Four *tadjahs* are built in St. James, a neighborhood of Trinidad's capital, Port of Spain

The construction takes place in compounds, or yards and is organized around families.

This is Balma yard, and the chief builder is Noble Bisnath

### Cocorite Yard

#### **Narrator**

The *tadjahs* are built in what are know as *imambaras*, garages and sheds temporarily sanctified for this purpose. Women are not allowed inside.

#### **Junior**

We have our own style, you know. You can observe from last year. Last year they had like more mosque. We had more like a castle. .

You know, as I say we going modern. We identify that going up St. James there dark spots, and sometimes you're looking at the *hosay* you can't even identify what you're really seeing. So we decided to come up with the lights, so that right here you'll be seeing, you'll be identifying what you're looking at, and not just guessing.

*(Shot of sign, Raez talks.)*

### Ghulam Hussein Yard

#### **Raez**

Well this yard really gets it's name from the Ghulam Hussein, the man Ghulam Hussein himself. He were a man of great respect within the community and such and he had a lot of talent and art and so, in those days, you know the old days.

*(Inside Imambara, checking size of gumji's)*

#### **Hamdoo**

From the day of Bakr-e Eid or Eid-ul Ada, that is the day that Father Abraham was called upon to sacrifice his son. That is on the tenth day of the last Islamic lunar month, Zilhaj. From that day, counting for thirty days, we actually start to build the *tadjah*, from that day.

### Bay Road Yard

*(Outside of Bay Road, and inside Bay Road)*

#### **narrator**

Bay Road *tadjah*, the community's *Hosay*, is designed by Muggy who returns from NewYork each Muharam.

#### **Muggy**

I have been around, and ordinarily it comes to mind, changes, you know, and colors and

everything else. So this year we are trying to make it more like a church... a lot of mosaic, and white, stained glass. Last year we did it in red which is signifying the blood of Hussein, but this year we are trying to do something else, trying to make something a little more Christian like this year. That's my idea about it.

**James Ghassy**

And this is from my memory from 1945. I took part in this one, I took part in making this *hosay*. I sat down and just draw it out of memory, how St James was in those days.

**Rasheeda**

My father told us about it and my mother in law. She said it was really sad, and they would walk all along barefeeted, no shoes also, head and so covered and these old women would be singing and crying. Because at that time it was really religious you know. No alcohol, and no getting on, and all that, you know.

**Aloh**

It brings tears to your eyes, when you really speaking about it, because, you can see it....

**Faroza**

Something we have both ... we were in love together, we grow in it together, we have our children, we get married in it, and that was something that I take, my father he put it into me so much, I just felt that, it's something that I cannot describe to nobody, that, show me that, in the remembrance of the martyrdom, the fight for Islam, our religion, what it means, and knowing about the martyrdom of both Hassan and Hussein, Imam Hassan, Imam Hussein, and perfect Mohammed, baby Fatima, and Hazrat Ali, and what we take in our hearts, that we take in our mind, and our body that what we do we bring it out of pioussness, to show that we care about what Islam is about in one way and yet at the same time remembering the martyrdom and everything pertains to the battle of Karbala.

**Muggy**

But Trinidad being a country of mixed races, you cannot compare them to Iran which is a country of Muslims, 99% of Iran is Muslims.

*(shot of Iran)*

**Junior**

Well I saw it in a documentary, where they was like walking and they had ... it looked to me like leather, with nails or spikes, and they were just beating theirselves and walking, you know, and they walked for long distance like us and nothing happened to them, so I was wondering what kind of celebration is that

*(Iran sequence)*

**Narrator**

In Iran the Muharram observances include bodily mortification and chanting in remembrance of Hussein's suffering 1300 years ago. The participants reenact his betrayal and death. Sacred objects are paraded. The *nakhl* carried around the courtyard on the shoulders of the faithful.

*(Sequence of Indian miniature paintings)*

As Shi'ites migrated to India, they brought Muharram rituals with them, and adapted them to local customs.

These depictions of Muharram from India were painted in the 1850s about the time that indentured Indian laborers were establishing *hosay* in Trinidad.

Elaborate representations of Hussein's tomb, carried like the *nakhl* in Iran on the shoulders of the faithful, dominated the Indian processions, and resemble this St. James *tadjah* from a turn of the century photograph...

Those processions in India also included standards, shaped like moons, and carried by a single man. Almost identical objects are used in St. James today

*(Working on tassa drum)*

Drumming is an integral part of the *hosay* observance. Tuning the drums and rehearsing the special rhythms known as hands, is pervasive during the month preceding the public processions.

### **Shazaad**

What I'm doing, I'm really tightening the drum. Taking out all the slack from it. Getting it as tight as possible. Right now I was just pulling it and taking out all the slack. but right now I'm even tightening it more. Due to plaiting two of these and making one. What we are doing now is passing this piece of deerbody inside one of these, right, so what we are really trying to do is to take two and make one, and by doing that now, it tightens this whole housing here. So by putting this plait on it now, it becomes even tighter. And the tightest is the best for the drum. I pull it over like this, it makes a plait. See, you got a plait here, and it pulls the skin even tighter across the shell.

*(Potter throws tassa shell )*

### **Goolcharan**

And now here we goes

Before getting it into this stage, there's a lot of work behind it.

The bigger the size of pot, you use a slower speed and a different shape; different shape, different size, different speed.

This one you see I holding here is a finished one. It is already baked, it has already passed through the process of being a *tassa* shell. So it is ready for the buyer to come

and buy them now.

### **Azeez**

Now a drum take about, when you make it, take about six, seven times heating before you can reach the pitch to stand up. Because right now it's soft. So you have to beat and pull back, beat and pull back, beat and pull back and keep it going and keep it going keep it going till it stand up and when it do stand up you don't need to pull it again. That take about seven heating.

*(Description of drum hands intercut with examples)*

### **Shair Ali**

It is four natural hands, all relating to the martyrdom, Well the first hand, *kabulkhana*, the marching, that is the marching drum. When they were invited by the Yazid, you know, Hussein, and he and his people went with the flags, that drum was beaten, you know. They call it the marching drum, *kabulkhana*.

Then when he realized that they are tricked, started beating the war drum, *mahatam*. Is the war drum,

And the third hand was *nabeesarwar*. *Nabeesarwar*. That is the burial drum,

And then the fourth hand was *teen chopra*, the drum of sorrow.

*(relaxed scene in GH drum room)*

### **Azeez**

We don't just beat the drum, we beat the drum with love and feelings of our heart. The more we beat, the more we feel to beat. Each person going to the one tempo, one song that they're playing. And this keep the music up. As I tell you again, the cymbals, which is the *jainch*, is an important piece of music. Because when you play without the *jainch*, the cymbals, you get a sadder song, you get the music more, you try it and see, you get the music more deadish. With the cymbals are pushing, and the bassman corresponding harder, and the drummer coming up, everybody get together.

### **Butto**

A steel band now, a steel band, I am keeping the tempo coming see the *jainch* keeping the same, same tempo

*(Drum sequence*

*Work on gumjies at Balma Yard)*

### **Narrator**

As Muharram draws near, work on the *tadjahs* intensifies.

### **Noble**

We get rain sometime. that is the plan right, the style, but we prepare for the rain too. If we do get rain it will slide off instead of falling back. It's cardboard you know, and water soak and we in some trouble.

*(Put cloth on GH tadjah  
Styrofoam tracery)*

### **Purple**

Over the archway like this for instance this goes inside. Above here now we'll have raised work now, it won't be just like a piece of styrotex put in just bam! You see it will be more effective, like for instance when you get more lines and columns and stuff like that. that's what makes your artwork and your building effective.

### **Azeez**

Something to experience, you get people from all cultures, all different races coming to it, all barriers, nothing blocked, everything is free to come is welcome, once they obey the laws, and it's wonderful to see that. Like last year remember what the professor told us -- he was amazed to see different ethnic groups taking part in this, and we don't discard them, we have shangbu, we have Baptist, Muslim, we have Hindu, everybody, Christian, plenty Christians. Everybody get together we live in an area where we communicate a lot with the people.

### **Purple**

I'm Christian Catholic. Yeah but you see, the Catholic thing, I wasn't too much into it. You understand, as a little kid growing up into this, perhaps through that I got involved, with just being artistic wise, creativewise with it. It also follows that as you say one hand don't clap. Because you can't just do things halfway. You do things the right way, and make sure all goes well and maybe in whatever way we get our blessing. You don't see it by receiving it. that is not the blessing. You don't feel it by a breeze. It will just automatically happen, and it will happen when you don't even know.

### **Hamdoo**

Take us for instance, the Emanalis, and the Bisnaths, and those who are directly connected with building our *tadjah*. We might be forty, fifty, sixty in number. But the forty fifty or sixty of us will not make it a carnival, or bacchanalish affair, Because we know the significance of it, and we know the reason for doing it. But Mr. John Public, when you have 30,000 or 35,000 people, members of the public who is looking on as on-lookers, hearing the beat of the *tassa* drums. In Trinidad especially people go get frenzied the moment you start beating *tassa* drumming. And so they start dancing right away. You really cannot contain them, you cannot prevent them. The police is helpless to prevent anyone from dancing or jumping or drinking. You couldn't very well go and tell the people don't drink beer tonight. Or to have them lock up their liquor shops and what not and so on tonight. No it would be impossible to do something like that. Because we live in a cosmopolitan population; this is not an Islamic state, We are not

only Indians, This is a small United Nations, Trinidad is likened to a small United Nations.

**Moms (vo)**

In every *hosay* house you have to abstain, from certain things, abstain from your wife, wife from husband, they don't sleep together or if they do it just on one end of the bed, near to each other. We can cook rice with peas and so but no meat in it, only coconut milk. You can eat any vegetable, but just boiled, you cannot *jhank* it, that is to put it with oil, or anything, so no oil. You can use fruits and vegetables, a lot of milk, cheese butter, that's it

**Azeez (on camera in drum room)**

Keep away from salt, oil, and what do you call it, pepper. These things cause the silva lining to burn and you don't have enough power to develop to beat the drums. Because if you eat salt, pepper, oil, when you beating the drum, under that pressure, you pant fast, you get shortness of breath and all these things so that the food that we eat help us and give us courage.

*(Making maleedah the old way)*

**Narrator**

It is the first day of Muaharam and the women prepare *Maleedah*, a ceremonial food made of shredded flat bread, sugar, butter, nuts and raisins, that is shared with all who attend the prayers for the ten nights.

*(Paint the chowk at Balma  
Dressing the chowk for first night)*

**Narrator**

Each yard has a sacred square called the *chowk* which is purified and decorated and is the ritual locus for the ten days.

*(Prayers at Balma chowk)*

**First Night**

On the first of Muharram. The families of each yard begin their observance. They gather at their *chowks* to pray and share *maleedah*. as they will for the next ten nights. Relatives and friends come from all over the island and as far away as England, Canada and the United States to participate.

**Imam prays in Arabic**

*(Distribute maleedah and incense)*

**Narrator**

After the prayers, the *maleedah* is distributed and the compound's houses, drum room and the *imambara* where the *tadjah* is being built are purified with incense..

**Muggy**

All arches are done like this. You get that color in here, can you imagine the color scheme you're going to get, unusual. Got a lot of work still to be done. I've got actually four more days of assembly and so on...

**Flag Night**

**narrator**

This is the 7th day of Muharram, the first night of processions. Each yard will parade their their flags and drums on the main road in St. James.

**Rasheeda** (on camera)

Red the color red of the flag would be for sickness, the green and the white flags is prosperity. That's what we know it, red green and white

**Shair Ali** (vo)

Flag night, the flags symbolize the peace treaty then, they were invited by the Yazid, so (on camera) they had flags, you know, going to meet the Yazid

**Raeaz**

The flags will be used for the prayers and such, and after being used they will be carried on the street.

*(sequence of flags and drums out on street  
back to Balma where tadjah work goes on)*

**Narrator**

Even while the flags are out on the street, some men remain behind working on the the *tadjah*. Noble's son, Jameel, has built the small *hosay* which is brought out on the eighth day, the second night of processions.

**Shair Ali**

The little *hosay* represent, you know, the death of Hassan, symbolize that, Hassan, that is Hussein's brother.

**Little Hosay Night**

*(sequence of drums and small hosay on street)*

## Big Hosay Night

**Noble**

We just wait until the rain stop

**Shair Ali**

The big *hosay* represents Hussein, the tomb of Hussein, the mausoleum. The moon symbolizes how they died, the green and the red moon, Hassan was poisoned the symbol is the green moon. HUSSEIN was killed by the sword, red, symbol. And there is also a traditional story, that when Hassan was poisoned, in prison, the moon turned green, and when HUSSEIN was martyred, the moon turned red.

**Noble**

Looks great man, good design man

**Imam prays in Arabic**

*(scene of the green moon at its chowk)*

**Narrator**

The moons, built in seclusion, are also ready to come out at this time.

*(sequence of tadjahs and drums on the street)*

**Hamdoo (vo)**

When the *tadjahs* are being brought out onto the street, in public view, and they are being drawn onto the street, onto the main streets in St. James. From among the four *tadjahs* in St. James, one is known as the *panchayatee tadjah*, or the *panchayatee hosay*. This is the village *hosay*, this belongs to the village, and this one must be in front, this one must be first. Then you find the Ghulam Hussein family, who will be right after the *panchayatee hosay*, on account of the amount of years that they have been building *tadjahs*. And then you'll find the Cocorite *hosay*, which comes third again through seniority. And then you'll find the Emamalis, the last one, because apparently we started after Cocorite.

When the moons meet each other, when the moons meet each other, they both will touch which we call the moons kissing each other, that is two brothers meeting each other and you know kissing each other at the time.

And when they meet, when the moons meet the *tadjahs*; they will have to touch the *tadjahs* whenever they meet the *tadjahs* for the first time. They have to touch the *tadjahs*.

**Muggy (on camera)**

Wonderful year!

### **Karbala Day**

*(sequence of tadjah and moons on street during day)*

Now comes the ritual climax, the symbolic burial of Hussein and his brother Hassan.

**Hamdoo** (vo)

On the tenth day, the moons are brought out again to go in front of the procession, where we go along a proscribed route that was granted to the Muslims in St. James, to go along that proscribed route.

**Narrator**

The route retraces footpaths from the days when St. James was a plantation.

This is the last time they will dance the moons and play the drum hands until the following year

*(prayer at Queen Regents College)*

**Hamdoo** (vo)

And there is a sacred piece of ground on the Queens Royal College playing field. There the moons will have to go and rest there from 3:30 in the afternoon of the tenth day of Muharram. The genasa prayer, our funeral prayer is then read. because at 3:30 here in Trinidad time coincides with the time that Iman Hussein was martyred on the battlefield in Karbala.

**Imam starts praying In Arabic**

**Imam** (vo)

Oh mighty Allah, please kindly accept these few verses of Koranic recitation, eh Allah. Eh Allah bless this platform, we thank you very sincerely all mighty Allah for this beautiful life that you have given us here, all mighty we stand firmly begging you eh Allah for this moment of time, yeah Allah accept this *ibadat*, accept this *dua* on behalf of Hazrati Imam.

*(montage reprises building tadjahs)*

Almighty Allah, this offering and this gathering this evening on this platform, on behalf of all those brothers who put themselves out eh Allah, for their hard work, effort, and sacrifice Almighty Allah, this offering has done in your name, .....

**Teejah Day**

*(people taking photos)*

*shots of all the tadjas)*

**Aloh** (vo)

It's a great achievement for me, I put God in it, I feel like I see God

*(sequence of taking tadjahs to sea and breaking them up)*

**Dua**

*(credit roll over hosay carried into the surf)*