

**THE SEASON OF GRIEF: A PHOTO ESSAY BY
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Muharram marks the start of the Islamic lunar calendar, which holds a historic importance for all the Muslims across the world especially Shia Muslims.

The Shia Muslims mourn in this month by holding processions, flag hoistings and at some places, self-flagellation, to commemorate the martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussain Ibn Ali in the Battle of Karbala.

The banner preparation is done before the 1st of Muharram in a shop at Khomeini Chowk, Bemina. The artists do it either for free or very less profit. The longest banner is almost 16m long, that is hoisted at the clocktower at midnight, that marks the start of Muharram.



On July 25, the 7th of Muharram, a large procession took place at Botaraj Colony, located on the slopes of Srinagar's Hari Parbat fort, near Kathi Darwaza. It is said to be the entrance to the Hari Parbat fort.

Despite the small population of Shia Muslims, the processions were joined by the people from different parts of the city and Valley as well. Different groups carry 'alam', a sacred flag with distinctive Arabic scriptures, that are considered holy by Shias. These are often carried to lead the processions with different colors, symbolising different events that happened in Karbala. The procession took place from the Botraj colony and culminated at the Imam Bargah of Hasanabad.





On July 26, the 8th of Muharram, the procession that once used to be the largest among all was allowed by the administration after over three decades.

The procession was last seen in 1989, and banned afterwards due to critical law-and-order situations that arose in it. Ever since, this day saw violent confrontations between the security personnel and shia mourners who often tried to break the restrictions that were imposed on this day.

The processions were allowed for two hours, between 6 - 8 am, keeping in view the working day and all possible arrangements were made to make it successful.

At the dawn, the black dressed shia mourners started gathering in Guru Bazar who proceeded through Lal Chowk and concluded their procession at Dalgate.







In the series of procession events being held at different places in the valley, Saida Kadal Srinagar holds a unique Muharram procession on the 9th of Muharram, every year, in boats from Tinda Mohalla to Hasanbad. This small shia population who live inside the Dal, have preserved their culture and traditions.

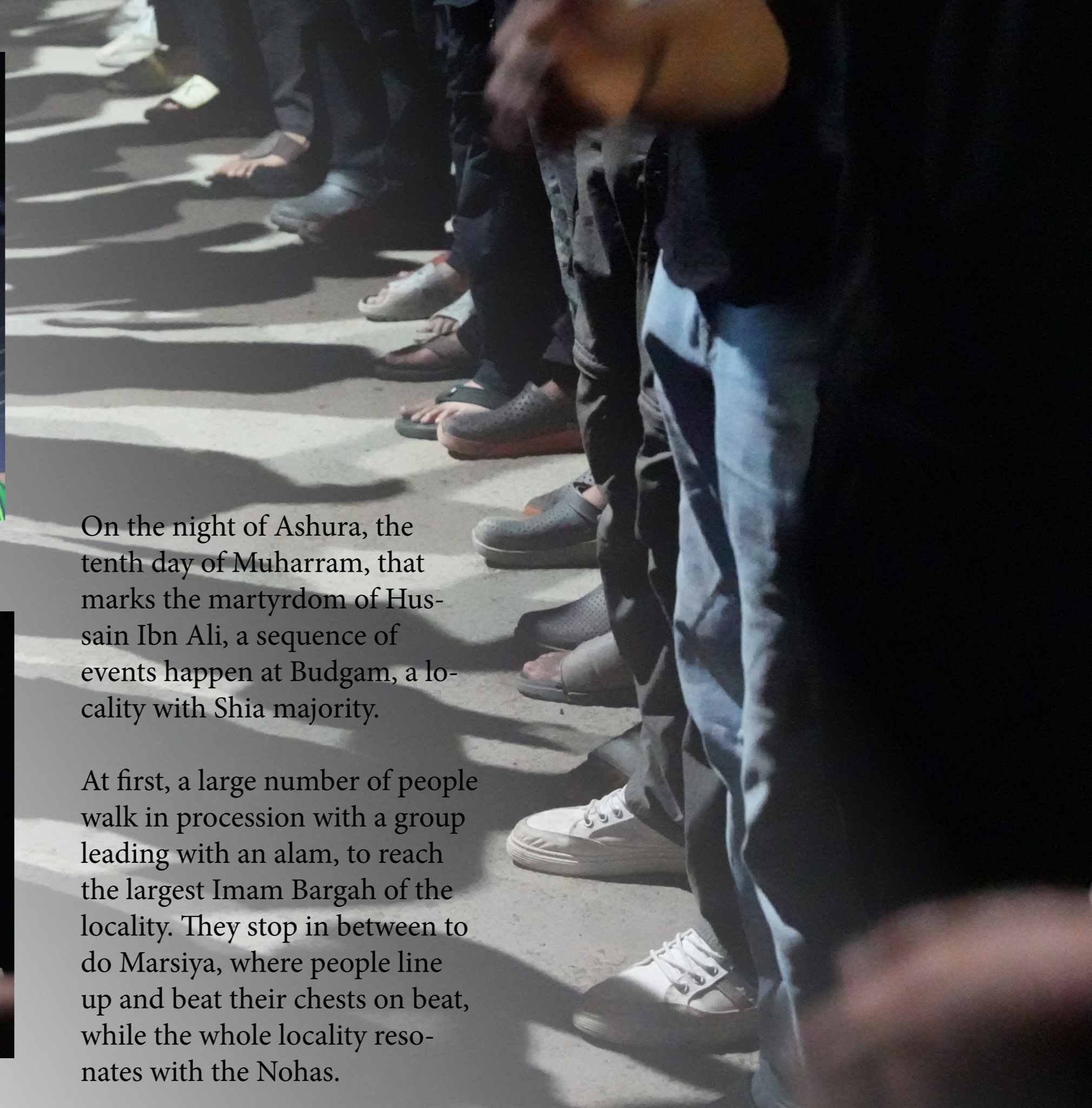


On July 27, the procession day, the tea is served throughout the day in almost every house in the locality. They serve wazwan at lunch for the people who have joined them from far places. At around 4 a.m., the people, most of them donned in black, including women and children, gather near the old architecture who perform Marsiya before leaving in the boats



The procession is led by a group of children who self-flagellate by whipping their head and back with chains and knives. The religious practice is done as an act that Shia's can lay their lives down for Imam Hussain. The practice, however, is banned in many countries including Iran.






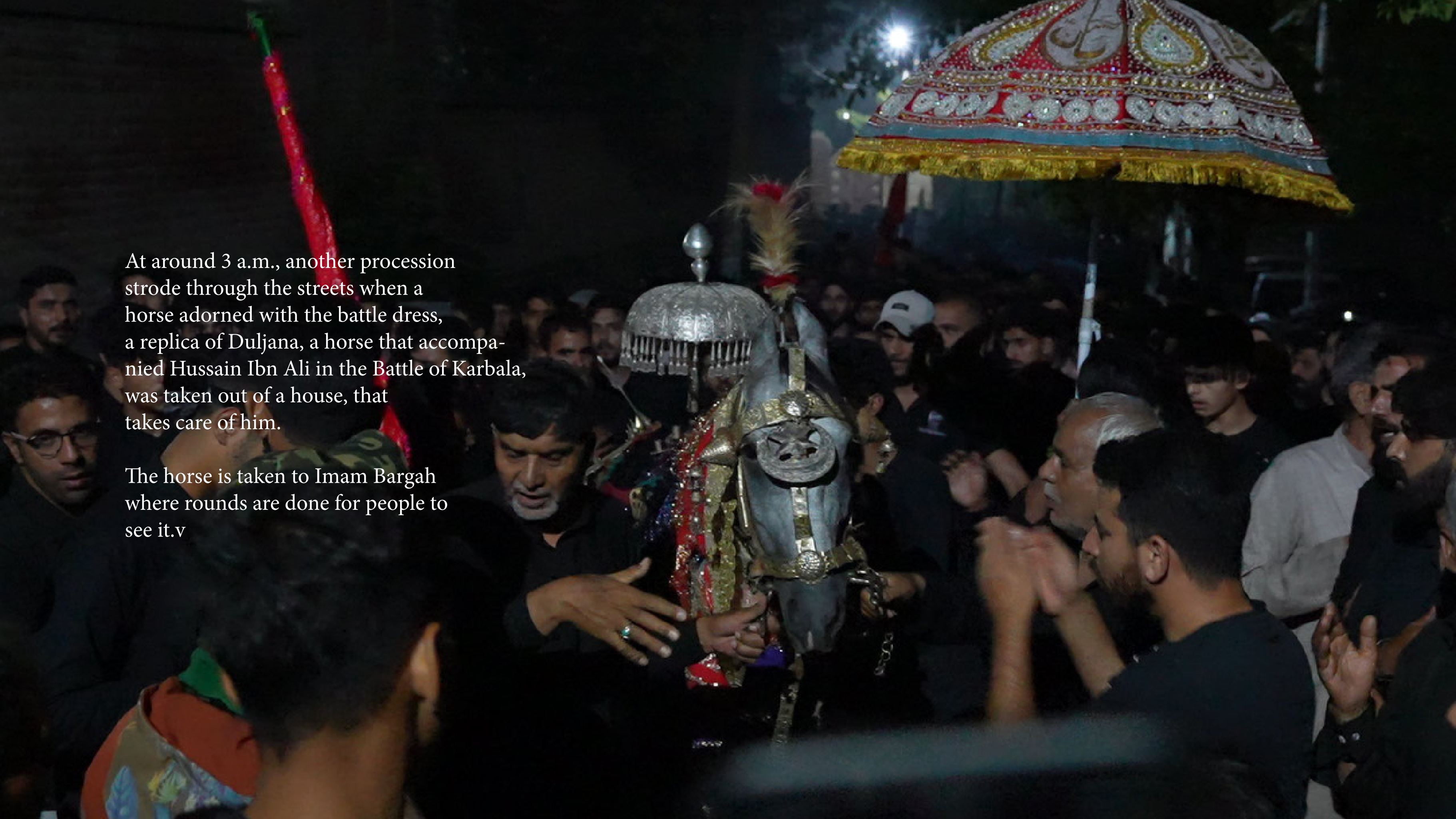
On the night of Ashura, the tenth day of Muharram, that marks the martyrdom of Hus-sain Ibn Ali, a sequence of events happen at Budgam, a locality with Shia majority.

At first, a large number of people walk in procession with a group leading with an alam, to reach the largest Imam Bargah of the locality. They stop in between to do Marsiya, where people line up and beat their chests on beat, while the whole locality resonates with the Nohas.



A photograph of a religious gathering. In the center, a man with a white beard and a white robe stands with his right hand raised, addressing a crowd of people. The crowd is mostly men, some wearing white caps, sitting on the floor. The background features a large, ornate archway illuminated with red light, set against a dark backdrop. The room is dimly lit, with a few ceiling lights visible.

After reaching Imam Bargah, that has a separate chamber for men in the center, and a sitting for women all around, another Marsiya is performed. This time a man, often called Zakir, speaks of Hussain Ibn Ali's character and the hardships that he and his men faced in the Battle of Karbala, while the other men sit around him in circle, who respond to his sayings, and sometimes beat their heads and chests to show how their grief. Then, another man stands up and says the same. This goes on for hours.

A night procession featuring a decorated horse replica (Duljana) with a silver dome and a crowd of people. The horse is adorned with intricate patterns and a large silver dome. A crowd of people, including men and women, surrounds the horse, some with their hands clasped in prayer. A large, ornate umbrella with a face and intricate patterns is visible in the upper right. A red flag is visible on the left side of the image.

At around 3 a.m., another procession strode through the streets when a horse adorned with the battle dress, a replica of Duljana, a horse that accompanied Hussain Ibn Ali in the Battle of Karbala, was taken out of a house, that takes care of him.

The horse is taken to Imam Bargah where rounds are done for people to see it.v



The most heartbreaking sequence is that of the time when a morning prayer is being called. As soon as the call for the prayer (Azan) starts, people sit wherever they are and start crying.

The wails of men, women, boys and girls resonate through the walls of Imam Bargah until the azan stops.

This marks the start of the day of Ashura, when Hussain Ibn Ali was martyred.