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Most Gracious, Most Merciful*

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Tolerance and Modern Art: Comparative Definition and Critical Analysis

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Abstract

The discussion about tolerance has long been analyzed by various thinkers. Some of these ideas were supported by their societies, while others were dismissed. In this article, the claim that art should be tolerated even if offensive to others or their religious beliefs is discussed in depth. The definition of tolerance is introduced and compared with various world views on, while its historical roots in Western renaissance and the various types of tolerance are considered. The Islamic viewpoint is addressed, while the finally adopted definition is presented leading to clarification of the reason as to why Muslim masses as well as elites have rejected offensive kinds of art.

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Introduction

Many Muslims have been shocked to watch how some disrespectful atheists or non-Muslim individuals have created images in caricature of the holy Prophet (sawas). Those occurrences, in a number of European countries, involving the spread of detrimental actions arising from deep-rooted hostility emanating from immoderate, imprudent and unfair instigators, have resulted in injurious activity aimed at damaging the reputation of the noble religion of Islam, notoriously attempting to humiliate the holy Qur'an and the noble Prophet (sawas), through various different means, and has kept many devout Muslims in a state of mortification whilst being at the forefront of intellectual confrontation with malevolent elements. Indeed these elements have vowed to challenge illustrious Islam; during the course of these slanderous attacks, the perpetrators have descended to a level betraying a lack of honour for any value of ethics and science.

Art as a trick for manipulation

The Qur'an states: "Warn people of the day when punishment will overtake them, whereat the wrongdoers will say, Lord! Respite us for a brief period so that we may respond to Your call, and follow the apostle. [They will be told,] 'Did you not use to swear earlier that there would be no reserve for you, while you dwelt in the dwellings of those who had wronged themselves, and it had been made clear to you how we had dealt with them, and we had [also] cited examples for you?' (The holy Qur'an, Surah Ibrahim verses 44 and 45).

There are many who claim that the criticism by Muslims of those artists' works is baseless, as there is no ground to discuss or criticize someone if they are delivering a work of art. They state that one may criticize utterances if they are

against others' beliefs or defamatory to some groups' ideology, but as long as a work of art is in question it should be respected.

Even if the above-mentioned so-called artistic caricatures were offensive, there must be freedom of expression, it is claimed, and it is almost sacred to let art flourish, the conclusion being that it is unacceptable to negate either an artist, or any author presenting their work. Art is a professional, inventive and imaginative manifestation; therefore those acts must not only be tolerated, but treated with the utmost respect.

In this article an attempt is made to discuss these sensitive issues and answers will be given to the following questions:

What, literally, is tolerance, and what are the crucial factors in shaping the current understanding of it?

How should it be defined according to western and Islamic world views?

Are those two dissimilar world views identical in their approach as to the adoption or dismissal of tolerance being a consistently absolute virtue?

The primary reaction of the Muslim masses

Millions of Muslims have considered these caricatures - amongst other so-called artistic works - offensive. Their logic concluded that as these works were not reflecting a perfect image of their honoured Prophet (sawas), their creators should be classified as heretics and their works should be rejected and banned by law. The first reaction to the novel "The Satanic Verses" by Salman Rushdie was rather violent, but the first expressed act in a form of a blunt and legal verdict was through a 'fatwa' from Tehran issued by the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Ruhullah Khumaini (ra). Many westerners were extremely shocked by the direct and unpleasant proclamation of this 'fatwa', but he maintained his firm position until he passed away in early 1989. His successor did not dare to change the 'fatwa',

while the late Ayatullah M. Fadhil Lankarani (ra) gave it further juristic intensification stating that lifting the fatwa would be prohibited.

During the early nineties, the French author Roger Garaudy was accused of historical falsification, due to one of his writings that was considered offensive to the Zionist version of the 'Holocaust'; many Muslims were extremely shocked about these Western double standards, as to why freedom of expression should not be allowed regarding this French thinker's writing, while the novel of a heretic British author was massively defended as being an act of freedom of expression! If historical falsification should apply when judging the French writer, why should the same logic not condemn the author of 'The Satanic Verses' or at least revoke a reprimand for this acrimonious act?

Many may not know that the holy Prophet (sawas) had reached the peak of perfection creating an ethical example on which point Almighty Allah addressed him as follows: "And indeed you possess a great character". (Surah al-Qalam, verse 4).

And he was not sent except: " as a mercy to all nations". (Surah al-Anbiya, verse 107).

It would seem that a large proportion of European society totally unaware of these important realities and, if this is the case, then how is it possible for him (sawas) to be an inspiration for human thought and a provider of contemplation for a tranquil mind? Certainly, this kind of historical falsification only prevents the truth reaching those minds, and creates huge hurdles in their paths towards perfection.

One sees that these so-called artistic works have manifested him in a totally different light! This is even though nobody dares to accuse them of historical falsification as others have been accused; for instance, some French thinkers have been both accused and punished for raising doubts about the Holocaust.

Different ideas on tolerance

We see tolerance as a virtue in Islam but it has to be within the framework of an Islamic World view; therefore the meaning of tolerance could be different from a western point of view.

This paper shows how ideas on tolerance vary according to the ideological, religious and spiritual beliefs of the Muslim standpoint with those of the west. We will try to examine the ideas of both World views in detail; however we should first address the linguistic meaning of the word.

Tolerance: linguistic definition

The word 'tolerance' comes from the sense of endurance and fortitude. Of authorities, it means being permissive and of individuals it means freedom from stubbornness and prejudice towards those who differ¹.

According to the Cambridge University Press Dictionary: (formal toleration); is the willingness to accept behaviour and beliefs which are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them.¹

The Cambridge University Press Dictionary further defines the word as: the ability to bear something unpleasant or annoying, or to continue existing despite disadvantageous conditions.²

Within Islamic ethics, four terms are used: tolerance, leniency, negligence (or more accurately, ignorance) and affection. It seems that contemporary writers use these terms in reaction to agitating propaganda without realising the problematic nature of this multiple usage of four very different words. The first word is usually used within the western milieu, while Muslim scholars are yet to provide us with a fundamental definition. The third word has negative connotations, while the fourth is used by Muslims when

1. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=83592&dict=CALD>

2. <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=83596&dict=CALD>

referring to the desired virtues of an ideal Muslim. The second ethical term is used to refer to the tolerance and mercy shown when dealing with crimes or misdemeanours. It stems from the Latin word *lenire*, to make mild, the adjective being 'lenis' meaning 'mild, gentle'. This is a direct translation of the Latin word but not a technical term used by jurists, although one may assume it is equal in meaning to the Qur'anic word [ra'afa]. The topic of this essay is tolerance and it is important therefore to avoid the misuse of other terms as a substitute for the word 'tolerance'.

The difference between negligence (tasahul) and tolerance (tasamuh)

It is useful to distinguish between two fundamental ethical concepts. (Tasamuh) tolerance, meaning acceptance, forbearance, patience and ease is an Arabic term used in a cultural and political context as the method for describing people's actions and attitude. Tasahul (negligence or ignorance) has often been used interchangeably with tasamuh (tolerance), and understandably so. Negligence refers to one's careless and passive attitude, which somewhat reflects the passive nature of accepting or acknowledging something that goes against one's personal beliefs, i.e. tolerance.

Nonetheless, a line can be drawn: tasamuh (tolerance) may occur due to noble character and great moral virtue, while Tasahul (negligence or ignorance) can mean the complete opposite.

Ethical and linguistic concerns

There is no doubt that many terms are inappropriately translated, taken out of their original context and given entirely different meanings. When a new word enters a new society or culture it is adopted and often transformed; its meaning is lost in translation. These words may be used in

their evolutionary stage without their historical background being taken into account. Be that as it may, one should first try to grasp the concept in its historical content, and ultimately we will discuss the other related issues.

Prelude: An introduction to the profound understanding of tolerance

A typical modern Christian thinker may attribute tolerance to authorities or individuals. Thus one may mainly refer to the tolerance of authorities or a governing power, while an individual would hardly play a crucial role. An individual would prefer to grudgingly resolve to accept concessions offered by someone in power; those who dissent from the dominant outlook are relatively powerless. As such, tolerance does not always appear a virtue. One should not tolerate things like rape, murder, child abuse or murder. In fact one should heed the fact that too much tolerance can lead to moral ambivalence.

According to the typical western scholar, tolerance is a working field for individual freedom and for Bentham, Locke and Mill, it is where the roots of tolerance can be found. Society has no right to interfere in the personal affairs of the individual. Individual actions must be treated with kindness and tolerance.

The meaning of tolerance in the eyes of western intellectuals

Tolerance, as previously discussed, means patience and forbearance. One does not display dismay, nor protest against something with which one does not truly agree.

Such a person exercises intellectual liberty as well as encourages it among his fellow men.

John Stuart Mill looked at tolerance from the same viewpoint. According to Mill, tolerance owes its place to freedom. Before John Stuart Mill, John Locke, left his mark regarding the boundaries of tolerance. However Mill was to

remove all such boundaries and leave his signature on the definition.

Elaborating on the liberal definition of tolerance, Mill presents another standard. He says: "The only standard for us is the problem of "genuineness of the profit" or "utilitarianism". On this basis, the activities and actions of a person are thought to be correct unless they become the reason for happiness, utility, fun and/or pleasure. Mill, inspired by Bentham's extraction and interpretation of happiness, says "happiness is nothing but the inclination to material pleasures and escape from pains and grief." Therefore, according to John Stuart Mill, the extreme desire is to achieve individual pleasures which also embrace the individual happiness in them. According to him, no factor is allowed to stop or make limitations for human freedom. Every action attempting to bind individual freedom and withhold pleasure is certainly against freedom and such an action must be given a response with action. Let us elaborate further on another English philosopher's view of tolerance.

John Locke's views on tolerance

The English philosopher John Locke published an essay in 1688 on tolerance. However since this essay was somewhat lacking in philosophical aspects, it did not receive the attention it sought:

"One of the reasons behind the disfavour is that this letter was written referring to the specific conditions which were dominating Europe and England in particular towards the end of the seventeenth century. John Locke was very much inspired and influenced by Puritans. Since he was a close friend of Lord Shaftsbury he was heavily involved in the political problems of his time. The letter was written as criticism of the intolerance of the English government. In this letter, the problems originating from intolerance in Europe, especially England, were analyzed and criticized.

Another reason behind the disfavour of the letter is that it is largely inclined to religious tolerance and discussed relatively little is the authoritativeness of tolerance in general."¹

Nonetheless, John Locke's epistle was the first fluent writing to discuss this issue. The basic concept and essence discussed in this epistle is as follows:

"Severe punishment is not the right politics; because, using force and punishment against a person only makes him obey in exterior; however, it cannot become the reason to make him accept any idea in his heart. Therefore, it will be only a tool of enhancement for hypocrisy. Therefore, in the matter of beliefs, the punishing method is not a recommended but a condemned method. Of course, such method does not guide the people; neither can it guarantee their freedom."²

In John Locke's epistle, the second important point was the stress on the duality of the responsibilities of the church and government towards society:

"John Locke's second point was the logical rejection of tradition. The Christian traditionalists said that the responsibility of every person towards the church is the same responsibility which he has towards the government; and if we become negligent regarding the enemies of the church, anarchy will be created in government too. But Locke believed that apostleship of the church in the world was something independent and different from the government. The only reason for the church is to rescue the soul of human beings, which is only possible by violence-free propagation and persuasion; but, on the other hand, the government is responsible for saving and securing lives and the freedom of the people. Therefore, it is necessary for the government to use force as a last option in necessary

1. The letter of culture, vol. 28; Dr. Sayyid Ali Reza Beheshti, pp. 186l.

2. Bolton of Thoughts, vol. 5 to 7, pp. 12.

cases."¹

To be brief, in consideration of tolerance, the government cannot claim that it has perfectly understood reality because of its essence. Neither is the government allowed to impose on the people what it has not understood. Therefore, it should show tolerance so that it does not leave prejudicial effects on its politics; and the government should present its thoughts in different fields. In this way, Locke's thoughts were accepted because of their harmony presented in them. However, when Mill's ideas came to the fore, the topic of tolerance became so widespread that Locke's ideas practically disappeared into oblivion. As such one should elaborate on the various types of tolerance as are practiced in the various sectors of human activities.

Different kinds of tolerance

Tolerance can be divided into the following categories:

Doctrinal tolerance:

Perhaps doctrinal tolerance is the very first target of tolerance. As John Locke said:

"Nobody is born a member of any church; otherwise the religion of parents would descend unto children by the same right of inheritance as their temporal estates, and everyone would hold his faith by the same tenure he does his lands, than which nothing can be imagined more absurd. Thus, therefore, that matter stands. No man by nature is bound unto any particular church or sect, but everyone joins himself voluntarily to that society in which he believes he has found that profession and worship which is truly acceptable to God. The hope of salvation, as it was the only cause of his entrance into that communion, so it can be the only reason of his stay there. For if afterwards he discover anything either erroneous in the doctrine or incongruous in

1. Kiyani, The specialty of the religion, compromise, violence, essay by Ziya Moahhad, pp. 60

the worship of that society to which he has joined himself, why should it not be as free for him to go out as it was to enter?"¹

By accepting this kind of tolerance, it is possible to delineate the relevant boundaries wherein an individual can express his or her thoughts and beliefs.

Political tolerance:

Political tolerance is a kind of political pluralism. According to this, "different groups, wings and parties should co-operate with each other. It is only necessary to accept the existence of the opponents' beliefs on the political stage."²

Certainly, like doctrinal tolerance, political tolerance is also a praiseworthy matter. It is also very necessary from a certain viewpoint. A society which provides grounds for expressing different and contradictory ideas, whether political or otherwise, is considered to be a developing and advancing society; different and contradictory political parties are able to present their own thoughts and ideas. Such political tolerance is what facilitates the developing of new ideas; for it is quite obvious that dogmatic regimes and atmospheres frequently engaged in violence do little in the way of allowing new ideas to flourish.

For example, during the oppressive rule of the Shah of Iran, all political discussion was closed and political activity feared.

"The reason that despotism feared discussion and dialogue was that it knew it would provide the people with social identity; but what despotism wanted was to produce men without any identity and social memory like a person who has lost his memory through an accident. He recognizes no one and remembers nothing about the place. He cannot

1. A Letter Concerning Toleration; John Locke, pp. 62.

2. Sayyid Ahmed Meeri, Tolerance, Yes or No. (Nashr Moassissa Farhangi Andisha Muasir), pp. 266.

perform anything, nor build natural relations with his surroundings. Essentially, despotism wants a man to forget his surroundings, society and history."¹

It can be accepted that tolerance is displayed in the name of a political compromise, but only when the compromise supports a worthy and just cause, not when it supports a violent agenda.

Moral tolerance:

In its first instance, tolerance most likely encapsulated a doctrinal and political meaning. As time passed, however, it seems to have also developed a moral dimension.

Moral tolerance deals largely with the individual and his liberty. Contrary to the schools of thought that consider moral values to be a set of framework for life that must be met by the individual and for which the individual must prepare, moral tolerance is identical to religious tolerance. Moral tolerance allows the individual to select his values and lay the foundations of his morals."²

Regarding tolerance, it is not necessary for reality to coincide with inherent values; rather a person is allowed to do anything he likes within the boundaries of his actions.

"A picture of a person against the historical events of his time has been captured who can order these events according to his own wish. He can choose his values on his own, and the facts do not restrict him."³

That is why government and society do not have the right to interfere in the matters of the individual or create obstacles.

Cultural tolerance:

The adherents of this kind of tolerance are mostly in the west. This tolerance defends cultural freedom and the

1. Saeed Barzeen, political and economical information, vol. 57 and 58, pp. 45.

2 Western liberalism; appearance and decline, pp. 22

3 Western liberalism; appearance and decline, pp. 25

removal of restrictions on freedom of expression, for example the publishing of books and other printed materials that include cultural aspects.

Cultural tolerance is most praiseworthy for it allows the individual to express his or her ideas, albeit within the limits of the law. Such a quality cannot be condemned, for this type of tolerance helps to create a successful and harmonious society.

However, aspects of it can be condemned, for some published beliefs can spread and encourage hatred, or destroy the roots of a culture or a religion. Unfortunately, current tolerance in Europe is linked to this latter point. The cultural freedom that has dominated the west is not so much cultural freedom but rather a cultural meanness with regard to all-embracing tolerance. In any case, we should appreciate why sometimes tolerance cannot be found acceptable. The previous arguments lead us to the discussion as to whether tolerance is an absolute virtue.

Is tolerance an absolute virtue in the western context?

The questions can be posed; is there an 'absolutely open' atmosphere in the west that praises tolerance extensively? Is there really tolerance in the west, encapsulating doctrinal, political and cultural beliefs?

In actual everyday life, absolute tolerance cannot be found anywhere in the world. It must have some boundaries and restrictions; if it is absolute, such excess will cause great damage and offence. There are some questions asked against tolerance: what is the limitation to human freedom in the domains of beliefs, politics and culture? And what is the limitation of permissiveness?

If we study this problem from the point of view of the liberal tradition, we produce one meaning; if we study it from the viewpoint of traditions and religious values, another meaning will emerge.

No matter what viewpoint we favour, it must be clear that absolute tolerance does not exist. Absolute tolerance is quite

simply the destruction of values, beliefs and traditions and would destroy the rights of individuals. In short, we cannot accept the concept of absolute tolerance, even as a liberal tradition.

Furthermore, is tolerance truly practised and nourished in the countries from which it originates? If certain states are practising tolerance then how can one explain the mistreatment of Muslims when they wish to establish the foundations of Islamic ideology in the west? And will America allow Muslims to publish and propagate their beliefs?

How can one explain the growing racial discrimination across America towards Muslims? If tolerance does exist, why are Muslim women refused entry to college or school simply because they choose to express their faith through a garment? Does this tell us something about tolerance? Or is this about a far more removed atmosphere, one of potential violence that has nothing to do with tolerance at all?

No government, in fact, allows absolute tolerance. Unfortunately, those who merely follow and propagate the ideals of 'western' tolerance have somehow derived from it a notion that infers absolute tolerance and absolute freedom. By doing this, all religious values are removed in the name of tolerance and there remains nothing sacred or holy.

However, some of "the most concentrated liberal texts when talking of democracy, liberalism and pluralism also make many restrictions and boundaries such as social manners, laws and national security. And mention freedom with such matters every now and then".¹

Is tolerance Islamically always a virtue?

It must be remembered that continuing to allow someone to act in a certain way without interfering for the sake of justice is not an act of virtue. There are certain

1. Hassan Rahim Pour Azghadi, Indifference; yes, or no, p. 281.

jurisprudential rulings which regulate when, how and where to stop someone carrying out an evil or unjust act.

One can confirm, however, that as long as tolerance functions dynamically in favour of preserving harmony and a peaceful co-existence it can be considered a virtue. Many acts in the west are considered an expression of tolerance and virtue. However, in the eye of the Muslim moral philosopher, they are merely shameful examples of excess.

In the repercussions of the western agitating propaganda, we are also facing the rise of religious fanaticism, which is probably going to make the world a more intolerant place. Is there an answer from the religious texts as to how to handle this modern phenomenon? We believe that a common-sense religion eliminates any form of fanaticism and has settled all forms of partisanship in its proper position. Thus it must be that ignorance and arrogance, which are two overwhelming negative qualities that control many individuals, western and eastern alike, are to be considered its real cause. The more the number of ignorant religious people rises, the higher the risk of casualties. Also, the more hegemony is carried out by arrogant super-powers, the more false accusations, additional prejudices and further stereotypes will become wide-spread. The outcome of these destructive factors would only be an intolerant global society.

One may claim that it is hard to practise tolerance today, as we must stand against injustice while simultaneously being tolerant. One may also claim that, just as it is hard to fight oppression, tyranny, occupation, apartheid and hegemony, it is good to practise tolerance in all aspects of human life. The prophet Moses, when ordered to preach against the tyrannical Pharaoh, asked Almighty God to grant him tolerance:

"O, Lord, expand my breast for me, and make my task easy for me." [Holy Qura'n C. 20, v. 24-5]

This verse speaks about tolerance while addressing the situation of a religious leader who was about to face a

political leader.

Based on these arguments one can explicitly assert that both the Qur'an and Sunnah on various occasions have provided supportive evidence in forms of narrations as well as Qur'anic verses in adopting moderated tolerance. The sacred Islamic texts also explicitly state that tolerance is a virtue in the Islamic worldview, and give a moral justification for it that can be universally accepted namely, that it is vital in the process of harmony in society. However, when it exceeds the boundary and disturbs the harmonious atmosphere of a society, creating sedition, poisoning minds and violating the cultural stability of a society leading to acrimonious acts, then it cannot be tolerated. Even if one were to approach these results through so-called artistic channels, one should disapprove of it. The sense of endurance and fortitude that we mentioned at the beginning of this analysis as the etymological meaning of tolerance is clearly missing in those acts. Tolerance is not as easy as letting others "do their own thing", but rather it may lead us, hard as it is, to fight against oppression, tyranny, occupation and apartheid. It is not surprising, therefore, that tolerance - in this context- is dynamic and proactive as opposed to being potentially an act of apathy, as others may warn against.

Based on the above-mentioned arguments it is quite appropriate to conclude with a version of tolerance adopted within the Islamic world view.

Finally: The adopted definition of the espoused form for tolerance

The definition of tolerance, within Islamic ethical terminology, could therefore be formulated as follows: 'The virtue of reacting wisely, conscientiously, patiently and often passively while facing divisive, incorrect or evil acts, thoughts or ideologies.'

Thus it is not a dormant impervious element, nor

necessarily passive observation. The prophets and reformists have constantly practised and promoted the principle of tolerance as a vital institution for the perennial harmony of human society. However, when it poses a serious threat to the peaceful co-existence of socially stabilised society it must be rejected, whether this is in the form of an ordinary act or the manifestation of a work of art.

Conclusion

Tolerance is a global and human principle applied both within the individual and the public sphere.

Tolerance, as a technical term, can be incorporated with other terms like negligence and/or feigning ignorance whereas the original concept, which is our focus in this article, can be defined in various ways.

As a technical term, tolerance can be historically traced to Medieval times, and from the Renaissance was introduced as a practice that would save Christianity which was then dwindling in Europe.

The espoused form of tolerance is adopted within the Islamic world view, ethical norms and social codes of conduct and is explained in the light of an innovative Islamic jurisprudential theory: The relativity theory within Islamic jurisprudential rulings.

After quoting many western writers about tolerance, along with historical association, its absolute status of being a virtue is questioned after the different kinds of tolerance have been perused.

A critical approach has been employed ultimately leading to a conclusion with an Islamic definition of an espoused form of tolerance, after explaining why it cannot be used to justify offensive and obstructive types of works of art.

The Mystical Principles of the Islamic Art

Dr. S. Razi Moosavi Gilani

Abstract

Islamic culture and especially the Shia is full of mystical and philosophical elements. A close look at the history of Islamic civilization, which is supposed to represent the teachings and words of faith leaders with the knowledge and use of the philosophical and mystical concepts, has influenced Islamic art. This article explains the influence of Shiite Islamic teachings and their teachings of mystical elements on Islamic art and examines as case studies in the arts such as architecture, calligraphy and painting. These arts have always been associated with mystical and philosophical teachings in view of traditional artists.

Introduction

As a significant part of Islamic art is realized in Iran and in Persian culture which has a blend of Shiite and mystical ideas, the discussion of the relationship between such art and Shiite and mystical influence and the place of Iranian civilization in it is inevitable and necessary. Some scholars consider the share of Iran (civilisation) more than any other civilization in the Islamic art. The history of Islamic art, especially in courses such as Ilkhanan, Timurid and Safavid,

has corroborated this view. The early Safavid period is one of noblest courses of artistic creativity in Islamic culture which places this period as a historical peak of Islamic Art. [This period represents] Persian-Islamic art patterns, drawing backgrounds, colour fitness, a delicate care in making fine arts, and exquisite decorative handicrafts, a variety of carpets and tiles full of drawings and pattern drawings, a variety of traditional and sacred arts, included in mosques' architecture, calligraphy, tiling, textiles, paintings and so on (Pakbaz, 1385, pp 733-725).

Formation of Shiite and mystical art and its impact on creating works of art began from Ilkhanan rule and peaked in Safavid times. In many areas of cultural and intellectual work, this coincided with the coming to power of Mongols and reached to its peak and sublime point when Shah Ismail Safavi, the founder of the Safavid dynasty came to power. [Shah Ismail] was himself a member of Sufi, a mystic believing and practicing group, and his followers called him "The Friend of God" and regarded him as the pole of spirituality and faith, who declared shiisim as the official religion of Iran. The rulers of these dynasties consistently showed interest in art. People like Holaku, and Eljaytu became familiar with Iranian culture after the conquest of Iran. They got inspired and influenced by Iranian culture and began to revive art. In the Timurid era, Timur, Shah Rukh and his wife Goharshad, Alogh-Beyg, Baysonqor, Sultan Hussein Bayqara and in the Safavid dynasty, rulers such as Shah Ismail, Shah Tahmasb, Shah Abbas the first made efforts to revive arts such as Islamic architecture, painting, decorative arts and book layout. They all began to gather artists with their support. In addition to [genuine] interest and pursuit of art, they used it to stabilise their position and boast royal power and religious and philosophical approach directed their attention to the arts. Establishing fine works of architecture such as palace, citadel, mosque, and building and decorating the shrine of

Imams and Imamzadehs as well as building the Royal Library, book decorating and its related arts are counted as their artistic activities. Reviewing works of art in these centuries suggests that the rulers in this period, held the Shiites and its leaders in great esteem. Paintings, inscriptions, architecture and decoration of mosques, and decoration of Shiite Imam and Imamzadeh shrines signify it.

Many historians consider the formation of Shiite and Sufi art in this period due to the factors such as interest in Islam, Shi'ism and Sufism among Ilkhan Timurid and Safavid rulers, closeness of Shiite scholars and mystics to the court and the tendency to mysticism among religious scholars (Wilbur, 1365, pp 36-33). For example, rulers in Timurid period, without distinction between Sunni and Shiite, attempted to bring Shiite scholars on their side. Their companionship with great leaders of Sofia, seeking attention and public support of Shiite people and adopting equinox policies to add to their power, fame and political position are among the significant motives that led to people like Timur, Shah Rukh and their children to use Shiite elements in creating works of art. This happened despite they were Sunni themselves. Although unlike Safavi, Shiism was not Iran's official religion the Timurid period, still the rulers of this period show interest in Shiite subjects and themes in works of art, just like the Safavid rulers.

The first rate scholars such as Khwaja Nasir Tusi, Allameh Helli, Seyyed Ben Tavous, Ibn Fahd Helli, Sayed Haider Amolee, Allameh Majlesi, Mirdamad, Shaykh Baha'i and the like attempted to create connections between the Shia and Sufi. These, along with mystical ideas of Ibn -e-arabi and his exponents, have all played a great role in explaining the philosophical principles of Shiite and mystical art. A prevailing attitude is of mystical theology in this period and the idea formed is that conscience and truth of Sufism is the conscience and truth of Shi'ism or vice versa (Amolie, 1368, pp 12-3; Alshyby, 1982, pp 455-369),

this is in a way so that art Shiite and Sufi mystical works of art in this period are the same and truly united (Mosaveqat).

Interests of Sufi and Shiite religious scholars as well as tendencies of Shiite and Sufi kings, in the eight to eleven century and their support of artistic works and figures are the most important factors have remarkably helped the link between art and mysticism. Among other factors to approach the Sufi mystical art in this period is the tendency to mysticism and the spiritual aspects of art with little care about differences between Shiite and Sunni jurisprudence. Mysticism did not intensify differences between the Islamic religions, but it seemed to help the cause of unity among them. If sometimes artists have not been fully aware of the mystical theme and other elements running through their works of art, they just followed the mystical traditions before them in creating their works of art.

Mystical aesthetics

Islamic mysticism has certain principles that are essential to be explained in understanding of Islamic art is in the fields of epistemology, ontology and anthropology. The most important ontological issues that caught the attention of mystical Sufi scholars such as Ibn -e- arabi, Qunnvy Sadr, Abdul Rahman Jami, Ibn Abdul Razzaq Kashani and exponents of Ibn -e- arabi, has been debates of Their five-fold (Khamseh) Excellencies, hierarchy of being as well as climb and descent curve. Each of these topics has a significant contribution in explaining the mystical system.

Considering the absolute truth and unity of God there, ontology from the perspective of Ibn -e- arabi is equivalent to studying divinity. From this perspective, the universe is based on longitudinal realms which in climb curve to the divine essence and in decent curve comes down to the material world. Perhaps this is the most important assumption of Islamic mysticism that has the full and default presence in all Islamic culture. We basically cannot

assess and analyse Islamic art and disregard this ontological aspect.

In Islamic Sufism, perfect man or a comprehensive spiritualist is one of the pivotal topics in mysticism in which the character and personality of human is totally considered and therefore researchers of mysticism believed that mysticism is an equal to anthropology. Mystics consider the human as a microcosm that represents a macrocosmic world with all of its great features. Ibn -e- arabi has dedicated his first chapter of the book *Ghasas Ol Hekam* to discussing this perfect man issue and considers man as a comprehensive being that embodies all the names and attributes and mirrors God in that the extract of being embodies all the aesthetic and mighty traits of the divine being (Ibn -e- arabi, 1980, p. 49-48 .) From his perspective, the universe including the human is manifestations of God and there is moment to moment flourishing and diversifying and it is not repeated. Upon creating the universe and hierarchies of existence, God has appeared from the world of hidden unity to plurality and this downwards arc has sparked the creation (Jami, 1360, p. 55). He has distinguished the individual human and existential human from each other. His conception of perfect human in the existence level is the existential human, whereas at the individual level all human beings are not perfect, but only a few human beings deserve to have the title of the perfect man. The truth of Mohammed is the first manifestation of God after the manifestation of perfect human and all the prophets are manifested in the light of Mohammad and all existence which spans from the eternity to infinity is nothing but the manifestation of the emergence of the truth and the light beam of Mohammed. This is called the secret of Mohammad perfection which appears in all spiritual states of big authorities and perfect humans (Chittick, 1384, pp 56-52; Izutsu, 1378, p. 25; Shayegan, 1384, pp 290-288).

Human in the views of mystics is beyond the historical

and earthly existence and has an existence beyond historical truth which is from a fixed and immutable nature of God and much of human existence levels are drawing from his reality. For them the world has five levels of existence and length and each higher rank is there because of realization a lower rank. The more we sink to the lower rank, we see greater plurality and diversity and world unity gets diminished. Ibn -e- arabi who calls terms these as five levels of existence 'Hazarat e Khams' the considers each lower 'Hazrat' or rank as having an existing face or mirror in a higher rank after which we get there. Each lower rank is by far, a mirror in the higher-order, for example, what is the concrete world of matter has a picture in the exemplar world and each level of the existence levels is the sparkle of a higher level and so on, to reach the divine essence of all worlds and existence levels, creation and the manifestation of divine beauty become divine beauty and represent each divine attribute of God's attributes. Therefore, Ibn -e- arabi terms the universe God's creation; God's action or exit from his divine oneness of essence towards plurality of names and to the multitude of divine attributes (Ibn -e- arabi, 1329, c. 6, p. 234).

These existence have been stated with occasional differences in wording and attitude of their specific numbers or levels that are in sum:

1. world of property or material and concrete world
2. the world of heaven or the purgatory world
3. 'Jabarut' Universe or the universe of intimate angels
4. 'Lahout' Universe or the universe or divine names and attributes of God
5. 'Hahut' or nature and essence of the universe which is the same as unseen God and at that level God is [even] beyond any names and attributes (Kashani, 1383, p. 246)

The world of exemplar

Fantasy world is among the most important issues that

Islamic mystics and philosophers talked about with different words and phrases in their written works. Sometimes exemplar world is regarded as one of the inner forces along common sense, memory, fantasy and possessive powers among philosophers in studies of philosophical psychology and *elm-o-nafs*. In an ontological perspective, this is sometimes regarded as an external and factual reality as the intermediary between intellectual and sensory world, which is mentioned as a detached imagination or exemplar world or the purgatory (Lahiji, Bitā, pp 434-433).

Exemplar world / the First Purgatory / detached imagination, is a spiritual world that, on the one hand, is related to the material essence for some features such as dimension and the amount. On the other hand, because it is not material, it is associated with the intellectual and abstract essence. This exemplar world is an intermediary between testimony and unseen and contains forms of world. It is called purgatory or intermediary due to the fact that such intermediate body is a composite material body and the essence is an abstract rational being. In other words, it is an intermediate level between dirty and opaque material nature and the abstract soft essence. Whatever is there in purgatory, can be experienced and observed in the material world. Sometimes such interpretations are termed 'the eighth climate' in words of philosophers such as Suhrawardi and his interpreters, e.g. Qotbeddin Shirazi, Mohammad Shamseddin Lahiji and others. This climate is inclusive of climates of Jabalaqa, Jabarasa and it is Hourghalia (Suhrawardi, 1384, pp 383-382; Shirazi, 1383 , pp 531-530). In the *Ghesas-ol-hekam* by Ibn -e- arabi in Yousefi chapter, exemplar world have been discussed. This is because Joseph, in the Qur'anic literature, is the symbol and sign of a person who is a master of dream interpretation, for he has discovered the exemplar world and that he interpreted the visible forms of the exemplar world very well (Afif , 1380, p. 158). This is why Ibn -e- arabi

considers his name as symbolising the exemplar world and he named *Joseph* the Fass or chapter where speaks of exemplar world.

But the second purgatory is a universe where spirits go there when the exit the tangible world of the earth. There, all their actions and behavior emerges in accordance with the holy book and the traditions (Lahiji, 1366, pp 136-134). Contrary to common belief, these two Purgatories are not the same. Mohyeddin defines the first purgatory as the mysterious possibility tor possible unknown world which is located between abstract spiritual essences and the material world. The second purgatory is where spirits transfer to after separation from the terrestrial world, and there action mirror and the results of worldly actions are reflected on them. This is called a never-seen or ever mysterious (Ibn -e- arabi, 1329, c. 1, p. 307).

From the perspective of illuminated mystics and philosophers, the first purgatory which is the mysterious possibility tor possible unknown world located between abstract spiritual essences and the material world can be perceived by the active imagination. It is an external and real world in that all the richness and diversity of the world's delicate state can be felt and is an entry and crossing to the kingdom of heaven:

Imagination power (exemplar power) which belongs to the spirit of the world, can itself understand whatever other imaginative powers happen in its surrounding, the finds (powers of spirits in heavens) and is the place of reincarnation and the manifestation and symbol of this purgatory. The reason to call it exemplar world is that it contains mirror forms of whatever exists in this world. In this way, it has all forms and examples of individuals and the essence which exist at the level of divine knowledge. These are also termed the world of imagination by essence, because it is immaterial and abstract, which is in contrast with the inborn imagination and the innate quality (Corbin,

1374, p. 250).

According to some historians of philosophy, Suhrawardi is the first philosopher that explains existentiality of this intermediary world between material world and the kingdom of heaven, then all Muslim mystics and scholars have extended it after him, that seems Suhrawardi is the first philosopher who founded the idea of existentiality of the intermediary world and all the Muslim mystics and scholars returned to this discussion to develop it (Corbin, 1377, p. 300). Quranic data interpretation is accomplished through the existence of the same universe without which it would not be possible except for a virtual symbol (ibid).

Suhrawardi followed Plato and Neo Platonists in allowing a longitudinal system for the world, like Plato who believed in the universe of ideas in addition to the material universe or Plotinus who believed in unity, reason, self, nature and matter, in the longitudinal system of the universe (Plotinus, 1366, c. 1, p. 122; Palmer, 1378, p. 13). Suhrawardi similarly believed in a longitudinal system of universe which includes the universe of The Light of Lights (Essence of God), the universe of Powerful Lights (wisdom), universe of Prudent Lights (self), the universe of Possessed Exemplars (Exemplars world) and universe of Materials.

[However], Suhrawardi's conception of Possessed Exemplars world is different from Plato's Exemplars world. That can be termed the Exemplars World of Light. In addition to the belief in Plato's Exemplars World of Light, Suhrawardi allowed a mirror form for all phenomena as part of a Exemplars world and it is an intermediary between concrete world and abstract world or as another reasonable interpretation of the universe, as distinction between spiritual and physical world (Ebrahimi, 1366, pp 415-413; Nasr, 1371, pp 85-84). In addition to that, he believed in a hierarchy of angels' excellence, as well as angels of a transverse field was allowed as they can be adjusted with the world or universe reproductive master types which Plato

believed it was. He believed Plato's exemplar world or world of types do not reproduce longitudinally from each other.

Thus, this intermediate world is the average and mean of the concrete and abstract worlds that could be understood by proactive imagination. In fact, the exemplar universe is the universe that goes beyond the material or physical universe with an independent essence and has some characteristics such as shape and material universe, but not with weight and dimension. It does not have strength and material, meaning Peripatetic. In fact, this sensory world's creatures and whatever material is manifestations of exemplar world. Above exemplar world is the universe of Jabaroot or kingdom of heaven, of which rank higher than those and not any shape, form and material properties can be seen in this type of universe. It is world of a pure abstraction (Amolie, 1368, p. 559).

According to noble possibility rule, Suhrawardi considers the existence possibility of lower world before nobler world while many philosophers and Islamic scholars believe that the nobler universe comes before the lower universe, but there is a liking and attraction from the lower to the nobler world, and has its existence dependent upon that higher world, so the exemplar world is a rank in existence higher than the material universe. In fact, purgatory is more between the world of abstraction and the material world. The coming of the Universe of rationality to exemplar world is a lowering in rank.

Suhrewardi considers Possessed Exemplars as a spiritual essence which is independent in the exemplar world. He believes that the wonders and undiscovered points of the exemplar world are infinite and its cities are unreachable, and only people who practice mortification and self-discipline and have mysterious knowledge are can receive information about these unseen affairs in different ways (Ebrahimi, 1366, pp 418-417). In this world, all the richness

and diversity of the world can be felt, open to a delicate state. The exemplar universe finds that such a consistency and independence that becomes an entry into the kingdom of heaven with parable-like cities located in this universe (Corbin, 1377, p. 300). Suhrawardi believed that illuminated people find ways into Havarqalyā world and view "Havarkhash" in their frequent and reliable ecstasies. The meaning of Havarkhash among the Illuminati is excellent divine face which is manifested as the most beautiful and breathtaking view after the talking self of man broke away from his sensory employment, and enters trance and fascinated and attending by the holiness side. The most important debate in relation to such mystical art is the issue of exemplar world and the kingdom of the heaven. In this case, occult designs with smooth and clear conscience sometimes sit in tablets and sometimes crumbling quickly and sometimes with durability; also sometimes the designs come to plan and control the imaginative part of thought or common sense and some designs are drawn in the utmost beauty at the end (Suhrawardi, 1380, pp 4-3). According to philosophers generally, many of the prophetic experiences, mystical, literary and artistic works are created through imagination and powers of perception and their relationship with the exemplar world which is the perfect location for "subtle bodies", and takes place between the inner world of imagination and powers of the exemplar world in a strong and sure relationship (Suhrawardi, 1384, pp 384-380).

Power of imagination

In view of the classification of realms of existence and being to the concrete world, exemplar world or heaven and abstract minds, there are perceptive and cognitive abilities for specific to humans to understand each of these worlds. To communicate with the concrete world, there is human feeling. Also involved with the exemplar world, the kingdom of heaven, imagination and fantasy, or exempalr

face and mirrors can be used. Understanding of the world of minds or rationality, mirrors of mind are used. In Suhrawardi's words, to communicate with the eighth climate, imaginative perception can only be used and cognitive dimension and its value is possible with imagination and great spirituals are associated with this world and their strange and extraordinary actions owe to the mate that they are connected to this world (Shirazi, 1383, pp 531-530). Exemplar world is a world of softer bodies while composite materials are not able to penetrate to this world and softer bodies are only capable of subtle ways to find their way to this world.

Philosophers such as Suhrawardi, has divided exemplar world into attached and detached fantasy worlds and related the detached form to the world of dreams. Interpretations and fictional forms of humans which embodies the exemplar detached world are considered attached. This have been interpreted as "detached world is detached because it is independent from imaginative detailed selves which attached world opposite to the detached, is not independent from imaginative detailed selves and constantly reappears in imagination of people" (Ebrahimi, 1366, p. 364). Illuminated and Sufi philosophers believe that all forms and shapes human might see during sleep in which man sees them and the angels, jinn and demons are all creatures of exemplar world and the imagination attached to the mirror world is a manifestation of creatures that the universe reveals to us (Corbin, 1374, p. 18 and 291). Great scholars like Ibn -e- arabi have it stipulated that all intuitive experiences, including sleep and dreams of prophets and mystics and mystical experience arose from the relationship between the exemplar world and imagination (Najm Razi, 1371, p. 290). Some sages, such as Sadra, not only consider revelation and mystical experiences to exemplar world, but also include to that doomsday events and happenings at the day of rising from the dead (Corbin, 1374, pp 23-22). Sadra,

in contrast to Suhrawardi, believes in exemplar world that is real external to the world, and In fact, his example of the universe through the world of imagination establishes that they are dependent upon human imagination and believes that the force of human imagination creates the purgatory universe and hereafter and all human forms and conditions after death in an ascending arc. It can not be detached from human and he believes that all states in the world after his death, manifested or fantasized (Sadra, 1371, p. 237).

Ibn -e- arabi, relying on fantasy discussion, remarks a considerable view of Islam and the Christian attitude which is very important in distinguishing between the Islamic and Christian art. His focus on art makes some researchers of his works to call his collection of mystical ideas "philosophy of mind" (quoted form Hekmat, 1384, p. 236). The art to the Christian faith and Christian embodiment of the divine existence of Jesus, is considered an art that the metaphorical aspect of it dominates it purgatory aspect. In other words, Christians grew a tendency to arts such as sculpture, since they look at the issue based on the Trinity and embodiment of Jesus (Peace Be upon Him). But given the exemplar world, Muslims also rely on the characteristics of divine beauty and glory and likened purgatory balance, interstitial interpretation of that divinity. Although the art has always relied on metaphorical aspects, Muslim relied on the power of the imagination, denying making sculptures and painting and instead tend to create forms in their mind: "When Mohammed's (PBUH) Sharia came and banned the face drawing to be done Then God said that you should serve Him as if we see Him"(Ibn -e- arabi, 1329, c. 3, p. 360). Hence it was prohibited Muslims from the creation in the sensory world - including portrayals – they were considered permissible in the world of fantasy, then this command of God entered us into our imagination power and what can barred from feeling the outside world in the Ummah of Muhammad, was permitted to be created through the

dreams (same, pp 361-360).

As mystics achieve some kind of knowledge which is referred to as discovering fantasy and in discovering fantasy, any reasonable facts in the Cosmos appear with the kind of form that fits it, so that the world events and affairs will appear as a fantasy in view of divine beings. Additionally, the literary people and artists form their imagination in the shape of simile and metaphors and realize them in their dream. What confirms the creative force of fantasy is the growth of literature and literary and artistic creativity in Islamic culture and the use of metaphor and literary metaphors such as Narcissus Eyes, Lip Speckle, the Beloved Hair and other literary concepts in literature, with lyrical literature for mystical poets. Muslim's tendency toward abstract art or literature, and fantasy forms, all indicate the Muslim suggestiveness of power of fantasy. So the word of Prophet (PBUH), cited by Ibn -e- arabi is: "Worship God as if you see him" which really connects to impersonal force of fantasy, a fantasy that in addition to worship, is used in creating works of art, metaphorical Literature. This all manifests God and requiring his presence.

Beauty and manifestation in view of mystics

The terms of 'beauty' and 'embellishment' are the most serious terms in mystical literature which are focused as issues in spiritual aesthetics of mystics and have been rooted in narrative literature, and some narrations of religious leaders are listed in this regard. Ibn -e- arabi in Fasse Loghmani from Ghesas ol Hekam, for the word advises three times and stages for "Ehsan":

A – Doing a work right and decently matched with it, as the Prophet (PBUH) has said in a narrative: "Verily, Allah has ordered decent [handling] of all things"

B – Worshipping with full presence of heart, so that it is

thought as if God is being seen. As the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Proper [handling] of worship as if you are seeing"

C – Worshipping God, not based on thought of meeting him, but based on an authentic observation and a genuine reunion with the worshipped, as when Imam Ali (peace be upon him) was asked that did you see the Lord? He said in response: I do not praise a Lord that I do not see (Ibn -e- arabi, 1980, p. 262).

Common roots of these two words beauty and good practice, "Hosn" and "Ehsan" in Arabic, represent the semantic relationship of the two words in lexical meaning. As good action is good, it is beautiful too. From ontological perspective, every good work (Hosn), contains beauty and beauty is the root of every action that is good. In other words there is an interaction between the goodness and beauty. The good practice is a virtue because of Hosn and inner beauty, and as mentioned, the moral and aesthetic action are linked in Islamic teachings and beauty that comes with a beautiful virtue, or virtue of beauty are the two close concepts in Islamic culture. So when Ibn -e- arabi investigates the root of word 'Ehsan', he also looks at the beauty of the good deeds and he considers the level of Ehsan and reaching at the stage of beauty of practice as the best and superior level of religiosity and above the stage of having Islam and faith.

The mystics' conception of the universe and the creation of the universe, is creation from the inexistence and they're not considering the creation of the universe originating from nothing there, which is something impossible and unworkable. Their views of the origin of creation, is the manifestation and appearance of Allah or God and the universe is the radiation from the divine light manifested and living beings are divine attributes of his power and beauty. Their relationship to the divine nature in analogy is to the relationship between the shadow and object in mystics, the sea to the waves and the sunlight to the sun. As

the metaphor has been set as shadow, light and waves, are dominated by the object, the sea and the sun, the universe has the same relationship to God and the roots of all things in the ongoing Grace of God's manifestation which is continuous and incessant; Sadra's interpretation is that the relation of God to the creation of the world is constant creator, dependable and beneficial who gives existence to the universe and the universe depends on God in maintenance as well as its creation and requires continuous divine [support] in every moment and [that is untrue to think that] God has not just once created the universe and then left it to its own devices.

One of the points of interest of many mystics is the existentialist relationship between goodness (Hosn) and manifestation. According to the mystical base that world and the universe is the manifestation and radiation of divine characteristics, mystics consider the beauty of the universe and its beautiful creatures as enjoying or benefitting from the divine manifestation of God or his actions. Roozbahan Baqaly says about it: "The difference between human goodness and the goodness of non-human of colours and objects in the world is that human goodness is characterised by an inherent divine manifestation and the other good things is related the freshness of the action" (Baqaly, 1383, p. 35). The relationship between Hosn and manifestation of divine attributes are so tied together among mystics that some of the Sufi tried to exaggerate in this path and prostrate upon seeing any beautiful creature and believed that because God is the absolute beauty, any beautiful being is a sign of divine beauty (Shia Encyclopedia, vol 6, p. 503).

The beauty and the love

As there is a strong relationship between the good and transfiguration in views of mystics, there also exists a relationship between the good and love so well, so that the

two have been known to be twin to each other. These two were similar to each other from eternity, and good and beauty belong to the descent curve while love is belonging to the climbing arch and anywhere which is beautiful and good, love also exists there. Suhrawardi says, when the affection reaches its end, love brings up and love is an affection on that is gone out the extent (Suhrawardi, 1380, c. 3, p. 329). Philosophers such as Avicenna and Sadra, know love to mean Bahjat (happiness and ecstasy), which results from the inherent presence which is the nature of beloved and which is realized by the mere sight or imagination of its beauty and greatness (Avicenna, 1368, p. 435). Following Sadra, Avicenna also distinguish between love and enthusiasm, and considers enthusiasm to be meant to seek completion, imagining the beauty and moving toward adding much to it and increasing Bahjat (Avicenna, same, p. 434; Alshyrazy [Sadra], 1380, p. 251). These two great philosophers explore the meaning of human love, real love and passionate love of virtual types of it and then animal love each are expressed in detail and their features explained (Avicenna, *Bitā*, pp 398-373; Alshyrazy, CE 1990, c. 7, pp 175-173). Ghazali believes that wherever there is Beauty and greatness, which means wherever there is perfection which is proportional to the object, there is also the affection and love towards it and that thing is beautiful, popular and will be of interest to the human, and human has an inward interest towards it (Ettinghausen, 1373, p. 29).

The story of Joseph and love of Zuleikha in the Qur'an led Sufis to have allegorical interpretations of the relationship between good and beauty in which Joseph, is the symbol and embodiment of good and beauty and a divine manifestation whereas Zuleikha is the symbol of extreme unutterable love. According to this story and this statement: " Love for a human (virtual) is the bridge to love for God (real) " It is said, love begins with the passion for creature ends with love for God and annihilation in God, and this

notion leads people like Jami [a great poet] to describe this Quranic story in his poetry and paintings and use this as a symbolic and mystical expression of divine love. Suhrawardi's dissertation [entitled] "Fi Haqiqate eshgh / Mones ol oshaq [Truth of Love / The Lovers Companion]" stated that wherever and goodness is found, love emerges of it and that God created his first essence, wisdom, and gave it three attributes, one of them was the attribute of knowledge of God that created the concept of "beauty" and it is also called the "goodness", the second attribute is to identify traits of God that creates "love" and was coined as "affection" and the third trait of wisdom which is denying conceptual which is awarded to the existential matters is "grief or sorrow". Hence these three, "beauty, love and sorrow" are the attribute of wisdom while beauty and love are closely linked: "Love which is [like] a brother in the middle had a kind of affection towards beauty, that made her unable to look away from [set her eyes elsewhere], she was attached to beauty like a servant" (Suhrawardi, 1380 c. 3, p. 269).

Description and purism

The art in Hindi religions and some of the Abrahamic / Sami religions, including Christianity, is based on the metaphorical aspect. So many artists of these [faiths] are trying to embody immaterial and spiritual concepts in visual and metaphorical way, for example, the threesome gods (the gods) in Hinduism Buddhism, Sydarteh Geotmeh in Buddhism, Jesus and the apostles in Christianity, are made and shaped into figures and statues, for example Buddhist embody Buddha in the form of Mudra embodiment (Picture 1) or Hindus, give their three Gods and Godesses material figures like Shiva, Vishnu and Brahman (Picture 2). Similarly portrayal and sculpture have always been emphasized in Catholic thought, and reliefs and portrays are

metaphorical inside the church are as a manifestation of God or the manifestation of Jesus as one of three.

Among many Muslim philosophers and mystics, unlike many other religions, there has always been a balance which has always been emphasized between metaphorical aspects and transcendental aspects, so that people, so they are not allowed like metaphorists to embody the nature of concepts of the Lord in a physical and material way, nor Like Purists who consider Allah beyond any understanding and description, so there is a balance between two metaphorical and transcendental aspects, or in other words, between beauty and glory. knowledge of God, in their terms, is far from both the indescribable interpretation of God as something impossible, and as an embodiabale metaphor such as understanding the material and worldly affairs and the interpretation of sculpture, as the knowledge of God. Ibn -e- arabi believes that human has the imagination power that can describe the conception of God in a balance between knowledge and imagination and the full knowledge of God is possible only when both insight and imagination are employed. His balance between objectivity and subjectivity or Him and Else, and he claims that the reason behind why people were not receptive to Noah's message was because Noah had invited them to unilateral and absolute conception of Noah, while someone with absolute [unimaginative] concept of God do not find tendency to the right path and if Noah used imaginative aspect in his invitation, they would have responded to him (Ibn -e- arabi, 980, p. 70).

According to many people who study mystical issue, the belief to both aspects of beauty and glory and the above said balance led the Islamic decorative arts, and alternative non-visual and abstract art to replace the visual art (figurative). The interpretation of Ibn -e- arabi is that Muslims, who were not allowed to use metaphor to describe God as something to describe in a material way, relied on imaginative powers to describe God. For example, a

Christian artist may describe God in trinity and sometimes paint God or the Creator of the universe, as the drawings of some artists before the Renaissance or in the Renaissance period, artists like Michelangelo or the romanticist painter William Blake shows God in the image of human figure, while Muslim artists have never shown God in the mosques in a drawing of the human figure or have not made any statue and did not display image of Prophet, Imams and faith leaders. Instead, art made from vegetable and geometric motifs has always been used in mosques or paintings that have taken the form of abstract art. This unnaturalistic and abstract art in Islamic culture is a response and was a reaction against the metaphorical art. The God's simile to light in the Koran, or perfect human to full iron and God to fire emblem and the like in mystical texts (Suhrawardi, 1380, p. 503) are in fact metaphors based on power of imagination [rather than anything material], these examples did not go to any extreme of description of God and also made a significant contribution to spiritual formation of fine literature.

Calligraphy and spiritual growth

Calligraphy has always been the sacred arts and arts component always associated with the conduct was spiritual is one of the arts associated with mystical and philosophical approach was always have focused by the mystics. Calligraphic abilities are considered sacred and related to a spiritual behaviour, due to being attributable to great prophets such as Adam (PBUH) and Imams like Ali ibn Abi Talib (PBUH) to whom Kofī famous script is attributed to. On the other hand, growth of calligraphy in Islamic culture is in order to correlate it with the script of the Holy Quran and a kind of spiritual presence in writing of Quran. Application of divine concepts such as divine pen, eternal protected written tablet, 'Noun-val-ghalam-va-ma-yastorun

[God's oath to the pen, etc.]', 'raf'-ol- qalam [related to pen]', 'everlasting writer' and concepts like that in the Quran, and believers always get inspired by a passion for writing and always has tried to associated with the author of eternal written Calligraphy (Schimmel, 1374, p. 306, 1380, pp 12-11) so that the Quran verses are a copied from the fixed dignitaries and protected script and was written in thought and science of God in the Qur'an in a visible and hearable form, and as follows, the calligraphy of the words has been an expression of thought and science of God (Dickie, 1978, p.16).

In a speech, Imam Ali (PBUH) has said a good handwriting or calligraphy is sign of the good and pure spirit of Enlightenment: "goodness of the handwriting is the language of hand, and clarity of within" or "If the ugliness got cleaned from one's spirit, what is inside spills over and appears to body parts such as hand and the language (Qomi, 1360, p. 11).

Many Sufi leaders and seekers of the right path have been involved with this art and counted calligraphy of texts like the Quran as an act of worship and a religious duty and they would not do it without ablutions. Sometimes, they wrote (in calligraphy) two sections of the Quran in a day. The Art of Calligraphy or Calligraphy in Islamic culture had a lineage and dynasty just like the mysticism in that calligraphists of the past were known celebrities and many of their names are collected in Qazi Ahmad Qomi's book called 'art flower garden' and entitled them as Molana [great leader]. The poles of Sufi tried to attribute their dynasty of 'velayat' to Imam and they knew this as an imperative. Calligraphers have also tried to show that they are originated in the generations to the progeny of Imam Ali (PBUH) (Schimmel, 1380, p. 306). Hence, great calligraphy and handwriting was a commonplace among calligraphers, and what this art would make them more interested, was not the purely aesthetic matters and decorations, but the spiritual

aspect: "After all the consequences of various lines and different lights one after another, in pens or tastes - the so-called Gnostic calligraphists of the profession "Safa" - the great masters of calligraphers [was also] the power for their faith is the source of great effects (same, p. 313) and the fact that calligraphy was characteristic of Iranian Muslims which has austerity and heavy practice were considered as their two main features (same, pp 310-309).

Considering the sacred and spiritual aspects of Koran, we have a range of great Islamic calligraphists going back to the Ilkhanan period in Iran and the Order of the Timurid and Safavid and also during Mamlukyan (923-648 AH.) in Egypt and Syria, who encountered the writing of Quran and decorating it with a variety of decorative lines and segments. They were always enjoyed the support of the court. Over time, scripts developed in Islamic culture to a large variety and many types of lines have been formed, including the Iranian Ebne Moqleh, the minister of Abbasids in the fourth century who developed six different types of pens known as 'six scripts' from [just] the Kufic writing. These include: Naskh, Sols, Mohaghagh, Reyhan, and Toqi' and Reqa' or the Nasta'liq by Mir Ali Tabrizi, known as Qoduth Alketab and history of Islamic calligraphy was gradually formed (Sfady, 1381, pp 35-31).

Calligraphy was associated with inscription writing in the evolutionary process and a wide variety of calligraphic species such as Kofi line and then the Naskh and the Sols came to contribute to that and in some cases associated with Arabesque and geometric designs. Therefore, these arts, including calligraphy in the Timurid and Safavi periods serve decorative elements of Islamic architecture and mosques, shrines and schools and became closely linked with calligraphy and geometric designs and a field was founded entitled "the geometry of lines" which defined the symmetrical representation of lines and their mathematical proportions. Calligraphy later became part of the Arabesque

designs and letters combined to form plant motifs and which had a plant in the backgrounds which couched the Quranic words such as, ‘in the name of Allah, the beneficent, the merciful’, ‘Allah’, ‘Muhammad’ and in buildings located in in Shiite lands words such as the words of Ali (PBUH), Hussain (PBUH) and the name of other Shiite leaders were decorated. Decorative tiles in Iran have these names inside the Shamse [a geometrical figure] after the seventh century AH (Jones, 1978, pp.168-173). Naein mosque buildings, the Friday mosque of Varamin, Heidarieh school of Qazvin, Isfahan Friday Mosque and the like are part of this and they are considered masterpieces of calligraphy, so that the inscriptions on Islamic architecture, such as altar decorations, minarets, spots, domes, walls and tiles of the mosques gained the same scared place as the paintings found in churches of Jesus, the apostles and other prophets, and the writings of the calligraphy were having this inscription such as ‘Ayat ol Korsi’ [A Quranic Surah], the verse of Light [A Quranic Ayah], names and attributes of God, the prayers, the name of the messenger and faith leaders bestowed them with a kind of spirituality and the ritual aspects of the artistic writings served to bring Art and Religious tradition closer.

in Islamic culture, many religious and mystical concepts are written into a code, and inscriptions as a symbolical expression of Muslim’s faith. A look at a variety of inscriptions in mosques, holy places and shrines and written, reveals stating the concepts like belief in monotheism, prophethood of the Prophet Mohammad and Imamate of Imam Ali (PBUH) in the form of writings which from the lines, engravings of animals and fusing with the Arabesque designs which has been expressed symbolically.

The mystical elements in architecture

Between the different components of thinking about the

world of the Muslim artist are unity and consistency and Islamic architecture in this regard is included in the sacred arts and spiritual principles that is related to cosmology and also related to metaphysical principles and represent the all view mirror of the Islamic soul of all arts developed in the Islamic period. There is an ability to find a mystical interpretation for the dome, minaret, sanctuary, porch, pool, tiles, seven-coloured, gardens, water and space, from this perspective. Belief in both material and immaterial world and many longitudinal realms are always compared in the form and meaning of Persian literature, so that everything which is in the matter and in the universe, has a figure or image in the higher world.

Muslim architects considered any beauty they would see as worthy of the divine names and attributes and would guarantee it in the most marked Islamic monument, or the mosque. Mosque is one of the main arenas for the emergence of Islamic art form by which aspects of the Ritual Arts are attended and the arts and religion has been found to intersect with each other.

From spiritual perspectives, techniques and structures have different architectural are encoded with symbolic meanings and all shapes and geometric volumes, numbers, colors, plants and geometric designs symmetry, proportion, color and contrast has emerged from the content, which the architect or the artist intended them to mean the facts shown beyond appearances. For example green is the symbol of sure selfhood, yellow is a symbol of youth, blue represents the sensuality and the red has been the symbol of animal soul: "Colour turn into a marker for the Sufi to thereby to judge mystical and illuminating authority. He is beyond the time and only the world of colour represents his route of journey"(Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 1380, p. 50) hence always green is used in the mosque as it contains the three other colours and the best symbol of divinity and perfection (Corbin, 1384, pp 63-11).

From a mystical perspective, the ratio between the numbers that sometimes creates a golden proportion or ratio between the sides and the building geometry in Islamic architecture with buildings such as building mosques, the most important aspects of architecture has always been considered, so that the Pythagoras roots of them which is related to the discussions between the numbers and nature, along with mystical interpretation, appears with their architects that have mystical and divine tendencies. They reveals them by imitating nature and the great universe, as this interaction is between numbers and shapes of nature or the geometry and number concepts in the mystical and Ritual Architecture in the sacred mosque of Isfahan, the Kaaba house and the like.

Ghazi Saeed Qomi provides an analysis of geometry of the house and the Kaaba, which deals with the full adjustment of Perfect human or Mohammedia truth which is the first divine grace the geometry of the Kaaba, and believes that there is a logical connection between the sides of the Kaaba house and a dozen Shiites Imam. The house geometry of Kaaba is a metaphorical and symbolic expression of the belief in twelve Shiite Imams. Thus, the number of twelve is one of the main mathematical numbers in Shiite culture, tied with the geometry in Islamic architecture: "If the appearance of Kaaba is the same as the appearance of universe and the world's temple, its appearance is also the face of Imamate as the world beyond the inner meaning then is beyond what is sensible" (same, p. 353). Regarding the geometrical analysis of the Kaaba house, he believes that what is located in the world of matter has a radiation and an image of the astral world, astral spirit of truth and the truth of the material world. Therefore, with the help from the concept of Imamate which is the inner heart is prophecy, the Divine Throne which is the same as Mohammad light [Mohammedia truth] is a settlement on the water (same, pp 352-345).

The best tool for transfer of meaning and concepts in the architecture are symbols and the different components of Islamic architecture are full of these symbols. Islamic architecture has potential forms and shapes that can be activated and applied in certain conditions and entering them in the world of symbolic elements has great power. For example, the dome on the cubic structure is sometimes just a simple means to the ceiling and roof and sometimes a symbol of awe and grandeur of the heavens above the earth that refers to the message of God glory and uniqueness. Considering the fact that why this element is usually being built at the highest point of an architecture, it has been stated that vaulted arc have special symbolic meanings which is probably joined over time; the effect that vaulted arc creates by dissolution of surfaces, knowingly or not, to be taken from an unreal quality and essence of this world in relation to the immaterial world and the world hereafter or plans to show the transitional zone [Dome related] representing the lack of continuity and separation [universe] between heaven and earth, like a cloud below kingdom of the heavens.

Islamic art in view of the mystical commentators, attends to many features of Islamic art beyond the world of appearances and the world hereafter. But these symbols have often connoted their entirety more than their symbolic meaning. Hence the use of dominant meanings can be enhanced by inscriptions found in the literature, with the aim of making visible the symbols of invisible. Inscriptions although not as definitive and permanent, have a phrase or piece from the anthology of Koran that is expressed deeply (Brand, 1383, p. 229). Many of the elements used in Islamic architecture including paintings like Lion, Peacock, Phoenix, Shamseh in buildings like domes, pool, vaulted arc, minarets and the like have concepts. The Islamic architects, who have spiritual generosity and great moral conduct with many years of conduct and learning secrets,

deliberately chose some of the forms and techniques. For instance, selecting the mosques in the backyard pool, that constituted a mirror image of the water in also made clear the dome of the sky vault as an example of true worship, reflected in its extravagance, and the image of tiles that cover the seven colors and images showing the reverse views of one of four mirrors in the mosque courtyard, plus a reverse image of the dome itself, so is mystical literature as a mirror concept for the words in their strictest and finest sense to express the interaction between the universe of matter and the universe of the exemplar world.

Spiritual concepts are always induced in mystical literature through words in allegory, metaphor and volumes understood through the senses. So slick water, pool and a reflection of virtual image on the dome and veranda are expressive example of the manifestation of the universe or the interpretation in Sohrevardi's eighth climate in the fragile and concrete world. Mosque courtyard is a place with a cosmic property that is directionless in which the dome is the divine ceiling of the sky with a divine image in the middle of the courtyard pool is a figurative expression of the divine atmosphere of immortality and eternity, and allegorical of this notion that whatever is below is the same as what is on top of it. Water is also one of the symbols and icons in Islamic architecture that has a significant impact. In addition to its use for worship as ablution for prayer, it is one of the decorative and symbolic elements in architecture that is always used in setting the atmosphere in addition to being a symbol of the purity and cleanliness, which reflects the other world. The melange of light and water in the pool brings a relaxed and pleasant sense in certain religious buildings (Jones, 1978, pp.173-174).

Another symbols used in Islamic architecture is the light that commentators look at it as a mystical symbol of divine unity and the Muslim architect is always drawing interest towards this quality space, so that many architectural

elements in buildings such as mosques and funerary monuments, such as vaulted arc, decorative plaster, mirrors, shades of golden tiles, marble and wood inlay designs and existing buildings, which is evident by the light of beauty and their effects, plus the light reflected by the elements or is broken and the interaction between light and architectural elements, as this spiritual space appears before the eye of believers and prompts their total emotional effect (Ibid, p.173).

According to Henry Corbin, the mirror is the way to enter Havarqalyā and what is attractive and witching in the western veranda of Shah Mosque is its morning sun which is reflected in the central pool of water. He comments on his coming to the Shah Mosque of Isfahan similar to meeting point of Havarqalyā, the tallest “emerald city” and the most startling architecture feat in the concrete world, means coming to the Eshraghi philosophy of imagination made possible with metaphysical philosophy of mind because the inlet contour to the intermediary world between the rational and sensible world is opened to us. Isfahan visit is a symbolic because we have learned to search for Havarqalyā headquarters in Isfahan, as William Blake searched for Jerusalem headquarters in London (Corbin, 1377 (b), pp 12-8).

Still other symbols with the usage in Islamic architecture with religious and mystical meaning are tile, colourings, plants and image of some heavenly animals. Images of peacocks or other birds of paradise are sometimes on the back or side entrance of Mosque’s arch, are to repel evil or to welcome believers and sometimes defeat the dragon, python or a lion that is conquering a bull dog - all concepts from star astrology - are found in similar locations and even the title Lion is sometimes just a reminder of Imam Ali (PBUH) and his name is known as Haider or Lion, makes up the interior of dome (Hyldenbrand, 1386, p. 55). For example, existence of a pair of big peacock green triangle

above the entrance door of the mosque of Shah [Imam] of Isfahan like the phoenix in the Iranian tradition, is a symbol of eternity and along with the other pictures in the tiles with the sparrow and bush branches and flowers is a reference to the gardens of Paradise and the best heaven or the seven coloured tiles are not one of the minor elements in the architectural structures, but they are considered important and integral part of the architecture, and meant to have a key role in the outlook of the viewer and opens celestial colours, as Allah in Surah Rahman described the green gardens of Paradise which looks darkened [by greenness] and depicts a fantasy image of heaven for the believers. It features the seven colour tiles as a relaxed picture of the better world before the eye of the believers which according to many art historians, the revival of the art of salt glazed bricks in Iran owes to Messianistic feelings of twelve Shiite and when we talk about the green or turquoise domes of Baghdad and Bukhara in the tenth century so to speak, undoubtedly these places are considered based on Shiite thinking. According to Hadith the Prophet (PBUH) about the Night of Ascent, he said that he has viewed Greenness when he was taking the ascent, or during his ascension in the night making an upward sear he has reached the green light. The light contour which is between darkness and light is white is considered symbolizing the motto of Alavids and Shiites. The seven coloured tiles are in full bloom in your reign of Twelver Shiites, the Shah Abbas in Isfahan in which the blue and turquoise that cover domes attains a mysterious and religious value and the decorates the surfaces of the decorative architectural on the big religious buildings in a way that there is a link, such an unbreakable link between the Islamic ideas and colours used in Persian and Shiite architecture (Stirlen, 1377, pp 79-49).

The use of herbal plants and trees in designs and paintings in mosques, is an allegory of paradise trees and plants, as in the Quran and the Tuba tree Sedrat-ol-montaha which is the

housing and stance of a pious people, is made as an example (Koran, Najm (53), verses 15-13). Prophet (PBUH) sees the tree on the sidelines of heaven as a place of believers in one of his true dreams, and Suhrawardi describes Tuba as the tree of “Red Intellect” which is a giant tree, that every believing person will observe in heaven when going to promenade or just taking a walk. It will be observed with its branches over hanging gardens in highest peaks and points. The tree of Tuba is a symbol or a strong icon in mystical traditions that places this tree in the center of the mountains forming the peak of Mount Qaf in heaven where paradise is located, so we see leaves the trees in the decorative surfaces and paintings on religious centres and mosques on the outer walls. This evokes the concept as a symbolic and iconic design and green vegetation mixed with emerald richness makes a symbolism that it has functions more than mere decoration or a symbol that reveals the mystical paradise. Hence some of the mystical commentators believe that symbols are in themselves icons of absolute light and are bound to forms of symbolic, material and concrete expression of supernatural reality. Humans not only make the symbols, but they also evolve with them, so that the symbols are of the earthly type tool for the supreme manifestation of the universe. In fact a muslim can strive towards the truth beyond these Islamic symbols and interpretation (Ardalan and Bakhtiar, 1377, pp 5-3).

In the use of numerical and visual symbols and codes in Islamic architecture, the impact of the Quran can not be ignored. For example Sura Rahman describes four gardens or four paradises below that God describes two other gardens which has four rivers running and located in the other two gardens (Quran, Rahman (55), verses 64-43), This has opened an imaginary picture for the Muslim architects to build Chahar Bagh [Four Gardens street] in the era of Shah Abbas in Isfahan. Actually the mystical and the Qur'anic beliefs led to the formation of Safavid architecture

and so it has been named. The Quranic concepts including Four Gardens, The deep green colour, Sedrat ol montaha, Tuba, peacocks and the like has made a remarkable contribution to shaping a set of symbols and colours in visual culture of Muslims in Islamic art.

The effect of mystic on painting

After the entrance of new types of art in Islamic culture and civilization, with all the limitations and sometimes disagreements, what is certainly confirmable from the initial effects, is that the art is used in expressing concepts and direction of religious themes, like life of the Prophet (PBUH) and leaders of religion, Stories of the Prophets, and allegory of Qur'anic stories and have been also effective for advice provisions and other mystical and ethical issues: "Religious Painting in Islam from its inception served the faith, although they were not used as a vehicle for religious instruction and did not qualify to be at the altar of the mosques" (Akasheh, 1380, p. 197).

Persian literature is mixed with mystical Quranic and narrative concepts, and as due to the influence of painting in Iran from Persian literature, as literature is also mixed with mysticism, the paintings has also gone in the direction of that trend. Allegories of poets like Nezami, Hafez, Rumi and the Quranic stories, like the story of Joseph and Zuleikha is full of rich spiritual and mystical concepts and it is not fair to criticize them of tomfoolery and sexuality because of their imitating of the painting of the themes. In fact, the opponents of the mystical interpretation of the painting, music and other arts should first explain or clarify their position to the lyrical literature in Persian literature. Scholars and philosophers such as Avicenna and Suhrawardi used stories of romance, mythological and epic poems, in promoting spiritual and philosophical issues, the painters also have employed themes from epic, romantic, mythological and mystical issues for explaining the spiritual

and philosophical concepts in their works of art. For example, ascension paintings are one of the themes in painting that has important religious and mystical themes, and have been noted by painters (Sagay, 1385, pp 155-31).

In fact, the denial of the role of spiritual themes in paintings would have consequences as to the logical inference that the poems of Iranian poets has also paid attention merely to material and worldly themes in their poetry and have had no underlying spiritual ideas. But if it is accepted that the poet brought wisdom and spirituality in their poetry, the same goes to pictures drawn, except that words and poetry have used words while painting has been benefited from form and color. [This is true] even if the artists are not personally mystic and just imitated mystical themes or literature in their work or performance. In fact, the response to these challenges raised in the literature, the question of being mystical or mundane as of the painting will also be resolved (Pope, 1384, pp 162-161).

Romantic terms and concepts used in poets like Hafiz, Jami, and Nezami have aspects of metaphor and simile and allegory and these elements have used in their poems to induce a mystical and spiritual effect, plus some of the topics are taken from the Quranic literature and a sole worldly interpretation of them is unlikely (Arnold, 1384, p. 165). It worth noting that there are copies of the paintings with mythological themes and epic taken from Shahnameh, and similar in that there is no denying of the concept of relation between these paintings to the question of literature and spiritual desire, as they are not incompatible. Iranian painters prior to the period of Shah Abbas II, placed graphics beside poetry on a page, and the painting would follow the literature that continued until then. Only it was in that era that link between painting and literature were gradually loosened by painters as Reza Abbasi, Muhammad Zaman and their students. The components of Western art were experienced by the new renaissance in the field of

literature and art was entered to Iran by Persian artists who had graduated from Western countries (Pope, 1380, p. 2).

Some of art historians have claimed that if artists and painters were mystic, they should have never gone to illustrative arts of the dignitary which has a religious ban attached (Grabar, 1379, p. 132). In response to this point, it should be noted that the illustration or some of the other arts such as music from the perspective of Sufism are not on the level of the ban as it did with respect to Faqihs [Islamic jurists]. Some of these arts were considered banned for Faqih people, while they were considered legitimate among mystics. This is because mystics strongly disagreed with some of the bans and ha tendency towards some traditional arts such as painting, music, rituals and ritual dance (sama). Today Faqih people have come to agree to some extent among themselves and also reached acceptance of them or reduced their tendency to boycott them. In other words the collective agreement or consensus on a ban on certain arts does not exist.

Suppose if any illustration is forbidden in Islam, again this claim is incompatible with no historical citing of the painters in Timurid, Safavid and Qajar era practiced despite theological and jurisprudential objections to their work. The mystical themes in book illustration and painting, or acceptance or rejection of sanctions on arts dos not raise any doubt regarding the historical reports for the tendency of artists to create through some traditional arts (Hassan, 1384, p. 52). Despite some restrictions, artists did not halt from doing the arts and continued through some support from court and nobility for their jobs. Although some religious restrictions reduced creativity of artists, the arts were never drawn to a shut down: the issue of permissibility in Islamic tradition did not cause suppression of artistic talent in creating artistic representations of human and animal forms due to theological grounds for usurping the divine attributes. They continued with initiatives and advocacy in support of

the artists from Iranian and Persian kings who did not hesitate a moment. But little attention to arts in religion reduced the creativity of public in reflecting the aspirations of the people through art (Bignon, 1384, p. 170).

The existence of religious prohibitions, and mystical tendencies and power of fantasy world, especially from eight to eleven centuries AH, are among the most important factors for the reluctance of Muslims to portraying and painting. Despite factors such as entering of the Mongols to Iran who were very interested in portraying as well as interest in some of the kings and nobles, painters painted humans as an unreal and imaginary being before the period of Shah Abbas II, which is reflecting the influence of religious and mystical elements on painting. But after the Shah Abbas II, artists found interest in the naturalism and painting:

From the era of Shah Abbas II, the aesthetic interests of Iranians gradually became transformed and traditional norms were replaced with a new aspect. Instead of recreating the non-tangible intermediary world between death and hereafter, depicting the surrounding tangible world took its place (same, p. 243).

Human depictions and drawing pictures are on the coins go back to early centuries of Islam in Abdul Malik of the second half of the first Hijri century architecture in the six images seen in Ghosair Amrah, but their images are being unrealistic and imaginative due to a little resemblance to real human faces and the pictures are drawn so idealistically that determining the face is not possible except through signs and inscriptions (Azhand, 1385, p. 121).

What is indisputable in Persian painting is the ethical framework and boundaries that have dominated the painters. So that this feature makes a distinction between Imagination in Islamic tradition in art with modern art and art in other cultures and a major difference between traditional painting with modern painting is that pornography can never be

found in the Islamic civilization, and if a few instances were seen, they were not legitimized and it is something uncommon among the painters and does not equal the like in the paintings of the Renaissance in the West.

In eras when Persian kings have had religious tendencies, there can be a distinction between [Islamic] art and the kings' interest to various arts and they can be separated. Kings usually wanted art for strengthening their position and their government, which would exploit a religious element. This approach often occurred at the realization of approaching the religious scholars or by spending money with the architecture of mosques, religious shrines and decoration of Imamzadehs, and painting, and inscription on the mountains. For example, to build mosques, or dome or Imamzadeh shrine decorated with a combination of architecture and calligraphy, is considered a religious matter with a divine content, but paintings on Shahnameh or book decoration, illustrative arts in books, architecture, [building and decorating] mansions, and applying the decorative arts such as bed decorated homes and mansions are considered traditional and non religious art. Among paintings, one should even make distinctions, e.g. between the Shahnameh of Shah Tahmasb which has patterns based on ancient myths such as the Persian Shahnameh and Nezami's Khamseh with those paintings related to the Ascent of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and find the difference in their artistic origin and analysis, to present a separate interpretation. Accordingly, painters of Timurid and Safavid era have Iranian an Islamic elements because they were Iranian Muslims - paintings related to the Ascent of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) represent the religious aspects of personality of painters, and paintings related to the myths that arose from Shahnameh and Nezami's Khamseh, indicate their Iranian features.

The Return of Imam Mahdi and Jesus Christ: A Comparative Eschatology

Leonardo N. Mercado

I. Introduction

A branch of theology called eschatology (from *eschaton*, last, furthest +*logos*, study of) is concerned with the final destiny of humankind. Particularly it deals with topics like the resurrection of the dead, the second coming, last judgment, heaven and hell. The purpose of this study is to compare the eschatology of Islam and of Christianity. However, since Shia Islam focuses more on Imam Mahdi than what Sunni Islam does, this study will focus more on the Shiites. A central focus of Shiite doctrine is the return of the Imam Mahdi at the end of the world. We shall contrast this doctrine with the Christian doctrine on the return of Jesus Christ.

However, we shall also refer to commonalities which also touch the Sunnis. While both Sunnis and Shiites are united in accepting the Qur'an as God's word the basic principles of Islam as a faith, the split between the Sunnis and Shiites was caused on proper choice of the Prophet's successor. The Sunni claim succession to Abu Bakr as the first caliph. But the Shiites claim succession through Ali. However, the split was not primarily on the question of the successor but on

“who should be the successor of the Holy Prophet as what the function and qualifications of such a person would be” (Tabataba’i 1975:10).

According to the Shi’ite view the successor of the Prophet of Islam must be one who not only rules over the community in justice but also is able to interpret the Divine Law and its esoteric meaning. Hence he must be free from error and sin (*ma’sum*) and he must be chosen from on high by divine decree (*nass*) through the Prophet. (:10)

In short Shia Islam follows Ali and his successors (or the Twelvers) after the Prophet died.

They were originally the same group of friends and supporters of Ali who, after the death of the Prophet, in order to defend the right of the Household of the Prophet in the question of the caliphate and religious authority, began to criticize and protest against prevalent views and separated from the majority of the people. (:83-84).

We shall be primarily quoting the Qur’an and the Bible and less from the hadith or sayings and traditions from the Prophet.

Besides the meaning of eschatology which we have defined above, another term which needs clarification is the word Imam. We take the definition from a Shiite scholar.

Imam or leader is the title given to a person who takes the lead in a community in a particular social movement or political ideology or scientific or religious form of thought. Naturally, because of his relation to the people he leads, he must conform his actions to their capabilities in both important and secondary matters.

Shi’ism believes the since Islamic society is in dire need of guidance in each of these three aspects [namely, perspective of Islamic government, Islamic sciences and injunctions, and of leadership and innovative guidance in the spiritual life], the person who occupies the function of giving that guidance and is the leader of the community in these areas of religious concern must be appointed by God

and the Prophet. Naturally, the Prophet himself was also appointed by Divine Command (Tabataba'I 1975:173)

We shall proceed in the following manner. We shall treat about the signs of the end-time, such as cosmic signs, human unrest, the rise of false messiahs, death and resurrection of humankind. These are preparatory signs to the return of Imam Mahdi and Jesus Christ. We shall point out the similarities and differences between Muslim eschatology and Christian eschatology.

2. Signs preceding the end times

We find commonalities and differences on the signs of the end of the world as well as the signs preceding the return of Imam Mahdi and of Jesus Christ. Both Islam and Christianity hold that the world will come to an end. The end will be marked by cosmic signs, wars, the appearance of the antichrist or false messiahs (*al-Masikha ad-Dajjal*), the resurrection of the departed and their final judgment (as to whether they go to final damnation or eternal reward in heaven). In Shiite doctrine, the signs of distress at the end of the world also point to the return of Imam Mahdi.

Such chaos will serve as test of the purity of the faithful who will remain in the final stage of this process, the Mahdi will reappear to usher in a new era of restoration and to reconfirm the validity of Gods' revelation. (Crow 1987:479)

Let us treat the details.

The end

Both the Qur'an and the Bible speak predict the end of the world. But although the end is predicted, when that will exactly happen has been kept secret. In hundreds of places the Qur'an speaks about the Day of Judgment (or the Day of Recompense, the Day of Sorting) which will take places at the end of the world. When is the end of the world? Only Allah knows (Q 7:187). Likewise the Bible says that only God the Father knows when it will take place (Mk. 13:32):

“But of that day or hour, no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, or the Son, but only the Father.”

Cosmic signs

Cosmic catastrophes will precede the end times. The Bible predicts: “the heavens will be dissolved in flames and elements melted by fire” (2 Pet. 3:12). “The heavens will pass away with a mighty roar and the elements will be dissolved by fire, and the earth and everything done on it will be found out: (1 Pet. 3:10). “Then there were lighting flashes, rumblings, and peals of thunder, and a great earthquake. It was such a violent earthquake that there has never been one like it since the human race began on earth” (Rev. 16:18). Huge hail stones will rain (Rev. 16:21). Rev. 17 foretells the destruction of pagan nations. Other signs: “the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken” (Mk. 13:24-25). “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heaven will be shaken” (Mt. 24:29). The Book of Revelations predict the seven plagues that precede the end of the world.

On the part of the Qur’an, the cosmic signs will include having a new earth: “One day the Earth will be changed to a different Earth, and so will be the Heavens and (men) will be marshaled forth, before Allah, the One, the Irresistible (Q. 14:48). The moon will be split: “The Hour (of Judgment) is nigh, and the moon is cleft asunder” (Q. 54:1).

The rise of false prophets and the beast

Antichrist/s and the false messiah/s will deceive the faithful (2 Th. 2:1-12; 1Jn. 2:18-23). “False messiahs and false prophets will arise and will perform signs and wonders in order to mislead, if that were possible, the elect” (Mk. 13:22) The coming of false prophets (Mt. 24:11) and false Christs: “Many false prophets will arise and deceive many.”

But Christ will defeat Satan or the primordial Serpent:

Islam also holds Al-Dajjal (the false savior or Antichrist) will appear before the end of the world. All the above-mentioned unrest and chaos will purify the faith who will remain until the end.

Another sign will be the Beast: “We shall produce from the earth a Beast to (face) them: he will speak to them for that mankind did not believe with assurance in our Signs” (Q. 27:82). The commentary says that the said beast represents gross materialism and “will be the embodiment of fat worldly triumph, which will appeal to a misguided and degenerate world” (Ali 1989:956).

Human unrest

The human unrest will entail warfare and chaos. “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be famine and earthquakes from place to place” (Mt. 24:7). Christ predicts hatred persecution to his followers (Mt. 24: 8-9).

The end battle is called the Armageddon or the battle between the Antichrist/Satan and Christ. After Satan’s defeat he will be put in the bottomless pit for a thousand years. Then Satan will gather Gog and Magog, peoples of two specific nations (Q.18:94; 21:96).

The name stands for wild and lawless tribes who will break their barriers and swarm through the earth. This will be one of the prognostications of the approaching Judgment” (Ali 1989:816).

The same is reported in Rev. 20:8 (cf. Ex. 38-39) where Gog and Magog are symbols of pagan peoples. But Satan and those whom he led stray “will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10).

Final death and resurrection

The Qur’an speaks about the finality of death and the resurrection (Q 17-14-26) wherein Allah will reward the just

and punish the evildoers (Q 37:20-21; ! 98:6-7). Then the sound of the trumpet will signal the resurrection from the dead. We find this point both in the Qur'an and in the Bible. According to Q, 50:20: "And the trumpet shall be blown that will be the Day whereof warning." That sound summons the dead to resurrect and be ready for the Judgment. In another passage: "Then, when one blast is sounded on the Trumpet, the earth is moved, and its mountains, and they are crushed to powder at one stroke" (Q. 69:13-14). Who will sound the trumpet?

According to many post-Qur'anic commentaries, the Day of Judgment will be announce by two from the trumpet of the archangel Israfil, whereupon souls will be reunited with bodies in the graves, resurrected, and assembled. Their deeds will be read out of the heavenly books... Saved believers will cross safely into the Garden (Waldman 1987:154).

On the part of Christians and according to the Bible, the following signs precede the Final Judgment, trials that will test the faith of the followers (Mt. 24:12). Christ predicted persecutions on his followers (Lk. 21:12-19; Jn. 15:20)

But after the death of all humanity through world catastrophe will follow the resurrection of all people, good and bad. The sound of the trumpet will signal that moment. "We shall not fall asleep, but we will all be changed, in an instant, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51-52). Likewise, Paul writes (1 Th. 4:16): "For the Lord himself with a word of command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God, will come down from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first." "And he will send out his angels with a trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other" (Mt. 24:31).

The final judgment

Islam and Christianity hold that all peoples at the end of their lives shall answer before God. The Qur'an calls it the Day of Sorting Out (Q. 37: 20-21; Q 78:17) or the Day of Judgment.

In the Christian perspective (Mt. 25:31-45), the basis of salvation or condemnation to Hell is not based on adherence to religion but on concrete deeds, whether one has feed the hungry, drink to the thirsty, welcome to strangers, clothing the naked, visiting the imprisoned. And condemnation to Hell fire will be for those who did not do such deeds.

After the Judgment, the just will be rewarded in Heaven (Q 89:23-30). The final judgment is either a person goes to the torments of Hell or enjoy Paradise. Hell is pictured as punishment by fire: for those who deny God, will have a "garment of fire" and "will be poured out boiling water" (Q. 22:19-20; Q 38:27).

The picture of heaven

Heaven is the reward according to God's mercy (Q. 29:21; 3:129). Heaven is described graphically as a cool garden with fine food and the just with their spouses reclining upon couches and have what they need (Q 36:55-57). "Allah hath promised to believers...gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss" (Q. 9:72). In spite of the promise of unlimited food and drink, and companions, Heaven has pleasures that exceed the sensual pleasures. The faithful will be granted the beatific vision of their Lord.

The Bible depicts Heaven in various metaphors: light, peace, wine of the kingdom, the Father's house, the heavenly Jerusalem, paradise.as a never-ending banquet of the marriage of Lamb and his bride, the Church or people of God. Therefore heaven is "the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*,

no.1024).

The foregoing Qur'anic and Biblical data about the signs of the end-time converge. Even the metaphors, like the sound of the trumpet to call the dead, are found in both faith traditions. These signs precede the return of Jesus Christ and of Imam Mahdi which we shall discuss next.

2. The return of Jesus Christ and of Imam MaHdi

While there has been a family resemblance between Shiite Islam and Christianity on the foregoing points, they diverge on the issue of the return of Imam Mahdi and of Jesus Christ. We shall first deal about the return of Jesus Christ and then the return of Imam Mahdi.

2.1. The return of Jesus Christ

Let us now see the return of Jesus Christ from the Islamic and Christian perspectives.

From the Islamic perspective

The Qur'an says that Christ's second coming (Q 4:159; 43:61) is a sign of the Hour of Judgment. "And (Jesus) will be a sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment); therefore have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow ye Me: this is a Straight Way (Q. 43:61). The following passage (Q. 4:158) concerning Jesus reads: "Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is exalted in Power, Wise." How Allah "exalted" Jesus has different interpretations. Concerning this passage Abdulah Yusuf Ali (1989:236) comments thus:

There is difference of opinion as to the exact interpretation of this verse. The words: The Jews did not kill Jesus, but Allah raised him up (*rafa'a*) to Himself. One school holds that Jesus did not die the usual human death, but still lives in the body in heaven, which is the generally accepted Muslim view. Another holds that he did die (v. 12) but not when he was supposed to be crucified, and that his

being “raised up” unto Allah means that instead of being disgraced as a malefactor, as the Jews intended, he was on the contrary honoured by Allah as His messenger...

The passage in Q. 4:159 has a different comment which reads: “And there is none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death; and on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them for the iniquity of the Jews We made unlawful for them certain (foods) good and wholesome which had been unlawful for them in that they hindered many from Allah’s Way.” According to commentary of Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1989 :236):

Before his death. Interpreters are not agreed as to the exact meaning. Those who hold that Jesus did not die [on the cross] refer the pronoun ”his” to Jesus. They say that Jesus is still living in the body and that he will appear just before the Final Day...

Many hadiths say that Jesus as a Muslim will return at the end of the world. According to Shiite doctrine, the return of Jesus will be in the context of the struggle which also involves the fight of Mahdi against the Antichrist. Jesus will help Mahdi to kill ad-Dajjal and his followers. Furthermore, Shiite doctrine says that Jesus will correct the “mistakes” in Christianity because Muslims believe that Christianity is a corruption of the true religion, which is Islam. Then the other people of the book, namely, the Jews and Christians will become one community with Islam. Then there will be an era of peace.

From the Christian perspective

The Catholic creed begins with “I believe in one God, maker of heaven and earth...” This belief in the one God is spelled out into the Trinity as summed up in the Apostles’ Creed (or the Nicene Creed as adopted in the ecumenical council of Nicea in 325 AD) which partly states: “I believe in God the Father... I believe in Jesus Christ.... He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified and was buried. He

descended to the dead. On the third day he arose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead.”

The foregoing signs precede the Last Judgment where all secrets will be revealed in Christ’s second coming or parousia. “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit upon his glorious throne, and all the nations will be assembled before him” (Mt. 25:31-33). According to Mark (13:26-27): “And then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and then he will send out the angles and gather [his] elect from the four winds, from the end of the earth to the end of the sky.” In Matthew (24:30-31) we find a parallel version: “And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the earth to the other.”

The manner of Christ’s reappearance or descent at the last day will be the reverse of his ascension, as the angels told the apostles on Christ’s ascension: “Men of Galilee..., this Jesus who has been taken up from you into heaven will return in the same way as you have seen him going into heaven” (Acts 1:11). Furthermore, his coming will be worldwide and sudden: “For just as lightning comes from the east and is seen as far as the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Mt. 24:27).

While Islam says that Christ is just a prophet and did not die on the cross, Christianity however, holds that Jesus is both human and divine. Furthermore, the Christian doctrine does not mention the role of Imam Mahdi which is particular in Shiite Islam.

2.2. The return of Imam Mahdi

The Qur’an (6:90) entrusts the followers to the prophets.

But the role of prophet and of imam “may be joined in one person who is then appointed to the functions of both prophet and Imam, or to both the reception of the Divine law and its preservation and explanation” (Talababa’I 1975:186). The Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam differently view the return of Imam Mahdi. Let us explain those viewpoints.

The Sunni view

Imam Mahdi, a messianic figure, is more popular in Shi’ah than in Sunni Islam.

Two of the four fundamental collections of Sunni traditions...make no mention of the Mahdi...Yet Sunnis accept the general Muslim belief in a Renewer or Reformer (*mujaddid*), who appears every century in some part of the Islamic world and whose function as the reviver of the faith and the strength of the community partly parallels the role awarded the Mahdi (Crow 1987:479-480).

Sunni and Shia Muslims are divided on Imam Mahdi.

Some Sunni Muslims...say that no one can know the identity of the Mahdi until he actually appears and makes his claim, while others limit the function of the Mahdi to Jesus alone. He is to appear like an ordinary man whose career is that of a reformer or conqueror, although some Sunnis accept that the Mahdi is hiding with no suggestion of supernatural concealment (Crow 1987:479).

We said that Sunni theology downgrades the role of Imam Mahdi.

Belief in the Mahdi is not an essential part of the Sunni creed, but is integral to Shi’ite Islam, where it is connected with the doctrine of the Hidden Imam. Sunni Islam does affirm that there will be a final restorer in the eschatological drama, but not that he will be called al-Mahdi. (Leirvik 2010:41).

The Shiite View

According to Crow (1987:478):

The Mahdi was understood as a prophetic eschatological figure who had disappeared from mortal sight and subsisted miraculously in a semiparadisial state until the time of his awaited reappearance; according to prophetic tradition, at that time he would lead the army of the righteous and initiate the terrible drama of the eschaton... He functions both as the avenger for the wrongs suffered by the Shi'ah and the herald of the ultimate theocracy on earth, when punishment for wickedness and tyranny will be administered, followed by the inauguration of a blissful reign of social and religious perfection preceding Resurrection Day.

The same author writes:

Beliefs touching on the sinlessness of the imam/Mahdi, his supernatural knowledge, the mode of his ascensional being, his power of intercession and remission of sin, and his future glory and vindication were developed and in time admitted as integral to the Mahdi figure among the largest body of the Shairah, the Twelvers (Crow 1987:479).

The Shia Muslims believe that the twelfth imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi, who was born in 869 CE and was hidden by God at the age of five in 874 CE. He has been in hiding (or occultation) and awaiting for the time that God has decreed. The signs of distress as mentioned above point to the return of Imam Mahdi. Since Shi'ite Islam bases its roots to Ali as the first successor of the Prophet, it follows that the succession should continue from the line of Ali, whose full name was Amir al[-mu'minin] Ali. He was the wife of Fatimah, the Prophet's beloved daughter from Khadijah. Shi'ite Islam, as mentioned above, traces its roots to the Prophet through Ali, the first imam, the first of the twelve imams. The twelfth imam was Mahdi (born in 256/868), son of the eleventh Imam. Imam Mahdi is "usually mentioned with his title of Imam-'i Asr (the Imam of the 'Period') and Shib al-Zaman (the Lord of the Age)" (Tabataba' i 1975:210).

After the martyrdom of his father became Imam and by Divine Command went into occultation (*ghaybat*). Thereafter he appeared only to his deputies (*na'ib*) and even then only in exceptional circumstances. (:210)

His occultation as the twelfth Imam has two parts:

The first, the minor occultation (*ghaybati-i sughra*) which began in 260/872 and ended in 329/939, lasting seventy years; the second, the major occultation which commenced in 329/939 and will continue as long as God wills it." (:211)

Shi'ite Islam believes that Imam Mahdi is still alive and in hiding; he will return at the end of the world. But is it possible for a human to live for centuries? By today's reckoning, he would be more than twelve centuries old. While Sunnis says that to survive for more than twelve centuries is impossible. But the Shiites claim this miraculous feat is because God wills it.

It can never be proved that the causes and agents that are functioning in the world are solely those that we see and know and other causes which we do not know or whose effects and actions we have not seen nor understood do not exist. It is in this way possible that in one or several members of mankind there can be operating certain causes and agents which bestow upon them a very long life or a thousand or several thousand years. (:214)

In the meantime,

The Imam watches over men inwardly and is in communion with the soul and spirit of men even if he be hidden from their physical eyes. His existence is always necessary even if the time has not as yet arrived for his outward appearance and the universal reconstruction that he is to bring about. (:214)

In short, according to Shiite theology, Imam Mahdi will come with Jesus Christ:

The Mahdi will arrive at the end of a long period of disintegration culminating in the appearance of al-Dajjal, whom he will kill, just as he will kill all the enemies of the

family of the Prophet. By then Jesus will have returned and will rule for a time, after which the Mahdi...will reign in peace and justice, fulfilling the mission of all the prophets. The family of the Prophet will participate not only in intercession but in judgment as well, in the persons of 'Ali or Fatimah or Husayn (Waldman 1987:134).

Both Sunni and Shia Muslims agree that Imam Mahdi is a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad of the line of Fatimah. The Imam's coming will be accompanied by the appearance of the Antichrist, that he will fill the world with justice and fairness at the end of time.

4. Conclusion

From the foregoing signs, both the biblical and qur'anic data are almost unanimous on the details, such as cosmic and human disasters. Both the Qur'an and the Bible agree that Jesus Christ will return at the end-time. However, Shiite and Sunni Muslims have varied opinions on the return of Imam Mahdi.

Belief in the Mahdi is not an essential part of the Sunni creed, but is integral to Shi'ite Islam, where it is connected with the doctrine of the Hidden Imam. Sunni Islam does affirm that there will be a final restorer in the eschatological drama, but not that he will be called al-Mahdi (Leirvik 2010:41).

In short we find similarities and dissimilarities concerning Imam Mahdi and Jesus Christ. Islam has varied views on Imam Mahdi although both Sunni and Shiite Islam agree that Imam Mahdi descended from Muhammad in the line of Fatimah. Shiite Islam holds that Mahdi was born in 869 CE and was hidden by God at the age of five, is still alive and awaiting the time when God will decree the return. Both Islam and Christianity hold that the world will come to an end, that signs (cosmic and human) that will precede the end. On the other hand, The Qur'an considers Jesus as a prophet second only to Muhammad. Hence Jesus is human.

But Christianity holds that Jesus is both human and divine, that he is inseparable from God the Father and the Holy Spirit, forming the One God.

In spite of doctrinal differences and similarities, will this all matter at the end? Will the world's religions continue in the afterlife? Here the opinions are varied. The Qur'an (29:46; 3:113-115) enjoins tolerance and respect between the People of the Book, that is, Jews, Christians and Muslims who all claim Abraham to be their common ancestor. Furthermore, "any who believe in Allah and the Last Day, and work righteousness, shall have their reward" (Q:2:62). Furthermore, the Qur'an (22:17) encourages a neutral position toward all non-Muslims According to St. Paul (1 Cor. 13:8-13):

Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will be brought to nothing; if tongues, they will cease; if knowledge, it will be brought to nothing. For we know partially and we prophesy partially, but the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I used talk as a child, think as a child; when I became a man, I put aside childish things. At present we see indistinctly, as in a mirror, but then, face to face. At present I know partially; then I shall know fully, as I am fully known. So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

In other words, there will be no need of faith and religion in the afterlife because what we believe and hope we shall have been attained.

Here we must give the nuances between faith and religion because the meaning of a word depends on its usage. Faith is one's personal response to God's love. Now this response can become systematized and institutionalized into practices as reflected in a people's culture according to its beliefs, laws, rites and the community. This gives way to expressions like Muslim faith, Christian faith as synonymous respectively to Muslim religion and Christian religion.

We believe that religions then are just vehicles in the journey to the other world. Buddhism classifies such vehicles as Mahayana Buddhism (or the big raft) and Hinayana or Theravada Buddhism (the small raft) in the life's journey to attain enlightenment or salvation. But once the destination is reached, the vehicles are no longer needed. So in our discussion of eschatology or the last things, religions will disappear at the end. There will be no need for theological debate. What will remain is love.

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Arts Education and Training Strategies for Islamic Seminaries in Perspective of Mahdism

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Abstract

Arts education in Muslim countries excluding Iran has almost failed to protect the ideological strength among people. For example, in Pakistan, although a limited content of Islamic ideological past is presented in the early classes of general education, a more secular trend emerges in upper classes. Especially, there is hardly found any content that prepares the students in perspective of fears and hopes of the future under the Islamic belief pattern. The case of Islamic seminaries is also not much different. Despite that according to all Islamic beliefs, Imam Al-Mahdi and the Jesus Christ will appear sooner or later and also that in the pre-appearance era, there will be disasters and complex problems in the world, nothing significant is being taught in the universities, colleges, school and even in Islamic seminaries. The importance of futurism is

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evident both as a belief that “the meaning of life and one's personal fulfillment lie in the future and not in the present or past” and as a practice of making life contextually aligned, energetic and dynamic. However, sufficient efforts are not observable in the form of degree programs, training modules, text books and course materials for the students to prepare themselves as per future fears (such as disasters in pre-appearance or deceptive system of anticipated Anti-Christ) and hopes (such as appearance of the promised savior). Due to this trend, the capacity of Muslim communities and nations to cope with emerging future is narrowing down day by day while their counterparts are rapidly progressing. It may be expected that if the Muslims do not develop any systematic knowledge base for relating their content of degree programs and training modules with their possible futures, they will further lose their identity and freedom.¹

The present paper presents an attempt to highlight the importance of Arts education, its relevance to futurism in general and Mahdism doctrine in particular. An overview of Arts education in Islamic seminaries is presented. The paper provides some guidelines for future strategies to promote Arts education as well as Mahdism doctrine particularly in Islamic seminaries.

Keywords: Contemporary Problems, General education, Arts education, Islamic seminaries, Futurism, Mahdism and Strategies.

1. “When a government takes over a people’s economic life it becomes absolute, and when it has become absolute it destroys the arts, the minds, the liberties and the meaning of the people it governs” [Maxwell Anderson <http://quotes.liberty-tree.ca/quotes/art>].

Introduction

The contemporary as well as emerging problems of the world invite the attention of scholars, professionals, researchers and educationists to give up lethargy and alienation in order to protect themselves and the Muslim Ummah. They need to proactively think how they can enhance Muslims' capacity to solve their current and future problems. This requires, among other things, a reformed educational system that is able to protect Muslim ideological foundations and Islamic culture on one hand and effectively promotes Islamic futuristic vision of the world on the other. This is possible through a reformed Arts education.

The present paper presents an attempt to highlight the importance of Arts education, its relevance to Mahdism doctrine and the situation of Arts education in Islamic seminaries. The paper provides some guidelines for future strategies to promote Arts education as well as Mahdism doctrine particularly in Islamic seminaries.

The basic concepts

The Arts means a group of disciplines. These are creative disciplines to constitute or shape the culture of a nation. The arts are defined in many ways.

... "imaginative, creative, and nonscientific branches of knowledge considered collectively, esp. as studied academically" [the Free Dictionary].

... "Art is created when an artist creates a beautiful object, or produces a stimulating experience that is considered by his audience to have artistic merit." [Irish Art Encyclopedia]

... "Art is a global activity which encompasses a host of disciplines, as evidenced by the range of words and phrases which have been invented to describe its various forms" [Irish Art Encyclopedia]

Arts are of many types; performing arts (music, theatre, dance and film), Visual arts (Drawing, Gastronomy, Architecture, Painting, Sculpture), Conceptual art, Video games, literary arts., Fine Arts, Liberal Arts, Decorative Arts, Applied Arts, Design, Crafts, Cinema etc. modern Photography, Comics, computer graphics and animation are non-traditional additions in the list of Arts.

Religious arts also exist in almost all religions and regions of the world. Religious music in Iran is popular in its mosques, holy places, streets and on occasions. Noheh, Qaseedah, manqabat, calligraphy, painting and print-arts are very famous globally.¹ Christian, Jewish, Hindu and other religions have their religious music and arts which are used to perform rituals or promote thinking, meditation, excitement and collective interest in ceremonies. Music created out of Sufism in Pakistan is also an example of religious arts. There are some religious arts in Islam which do not originally belong to any Islamic culture but are imported from other cultures.

In most of the Muslim countries, the arts are studied under the group of the Humanities which includes subjects like history, linguistics, literature, languages, philosophy and media etc.

Why arts education? The economic and other benefits

Arts education enables the individuals to foster their general development by use of their emotional and imaginative perceptions, experience and expressions. Their knowledge and understanding of life, universe, aim of life, and future destiny becomes more easily understandable with the help of arts education. Their ideas, feelings, enquiry and expressions are transformed into disciplined form and they can respond to their own and others' personal experiences in a systematic manner. The most important contribution of

1. Ta'zieh music, Ashurah music etc. Are special types of arts in Iran.

arts education, hence, is promotion of creativity, intellectual activity and development. Therefore, if theory and practical of arts education is provided in a well manner, the country will achieve development in all fields including science and technology that requires creativity.

Among students, teachers, educational managers and others do also include those who oppose art education or give less importance to it and consider it as burden on the national budget. While some of these consider art education as very productive for the nation. Horne says. "We're preparing kids for jobs. We're preparing them to be citizens. And we're teaching them to be human beings who can enjoy the deeper forms of beauty. The third is as important as the other two." McElroy (2005) says "that students in all the programs - whether related to sports, academics, community, or the arts - did better in school and in their personal lives. Interestingly, students in the arts programs did the best." KerenVeisblatt (2012) writes on the importance of "arts" in human creativity and advancement as "The arts not only play an important role in our nation's well-being and foster creativity and innovation, but they also create jobs and prepare our workforce to compete in the global economy. The ever increasing human capital in global advancement also convinces us that creativity emerging from arts education is vital for economic performance". The same source further notes that "In order to meet the demand for innovation in the global economic marketplace, we must first begin to teach skills of the imagination, innovation, and creative thought processes in the classroom"

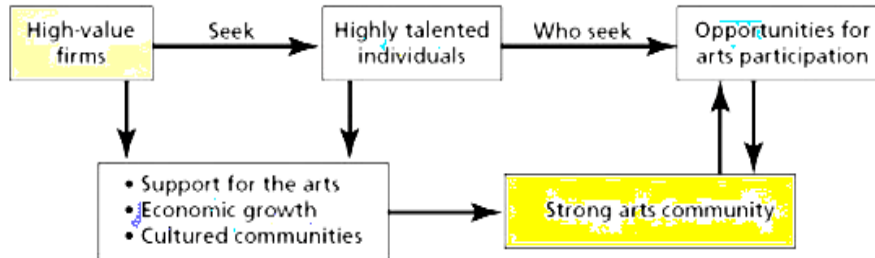
Figure 1.1
Framework for Understanding the Benefits of the Arts



Available at <http://studentadvocatesforthearts.wordpress.com>

Figure 1.2

How the Arts Create Indirect Economic Benefits



SOURCES: Arora et al., 2000; Florida, 2000.

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Available at <http://studentadvocatesforthearts.wordpress.com>

Arts have multidimensional role in human's life starting from individual's aesthetic and emotional entertainment to leading the freedom movements and protecting the state's ideological boundaries. Arts involve in ritualistic actions, traditional cultures, modern life, hunting, military sessions, raising the morale of people and creating other desired

situations. The history is full of stories telling how far was transformed by technological developments and how far by traditional arts. The works of Paul Gauguin, Pablo Picasso and the Cubists, as well as the Futurists and others can be seen to know the role of arts in community or national history.

Studies show that students' active involvement in different arts results in their improved performance in mathematics, reading and comprehension, critical thinking, and interpersonal communication. Arts learning can also improve motivation, concentration, confidence, and teamwork. Other benefits of arts education include;

1. To build tomorrow's creative workforce.
2. To protect and develop the nations through long term visions which usually do not emerge from education of sciences and technology
3. "Education for all" not possible without arts education which is more affordable for deprived classes than the science education.
4. For low performers it is easy to learn and succeed in life
5. To shape up values about home and family, work and leisure, the individual and society, nature and the environment, war and peace, war and love.
6. To shape human efforts distinguishing right and wrong
7. Art encourages for self-expression and develops self-esteem
8. Arts makes increased parental involvement possible
9. Arts evolve creative solutions to challenging problems.
10. Art education provides a means to many educational ends.

Arts education in Islam

In Islam, knowledge of any type is respected. There is no

concept of Islamic knowledge or non-Islamic knowledge as such. But it depends on the use or intention to use a knowledge that makes it Islamic or non-Islamic. In this sense, Arts education is Islamic if it is learnt and used for any purpose of Islam. Historically speaking, Arts has been great source of promotion of Islam and its different teachings in all ages. The complete code of Islamic conduct includes respect for aesthetic values because these lead to strong belief in Allah. It also requires harmony within self and with regard to others. Arts education can play very vital role in these fields of human life. A most successful example in the world is Iran where due attention has been given to education of Arts in general institutions as well as Islamic seminaries. This has built a safety wall around the Islamic revolution.

The legitimate arts vs. the prohibited arts

As we noted above that arts are of many types and take many shapes in different societies which follow different religions and sects or may be no religion at all. There types which are allowed and prohibited in different religions and sects. It is possible that one form of the art is highly valuable in one sect but prohibited in another sect within the same religion. There are some arts whose legitimacy is established and others which are yet debated. Therefore, a precaution is pertinent at this place that in this paper, when we favor to promote ‘arts’, it refers only to the *arts* that are not prohibited.

Is arts education in Islam different from conventional arts education?

In this paper, we will not go into the debate whether there is a separate Islamic philosophy of arts or merely ‘philosophy of arts’. However, a general debate about whether Islamic education is different from education is presented here to draw the deep meanings for Arts

education.

There are educationists and thinkers [such as Hirst 1965, 1974] who believe that phrases such as Christian Education [or Islamic Education] are meaningless because of their perceived compatibility problem between science and education and consider these merely practice not having a separate theoretical dimension. They also believe that scientific knowledge is ‘autonomous of other forms of knowledge including religion’.¹ One important base for this type of belief in Hirst’s view is that differences among the interpreters of religious text (resulting in emergence of sects and denominations), how it can be determined whether the so-called Christian or Islamic education is truly Christian or truly Islamic and how it can be generalized?² For such thinkers, co-existence of science and ideology is accidental.

There are other thinkers such as David Carr [1994, 1996] who believe that religion and science have distinct forms of knowledge. For example, ‘Spiritual truths cannot be put under the other truths’. Noaparast (2001) quotes four examples from relating to such claim;

Bible says -

“Man does not live by bread alone”

“No man can serve two masters”

“What does it profit to gain the whole world and lose his soul”

“Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof”

The Qurán in SuraZumar says the similar –

﴿ضَرَبَ اللَّهُ مَثَلًا رَجُلًا فِيهِ شُرَكَاءُ مُتَشَاكِسُونَ وَرَجُلًا سَلَمًا لِرَجُلٍ هَلْ يَسْتَوِيَانِ﴾³

“Allah sets forth example of a man in whom are several partners conflicting with one another, and there is another man wholly owned by one. Are the two alike? ”

These verses clearly indicate that religious view of life, its

1. For detailed discussion on this, see Noaparast (2001, pp 05-28).

2. Hirst, 1974 pp. 87-79.

3. 39:29

activities, and outcomes is systematically different from others. And accordingly, education even rationally, at least in an Islamic country has to be a process of becoming divine. This process, in the words of Noaparast (2001) requires the ;

“... that one knows God (Allah) as the Lord of the world and, the human chooses Him as his or her Lord, and undertakes His lordship (al-Rabubiyah) and avoids taking others as his Lord. Based on this definition, the purpose of educationist that human beings become divine” [p. 26].

Becoming divine, according to Noaparast, contains three rationally involved elements;

1. Knowledge (of God as Lord)
2. Choice (choosing God as one's Lord)
3. Action (undertaking God's leadership throughout one's life)

With the above discussion, it becomes easy to understand that if not for all, at least for believing societies, the goal of education as well as its outcome should be to enable the people becoming divine. Only this way, their belief pattern and their education shall become coherent. Here we can also say what phrase is used for education 'Islamic education', 'science education'. Arts education' is important or not is a less relevant question; the more important is what goal can be served by Arts education, science education or Islamic education. If Arts education can serve any/all goals of an Islamic society, then we can say it is different from conventional Arts education in either theory or application or both.

Goals of Islamic education

Islam has a clear code of conduct for humans and its all dimensions including society, universe, ethics, politics, economics, arts, legislation etc. It encourages physical training, hygiene, healthy habits, struggle and preparedness etc. Hence, all schools' universities, courses and other

sources of education and training must originate from Islamic philosophy. If education and sources of education are not according to Islam, the society and people cannot be transformed into the Islamic teachings and practices.¹ “Basic motives and instincts exist within all people, but have different magnitudes with respect to strength or weakness. Hence, it is acknowledged that people possess various potentialities such as intelligence, noble characters etc.... Islam takes this fact into consideration in its education process and observes this reality when shouldering people with responsibilities and duties” [The Bilagh Foundation].

The text that follows further emphasizes the importance of Arts in shaping the societies. “Furnishing a model practical code of Islamic values and ethics is an important part of constructive Islamic education. Such an example would provide the society with a visual portrait, add dynamism to thoughts and concepts, induce people to be keen adherents, and encourage the mixing of principles with concepts” [Bilagh Foundation].

Islamic education develops people's on ethical foundations to achieve the following goal; 1. Making people dutiful, 2.conscious and nearness to God 3. Building a balanced personality and promoting harmonious relationship among all concerned including the universe 4. Enabling people to differentiate between good and evil 5.Evolving a process of thought and actions according to the Islamic teachings 7.Safeguarding larger interest and so on.

This above list of goals is not exhaustive however, all goals can be lumped into one, that is, shaping people's behaviors and practices according to the Divine in matters of worldly life as well afterlife.

Imam All (a.s.) said:

"Train your children in swimming and sharp-shooting"

1. "There is no proper belief without deeds, and belief cannot be firm unless coupled with practice." [al-Hurai-Amili. Wasa'il al-Shi'ah, Vol. 6, Chapt.4, p. 127.].

[al-Kulaini, al-Kafi. Vol. 6. p. 47.]

Imam Ali (a.s.) when explaining the meaning of this verse, said: "Teach yourselves and your families virtue and good conduct".¹

It is also narrated from the Prophet (s.a.w.)

"Look who nurses your children, for their milk would influence children's personalities." [al-Kulaini, al-Kafi. Vol. 5. p. 44]

Education is generally a personal and social responsibility. "O you who believe guard yourselves and your families against a fire whose fuel is people and stones..." Holy Qur'an (66:6).

From these narrations, different arts subjects more important than usually considered.

Can arts improve ethics and religiosity?

This is a question that concerns all who relate arts with Mahdism. If the answer is no, then there remains no need to construct the rest of this article. But the answer is both 'yes' as well as 'no'. Because it depends on the type of arts, the presentation, the context, and the quality etc. That will determine the effect of arts on human's personal, social, ethical, religious, and other behaviors. "The arts affect individual identities, communities, and relationships between people and their environments. The arts can contribute to the ethical life of a community, as exemplified by public art and theatre".²

Arts education in Muslim countries

Arts education in Muslim countries excluding Iran has almost failed to protect the ideological strength among people. Especially, there is hardly found any content that prepares the students in perspective of fears and hopes of

1. Muhammad Husain Tabatabaai. Tafsir a~-Mizan. Sura Tahrim.

2. <http://www.twu.ca>.

the future under the Islamic belief pattern.

Except Iran, Arts education in Muslim countries seems to have only a tradition. Its role in presenting, protecting and promoting the Islamic identity and culture is almost negligible. The scheme of studies, course outlines and text books all are predominantly copy-pasted from Western world.

Iran on the other hand, has made significant progress after Islamic revolution to re-design the scheme of studies, course outlines and text books to align them with the Islamic religious, ethical and spiritual values. It has also excelled in going beyond the curriculum and produce globally marketable arts and crafts which not only reinforce ones religious and spiritual attributes but also preserves Islamic historical heritage and cultural identity. This can be sustained only if arts education continues effectively.

In Pakistan, Arts education has failed on both fronts; it is not much productive with regard to economic benefits of education and also it is almost ineffective in preserving and promoting ideological strength among people. Although a limited content of Islamic ideological past is presented in the early classes of general education, a more secular trend emerges in upper classes. This opposite to the National Education policy;

‘The highest priority would be given to the revision of the curricula with a view to reorganizing the entire content around Islamic thought and giving education an ideological orientation so that Islamic ideology permeates the thinking of the younger generation and helps them with the necessary conviction and ability to refashion society according to Islamic tenets’ (NEP 1979).

Alnowaiser (2012)¹ discusses the problems facing Muslim nations. In his views, most Islamic countries are being left behind in social progress as compared with other nations

1. <http://arabnews.com/opinion/columns/article583172.ece>.

due to five reasons; 1) the educational curriculums not conducive for talent and minds of scientists, inventors and innovators, hence no innovative thinking takes place. In his view, this is because in religious institutions, subjects like mathematics, chemistry, physics, philosophy and logic are replaced by religious subjects. The result therefore is that the verses of the Holy Qurán such as; Do they not reflect? Do they not ponder? Do they not understand? Are practically neglected? 2) Islamic nations generally revolve around the past at the expense of the present and the future. He seems right and this is not because Islam leads them to such patterns of thinking but because of their own misperceptions. Islam does give importance to the past history but with the aim to shape the future history of nations. 3) Islamic nations' education produce experts in halaal and haraam and not in the scientific disciplines. 4) Islamic countries have a culture of escape from reality in the name of *tawakkal*. 5) Severe neglect of Arts education.

As Alnowaiser (2012) writes; "Islamic nations have used lame and illogical excuses to push art aside and intentionally hide it from their people. All kinds of art such as music, theater, painting, and sculpture have been de-emphasized or completely disregarded and buried alive. This has led to creating shaken and disturbed personalities and spirits, stifling talents that could add to the enjoyment of life. Art is a means to satisfy our soul and feed our emotions, producing a more confident, balanced and spiritual humanity and motivating people to live and work, and even more, to create, innovate and give of themselves to others. Art protects humanity from all that can bring it down and allows spirits and hearts to soar high into a sky filled with optimism and hope and to move steadily down the road of innovation, creation and discovery. The Prophet Mohammed taught us to cheer up our hearts from time to time, because grieved hearts live in darkness".

The Arts education in Pakistan is not much different from

many other developing countries and Muslim countries. Either it is not regularly updated and if updated, is not contextualized to serve best to the nation as well to Ummah. It contains negligible content about future issues which have already taken their start. Hence one can guess that topics such as coming of a savior or its pre and post conditions would gain no importance unless the concept of 'future' itself becomes important [Annexure-A1 is the scheme of studies for 4 year degree program in Pakistan studies; one can see how far it is futuristics]. This will happen when the creativity and thinking process activates through an updated and contextualized arts education.

Keeping in view the above mentioned five factors, one would be convinced that Islamic nations can achieve progress if their educational system becomes conducive to promote critical and futuristic thinking in all fields of life. For this purpose, the importance of arts education that enables people to think and act creatively is very evident.

Muslim's dilemma of language and arts education

Education in Muslim countries is day by day weakening as a process of building, reform, guidance and practical training for people and taking the shape of information not the knowledge and wisdom. Because with Islamic knowledge and contemporary information, the Muslims should have gone taking Islamic culture and economic development hand in hand. But today we see economic development in these countries with dominated western culture. This is obvious because non-Islamic educational theories and principles cleverly disguised the theories that may transform Muslim societies in a slow poisoning manner. The ever increasing practice of copying or importing of Western theories that are based on observation, empirics or half-wisdom (materialistic benefits) are damaging Muslims at large and undermining the Islamic heritage, ethical values and behavioral excellence.

Many of the Muslim countries are confused about the teaching and use of mother language or English language as medium of communication. In Pakistan, national language is Urdu which is 70 percent Persian. If Urdu is developed and used effectively, then with a little additional effort, the religious, philosophical and cultural literature of Persian becomes easily understandable. Unfortunately, due to gradual increase in inclination towards promotion of English language, the Persian language lost its place in Pakistani society. That has proportionately affected the people's literary creativity, thinking and wisdom.

Similarly, in Muslim countries including Pakistan, a perception emerged that science education is more important than arts education. The result of this perception and consequent weakening of the arts education has proved to be dangerous in many ways; 1) Muslim countries are producing doctors, engineers, accountants and other professionals who do not possess sufficient skills of contextualization, 2) A notable moral and ethical deterioration has taken place that caused mass corruption and consequent failures of economics as well as governance. What Confucius said about language and Arts seems pertinent to quote here:

... "If language is not correct, then what is said is " not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what must be done remains undone; if this remains undone, morals and art will deteriorate; if justice goes astray, the people will stand about in helpless confusion. Hence there must be no arbitrariness in what is said. This matters above everything".[<http://quotes.liberty-tree.ca/quotes/art>]

In Pakistan, during 2004 to 2011, courses of about 94 disciplines/subjects were updated by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan out of which only two (Fine Arts and Fashion Design) were picked from the list of Applied

Arts.¹ Within these subjects/disciplines which were improved, were not enriched regarding the ideological need and importance of the Arts. The major aim of improvement seems to be marketability and job prospects of the subject but not the ideological protection of the nation. During the same period, the courses of two languages i.e. English and Urdu were improved while Persian could not get any attention which is the great source of Islamic Philosophy, knowledge, cultural identity and futuristic vision including the doctrine of Intezaar-e-Imam (Ajj.).

Arts education, futurism and Mahdism

General education and futurism

Futurism has many meanings. It is thinking and knowing about the future. It is planning in perspective of foreseeable and far future. It is a form of belief that one's personal fulfillment lie in the future and not in the present or past. Futurism has been a movement of the 20th century industrial life in Italy and other countries to replace traditional aesthetic values with the modern machine age values.² Futurism as behavior is among one of the powerful factors that pull the development process of individuals and nations. Therefore, futurism in one sense or the other is important to be included in general education of a Muslim society.

Arts education, futurism and Mahdism Doctrine

Arts and futurism usually go hand in hand. At one time, a futuristic imagination gives birth to an artistic creation and at another time artistic production activity generates future vision and understanding. The reason behind is that various forms of arts involve critical appraisal of contemporary

1. See www.hec.gov.pk for the details.

2. Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged © HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003.

social circumstances. When it is done, the futuristic thinking and problem solving gains importance in individual's behaviour. Depending on four main factors that affect the development of talent i.e. age, ability, motivation, and availability of opportunity, the nation's manpower foresees the future and moves towards progress and strength accordingly as it moves along different Arts.

As already mentioned, in many Muslim countries including Pakistan, the education in general has taken the secular form. This trend of education, and in addition, deterioration of Arts education has resulted in many problems that need attention of experts;

- The courses taught are not necessarily relevant to the contextual needs of these countries
- Content included in the courses does not enable the pupils creatively solve the social, economic, engineering or medical problems of the local communities.
- Such education system is very far from that which prepares the students in perspective of fears and hopes of the future.
- Islam has remained merely one subject in the whole scheme of studies of most of the degree programs and is not the integral part of the whole education process. Therefore, the students remain unable to apply the Islamic belief pattern to contemporary or emerging problems.

This all points to the alarming fact that if Arts education in Muslim countries in general and in Islamic seminaries in particular continues to be neglected, is not reformed and is not enthusiastically promoted, these nations will be at risk with regard to their ideology and cultural identity.

The futurism in Muslim societies is even more important because of multiple reasons;

1. The commonly prevailing local and global problems such as poverty, population, water scarcity, migration, violence, wars, technological advancements, and other

emerging issues call for futuristic thinking in order to effectively solve such problems.

2. Almost all religions have predicted the problems and the state of future world from social, natural and economic perspectives. Islam has clearly predicted some disasters and pre-conditions of the second coming of Jesus Christ and appearance of Imam Mahdi. The societies which want to remain safe of those problems may succeed in that partially or fully depending upon their practices of futuristic thinking, planning, strategy development and implementation.

3. The concept of Anti-Christ (*Dajjaal*) is a well-known and accepted as belief in Christianity and Islam. In other religions too, a similar concept exists. To some, *Dajjaal* is a person and to others it is a system characterized by attributes that evil will be strengthened and goodness will be prosecuted under this system. Both in Islam and Christianity, some very clear signs and deceptive methods have been attributed to him. Therefore, knowing such attributes and adopting appropriate strategies against that may minimize the social, economic, cultural, religious and other harms that are likely to challenge the very existence of some nations. This can be done through promotion of futuristic creativity possible along with promotion of arts education.

Perfection, arts and Mahdavi Era

Belief in coming of a savior of humanity can be found in all religions and sects in one form or the other. More than two third population of the world believe in appearance of a savior of the mankind who will free it from on-going tyranny, injustices, corruption and massive unrest.

In Christian faith it is believed that this will happen when Jesus will come again to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. In Islam it is believed that Jesus will come when Imam Al-Mahdi will re-appear after a long occultation. In

Muslim countries with the exception of Iran, yet there seem no attention towards a general education about the world's future from science as well as religions 'perspective.

The perfection, harmony, order, beautification and correct relationship of different things are the fundamental of Islamic philosophy. It has been abundantly reported in Islamic traditions that in the time of Imam Mahdi Ajj., all things will be put to proper order, the wisdom will reach to perfection, the earth will be beautified, and there will be correct relationship among all things. In fact, the nature and the human soul will be harmonized. Hence, it is not merely a hope or expectation but is a logical climax of the universe and is essential part of faith without which faith is considered to be incomplete. And, the waiting for appearance of Imam Mahdi is in other words waiting for the perfection of everything on earth.

With special reference to Mahdism doctrine, the Arts education can play important role from two aspects;

1. General Role of Arts: Arts education is generally useful to promote creativity and futuristic visions hence, may be helpful in promoting Mahdavi perspectives too.

2. Specific Role of Arts: Arts education that is specific to promote Mahdism education. That includes visual arts, performing arts, photography, animation, graphics, and in fact all types of arts.

Once it is clear that the concept of a savior is essential part of Islamic and other faiths, then it becomes logically obvious that both general and Islamic education, at least in Islamic countries, must include this concept, its different forms in different religions, and its pre-conditions and signs etc. in the education system. Even in secular education that claims religious neutrality should include this concept as a futuristic topic in the same way as it includes the topic like future waters, future politics, future global issues etc.

Arts education and training strategies for Islamic seminaries

The case of Islamic seminaries with reference to arts education and training is even worst. Iran is an exception with regard to Islamization of education in the context discussed in the early paragraphs. This is true both in case of general education and Islamic seminaries. Although a lot yet needs to be done in both fields, we can still say that Iran is far ahead of other centers of knowledge in most of the Muslim countries. Besides significant advancement in science, technology, space and oceans the educational system of Iran was able to protect ideology in severe challenging situations during the last three decades. This became possible only due to the Islamic seminaries in Iran which have promoted religious teachings on the one hand and preserved and developed the arts and culture on the other. Either through providing arts education or creating conducive environments for arts, these seminaries produced countless professionals who produced revolutionary arts products and services that supported the revolution, culture, economy, development process and political system much the same way as army and specialists workforce does in the other countries. It is the successful strategies and role of Arts education in Iran that helped Iranians to safeguard their identity and freedom so far.

Obstacles facing arts education and training in Islamic seminaries and needed strategies

Islamic seminaries are the places where the Mahdavi knowledge, signs of appearance, post-appearance government structures, personal attributes of Holy Imam (Ajj.) and other related courses can be offered in larger proportion as compared to other type of educational institutions. Therefore, improvements and reforms in these seminaries in general and strengthening arts education in particular may go a long way in popularizing the doctrine of Mahdism. Despite that according to all Islamic beliefs,

Imam Al-Mahdi and the Jesus Christ will appear sooner or later and also that in the pre-appearance era, there will be disasters and complex problems in the world, nothing significant is being taught in the universities, colleges and even in Islamic seminaries due to a number of obstacles and problems.

For this purpose, the first step is to understand the general and arts-related obstacles and problems faced by seminaries. Only then some solutions can be found and strategies may be developed to solve those problems. The major issues and obstacles facing the Arts education in Islamic seminaries are;

a. The growing digitalism has changed an overall context of the world's present and future. Hence, new generation is more inclined towards the emerging digital technologies. To keep the Arts alive in such situation demands that Islamic seminaries should pay full attention to excel in digital information sciences and invent the ways to promote students creativity in digital arts or those which combine digital equipment with other forms of Arts.

b. The new technology and in-house entertainment facilities have drastically harmed the traditional arts. The children, youth and old, all seem to prefer these over the traditional arts. The Islamic seminaries have to maintain traditional arts on one hand and get hold of the emerging arts on the other. Otherwise, the Muslim nations may not be able to sustain in the present era of technological imperialism.

c. The general curriculum in developing countries is mostly obsolete, irrelevant and uninteresting hence is unable to enable the Muslims move along the fastly changing world. The curriculum of the Islamic seminaries on the other hand is far more obsolete. It is good in providing comprehensive knowledge about principles of Islam but has almost absolutely failed to enable the students develop Islamic philosophy in different fields of natural and social

sciences. Arts education can help getting out of this trap.

c. The students of Islamic seminaries lack team approach and skills, are less competent in problem solving as compared to a student of MBA of even a most third class university, and mostly belong to disadvantaged circumstances.¹ The arts are useful for Islamic seminaries from these dimensions but such seminaries usually don't realize the importance of arts in this context. Therefore, there is a need to sensitize the need and importance of the arts education in religious seminaries.

d. The whole education system in most of the developing countries is not contextually aligned. Therefore, the degree programs, the training modules, the text books, the teacher; all are available but none is helpful to promote real understanding of the present and future of

e. Islamic seminaries usually run long duration degree programs but lack the culture of short training and human resource development programs.

f. If the Muslims do not develop any systematic knowledge base for relating their content of degree programs and training modules with their possible futures, they won't be able to meet the challenges that are ahead in a rapidly changing world.

Need for coherent policies

The ever increasing general local and global disorder (*fasaadfilbarr-e walbahr*) on one hand and the overall poor performance of the Muslim Ummah on the other, call for coherent policies for education, arts education and training that meet the contemporary professional criteria within the religious framework so that dichotomy between religion and state policies is reduced. This should be applicable to almost

1. According to a U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, "The arts can help students become tenacious, team-oriented problem-solvers who are confident and able to think creatively. These qualities can be especially important in improving learning among students from economically disadvantaged circumstances."

all policies. With specific reference to arts education, missing a coherent government policy is a problem not restricted to developing nations. Even the United States undergoes the same problem as described by Keren Veisblatt (2012) that “As a result, the federal government has been funding arts education in our public schools for decades and we still have not implemented a coherent approach to using the arts to benefit our children”. If a proper art education and training policy is crafted, the nations like Iran and Pakistan, can reap great economic, religious and spiritual benefits including the setting of ground for appearance because these nations have very motivated and talented manpower having rich potential of creative arts.

Concluding remarks

The analysis in preceding pages suggest a change of mindset of the experts, educationists, curriculum writers, theoreticians and other stakeholders of the education system in Muslim countries. They need to evolve futuristic creativity and revise and reform the existing educational pattern, policies, programs, textbooks, training modules and procedures that are according to their own context and are not adopted from the footsteps of Western theories or non-Islamic codes.

Before it is too late, the Islamic seminaries should come forward and take the lead in reforming not only religious education but also the general education system so that the whole system of education and training is run under the one coherent shade of Islamic system.

The Islamic seminaries, however, have to adopt scientific methods of thinking, learning and knowledge acquisition and specialization in various fields. They cannot make significant Islamic contribution if their students keep on only memorizing the Islamic history and culture but are not able to preserve and promote it.

The students of Islamic seminaries need to absorb the

Islamic spirit and then convert it into principles, ethics, new history, culture, economic advancement, and futuristic thinking. That requires piety, struggle, and creativity which is possible with the promotion of arts education.

The reformed education system having due place for arts, shall also produce some macro level outcomes too. The talents produced through the above mentioned creativity shall be able to effectively attract other people to the message of Allah, justices, and prosperity. With Arts education they shall also be able to counter the media war and minimize the damage in ethical, cultural, religious and economic life of Muslims through the mass media, educational and cultural institutions, electronic screen, and publishing houses. In fact they will be the people who are ready and who will be preparing others to get ready for welcoming the divinely guided global savior.

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The Arts and the Mahdaviat

Dr. Olivier Souan¹

If the doors of perception were cleansed
every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.
For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things
through narrow chinks of his cavern.

William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Earth

The Arts are usually considered as a minor issue in politics, far below economics or foreign affairs. This is certainly a mistake. The arts are not a hobby for rich citizens, neither is a cultural policy a pretense for flattering the electorates; the arts have a far wider meaning: they create an atmosphere in which we are living, acting, thinking, especially in our era where the Internet and the media unceasingly diffuse music, videos, motion pictures. Not just in the West, but also on the whole planet, people are bathed in a continuous stream of musicals, videos, movies, deeply impacting their imagination and feeling. Even if this industrialization and massification of the arts can raise concerns, this phenomenon is actually not a superficial one, it reveals that man cannot live without the

1. (St John's University).

arts, as they not only reflect something essential about his life and destiny on earth, but also are an absolute precondition for its material, psychical and spiritual survival. Many poets have underlined this essential function of the arts. Hölderlin, one of Germany's greatest poet, once wrote: "full of merits but poetically dwells Man on this Earth"(Hölderlin: voll Verdienst, doch dichterich, wohnt der Mensch auf dieser Erde), i.e., man has accomplished a lot of impressive ordeals, but his very relationship to the world is ultimately poetical. "In Greece" wrote the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, "verses and lyres rhythmed the Action", thus producing a "harmonious life" (To Paul Demeny, 15 May 1871).

I. The social role of the arts in the Mahdaviat

But what could be the relation with the Mahdaviat? The Mahdaviat is the effort accomplished to usher an era of peace and prosperity which would be beneficial to all mankind. In Shia Islamic eschatology, a given messianic figure, the Mahdi, plays the role of a catalyst who allows this transition to take place. From this viewpoint, the Mahdaviat is precisely the efforts on man's behalf to ease this transition.

But if the whole process really rests on only one man, then he must be understood as not only potentially fulfilling the aspirations of a generation but also as serving as their embodiment. Indeed, there is a direct connection between the state of a society and its leaders, those latter mystically representing the qualities of a given society, in good or bad. This is precisely the reason for why given society can "recognize" some persons as being their leaders, as role models, or, in the contrary, as counter models. That's how famous politicians can be seen as expressing something deeply ingrained within the societal unconscious. By the law of polarities, to each positive figure a negative figure is

often associated, both expressing the positive and negative sides of a given society. For instance, Abraham and Nimrod were clearly such expressions, with Abraham opening the way to the monotheist era and Nimrod embodying the regressive aspects of the underlying civilization. The same holds of Moses and Pharaoh, etc. That's why this kind of clash has often epic proportion, as it in fact concerns each of us and our future.

As a consequence, famous figures must not be understood as heaven-sent, but as a projection of forces latent within a society, which have slowly been maturing for centuries. But, precisely, the arts have a deep impact in the development and the orientation of those forces. During their childhood, the individuals are influenced by rhymes, legends, books; later on by music and movies. Those artistic productions are like seeds sowed in their mind, which help them building their character and worldview.

II. Arts and values.

The problem is the following: what is the function of the Arts? Can the Arts have a political function? But if they have a political function, would not that ruin the very notion of artistic freedom on which they rest? Thus we have to reconcile three different elements: the arts themselves, the common good and the freedom of the individual. Associated to those elements are three different values: Beauty, the Good and Freedom, equally difficult to reconcile.

Instead of proceeding the other way around, i.e. to discover the values structuring a society and then how to enforce them on a society, we would rather start from the very notion of Beauty in order to subsequently reach the common Good and Freedom.

a) Art and beauty

Indeed, the arts are intimately connected with the notion

of Beauty, as they try to present beautiful artistic productions. Beauty has nothing to do with Utility. A work of art is not by itself useful. Modern phenomenology has shown that ordinary life has a very utilitarian approach to the world: the objects are considered as being useful for given purposes (for instance, a pen to write, a windows to bring light while shielding from the air, etc.), they are tools embedded in a wider network of such utilities (my desk, the functions of a building, etc.), in such a way that modern life is totally immersed in a utilitarian world where everything is a tool having a given function (Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*). By contrast, the work of art extracts the object from its utilitarian background and considers its intrinsic artistic value, as seen in the case of Heidegger's celebrated analysis of Van Gogh's painting of a pair of peasant shoes (Heidegger, *The Origin of the work of art*). There the object is considered in its brute phenomenality, as existing by itself. Likewise, while the immense majority of artistic works are 'beautiful', Beauty must not be confounded with what is merely pleasurable to the senses. French romanticism, with its celebration of the Grotesque, seen for instance in Victor Hugo's works, has tried to integrate ugliness into Beauty itself. The strange paintings of Picasso tries to present the world as seen from a multidimensional viewpoint, i.e. from a viewpoint where an object can be seen from various viewpoints simultaneously, the result being not directly aesthetic. Beethoven, in some of his symphonies, also makes use of unpleasant sounds, a tendency which will be radicalized in the XXth Century with Schoenberg and other musicians.

b) Beauty and truth

Actually, in those latter attempts, a new function of the arts appears: to manifest something. From this viewpoint, there is a connection between the arts and Truth. Indeed, an artistic production is before all a production, a work

produced by human activity. The word art indeed comes from the latin word *ars, artis* (accusative *artem*), meaning "skill", and translating the Greek work *technè*. *Technè* indeed designate everything that has been created with the help of human skills, by contrast with the products of nature. Later those "technical products" will be subdivided into artefacts of human craftsmanship, industrial products and works of arts properly said. The distinguishing features of the artworks being precisely their artistic function. It is to note that this artistic function is associated with the notion of Truth. Indeed, "poetry" - *poesis* in Greek, means "to produce", but has also interestingly an associated meaning which is "to reveal", meaning which Plato uses in his *Republics*, book X. The "poet" hence "produces" an artwork while "revealing" something - a duality which has entered literature as the opposition between the poet as "homo faber" (the poet as a technician producing artworks) and as "vates" (the poet as seer, or prophet, revealing hidden things). Thus the artist also plays the role of a revealer, bringing forth things in a way that they have never been seen before. And, indeed, there are many realities which can be revealed by the artistic process: nature itself, but also the feelings and emotions, the human condition, social problems, etc.

c) Fascination with evil in western arts.

Actually, this expressivist stance found in the arts can be somehow dangerous. Indeed, if the arts want to express everything, they also have to express the darkest sides of the society and of the human psyche. This is precisely what has happened to some significant parts of the arts in the West since one or two centuries. In music, it is associated with the growing presence of dissonances, especially the famous "diabolus in musica." In literature, the Gothic movement, for instance, has given rise to an artistic movement and a lifestyle fascinated with death and melancholy. In music

again, some "dark metal" rock group tend to promote pagan, if not downright satanic values, sometimes as a part of a systematic ideological agenda - and this is the case of the satanist rock singer Marilyn Manson, sometimes as a part of an artistic posturing initially thought as harmless. Some of the musicians who are part of this trend, like Thomas Gabriel Fischer (*Celtic Frost*, Switzerland) affirms that the "gothic" and even "satanic" elements contained in their arts allows them to express some of the deepest (and darkest) feelings of their souls. Likewise, in Western movies, the darkest sides of the Western culture and its freedom are sometimes very crudely presented. There are even sometimes some downright blasphematory works, especially aimed at Jesus Christ and His Church.

Of course, this aesthetization of evil is not innocuous. In fact, there has been growing complacency towards it since decades, to the point that it has somehow become a new norm, and that parts of the Western culture and subculture have been contaminated with esotericism, if not satanism, used for shock value and to tease the public. This fascination for evil is metaphysically unsound, since it gives too much reality for a reality which is actually pure nothingness, nonsense and meaninglessness, and instills bad values within society. However, some of the artists who have been dabbling with satanism have given up their ways, like the American rock star Alice Cooper (Vincent Damon Furnier), who wants to warn about the reality and nocivity of Satan.

d) The metaphysics of evil

There is actually a metaphysical origin in this trend this quest of truth that was alluded to earlier. For instance, Victor Hugo, in his *Preface to Cromwell*(1827), wrote: "Christianity leads poetry to the truth. Like it, the modern muse will see things in a higher and broader light. It will realize that everything in creation is not humanly beautiful,

that the ugly exists beside the beautiful, the unshapely beside the graceful, the grotesque on the reverse of the sublime, evil with good, darkness with light. It will ask itself if the narrow and relative sense of the artist should prevail over the infinite, absolute sense of the Creator." This is an aesthetical, not moral, view of the divine Creation, according to which evil serves as a means towards a greater good. Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the great forerunners of this aesthetical reevaluation of evil, thus wrote that God was "beyond Good and Evil", and was something like a poet or a playwright (a Hollywood scenarist one would say today): "around the hero everything turns into a tragedy; around the demi-god, into a satyr play; and around God- what? perhaps into 'world'?"(Beyond Good and Evil, §150) In this aesthetical theology, the universe is seen as a divine artwork authored by God.

This view can also be found in classical metaphysics, where Leibniz explains evil not only as a metaphysical necessity arising from the limitation and finiteness of the creatures, but also as the prerequisite for a more perfect harmony. Again, the artistic metaphor is being used: "the most confused discord fits into the order of the most exquisite harmony unexpectedly, as a painting is set off by shadow, as the harmony due to dissonances transforms the dissonances into consonance"(Confessio Philosophii, VI iii, 126) Likewise, "the great composers frequently mingle discords with harmonious chords so that the listener may be stimulated and pricked as it were, and become, in a way, anxious about the outcome; presently when all is restored to order he feels so much the more content."(The ultimate origination, p.142, Theodicy, p.248, Résumé §19) The same idea is to be found in Saint Augustine's *De Ordine*, where, the Catholic saint opposes the beauty of an initial divinely instituted order to the beauty of an order which has known failure and sin, from which God has created a higher good.

It then seems that there is a metaphysical origin to the

generalized complacency of the Western tradition towards evil. And there are several drawbacks, socially speaking, concerning this use of evil in the arts. First of all, it sows bad influences in the mind, to the point that sometimes prayer is needed to break the power of those influences. Indeed, there is an old Greek saying that you become what you look (or, more exactly, that you become what you love by looking at it), and the sight of evil things progressively transform the soul. This is all the more valid today that the devices used to (flickering electronic screens, isolating headphones, etc.) heavily intensify this exposure, which was in the past after all quite limited. Second, this creates a general atmosphere which is growingly under this influence, casting confusions in the minds. Third, the merely descriptive role of the arts then becomes normative, as this artistic self-realization and self-revelation of the darkest sides of the human society tends to actually promote them to some extent.

From a purely artistic viewpoint, this stance (confronting evil with the arts) can be considered as deeply authentic, as a part of the artistic effort to aesthetically reveal reality. After all, art only makes manifest tendencies which are latent or patent in the society as a whole. And our epoch, located at the end of a cycle, as René Guénon remarked, is the time where the lowest possibilities are made manifest, after the long cyclical and historical exhaustion of the universal possibility. It is thus not surprising to have strange tendencies occurring in the realm of the Western Arts.

Moreover, casting a look on evil can indeed be part of an aesthetic voyage; with the condition, however, of not sinking into it, and not falling in the mud of failed eleusinian initiations, where the initiate, instead of accessing the light, remains stuck in the darkness. As Nietzsche once said: "When you look long into an abyss, the abyss looks into you" (Beyond Good and Evil, §146). René Guénon, again (*Reign of Quantity and Sign of the Times*), remarked

that crossing the realm of evil can have an initiatory value, provided that, after the exhaustion of all the lowest possibilities a reversal towards the Good truly happens. At the opposite of the modern fascination or complacency for evil, by contrast, Dante's *Divine Comedy* presents a successful description of evil under all its forms, followed by a return to the highest realms of light and of true and plain aesthetic beauty.

e) Arts and spirituality

It is to note that the arts are also deeply be associated with spirituality, for mainly three reasons.

First, the arts have also a normative function. Indeed, they reveal the world the way it is, but the choice of the thing depicted and the way it is depicted are often associated with norms and values. For instance, the genre of artworks called "memento mori", where skeletons or skulls are painted next to symbols of beauty, have a purpose to remind people of their mortality, of their eternal destiny, and of the fainting and transitory nature of mundane glory (for instance in Franz Hals' famous *Youth with a skull*). At the opposite, some paintings depicts war scenes, either to glorify military victories (Velasquez, *The Surrender of Breda*) or to denounce the ennemy (Goya, *The Second of May*), or the atrocities of the war (Picasso's *Guernica*, Otto Dix's *Skat Players*), In those cases it is clear that the art have a social and a normative function.

Second, art has a deep association with religion. The Greek statues of the God, the Tankha of Buddhism, the images and statues of Catholic Christianity, the icons of Orthodoxy and the images of Shia islam tend to depict religious figures, who are models, standards of something. Messianism is also part of this artistic effort: allusions to the Mahdi in Shia Islam, paintings on the end of times and paradise in Western Arts.

III. The Metaphysics of Beauty: arts, politics and religion

a) The Beauty of the essences

The third reason, and the most interesting, is that the arts have a strong affinity with spirituality understood as an existing reality. More than that, there exists a direct affinity between religion and the arts, which goes even beyond what we have just seen. This affinity is already to be seen in Plato's *Symposium*, where the contemplation of beauty progressively lead to the sight of the Form of Beauty, then to the Good, which is God. In the same vein, Plotinus, in *Enneads*, V, 8, 1 writes; "it is a principle with us that one who has attained to the vision of the Intellectual Beauty and grasped the beauty of the Authentic Intellect will be able also to come to understand the Father and Transcendent of that Divine Being." Here, Beauty serves as a mediation towards God, and it is no surprise that the Christians have christened, so to speak, the Intellectual Beauty by identifying it with Jesus, the Verb of God. In Islam, this text also served as a basis for the Arabic Compilation known as the *Theology of Aristotle*, chapter 4, which had a deep influence on muslim thought, notably on Al Farabi's *Virtuous City*.

But Beauty not only exists by itself and as a mediation, but also as infused within reality by the artist. Plotinus further writes: "now it must be seen that the stone thus brought under the artist's hand to the beauty of form is beautiful not as stone- for so the crude block would be as pleasant- but in virtue of the form or idea introduced by the art. This form is not in the material; it is in the designer before ever it enters the stone; and the artificer holds it not by his equipment of eyes and hands but by his participation in his art. The beauty, therefore, exists in a far higher state in the art."(Ibid). A view which has been very influential in the West, especially in the theory and practice of

Michaelangelo. The artist thus has a demiurgic role by revealing within reality, by his work, the spiritual forms and essences which are the archetypes of everything.

Those archetypes are perfect forms, and their presence in reality makes things beautiful.

Moreover, it is to note that the essences form a totality, a domain of their own, which is precisely that of the plotinian Intellect. The Intellect is seen as the vivid expression of the inner diversity contained in the One. In it are the archetypes and perfections of everything, which the artist tries to model more or less consciously on earth. It is a world of its own, the intelligible world. Plato, in the *Sophistes*, already remarked that this world, being perfect, must have life, conscience and movement, rather than being dead and still. It then has a distinctive mode of existence, different both from the real world, struck by imperfection and evil, and the ultimate simplicity and unity of the Godhead.

It is something quite similar to the 'imaginative world' (*alam al-khayal wal mithal*) of some Shia theologians (Qazi Said Qommi for instance) and rediscovered by Henry Corbin. Strangely enough, some American artists claimed to have had access to this world. For instance, Philip K. Dick, whose works were very influential in modern American cinematography, gives the following description «it wasn't like an alternative reality; it was like what I call 'transtemporal constancy'... It was an eternal truth, like Plato's archetypal world, where everything was always here and always now, and had been that way and would be that way. But there was some kind of dynamism, where it wasn't static. There was some kind of time, but it was a different kind of time... A dream time, where the deeds of heroes occur. It was some kind of mythological time, everything assumed a mythological quality.» (The Last Testament, p.35)

b) The phenomenon of inspiration

The great artists (if not all of them, to various degrees) just 'tap' in this reservoir of inspiration to produce their works of art. It is true that a good artist needs to develop artistic skills through hard work, Mastering the rules of an art is necessary to produce good works of art. But the mechanical application of those rules is not sufficient to produce masterpieces. Some 'inspiration' is needed. But the status of this 'inspiration' has remained quite undeterminate. Kant once said: "genius is the inborn predisposition of the mind (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art" (Ak. 307, § 46, GM 186). The artistic genius gives new rules to art, ushering a paradigm change – for instance impressionism, cubism etc., which has a lasting effect on art history. Here, «genius» is understood as the unique individuality who revolutionizes the arts in some way. But Kant adds that, while doing so, he is only the instrument of Nature, or Providence – a spiritualist view which enters in stark contrast with the celebration of the individual in XIXth century Romanticism. In other terms, the artist, being in touch with something higher than he is, gains some inspiration which is subsequently translated in the material world thanks to his skills.

The precise mechanism, so to speak, of inspiration is not very well understood. The following remarks, however, can be made: (i) the intelligible world is not something totally transcendent to the mind; on the contrary, it is an intellectual medium in which the mind lives and can 'see' everything (ii) this is made possible by a part of the soul which is in contact with the angelic world and the upper realms (Ibn Khaldun, *Prolegomena*, I, Introduction, ch.6; Plato, *Ion*). (iii) such a contact is made easier if the soul is pure, virtuous and calm. (iv) in some cases, the soul receives extra guardian angels who help her to perceive and to express the information contained in the non physical

worlds. Plato thus describes the poet as inspired by a divinity (an angel): the Musè, responsible for poetry and music (in Greek, *musikè*, hence, music). (v) this extra spiritual help is established by a life of prayer and virtue, or by entrance in some artistic initiatic movement. For instance, Dante Alighieri, the famous Italian poet, was part of the *Fideli del'Amore* movement ; he presented his famous Divine Comedy as inspired by an angelic entity, Beatrice, which he depicted dressed in a cloth with three colors (*Purgatorio*, 18) : red, white and green, which became the colors of the Italian flag (and some others, apparently).

By contrast, modern artists also try to get in touch with the infinite riches of the intelligible realm, as they know that ordinary perception and intuition is not sufficient, they use disastrous means, chiefly drugs, for that purpose, since Aldous Huxley's infamous «Doors of Perceptions» (1954). Hence the widespread use of drugs in Western modern art, by so many different artists: the Beatles, the painter Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jack Kerouac, Alex Grey and many others.

Unfortunately, the use of drugs does not open them to the spiritual realms, or at least not exclusively, but also to very nefarious spiritual influences, as there are many negative entities roaming out there. That's why some Western artists can be clearly seen as being downright possessed, or infested, as can be deduced from, for instance, Lautréamont self-portrait of *Chants*, IV, is more a spiritual self-portrait than a physical self-portrait. Madness, drugs and evil have thus become common methods to become an 'inspired' artist in the West, and no wonder that the arts are now so replete with nefarious spiritual influences.

c) Religion as founded in the intelligible world : Judaism

This intelligible world is not only the source of true art, but also of religion and politics. As it encloses all the

perfections, it serves as an ultimate standards for ethics, politics and religion. Thus all religions are ultimately founded in this intelligible world, which helps them organizing the world according to perfect ethical and liturgical standards.

As for Judaism, it seems that the arts are forbidden, as a consequence of the ban made on representation:

«Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God» (Ex.20 : 3-4 , cf.Dt.5 :7 ; 4 :6 which forbids images having a human shape.)

However, this interdiction is not absolute. First, it is conditional upon God's own lack of visibility (Dt 4,15). Second, it does not concern spiritual realities proper (God being unseen). Exodus 25, 18 thus commands the production of the two golden cherubims of the Ark of the Covenant. Third, the image thus designed must have been created for idolatrous purposes. Fourth, the arts are still allowed insofar they respect those two restrictions. This leaves open the possibility of poetry and music (which were one of the same thing), which played such an important role in Judaism. Likewise, architecture and liturgy can still be related with beauty.

And this interdiction has been gradually relaxed with time. The Torah treatise *Roch Hachana*(24b) restricts the interdiction to human faces – medieval artists will simply replace human heads with animal heads ! In the XIXth century, Rav Solomon Hirschell, and, later, the Rav Kook, have authorized the representations of human faces provided they did not promote idolatry or idol worshipping.

Moreover, an allusion is made to the spiritual reality as the ultimate source of artistic beauty. An exegesis on Psalm 122 5 (Midrash ad loc.) affirms that to the earthly Jerusalem

below does correspond a celestial Jerusalem, its archetype. Treatise *Hagigah* 12b affirms that the celestial Jerusalem is located in the 4th heaven, where the Archangel Michael leads the celestial liturgy in a celestial Temple. And Ex.25:40 indicates that the liturgical instructions given to Moses on Mount Sinai corresponded to eternal archetypes found there (1 Chr.28 :19 ; 1 Enoch 14:16-18; 2 Enoch 20 :1-40; see Philo, Moses, 2 :15-26 ; 74-76). Endly, Bezalel (Ex.31,1-6), a craftsman, was chosen to build with the help of the «Spirit of God» the tabernacle, where God would reside, in anticipation of Solomon's Temple built by Hiram, a craftsman «full of wisdom» (1Kings 7:14)

d) Christianity

In Christianity, the idea of a celestial city containing the archetypes of everything, and where the true cult is being made appears as central. The *Epistle to the Hebrews* (10 :1) emphasizes the idea that the Catholic cult is modelled after the celestial cult, like the Jewish one, not in the manner of a 'shadow' (*skias*) like this latter, which only foreshadowed it, but in the manner of an 'image' (*eikon*). A reference to the celestial Jerusalem is also being made (*He*12 :22). Consequently, the liturgy and the arts are from the start rooted a transcendent founding, which the council Vatican II has recently reminded (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* §8).

Another important difference is that Jesus is understood as being God. As a consequence, the ban on visible representation is lifted, since it relied on God's invisibility (cf Ex.25, 18): Jesus is God, and has been seen not only as a human but also as a God (in a brief moment, on the Mount Thabor (Mt 17, 1-8). Moreover, his very human form is totally appropriate for its divinity and is thus perfect. Lastly, Jesus, as being God, must be adored. All those tenets of the Christian faith are summarized in *Colossians 1:15*: "He is the perfect image (*eikon*), the visible representation, of the unseen God."

Since the beginning of Christianity, images of Jesus and the saints were held in veneration by the faithful. However, some excesses in the worship led the Byzantine authorities, in the East, to forbid the images. A tense debate occurred, and finally the worship of icons was allowed at the Council of Nicaea II in 787, on the basis of Saint John Damascene's positive assessment of icon worship: God's Incarnation lifted the ban on representation. People could give «worshipful honour» to an icon «but not real adoration. (...) For honour paid to an image passes on to its prototype; he who worships an image worships the reality of him who is painted in it. ». Moreover, the painting (or, more exactly, the «writing») of icons must be submitted to strict rules, such as described in Adophe Didron's famous 1834 translation of a Greek Orthodox manual. In the Catholic Church, however, some rules were late much more relaxed, and, with the rediscovery of the Byzantine spiritual legacy, contributed to the Renaissance and the birth of the modern Western artistic tradition, which has growingly gone secular.

In any case, the Christian artistic tradition also depends on a transcendent view of the arts, in a somewhat complicated version of neoplatonism where Jesus Christ, being both the Verb containing all perfections and a perfect and sinless man, is at the same time the container of the intelligible world and the ultimate standard of Beauty and Morality.

e) Islam

Islam also has a notion of a heavenly temple, the heavenly Kaaba where God's throne is, surrounded by the angels. Some traditions and some orientalists (Shrieke for instance) also identify a heavenly sanctuary as the final point of Muhammad's Miraj (Surat 17). The Night Journey is of importance since it links Islam with a transcendent element, beside the Quran. Thus, the Ascent to the heavenly sanctuary and the Descent of the Quran are the two

founding experiences of Islam from a transcendent viewpoint, subsequently allowing the contemplation of nature in the light of faith : « We shall show them Our portents on the horizon and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth » (41 53).

Art then becomes a way to reflect the Divine Unity and the Names within matter, thus promoting, in spite of a principled rejection of figurative representation, many artistic activities. For instance, calligraphy, which replicates, according to Qadi Ahmed (XVIth century), a divine activity : 'creation itself is the divine calligraphy with which god covered the pages of changing time with the black and white design of night becoming days and days becoming night.' The same holds for the planting of gardens and architecture, which try to reflect the harmony of the heavenly realms.

It is often said that Islam forbids figurative representation. Actually, the Quran itself never mentions such an interdiction, except to the case of downright idolatry. The emphasis put on calligraphy in Islamic arts is more a consequence of the scriptural nature of the Quran, and thus of the cosmos itself, much like the emphasis put on the visual arts in Christianity is a consequence of the visible Incarnation of the Verb as Jesus, which plays a role analogical to the Quran. The only explicit interdiction of figurative representation is found in a hadith, which will be the basis of subsequent artistic restrictions. However, figurative art will continue to flourish, especially in Egypt and Iran, where the *Qisas al-anbiyyâ'* (stories of the prophets) will represent many famous figures of the Islamic religion.

As for the role of the artist, a parallel could be drawn, to some extent, with the role of the prophet, or more exactly with the role of the philosopher as described by Ibn Sina and Ibn Farabi, as a man whose pure mind not only has strong logic abilities, but also can be informed by the Active

Intellect of the souls contained therein, by ‘inspiration.’

IV. Conclusion

The arts, in the Mahdaviat must not only focus on the person of the Mahdi (that could even arise God’s jealousy) but be part of a grander design of social engineering, where the arts could be promoted in order to enhance the ethical and religious climate of the Awaiting society, since it is precisely the moral state of a community which produces its temporal and spiritual leaders.

The Mahdaviat in relation to the arts would thus have to:

1) acknowledge the sad state of Western Society and the correlative problems within the Western Arts

2) Propose a view of the artistic activity which is based both on artistic freedom and on spiritual inspiration.

3) attempt to draw some tendencies of Western art out of their impasses.

4) Promote the arts as a remedy to all kinds of social problems, in order to enhance the general climate of the society and to ensure the transition to a more peaceful era.

Thus a renewed view of the arts could prove beneficial to the major centers of artistic activities (Los Angeles, New York, Berlin, Paris, Rome), thereby instilling the West with the idea of an artistic spiritual Renaissance, which would also contribute to enhance Iran’s «soft power».

Messianic Cinema of the West: Antichrist and Psychological Condition of Society

Mindaugas Peleckis¹

Introduction

My article will discuss the messianic cinema of the West. This kind of cinema is rather often in the past decade, and it needs a decent review and critique. Also, we should consider that it has almost one hundred year roots.

Considering that main movies released by Hollywood and so called independent (*arthouse*) movies' producers dealing with Messianism, are rather satanic, we should investigate it thoroughly.

Cinema of the West makes not only big money but also works as a big propaganda machine. Once, Lenin said, that cinema, films are the best way to make propaganda. This truth was understood by Nazi Germany and now is used by American Hollywood.

On the other hand, apocalyptic movies that deal with psychological dimensions of human being (like Danish film-maker's Lars von Trier's „Antichrist“ and

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„Melancholia“), show us in what psychological condition West now is. Knowing this propaganda, we can see a really big scale of moral self-destruction in the West. To compare it with Messianic Art of Iran and other Islamic countries, we can clearly conclude that West paves itself the way to total self-destruction.

The purpose of this analysis of the messianic cinema of the West is to deconstruct it from the very beginnings to the year 2012, when lots of Westerners wait for their imaginary „Messiah“. Unfortunately, they do not wait for Imam Mahdi (a.s.), but rather for the false *cinema* „Messiah“. Why? This is one of the main topics to discuss now.

In my humble opinion, the main „religion“ of the West now is „scientific atheism“, especially propagated by so called scientists as R.Dawkins, S.Fry, J.Kevorkian, S.Hawkins etc. And this „religion“ makes big impact to the messianic (sometimes called apocalyptic) cinema and whole art of the West.

It is fascinating the the first messianic (apocalyptic) movies of the West appeared about one hundred years ago (for example, „The End of the World“, 1916, a Danish science fiction drama film that depicts a worldwide catastrophe when an errant comet passes by Earth and causes natural disasters and social unrest). Now, the history repeats itself and we have 2012-panic, which is also depicted in lots of movies of the West (and in miriads of books).

However, the Westerners movie makers do not wait for Imam Mahdi (a.s.). They either wait for a catastrophe (and do not explain its cause or just talk about „Mayan prophecy“, „asteroid“, „comet“ etc.), or speak about technological breakdown. Human soul and belief in a better world is rare in Western cinema, especially in Hollywood.

Despite of this, we can find more true Messianic cinema in so called post-soviet countries including Russia. Such films as Andrey Tarkovskiy's created a new school of

cinematographers, who create messianic cinema which is not technology-and-catastrophe based but dealing with spirituality. I should mention 2006 Russian biographical film „Ostrov“ („The Island“) about a fictional 20th century monk, „Siberia, Monamour“ (2011, Russia) and lots of other movies that show us the clear message: spirituality is not totally lost until Islamic and post-soviet cinema (also, some independent Western film-makers) will continue to produce cinema for the heart and soul, but not for money and empty show.

„Metropolis“

Probably the first well-known and still actual messianic movie of the West is „Metropolis“ (1927; filmed in 1925). It's German expressionist science-fiction film directed by Austrian-American Fritz Lang (1890-1976). The film's scenario is set in a futuristic urban dystopia, and follows the attempts of Freder, the son of a wealthy intellectual, and Maria, a worker's daughter, to overcome the vast gulf, separating their two classes. The story is rather simplistic and naïve, but film's messianic message (as well as technical achievements) was very clear and important. The main influence of „Metropolis“ is metaphor of Tower of Babel, well-known visually from Brueghel's 1563 painting. Also, F.Lang was impressed by his first sight of New York skyscrapers in 1924. Biblical story of the Tower of Babel highlights the discord between the intellectuals and the workers. Also, a delusional Freder imagines the false-Maria as the Whore of Babylon, riding on the back of a many-headed dragon. Joseph Goebbels was very impressed and took the film's message to heart. In a 1928 speech he declared that "the political bourgeoisie is about to leave the stage of history. In its place advance the oppressed producers of the head and hand, the forces of Labor, to begin their historical mission". After about 100 years, film

critic Roger Ebert noted that „Metropolis“ is „a work so audacious in its vision and so angry in its message that it is, if anything, more powerful today than when it was made“. „Metropolis“ was ranked No. 12 in „Empire“ magazine’s „The 100 Best Films of World Cinema“ in 2010.

It is interesting that one of the main characters of „Metropolis“ is Maschinenmensch (German for „machine-human“) – first robot, named Maria, ever depicted in cinema. Maria has several other important names – Parody, Ultima, Machina, Futura, Robotrix, false Maria, and, what’s the most interesting, Hel. Maschinenmensch is an archetypal example of Western degradation, as it was showed in such characters like Frankenstein and Golem.

In „Metropolis“ there are such words: „There can be no understanding between the hands and the brain unless the heart acts as mediator“. F.Lang’s intention for the epigram in „Metropolis“ was to set up our expectations that some great conflict would be resolved by a savior figure or messiah. The basic idea of a messiah is a person who leads others to salvation, or saves people from a terrible state of being. Lang uses a few characters as messiahs, Freder and Maria, and he even has an Antichrist figure in the robot Hel. Lang doesn't use his "mediator" in the purely religious sense of salvation unto heaven, but as a socio-economic salvation between the upper and lower classes. Freder is the son of Joh Frederson, „Metropolis“’s chief designer or "the brain." This fact allows F.Lang to use Freder as an allusion to Christ in that Freder is the son of this city's God. Freder has a hallucination of a metaphorical pagan god, Moloch, eating workers marching as if they were just another part in the machine. Freder's mission to help people is complicated because of the Antichrist-like actions of Hel. The Antichrist is supposed to be the "adversary of Christ while resembling him in a deceptive manner," and Hel is that in spades. F.Lang uses Hel's status as the Antichrist as a metaphor for the excessive rationality in machines and their

destruction of the heart. Hel is being depicted as the Whore of Babylon. Hel seems to be drunk with her power, or with her knowledge of destroying the children of the workers, when she is being carried to the stake to be burned. We can see Hel bask in her glory as the destroyer of the new Babylon, even while the workers are clamoring to burn her, some even trying to tear her apart. In the end of the film Hel tells: "Lets watch the world go to the devil".

Lars von Trier's Messianism and A.Badiou

Although there are thousands of Hollywood movies about apocalypse and almost none about coming of Messiah, one person is a very interesting one. Danish film director Lars von Trier (1956) created at least several films that could be called psychological messianic-apocalyptic movies. Especially interesting are two his last films – „Antichrist“ (2009) and „Melancholia“ (2011), however, much more earlier there was „Europa trilogy“ and two films called „The Kingdom“, which showed our world as something approaching to an end. Lars von Trier didn't promise happy end, contrary to that – he always showed not the brightest side of man and humanity.

It's interesting that „Antichrist“ is dedicated to the legendary Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky. We will talk about him a little bit later, but now we should admit that he probably understood the real coming of Messiah in the best way one can find in the Western / Russian cinema.

French philosopher Alain Badiou (born in Rabat, Morocco, 1937) is one of the most prominent figures in an anti-postmodern philosophy. One of the main concepts that A.Badiou uses, is that philosophy is suspended from four conditions – art, love, politics and science, which in this age become inaesthetics rather than art, metapolitics rather than politics, ontology rather than science etc. Here, talking about Western cinema, we should use A.Badiou's phrase

„inaesthetic“, which refers to a concept of artistic creation that denies „the reflection/object relation“. For A.Badiou art is „immanent“ and „singular“ – that means, the truth is given in its immediacy in a given work of art, and the truth is found in art and art alone. Philosophy and art become one.

So, if we use this A.Badiou's concept, all Western cinema talking about messianism, apocalyptic times is not only art (let's pretend that it's all art), but also a specific philosophy which shows us the psychological condition of Western civilization. Films reflect society. And if we see calmness and deep thinking in, for example, Iranian cinema (Abbas Kiarostami, Majid Majidi etc.), in Western cinema we won't find it. It's always in a rush, neurotic, psychotic, depressive and approaching to insanity.

Sop, it's not strange now, that in 2007 Lars von Trier announce that he was suffering from depression. After that he made „Antichrist“, which could really be classified as a horror film. Before filming started, the main actors were shown A.Tarkovsky's „The Mirror“ (1975). It's not a coincidence, as we remember the best A.Tarkovsky's movies, they always dealt with Messianism, only with subtle touch, which now is lost in Hollywood filmmaking machine. In „Antichrist“, probably the main phrase becomes words of the fox: „Chaos reigns“.

This could be the start of talking about the last movie of Lars von Trier – „Melancholia“. This is truly apocalyptic film, reflecting fears of the big part of Western society, which is afraid of the end of the world, unfortunately, not thinking about coming of Messiah, but waiting for a catastrophe. 2012 year hysteria is much more bigger that millenium hysteria and it started at least two years ago. „Melancholia“ just showed people's fears. In this film Earth is about to collide with an approaching rogue planet, called Melancholia. Film's hero Claire is very fearful and believes the end of the world is imminent. She finds that

Melancholia's movements around Earth are like „dance of death“. Claire thinks that Melancholia finally will collide with Earth. Her husband John commits suicide because of that. Destruction of Earth will mean the end of all life, and people lost their hope. Finally, collision occurs, destroying Earth.

Lars von Trier didn't try to create a disaster film, but he wanted to examine the human psyche during a disaster. Depressive people tend to act more calmly than others under heavy pressure.

The idea of a planetary collision was inspired by websites with theories about such events. Trier decided from the outset that it would be clear from the beginning that the world would actually end in the film, so audiences would not be distracted by the suspense of not knowing. Much of the personality of the character Justine was based on Trier himself.

Russian Messianism in the cinema

Russian cinema tend to become more and more religious in the last decades. Films „Muslim“ (1995), „Coming back“ (2003), „The Island“ (2006) show not only Russian way to go back to God after lots of years of communism, but also remembers first Russian movies that were religious. For example, „Bezhin Meadow“ (1937) by Sergei Eisenstein was the movie which told the truth about communism and was forbidden by Joseph Stalin himself. The film is rich in religious symbolism and became the focus of academic study. Communists, i.e. Soviet leadership claimed that S.Eisenstein „confused the class struggle with the struggle between good and evil“ and presented the conflicts of the film in Biblical terms. S.Eisenstein later said that murder of Stepok by his father in the film was „reminiscent of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac“.

Another religious movie, shot in Soviet times, was

A.Tarkovsky's „Ivan's Childhood“ (1962). 12-year-old Russian boy Ivan wakes up and crosses a war-torn landscape to a swamp from which he makes his way across the river. The boy is like a symbol of peace which is so fragile in a war time.

Russian philosopher Sergei Bulgakov in the beginning of the 20th century wrote, that death of spirit can become a beginning, a dawn of spiritual rebirth. This messianic idea through Pravoslavie (Russian Orthodoxy) came into Russian cinema and stays until now. To compare with Hollywood, Russia produces also pretty much Hollywood-like films, but there is a small, but stable set of movies who deal with traditional spirituality. That's why, in my humble opinion, Russian cinema has the future as messianic cinema, and Western / Hollywood one has very little hope of that.

Russian film directors like A.Tarkovsky, P.Lungin, A.Sokurov, A.Balabanov, A.Uchitel and others tend to search for Messiah with their own film language. In, for example, A.Balabanov's film „Brother 2“, which gained cult status in Russia, the main hero fights for justice trying to help his brother going from Russia to America. He is not Messiah, he doesn't pretend to be such, although one can think so. Danila – the main hero – saves a man's life, brings justice back, punishes sinners and goes home. The last song of the film has the lines „Goodbye, America“. Here, America is portrayed as a symbol of devilness, Antichrist, in which only money rules.

Apocalypticism is common to a Russian man's mentality, it showed itself in revolution, and appears again and again. To compare it with Western catastrophe-phobia, this apocalypticism is messianic, spiritual and has hope.

Underlying Indicators in Art that Will Pave the Way for the Reappearance of the Mahdi

Fatima Kanji Chagpar

Art and Mahdism

Art is a means by which human beings express themselves using unconventional methods of communication. Unconventional methods of communication are any forms of expression that do not include any form of day-to-day colloquial prose. Many forms of expression fall under this definition, the most common, and the ones that this paper will focus on, are film, poetry, fiction, painting, photography and calligraphy. Human beings use these forms of expression to convey meanings beyond what the evident expression of the art indicates. For example, a film may have an entertaining external story line, but deeper than that is the author's implied message that is contained in the script, which he or she is trying to convey to the listeners. Similarly, calligraphy may beautifully reflect a certain word or phrase, but it is commonly in a shape or form that has conveys a deeper meaning.

The hypothesis that this paper seeks to present is that an increase in people's awareness of the Mahdi (AS)¹, either as

1. AS – stands for 'Alayhi as-Salaam – May Allah's peace be on him.

a result of the unjust and prevailing social conditions, or because of an increase in knowledge about the Imam (AS), will lead to an increase of themes of Mahdism in art. Subsequently, an increase in themes of Mahdism in art indicates an increase in awareness of the Mahdi (AS) and a sense of preparation for his reappearance. Themes of Mahdism include implied messages in art that are connected with the Mahdi (AS) or his reappearance.

The deeper messages contained in the different forms of art are usually a reflection an individual's state of mind based on existing social and cultural conditions, which will be studied in detail. For example, the prevalence of injustice and war may prompt an artist to paint a picture reflecting this. Therefore, in order to identify the indicators that will be prevalent in art that will indicate a awareness in the people for the reappearance of the Mahdi (AS), it will first be necessary to study the social conditions in the society before the reappearance of the Imam (AS) as well as the factors prompting one to know more about the Imam (AS). This will give us some indication of the inner feelings of a *Muntadhir* – a person waiting for the Imam (AS) – and how, as a result of this, they will express this in the different types of art. The paper will present some examples of types of art that exhibit the inner feelings of a *Muntadhir*. In order to contain the length and analysis in this essay, we will focus this discussion on Mahdism art among the Shia artists.

Finally, the paper will draw the link between themes of Mahdism in art and their connection with preparing oneself for the appearance of Imam (AS) and show how the two are closely connected.

Art as a means of communication

Art has been used since time immemorial to communicate messages. The early peoples would draw images on caves and come up with poetic stories in order to impart messages.

Over time, the forms of art have evolved – for example, we have new forms of art in the form of photography, film and multimedia. Regardless of the medium which the artist uses to convey his message, there are always one or more themes in a piece of art. The basis of this theme (or themes) is largely based on the experience of the artist. For example, one would expect an artist living in a society that is oppressed to have themes related to oppression or love for freedom running through their art. In other words, the person viewing the artwork, would be able to determine what the societal conditions are as well as the artists inner feelings. The theme (or themes) therefore, is an important element in art as it conveys the essence of the message to the audience.

There are therefore three points that are important when identifying the underlying indicators in art that may indicate a readiness in people for the reappearance of the Mahdi (AS). Firstly, the art will reflect the social conditions and ills of the society in which the Imam (AS) will appear; secondly the artist will convey a message related to the 12th Imam (AS); and thirdly the artist's personal feelings in relation to the reappearance of the Imam (AS) are reflected in the piece of art.

The condition of the society before the Mahdi (AS)

In order to know whether a work of art depicts the societal conditions that will exist prior to the coming of the Imam (AS); we need to first know what these conditions are. The Shia Ahadith – narrations from the the Ahlul Bayt (AS) – outline these conditions and are examined below..

In a tradition from Imam Muhammad Baqir (AS) in response to a question asked by a companion on when the Qa'im (AS) will emerge, he (AS) said: “At the time when men will imitate the women and women will imitate the men; when women will ride on saddles; when people will

cause their prayers to die and will follow their carnal desires; when people will turn (to) usurers; when shedding of blood will become something insignificant; when trade and business of the people will be based on usury; when people will openly commit adultery; when they will make towering constructions; when they will consider lie to be lawful; when they will accept bribes; when they will follow their lusts and desire; when they will sell their religion for this world; when they will sever their relation (with others); when they will hold under obligation the one whom they feed; when they will consider forbearance to be the sign of weakness and feebleness and injustice to be an honour; when their rulers will be evil and their ministers liars; when the trustworthy amongst them will be traitors; when the helpers amongst them will be unjust; when the reciters of Quran will be transgressors; when cruelty and oppression will become manifest; when divorce will increase; when people will engage in debauchery and libertinism; when forced witness and lie will be accepted; when they will engage in drinking and gambling; when men will be mounted on; when women shall engage with women (indecent acts); when people will consider Zakat to be a booty and charity to be a loss; when they will fear from the tongues of the wicked people; when Sufyani shall revolt from Syria and Yemen; when Baidah which is between Mecca and Medina will sink; when a child from the progeny of Muhammad (SAW) will be killed between Rukn and Maqaam and when a live voice will be heard from the heavens crying out that the truth is with Mahdi (AS) and his followers. It will be then that our Qa'im will emerge. When he re-appears, he will stand with his back against the wall of Ka'aba and 313 of his followers would gather around him..."

This Hadith eloquently summarizes the socio-cultural conditions preceding the advent of the Imam (AS). It talks about a time when men will imitate women and women will

imitate men. This imitation could be in the form of dress, appearance, role in society and so on. The Imam (AS) also mentions the rise of carnal desires. This perhaps means that people will pursue their lusts for wealth, power and physical desires without caring whether what they receive in return is Halaal or not. Usury has also been noted as one of the conditions in the society – a condition which will be the norm and businesses will be based on it. The Hadith mentions the open existence of oppression in the society. This oppression will be obliterated and replaced with justice and freedom under the rule of the 12th Imam (AS) when he appears, InshaAllah.

In another Hadith, it is narrated from Imam Muhammad Baqir (AS) that he said, “Mahdi (AS) will reappear at the time when fear, mischief, calamities, epidemics, violence, divisions in religion and transformation of the peoples’ condition shall be dominant on the world and society. Day and night people would yearn for death and shall be at each other’s throat. In other words despair and hopelessness would have conquered them. At that time His Eminence would reappear; and congratulations to the one who reaches Imam Mahdi (AS) and becomes his supporter and woe to the one who opposes him.”

According to the content of some traditions, during this period protecting one’s religion will become more difficult than holding fire in the palm of one’s hand, and oppression, injustice, corruption, and perversion will become prevalent. Values will be regarded as being against values, and things opposed to values will be regarded as values. Sins will be considered a matter of pride and accomplishment. One’s friends will encourage and induce him to sin and reproach him for not cooperating with oppressors, sinners, and corrupt people.¹

1. al-Gulpaygani, Lutfullah as-Safi. 2000. Discussions Concerning al-Mahdi (May Allah hasten his return) [online]. [Accessed on: May 18, 2012]. Available from: <http://www.al->

Women will enter into work exclusive to men. Many wars and natural afflictions will come about. In a tradition of Jabir ibn Abdullah al-Ansari regarding the commentary of the verse:

﴿أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولَى الْأَمْرِ مِنْكُمْ﴾

“(O you who believe!) Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority amongst you (the legatees of the Messenger).”¹

The Noble Messenger (peace be upon him and his family) gave news about his successors from Imam ‘Ali (AS) until Imam Mahdi (AS), and named them one after the other and gave tidings to the people about the conquering of the East and West of the world at the blessed hands of Imam al-Mahdi (AS), and said:

ذلك الذى يغيب عن شيعته أوليائه ولا غيبه لا يثبت فيها على القول بإمامته إنا
من امتحن الله قلبه للايمان.

“He is the one who will be concealed from his Shi‘a and friends such a concealment that none shall remain firm in belief in his Imamah except one whose heart Allah has tested for faith.”²

And Amir al-Mu’minin has also informed about these difficulties and tribulations in Nahj al-Balagha. In one instance, he says;

ما أطول هذا العناء أبعد و هذا الرجاء.

“How lengthy is this adversity, and how distant is this hope!”³

It has even been related, in another tradition, that:

إن لصاحب هذا الأمر غيبة المتمسك فيها بدينه كالخارط للقتاد.

islam.org/discussions_mahdi/. Kitchener, Islamic Humanitarian Service.

1. Surah an-Nisa’ (4), Verse 59.

2. A’lam al-Wara, p.397 cited in al-Gulpaygani, Lutfullah as-Safi. 2000. Op cit.

3. Nahj al-Balagha, Subhi as-Salih, Speech 187, Part 4 cited in al-Gulpaygani, Lutfullah as-Safi. 2000. Op cit.

“Verily the Master of this Affair has a such a concealment that one who grips firmly to his religion during it is like one who picks thorns with his hands.”¹

Therefore, as can be understood from the traditions, the entire period of concealment is a period of trial and examination; of course, the types of those trials are different in the different times and places. The key lesson is that the believer during this period must show perseverance in abiding by the commandments of religion and struggle to elevate the word of Islam and honor of the Muslims and to repel the influence and cultural and political domination of the oppressors. He must not lose hold of himself in face of the power and strength of the disbelievers or become inclined towards their improper behavior. And at the same time he must have certainty that the promises of Allah and the Prophet of Allah are true and that eventually Islam will be victorious and conquer the world, as a result of which justice and equity shall fill the world.²

These trials have wisdom and many benefits, among which is that the disposition of the people of the world and society become ready for that dignified reappearance in which the resolute and steadfast believers will be separated from the remaining people.

Messages and feelings of the artist conveyed through their art

We live in a society today that exhibits a lot of the qualities mentioned by the Aimmah (SA) above. As a result, believers in the Mahdi (AS) are increasingly realizing that the solution to the current societal problems is in the reappearance of the Imam (AS). As a result, artists are reflecting this in their artwork the ills of society as well as the need for the 12th Imam (AS) in their art. The underlying

1. Bihar al-Anwar, Volume 52, Page 111, hadith 21 cited in al-Gulpaygani, Lutfullah as-Safi. 2000. Op cit.

2. al-Gulpaygani, Lutfullah as-Safi. 2000. Op cit.

indicators in art therefore, are related and connected to the 12th Imam.(AS).

As mentioned earlier, this essay will focus on Mahdism art among the Shia artists. What we will notice is that the existing societal conditions play a big role as themes of their art and that the solution they provide to these social ills is the reappearance of the 12th Imam (AS).

Let us start with analyzing the movie 313.¹ This movie was written and directed by Masuma Virjee. It is a 2008 British film that tells the story of a troubled 17-year-old Layth Ali (Inayat Kanji) who finds himself on the wrong side of the law following the death of his older brother. Layth Ali soon discovers his only way out is his hard-line orthodox Principal, Hakimi (Abbas Jaffer) – the Head of the Islamic College. Layth is given two weeks to complete an assignment on a subject he refuses to believe in, The Mahdi (AS). The reluctant student seeks the help of Mohsin (Abbas Virjee), an unusual, mystical Shaykh, who catapults him into a world of spiritual discovery, faith and understanding. Layth's assignment allows the writer of the movie to address the themes of injustice and oppression in the society, the Imam's (AS) life and its length and the responsibility towards the Imam (AS) in his absence. There are however certain personal feelings of the author that have been revealed through the movie such as the role of mysticism in the awaiting the Imam (AS). Fundamentally though, the movie reflects the social conditions prior to the Imam (AS) and him being the bringer and establisher of justice.

With regards to poetry, there are several poems written by Shia poets that have themes related to the 12th Imam (AS). In such poems, we see that the themes are based on the existing conditions of the society. In addition, in most them

1. Virjee, M. 2008. 313 Film [online trailer]. [Accessed on: May 18, 2012]. Available from: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zQymGHFIWE&feature=related>.

there is also the prayer for the reappearance of the Imam (AS). One can argue that as Shias become more aware of the Imam (AS) and learn more about him, they are attracted to him (AS) and this would increase the number of poems in his (AS) honour. The poems on the 12th Imam (AS) are written either in prose or rhyme. Some of these are vocally recited as poems as well and can be found on sites such as www.youtube.com, www.zainab.org and www.shiatv.net.

I would like to discuss one poem titled A Single Tear Drop, written by Sister Mardhiya.¹ In this poem, she talks about meeting with her beloved, the 12th Imam (AS). She expressed feeling distant from the Imam (AS) and wants to “relive the motionless soul within” which has perhaps been made stagnant by the vicissitudes of life and the lack of spiritual growth in the present decayed society. Then Sr. Mardhiya expresses her feelings of wanting to be with the Imam (AS), when she beautifully says:

Travelling from valleys of Mecca,
to the pleasant neighborhood of Najaf,
Tell me O' beloved;
are you by your mother's grave ?
Though wingless I may appear,
I shall fly past the boundaries,
like the migrating bird in the heart of sky,
with your love flaming in me!²

Mahdism themes can also be found in fiction. This is a relatively new form of art that is now beginning to have themes related to the Mahdi (AS). Take for example the fiction novel by I. M. Hussaini called The Detour.³ The novel is about an American Researcher, Edward Fleming, who ventures into the holy city of Medina to look for his

1 Mardhiya, n.d. A Single Tear Drop [online]. [Accessed on: May 18, 2012]. Available at: <http://www.almujtaba.com/poems/14/000030.html>.

2. Ibid.

3. Hussaini, I.M. The Detour. 2011. Barbed Wire Publications. For more information on the novel see www.thedetour.info.

kidnapped friend Kimberley. Both Edward and Kimberley work together in a small agency that verifies the authenticity of historical documents and have most recently been studying documents associated with Fatima al-Zahra (AS), the daughter of the Holy Prophet (S). In the story, Kimberley went to the land of Fadak to meet a man called Abdul Zahra in order to find out more about the Mushaf of Fatima (A). The novel guides the reader through various landmarks connected to Fatima al-Zahra (A) in and around the holy cities of Medina and Makkah, and exposes the attitude and mindset of the current regime in Saudi Arabia towards historical sites associated with the family of the Prophet (S) – and their continued oppression towards the Shia. The novel also exposes the oppressive attitude of the Saudi authorities, and the Wahhabi mentality, towards the followers of the Ahlul Bayt (AS).

One of the central themes in the novel is the establishment of justice by the twelfth Imam (AS) with respect to Fatima al-Zahra (AS) and her sons (AS) regarding the oppression they faced and continue to face to this day. This central theme revolves around the “contents” of the Mushaf of Fatima (AS), which the author discloses as historical documents that prove the oppression by certain segments of the “Muslim” world on Fatima al-Zahra (AS) – which continues today in Makkah and Madina where the Saudi authorities obliterate any trace of historical significance related to the family of the Holy Prophet (S). This oppression, the author notes, will only be avenged by the appearance of the twelfth Imam (AS). Hussaini elaborates that by disclosing Mushaf of Fatima, which contains the true interpretation of the holy Quran, the twelfth Imam (AS) will change the world of Islam. In fact the Islam today is starkly different from the Islam that the twelfth Imam (AS) will reveal. The novelist also inserts his own humourous comments on the ridiculous and hypocritical behaviour of the Saudi authorities when it comes to places of historical

significance.

In the sphere of paintings and photography, there is the same trend we have been discussing so far: and that is that the paintings and photographs point to some sort of social condition, either before the Imam (AS) appears or after he (AS) appears. These pieces of art also contain messages and feelings of the artist. One of the well-known Iranian artists, Mahmoud Farshchian, has some paintings with the theme of Mahdism (AS). Take for example the painting below. This painting is entitled Birth of hope – Imam Zaman (A). In a manner that is consistent with Shia depiction of their infallibles, the Imam's (AS) face is not depicted. As such you can see in here that it is hidden. The picture depicts the Imam (A) reappearing, coming out from physical ghayba. The cloud like atmosphere gives the Imam (AS) a heavenly or divine appearance. And at his feet, there is a glowing light – which is line with the teachings of Shia Islam that the Imams (A) is the light of Allah (SWT). This is a beautiful depiction and conveys a message of peace at the onlooker.

The painting depicts a state of peace, tranquility and divinity. The artists have tried hard to make the painting depict the reappearance of the Imam (AS) and therefore give the onlooker the feeling that the Dhuhur – reappearance, is close.

The next painting shows the Imam (A) enveloped in light. As with the previous one, in this one too you do not see the face of the Imam (A) as the artist does paint or draw it. However the artist paints a bright light around the face of the Imam (AS) – perhaps pointing to the Ahadith that speak about the shining light that radiates from the faces of the Ahlul Bayts (AS) The Imam (AS) in this painting is portrayed in the state of Dua. At the bottom of the painting is the famous Dua Faraj, *Ilahi Adhumal Balaa*, which talks about the tribulations that have befallen the world as a result of the absence of the 12th Imam (AS) as well as the blessings that have been withheld from the inhabitants of

the earth: “O Allah, terrible was the calamity, and its evil consequences are visible, the covering has been removed, (all) hopes have been cut off, the (plentiful) earth has shrunk (with very little to spare).”¹



Birth of Hope: Imam Zaman (aj).²

1. See <http://duas.org/azbala.htm> for the entire text, transliteration and translation of this Dua.
2. Farshchian, Mahmoud. Birth Of Hope: Imam Zaman (aj) [online]. [Accessed on May 18, 2012]. Available from: <http://www.farshchianworld.ir/index.html>.

The dua also mentions that these trials and tribulations can only be removed by the coming of the Imam (AS). Interestingly, the Dua speaks about the social conditions in the absence of the Imam (AS) and highlights the fact that the Imam (AS) is the only Faraj, the only relief, of this condition. The artist's feelings are basically relayed through the Dua at the bottom of the painting.



Faraj¹

1. Ostadreza, 2012. Faraj [online]. [Accessed on May 18, 2012]. Available from: [↗](#)

The next painting below is called Imam Mahdi (AS). We notice again that consistent with the previous paintings, this one as well does not show the Imam[s] (AS) facial features, but instead has the Imam's (AS) face enveloped in light. Behind him are clouds which give the effect of a heavenly sort of figure and in front of him is a bird with white feathers – this would usually signify peace. The picture is depicting the Imam (AS) with open arms which most likely points to the open heartedness and welcoming nature of the Imam (AS). Below this painting, as in the previous one, there is the *Dua Ilahi Adhumal Balaa*, indicating that it is perhaps the same artist who created this image as well.

I have placed a related picture by a non-Muslim artist on the right hand side of the painting of the 12th Imam (AS) and interestingly one can notice the that pose of in both the pictures is similar. This can either mean that the artist of the painting of the Mahdi (AS) transposed the pose from the Christian images of Jesus (AS) or that he or she wanted to draw a similarity between the two great personalities that will appear together at the end of time.

The next picture is a fantastic depiction of the sun behind the clouds, but still providing sufficient light for the observer to view the surrounding environment. It is not obvious to one who is not familiar with the concept of Mahdism (AS) as to what this is about. To such a person, it depicts an amazing view of nature. However, what the artist is trying to depict is the “sun behind the clouds” in line with the famous narration from Jabir Al-Ansari, who asked the holy Prophet of Islam (SAWW): “O Messenger of Allah! Will the Shia benefit from (the Qaem (AS)) when he is in occultation?”



Imam Mahdi (pbuh)¹

1. Ostadreza, 2012. Imam Mahdi pbuh [online]. [Accessed on May 18, 2012]. Available from: <http://ostadreza.deviantart.com/gallery/?offset=24#/d4rnxes>.



Resurrected Master Jesus Christ¹

The Prophet (SAWW) replied:
“Yes! I swear to He who sent me as a prophet, that they will. They will see with his light and benefit from his

1. Image from: <http://www.purechristians.org/>.

Wilayat just as people benefit from the sun when it is behind the clouds.”¹

To make the connection between the picture and the 12th Imam (AS) the artist has placed a small logo on the top right hand corner of the image that says “Ya Aba Saleh Mahdi (AS) Adrikni” – O father of virtue, Mahdi (AS), please come. The artist is probably highlighting that despite the trials and tribulations in the Ghayba of the Imam (AS), his (AS) followers still benefit from him – and the salutation to the Imam (AS) at the top right hand corner perhaps means that even though people benefit from the Imam (AS) in Ghayba the artist still wants the Imam (AS) to appear physically as that in itself will resolve many or the trials and tribulations.



Ya Mahdi (AS)²

The next form of art that I would like to discuss is calligraphy. The first artwork below says Ya Aba Saleh

1. Al-Bahrani, Hashim. 2006. The Qa'em (AS) in the Qur'an..Tr. by Milani, M.. Miami, Shiabooks.ca.
2. Montazerart, 2011. Ya Mahdi (AS) Sky, [online]. [Accessed on May 18, 2012]. Available from: <http://montazerart.deviantart.com/gallery/#/d4739uk>.

Mahdi Adrikini. It is an interesting piece of art as the letters are shaped in the form of a ship. I have, as reference, included a picture of a ship beside it to show the similarity between the calligraphy and an actual ship.

The “Ba” in *Aba Saleh* represents the hull of the ship. The “Ha” in *Saleh*, “Ya” in *Mahdi*, and “Ya” in *Adrikni* represent the sails whereas the “Nun” in *Adrkini* represent the mainmast. The significance of the portraying this phrase in the form of a ship is perhaps based on a well known tradition from the *Ahlul Bayt (AS)*. This tradition is also narrated by many Sunni scholars as well and is known as the "Tradition of the Ship" in which the Prophet (SAWW) stated:

"Behold! My *Ahlul-Bayt* are like the Ark of Noah. Whoever embarked in it was saved, and whoever turned away from it was perished."¹



Ya Aba Saleh²

1. al-islam.org. A Shi'ite Encyclopedia. Quran and *Ahlul Bayt* [online]. [Accessed on May 18, 2012]. Available from: <http://www.al-islam.org/encyclopedia/chapter1a/1.html>.

2 Montazerart, 2011. *Ya Aba Saleh Mahdi (AS) Sky*, [online]. [Accessed on May 18, 2012]. Available from: <http://montazerart.deviantart.com/gallery/#/d47jl4t>.

The artist therefore is comparing the deviant nature of this world as rough waters in the sea and that the only way to escape this is to board the ark of the Ahlul Bayt (AS). And since in our time, the Imam (AS) is the remainder of the Ahlul Bayt (AS), the artist is stating that we should embark on his ship by following and obeying him and most of all praying for his appearance – this will be the only way to salvation.



As-Salaamu Alayka ya Aba Saleh¹

The next artwork below is unique as well. The calligraphy writing says *As-Salaamu Alayka ya Aba Saleh Mahdi (AS)*. This means peace be upon you, O Father of Virtue, Mahdi (AS). The green background is calming as green is naturally a calming color. The shape of the calligraphy is also interesting. It is shaped as a butterfly or a

1. Ostadreza, 2010. Imam Mahdy AS 114 [online]. [Accessed on May 18, 2012]. Available from: <http://ostadreza.deviantart.com/gallery/?offset=120#/d2ry3e0>

bird in flight. The artist has placed the butterfly in the diagram perhaps to guide the viewer of this artwork to make that connection. A butterfly or bird in flight signifies freedom. Perhaps the artist is trying to convey the message that true freedom in this world can only be achieved through the 12th Imam's (AS) reappearance or that in Ghayba freedom can only be achieved through connecting with the 12th Imam (AS) by offering him Salaam.

Conclusion

We have presented art with themes on Mahdism, that are produced by those who are aware of the Mahdi (AS) and his virtues and qualities. The artists, being aware of this, have central themes in their artwork regarding the reappearance of the Imam (AS) and the notion that the affairs of human beings will be set right when he (AS) reappears. In the portraying these themes, they have also conveyed their personal feelings of longing for his reappearance.

Such artwork, makes those who are aware of the Mahdi (AS) more aware of him (AS) or increasingly aware of him (AS). Secondly, since most of these artworks are available to the general public, it also spreads the message of the Ghayba to the general population, most of who are non-Muslims and thus increases the awareness of the Mahdi (A) in them.

The hypothesis we presented earlier is that that the more the society resembles the state before which the Imam (AS) will appear, the more art with Mahdism themes will appear and this will in turn increase the awareness of the Imam (AS) firstly among the Shia, then among the Muslims and then among the general population at large. This increase will hopefully change the attitude of people and make them prepare themselves for the reappearance of the Imam and increase their knowledge about him (AS). As we have shown in this paper, the current society has many traits of

the society in which the Mahdi (AS) will reappear. We have also shown that art with themes of Mahdism exist in various forms, from film to calligraphy. Thus we can argue that the pathetic societal conditions have led to an increase in the Mahdism related art.

We hope that an increase Mahdism art will increase the awareness of the Imam (AS) and increase the number of people actively awaiting the Imam (AS). The goal of course is to have people actively awaiting the Imam (AS) so that they (and us, Insha Allah) can be companions of the Imam (AS) in this life or counted among his companions in their death. Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad as-Sadiq (AS) said: "A person who would like to be among the companions of al-Qa'im should be in a state of (active) waiting (Intizar), and perform all of his deeds with Wara' [a level higher than Taqwa] and with the most beautiful etiquette and then one will be counted as being in a state of (true) waiting (Intizar). Then if such a person was to die and al-Qa'im was to make his advent after this, then that person would receive the reward as the one who witnessed his (al-Mahdi's) advent."¹

In conclusion, the reappearance of the 12th Imam (AS) is ultimately in the hands of the Almighty Allah and not in the control of man and the will of humanity. However, we need to do all that is in power to raise awareness of the Imam (AS) and to be in the state of active waiting ourselves. And InshaAllah, when the time is right, Allah (SWT) will give the Imam (AS) the order to appear and to establish the system of divine religion in the human society.

We pray that this time comes soon, InshaAllah, and that we are considered as part of his (AS) companions.

¹ Biharul Anwar, Volume 52, Page 140; al-Ghaybah of al-Nu'mani cited in Mugahi, A. The Awaited Savior of Humanity (al-Mahdi in the Eyes of the Ahlul Bayt) [online]. [Accessed April 29, 2012]. Tr. by Bhimji, S. Available from <http://www.al-islam.org/40ahadith-twelfthimam/>.

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Expressing Love towards the 12th Imam in the form of Poetry: A Study of the Poetry of Taher Adel, Husein Rajabali and Hamid Alimi

Munir Abbas Chagpar

Introduction

The Twlever Shi'a, also known as the *Shi'a Ithna 'Ashari*, believe that there must be a divinely appointed guide for humanity at all times. The guide of the current era is known as Imam al-Mahdi (A)¹, the great grandson of the Holy Prophet of Islam (S)². The Imam (A) ensures that there is a perpetual source of guidance to the true religion of Islam and that the connection between God and man is never lost.³ Imam al-Mahdi (A) went into a state of occultation around the middle of the third century Hijra and is still in this state. This period of physical absence of the Imam (A) is known among the Shi'a as the period of *Ghayba*.

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1. (A) – used as a sign of respect to denote 'Alayhis Salaam – upon him be the peace of Allah the Glorified and may He hasten his reappearance.
 2. (S) – used as a sign of respect to denote Salaalahu Alayhi wa Alihi wa Sallam – may the peace and blessing of Allah the Glorified be upon him and his family.
 3. This concept is derived from the famous supplication of al-Nudbah, in which is stated that the Imam (A) is *alssababu almuttas'ilu bayna al-ardhii walssam'i* – the means of access that is connectedly extended between the earth and the heavens.

The pivotal role of the Imam (A) during the period of *Ghayba*, in the lives of the Shi'a, cannot be overlooked. This is because to the Shi'a, he is everything – a kind and loving parent, a guide in turbulent times, a source of emulation, a resort when in affliction, and so on. It would not be a far stretch to state that the ultimate goal of his followers is to just be in his physical company and benefit from his radiating beauty in all matters of life and afterlife.

In his physical absence there are many ways in which his followers endeavour to connect with him (A) in order that they may benefit from his radiance and express their love and loyalty towards him (A). Some of the ways of doing this are engaging in the recitation of supplications that are specifically dedicated to him (A) such as *Dua al-Nudbah* and *Ziyarat Aale Yaseen*.¹ Another way of connecting with the Mahdi (A) is through reading, writing or listening to poetry specifically dedicated to him (A).

This paper will study Mahdism poetry of Taher Adel², Husein Rajabali³ and Hamid Alimi⁴ and show that among the common themes in their poetry about the virtues and qualities of the Imam of the time (A), is the unmistakable theme of expression of love of the poet towards his master (A). The expression of love is sometimes hidden in a prayer asking for his reappearance or in ardent expression of longing; and sometimes this expression is vividly apparent through the use of words and phrases of love. We intend to

1. For full text of these supplications and more, please see www.duas.org

2. Adel, T. 2011. Dear Awaited [online]. [Accessed April 28, 2012]. Available from: <http://www.shiapoetry.com/the-awaited.html>. And Adel, T, 2011. Deep Inside This Poet's Heart [online]. Op. cit.

3. Rajabali, H. Al Ajal Ya Imam-e-Zamana Al Ajal [online]. [Accessed April 28, 2012]. Available from: <http://www.englishqasida.com/index.php/qasidas/an-offering-1432-2011/37-9-al-ajal-ya-imam-e-zamana-al-ajal>. This link also has the vocal rendition in the form of a Nasheed by the author.

4. Alimi, H. My Imam! My Purifier! [online]. [Accessed April 28, 2012]. Tr. Shirazi, H. Available from: <http://www.zainab.tv/videos/1009/my-imam!-my-purifier!-hamid-alimi-%D8%AD%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C%D9%85%DB%8C>. This link also has the vocal rendition in the form of a Latmiyat by the author.

analyze these expressions and tie it in with the various styles used among the poets, which are largely personal.

The paper will conclude by showing the intimate connection created between the poet and the object of the poem, that is – the Imam (A), through the poem itself. It will also study how this intimate connection is transmitted to the listener or reader of the poem using various literary styles thus linking the audience with the Imam (A) in some way.

The Mahdism effect

The twelfth holy Imam (A) of the *Shi'a Ithna 'Asheri* Muslims is their living guide. To fully know the impact of the Imam (A) on the lives of the Shi'a, one would have to study the role of Imamate and Wilayat in Shi'a Islam. Undoubtedly, these topics are beyond the scope of this paper; however it is necessary to understand the relationship between the Mahdi (A) and his followers.

The Imam (A) is the epitome of leadership and guidance. In addition, he possesses sublime characteristics and is the ultimate source of guidance to the object of worship – Allah (SWT). In other words, he is the representative of Allah (SWT) on earth – *Hujjatallah*.¹ The qualities and merits of the Mahdi (A) are the same as those of the divine messengers and successors. Furthermore, the effulgence of Imamate and the awe of the prophets is perfectly apparent in the face of the Holy Imam (A).² It is these sublime characteristics of the Imam (A) and his role on earth that attracts his followers to him. It follows then, that the more one knows about him (A) and his characteristics, the greater is one's love towards him (A).

1. In the Ziyarat of the twelfth Imam (A) recommended to be recited on Friday – the first statement in the Ziyarat is “As-Salaamu ‘Alayka ya Hujjatallahi fee Ardhi”.

2. al-Qarashi, B. 2006. The Life of Imam al-Mahdi – peace be upon him [online]. [Accessed April 29, 2012]. Tr. by Rizvi, A. H. Qum: Ansariyan Publications. Available from <http://maaref-foundation.net/english/index.htm>. p.47.

Take for example the following traditions that talk about the Imam (A):

It is narrated from the fifth Imam of the Shi'a, Imam Muhammad Baqir (A) that he is quoted to have said, "Knowledge of Almighty Allah, the Mighty and Sublime and the Sunnah (practice) of the Messenger of Allah (A) grows luxuriantly in the heart of our Mahdi (A) in the best form. Any of you that survives and sees it should say when you see him: 'Peace be upon you (all) of Ahle Bayt of Mercy and Prophethood and the mines of knowledge and the location of messengership.'"¹

The first Imam, 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (A) has said: "When Imam al-Mahdi makes his advent the following of the lower desires will be transformed into the following of guidance (of Allah) after the following of the guidance (of Allah) had been transformed into the following of the lower desires; and the thoughts and opinions (of the people) will be in line with the Qur'an after the Qur'an had previously been put in line and accordance with the people's thoughts and opinions."²

Abu Salih Saibi in Al-Fitan has narrated from Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib (A) that he (A) said: "His Eminence, Mahdi (A), in appearance, character, habits and good virtues, would most resemble the Messenger of Allah (S)."³ This means that the characteristics mentioned in the holy Quran regarding the Holy Prophet (S) equally apply to Imam Mahdi (A).

Although these traditions do not do justice to the concept of knowing the Imam (A), they hopefully provide a glimpse into how one can increase their knowledge, *Ma'rifat*, of his or her Imam (A). As a result of this increase, their attraction

1. Ibid. p.54.

2. Kulayni, n.d. Biharul Anwar. Vol 51, p.120 cited in Mugahi, A. The Awaited Savior of Humanity (al-Mahdi in the Eyes of the Ahlul Bayt) [online]. [Accessed April 29, 2012]. Available from <http://www.al-islam.org/40ahadith-twelfthimam/>. Hadith n.7.

3. Al-Malahim wal Fitan, n.d. Chap. 79 cited in al-Qarashi 2006 p.50.

and closeness to him (A) increases. This closeness is undoubtedly the result of an indescribable love towards something divine. The effect of this love is so profound that the Shi'a cannot help but express it, be it in an artistic form or otherwise. One of the artistic ways in which this ardent love is expressed is through poetry.

Common theme of love in Mahdism poetry

I have chosen to study the poetry of Taher Adel, Husein Rajabali and Hamid Alimi as all three poets have profound Mahdism poetry.¹ In addition, the three poets, through their poetry uniquely display love towards the Imam (A). The poets have written their poems using different styles. In fact Rajabali and Alimi have actually expressed their poetry vocally as well.

All the three poets point to the lofty virtues of the Imam (A). It is in these lofty virtues that the expression of love is rooted. The virtues of the Imam (A) are not explicitly stated in the poems, however they are alluded to in the manner in which the poets write or speak. For example, Adel in his poem, *Dear Awaited*, says to the Imam (A):

I offer you my self portrait
So you may consider my soul
Knowing I can only reach you through words

The tone of this statement is humbling. Adel is inviting the reader to see that it is not a matter of shame or humility to offer one's sinful soul to the Imam (A) so that he may seek forgiveness on the sinner's behalf, but it is a matter of honour. Alimi has the same approach when he says:

An ocean all of it – can never purify me or my shame
All by his grace – my master washed me with the dirt
of his lane

This couplet indicates the Imam (A) has a far much higher position that the poet and that the poet acknowledges this. It

1. For the full text of the poetry of these poets, please refer to the appendix.

also indicates that the Imam's (A) closeness with Allah (SWT) is par excellence and that no one can surpass it and that makes him (A) worthy of seeking assistance from and directing praise to.

The assumption that these poets have made is that the listener is aware of the significance of the Mahdi (A) and that they would join in the poet's reverence of him. However, even if the listener is not aware, they will be aware after reading how the poets address the Imam (A) that he is a figure of great importance and reverence.

As a result of this implicit knowledge of the virtues of the Imam (A) is the manifestation of the expression of love that we now want to discuss. Love is a fervent emotion of attraction that is felt by one (or more) person (people) towards another (or others). This emotion is so strong that there is almost always a visible and material expression of it. In the case of Mahdism poetry, the expression of love is in the form of the poem itself. Poems are powerful mechanisms to express the innermost feelings in one's being. The most eloquent poems are the ones that most effectively express this feeling using as few words as possible.

The love towards the Imam (A) in the poems being studied is sometimes hidden in a prayer asking for his reappearance or in an ardent expression of longing; and sometimes this expression is vividly apparent through the use of words and phrases of love.

In the poem *Dear Awaited*, Adel writes a letter to the Imam (A) in which he uses profound imagery. In this beautiful poem, Adel points to the fact that it is his pen that is drawn to write instinctively as a result of being struck by the reality of the Imam (A) – interestingly as well, from the words in the later part of the poem, it is as if the love of the Imam (A) is compelling Adel to write through his pen.

Adel, taking the pen begins to write and explains the how the pen was “inspired” by the Imam (A) and then he (Adel)

takes the opportunity of being the holder of the pen to pen his own feelings and communicate with the Imam (A); since it is using the pen that is the only way he can communicate with the Imam (A). This notion brings us to a parallel act of significance in Shi'a belief – and that is the act of writing an *Aridha*. The Shi'a have the concept of writing an *Aridha*, or letter, to the Imam (A) of the time based on traditions that date back to the early life and *Ghaybah* of the Imam (A). The *Aridha* has an instruction to one of the representatives of the Imam (A) – appointed by the Imam (A) himself, Husayn bin Ruh – to deliver the letter to the Imam (A). Adel brings this notion to life in his poem – that in reality, the only way to communicate with his beloved is through his pen – sending an important message to his readers who are seeking to connect with the Imam (A).

Towards the end of his poem, Adel says:

But here I am, still broken
 Falling between these cracks hiding
 Flying dreams from land to land
 In-between where mountains stand
 With words offering my hand
 To be taken away with you...¹

This is an impressive manifestation of love and longing. Adel is stating that no matter how much he writes and moves from place to place, he is not able to come into contact with the Imam (A). And this hurts him, but does not make him lose hope and he keeps offering himself through his words to the Imam (A), waiting to be taken away; waiting to be encompassed, to be in servitude of the Imam (AS). This is indeed a manifestation of love.

In another of Adel's poems, *Deep Inside this Poet's Heart*, he again expresses the need to write and connect with the Imam (A). He expresses his hope for the reappearance of the Imam (A). The love is expressed

1. Adel, T. Op. cit.

towards the end of the poem when Adel says:

No ruler can dent his dreams
 No King can drag him this deep
 No leaders can lead his heart
 But the Mahdi; it's all yours to keep

In this piece Adel is stating that no external threat can dent his desire and fervour towards the Imam (A) or turn him away from the Imam (A). In addition, there is no leader out there who has the ability to lead him away from the Imam (A). Ultimately thus, he submits his heart entirely and willingly to the Imam (A) and wants the Imam (A) to rule his heart – pointing to yet another manifestation of love towards the Imam (A).

Rajabali in his poem *Al Ajal Al Ajal Oh Imame Zamana*, speaks about the injustices in the world and lack of peace in society. In a sense this poem speaks about the depraved society in which the Imam (A) will appear in and change. This society is filled with injustice, oppression towards people in general – and towards the Shi'a in particular. It also speaks about the highest form of oppression in the world and that is the killing of Imam al-Husayn (A). This then sets the stage for the *Du'a*, prayer, for the reappearance of the Imam (A) to come and correct all these injustices. This poem is performed by Rajabali as a Nasheed¹ and at the heart of it is a chorus, which is a classic example of the expression of love.

If the length of my life was in my hands Oh Imam
 I'd wait over a thousand years for you Oh Imam
 Allah please cast aside the veil of ghaibat from our eyes
 So I may have the feeling of true bliss in my life

This chorus is repeated after every stanza of the poem. Rajabali expresses a form of love typical of one waiting to see their most loved one. This chorus indicates the poet's strong sense of love and expresses it in a form that is

1. Vocal rendition of a poem. See Rajabali, H. Op cit. for link to the Nasheed.

theoretical – that is, if the poet was not bound by the forces of nature and if he had a choice in the matter, he would wait, no matter how long it took for the Imam (A) to appear. The thousand-year figure is just a figurative statement in saying that he would wait as long as it took.

In this expression of love there is also another unique aspect and that is a *Du'a* to Allah (SWT) in which the poet is begging Allah (SWT) to make the Imam (A) reappear – this *Du'a* is prefaced by the oppression he has mentioned in all the stanzas. The hope is that with all the oppression in the world, the conditions of the appearance of the Imam (A) are at least partially met. The *Du'a* also identifies the true utopian state of bliss in human society that will prevail after the Imam (A) appears and establishes his government. Incidentally this points to the virtue of the Imam (A) as a saviour and provides another reason to express love towards him.

Alimi's poem has a different and interesting approach to the concept of love towards the Mahdi (A). His poem, like Rajabali's, is also vocalised by Alimi himself; however, it is read as a *Latmiyat*¹ instead of a *Nasheed*. This approach conveys the tone of sadness and loss at being separated from the Imam (A).

I would argue that the wording in Alimi's poem follows the example and approach of the 4th Imam (A) – Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn (A) – towards Allah (SWT) as exemplified in the famous collection of supplications – *As-Sahifa As-Sajjadiyya*. Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn's (A) approach is that of humbling the self (creature) in front of Allah (SWT) (the Creator) in order to seek the attention, favour, mercy and forgiveness of the Absolute Creator; in other words lowering the state of the supplicant in front of the Master or the beloved. On a similar plane, Alimi's approach is lowering the follower of the Imam (A) towards the Imam

1. Vocal rendition of a poem in a sombre tone. See Alimi, H. Op cit. for link to the recitation.

(A). Notice for example, how he lowers himself in a state of submission in asking for a favoured look from the Imam (AS). He says:

An ocean all of it – can never purify me or my shame
 All by his grace – my master washed me with the dirt
 of his lane

In this couplet, Alimi points out to the spiritual dirt of all human beings, who, being fallible can never be cleansed by anything other than an infallible one. In fact, so high in rank is the infallible compared to the fallible that the dirt of the path he walks upon is sufficient to cleanse the sinner. This couplet points to the virtue of infallibility of the Imam (A) but also manifests a loving submission towards the kindness and grace of the Imam (A). The relationship of the master and slave in Alimi's poem is not that of fear and oppression but of hope and love.

In another couplet, Alimi says:

Wilayat my religion and my faith – love sure it is
 Let your enemies name me as an atheist

In here, Alimi expresses that the Wilayat – or authority of the Ahlul Bayt (A) in general and the Imam (A) in particular, is part of his religion and faith – meaning that he knows about it and believes in it. In addition, this belief is not a forced belief, it is a facet of his belief that he has chosen out of love for the family of the Prophet (S). This connection to the Wilayat of the Imam (A) is so strong that nothing can break it – and that is why he says that it does not matter that even if it means being called a disbeliever – he will not let it (Wilayat) go. This style is similar to that of Rajabali's who notes that he is willing to wait a thousand years for the Imam (A). Again, this is a manifestation of love: when someone is willing to go to great lengths, or to suffer worldly sufferings to gain the pleasure of their beloved.

The notion of submission emanates in Alimi's entire poem making it, in a sense, the speech of a lover towards his

ultimate beloved. Interestingly, he also admits, and which the case in Shi'a Islam, and which we have not seen explicitly in the other poems, the reciprocal feeling of love of the Imam (A) towards the poet. Alimi says:

Deprived more than me, is no slave yet – you see
Never will you disown me, my master – I believe

There are Shi'a narrations that speak to the love of the Imam (A) for his followers. For example, the Messenger of Allah (S) has said: "Congratulations to the person who meets the *Qa'im* [one who will rise] from my Ahlul Bayt and has firm belief in him before his advent. He will have love for his friends, and will distance himself from his enemies and will have love for the leaders of guidance (the Imams) who came before him. Indeed these are my true friends, those whom I have love and affection for and (they) are the noblest of people from my nation."¹ Narrations such as these provide the context for the approach that Alimi has used, knowing indeed that by humbling oneself in submission to the Imam (A) will undoubtedly gain his (A) love and mercy.

Styles used by poets

The styles used by the poets in the expression of love towards the Imam (A) of their time are different. All three poets use first person poetry making the poem very personal. The listener or reader has to step into the shoes of the poet to experience this connection otherwise it cannot have the effect that the poem has on the poet and the reader or listener can easily feel that these are the feelings of the poet alone. However, since the object in all the poems is the Imam (A); and since this is in most cases not an unknown object; all readers and listeners can relate to the Imam (A)

¹ Kulayni, n.d. Biharul Anwar. Vol 52, p.129 and Tusi, n.d. al-Ghaybah cited in Mugahi, A. The Awaited Savior of Humanity (al-Mahdi in the Eyes of the Ahlul Bayt) [online]. [Accessed April 29, 2012]. Available from <http://www.al-islam.org/40ahadith-twelfthimam/>. Hadith n.4.

based on their knowledge of him. Therefore there is always a degree of participation in the feelings of the poet.

Adel uses a mixture of prose and rhyme in his poetry. His poem *Dear Awaited* mostly uses prose whereas his other poem *Deep Inside this Poet's Heart* is a fantastic example of rhyme. Throughout the poem, the second and last line of each stanza end in similar sounding words, whereas in some of the stanzas, there is also some form of rhyme in the beginning. Take for example (rhyme highlighted):

His hopes are tied to the wind
 While his dreams have slept a while
 His hopes to see his nation rise
 While his dream is to see the Mahdi smile

Rajabali and Alimi may have some rhyme in their poetry, however since their poems have a vocal rendition – there is more syllable rhyme. This means that each paragraph or couplet, as the case may be, has a similar number of syllables in each corresponding lines and these correspond to tune in the vocal rendition. For example, the first line in each stanza would have the same number of syllables; the second line in each stanza would have the same number of syllables and so on. Below is the syllable breakdown, separated by a forward slash, of the first line of the first and second stanza of Rajabali's poem:

Stanza 1, line 1: Ya/ I/mam look/ at/ the/ pre/sent world/
 so/ emp/ty of/ jus/tice

Stanza 2, line 1: Ya/ I/mam look/ at/ the/ peo/ple now/ all/
 slaves/ to/ their/ de/sire

There are 15 syllables in each line, which allows the tune of the vocal rendition to be constant across each stanza.

A similar breakdown can be done for Alimi's poem, however since the original is in *Farsi*, and what we are studying is the translation, it will only make sense if the breakdown is done on the original – and this is beyond the scope of this author's ability due to a language limitation. One thing noticeable in Alimi's vocal rendition is that there

seems to be more flexibility in the syllable breakdown as his rendition is almost colloquial (slight variances in tune between each stanza) whereas Rajabali's is consistent (same tune in each stanza) and he also brings in a consistent chorus between each paragraph.

The effect of using rhyme, whether in words or syllables, is that it captivates the attention of the listener and/or reader and draws their attention into the content of the poem. In many instances, the rhyme also helps facilitate the expression of multiple meanings in the poem.

The vocal rendition of the poems in the case of Rajabali and Alimi is itself a style; for something that is vocally expressed tends to give the poet an additional opportunity to convey their feelings and convey it to the listener. This of course has a greater impact on the listener than just a written poem. The vocal rendition also captivates the heart of the intent listener and enables him or her to "feel" the meaning of the poem. Having said this, it would be interesting to hear a vocal rendition of Adel's poems by Adel himself.

A powerful literary style that captures the imagination of the listener or reader is imagery. Whereas Rajabali and Alimi have used imagery in their poetry, their imagery is fairly straight forward to which a listener or reader can easily relate. However Adel, in both the poems studied, uses stunning imagery – one that undoubtedly keeps the poem fresh every time one reads it. The imagery also provides an opportunity for multiple meanings to his poetry. Take for example the statement in his poem, *Dear Awaited*:

I write because I could not write before
 Until that day
 When you took a step followed by another
 Into my home
 Upon ebullient breaths of dawn
 You greeted my pen one morn

In referring to the Imam (A) stepping into his home, Adel is perhaps referring to the Imam (A) stepping into his heart

and giving him the inspiration to write, or into his life – in the sense that he is now more conscious of the Imam (A). The imagery about the Imam (A) greeting his pen is fantastic – as in reality the Imam (A) is aware of everything, both animate and inanimate – and leaves the reader thinking whether greeting the pen is actually the inspiration that the poet received to write in praise of the Imam (A) or whether this is purely symbolic. This example serves to highlight that fact that Adel's use of imagery affords his poems different meanings, depending on who is reading it and when.

With regards to Alimi's poem, from the background sounds in the vocal rendition it seems to have been recited at a commemorative event of the Ahlul Bayt (A)¹ or perhaps a *Du'a*² program. It is unlikely that the multimedia reference provided³ to Alimi's poem is a creation of Alimi himself. However, the individual who uploaded the multimedia onto the web has significantly added value to the poem. Therefore the style presently being discussed is not something by Alimi himself but by the individual/s who created this multimedia presentation and uploaded it online. This style, although not Alimi's, is important to discuss in this age of technology. This is because it is possible for individual to write a poem and another to express it or to add multimedia components to it and as a result enhance the meaning of the poem.

The online presentation has a translation of Alimi's poem, which increases the reach (in terms of audience) of his poem – and indeed this author would not be studying this poem had it not been for the translation available. Secondly the creator of the presentation has put in the background a picture of *Masjid Jamkaran* in Qum. This *Masjid*, or

1. An event marking the martyrdom of a member of the Ahlul Bayt (A).

2. Perhaps after the recitation of Du'a Kumayl either on Thursday night or on the night of the 15th of Sha'aban, or a Du'a Tawassul program.

3. Alimi, H. Op. cit.

mosque, is connected to the Imam (A) as it was built in his honour.¹ Every Tuesday night at this *Masjid*, there is a *Du'a Tawassul* program where Shi'a congregate to recite this *Du'a* and to pray for the reappearance of the Imam (A). For someone who has experienced the spiritual feeling at this *Masjid*, hearing Alimi's poem in this multimedia format is nostalgic and certainly enhances the effect that the poem has vis-à-vis connection, closeness and presence of the Imam (A).

Conclusion

The purpose of a poem is to allow the poet to express his innermost feelings in a succinct and eloquent manner such that listener or reader is able to identify with the feelings of the poet. This is not something that everyone has the ability to do. Some can do this better than others. In the case of the three poets studied in this paper, all three of them have attempted in different ways to express their inner feelings towards the Imam (A) in the form of their poems. They have endeavoured in the process to allow the reader/listener to experience these same feelings towards the Imam (A).

Through the existence of different literary styles, the poets have each used styles that are personal to them and that they are most comfortable with employing in order to effectively convey their feelings. Adel approaches the Imam from a pen and through a letter, Rajabali from someone sincerely seeking his (A) reappearance and Alimi from a dejected slave of the Imam (A). These approaches, in conjunction with the various styles the poets have used, as we have seen, bring out the feelings of adoration, awe, hope and most of all – love, towards one primary object – and that is the Imam (A). The effect of this on the listener or reader is that they too are able to participate and partake in these feelings.

1. Alamdar, H. (tr. by). 1996. Masjid Jamkaran [online]. [Accessed on April 30, 2012]. Available from <http://www.al-islam.org/short/jamkaran/>.

On a concluding note, I feel it is important to keep in mind that every individual who acknowledges the Imam (A) does so in their own way. In fact, it would not be a far stretch to say that every such individual has a different feeling towards the Imam (A) – in others words a different expression of love towards the Imam (A), even though all these feelings are of love. It is beneficial, as these poets have done, to share these feelings in order that each of the *Muntadhir*, one who awaits the Imam (A), can experience his or her fellow *Muntadhir*'s pain, longing and emotions and as a result join them in their feelings of love and anticipation for the Imam (A).

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The Role of Social Media in Paving the Ground for Reappearance: A Hijab Case

Reni Susanti

Abstract

Our today's world is not only shaped by the conventional media that provides information in the one-to-many form that controlled by media company or government, but also by the social media that gives more spaces and power to the ordinary people to spread information in the many-to-many form. In this article I will present examples of the use of social media tools by few groups of Muslim Women to increase their capacity to spread information and ideas to global public as well as to build networks among them. At the end of the paper I will describe lesson learned for the society that paving the ground for the reappearance.

Introduction

It was in June 2009 when I opened my Facebook account and found a status of Paulo Coelho telling his audience that there was a dying girl in Iran shot by a basiji member and a doctor, Coelho's friend, was trying to save her life. The girl's name is Neda Agha Solthani that soon became very popular in the social media sites. Videos of her falling down were spread through YouTube and Facebook and many people from all over the world started to send sympathy and curse the killer as well as the Islamic government.

During the post-election riot in Iran, it was difficult to find unbiased media informing the actual things that happened. Western media were dominated by anti-Islamic government's discourse and the Iranian media were told as being stirred by the government, hence they never gave correct information. Social media was filled with green movement supporter campaigning "Where Is My Vote" that confused outsiders like me. Whom should we believe in? The whole world seemed to be against Iran.

Still in June, I wandered around YouTube trying to find any news from Iran that was generated by government supporters. I looked for the information in YouTube with an expectation that I would be able to hear ordinary people's voices. Luckily, I found a very nice interview between NPR and an Iranian girl named Setareh who described what was happening inside her country. I was happy to listen to her, which gave me balanced information from inside the country.

My experience above shows that today's world is not only shaped by conventional media like newspaper (online and printed), radio and television, but also the so-called social media tools such as MySpace, Facebook, Blog, Vlog, etc.

What is social media?

The debate on social media and its roles in the modern

society is ongoing. It was a popular topic in the field of business and marketing that later became a crucial issue among politician and social scientist. It is important to understand the nature of this media so that we can use it for the benefit of our society.

Social media was known as an ability to make online information available in conversational format. It is then evolved into providing platforms and networks that enable the power put on the hands of the people (Solis 2007). Today, the consumers turn to be producers using social media tools such as blogs, vlogs, social networking sites, etc. When the conventional media share information in one-to-many formats, the social media conduct the job from many-to-many.

Thornley defines social media as “online communications in which individuals shift fluidly and flexibly between the role of audience and author. To do this, they use social software that enables anyone without knowledge of coding, to post, comment on, share or mash up content and to form communities around shared interests” (Thornley 2008). Meanwhile Stowe Boyd explains “Social Media Is Not A Broadcast Medium, Social Media Is Many-To-Many, Social Media Is Open, Social Media Is Disruptive.” (Boyd 2007)

Chong, who looks at social media in the way it may shape our today’s political circumstances, emphasizes social media giving spaces and tools for those who lack of resources to develop collective action and maintain activities necessary for social movements (Chong 2009). He then articulates that the media is user-generated which means that the media is established by the users of social media tools. Everyone who has enough knowledge to internet and the tools can use them to spread information, build network and then constructing online community for their political purposes.

Unlike conventional media that usually work in hierarchy and certain standard on journalism, social media empowers

ordinary citizen in self-publishing, social networking and group-forming. It is thus enable citizen to circumvent state or company power over information.

Women and the social media: Hijab case

In the western imagination, the image of veiled Muslim women stands for oppression and lacking of freedom. This notion became visible and more persistent particularly after the 9/11. The *Kit Runner*, an Oscar nominated movie based on the novel of Khaled Hosseini, for instance, draws images of Afghanistan women as covered from head to toe in their burqas and one of them is stoned to death for having an affair, right after a football match. The novel itself became a bestseller nationwide and worldwide.

Anthropologist Laila Abu-Lughod recorded that the speech given by Laura Bush to justify American bombing and intervention in Afghanistan, enlisted women to make the case. “Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment. The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women” (Laura Bush in Abu-Lughod 2002). Hence, the notion of “saving Muslim women from the oppression of Muslim men and their backward society” became one of the justifications to bomb Afghanistan, Iraq, as well as to ban burqa from France’s public sphere.

This context gives us an understanding to see the movement established by Muslim women in the western society to fight for their rights to wear hijab as their cultural and religious rights.

In 2003, Pink Hijab Day movement settled by Hend El-Buri and her friends in the United States. They are a group of Muslim women concern about breast cancer along sidetheir motivation to promote Islamic dress in the western

society. El-Burifound out that during her middle school days, wearing pink attracted people to ask friendly questions; thus, she took the concept of wearing pink nationwide to raise people awareness on breast cancer as well as encourage people who are curious about hijab to ask questions (Abdullah 2009: 26).

“It is important for Muslim women to work toward bettering their societies, whether they live in the Muslim countries or abroad. Breast cancer is something that affects all women- supprting with donations and raising awareness are essential parts of fighting breast cancer” (El-Buri in Abdullah 2009). However, El-Buri’s project was beyond the breast cancer issue as she wanted to use the pink hijab to override negative stereotype against Muslim women, particularly after the 9/11. Hence, the missions of Pink Hijab Day as described in the website and Facebook page come as follows: (1) To encourage people to ask questions about Hijab, and extinguish stereotypes people may have about hijab; (2) To raise awareness and funds for breast cancer foundations across the globe; (3) To encourage Muslim women to participate in helping their own communities (Pink Hijab Day 2010; The Official Global Pink HIjab Day Site 2010).

At the beginning, the project did not attract people at large as many people thought it was funny and silly. The organizer then used social media to promote the cause and it reached larger public, particularly from South Africa, Australia, Canada and Egypt. In 2007, more than 7000 people joined the cause online through Facebook. It is noted that in 2010, 101 organizations participated in the movement around the world(The Official Global Pink HIjab Day Site 2010; Abdullah 2009). It was even reached support from the non-Muslim women, particularly the university students and lecturers who wanted to wear pink headscarves to support the Muslim hijabis(Abdullah 2009)

The movement by nature was a real world action

conducted by Muslim women in America but then through the social media it could reach its global public and became a global action. The organizer uses social media tools such as Facebook, Youtube and Blogs to get support, although these media are only massively used once in a year, particularly few months before the Breast Cancer Day in October. In 2010, this movement became an alternative for the secular campaign on breast cancer in the net that brought a vague and multi-interpretative slogan “I Like It on the Floor”.

Another example of the Muslim women use of social media is a page settled in facebook under the title “Women Against the War on Hijab”. This page was established as a “protest of the recent Hijab and Niqab bans in various countries - notably France, Turkey, Tunisia, Holland and Germany” (Women Against the War on Hijab 2010). The page has reached more than 20.000 followers from different Islamic sects and is currently still active in engaging the public with issues on hijab as Muslim women’s right.

However, the movement is not conducted offline, although it is followed by an online petition that articulates stronger statements in to action:

(1) It is neither Constitutional nor Democratic for a government to ban the wearing of certain traditional / religious / conservative clothing, by women (or by men); (2) Any government that passes such legislation cannot claim to be Democratic, and damages its country's reputation as a Democracy; (3) To ban Islamic women's clothing discriminates both against Women, and their choice of faith (freedom of religion); (4) Such bans are an assault on Human Rights, and Women's Rights; (5) We protest against such action in the name of our Constitutional Rights as Human Beings, and our rights to freely and peacefully practise our faith; (6) What a woman wears is her personal choice, and hurts nobody else. To tell a woman what she can and cannot wear (unless it falls under public indecency,

which Hijab and Niqab do not) is an abuse on that woman's rights as a Human Being (Women Against the War on Hijab 2010).

The use of social media by Muslim women emphasizes few issues. First, in the social media we can see the representation of Muslim women. Muslim women show the way they are, the way they want to be treated and understood, regardless their dress code. The nature of the media helps the women to narrate their own stories and images; in the other hand, the audience may expect originality of the representation.

Second, social media enabled peer-education among Muslim women. Muslim women teach each other how to wear proper hijab and to support each other to be strong in faith and commitment to follow the Islamic rules on dressing. A group settled in Facebook under the title "Hijab=Freedom, Reputation, Pride..Not Elimination, Oppression" put a special album to show the audience pictures of unproper way of wearing hijab. It shows simple definition of what is hijab and which hijab is Islamic and which one is not. Another group named "Da Hijabi Code" goes farther by making classification of hijabi in its info page "What Hijabi are you?" then it gives five types of hijabi, that one of them says:

1) HIJABI HOEs: They are the Hijabis that wear the Hijab then try to even out not showing their hair with short sleeves, capris and the all famous low cut tops. These girls give other Hijabis a bad name..... This group of too "friendly" Hijabis do everything a Muslim let alone a Hijabi should NOT do. We hope none of u fit this description...if u do...we say to u with nothing but love...Respect the Hijab...Stop being a HOE (Da Hijabi Code 2006).

These comical ways of defining what is a hijabi trigger many responses range from affirmation to one of the types, to the discussion on niqab and burqa.

Third, social media can be used as a tool for resisting

injustice. Muslim women work together to challenge the stereotype and bad images portrayed in the western media and society about Muslim Women as well as campaigning on the rights for modest dress for the Muslim Women.

Fourth, through the hijab issue, it is easily to invite Muslim women regardless their sects to unite; they are working together to challenge the hijab ban regulation and the increasing of Islam phobia in the world. The social media natures that are open, transparent, egaliter, and diverse make it reachable by Muslim women from any walks of life.

Lesson learned for the society that pave the ground for the reappearance

It is evidenced that social media plays crucial roles in our world today. It provides many features that can not be fulfilled by conventional media, even the ones that go online. The social media enables ordinary people to make news and spread it everywhere, so the power that usually held by media industry or government is now shared among the ordinary people. It is also enable the users to set networks with whom they want to establish allegiances. Thus, it is important to educate our society and raise people's awareness on the nature of the media and how they can use it for noble purposes, such as paving the ground for the awaited Imam's reappearance.

However, I strongly suggest that the social media activities must be well organized in order to reach the goal we are expected, because the bulk information in the cyber world may easily mislead the audience. In this regard, we need cyber volunteers from all over the world to spread good information and knowledge, to educate their peers as well as to build global networks of the waiting society. The other important actors in the movement are the seminary and Islamic scholars as the think tank, parents and local

Islamic leaders for their physical assistance, adequate digital library from which the cyber activists can take sources, and last but not least is the trusted conventional media where the cyber volunteers can find information, particularly the ones need deep investigation.

The social media activities that mostly happen in the cyberworld must be followed by offline/physical and vice versa so that the activities may reach their broader public and impacts because the message of paving the ground for the Imam's reappearance is a global one.

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