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MUSLIM APOCALYPTIC CONSCIOUSNESS: REPRESENTATION OF IMAM AL-MAHDI (A.S) IN LITERATURE

Abstract: *The concept of apocalypse is well established in all the major religions of the world, be they Semitic religions (which include, Judaism, Christianity and Islam) or Hinduism. The underlying idea behind the concept in all the religions remains the same, that is, the world will come to an end. The end itself, which has been called the Judgment Day, Day of Resurrection, or the Day of Retribution or Reckoning will be preceded by some signs. It has also been called the day of Apocalypse, the day when the whole world will be destroyed. One of the distinct forms of it is Muslim Apocalypse about which a lot has been written. However, the argument of the present research paper shall be to examine the concept of the Mahdi (a.s) from the Muslim point of view which includes both the Sunni Muslim and the Shi'te Muslim point of view. The premise of the argument is that Shi'te argument or concept of the Mahdi (a.s) is far more substantial having a solid theoretical foundation than the other perspectives about it. The reason for this is that belief in the Mahdi in Shi'te faith is of doctrinal importance whereas in Sunni faith it is not so. As far as literature is concerned, poets from both the above faiths have highlighted this belief in their poetry. The concept of the Mahdi (a.s) has manifested itself in literature across cultures and ages. There are so many Muslim poets who have highlighted this concept in their poetry and thus the research paper shall make an attempt to look at some of those poets and how they manifest this faith in their poetry.*

Key Words: *Apocalypse, Eschatology, Mahdi, The Revelation, Manvantara, Twelvers.*

Main Body. The word 'apocalypse' actually has a religious origin and is interpreted as to remove the cover from or to reveal. And it is in the last book of the Bible, *The Revelation*, that apocalypse, signifying the end of the world, finds its full expression. It is also known as *The Book of Revelation* or *Revelation to John* or *Apocalypse of John*. Apocalypse is a feature of all the three monotheistic religions, that is, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. *The Book of Daniel* describes the Hebrew Prophet's vision of the end in Judaism and in Islam, the resurrection, the Day of Judgement and salvation are apocalyptic features of orthodox belief as is evident in the Holy Quran. Even Hindusim, which is based on polytheism, is also apocalyptic in nature. The Hindu doctrine teaches that *Manvantara*, the human cycle, is divided into four periods. These periods correspond with the Golden, Silver, Bronze and Iron Ages of the ancient Western traditions. It is believed that we are now in the fourth stage, the *Kali-Yuga* or Dark Age.

David Cook, Professor of religious studies at Rice University, Houston, in his book *Contemporary Muslim Apocalyptic Literature* (2005) argues that, «Islam probably began as an apocalyptic movement, and it has continued to have a strong apocalyptic and messianic character throughout its history, a character that has manifested itself in literature as well as in periodic social explosions» [Cook 2008: 1]. He comments that, «Muslim apoclaypticism is not only an important area of study in its own right; it is also part of the rapidly changing field of Qur'anic exegesis, as well as of modern political and religious thought» [Cook 2008: 2]. However, the main aim of the present paper is to argue that the Muslim Apocalypse strongly believes in the appearance/reappearance of the Mahdi (a.s), as one of the important signs which will precede the Judgement Day. This belief is shared by both Shia's and Sunni's. In fact, belief in

Imamat Hazrat Ali (R.A) as the first Imam and the Mahdi (a.s) as the last Imam, is one among five foundational pillars of Shi'te Islam while as in Sunni Islam, it is just a belief and not foundational in nature. The paper further highlights the various manifestations of the said belief in literature and to vindicate this claim, the study shows that many poets across cultures like Arab, Persian and Urdu speaking world have poetically responded to the belief in the coming of the Mahdi (a.s).

The Mahdi (a.s) has been one of the important concerns that Persian poets in particular have written about for many centuries now. They have expressed their love, loyalty and imamate guardianship acceptance in their poetry. It is important to understand what is meant by Imamat in Shiasm. In Arabic it stands for leadership and is a seminal concept in what is called Twelver theology proclaiming that the twelve Imams are the spiritual and political successors of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). They further believe that the Imams are innocent and infallible humans whose rule is based on justice and true interpretation of Sharia and the Holy Quran. In this way the Imams will continue to guide the community. They are chosen by God through the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and they are completely free from common human failings and sins. They do not claim that the Imam receives the divine revelation but has a close relationship with God who always guides him and who in turn guides the community. Hence the Imamat or belief in Imam as the divine guide is of foundational importance in Shia Islam based on the premise that God will not leave humanity without access to divine guidance. In this way, Hazrat Ali (RAA) was the first Imam in the chronology of Imams and the rest are followed by the male descendants of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through his daughter Hazrat Fatima (RAA). Imam Ali (RAA) was followed by his son Hasan

Ibn Ali (a.s) who was in turn followed by Hussain Ibn Ali (a.s). The last Imam is Muhammad Al-Mahdi (a.s), who Shias believe is in a state of occultation.

Pertinently Twelvers who are the majority Shi'ites today believe that Muhammad al Mahdi (a.s) who is the son of the 11th Imam Al-Hasan al-Askari (a.s) is in occultation and hence the awaited Mahdi. It is also important to bear in mind that the belief in the Mahdi (a.s) as the twelfth Imam divided the Shi'ites into many sects. For example, Tayyibi Ismaili Shi'ites like the Dawoodi Bohrahs, believe that At-Tayyib Abul-Qasim is the current occulted Imam and Mahdi, who went into hiding in 1134 A.D, after his father Al-Amir's assassination in 1132 A.D. Coming back to the concept of occultation or concealment, the Twelvers or majority Shi'ites believe that this concealment has been chosen by Allah (SWT) and it will remain so, till He (SWT) deems it necessary. At a proper time, Allah (SWT) will command him to reappear and take the reins of the world in his hands to establish peace, justice and equality. They further argue that Muhammad ibn Al-Hasan al-Askari (al-Mahdi, a.s) had a first occultation when he was four or five years old only in 260 AH/874 AD, at the time of his father's death, and it lasted nearly 70 years. This is called minor Occultation. There is a mosque at Samarra in Iraq under which there is a cave in which the Mahdi (a.s) is believed to have gone into concealment. His father, Imam Askari (a.s), the eleventh Imam, would also retire into this cave for mediation from time to time and thus, his son also chooses the same cave. While he was in occultation, he would communicate with his faithful four advisors/representatives (*Nayibs*) and address/answer the issues of Muslim community.¹

¹ The four representatives are:

In 329 AH/941 AD, the fourth representative received a last autographed note from the hidden the Mahdi (a.s) saying, «In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful; Ali ibn Muhammad al-Simarri, may God increase, through you, the reward of your brothers; your death will take place in six days. Prepare yourself and name no one as your successor [as representative] after your death» (al-islam. org). In this way the period of major occultation starts and during this period there will be no more manifestation till the command of Allah (SWT). After six days, Abul Hasan, was on his deathbed and he was asked by people, «Who will be your successor?» to which he replied, «from this point on, the matter is in God's hands, He will arrange it Himself».²

Thus the Mahdi which means the guided one is an apocalyptic figure and a redeemer of Islam who will appear before the Judgment Day and rid the world of evil and injustice. Although The Holy Quran does not refer to him directly but some scholars say that there are hints about his coming which are debatable. However, in Ahadith, that is, the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad's teaching and sayings, reported authentically, there is a mention of the Imam (a.s) and these beliefs are shared by Sunnis and Shi'tes alike. ³

i) Abu Amr Uthman ibn Said al-Umari, (260 AH/874 AD to 267 AH/880 AD).

ii) Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Uthman al-Umari, (267 AH/880 AD until 305 AH/917 AD.)

iii) Abul-Qasim al-Husayn ibn Rawh al- Nawbakhti, (305 AH/917 AD to 326 AH/937 AD).

iv) Abul-Hasan Ali ibn Muhammad al-Simarri, (326 AH/937 AD to 329AH/941 AD).

² www.shia.org

³ i) The Prophet Muhammad(PBUH) says: The world will not come to pass until a man from among my family, whose name will be my name, rules over the Arabs. (Tirmidhi 9:74)

ii) The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) says: Allah will bring out from concealment al-Mahdi from my family and just before the day of Judgment; even if only one day

Besides the above traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), there are five signs which will occur before the reappearance of the Mahdi (a.s). The tradition (hadith) of sixth Imam Jafar al Sadiq(a.s) mentions these signs which are, «there are five signs for our Dhuhr (the reappearance of the twelfth Imam), the appearance of Sufyani and Yamani, the loud cry in the sky, the murder of a pure soul (Nafs-e-Zakiyyah), and the earth swallowing (a group of people) in the land of Bayda».⁴

As far as Sunni belief in the Mahdi (a.s) is concerned, they also believe that he will be an «epitome of what the Islamic ruler should be; he is the person who will set things right». (Cook 126). David Cook quotes Fahd Salim, who has dedicated

were to remain in the life of the world, and he will spread on this earth justice and equity and will eradicate tyranny and oppression. (Hanbal 1:99)

- iii) The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) further states: Even if only a day remains for Qiyamah to come, yet Allah will surely send a man from my family who will fill this world with such justice and fairness, just as it initially was filled with oppression. (Abu Dawood)
- iv) The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) states: The promised Mahdi (a.s) will be among my family. God will make the provisions for his emergence within a single night. (Majah 2:519)
- v) The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) states: The promised Mahdi (a.s) will be among my progeny, among the descendants of Fatima. (Dawud 2:207 & Majah 2:519)
- vi) The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) states: Al-Mahdi (a.s) is one of us, the members of the household (Ahlul-Bayt). (Majah 2:4085)
- vii) The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) states: After the death of a Ruler there will be some dispute between the people. At that time a citizen of Madina will flee (from Madina) and go to Makkah. While in Makkah, certain people will approach him between Hajrul Aswad and Maqaame Ibraheem, and forcefully pledge their allegiance to him. Thereafter a huge army will proceed from Syria to attack him but when they will be at Baida, which is between Makkah and Madina, they will be swallowed into the ground. (Abu Dawood)
- viii) The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is also reported to have said: A group of my Ummah will fight for the truth until near the day of judgment when Jesus, the son of Mary, will descend, and the leader of them will ask him to lead the prayer, but Jesus declines, saying: «No, Verily, among you Allah has made leaders for others and He has bestowed his bounty upon them». (Sahih Muslim)

⁴ www.wikipedia.org

this book *al-Sharr al-qadim* to the Mahdi (a.s) in which he makes the following observations about the Mahdi (a.s).⁵

The above paragraph hints at one of the important things about the Mahdi (a.s), that is, he will be a reluctant leader, that is, he himself will not know it as he will be chosen by God. In this connection, Tawila (1999) remarks about him.⁶

Stressing on the importance of this fact about the Imam, David Cook argues that «this reluctance on the part of the Mahdi (a.s) is presumably designed to preclude the ambitions of those who would otherwise struggle for the title» [Cook 2008: 16-127]. Zeki Saritoprak in his article highlights the Sunni Muslim beliefs about the Mahdi (a.s) argues:⁷

⁵ To my lord, the great leader whom God will cause to appear after clear signs in the heavens and on the earth, to put out through him the fires of blinding temptations. To that one whose personality I do not know, and (even) he does not know himself, and none of the people know him, but he is the pure and inspired one, who will appear pure and will not be mixed up with political calls or intellectual or sectarian creeds. To the expected divine deliverer, who will have the caliphate delivered to him while he is sitting in his home, who not call [people] to himself, and no one will call to him. To the helper of the faith and the unifier of the Muslims against the enemies of Islam at the end of time, to the arising of my noble lord I dedicate this humble book. (Qtd. in Cook 126-127)

⁶ The Mahdi (a.s) is a man from the family of the Prophet, and his name is Muhammad b. 'Abdullah of the progeny of Fatima, the daughter of the Messenger of God, though the descendants of the al-Hasan-he is the Alawite, the Fatimud, the Hasani, whom God will straighten (make right) during a single night, and he (God) will give him success....He will not know, and they will not know, that he is the expected Mahdi(a.s), and previously there will be no calls for him to be Mahdi (a.s), and he will not even know himself, but God will choose him, and the people will choose him suddenly. (Tawila 1999, 65)

⁷ Early Sunni sources record several traditions from the Prophet (peace be upon him) about the appearance and attributes of the Mahdi (a.s): he will be from the Prophet Muhammad's family, he will appear at the end of time, he will be an imam, he will be a caliph. Even though there is no reference to the Mahdi (a.s) in Abu Hurairah's famous hadith which mentions the ten signs of the Final Hour, in another tradition recorded by Ibn Majah the Mahdi (a.s) is mentioned with the title, «Caliph of God». Perhaps because some traditions associate the Mahdi with caliphs, the Mahdi (a.s) came to be seen as a great Muslim leader at the end of time. Therefore, the Mahdi was associated with such historical leaders of the early Islamic period as Abd Allah ibn al-Zubayr (d. 72/691) who fought against the oppression of Hajjaj (d.101/720). In the traditions about the trials that will be encountered at the end of time (the

It can be safely said that the belief in the coming of the Mahdi is shared by both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims alike but for Shi'ites it is one of the established doctrines. It is equally true that many Sunni Muslim scholars are in conformity with the Shi'ite beliefs about the Mahdi (a.s). Ibn Arabi (26 July 1165 – 16 November 1240), the famous Arab Andalusian Muslim scholar, mystic, poet, and philosopher is one of the Sunni Sufis who also confirms to Shi'ite version of the Mahdi. Commenting on Ibn Arabi's belief about the Mahdi, Zeki Saritoprak remarks.⁸

However, on the other hand, Henry Corbin, a philosopher, theologian, Iranologist and Professor of Islamic Studies in

malahim traditions), the Mahdi (a.s) is described as the political leader of the entire world. Among Muslims, however, the Mahdi (a.s) is generally conceived as a person who will govern an Islamic state. Based on this notion, the Mahdi (a.s) became the focus of attention as a messianic political figure. (634)

⁸ Like some earlier Sufis, Ibn al-Arabi accepted the concept of the Mahdi (a.s). However, his opinion about the Mahdi (a.s) is completely different from the classical-traditional belief. According to Ibn-al-Arabi, the Mahdi (a.s) is a very powerful spiritual person. The mystery of the Mahdi's power lies in his faith and sincerity. The Mahdi (a.s), as a follower of the Prophet (peace be upon him) will not be defeated, for the prophets have never been defeated. Ibn al-Arabi's thought that there could not be any weakness in the hearts of the Mahdi's followers. Since the Mahdi (a.s) would know this, he would be the most sincere person among the people of his time. He would use the most holy and beautiful names of God in his prayers and with the names of God, he and his followers would be able to achieve many things....Ibn al-Arabi described the would-be Mahdi (a.s) as a descendant of Hasan, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and as the «seal of the saints», just as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was the «seal of the prophets». The coming of the Mahdi (a.s), in Ibn al-Arabi's opinion, would be one of the signs preceding Doomsday. Also, certain historical events would occur during the time of the Mahdi (a.s), including the conquest of Rome and Constantinople and the biggest ever war....He represents and brings the mercy of God to humankind just as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did....Thus Ibn al-Arabi's explanation of the coming of the Mahdi (a.s) differs from the general Sunni view. Most Muslims believe that the Mahdi (a.s) will establish justice by means of his physical prowess and military strength, whereas Ibn al-Arabi believes that the power of the Mahdi lies in a strong faith in God and honesty. In his opinion, the Mahdi (a.s) would not be a political ruler, although the majority of Muslims perceive him to be so. (659-661)

Paris, argues.⁹ The premise of Henry Corbin's argument is that it is only the Twelver Shi'as who believe that the link still exists through the Mahdi (a.s) and will thus continue to exist forever.

The prominent Shi'ite spiritual leader Sadeq al-Sadr also known as Muhammad Sadiq as-Sadr (1943-99) and an Iraqi Twelver Shia cleric of the rank of Grand Ayatollah, wrote an essay in 1977 based on the subject of revisiting the traditional Shi'ite understanding of the Mahdi (a.s). The essay highlights the miracle of Mahdi's (a.s) longevity, mystery of the occultation and above all the role of Mahdi (a.s) in times to come. Ayatollah Sadr argues that, «Mahdi (a.s) is man of flesh and bone, who lives among us, who sees us, who sees our hopes and our suffering, who shares our sorrows and joys, who grieves to witness executions, poverty and oppression, while impatiently waiting for the right moment to come to the aid of all victims of oppression, plunder and poverty and to overcome oppressors» [Sadr 2013: 142]. He bases his argument the longevity of Mahdi (a.s) on the premise that, «the sphere of logical possibility is greater than the scientific possibility, which in turn is greater than that of practical possibility» [Ibid.]. He deduces that, «the prolongation of human longevity by several centuries is logically and scientifically possible, and even though it does not yet appear to a practical possibility, science is moving in the direction of its realization over the long term» [Ibid.]. He further argues ¹⁰.

⁹ To my mind the Shi'ite is the only sect which has preserved and perpetuated the link of Divine guidance between man and God through its belief in the Imamate. According to the Jews the Prophethood, a real link between man and God, came to an end with Moses. They do not believe in the Prophethood of Jesus and Muhammad. The Christians too, do not go beyond Jesus. The Sun'ite sect has also stopped at the Prophet Muhammad and believes that the man and God has been severed with the end of the Prophethood. (As-Sadr 3)

¹⁰ The only two men to have been assigned the task of emptying humanity of its corruptions and reconstructing the world were endowed with longevity on a scale incommensurate with that of nature. The first was Noah who carried out this task in

With regard to the disappearance of twelfth Imam, Jean Pierre Filiu in his book *Apocalypse in Islam* (2008) argues that, «he (Sadeq al-Sadr) stresses the importance of the transition between the Lesser Occultation, entered into when the Imam was a child and lasting into old age, and the Greater Occultation, which began when he had already been alive for more than seventy years. Though he is still present in the world, the Mahdi (a.s) has become both invisible and inaccessible» [Filiu 2010: 143]. Filiu goes on to say that, «Sadr does not venture an opinion as to the date of his reappearance, but he notes that the present moment is propitious for two reasons: first, because of the “feeling of exhaustion that has come into being and is now taking root in mankind”; and second, because of the “objective conditions of modern material life, which may be more favourable to the realization of a message on a planetary scale now than during the Lesser Occultation, owing to the decrease in distances between people and the increase in the possibility of interaction between them» [Ibid.].

Aminullah Habibi in his thesis puts forward Abdul Karim Soroush's point of view about the Mahdi and argues:¹¹

the past: the Quran says that he lived for nine hundred and fifty years among his people and that, thanks to the Flood, he was able to reconstruct the world. The second is the Mahdi, who has until now lived more than a thousand years among his people and who will carry out the task of reconstructing the world in the future. (Al-Sadr and Al-Fadhi 149)

¹¹ The concept of waiting for the twelfth Imam to re-emerge and bring justice to the world and Shia communities had crippled Shia communities around the world. It was the political culture among the Shia communities that they were not supposed to attempt politically to bring justice, since they were not in a position to bring justice to their communities and partly because they had been minorities everywhere and preferred quietism for survival. In the case of Iran, the representation of the hidden Imam by the Ulama had been transferred to the kings under the notion of 'king, the shadow of God on earth'. Other rulers could not bring justice either and the injustices that have existed during the occultation of the twelfth Imam, not only in the Islamic world but also in the world at large, are due to the fact that the rulers are not deemed to be innocent....The theoretical basis of revolution and reform in Iran was mainly introduced by Islamic intellectuals led to Ali Shariati, who interpreted

Abdolkarim Soroush, an Iranian Islamic thinker and reformer has also talked about the concept of the saviour (*mahdaviyat*) and holds that the concept of the Mahdi has been a perennial feature in Iran.¹² Javed Ahmed Ghamidi (1951), a Pakistani Muslim theologian, Quran scholar, Islamic modernist, exegete and educationist argues against the coming of the Mahdi in his book *Mizan*.¹³

the concept of waiting for the twelfth Imam to introduce a revolutionary ideology against the injustices rather than waiting for his emergence. In his view, waiting was «the religion of protest» and «a philosophy of history where the unjust and discriminatory systems and class divisions will be destroyed». He thought that whenever the people revolt against injustices and fight for justice, then the Imam would emerge and not vice versa. In other words, the Imam is waiting for us rather than that we should wait for him. Shariati dismissed the dominant perception that Shia were not supposed to struggle for power and maintained that in fact it was their duty to struggle for justice. This was the attractive and dominant discourse among the religious intelligentsia and clerics like Ayatollah Khomeini and it was this discourse that changed the course of history for Shia forever and provided the theoretical basis of the Islamic revolution. (2011, 51-52)

¹² The pious people of our country see religious leaders as the deputies of the 12th Imam and esteem them for this reason. The people pay a part of their assets and revenues to them each year, and believe that these funds belong to the Hidden Imam by right. They believe that a fifth of their assets belongs to a person who is not observable in society today - but who is really present in the world – and that his deputies take these funds from the people in his name and by his command and spend them on causes that have his approval. [The Mahdi (saviour) or the Hidden Imam is the 12th Shia Imam, who is believed to be in occultation and is to return one day to establish the reign of justice on earth.]....The Shia community has lived with and been enlivened by this belief for centuries, and the belief continues to be held firmly today. The rulers of the Islamic state, for their part, believe this of themselves; they believe that they are sitting in the 12th Imam's place, that they are ruling in his name and that they command the people as his deputies. They base their entire legitimacy on the legitimacy of the Hidden Imam. They believe that, just as Shi' is submitted to the Imams when they were present, so too must they submit to their deputies now and consider their words to be the words of the Hidden Imam. And, in order to prove their case, they present arguments based on Islamic jurisprudence [henceforth *fiqh*] and religious narratives. www.dr.soroush.com.

¹³ Besides these, the coming of the Mahdi (a.s) and that of Jesus from the heavens are also regarded as signs of the Day of Judgment. I have not mentioned them. The reason is that the narratives of the coming of the Mahdi do not conform to the standards of hadith criticism set forth by the muhaddithun (Hadith studies). Some of them are weak and some fabricated; no doubt, some narratives, which are acceptable with regard to their chain of narration, inform us of the coming of a generous caliph;

Keeping in view all the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) beliefs and theories about the Mahdi (a.s) and his reappearance/appearance shared both by Shias and Sunnis, it is but natural that many poets are influenced by this belief so much that it is represented by them in their poetic works too. This paper makes an attempt to highlight that there are many Persian, Arab and Indian poets from different ages who have envisioned the reappearance/appearance of Imam Mahdi (a.s) in their poetry. The select poets belong to both Sunni and Shi'ite faiths and all of them believe in the coming of the Mahdi (a.s). They address him as Imam-e-Zaman (the Master of the Age), Muhammad al-Muntazir (The Expected Imam) and Imam-e-Gayab (The Imam in Occultation) etc. The poets like Nosrat Alavi Razi, Hamzeh Kouchak, Shahab Semnani, Naser Bokhari, Shah Ne'ematullah Vali, Nezami, Vahshi, Bafghi and Baba Faghan Shirazi.

Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209), a 12th-century Persian Sunni Muslim poet highlights his belief in the Mahdi (a.s) in the following way:

Of the responsibility that his promise has in its head, by Mahdi, one can get away from his kindergarten.

Like Mahdi who unified with the God in the sunset, his desirousness get well passed the limits of the east [Khanlari 2017: 807].

Baba Faghan Shirazi says:

Lo! Mahdi, How long shall your sun stay in the well,
burn yourself and have a look at the letter and the notebook [Ibid.].

(Muslim, No: 7318) however, if they are deeply deliberated upon, it becomes evident that the caliph they refer to is Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz who was the last caliph from a Sunni standpoint. This prediction of the Prophet has thus materialized in his personality, word for word. One need not wait for any other Mahdi (a.s) now. en.wikipedia.org.

Your justice was expanded to the extent on the vault of the universe,

That the pigeon enjoys the shadow of the falcon's wing
[Ibid.].

Similarly Hamzeh Kouchak writes:

Although Saheb Zaman took residence in the territory of occultation

Know Asgari as an Imam who is having a good time and charming in the Paradise [Ibid.].

Likewise Shah Ne'ematullah Vali, a 14th and 15th century Persian Sufi Master and poet, known as the founder of Sufi order, dedicates an ode to the Mahdi (a.s) in which he writes:

Imam Hadi, from whose generation Mahdi is begotten
Truly deserves it if he is called the light of the guidance by the fellows of truth [Ibid.].

Similarly there are Arab poets too who have highlighted their faith in the coming of Mahdi in their poetry. The poets are as under:

Al-Kumayt ibn Zayd al-Asadi, (679/680 – 743 AD) an Arab poet from Kufa who write poems in praise of the Umayyads, as well as Ahlul Bayt, comments:

When the truth shall be established among you.

When your second Mahdi will rise up
[www.shiavault.com].

Dibil bin Ali al-Khuza I, (765, 66-860, 61), a famous Shia poet of the 7th and 8th century from Iraq, puts his views/beliefs about the Mahdi (a.s) as:

Then if it had not been what I desire for today or tomorrow.

Any heart would have broken in the grief of your signs.
Advent of an Imam (a.s.) whose advent is imminent.

He will move with the name of God and with bounties
[Ibid.].

Al-Sayyid Ismail bin Muhammad bin Yazid bin Rabia al Himyari, (740-813) an Ismaili Imam from Medina, says:

And in the same way we have narrated from the successors of Muhammad (S)

And none of us that has said it has any falsehood in it
[Ibid.].

Ibn Abil Hadid comments:

And certainly I know that it is necessary that your Mahdi will come.

And I am awaiting for that day [Ibid.].

Amir Basri remarks:

Imam of guidance! How long will you be away from the sight?

To whom do we complain about your return, O our father? [Ibid.].

Abul Maali Sadruddin writes:

He will be established on the earth by the command of Allah (SWT) and reappear on the earth

In spite of the mischiefs of the evil people [Ibid.].

Sayyid Haider Hilli says:

Is there anyone to take my message to the master of affair?

That contains the true feelings (sadness) and all of them are sparks of fire (embers) [www.shiavault.com].

Besides the Arab and Persian speaking world, there are poets from Asia also, particularly India and Pakistan, who have highlighted their beliefs about the Mahdi (a.s) in their poet. Allama Iqbal is one of them. Allama Iqbal, who is also known

as the poet of the East, has also referred to the Mahdi (a.s) in his poetry. Upon analysing his works, it seems that Iqbal takes two positions about the Mahdi (a.s); one in his prose and the other in his poetry. In his prose, he comments.¹⁴

However, as far as his poetry is concerned, Iqbal has highlighted the concept of Mahdi in his poems and held the view that this concept is of paramount importance for the Muslim world in particular. He has primarily written three poems on the subject of Mahdi (a.s). Besides this, he has also used other words which, it could be argued, refer to Mahdi too. In all these poems he manifests his belief in the Mahdi but the poems do not confirm to the Shi'ite version of the Mahdi (a.s). All across his poetry, Iqbal has used words like Mard-e-Musalman, Banday-e-Mumin, Mard-e-Mumin, Mard-e-Khuda, Mard-e-Barhaq, Mard-e-Darvesh, Mard-e-Qalandar, Banday-e-Moullasifat, Mard-e-sipahi, Mard-e-Maidan, Meer-i-lashkar, Meer-i-Karvan, Salar-i-Karvan, Mard-e-hur, Shah-Sawaar, Imam-e-waqt etc. In his poem title «The Guide» (Mahdi), Iqbal highlights the belief in the coming of Mahdi (a.s) as:

قوموں کی حیات ان کے تخیل پہ ہے موقوف
یہ زوق سکھانا ہے ادب مرغ چمن کو
مجزوب فرنگی نے بانداز فرنگی
مہدی کے تخیل سے کیا زندہ وطن کو
اے وہ کہ مہدی کے تخیل سے ہے بیزار
نو مید نہ کر آہویے مشکین سے ختن کو
بو زندہ کفن پوش تو میت اسے سمجھیں
یا چاک کریں مرد ک نادان کے کفن کو

A nation's life gets much prolonged, By lofty aims and ideals high:

¹⁴ In my opinion, traditions pertaining to the advent of Mahdi (a.s), Second Coming of Messiah, and the appearance of Mujaddids, owe their origin to the Iranian and non-Arab way of thinking. They have nothing to do with the Arab concepts or the true spirit of the Holy Qur'an. (Iqbal Namah, vol. 2, p. 230-231, Letter addressed to Chaudhry Muhammad Ahsan)

If residents here some zeal possess, They can explore the heights of sky.

The Frankish Sage (Nietzsche) by guile (cunning) and skill, New lease of life to nation gave:

The path for birth of Superman, By valor great he strove to pave.

To Guide's concept you seem averse (reluctant), Too fed up with this thought appear:

This view for Muslims has the weight, That for Cathay has musk of deer.

If man alive puts on the shroud (burial cloth), Must we take that foolish for dead:

Or tear to pieces small and shreds, His shroud and cast away the threads? [ww.blogspot.com]

In this poem, Iqbal does emphasize the coming of Mahdi (a.s) and that we should not feel sick of waiting for him. We should understand it that the same concept was appropriated by the German Philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche which eventually paved a way for their material progress and development. Nietzsche introduced the concept of 'Superman' (it is possible that he had read about the Mahdi (a.s) from different sources) to the western world and prepared them for the same. An overman is a main character from his famous work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1881) who is ready to risk everything for the sake of enhancement of humanity. Iqbal admits that the concept of Mahdi (a.s), among Muslims has led to their intellectual decline as they (Muslims) have started relying on Mahdi (a.s) only and themselves become complacent. Therefore, in the above poem, Iqbal says that he is not hopeless about the coming of Mahdi (a.s) but Muslims should not sit idle till then. They should go on striving endlessly in the path of knowledge and create a platform for him to come. In Iqbal's view, this is a

characteristic feature of a living man. And if there is someone wearing the shroud of despondency and sadness due to the sorry state of affairs in the Muslim world, and thus make it an excuse for his inactivity, his shroud should be thrown away. Professor Yousuf Salim Chisti, while interpreting the above poem, argues that «Iqbal wants to tell Muslims that you are hopeful of the manifestation of Mahdi but hopeless of his Imagination. It is very strange. You say that the Mahdi (a.s) will come and Muslims will once again ascendancy. I do not deny it. But the question is why you are sitting idle waiting for him. Until he appears we should go on with our struggles and remain busy with them».

The other poem in which Iqbal has again referred to the Mahdi (a.s), is the poem «Mahdi Barhaq» (The True Guide) from *Zarb-e-Kaleem*. The verse is as follows:

دنیا کو ہے اس مہدی برحق کی ضرورت
ہو جس کی نگہ زلزلہ عالم افکار

It is time that the expected Guide may soon appear on worldly stage;

His piercing glance in realm of thought would cause a violent storm to rage [Ibid.].

Likewise, Iqbal proclaims his faith in the coming of the Mahdi (a.s) in the most unequivocal terms in the poem «Khizire Waqt» (The Guide of the Time) from *Zabur-e-Ajam*, in the following verse:

خضر وقت از خلوتے دشتے حجاز آید برو
کارواں زین وادی دور و دراز آید برو
من بسیمائے غلامان فر سلطان دیدہ ام
شعلہ محمود از خاک ایاز آید برو
عمر ہادر کعبہ و بتخانہ می نالد حیات
تاز بزم عشق یک دانائے راز آید برو

Out of Hijaz and the lonely plain, The Guide of the Time has come

Back from the far, far vale again, The Caravan hastens home.

Lo, on the brow of the slaves I see, The Sultan's splendour bright,

The dust of Ayaz shines radiantly with Mahmud's torch alight.

In Kabah and Temple long, long years the deep lament arose,

Till from Love's banquet now appears One Man who the Secret knows [Ibid.].

Of all the poems about the Mahdi (a.s), this poem is highly prophetic and apocalyptic in nature. The first couplet clearly highlights that the appearance/reappearance of the Guide of the Time is just at hand and the caravan is about to start and emerge from this valley. The second couplet breaks the news of the dawn which is also at hand. As a result of it, the slaves will turn into magnificent masters. The third couplet stresses the point that Seers come to this world after centuries of wait and he is one of those Seers.

Besides Iqbal, there are other poets who have also written about the Mahdi (a.s) and most of them are from the Sindh region of Pakistan. Muhammad Muhsin (1859-1882) is one such poet who wrote about the Mahdi (a.s). He is popularly known as *Bekas*, the pen name that he chose for himself. He wrote five Persian books and one Diwan. One of his books *Tiraz-i-Danish* (Royal robe of knowledge), a *mathnavi* which commemorates the birth of the Mahdi (a.s) [Sadarangani 1986: 92].

Similarly, Mian Sarfaraz Kalhoro, the famous king of Sindh from 1701 to 1783, who was also given the title Khudayar Khab by the then Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II, also wrote about the Mahdi (a.s) as he was a Persian poet too. He wrote *marsiya*, *Rubais*, *ghazals*, *munajat* and *madah* in Persian language.

It is said that when he was in a prison after his dethronement, he wrote *Rubais* (quatrains) on the Mahdi (a.s). In one of his *Rubais*, he invokes the Mahdi (a.s) and seeks him help to end the cruelty and injustice which he witnessed all around and himself became a victim of.

My lord, my beloved, My Mahdi, my majesty,
How long I bear this injustice, violence and cruelty
From the injustice, the cruelty and violence of Kings and
their governors

I am standing at your door seeking your help against them [Kalhoro 2015: 167].

Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro, in his paper titled, «Depiction of the Mahdi (a.s) in Sindhi poetry of Sindh», argues that Sindhi poets composed poetry on the Mahdi (a.s) by focusing on four themes 1) Birth 2) Zahoor (appearance), 3) help/assistance 4) *Salam* (Salutation). (Zulfiqar 167). The other Sindhi poet who wrote on the Mahdi (a.s) is Syed Sabit Ali Shah who made experiments with two poetic genres in Sindhi, which are *manqabat* and *salam*. He used *manqabat* to shower praises on the Mahdi (a.s) and *salam* to send salutations to him. He was followed by other poets who also addressed their poems to the Mahdi (a.s) like Mirza Murad Ali Beigh. Zulfiqar Ali Kalhoro comments: ¹⁵

¹⁵ In the 19th century during the Talpur rule, there was a tremendous poetry composed on the Mahdi. The Talpurs were Shia by faith; therefore, they encouraged the poets to compose poetry on the Mahdi. One finds the names of several important poets who commemorated the birth of the Mahdi in their poetry. A Talpur period poet Mira Hamid Ali Beg is overjoyed on the birth of the beloved the Mahdi... Even in the British period (1843-1947), one finds several poets composing poetry on the Mahdi. One of very famous poets of this period was Mir Abdul Hussain Sangi (1852-1924). He composed poems on the birth, and zahoor (appearance), and made Salam (salutations) to the Mahdi in his poetry... After the fall of Talpur dynasty at the hands of the British, the poets continued to compose poetry on the Mahdi. In this period, there were also many Sindhi poets who wrote poetry on the Mahdi. (Zulfiqar 167-68)

According to Zulfiqar, there are other poets also who have written about the Mahdi (a.s) as he states: ¹⁶

To conclude it is also important to understand that the concept of Mahdi (a.s) finds a mention in many Persian, Arabic and poets of other languages but very little of their poetry has been translated into English, therefore, the present study does not claim that the above mentioned poets are the only ones who have mentioned the Mahdi (a.s) in their poetry. The other important dimension about the concept is that in Muslim apocalyptic literature, the concept is so dominant that it has also led to false Mahdi claims across the world and this process of laying a claim on being a Mahdi (a.s) figure started in the eight century A.D. The false claimants are Ṣāliḥ ibn Tarif (8th Century), Abdallah ibn Mu'awiya (8th Century), Abdullah al-Mahdi Billah (10th Century), Ibn Tumart (12th Century), Syed Muhammad Jaunpuri (15th Century), Shah Ismail Safavid (16th Century), Ahmed ibn Abi Mahalli (17th Century), Agha Muhammad Reza (18th Century), Alī Muḥammad Shirazi (Bab) (19th Century), Muḥammad Aḥmad (19th Century), Mirza Ghulam Aḥmad (19th Century), Wallace Fard Muhammad (19th Century) Muḥammad bin abd Allah al-Qahtani (20th Century), Riaz Aḥmed Gohar Shahi (20th Century), Ariffin Moḥamed (20th Century) and Dia Abdul Zahra Kadim (21st Century). One among them, Muhammad bin abd Allah al-Qahtani was the one responsible for the Grand Mosque Seizure (20 November – 4 December 1979). His claim of being Mahdi was made by his brother in law, Juhayman al-Otaibi, who mobilised more than

¹⁶ Many other Sindhi poets of British period who compose poetry on the Mahdi(a.s) were Mirza Imam Ali Beg (1881-1955), Mirza Husain Ali Beg (1890-1915), Mirza Ali Muhammad Beg, Mirza Gul Hasan Beg, Makhdoom Pir Ghulam Rasool (1882-1941), Mirza Maddad Ali Beg(1894-1930), Bedil Rohriwaro (1814-1872) Abbas Ali Beg, Mirza Ali Nawz Beg (1876-1970), Mirza Dost Muhammad Beg (1862-1920), Mirza Hussain Quli Beg (1865-1910), Mirza Murad Ali Beg (1862-1916), Mirza Nadir Ali Beg Nadir (1891-1940). (Zulfiqar 168).

200 militants to seize the Grand Mosque. The uprising came to an end with their defeat after two weeks in which at least 300 people were killed (Wikipedia.org).

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